Radical Ornament: Its Effects and Affects Understood through the Materiality of Rocaille Ornament and Body-Horror Films

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History
Department of Art
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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes a type of ornamentation I describe as radical through an examination of its effects and affects, which are observed in the common formal and functional aspects of French rocaille ornaments and in the material details of contemporary body-horror films. Although these areas of study have obvious differences, by demonstrating what their materiality has in common I make innovative claims about the potential agential power of ornament.

In Chapter One, the lack of analysis of rocaille forms is examined in the work of little-discussed rocaille artists. I explain that the framing systems formed by rocaille ornaments are open and that their effects are like Derrida’s parergonality. I also equate the actions of rocaille ornaments with the work of the informe. Chapter Two examines how the contemporary materiality, which I term heterogeneous organic detail (HOD), is physically comparable to that of rocaille ornaments, while its actions are explained as viral and prosthesis-like. Viral actions are described as those of breaking boundaries, communicating infection, and transforming infected subjects into symptomatic ones. Chapter Three demonstrates that rocaille ornaments and HODs have such powerful affect
that they allow their viewing subjects to connect to imaginary space and become other via what is explained as prosthetic imaginary experiences. Due to this affective process, *rocaille* space is argued to be subjective because it is resolved in the viewer’s imagination. Another implication of radical ornament’s induced prosthetic experiences is that the infected subject’s personal identity may be transformed. Thus, the areas most affected by the work of radical ornament are the subject’s perception of space and the subject’s personal identity.

The dissertation concludes that unlike other forms of ornamentation, radical ornaments destroy order and the centrality of subject matter by creating associations and connections between segregated sectors that allow for intersubjectivity. This disruption causes radical ornament’s subject to be re-embodied and the split between subject-object and mind-body to be effaced. By addressing the lack of material and theoretical examination of these two types of materiality, this dissertation contributes to a rethinking of the nature and agency of ornament.
Acknowledgments

I began this research in order to explain this similitude that first spoke to me visually. But to breach historical conventions of time/genre/media is not always an easy feat and I am infinitely indebted first and foremost to my supervisor, Professor Mark Cheetham, for his unwavering support for this project. From the moment I presented my ideas for his consideration, Dr. Cheetham was enthusiastic, energetic and supportive. He has always been available and generous with his time and advice, allowing me to also connect with various people and opportunities. He has been patient in allowing me the time and space I needed to gestate and formulate my ideas. I thank him from the bottom of my heart for having been an amazing supervisor. I am also thankful to my other two committee members, Professors Alison Syme and Charlie Keil. As my teacher, Dr. Syme has inspired me, been supportive of my experimental bifurcations, and has always oriented me towards useful and enlightening sources. Being generous and more than helpful with his advice on film studies, Dr. Keil was was a crucial component of my advisory committee. He guided me in the right direction in a field that is not my own. I am indebted to all three of my committee advisors for their time, patience, judicious advice and support. I am also thankful to the Department of Art at the University of Toronto and all its staff. I appreciate the support the department has shown me in purchasing the materials I required, funding my travels to conferences, and allowing me to teach a seminar, a highlight of my graduate studies there.

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Introduction

My research is based on the common formal and functional aspects of certain objects found in both eighteenth-century French rococo decorative arts from 1700-1770 and several contemporary body-centered horror and science fiction films ranging from the mid 1990’s to 2010 (with a brief look at a few from the late 1970’s and 1980’s). Although these two areas of study differ in media, epoch, socio-historical context, genre, and, above all, surface elements such as coloring and their assumed effects, by demonstrating what they have in common I will make innovative claims about the definition of rococo, the notion of ornament within body-centered horror and sci-fi films, and the potential of ornament.

The object of study is ornament, but this dissertation does not make claims for all types of ornamentation; rather, it tries to extend the category by investigating the potential of ornament and outlining certain aspects of its edges, which I have re-named radical ornaments. My hypothesis is that exploring the limits of a category and transgressions beyond its accepted definition may reveal its repressed potential. I try to establish similar sets of operations that exist in a type of relation between objects which I call an ornamental relation, and which goes beyond the confines of a specific cultural practice. In order to understand the potential impact of radical ornaments, this investigation leaves behind their more traditional interpretations, such as viewing rococo ornaments as frivolous decoration or contemporary organic details as visual effects meant simply to heighten sensations of horror. This synchronic study therefore describes the
potential of radical ornament in order to reveal aspects of the nature of rococo and body-centered horror and sci-fi films never previously considered.

