A History of Violence

The Evolution of Violence in American Film Remakes

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Appendix
1. Introduction

A simple Google search for film violence or movie violence will produce thousands of hits, all discussing film violence in one way or another. It is often talked about in news, newspapers, political agendas, social media, and even academic articles. Its study is still relatively new when compared to studies of violence in other mediums.¹ Slocum writes that “film scholars have traditionally treated violence as a secondary concern.”² He also claims that sexuality is always the primary concern when violence and sexuality are being studied.³ However, quite recently there have been studies into the quantity of violence in film. One of these, from 2013, examined 945 films from the 1950s to 2000s. The study found that violence had more than doubled.⁴ Another study, conducted in 2004, examining films from 1992 to 2003, found that violence had doubled during the eleven years.⁵ The studies counted violent acts and made their conclusions based on numbers. This quantitative analysis, however, does not provide insight into how depictions of violence have changed or even if they have indeed changed. A qualitative analysis is needed to answer the question of how violence has changed.

Violence is difficult to define, as it is a very multi-faceted subject. Slocum writes that the term implies some “action or behavior that is harmful or injurious[].”⁶ He continues that “harm can be physical, psychological, or even sociological[].”⁷ Further still, Kendrick writes that film violence can be a very broad term, as a gory act in a horror film is considered violent, as is a cartoon of a cat and a mouse “hitting

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³ Ibid.
⁶ Slocum, introduction to Violence and American Cinema, 2.
⁷ Ibid.
each other over the head with frying pans.”\textsuperscript{8} However, the aim of this thesis is not to discover a definition for film violence. Thus, violence in this thesis’s context will be considered as “the overt expression of physical force against self or other, compelling action against one’s will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing”\textsuperscript{9}, as Gerbner and Gross have defined it. Furthermore, the violence discussed in this thesis will always refer to representations of violence and not real violence. The acts are committed by actors and the bodily harm depicted is achieved through visual effects. The thesis will not discuss documents where the violence filmed may be real.

This thesis will study film violence from a qualitative perspective, and its field is film studies and American cultural studies. The aim is to introduce the history of American cinema from the perspective of violence and how it has been filmed and depicted. In addition, the paper will consider the regulations governing film content, such as the Production Code and later the MPAA ratings. These will be discussed in section 2. My claim is that violence has been a part of films since the beginning, and that we do not currently see anything that has not been present in films for over a century. The thesis will discuss how the depictions of violence have changed by analyzing eleven American films, both original films and their remakes or reboots, released in the different eras of Hollywood, which are also discussed in section 2. The thesis shows that violence has become more graphic, but the level of violence and the violent acts filmed are not much different from the early days of American cinema. Violence has evolved as have the special effects used to portray it. The films analyzed will show how decades of progress have affected the ways with which similar scenes are filmed. The films, or the data, and the methodology will be discussed in section 3. The analyses are presented in section 4. Section 5 will offer a discussion based on the analyses and the historical background.

It should also be added that this paper is neither to condone nor to condemn film violence; it is merely an objective survey into film violence.

\textsuperscript{8} James Kendrick, Film Violence History, Ideology, Genre (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 9.
2. The History of American Film Violence

The first part of the paper will, as discussed in the introduction, introduce the history of American cinema as well as examine film violence from the start of the American cinema. The following is divided into four sections each discussing a specific period of Hollywood filmmaking. This part of the thesis will investigate if violence has been a part of films since the beginning and how it has been depicted and moderated. The outline for this part is based on James Kendrick’s book *Film Violence History, Ideology, Genre*. Furthermore, this section is based on an already established historical timeline.

2.1 The Silent Era

While the birth of film can be credited to the French Lumièrè bothers, Thomas Alva Edison could be considered a pioneer of American film. Edison used his *Kinetograph*, the first motion picture camera created in 1891, to film various executions, including the electrocution of the elephant, Topsy, in his film *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903). The elephant was electrocuted in order to demonstrate the dangers of AC (alternating current), which was Nikola Tesla’s and George Westinghouse’s rival to Edison’s own DC (direct current) system of electric power distribution. Furthermore, Edison recreated the execution by an electric chair of a convicted assassin in his film *Execution of Czolgosz, With Panorama of Auburn Prison* (1901).

However, the early cinema’s fascination with executions predates the above electrocutions, as beheadings occurring in various historical events were a popular subject matter. The most popular and known of these is the Edison Company’s *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1894). This thirty-second

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10 James Kendrick, *Film Violence History, Ideology, Genre*, 33.
film could also be considered as one of the first films to utilize editing and special effects such as a doll and prosthetics:

An actor dressed as Queen Mary is escorted to the execution platform. The Queen kneels down and sets her head onto the chopping block. The executioner raises his axe. The Queen’s head is cut off by the executioner. The head rolls away, the executioner picks it up and displays it to the audience.

Figures 1 and 2 from *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots*. The left frame shows the actor and the right frame shows the doll, which replaced the actor.

The scene was created so that as soon as the executioner raised his axe, the filming was stopped and the actor playing the queen was replaced with a doll whose head the executioner then cut as filming was resumed. The above screengrab on the left (fig. 1) shows the actor kneeling down, and the screengrab on the right (fig. 2) shows the doll that was inserted as the filming was stopped. It is noteworthy that there is no blood shown, although, the severed head is displayed. The violent scene utilized techniques that are still used today in films that still utilize practical effects. If the scene had included blood, it would be directly comparable to a scene from a modern film. The film *The Terrible Turkish Executioner* (1904) depicts the simultaneous beheadings of four individuals, after which, the corpses reacquire their heads and proceed to cut the executioner in half. Another known historical film about a beheading, *The Tower of London* (1905), depicts the execution of Anne Boleyn. Again, it should be noted that none of these films depict blood, the executions are quickly over, and the victims are not shown to suffer.
Even before the historical recreations, violence was a part of the development of film, as boxing matches were filmed and displayed in *Kinetoscope* parlors. Prizefighting was a criminal act in most of the Union in 1896, therefore, the films were the only way people could see boxing. Some of the boxing films were recreations but others were actual recorded fights. The popularity of these films “was a crucial early moment in the history of film violence because it established the nascent medium’s role in allowing audiences to experience vicariously that which they were denied in their everyday lives.” Eventually, the evolution of film cameras allowed for recording of actual events, which were displayed as newsreel footage. These newsreels displayed real murders and executions. Kendrick argues that this evolution allowed the medium to become a journalistic enterprise and not just remain a cheap novelty.

When filmmakers began to include storylines into their films, they also started to add violence as a narrative element as well as invent new effects to better depict it. A good example of violence as a narrative is Edwin S. Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), in which violent criminality is the main source of thrills to the audience. Although often labeled as the first Western, *The Great Train Robbery*’s success did not cause an increase in the production of other Westerns, instead, more violent films, such as *The Bold Bank Robbery* (1904) and *Burned at the Stake* (1904), were produced. Filmmakers continued to increase the amount and quality of the violence depicted, and D. W. Griffiths’ epic *Birth of a Nation* (1915) features large-scale battle sequences. Griffiths’ next film *Intolerance* (1916) features two decapitations, complete with blood, while another bloody sequence is one where a soldier thrusts a spear into the stomach of another soldier while blood gushes out.

11 Kendrick, *Film Violence*, 35.
12 Ibid. 37.
13 Ibid. 38.
However, these films featured scenes of violence, which were over rather quickly. This changed when a Soviet film, Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1926), featured a long scene of sustained violence, known as the Odessa Steps sequence, of soldiers shooting unarmed civilians while also showing how the civilians are trampled due to the ensued panic. Some of the era’s films caused concerns over the effects of the depicted violence, especially on the youth. Therefore, film censorship and guidelines were established. The next section will discuss these attempts to sensor and regulate film violence during the Classical Hollywood era or the Studio Era.

### 2.2 Censorship, Self-Regulation, and the Studio Era

As discussed earlier, the early cinema had a fascination with violence and depicting violence. This caused some concern on the effects of violence on the viewers, especially on the youth. However, as violence itself was not discussed as a term until the 1950s, the focus was on criminality and on the depiction of criminal activities. Furthermore, most of the censorship issues and regulations were focused on sexual conduct rather than on violence. Prince highlights that the control on violence was not focused on the ways that violence was presented but on the violent actions. This emerged from the popularity of criminal films, or gangster films, from the 1920s onward. The gangster films were often based on actual criminals and criminal activities (for example *Scarface*, 1932, which was based on the real-life crime lord Al Capone, 1899–1947). Several commissions were formed to censor films that were deemed to possibly incite to crime or otherwise corrupt the morals of the viewers. For example, Kendrick mentions a case from 1912 where the film *The Great Train Robbery* was named to be the inspiration for a train robbery committed by a boy.

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19 Kendrick, *Film Violence*, 43.
The film studios conformed to some of the censor committees and submitted their films for screenings in order to get ratings, and the studios even paid fees for the process. However, in 1922, the film industry formed the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), an organization led by Will Hays. The organization’s aim was to act as a self-regulatory organ as well as to control the entire American film marketplace. It should be noted that before this, in 1915, the US Supreme Court had made a ruling called the *Mutual decision*, which essentially removed film from the protection of the First Amendment (Freedom of Speech), thus film could be censored at will.  

The MPPDA allowed film studios to control the whole film process from production to exhibition in the studios’ own film theaters. The MPPDA also created a set of rules known as the Production Code in 1927; it was later amended in 1934.\(^2\)\(^1\) The Production Code was a set of rules (in the form of Don’ts and Be Carefuls) which gave clear instructions on how to handle and depict various film content. However, the Production Code was not actively enforced until 1934 when the Production Code Administration (PCA) was formed. As Kendrick notes, the production code was not very strict towards violence but instead the main focus was on sexual morality.\(^2\)\(^2\) In addition, Schatz notes that “the [Production Code Administration] granted filmmakers far more license in their depictions of violence than sex – a fact borne out by the remarkable numbers of crime films, war films, and Westerns.”\(^2\)\(^3\) However, the 1934 amendment to the Production Code included a heading named *Crimes Against the Law* which, among other additions, “forbade presenting brutal killings in detail and restricted the use of firearms to ‘the essentials’.”\(^2\)\(^4\) Kendrick further continues that “[t]his ensured that the stylistic approaches filmmakers used to depict violence had to be significantly reduced, meaning that violence in Hollywood films of the classical era would be largely unrealistic and pain-free.”\(^2\)\(^5\) The gangster film did eventually suffer due to


\(^{22}\) Kendrick, *Film Violence*, 45.

\(^{23}\) Schatz, introduction, 3.

\(^{24}\) Kendrick, *Film Violence*, 45

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
the stricter Code and it was banned in America in 1935. Even Al Capone himself questioned crime films and called for their censoring:

These gang pictures—that’s terrible kid stuff. Why, they ought to take them all and throw them into the lake. They’re doing nothing but harm to the younger element of this country. I don’t blame the censors for trying to bar them…. these gang movies are making a lot of kids want to be tough guys and they don’t serve any useful purpose.  