My point of departure is to understand what made *rocaille* ornaments radical at their time of creation. I developed a theory about the difficulty commentators experienced in addressing *rocaille* by asking what seem the most obvious questions: why these ornaments were often a central subject matter, why this style was always associated with shells, and why was it so disruptive during the period of its conception and consumption. Conceptualizing rococo as a radical sort of ornamentation allows me to make several claims about the nature of the *rocaille* style itself and thereby redefine what *rocaille* can be: *rocaille* ornaments are not just objects but are ornamental relations between subject and object. Such an innovative view of the period’s ornament has never before been offered and represents a departure from current rococo studies.¹

In order to make these claims, I must explode our conventional conception of ornament. It is necessary for me to use a method of analogical comparison in which film acts as a counter measure to our deeply biased modernist sight, allowing us once again to view *rocaille*’s disruptive potential. Indeed, ornament, Jonathan Massey claims, has been studied for too long under the modernist idiom of linear evolutionary time, and instead

should be considered in a polytemporality. In other words, ornament should be considered across time periods and juxtaposed against other cultural productions that are disruptive of linear evolutionary time. This comparison between rocaille and body-horror films is therefore in league with Deleuze’s concept of the untimely, though not directly inspired by it. Deleuze conceives of time as free since life, he argues, is not tied to any beginnings or ends. Rather, life is a swarm of connections and affects, and so time does not flow linearly from one point to the next. In this context, Deleuze sees art and philosophy as being capable of untimely disruptions: the dislocation of time away from an origin and thus a linear trajectory. My comparison of different material cultural objects belonging to different contexts and times makes for a Deleuzian-like untimely connection, seeking to reactivate the past by making its questions and directions pertinent to our present. These rocaille/horror-film analogies offer incongruous connections that disrupt linear conceptions of artistic innovation in order to create Deleuzian lines of flight, and thereby reveal new affects. Such a method can be viewed as unorthodox, or it can be understood as a re-actualization and rejuvenation of the past, in which a historical object is still considered valid and active in the present. This disruptive analysis also allows me to bring a new perspective to film studies by introducing body-centered films

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3 Ibid., 513.


5 On the question of periodization and temporality in art see Christine Ross, The Past is the Present; It’s the Future Too: the Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art (New York: Continuum, 2012).

6 I am, of course, not alone in making comparative analyses between disparate media and time periods. See Mieke Bal, Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
into the discussion on ornament, arguing for the potential of film elements to go beyond
details or props.

Throughout this thesis, I detail the effects and affects of radical ornament and its
purpose, a study that reveals one core capacity of radical ornament: to break down the
fixity of rational structures. This thesis seeks to demonstrate there is common ground
between vastly different terrains of study. It is found in the relations between subject,
object, and space that are enabled by the presence of radical ornament and the ensuing
activation of the subject’s imagination to participate in the construction of space, thereby
allowing subjects to alter their personal identity. In its conclusion, this dissertation
therefore provides fodder to discuss and to further consider the impact of radical
ornament on perceptions of space and constructions of identity. Ultimately, this is a
project that dares to answer how ornament can alter our perception of space or even
perception itself, while it questions our relation to space and the role art can have in
altering our navigation of reality and our constructions of self.

The interdisciplinarity of this dissertation also parallels that of its object of study.
In fact, it is completely in line with the Enlightenment practice of collectors of
‘curiosities’ and their collections. The idea that disparate objects could co-exist in the
same space regardless of their disciplinary affiliations was fundamental to the eighteenth-
century (and earlier) rococo curiosity cabinet and widespread within the social realm of
the collector. As with mid-eighteenth-century collections, my thesis also brings together
strange elements from different areas and times, all to be looked upon, appreciated, and
discussed together.
It is important to emphasize, however, that while I make an analogy between cultural forms from distinct time periods, I am not tracing the history and teleology of ornament beginning with rococo and ending with contemporary horror films. If the method employed is analogical, it does not imply a universal understanding of ornament. This is not a transhistorical study in the sense that I do not assume that our contemporary understanding of horror and ornament is the same as an eighteenth-century understanding of these terms and genres. What I identify as capable of escaping historical specificity is the mode of operation of radical ornament and its affective potential, but the significance of formal aspects does remain historically specific.\(^7\)