However, the violence of the crime films did not disappear as the stories in films were now told from the law’s perspective.  

Another significant genre – which also pushed the boundaries of acceptable violence – introduced in the Studio Era in the 1930s were Universal Studios’ Gothic horror films (such as Dracula, 1931; Frankenstein, 1931; and The Mummy, 1932). This genre of films, known at the time as nightmare pictures, featured “perverse violence” such as “cannibalistic murder (Doctor X [1932])” and “extended images of torture (Murders in the Rue Morgue [1932])”. Despite the fact that these films were made just before the Code was actively enforced, they introduced a level of violence that had not been featured in films before, a violence that Kendrick describes as sadistic.  

Although the Production Code was strict, the Second World War caused a “relaxation of constraints put on ‘war films’ – initially newsreels and documentaries […] and eventually in dramatic features as well” as Schatz writes. This further rippled into other genres and especially into urban crime thrillers, which


\[\text{27 Kendrick, Film Violence, 47.}\]

\[\text{28 Ibid.}\]


\[\text{30 Kendrick, Film Violence, 48.}\]

\[\text{31 Ibid.}\]

\[\text{32 Schatz, introduction, 3.}\]
would later be called *film noir.* Furthermore, the US Supreme Court made another ruling called the *Paramount decision* in 1948, which disallowed film studios to own film theaters. Therefore, the studios lost their monopoly of the film marketplace, and as the film theaters were privatized, the large studios began to see competition in the form of art movies or low-budget independent films; these independent films will be discussed in the next section. The Paramount decision also caused a weakening of the Production Code, and it was the beginning of the end of the Studio Era, or the Golden Age of Hollywood.

Also significant in the demise of the Studio Era is the emergence of television, which quickly passed films as America’s “preferred form of habituated narrative entertainment.” Furthermore, the US Supreme Court made yet another ruling in 1952 called the *Miracle decision,* which reversed the 1915 ruling, thus giving film the same protection as to the press or the other arts. The violence during the Studio era is known as classical Hollywood violence, and it was not graphic or explicit, instead the violence was largely placed off-screen or it was shown through shadows. This is significantly different from the explicit beheadings and electrocutions of the Silent Era. The Production Code was intact until 1968 when it was dissolved and replaced by the Code and Rating Administration (CARA) and its MPAA Ratings system. The MPAA ratings are divided into five classes; G for general audiences, PG for parental guidance suggested, PG-13 for parents strongly cautioned, R for restricted, and NC-17 for no one 17 and under admitted. The relevant classes for this thesis are PG-13 and R. The PG-13 rating means that some material in the film may be inappropriate for children under 13, but children are allowed to watch the film without adult supervision. The R rating means that children under 17 require a parent or a guardian to accompany them to the theater. CARA allowed filmmakers to target adults as their audience, which resulted in graphic violence becoming increasingly common. The 1950s and the 1960s also saw the emergence of so-called exploitation or grindhouse films; these will be discussed in the next section.

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33 Schatz, introduction, 3.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Prince, *Classical Film Violence.*
### 2.3 The New Hollywood Cinema

The Paramount decision, discussed earlier, allowed the production and exhibition of independent films that did not fall under the guidelines of the Production Code. After all, the MPPDA was formed as the major studios’ self-regulatory organization. Therefore, not having to adhere to strict guidelines, independent filmmakers could potentially depict whatever they pleased. This gave birth to *grindhouse theaters*, which were film theaters that showed exploitation films.\(^{37}\) According to Drenner, exploitation films were films that exploited an idea, for example, nudity, sex, or violence, and then excessively portrayed it.\(^{38}\) In the 1950s, the most often exploited idea was nudity, as violence was not as strictly forbidden in the Production Code, and it was therefore present in major studio releases, as discussed in the previous section. Films that gratuitously exhibited nude bodies (for example, *Garden of Eden*, 1955) were not in the mainstream but they still garnered some popularity and financial success on the fringes of the film marketplace. The popularity of these *nudie-cuties* started to diminish by 1960s, and soon filmmakers introduced violence into the mix. This spawned a new genre called *roughies or ghoulies*, which mixed violence and sex.\(^{39}\) Drenner argues that the reason for such an escalation was a strict ban on sex in film, and therefore violence became a substitute for sex.\(^{40}\) While foreign – especially European – film was more focused on sexual content, the violence explored in foreign film influenced the American cinema as well. For example, in the 1950s, the violent Japanese samurai genre influenced Italian filmmakers, who then created the hyper-violent *Spaghetti Western* (for example, Sergio Leone’s films starring Clint Eastwood *A Fistful of Dollars*, 1964, and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, 1966).\(^{41}\)

During the 1960s, “[...] film violence underwent its most radical and rapid developments [...] with graphic displays of violence steadily migrating from the margins into the mainstream and forever altering what

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Schatz, introduction, 4.
was possible both visually and ideologically [...].”⁴² The most notable film in regard to film violence is considered to be Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960), and the infamous shower scene where the female character is stabbed to death, complete with blood. While the blade is never shown to directly penetrate the skin, the scene is nonetheless explicit, which was something the audience then was not accustomed to. This is evident in reports of the audience “gasp[ing], scream[ing], yell[ing], and even running up and down the aisles.”⁴³ After the success of Psycho, other filmmakers released several Psycho-inspired films albeit of a “lower-grade”.⁴⁴ Another film that redefined film violence is Arthur Penn’s Bonnie and Clyde (1967), which features a scene where the titular characters are, in slow motion, riddled with bullets while almost dancing from the bullet impacts. This is different from the classical Hollywood style in which characters would gracefully fall down after being shot, without any visible bullet holes or blood. However, Bouzereau writes that the director Penn did not want to show the death scene in a gross and realistic way where the bodies would be ripped apart by bullets, instead he wanted to create “an aura of unreality about the death of Bonnie and Clyde” thus creating “a mythical, balletic ending”⁴⁵.

Gore was introduced into films by Herschell Gordon Lewis in his ultra-violent, independent films Blood Feast (1963), Two Thousand Maniacs (1964), and Color Me Blood Red (1965). Although these were independent, exploitation films exhibited in grindhouse theaters, they paved the way for future films, and most notably the splatter genre. However, Drenner argues that the origin of gore is actually found in the French theater known as Grand Guignol, which often featured plays that had extremely bloody effects and violent stories; therefore, it was natural that gore would eventually become featured in film as well.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the 1960s and the 1970s saw the comeback of the gangster films, such as Bonnie and Clyde, and the Godfather (1972).

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⁴² Kendrick, Film Violence, 55.
⁴⁴ Schatz, introduction, 4.
⁴⁶ Drenner, American Grindhouse.
The reason for violent films becoming more acceptable and no longer under threat from direct censorship was that film had lost its appeal to a mass audience, and it had become a niche market that targeted specific audiences via the newly introduced MPAA age ratings.47 Further, the American society had witnessed a multitude of violence from the 1960s’ assassinations to the Vietnam War that all affected the cultural climate.48 The films that emerged in the 1960s are usually referred to as New Hollywood. Slocum defines New Hollywood as “a moment in which various components of classicism are subverted by formal innovation and narrative exploration, alternative mode of production, and institutional participation in the counterculture.”49 It should also be noted that during the 1970s and 1980s the special effects and make-up effects artists who had originally been “celebrated [...] as the men who created monsters”50 were now pioneers in creating realistic ways to inflict damage upon the human body. The next section will look at the film violence from the 1980s onward, as graphic displays of violence seemed to lose some of their allure, which was so evident in the 1960s and 1970s.

2.4 Contemporary Film Violence

In the 1980s, Hollywood film studios aimed to make profitable films that would attract a large audience. This was achieved by making violence in film more approachable, meaning that the studios sought to enthrall the audience instead of disturbing them by the violence.51 While the films were still very violent, they were “packaged as something completely different – mainstream, high-concept, audience-pleasing blockbusters like Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) [...] Rambo: First Blood Part II (1986) [...].”52 Another invention of the 1980s were the films that combined violence with comedic undertones (such as sarcastic one-liners, for example), the action-comedies. The aim was to get women to watch the films, thus

47 Prince, Classical Film Violence.
48 Kendrick, Film Violence, 60.
49 Slocum, introduction, 16.
50 Kendrick, Film Violence, 62.
51 Ibid. 63.
52 Kendrick, Film Violence, 63.
increasing the potential audience.\textsuperscript{53} One of the most famous and successful of these is \textit{Die Hard} (1988). However, before \textit{Die Hard}, multiple action films, starring actors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, were produced that became successes and spawned multiple sequels (\textit{The Terminator}, 1984; \textit{Commando}, 1985; \textit{Cobra}, 1986). These films show that violence was seen as acceptable. As Schatz notes, “[i]t is altogether remarkable, in fact, how ubiquitous violence has become in American cinema, to a point where the term ‘action’ is basically a euphemism for violence.”\textsuperscript{54}

The 1980s also gave birth to a new sub-genre of horror films, \textit{slasher films}, which became extremely popular, especially among adolescent boys who thrive on the “sadomasochistic pleasure”\textsuperscript{55} of the violence depicted in them. The origin of the slasher film can be found in the 1970s violent films, Tobe Hooper’s \textit{The Texas Chainsaw Massacre} (1974) and John Carpenter’s \textit{Halloween} (1978), both of which have gained sequels and inspired remakes. In fact, writing about \textit{The Texas Chainsaw Massacre}, Kendrick notes that it was extremely violent but the violence took place off-screen. For example, it features “a woman being hung alive on a meat hook while her dead boyfriend is being dismembered on a table in front of her, a man in a wheel chair being sliced in half by a chainsaw.”\textsuperscript{56} The violence was extreme but it was left to the viewers’ imaginations.

The 1980s notable slasher films are the sequels to \textit{Halloween}, Sean S. Cunningham’s \textit{Friday the 13th} (1980), and Wes Craven’s \textit{Nightmare on Elm Street} (1984). As Kendrick puts it, “[t]he primary appeal of these films was creative murders depicted with explicit gore[.].”\textsuperscript{57} The horror genre can be considered as one of the most successful and persistent genres of film and the level of graphic violence in it has dramatically increased during the century of film, however, the violent acts still remain the same as in older films. The level of graphic violence seems to have reached its height with the introduction of \textit{torture}

\textsuperscript{53} Altman, \textit{Elokuva ja Genre}.
\textsuperscript{54} Schatz, introduction, 8.
\textsuperscript{56} Kendrick, \textit{Film Violence}, 15.
\textsuperscript{57} Kendrick, \textit{Film Violence}, 84.
porn\textsuperscript{58} in films such as \textit{Saw} (2004), \textit{Hostel} (2005), and more recently \textit{Evil Dead} (2013). Indeed, that may be the case, as Kendrick notes that “[the] trend is currently on the downswing”\textsuperscript{59}, and another horror film from 2013, \textit{The Conjuring}, proved both critically and financially successful despite the fact that it is a more conventional ghost story without excessive gore or graphic violence. The success has been noted by Hollywood studios. Brad Fuller, a Hollywood producer, notes, “New Line had such a huge hit with \textit{The Conjuring} and that was a fantastic movie and it feels like New Line might be moving away from the kind of horror with a lot of blood and that kind of thing in their movie, more towards what \textit{The Conjuring} was.”\textsuperscript{60}

As is evident, violence has been a part of film since the very beginning, and it has not subsided. Instead, American film is still saturated with violence, and the recent successes of directors (such as Quentin Tarantino) clearly proves that violent films are popular and profitable. The next part of the thesis will provide analyses of American film remakes and their original versions while investigating how the depictions of violence have changed in practice.