Though analogical, this dissertation is nonetheless historically grounded. In fact, the reconstruction of a specific socio-historical context helps to perceive the historical object as it might have been by its audiences. To be sure, the cultural milieus that produced *rocaille* ornamentation and these films, alongside their audiences and viewing methods, are specific to each object. In the case of *rocaille*, identifying the cultural milieu that produced and nursed its emergence first requires the identification of the style itself, since for a long time historians did not consider rococo to be a period style in its own right.\(^8\) The cultural context in which the first form of the style flourished has been identified as the late reign of King Louis XIV, when it appeared in the decoration of

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\(^7\) For a thorough argumentation on the use of visual analogy in the advancement of human consciousness see Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).

several *châteaux* such as Meudon, Marly, the menagerie of Versailles, and La Muette. More specifically, the grotesque and arabesque types of ornamentation found in rococo were at first an aristocratic mode of decoration, used in interior spaces and on costumes for balls. The grotesques, arabesques, and *singeries* of Jean Bérain, Claude Audran III, and Antoine Watteau grew out of a nexus of social influences, such as *fête foraine* and masquerades, and were associated with the Regent and his circle. The boom in architectural private hotels after the death of Louis XIV in 1714 also helped promote the taste for rococo decoration. The style was viewed as a viable alternative to the classicism associated with Versailles and its absolutist ruler Louis XIV. As to the cultural contexts that produced the body-horror genre films discussed herein, these are as diverse as the films themselves. Because the films’ countries of origin range from South Africa to Japan, Canada, and the USA, there are specific cultural references that may speak more directly to an audience from that specific country. The discourse on segregation that underlies *District 9* (Neill BlomKamp, 2009), for example, may be more obvious to a person from South Africa than one from elsewhere.

As equally diverse as the cultural contexts of these materialities are, soo too are their audiences, consumers, and modes of viewing. Rococo was consumed mainly by

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10 Ibid., 6. Milam states the decoration that “first articulated the visual vocabulary of forms and motifs associated with the rococo thus developed from within the world of court culture and were not strictly opposed to the prevailing values and tastes of the highest-ranking nobles at Versailles.” Ibid., 8. Concerning a thorough explanation of the link between grotesques, masquerades, and balls see Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, 122-133.
12 Milam, *Historical Dictionary*, 9. See also the work of Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, for a consideration of the different publics that consumed the style. Ziskin’s research discusses the taste of high financiers for rococo decoration in *The Place Vendôme*.
13 For a discussion of the early genre of body-horror and its development see Chapter Two.
elites, upper bourgeois, financiers and aristocrats, while consumers of the selected films vary greatly. Most studies of audiences for horror genre films have concentrated on young males. But Vosper claims that it is hard to prove who the audiences are, and that studies cannot only account for moviegoers (which do tend to be young males) because consumption methods may vary. This also explains why it is difficult to consider the modes of viewing these materialities. Rococo ornamentation was found on all types of decorative objects and spaces: it could be viewed when drinking from a porcelain cup, in the reflection of a pier glass mirror, or on a *morceau de fantaisie* print. As from the grand scale of the rococo room to the intimate scale of the *morceau de fantaisie* print, the body-horror genre film also varies in its modes of viewing, from cinemas to intimate handheld devices such as smart phones. The mode of viewing body-horror films has also come to determine the availability of the films themselves. While they may have been made for viewing on cinema screens, their lack of distribution and availability may not have allowed for this type of viewing. Early Cronenberg films were often banned, Conrich explains, and for this reason consumed in private settings, on home screens with videocassettes. As with *rocaille* prints, gory details from these films could also be