\textsuperscript{59} Kendrick, \textit{Film Violence}, 68
3. Methodology and Data

This section of the paper will introduce the methodology used to analyze the films as well as introduce the data used for the analyses.

The methodology of the analysis in this thesis is a form of film scene analysis where the mise-en-scène is analyzed. The focus will be on the action and on what is shown, as well as on the special effects used to achieve the action. The analysis will be based on individual scenes from different films. The thesis will analyze and compare remakes and reboots to their original films. Sometimes, however, scenes and films may not be able to be compared directly. In those cases, similar scenes will be chosen and compared. The entire films may also be discussed for the purpose of understanding how the depicted violence has changed. The scenes chosen will be named, and then they will be described and analyzed. The process could be compared to close reading of literature. After the analysis, the scenes and films will be discussed in more detail. The scene description and analysis will be presented as a table where the two scenes to be compared are put side by side so that it will be easy to follow each scene and how they differ. The only difference is the analysis of the three iterations of *The Thing* films as the scenes chosen are very different. In this case the description will follow a more traditional scene description style.

The films chosen for analysis in this thesis represent films from various eras of Hollywood, from the 50s to the most recent films. Furthermore, the films are all such that they have been remade or rebooted a considerable time after the original was released. Additionally, two of the films were made under the Production Code.

A remake of a film means that the film is, as Beaver writes, “made from a film story produced earlier”. The plot remains largely the same but some minor details may have been altered. A reboot is more

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61 Frank Beaver, *Dictionary of Film Terms: The Aesthetic Companion to Film Art* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 204.
difficult to define as it a relatively new term. Willits writes that a “‘reboot’ means to restart an entertainment universe that has already been previously established, and begin with a new story line and/or timeline that disregards the original [...]”\textsuperscript{62} Thus, in the film industry, reboots and remakes are likely attempts to introduce older, financially or critically successful films to new audiences.

The table below gathers all films and relevant information together, including the age rating. All ratings are taken from the CARA website\textsuperscript{63} Each film will be introduced and its plot will be explained briefly in the beginning of its analysis section. The films represent genres in which violence is often a central plot element, such as horror, action, thriller, or science fiction. Screengrabs will be shown along with the analysis to better illustrate the scenes. The films analyzed are theatrical versions, which means that they are the MPAA rated versions shown in theaters. Sometimes home media releases of films may be called a director’s cut or an unrated edition. These special editions are not always rated, and they are slightly different versions usually with added scenes. Unrated editions are often more explicit than theatrical versions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of release</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>Age rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psycho</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Alfred Hitchcock</td>
<td>Shamley Productions</td>
<td>Not rated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycho</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Gus Van Sant</td>
<td>Universal Pictures, Imagine Entertainment</td>
<td>Rated R for violence and sexuality/nudity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Thing from Another World</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Christian Nyby, Howard Hawks</td>
<td>RKO Radio Pictures, Winchester Pictures Corporation</td>
<td>Not rated</td>
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\textsuperscript{63} “Film Ratings”, CARA, accessed March 5, 2016
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<th>Director</th>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<td><em>The Thing</em></td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>John Carpenter</td>
<td>Universal Pictures, Truman-Foster Company</td>
<td>Rated R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Thing</em></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Matthijs Van Heijningen</td>
<td>Universal Pictures, Morgan Creek Productions, Strike Entertainment</td>
<td>Rated R for strong creature violence and gore, disturbing images and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>RoboCop</em></td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Paul Verhoeven</td>
<td>Orion Pictures</td>
<td>Rated R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>RoboCop</em></td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>José Padilha</td>
<td>MGM, Columbia Pictures, Strike Entertainment</td>
<td>Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of action including frenetic gun violence throughout, brief strong language, sensuality and some drug material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Total Recall</em></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Paul Verhoeven</td>
<td>Carolco Pictures</td>
<td>Rated R</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Total Recall</em></td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Len Wiseman</td>
<td>Original Film, Relativity Media</td>
<td>Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of sci-fi violence and action, some sexual content, brief nudity, and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn</em></td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Sam Raimi</td>
<td>De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, Renaissance Pictures</td>
<td>Rated R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evil Dead</strong></td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Fede Alvarez</td>
<td>TriStar Pictures, FilmDistrict, Ghost House Pictures</td>
<td>Rated R for strong bloody violence and gore, some sexual content and language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. The Evolution of Film Violence in Film Remakes

As discussed in the Introduction, this part will examine American film remakes. The aim is to identify similar violent scenes that can be compared. The purpose of this analysis is to examine how depictions of violence have changed. Sometimes, however, the remakes may differ from the original and scenes may not match exactly. In these cases, discretion will be used to make connections between the two and thus enable comparison. A short plot description will be provided after which the scenes intended for comparison will be explained, detailed, and analyzed.

4.1 Psycho (1960) and Psycho (1998)

Psycho offers a rare chance to compare two almost identical films. The reason for this is that the 1998 version is a shot-for-shot remake, which means that it very closely matches the original shot for shot and scene for scene. The only differences are a new cast and a contemporary, 1998, setting. The remake also features similar filming and editing effects as the original. Both of the films discussed are rated R (Restricted) by the CARA.64 The reasons for choosing Psycho are that it is a shot-for-shot remake, and the original version was made under the Production Code – which was discussed in 2.2 Censorship, Self-Regulation, and the Studio Era. This provides a rare opportunity to investigate if the dissolution of the Production Code has led to an increase in graphic violence in the remake despite the fact that it is a shot-for-shot-remake.

Psycho centers on the story of Norman Bates (played by Anthony Perkins in the original and Vince Vaughn in the remake) who, after killing his mother, develops a split personality. Bates’ two personalities

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64 “Film Ratings”, accessed March 5, 2016, http://www.filmratings.com/search.html?filmTitle=Psycho&amp;x=34&amp;y=8
are Norman Bates and his mother. Bates becomes a killer when the mother personality is in control. Another notable character is Marion Crane (Janet Leigh in the original and Anne Heche in the remake) who is a secretary and steals money from her workplace. She then runs away from the city. After residing in the Bates Motel, Marion is killed. This is the beginning of a series of events that lead to the murder of a private detective, and the eventual capture of the murderer. The original Psycho was directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and the remake was directed by Gus Van Sant. The film’s screenplay is based on the book *Psycho* from 1959 written by Robert Bloch. Psycho could be considered one of the earliest slasher films.

The scenes analyzed here are the two murders that occur in the films. The first scene is the infamous shower scene that was briefly discussed in 2.3. The scene was so violent at the time that people became nauseous and left the film theater. In fact, as Bouzereau writes, “the scene was so effective that most people in the audience thought they saw the blade actually stabbing the actress, whereas in fact it never touches her.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shower scene 46 minutes into the film (<em>Psycho</em> 1960)</th>
<th>Shower scene 42 minutes into the film (<em>Psycho</em> 1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marion Crane flushes the toilet and enters the shower.</td>
<td>Marion Crane flushes the toilet and enters the shower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We briefly observe Marion washing herself as the camera cuts between her and the running shower.</td>
<td>We briefly observe Marion washing herself as the camera cuts between her and the running shower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The camera cuts to the other side of the bathtub/shower and we observe through the shower curtain as a dark figure enters the bathroom.</td>
<td>The camera cuts to the other side of the bathtub/shower and we observe through the shower curtain as a dark figure enters the bathroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The figure rips open the curtain while holding a raised kitchen knife.</td>
<td>The figure rips open the curtain while holding a raised kitchen knife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The camera cuts to Marion who starts to scream. The camera cuts to a close-up of her screaming mouth, then it cuts back to the killer.</td>
<td>The camera cuts to Marion who starts to scream. The camera cuts to a close-up of her screaming mouth, then it cuts back to the killer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The killer starts stabbing Marion and the camera cuts between the killer and Marion.

Very briefly the knife and Marion’s stomach come in contact within the same frame but no damage to the stomach is visible.

The camera cuts between the struggle and the knife slashing downwards. No blood is on the knife, but a stream of blood is seen on the bottom of the bathtub.

Marion turns her back, the killer stabs her a few times more and exits as Marion turns around again, leans on the wall and falls down very slowly ripping the shower curtain as she falls. A very light stream of blood is pictured entering the drain but no wounds are shown on Marion’s back.

The killer starts stabbing Marion and the camera cuts between the killer and Marion. As the knife hits Marion, it seems to get stuck and the killer struggles to release it. The knife is not shown to penetrate Marion’s skin. Marion’s feet are shown as bright red blood dribbles down and creates a stream along the bottom of the bathtub. Briefly the camera cuts to some clouds.

Very briefly the knife and Marion’s stomach come in contact within the same frame but no damage to the stomach is visible. Again, some clouds are shown.

The camera cuts between the struggle and the knife slashing downwards. No blood is on the knife, but a lot of blood is seen on the bottom of the bathtub.