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14 Anne Jerslev, “The Horror Film, the Body and the Youth Audience,” *Young* 2, no. 3 (1994): 18.
15 Vosper argues women may simply tend to consume such genres at home or develop a taste for it later on. See Jane Vosper, “Film, Fear, and the Female: An Empirical Study of the Female Horror Spectator” (master’s thesis, Film Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa, 2013), 16. Vosper’s thesis is that a female viewership of horror genre films also exists, and provides the empirical research to prove it.
16 Although rococo ornamentation was found on all kinds of surfaces, I address specific viewing modes such as print culture in Chapter One and viewing conditions and general rules of *bienséance* in Chapter Three.
17 Ian Conrich, “An Aesthetic Sense: Cronenberg and Neo-Horror Film Culture,” in *The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg*, ed. Michael Grant (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 42. For a retrospective of the viewing and banning of Cronenberg’s films see Conrich, “An Aesthetic Sense.” Conrich also argues that initially the lack of availability of this type of film developed a community of cult fans and a social space for viewing these but that such a viewing community was removed later on with home video; see ibid., 42. Discussing the horror film audience in 1986, Brophy writes of his own experience in Australia: “Thus, the bulk of my horror film viewing over the past four-five years has consisted of Drive-In doubles, Dusk-to-Dawns and hired video cassettes. (Most of these films do not reach
gazed at on the small scale of an image since magazines such as *Fangoria* would select key scenes and make close-up, blown-out posters, which could be hung in a room, or looked at appreciatively. Viewing devices allow for a different experience, what Conrich describes as the possibility to “skip or fast-forward to a selected part of a Cronenberg film, to view repeatedly, control and manipulate the image, rewind and replay a special effects moment and, where required, pause.” With the plurality of devices and modes of reproduction available, one cannot assume in which way spectators consume such cultural products. What was once available only to certain countries, to certain age groups, to perhaps only well-informed fans, is now available practically to anyone of any age, race, gender, and socio-economic background due to its online availability. The scope of visuality has multiplied to the extent that it becomes impossible to contend with a single traditional means of viewing.

Although this study is historically grounded, I do not engage in elaborate iconographical readings of period rooms or attempt to relate the signification of decorative elements to their possible patrons. While this is possible in some instances, the link between patron and decorative ensemble is both difficult to establish and in general irrelevant to the ensemble’s wider reception. Most often, a given patron was deceased.

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18 Conrich explains that the exploding head in *Scanners* was featured on the cover of the magazine *Fangoria* and that colored “pull-out” posters of “film image of the body monstrous” such as “a graphic enlargement of the horrific erupting body of Barry Convex in *Videodrome* […] was being offered by *Fangoria* for readers to display on their walls in delight.” See Conrich, “An Aesthetic Sense,” 45.


20 Katie Scott undertakes outstanding detective work when proposing that the patron of the Chinoiserie decorative panels by Watteau at the Château de La Muette was Joseph-Jean Baptiste Fleuriau d’Armenonville, intendant to the finances and tenant of the Château between 1705-1716. Although some meaning may be derived from uncovering this actual patron, such as why Chinoiserie was the chosen subject matter, the fact remains that the decorative ensemble’s relevance was not limited to a specific group of viewers. It was relevant enough, in fact, to be sold as prints to a larger audience. The links between work
or had sold the building by the time the decoration was completed; the decorative ensemble would then pass on to extended family or renters. Limiting the potential effect of decorative elements to communicating specific information about its instigator to a knowledgeable group of viewers does not realize the full effect or affective potential of these elements. This is why I steer clear of restricting the significance of ornament to a specific group of socio-temporal viewers. It must also be noted that the types of rocaille elements I study are often details abstracted from a more broadly representative decorative scheme.