Marion turns her back, the killer stabs her a few more times and exits as Marion turns around again, leans on the wall and starts falling down very slowly ripping the shower curtain as she falls. The camera cuts to an extreme close-up of Marion’s eye as her pupil dilates as a sign of death. A streak of blood is left on the wall as Marion falls down slowly. The bathtub is smeared with a lot of bright red blood and Marion’s back shows two long, bleeding knife wounds. She slumps over the bathtub’s edge and her naked backside is visible. The camera slowly pans to the water mixing with blood and going down the drain.
The scenes are almost identical in the way that they are shot and edited. However, the 1998 version appears to be bloodier as more blood is shown. However, it should be noted that it is not as gory as one would expect. One must remember that the Code was no longer in effect but the film being a shot-for-shot remake probably meant that the filmmakers wanted to preserve the mood and style of the original. Nonetheless, the newer version’s scene does show wounds on Marion’s back, and blood is left on the wall as Marion falls down, indicating that she does indeed have wounds on her back. Furthermore, the 1998 version depicts the killer’s struggle to detach the blade for another swing, which adds a more realistic twist to the act. This is completely absent from the 1960 version. The clearest difference is, of course, the fact that the 1960 film is filmed in black and white while the 1998 film is filmed in color (see fig. 3 and 4). The 1960 film’s scene is a very violent and explicit scene, which is further enhanced by the fact that the killing happens almost continuously and the cuts are masterfully blended into one creating the effect of a continuous attack. The 1998 film, however, disrupts the dynamic of the attack by adding the brief cuts to some clouds over a gray sky. From a special effects view, the scenes likely only utilize some makeup effects as no wounds are actually filmed appearing because the blade is not shown to penetrate the skin. Only some blood is shown. Both scenes are, nonetheless, extremely brutal as a helpless, naked female is killed in a shower in a surprising twist. It should be noted that the 1998 version includes more nudity as Marion’s buttocks are clearly shown. The 1960 film immediately cuts to the floor and does not display Marion’s naked backside slumped over the edge.
The second scene analyzed depicts the death of the Private Investigator, Milton Arbogast (Martin Balsam, orig. and William H. Macy, remake):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Murder of the P.I. 1 hour 17 minutes into the film (Psycho 1960)</th>
<th>Murder of the P.I. 1 hour 10 minutes into the film (Psycho 1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milton climbs the stairs of the Bates residence while the camera cuts to a door opening.</td>
<td>Milton climbs the stairs of the Bates residence while the camera cuts to a door opening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As soon as Milton reaches the top, the knife-wielding killer storms out from a room.</td>
<td>As soon as Milton reaches the top, the knife-wielding killer storms out from a room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The killer stabs Milton, Milton’s face shows a bloody wound, and he falls down the stairs.</td>
<td>The killer slashes Milton’s face three times, the attack leaves three bloody wounds across the face, and Milton falls down the stairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The killer follows Milton and proceeds to stab him twice; the frame fades to black.</td>
<td>The killer follows Milton and proceeds to stab him twice; the frame fades to black.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures 5 and 6: *Psycho* (1960) on the left and *Psycho* (1998) on the right. Note the increase in the number of wounds on the right picture from the newer 1998 film.

Once again, the scenes are almost identical and the knife is not bloody. In this scene, however, the killer does not seem to struggle with detaching the knife, as was the case in the first scene. The only difference is that the killer slashes Arbogast’s face three times, leaving three wounds, compared to the one slash in the original.

As it is evident from the scenes analyzed, the violence depicted has become slightly more explicit and gory; however, there is not much difference in the bodily harm depicted or in the acts themselves. Both
films clearly show a human being killed by another human by stabbing and slashing them with a kitchen knife, but the difference in the violence depicted is not great. In addition, the 1960 film was made under the Production Code and thus there were some limitations as to what was acceptable. The remake had no such limitations. In fact, the original book, Psycho, is even more brutal and violent because in the shower scene Marion’s head is actually severed with a butcher’s knife. Bouzereau depicts the scene as follows,

“Mary [in the book Marion is named Mary] started to scream, and then the curtains parted further and a hand appeared, holding a butcher knife. It was a knife that, a moment later, cut off her scream.

And her head.”

Of course, the Code would have not allowed such a scene to be filmed, as Bouzereau also notes, and therefore, the scene was moderated and changed to stabbing. Thus, the scene was the same for the 1998 film as it was a remake of the 1960 film and not an adaptation of the book. Curiously, neither film shows blood on the blade used in the murders even though blood is visible in the bathtub, on Marion’s back in the remake, and on Milton’s face (see the screengrabs above).

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66 Bouzereau, Ultraviolent Movies, 183.
67 Ibid.
4.2 The Thing From Another World (1951), The Thing (1982), and The Thing (2011)

The three versions of *The Thing* differ greatly, although, all three are based on the novella, *Who Goes There?*[^68], written by John W. Campbell, Jr. in 1938. However, the 1951 version, directed by Howard Hawks and Christian Nyby, is a looser adaptation than the two newer films (e.g. in the 1951 film, the story takes place in the North Pole while in the book, it takes place in Antarctica). Furthermore, the 2011 version, directed by Matthijs van Heijningen, serves as a prequel to the 1982 version, directed by John Carpenter. A prequel means that the film’s story precedes the previous film’s story and thus expands the back-story and the fictional universe. Despite the differences, the core narrative is very similar in each, and the 2011 version is comparable to the 1951 version in terms of story elements; both feature the expedition’s initial discovery of the alien craft and the alien. The reason for choosing the three versions of *The Thing* is that it is a very rare look at how film has changed during the decades as special effects and computer-generated effects have evolved. It is also interesting to note how these evolutions have affected the way with which violence is depicted.

The films center on the encounter of an alien and an arctic expedition. The 1951 version’s alien creature is entirely different form the two other versions; the alien is largely humanoid while in the other two it is more of an “insectoid” (meaning it resembles an insect) capable of imitating life forms and absorbing their memories. The 1951 version and the 2011 version have a similar story in that they both chronicle the discovery of the alien and its craft. Both versions also feature confrontations with the alien. The 1982 version differs in that the alien “discovers” the American camp while escaping from a Norwegian camp. Each film features the struggle for survival. The films do not feature scenes that can be directly compared; however, a comparison between the first confrontations between the characters and the alien will be drawn. The reason for choosing this scene is simple; usually in horror films, the first time

that the monster is revealed is a defining moment because the source of the terror finally gets a physical representation. For screenshots of the scenes described below, see the appendix.

The first confrontation scene 56 minutes into the film (The Thing From Another World 1951)

The characters, led by Captain Hendry (played by Kenneth Tobey), walk along a hallway leading to a door. Captain Hendry, holding an ax, opens the door and the Thing is revealed standing on the other side. The Thing attempts to hit or grab Captain Hendry with its arm but misses. Captain Hendry, with the help of the other characters, shuts the door while pinning the Thing’s arm between the wall and the door. The Thing manages to break free and the door closes. Another character fires four rounds through the closed door.

The first confrontation scene 28 minutes into the film (The Thing 1982)

Dogs sleeping in a cage begin barking at a new dog brought into the cage. The camera cuts to a close up of the new dog’s snout, which begins bleeding. The snout peels into four parts revealing the dog’s bloody skull. The dog, or the Thing, starts transforming into a pile of bloody mess while shooting tentacles from its back into the other dogs. A man enters the room and sees the Thing. A dog jumps out and pushes the man down. A tentacle almost catches the man’s leg but the man kicks the door shut while pinning the tentacle between the door and the wall. The camera cuts to the other characters being oblivious to the situation. An alarm blares and the people start running. After brief conversations and cuts to other people, MacReady (played by Kurt Russel) armed with a shotgun starts shooting at the thing, he is joined by other characters armed with revolvers. As shots impact the Thing, it trembles and blood squirts out of the holes, a dog caught by the Thing’s tentacle is shown to get hit.
By the end of the scene, MacReady burns the Thing with a flamethrower but not before several close ups of the slimy and bloody creature are shown.

**The first confrontation scene 27 minutes into the film (The Thing 2011)**

Two men are shown searching for the Thing. They hear a sound and start moving closer to a raised platform, which seems to hide something underneath. They see something resembling a claw or scales opening and closing. The man in front quickly turns around and starts agitatedly shouting to the other man. The Thing shoots a tentacle that goes through the first man’s back and a squirt of blood hits the second man’s face. After this, the tentacle opens up and forms a hook with which the Thing pulls the man back towards it. The man holds onto two walls on both sides as the Thing attempts to pull the man under the platform, the man struggles and screams from pain and fear. The first man loses his grip and is pulled under the platform. The second man starts screaming for help. Other people run to the second man and they all observe as the Thing devours the first man. Sam Carter (played by Joel Edgerton) starts shooting at the Thing; the other people join him. They burn the Thing with kerosene, and the first man falls from the Thing’s mouth; we can see his legs as the platform burns.

As is evident, and predictable, the 1951 version lacks all of the gore and most of the violence. It appears as if the scenes from the newer films are equally violent, although the 2011 version subjects the human body to the depicted violence, and it actually shows the murder of a human. Both newer films appear equally gory and explicit but the 2011 film’s effects are mostly computer generated and as such do not affect the viewer as greatly as the practical effects of the 1982 film. This is clearly visible in the screenshots included in the appendix. All of the scenes feature guns and gunshots but only the newer films depict the way the bullets impact the creature. It should be noted that all three films feature scenes where the Thing is burned alive; however, those scenes are not described in detail in this thesis. It could be argued that the 1951 film’s burning is most upsetting and disturbing since the Thing resembles a
human who runs and panics as it burns. The impact of the scene from the newer films is not as great, as the creature does not resemble a human at all, therefore, there is little to relate to or to empathize with.

It can be clearly seen how the advances in makeup effects and computer-generated special effects make the 2011 version seem more realistic when the filmmakers are not limited to using dolls or just makeup, which modern viewers can quite easily distinguish as fake. However, this also adds a problem as it is generally considered that too many computer-generated effects make the film appear somewhat weightless and artificial. Thus, while computer-generated effects could add more realism to what can be shown, they also cause the film to seem too clean and artificial because the actors are forced to interact with something that is not actually there. This is something that could be researched further; this will be addressed further in section 5. Discussion. The 1951 version relies only on makeup and costumes for the alien; the 1982 version has makeup, animatronics, and puppets available; and the 2011 version uses computer-generated graphics and makeup special effects.

Furthermore, while the first violent act, a man firing a gun, in the 1951 film happens relatively late, 38 minutes into the film, the 1982 film features violence immediately when, 8 minutes into the film, a gun fight ensues and a man is shot through the eye. However, the 1951 film does feature a severed arm; albeit it is the Thing’s bloodless arm – the characters make a point to note that the severed arm lacks blood. The 1951 film also contains a scene where the Thing is burned alive and later electrocuted. However, there is no bodily harm depicted. This is not surprising as the film was made under the Production Code, which was discussed in the Censorship, Self-Regulation, and the Studio Era. As per the Production Code, no surgical operations were allowed to be shown; although the characters investigate the severed arm, it is strategically placed behind a man’s back. The 1982 film and the 2011 film both contain detailed scenes of autopsies and other surgical operations.
4.3 Evil Dead 2: Dead By Dawn (1987) and Evil Dead (2013)

Evil Dead is a horror film franchise that started as a low-budget film in the 1980s but proved successful enough to get the attention of a major Hollywood film studio. Thus, The Evil Dead was released in 1981. It has spawned multiple sequels and even a television show in 2015. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the reboot of the original, Evil Dead released in 2013. The film will be compared to the second installment in the franchise, Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn (1987), because they both feature a similar scene that can be compared. The scene involves a character cutting off their hand; it will be described and analyzed below. However, for the purposes of this analysis, the first film will also be discussed and compared to the others, although no particular scene will be discussed in detail.

Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn was released in 1987 and it was directed by Sam Raimi. The film’s story concerns a book called the Necronomicon Ex-Mortis, the Book of the Dead, and the evil contained within it. In the first film of the series, The Evil Dead (1981), the evil is released from the book, and it possesses and kills most of the characters. In the second film of the series, Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn, the main character Ash Williams (played by Bruce Campbell) is forced to fight against the evil and his friends’ re-animated, or zombified, corpses. The film is not purely a horror film per se, but it contains some comedic elements that will be discussed later in the analysis. Interestingly, sometimes comedy is added to horror films to offer brief relief from the anxiety or to lessen the impact of the more graphic violence displayed, or as Hellenbeck writes, “comedy-horror films give you [...] the permission to laugh at your own fears[.]”69 This genre of horror film is known as the horror comedy or comedy-horror. It is also interesting that the first Evil Dead is a dramatic horror and the sequel is a horror comedy as is the third installment, Army of Darkness (1992). There is no information available as to why that is the case. Evil Dead 2 was released in 1987 long after the Production Code was removed so its filmmakers were relatively unrestricted in what they could show. Indeed, the film is rather gory and violent. The film was released

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before 1990, so the special effects are practical effects such as animatronics and prosthetic makeup. The film is rated R by CARA.70

*Evil Dead* was released in 2013 and it was directed by Fede Alvarez. It is a reboot of the Evil Dead franchise. Its story is more reminiscent of the first Evil Dead film as it also features a group of friends who travel to a remote cabin and discover *the Book of the Dead*. The group releases the evil contained within the book allowing the demon to possess the friends. Then, one by one, the demon starts killing the characters. However, the film features a scene where a character cuts off her hand, probably as an homage to the *Evil Dead 2* film, but nonetheless it can be compared to the second film in the original franchise. The film is extremely violent as it contains shooting, stabbing, self-harm, mutilation, etc. It should also be noted that the film lacks all comedic notes and is purely a dramatic horror film, much like the first *Evil Dead*. This will also be discussed further in the analysis below. Interestingly, despite it being a film from the 2010s, *Evil Dead’s* special effects are mostly practical effects (animatronics, prosthetic makeup, squibs, etc.) and not computer-generated effects, or CGI, as one would expect.71

The scene chosen for analysis is a scene where a character is forced to cut off their arm or hand because it has become “infected” or possessed by the evil. As discussed above, the hand scene is featured in the *Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn* and the *Evil Dead* reboot. However, the first *Evil Dead* also includes a violent scene where a possessed character bites a part off her hand. The scene is mentioned here, even though it is completely differently structured and differs narratively. Thus, no direct comparison can be made but it will offer an interesting view on the level of violence that was present already in 1981.

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### Hand Scene 28 minutes into the film; Evil Dead 2 (1987)

Ash struggles with his afflicted hand. The hand looks as if it is burned and scarred. Ash washes the hand in the kitchen. One by one, the hand grabs three plates and breaks them by hitting Ash in the head. The hand grabs Ash by the hair and repeatedly bashes his head against the sink. The hand also hits Ash in the stomach repeatedly. Then, by grabbing his hair, the hand throws Ash to the ground. Again, the hand breaks plates on Ash’s head while making strange screaming sounds.

Ash is unconscious and the hand tries to get to a butcher’s knife on the floor. Ash quickly impales the hand with a knife and pins it to the floor. The hand screams in pain, as does Ash. Ash smiles and says, “Aha, that’s right. Who’s laughing now?”

Ash grabs a chainsaw, turns it on, and screams: “Who’s laughing now?!” The chainsaw is off screen but Ash screams in pain while blood squirts all over his face implying that he is cutting off his hand. His face becomes covered in blood. The camera cuts to a night sky.

Another scene with people with flashlights who are trying to find the cabin.

The camera returns to Ash who traps the hand inside a pot and places books on the pot. One of the books is Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*. Ash bandages the stump with duct tape. The hand escapes and Ash starts hunting it with a shotgun.

Another shot shows the pot moving behind Ash. Ash begins hunting the hand with a double-barreled shotgun.

### Hand scene 51 minutes into the film; Evil Dead (2013)

Natalie removes a bandage from her hand and discovers that the hand’s skin is changed, almost as if it is badly burned.

Natalie washes her hand while grunting in pain. Some black substance comes out of the wounds on the hand as she squeezes it.

The camera cuts to David and Eric talking about helping Mia. The camera zooms to the cursed book, which shows a drawing of a naked woman being impaled by a large wooden post. The men argue about killing Mia.

The camera cuts back to Natalie washing her hand. The blackness on her hand starts spreading rapidly and her whole left hand becomes transformed. The hand starts shaking and the girl struggles to control it; the hand has a will of its own. Again, the camera cuts to the two men talking.

The camera cuts back to Natalie, now sitting on the floor while she and her afflicted hand twitch uncontrollably. The evil is taking over her. The shaking stops. She looks to the right and sees an electric knife. Natalie grabs the knife and turns it on. A transformed demonic Mia watches from the cellar and yells: “Don’t cut it off, bitch!”

Natalie takes the knife slowly to her bicep and says: “Fuck you” to Mia and proceeds to push the blade into her flesh. The blade shreds her flesh while blood gushes and sprays everywhere. The camera cuts between the arm, Natalie’s face, and Mia. Blood squirts on Natalie’s face. With a loud snap, the arm falls off; the camera shows Natalie’s face as she starts screaming in pain. Her face is red with blood. The electricity cuts off.

David and Eric enter the room holding a flashlight. They point the light at Natalie. She turns to them and says: “I had to do it. I feel much better now.” She turns to face the men and we see that her hand is still attached to her by
some ligaments or veins. The veins rip off, and the arm falls to the ground.

Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10: Screengrabs from the Evil Dead films. Top frames (figs. 7 and 8) are from Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn (1987) and the bottom frames (figs. 9 and 10) are from Evil Dead (2013). The pictures show how the 2013 film is more graphic and detailed. The 1987 film leaves the violence off-screen.

The most evident difference is the fact that the 1987 version has a clear comedic value to the scene. The fight against one’s own hand has some comedic value in itself and it is further enhanced by the fact that the hand slaps and beats the character Ash and even pulls his hair. Ash does not seem to have feeling in the hand but instead the hand has its own feelings and even the capability to express itself by screaming
and laughing. The hand clearly mocks Ash and the whole struggle is very reminiscent of a Tom and Jerry or Looney Toons episode. Furthermore, Ash places a book called A Farewell to Arms on top of the pot he uses to trap the hand – a rather funny detail to lighten the mood of something as traumatic as fighting against one’s own hand. The hand mocks Ash by displaying obscene hand gestures. The viewer has a sense of relief from the comedy, and thus the scene does not feel too oppressive or anxious. Concerning the level of violence and explicitness shown: the scene is extremely bloody as blood sprays all over Ash’s face, and at the beginning of the scene, Ash clearly impales his hand with the kitchen knife pinning it to the floor so that it cannot move. The act is shown in a continuous shot and it is clearly visible how the blade affects the hand as blood squirts out. The act feels realistic, although a modern viewer can easily distinguish the prosthetic used. The most interesting fact about the scene is that it is not filmed how the hand eventually is cut off on-screen; Ash starts the chainsaw and proceeds to cut off the hand but the action takes place off-screen and only Ash’s face is shown as it is sprayed with blood.

The scene in the 2013 reboot is a more realistic, albeit excessive, and explicit scene as is evident from the level of detail and intensity the scene has (see figs. 7–10 above for a general idea of the mood and intensity of the scene). Again, the hand is a prosthetic makeup effect and as such, the scene feels more realistic. The viewer can relate to the pain Natalie feels from the moment she tries to wash away the black goo. There are no comedy elements to relieve some of the stress of the scene or to laugh at. The viewer has no option but to watch in shock as the hand transforms into something unknown. The hand does not appear to have a will or move like it did in the 1987 film, the only signs of the infection or possession are twitching and black sores. However, the only relief from Natalie’s torment is the fact that she uses an electric knife to cut off the arm. It could be considered that the only way to make the scene even more traumatic is if she had to cut it off herself with a regular knife instead. For example, the film 127 Hours (2010) has a scene where the main character has to cut off his arm with a dull utility tool after he has broken the bones in his arm. The scene is set in a completely different context but, nonetheless, it shows that the act of cutting off one’s arm has been filmed previously in extreme detail.
However, returning to *Evil Dead* (2013), Natalie cutting her arm is filmed in an almost continuous shot as the only cuts are to her face, which becomes covered in blood. It is clearly visible how the blade cuts into the flesh as blood – an excessive amount of blood – squirts out. The amount of blood is excessive and it is clear how the scene might be influenced by the exploitation films from the 70s, discussed in section 2. One could say that the amount of blood is comic and offers a slight relief from the anxiety of the scene, but the blood accompanied by the actor’s screams only increase the horror value of the scene. Everything is intensified when the two male characters see how, as Natalie turns to face them, the arm hangs by a small ligament that then snaps, and the arm falls to the ground with a wet thump. The arm prosthetic looks very realistic, as can be seen from figures 9 and 10. Overall, the scene is very detailed and explicit. It is clear how advancements in makeup and prosthetics have added to the realism shown in films. The arm appears to have all internal veins and musculature in place and it does not appear fake, or at least the modern viewer will not as easily discern that the arm is fake as they would from the 1987 film. The arm can be compared to the hollow stump shown in *Evil Dead* (1981), which looks very dated in terms of special effects. When comparing these two films, it does appear as if the violence shown has become more detailed and explicit and less – if anything at all – is left to the imagination. The 1987 film leaves the whole act of cutting the arm to the viewers’ imaginations fueled only by the chainsaw’s buzz and spurts of blood. In the 2013 film, nothing is left unseen.

RoboCop is one of the film franchises to receive a remake in the 2010s. The original RoboCop was released in 1987 and directed by Paul Verhoeven. It stars Peter Weller in the titular role. The remake was released in early 2014 and directed by José Padilha. The remake stars Joel Kinnaman as RoboCop. The film centers on the story of a Detroit policeman Alex Murphy (Peter Weller in the original and Joel Kinnaman in the remake) who gets “killed” by criminals and is later revived by building and transforming him into a cyborg police officer, RoboCop. The film is full of violence as its theme is centered on police versus criminals, and its premise is a futuristic and crime-ridden Detroit. While the film also offers satire and critique towards various themes, the focus here will be on its portrayal of violence. It should immediately be noted that the original RoboCop has an R rating while the remake is rated PG-13.\(^{72}\) This is clearly visible in the film, and it will be discussed in more detail after the scene analysis.