This study does not consider the particular milieu of the screenwriter/director that may have influenced the film nor the biographies of rococo artists themselves. While the cultural context and the artist’s life do influence the production and reception of the work, taking these factors into consideration over-defines my object of study: the affective potential of the materiality. I do acknowledge that such materialities are issued from vastly different cultures and consumed by different audiences with different means of viewing. I have chosen, however, to focus on a formal analysis of this materiality in order to gain a better understanding of its affective potential. It is important to spend time on the material qualities of the objects studied since it is their physical presence that has and patron become irrelevant when such works become desirable and relevant to a much wider audience, and one that is likely unaware of the ties between patron and work. See Katie Scott, “Playing Games with Otherness: Watteau’s Chinese Cabinet at the Chateau la Muette,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 66 (2003): 193. Fabrice Ouziel also explains that it is extremely hard to retrace the history, patronage, and site-specificity of interior decors, such as those at Place Vendôme, since these may have been modified, amputated, or transformed, the documents concerning their transactions lost, or the woodwork unsigned. Furthermore, she points out that many eighteenth-century decors were ripped from their original architectural context in the nineteenth century to be sold throughout the world. Another problem is that many of the decors now found in eighteenth-century hôtels may not have originated there but have been installed later. Consequently, the history of attribution, site-specificity, and patronage of many eighteenth-century decors is like a jigsaw puzzle with little chance at forming a coherent picture. See Fabrice Ouziel, “Boiseries et Onemanistes,” *La Place Vendôme: Art, Pouvoir et Fortune* (Paris: Action Artistique de la Ville de Paris, 2002), 157.
an effect and impact upon viewers. To understand these effects, first the physical properties have to be discussed and considered. Unlike scholars who focus on the cultural meanings of visual culture (the cultural turn), I am interested in its material presence and the sensorial possibilities of radical ornament. This is why both Chapter One and Two formally describe what is seen and the physical links that bind these two materialities. By no means should this appraisal of the materialities be considered an argument for an aesthetics of either materiality. Rather, this type of analysis aligns itself with what Keith Moxey has named the ‘pictorial’ and ‘iconic turn,’ or what Lauwrens has called the ‘sensory turn’ in art history. These types of analyses emphasize the physical properties of art objects rather than their social function. My analysis of radical ornament subscribes to this emphasis on materiality over social meaning since it is the affective power of the materiality of radical ornaments that is key to understanding their radicality.

22 Bolt argues that constructivist cultural discourses have eclipsed the materiality of the arts due to their “colonization of the arts by cultural theory.” See Barbara Bolt, “Introduction Towards a “New Materialism” through the Arts,” in Carnal Knowledge: Towards a “New Materialism” through the Arts, eds. Barbara Bolt and Estelle Barrett (London: IB Tauris, forthcoming, 2011), 4.
26 Carl Plantinga discusses the affect film creates within its spectators and considers a wide range of emotions from pleasure to disgust; see Carl Plantinga, Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
Beyond this ‘pictorial’ and ‘sensory’ turn, my project also subscribes to the larger concerns of what has been called new materialism. Discrepancies exist among new materialist scholars, and their scholarship varies across fields and disciplines. There is also no unified theory of what new materialism is, but there is a range of concerns that unite these varied works. A common tenet is to return agency to the material world. Motivated by ecological reasons, advancements in neuroscience, or technologies that blur lines between human and machine, materialists argue that we are not the epicenter of the world. Materialists such as Jane Bennett, whose theories I apply in Chapter Two, consider the possibility that matter is active and has agency. Materiality is considered “more than ‘mere’ matter” and is construed as a vital force and relationality itself. New materialism, therefore, becomes a current in which the relationship between humans and non-humans can be re-thought. A second aspect common to new materialist theory is a

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27 In the humanities, this material turn is said to be a response to the cultural one. Bolt explains that “[e]xponents of the new materialism argue that where social constructivist theories thrive, matter becomes mute. New materialism aims to return to matter, the vivacity denied by social constructivist theories that posit all social processes and, indeed reality itself, as socially and ideologically constituted.” See Bolt, “Introduction,” 3.
28 Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn, New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies, (Ann Arbor: Mpublishing, Open Humanitites Press, 2012), 89. Van der Tuin and Dolphijn attribute the works of philosophers such as Deleuze, Guttari, and Latour as influencing new materialist scholars. See ibid., 89.
29 Ivan der Tuin and Dolphijn, New Materialism, 89. According to Bolt, new materialism is linked to previous materialist concerns originating in the ancient thoughts of Epicurius and Democritus, moving into the scientifically-based theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and into what is now called the material or new materialist turn. See Bolt “Introduction,” 2. New materialism brings together philosophies of materialism, speculative realism, objects and object-oriented philosophy, and the mediatic phenomena. See Jussi Parikka, “New Materialism as Media Theory: Medianatures and Dirty Matter,” Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies 9, no. 1 (March 2012): 95.
31 Ibid., 3.
33 Coole and Frost, “Introducing New Materialisms,” 9. For Van der Tuin and Dolphijn, phenomena reveal themselves in their relations. See van der Tuin and Dolphijn, New Materialism, 89.
move beyond dualities such as mind and body, nature and civilization, human and non-
human, and rather towards monisms.\textsuperscript{35}

My work ties in with this scholarship in its view that dualities between subject
and object, inside and outside, frame and framed, mind and body, human and non-human
are erased by the relations that emerge between the embodied subject and the materials
considered. Also in line with these new materialist concerns is my argument that radical
ornament exhibits agency through its viral informe actions. Phenomena are revealed here
through relations that emerge between subjects and objects.\textsuperscript{36} The radical ornaments I
describe are a type of matter that has agency, that is active, affective and affected. It is the
same type of matter that Coole and Frost describe as “indeterminate, constantly forming
and reforming in unexpected ways.”\textsuperscript{37} Alongside new materialists, I consider the
becoming of matter, found in the instantaneous morceau de fantaisie, which I describe as
being composed of both inert and alive matter and formed through the intersubjectivity of
body and matter.\textsuperscript{38} It is on account of radical ornament’s actions that it can be considered
a type of materiality that embodies concerns of new materialism.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 2. See also Coole and Frost, “Introducing New Materialisms,” 8; van der Tuin and Dolphijn, New
Materialism, 89. See also Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, “Pushing Dualism to an Extreme: On
the Philosophical Impetus of A New Materialism,” Continental Philosophy Review vol 44, no 4
\textsuperscript{36} Van der Tuin and Dolphijn, New Materialism, 89.
\textsuperscript{37} Coole and Frost, “Introducing New Materialisms,” 10.
\textsuperscript{38} Coole and Frost, “Introducing New Materialisms,” 9. New materialism sees no “definitive break between
sentient and nonsentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena.” Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{39} Speculative realists, who fall under materialists, would disagree with my emphasis on our relation to
matter, seeing as this emphasis emerges from my phenomenological methodology. Speculative realists do
not agree with the concept that the real is perceived only through the mind of the perceiver. See Iris van der
Tuin and Rick Dolphijn, New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies, (Ann Arbor: Mpublishing, Open
Humanities Press, 2012), 89. For a succinct explanation of the speculative turn see Levi Bryant, Nick
Srnicek and Graham Harman, “Towards a Speculative Philosophy,” in The Speculative Turn Continental
materialism and Realism, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, (Melbourne: re.press,
2011), 1-18.
I also find there is a need to apply a certain kind of relativism in discussing historical objects. Since historical distance can never fully be bridged, an attempt at the full recovery of any past is doomed to fail. As Oleg Grabar aptly pointed out, we cannot escape looking at the past with today’s sensitivity. I find a good antidote both to the dream of recreating the past and to the sense of impossibility in overcoming historical distance is to balance historical study with a jolting juxtaposition.

My methodology therefore embraces the failure of ever fully comprehending the historical subject by acknowledging that our perception is grounded in our own historicity and in the here and now. I must acknowledge my own temporality since the viewpoint I offer is in part the product of post-modernist thought and continental philosophy. But if I commit any transgressions, they are not across time periods, but rather, like radical ornament, they are transgressions of convention. Radical ornament commits transgressions and allows in its very nature for transgressions. One therefore benefits from viewing radical ornament in a new paradigm that breaches the boundaries of time and media. It is only through such an unconventional comparison that I am able to understand and explain the effect and affective potential of ornament.

The qualities of radical ornament that emerge throughout the thesis sketch an ontological discourse on ornament unlike any other. Many ontological theories of ornament are limited by the question of beauty, as they imply that the function of ornament is to decorate through embellishment. My work rejects this notion that

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42 Friedrich August Krubsacius thought the purpose of ornament was to bring beauty to what it ornamented; A.W.N. Pugin thought that ornament carried a specific style and was therefore the primary expression of
something becomes complete once it is embellished. I believe reducing ornament’s function to embellishment implies that its function is to beautify, which I demonstrate is not always the case with my examples of contemporary ornament. I am also unconcerned with the notion that ornament has an ethical function or that there exist grades of ornament from good to bad. Many eighteenth-century critics thought rocaille ornaments to be in bad taste, while my contemporary examples, which deal with moments of disgust and repulsion, can often be judged extreme, immoral, or sadistic. Such categories, however, rely on concepts of taste, value, beauty, and ugliness, concepts that do not apply to radical ornament since its very nature is to dismantle these hierarchies.