The scene chosen for analysis is the one where RoboCop is murdered by the criminals. It is a pivotal and vital scene to the plot of the film as it is the sole reason why Alex Murphy becomes RoboCop. Furthermore, the scene is present in both the original and the remake – albeit it is strikingly different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Death of Murphy scene 19 minutes into the film (RoboCop 1987)</th>
<th>Death of Murphy scene 24 minutes into the film (RoboCop 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murphy sneaks up on two criminals watching a movie and orders them not to move.</td>
<td>After hearing a car alarm, Murphy walks outside his house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The criminals reach for their weapons and Murphy shoots and kills one of them. Two wounds are shown on the criminal’s chest.</td>
<td>He attempts to shut off the alarm with his key remote but the alarm will not shut down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy apprehends the second man and radios his partner.</td>
<td>As Murphy approaches the car, the car door opens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murphy is about to grab the door and the car explodes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{72}\) http://filmratings.com/search.html?filmTitle=RoboCop&x=0&y=0 accessed March 5, 2016.
Men with guns overpower Murphy and take him captive.
The main villain ridicules Murphy and hits him with the butt of his shotgun twice.
The other criminals laugh while the villain shoots off Murphy’s hand, the hand explodes with a mist of blood smearing the floor.
Murphy is seen clutching his bloody stump in pain.
Murphy gets up and the other criminals start taking turns at shooting him. The first shot destroys the rest of Murphy’s right arm.
Murphy is shot in the torso repeatedly resulting in blood and smoke from the bullet impacts.
Murphy is shot multiple times but a criminal remarks that Murphy is still alive.
Murphy kneels down and twitches in pain while the criminals laugh and ridicule him.
The main villain remarks, “Ok. Fun’s over.” And shoots Murphy in the head point blank with a pistol. Murphy’s head shows an impact and an exit wound.
Murphy falls down lifeless and we see his forehead pierced by a bullet hole.
The criminals leave and Murphy’s partner runs over to the body to inspect it.

The screen is filled with a bright flash and we faintly see how Murphy is thrown through the air by the explosion.
Murphy is seen on the bottom left of the screen lying on the ground as the car wreckage burns in the foreground; Murphy’s wife runs out to check on Murphy.
A voice-over begins to explain the injuries sustained by Murphy: fourth degree burns to 80% of his body and his lower spine is severed. The screen fades to black.
The image returns and it features the doctor explaining Murphy’s injuries while an injured human body in bandages is shown behind him on a video screen. A close-up of an injured human eye is shown.
Figures 11 and 12: The top screengrab is from RoboCop (1987) and the bottom picture is from RoboCop (2014). Note how the original film shows a clear bullet wound on Murphy’s head. The remake has Murphy bandaged and cleaned.

It is obvious that the two scenes are very different not only in their content but also on the level of violence. The original is an extremely viscous scene where the criminals are shown to be sadistic and the level of graphic detail is high. Very little is left to the imagination as the viewer is clearly shown how Murphy’s limbs explode and even disintegrate from the shotgun blasts (see figures 11 and 12). While the damage might be called an exaggeration, the film is set in the future where firearms may be much more powerful than the firearms of today. Therefore, the harm depicted can be considered plausible. The special effects were blood squibs and prosthetics, which means that the arms did actually explode,
and that is translated to the viewer with great detail, as it feels and looks rather realistic as compared to computer-generated effects that have something that looks out of place or too clean. Perhaps that is so because graphics are not as photorealistic, at least not yet. Bouzereau notes that the film shown at the time, and used in this thesis, is the theatrical cut and not the director’s cut, which is even more violent. It is, in fact, so violent that it had received the X rating (or the NC-17 rating) meaning that it could not be shown, except to adults only. Furthermore, Bouzereau writes that the film had to be cut seven times for it to receive the R rating. It is interesting to note that the ratings system, while not as strict as the Production Code, still puts limitations on filmmakers if they want their films to be released to wider audiences.

The remake’s scene leaves everything to the imagination until the viewer is shown the image of the mutilated body, but even then, the amount of blood and tissue damage is minimal as the body is heavily bandaged and in a hospital bed. There is no doubt that the original’s scene is the more violent of the two, and furthermore, the scene could still be considered one of the most violent scenes of all time in blockbusters because Murphy is completely helpless. It should be noted that 80s’ action films often utilized a similar narrative technique where the main character, or the hero, is completely destroyed by either physical or emotional violence. This is done so that he – most often it is a he, although there are female heroines as well – has nothing to lose anymore, and can make a glorious return, while also justifying the violence that the hero inflicts. The technique originated in old Westerns. The remake’s scene is a way to inflict the maximum damage possible while showing actual violence as little as possible. Ultimately, the result in both movies is the same: Murphy is almost dead and he has to be transformed into RoboCop, thus moving the story forward.

Interestingly, the original version is far more explicit in its violence than the remake; a fact that is usually reversed when compared to other remakes. However, as mentioned above, the remake is rated PG-13 while the original is rated R. This is an interesting find, as most film remakes and reboots tend to keep

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73 Bouzereau, Ultraviolent Movies, 179.
the same rating as the original. The reasons why the RoboCop remake is PG-13 may be multiple, but perhaps it is a studio decision to widen the potential audience and thus increase the film’s profitability. However, the remake does contain a scene where a child holding a kitchen knife is presumably blown and killed by a robot. The death is not shown but the robot targets the child and shoots, resulting in a smoke cloud where the child stood, and shocked looks from other characters. The original does not feature violence against children. However, it should be noted that the inclusion of the scene is an effective way to turn the citizens in the film – and the viewers – against robots while giving even more justification for turning Murphy into a cyborg, as a cyborg still has some human emotions and can thus assess situations with a humanistic approach. In contrast, the remake features a pistol given to RoboCop that has a firing mode that seems to be shooting electricity. This way RoboCop incapacitates his foes in a presumably non-lethal way, while the original features RoboCop killing his foes by shooting them with his sidearm. The bullets result in blood spurts and ripped clothing accompanied with blood. The remake also features RoboCop killing criminals, but the deaths are shown from afar and the characters die theatrically, almost mimicking the classical Hollywood “death ballet” similar to most Western films; no wounds or blood is shown.

Furthermore, the remake features a large firefight between Murphy and multiple criminals, but the whole scene is set in a dark warehouse where some of the footage is made to look as if it were viewed through thermal vision, meaning that the picture is distorted and humans are seen as either white or red shapes. Thus, the impact from shooting humans is not visible. This effect is probably used to enable the film’s PG-13 rating. Furthermore, the enemies are heavily armored and indistinguishable from one another. The original also features a warehouse firefight, but in it the enemies are men without body armor or masked faces. RoboCop shoots the men and some die with blood spurts while others fall to the ground from a second story platform.

As analyzed above, RoboCop and its remake show a rather opposite phenomenon in remakes where the original is far more violent than the remake. However, that is not to say that the remake lacks violence. Indeed, it might even feature more shooting that the original but the lack of injuries and suffering lessens
the impact of the portrayed violence. Furthermore, the addition of heavily armored villains causes the firefights to resemble a video game where the deaths are probably not significant to the viewer and the impact of the clean violence is not as agonizing as in the original where the men are shown to suffer.

4.5 Total Recall (1990) and Total Recall (2012)

Total Recall (1990) is a science fiction action film loosely based on the Philip K. Dick short story, “We Can Remember It For You Wholesale”. The film was released in 1990 and directed by Paul Verhoeven. It stars Arnold Schwarzenegger as the main character Douglas Quaid. The film is the second film in this thesis that is directed by Paul Verhoeven. Verhoeven’s films are violent and full of political satire; however, it is interesting that two of his films have been remade in the 21st century, and thus used in this thesis. It should also be added that both films were originally rated R while the remakes are rated PG-13. Verhoeven’s films are considered extremely violent, but nonetheless, they have become financially and critically successful; and, furthermore, they could be both considered films with a cult following. Total Recall and Robocop, discussed earlier, are also considered iconic 80s action films. In that sense, it does seem understandable that Hollywood film studios wanted to remake them for new audiences. Thus in 2012, the film was remade. Total Recall (2012) was directed by Len Wiseman and it stars Colin Farrell as Douglas Quaid. The story is largely the same as it is in the original; however, the setting is no longer Mars. In the remake, the story takes place on Earth.

In both Total Recalls, the main character, Douglas Quaid (played by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the original and Colin Farrell in the remake), discovers that his life has been a false memory implanted by the orders of the vicious governor of Mars, or a by the evil corporate director in the remake. Quaid is actually a secret agent and as his true past unravels, he is forced to fight against his former co-workers, friends, and even his wife Lori (played by Sharon Stone in the original and Kate Beckinsale in the remake).
The films feature gun violence as well as physical violence. Most of the effects pertaining to the violence appear to be practical effects in the original 1990 film such as blood squibs, prosthetics, and makeup. In the 2012 remake, however, the special effects are likely a combination of practical effects and computer generated effects. It should be noted that the 2012 remake features far less bodily harm depicted, and the most dramatic effects are bloody noses or blood coming out of the character’s mouths. This will be discussed further after the scene analysis.

The scene chosen for the analysis below is a scene where Douglas Quaid is confronted by his wife, and it is revealed that she is not in fact his wife but a secret agent and Quaid’s life has been a lie. This particular scene was chosen because it is rare in the fact that the aggressor is female and the target is male. In the 1990 film’s case, the fight is between a large, muscular man, Schwarzenegger, and a much smaller woman, Stone. Comparatively, in the 2012 film, the fight is between two much more evenly sized people; Farrell and Beckinsale are almost equal in terms of body size, with Farrell being slightly larger than Beckinsale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife fight scene 25 minutes in to the film Total Recall (1990)</th>
<th>Wife fight scene 29 minutes into the film Total Recall (2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Douglas Quaid washes blood off his hands in the bathroom. The apartment is dark. As he exits, someone shoots at him. A close-up of a gun is shown. The shooter misses and Douglas jumps down to the ground. The shooter shines a flashlight and continues shooting at him but misses with each shot. The gun runs out of ammunition. The shooter reloads; Douglas throws a chair at the shooter and rushes towards the shooter. Douglas wrestles the shooter to the ground but the shooter manages to get up. Douglas grabs the shooter from behind, but the shooter slams him against a wall. Douglas turns the light on and realizes that the shooter is his wife, Lori. Douglas exclaims “Lori?!?” and the woman hits Douglas in the stomach with her elbow, and immediately</td>
<td>Douglas and Lori discuss what has happened. The couple hug. We start hearing bones cracking and Douglas starts grunting in pain. Lori looks angry as the camera focuses on her face. She is choking him. He starts struggling, picks her up and runs against a window. Her back hits the window and the glass cracks. She still holds on. She moves so that he is hit by a shelf. Douglas breaks free, and Lori hits him in the face with her fists. He fights back and grabs her arm. She breaks free by running against a wall and jumping. She reverses the arm lock and throws him on the ground. Douglas gets up as Lori slides across a counter and lands on him. He falls to the bed. She is on top of him and begins to repeatedly punch him in the face. They fight on the bed briefly and she pushes him off the bed. She grabs a gun and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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after, she hits him in the crotch and breaks free from the chokehold Douglas has put her in.

Douglas is dazed for a moment, and the woman hits him in the face. She continues by trying to kick him but Douglas manages to defend against the kicks. Lori kicks him in the crotch and in the back. As she tries to punch him in the face, Douglas grabs her arm and throws her over a counter and on to the ground.

Lori gets up and grabs a knife. Douglas asks, “Why are you doing this, Lori?” Lori slashes Douglas in the chest and this results in ripped clothing and blood coming out of the wound. She continues by slashing and stabbing, but Douglas dodges all but one strike. The strike lands on Douglas’ wrist and causes a bloody wound.