Another traditional perspective on ornament I contest is the notion that ornament is always on the surface of something else, that it belongs only as the textured superficiality of an object and not as part of its constitutive structure. When ornament is viewed only as an object’s surface element, the structure and the function of the object itself are deemed independent and/or superior. This is why ornament is often considered secondary to the constitutive structures of the ornamented object. Such a restricted beauty in architecture and decorative arts; Owen Jones believed ornament could achieve autonomous beauty as an independent creative act detached from its intended function as surface decoration; William Morris, concerned with the pleasure to be derived from decoration itself, believed decoration could yield beauty and pleasure when artist and craftsman worked together. For more on these theories see Isabelle Frank, ed., The Theory of Decorative Art: an Anthology of European & American Writings, 1750-1940, trans. David Britt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 22, 245-246, 248-249. More recently, Oleg Grabar argues that ornaments are intermediaries meant to help art elicit reactions of pleasure in its viewers; see The Mediation of Ornament, 230.

Both Ruskin and Pugin, for instance, were concerned with the question of being true to form and with the moral aspect of ornament when used appropriately and in accordance with the proper status of what it ornamented. See Frank, The Theory of Decorative Art, 22. See also Adolf Loos’s turn-of-the-twentieth-century critique of the excessive use of ornament and its ability to form depraved and criminal minds: Adolf Loos, “Crime and Ornament,” in Crime and Ornament: The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos, eds. Bernie Miller and Melony Ward (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2002), 29-36.

The question of the appropriate purpose of ornament has long been debated. Its relation to the object it ornaments has specifically been questioned since the two have long been viewed as separate entities. For instance, Karl Moritz’s “Preliminary ideas on the theory of ornament” (1793) was concerned that ornament retain its secondary rank and remain accessory to function while not superseding structure. Ornament was conceived at the time as something secondary, an enhancer of sorts but never central. See Frank, The
definition demonstrates a lack of understanding of ornament which, when radical, can be active not only in structuring the ornamented object but even in transforming its core. When we observe the relation between radical ornament and the structure of an object, we find ornament has a central role in constructing/constituting the structure, easily moving beyond a surface materiality that supposedly beautifies. While tradition understands ornament as a conventional framing device, I view radical ornament as something peripheral, on the surface, surrounding the central subject, which at the same time shifts continually to become itself the central structure and subject. This is why one of the key descriptors of radical ornament is its ability to upset the boundaries between periphery and center and ultimately affect the center by abolishing the distinction between subject and object. As I shall discuss in Chapter One, radical ornament’s framing structure emphasizes Derrida’s concept of parergonality. These extreme forms of ornamentation are therefore radical in that they subvert the traditional decorative functions assigned to ornament by critics like Kant and Alberti. Rococo ornamentation is a perfect example of an excessive ornamentation that deviates from traditional definitions. Thought to be unruly by the critics of its time, rococo ornamentation draws attention away from what it is meant to decorate, and instead becomes the very subject that commands attention.

Theory of Decorative Art, 21-22. For a quick review of theories that situate ornament beneath structure and function see Grabar, Mediation of Ornament, 24-25. Thomas Golsenne makes an interesting distinction between what he calls ornamental and ornamentation. He qualifies ornamentation as being non-essential to the structure of the work, on the periphery and subordinate to the function of the object it decorates, whereas ornamental is a free force; see Thomas Golsenne, et al., “L’Ornemental: esthétique de la différence,” Perspective 1 (2010): 11.

45 Thomas Golsenne comments on both Kant and Alberti’s definition of the role of ornament, which should enhance the core of what it ornates not supersede it. See Thomas Golsenne, “L’Ornement aujourd’hui,” Images Re-vues 10 (2012): 10.
Radical ornament not only oscillates between periphery and center, it also creates relations. Although my views on the relational qualities of ornament are similar to those of Grabar, who is one of the few art historians to have undertaken a serious study of ornament in recent years, they were developed independently. We both perceive ornament not only as something material but also as having the capacity to be an immaterial relation between materialities. Grabar’s ultimate goal, however, is to determine how we perceive the beauty of works of art. He concludes that ornament creates a mediating relationship between viewer and work of art that allows the viewer to perceive the work’s beauty. Like Grabar, I too consider ornament to be a mediator, but not only a mediator between viewer and work of art but also one between viewer and space, and subject and object. Moreover, I disagree with ornament’s “goal” being to enable the perception of a work’s beauty.