Douglas manages to grab Lori’s arm twisting it behind her and making her drop the knife. Douglas grabs her in a chokehold and grabs the gun from the floor. He points the gun at her face (see fig. 13) Douglas questions her. They talk for a while. The fight ends and they both sit next to each other exhausted. They talk some more. Lori tries to seduce Douglas in an attempt to distract him from the approaching villains. Douglas notices the villains from a monitor and points the gun at her again. He punches her in the face knocking her out and says, “Nice knowing you”. Then he leaves.

starts shooting, but misses with each shot. Douglas turns off the lights, and they start talking while he is hiding. Lori hunts him with the pistol.

Douglas surprises her, grabs the pistol, and puts her in a chokehold (see fig. 14) He questions her. He lets her go while still pointing the gun at her. They talk. Lori attacks Douglas, wrestles him, and he loses the gun. They both race for the gun, which is on the ground, but Lori gets to it first. Douglas slides under a table and through a glass window onto the street. He falls to the ground. Lori attempts to shoot him but misses. Douglas runs and Lori pursues. They run through the streets but Douglas escapes.
Figures 13, 14 and 15: Screengrabs from *Total Recall* (1990) and *Total Recall* (2012). The top left frame is from the original film and the top right frame from the remake. Note how the original’s color scheme is brighter giving it a lighter look, while the remake has a dark color scheme giving it a more serious, brutal look. The bottom frame, fig. 15, is from the original, and it shows the two characters taking a break from the fight.

Although it is the same scene in both films, the action is very different. In the 1990 film, the fight has a clear comedic value; firstly, because the fight is a considerably smaller, nimble woman against a large, very muscular man, resulting almost in a cartoon-like situation. Secondly, Lori hits Douglas in the groin multiple times with him only grunting in pain. This is very reminiscent of slapstick comedy, which is a genre of film that often includes exaggerated physical activities – very often *comedic violence* – and where the violence does not result in any bodily harm. Furthermore, the scene – as well as the film as a whole – contains a fair number of Schwarzenegger’s signature one-liners that act as a humorous release from the stress of the violence portrayed. Therefore, while the physical brawl includes some wounds
and blood, the overall mood of the scene is lighter and not as violent as it would be without the comedy. The 2012 version has a completely different, heavier, theme as well as mood as the fight is highly acrobatic and more evenly matched. The scene is more reminiscent of Asian martial arts films where the fights are very acrobatic and punches and kicks result in less damage. The 2012 scene does not show much bodily harm either, and noticeably less than the 1990 version, where Douglas is cut twice with the knife. In fact, the only weapon used in the 2012 scene is the pistol, while the 1990 scene had a kitchen knife as well as a pistol. However, the 1990 film includes a break from the violence as Douglas and Lori stop their brawl and converse briefly (see the screengrab above) before Douglas knocks out Lori. That said, however, the 1990 film’s scene includes Douglas physically hitting Lori so hard that she becomes unconscious, while both parties in the 2012 film remain conscious and the only way for the brawl to end is for Douglas to escape from the apartment via the window.

It is clear, however, that the biggest changes in terms of the level of violence in the new, PG-13 version are that violent acts do not result in bodily harm. The 2012 film forgoes most of the blood and exploding body parts and instead reverts to Code era graceful bullet impacts and ballet-like deaths of heavily armored and masked men. This is actually an important find, as it seems that the ones suffering from violence are unidentifiable, heavily armored men who do not display any emotion or personality, much like in the RoboCop remake. Furthermore, the viewer cannot identify with the masked characters. They are the soulless grunts, computer generated characters who have no weight or value other than being the henchmen of the villains and the inevitable cannon fodder of the main character, the hero. In the 1990 film, however, each enemy is a human whose face is visible and who is played by a real human actor. Their deaths often result in blood spurts and mutilation.

It seems that the lower PG-13 rating of the 2012 Total Recall means that the film is cleaner and less graphic than the R rated 1990 Total Recall. Both films are violent but the 1990 film almost excessively portrays the gory details of people being beaten and murdered. The 2012 film is much more subtle in the displayed violence and, as discussed, it does not show bullet wounds or other bodily harm. That is not to say, however, that it is less violent. It features a large amount of gun violence as well as physical
violence, perhaps comparable to the amount of violence in the 1990 film. The major difference is that the violence is not as detailed and the results of the violence are not shown. Furthermore, the 1990 film’s excess can be considered slightly comic and thus the impact of the violence is lessened. Nonetheless, it is clear that Total Recall is a rare case where the original film is more violent and far more graphic than the remake is. In fact, RoboCop, analyzed above, is a similar case.
5. Discussion

In this section, the violence featured in films as well as the findings of the analyses will be discussed. In addition, the chapter will add the historical background to the findings from the analyses and thus explain the findings further.

The analyses of the two *Psycho* films show that the violence depicted has remained at the same level of detail in both iterations. The analyses of *Evil Dead* and *The Thing* show that the special effects used have evolved, and thus more detail has been added, but the level of violence or the violent acts still remain the same. The difference seems to be that the resulting bodily harm is filmed in more detail. Contrary to this are the findings from the *Total Recall* and *RoboCop* films, which show that the violence has been lessened and reduced significantly.

While it was revealed that the general trend in film remakes and reboots is to increase the detail of violence as far as new technology allows, there is no clear trend toward more violent films. However, as the Production Code demanded, the violent content as well as the sexual content of films from before the 1960s were moderated. As the Code was dissolved, the new ratings system took its place as the film industry’s self-regulatory organ. Filmmakers could now display whatever they wished, however, as it was revealed, the studios that release the films want to conform to the ratings board as films that get the NC-17 rating or the X rating are not easily shown in film theatres and thus do not prove profitable. This does not benefit anyone because studios do not get profit from the films and filmmakers do not get recognition. Additionally, it is important to note that the film industry is a business where the main goal is to gain profit, and thus it seems that modern film studios will experiment in different ways. One of these ways is to make reboots from older films to new audiences. Interestingly, sometimes it means that film studios will make changes so that the original, perhaps R rated film, is now rebooted as a less strictly rated, for example, PG-13 film. Two such examples were given in this thesis: *RoboCop* and *Total Recall*. 
Other such examples can be found from sequels made in the 2010s. The action film *The Expendables* (2010) is rated R for “for strong action and bloody violence throughout, and for some language” as is its sequel *The Expendables 2* (2012) which is rated R for “strong bloody violence throughout.” Interestingly, their sequel, *The Expendables 3* (2014) is rated PG-13 “for violence including sustained gun battles and fight scenes, and for language.” In fact, actor and the film’s writer, Sylvester Stallone, has said in an interview that it was a mistake to go for a lower, PG-13 rating in order to gain a wider audience. This proves that it is a used tactic in Hollywood to reduce violence in films to gain a wider audience, and thus gain more profits. It also clearly points to the fact that films do not always feature more violence as the generalized research mentioned in the introduction implied.

In the films *Total Recall* and *RoboCop*, the violent acts remained largely the same, they both feature killing, fighting, shooting, etc. However, the detail of violence was tremendously lessened. For, example, all of the gore was removed as the results of violence were not showcased or gratuitously filmed. The action is very reminiscent of the Code era gangster films where people are still shot and beaten but it is not filmed in detail. Violent acts are quickly over and people are not shown to suffer. However, as Slocum writes, “the threat of harm or injury can often be as disturbing as the act itself.” Therefore, by showing less, more is left to the viewers’ imagination. Additionally, director John Carpenter thinks that by merely suggesting violence, the viewers will “do it [the violence] all up in there, in their heads” and that filmmakers should not “gross them [the audience] out, don’t show the meat when the knife goes in, don’t cut to the blood going everywhere[.]” His views echo some of the other trends prevalent in Hollywood today, as was discussed in 2.4 where the success of the film *The Conjuring* was briefly mentioned. Another horror film that was remade in 2014 is *Poltergeist*, which also retained a PG-13 rating. This clearly shows that there is no general trend towards more violent films.

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74 http://filmratings.com/search.html?filmTitle=Expendables&x=0&y=0, accessed March 5, 2016
75 http://filmratings.com/search.html?filmTitle=Expendables&x=0&y=0, accessed March 5, 2016
However, the other films analyzed clearly showed a trend where the explicitness and detail of violence increased with each new iteration. For example, *The Thing* shows that a Code era film was remade in the 80s with a lot more violence. Understandably, this is expected, as the Production Code was an incredibly strict set of rules. With its dissolution and the introduction of different age ratings, filmmakers were now able to target different demographics for their films and thus tailor the content appropriately. Interestingly, the 80’s *The Thing* could be compared to the 2011’s *The Thing* in terms of violent content.

The only major difference are the different types of special effects used to portray violence. The 80’s film contains practical effects that seem more realistic or real for the viewer, as the effects were created on set while the camera filmed and the actors’ reactions were real. The effects had real substance and they were as close to the real thing as possible. Bouzereau conducted an interview with Gregory Nicotero where the special effects master describes how in an ultraviolent Quentin Tarantino film, *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), the effects were blood squibs, makeup, and prosthetics, and how a scene involving a man getting his ear cut off was made with only makeup and prosthetics. These all give an illusion of reality. In the 2011 *The Thing*, the special effects are mostly computer-generated visual effects, which means that they were included after filming in post processing, and are completely artificial computer graphics. Of course, the film might have utilized some practical effect such as squibs and makeup, but as the creature is made with a computer, its interactions are likely computer-generated as well. The interactions with the creature do not convey to the modern viewer as realistically as one would hope because the violence lacks weight or substance as it is completely artificial. The modern viewer is accustomed to computer-generated violence mostly through video games. Additionally, the gore is so excessive that one finds it humorous.

The computer-generated characters in other films such as *Total Recall* and *RoboCop* are, as discussed in the analysis, usually heavily armored and masked grunts who have no value other than being the obstacles the hero has to clear. The viewer cannot identify with the humanoid figures who have no personality or emotion. Their most important task is to die in a graceful manner, much like the villains died in the Code era films. It seems as if the only difference between PG-13 and R rated films is the amount of damage the characters take before or as they are dying. In R rated films, the norm seems to
be to display a fair amount of blood, blood mist, and alternatively some mutilation. In PG-13 films, they
die gracefully or acrobatically without showing bodily damage. There are no limitations on what can be
shown with computer-generated effects, but as Evil Dead proves, the development of practical effects
and new materials can also translate to very realistic practical effects.

It is interesting to note how Evil Dead took a hand-cutting scene further, and to excess, while retaining
its serious tone. This is evident in the new, but still relatively, niche genre of torture porn, which actually
seems to mimic the exploitation films of the 70s and 80s. In fact, one could argue that a torture porn
film is actually a modern exploitation film only marketed to broader audiences. The violence in the
modern films is very similar to the violence in the old exploitation films, only now the new level of
violence is achieved with new technology. It is easy to disregard exploitation films because they were
such a low-impact, niche market. However, that would also leave us blind to the fact that films, especially
exploitation films, were extremely violent and excessive without being humorous to lessen the impact
of the violence. Of course, it is easy to dismiss older films by claiming that the violence in them does not
seem real or that their special effects look so outdated that they do not have the same impact as a
modern scene where someone’s head is chopped in half with a machete. Indeed, as Bouzereau writes
about the horror genre that has “changed a great deal since Halloween [1978] was made, and so has our
society. What seemed shocking and violent in 1978 looks tame today.”79 It seems that the film industry
has come full circle as the increase in violent content back in the old Hollywood was credited partly to
newsreels and world events. We are currently witnessing a new era of newsreels as events such as the
9/11 attacks or the wars in the Middle East and countless other terrorist attacks are spread through
television news and – unfiltered – through social media instantaneously. We are witnessing real violence
at a level that could not have been predicted. It is no surprise that modern films are violent to an excess
because excess gives us permission to laugh.

79 Bouzereau, Ultraviolent Movies, 188.
Film is still a relatively young medium when compared to literature or theatre. Both of the older mediums offer extremely violent content. Good examples of the more violent plays are, the French theatre called Grand Guignol, or more commonly known works such as Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus, which has violence as a central element. For instance, it contains a scene where a character is burned alive, his limbs are cut off, and multiple other characters are brutally killed. Other such revenge plays are John Webster’s The Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil. In literature, violence is not a taboo and countless books include violence excessively. A good example of this is Robert Bloch’s 1959 novel Psycho that is far more violent than the film based on it. For example, the shower scene is far more brutal and violent in the book as the character’s head is severed and in the film she is stabbed to death. Another example is a 1991 novel by Bret Easton Ellis, American Psycho, which was not published initially because it was so graphic. The book was later adapted into an R rated film, American Psycho (2000). It is interesting to note that in many cases films are based on books that also feature violence.

When asked about the limits of film violence, the director of the slasher film Friday the 13th, Sean S. Cunningham, replied that “at the end of the day people are just grossed out, as opposed to being entertained. What’s really important in a film is the story. You can enhance your story by the judicious use of violence, like they did in Interview With the Vampire, but by itself violence is pointless. It’s not a big trick to chop somebody’s head off on-screen; it’s a big trick to make the audience care about it.” Indeed, all films attempt to explain the violence and even justify it. As was discussed in the RoboCop analysis, the hero is put under a great ordeal in order to justify the violence acts they later cause. Special effects master Gregory Nicotero also has a view on violence and according to him in today’s films people who are killed deserve it, “Today the villains get killed, and in a way, the violence that’s done to them is justified.”

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80 Bouzereau, Ultraviolent Movies, 218.
81 Ibid. 89.
It is difficult if not impossible to prove that there is a clear trend toward more violent films as films should not be examined as a whole. Each film is the director’s individual artistic view and directors vary from those who always make violent films, such as Quentin Tarantino, to those who only make comedies or animations, such as John Lassiter. Then there are directors who make a variety of different themed films, such as Steven Spielberg. Moreover, sometimes films are later re-cut or edited so that they are made less violent or more violent. For example, Spielberg’s film *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* (1982) was edited so that the police personnel’s guns were digitally changed into handheld transceivers. Or *The Expendables 3* was re-cut as an unrated version for home media and contains more violence. Furthermore, the most profitable summer blockbusters are most often PG-13 rated action films.
6. Conclusion

The purpose of the thesis was to investigate and to study how film violence has been portrayed in American films during the various eras of Hollywood. The thesis introduced a historical timeline, which also considered the ways in which violence has been governed and controlled. The most important of these was the Production Code, which directly controlled what could be shown in films, and if filmmakers did not agree with the Code, their films would not be shown or made as studios wanted profits. After the Code, age ratings such as the MPAA ratings were introduced to slightly limit the content that was filmed. While the ratings do not condemn violence per se, they offer strict guidelines as to what can be shown in films targeted at different audiences. Understandably, a PG-13 film will be less violent than an R rated film. It should be noted, however, that while a PG-13 film appears less violent, it might still contain the same violent acts as the R rated film, the differences being how much is shown and how detailed the violence is. For example, a PG-13 film might feature killing off-screen or even on-screen but the action will likely resemble a Code era film where the violence is brief and not at all graphic. Contrary to this, an R rated film is targeted at mature audiences and the limits to what can be shown and filmed are less strict. An R rated film will likely be extremely graphic and violent, but still acceptable before the film is rated NC-17, or X. NC-17 films are not very profitable as few film theaters opt to show them. Therefore, the paper revealed that film violence is still being governed and controlled. In addition, the paper quoted two filmmakers who expressed that in their opinion film violence needs a story to drive and justify the violence. A film producer also noted a trend towards less graphic horror films.

The history of films reveals that violence has been a part of films since the beginning and the first special effects were used to depict a beheading scene. Furthermore, while the Code had banned some violence, it was more focused on sexual content and, therefore, films continued to be violent. Popular films included gangster tales and western films where the story revolved around violence. Later, horror films were created that portrayed a new level of violence. The Code was only followed by the major Hollywood
studios and with independent films becoming more popular, the boundaries of what could be shown were pushed. Eventually, the Code was dissolved and a ratings system was introduced. This led to a series of new violent films that would each show more. However, the acts in the films remained the same, everything was simply filmed with more detail and explicitness. The detail was achieved with new developments in special effects and makeup. Later in the 90s, computer-generated visual effects were introduced, which also allowed more to be shown. This is evident in the analyzed films such as *The Thing*. Interestingly, ultra-violence does not rely solely on computer-generated effects, and the analysis of *Evil Dead* shows that more can be achieved with practical effects as well.

The analysis of *Evil Dead* also shows that the lack of humor in violent scenes increases its felt brutality and stress. Furthermore, excess is often viewed as comedic and older, for example 80’s, films used excess as a comedic element to lighten the mood of the violent scenes. Another example of techniques used to lessen the impact of the violence are one-liners. For example, heroes jokingly shouting “Stick around!” after pinning someone to the wall with a knife, disarms the stress of the violence portrayed and gives permission to laugh at the violence. The analysis also shows that the targets of violent acts have become more neutral as heavily armored, undistinguishable villains are not shown to suffer.

The discussion also hinted at other arts that have examples of extremely violent content. Literature and theater, both much older than films, have had violence in them for centuries. It seems that films are finally reaching a level of maturity where it is possible to relatively freely convey the filmmakers art and vision without too much censorship, or at least when it comes to violent content. Future studies might make a comparison between violent content and sexual content in order to discover how the aforementioned are being treated in the film industry. In addition, further studies might look at even younger arts such as television and video games. It seems that television is currently experiencing the same breakthrough in violent and sexual content as the films did in the 70s; increasingly violent television series are being developed and watched. Additionally, future studies might significantly increase the amount of data used in the analysis, as the data was quite limited in this study. In fact, the only major limitation of this study is limited data, as it only focuses on a few American films. However, I
believe that the study is successful in fulfilling its purpose of examining film violence from a historical and qualitative perspective.

The analyses and historical overview could not prove a clear, general trend toward more violent films. Some of the films analyzed showed a slight increase in content that is more explicit, but others appeared either to retain the level of violence of the original film or even decrease it as remakes were aimed for broader audiences. Furthermore, from a historical perspective, the earliest films as well as the exploitation and horror films of the 70s were extremely violent and could be, from a special effects perspective, compared to modern violent films. The fact is that violent films caused a similar shock in past audiences as they do in modern audiences. However, what was then considered shocking is now tame. I suspect that 30 years from now, our films will be considered tame but perhaps no more violent than now. New effects will just result in different ways with which filmmakers will be able to display their art.

It is evident that violence has always been a part of films, and we do not see any more now than what was shown in older films. The difference is, however, that our real world is now more violent than before and real violence is present everywhere, thus films need to show more while the actual violent acts remain the same; killing is still killing.


Cambell, John W. *Who Goes There?* Accessed March 5, 2014,


Filmography

The following is a list of films mentioned in this paper:

127 Hours (Danny Boyle, 2010)

American Psycho (Mary Harron, 2000)

Army of Darkness (Sam Raimi, 1992)

Battleship Potemkin (Sergei Eisenstein, 1926)

Birth of a Nation, The (D. W. Griffith, 1915)

Blood Feast (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1963)

Bold Bank Robbery, The (Jack Frawley, 1904)

Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penne, 1967)

Burned at the Stake (Paley & Stenier, 1904)

Cobra (George P. Cosmatos, 1986)

Color Me Blood Red (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1965)

Commando (Mark L. Lester, 1985)

Die Hard (John McTiernan, 1988)

Doctor X (Michael Curtiz, 1932)

Dracula (Tod Browning, 1931)

Electrocuting an Elephant (Edison Company, 1903)

Evil Dead (Sam Raimi, 1981)

Evil Dead (Fede Alvarez, 2013)

Evil Dead 2: Dead By Dawn (Sam Raimi, 1987)

Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of the Auburn Prison (Edwin S. Porter, 1901)
Execution of Mary, Queen of the Scots, The (Edison Company, 1894)

Expendables, The (Sylvester Stallone, 2010)

Expendables 2, The (Simon West, 2012)

Expendables 3, The (Patrick Hughes, 2014)

Fistful of Dollars (Sergio Leone, 1964)

Frankenstein (James Whale, 1931)

Friday the 13th (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980)

Garden of Eden (Max Nosseck, 1954)

Godfather, The (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972)

Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, The (Sergio Leone, 1966)

Great Train Robbery, The (Edwin S. Porter, 1903)

Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978)

Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005)


Mummy, The (Karl Freund, 1932)

Murders in the Rue Morgue (Robert Florey, 1932)

Nightmare on Elm Street (Wes Craven, 1984)

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

Psycho (Gus Van Sant, 1998)

Raiders of the Lost Ark (Stephen Spielberg, 1981)

Rambo: First Blood II (George P. Cosmatos, 1985)

RoboCop (Paul Verhoeven, 1987)

RoboCop (José Padilha, 2014)
Saw (James Wan, 2004)

Scarface (Howard Hawks, 1932)

Terminator, The (James Cameron, 1984)

Terrible Turkish Executioner, The (Georges Méliès, 1904)

Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The (Tobe Hooper, 1974)

Thing From Another World, The (Howard Hawks and Christian Nyby, 1951)

Thing, The (John Carpenter, 1982)

Thing, The (Matthijs van Heijningen Jr., 2011)

Total Recall (Paul Verhoeven, 1990)

Total Recall (Len Wiseman, 2012)

Tower of London, The (Georges Méliès, 1905)

Two Thousand Maniacs (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1964)
Appendix

Figures 16, 17, 18 and 19: Top left from *The Thing From Another World* (1951), top right from *The Thing* (1982), and two bottom pictures from *The Thing* (2011). Note the increase in physical harm and blood. In addition, this is a good example of how the films have moved from make-up to puppets and animatronics to computer-generated special effects.