More recently, two other authors have suggested that ornaments establish relations or are relations themselves. Thomas Golsenne proposes that ornament can be understood as ‘ornamental’: a gesture that is the result of human expenditure, of a giving, vital force of desire positioned against convention and conservatism. Although close to radical ornament, Golsenne’s ornamental gesture does not consider the affective potential of particular materialities. He construes the ornamental as a force born of human social relations and which, through differentiation, brings order, identity, and distinction, and establishes power relations. Jonathan Massey also proposes, like Golsenne, that ornamentation is a relational device, one that differentiates not only by marking social status and distinction but also by associating things and people with certain ordering

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47 Golsenne, “L’Ornement aujourd’hui,” 23.
structures.\textsuperscript{49} I understand the radical potential of ornament rather as a relation that can transform by creating bridges that erase differentiation and the ordering structures of knowledge. Radical ornament, in other words, destroys order and rank by creating associations and connections between segregated sectors.

Although I think that ornament in general is not an object but rather a set of operations, I consider radical ornament, specifically, to be a set of actions triggered by finite formal qualities, which I explore in detail in both Chapter One and Two. This explains why my examples are limited to those exhibiting certain material qualities and their effects. They feature elements that appear organic and of which the shape resembles the Bataillesque \textit{informe}, or indeterminate. Ironically, Alina Payne suggests that it is precisely these organic material features, which are found in the ornamentation of various historical periods, that are responsible for the neglect suffered by a close study of rococo ornaments. Payne remarks that while ornament functions not only to create order, critical focus has been on ornaments that do just this, to the point of overshadowing other types.\textsuperscript{50} Organic properties are the overwhelming trait of the visual phenomena in the two periods I study: both have organic shapes with tendrils that suggest open systems and the potential to link to other things, and both display convulsive and distorted ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes that explode in curves and counter-curves alongside a proliferation of detail that creates dynamic visual movement. Due to their asymmetry and disorder, these shapes also often display a lack of patterned cohesion. In both periods this asymmetry stems partly from shapes growing out of each other and from the use of \textit{grotesquerie}

\textsuperscript{49} Massey, “Ornament and Decoration,” 497-499.
\textsuperscript{50} Certain types of ornamentation were historically ignored because these did not mirror a proper reading of the architectural orders. Payne also recognizes the need for further theoretical discussions of rococo ornament. Alina Payne, “L’Ornement architectural: du langage classique des temps modernes à l’aube du XXe siècle,” \textit{Perspective} 1 (2010): 91.
techniques. This results in the creation of incongruent visual and semantic juxtapositions, which in turn create illogical forms that are largely unknown; I will examine these in Chapter One and Two. Such material formal dispositions are prime visual features of radical ornaments; undertaking their study can only benefit our understanding of the many practices of contemporary architects who now integrate such features.  

A direct effect of these physical attributes is that they cause radical ornaments to form porous boundaries. By simultaneously framing, through the act of circumscribing, binding, and delineating, and by unframing with forms that visually and structurally break boundaries, these ornaments create open porous systems. If the argument is accepted that anything which acts as outlined above can be ornament, then the effect of such an ornament on the whole is to break the very boundaries that define the whole. I therefore argue that radical ornaments, unlike other ornaments, do not frame things or bring about a state of order or distinction. Massey may claim that ornament “has often marked membership in particular grades and segments of society,” and even did so in the rococo period, but rococo ornament has also been criticized for its breach of conventions and for wreaking havoc upon norms.

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51 Specific examples of organic ornaments in contemporary architecture include the work of Foreign Office Architects (FOA) for the John Lewis Department Store and Cineplex (2000-08) and Francis Soler and Frédéric Druot’s the Ministère de la Culture (2004) in Paris. Robert Levit proposes there is a turn towards the organic in contemporary architectural ornamentation; see Robert Levit, “Contemporary Ornament: The Return of the Symbolic Repressed,” Harvard Design Magazine, no. 28 (Spring/Summer 2008): 5. Farshid Moussavi, former architect at Foreign Office, advocates for an organic contemporary architecture. Moussavi perceives, as I do, the capacity of organic ornaments to stimulate affect. However, unlike me, she perceives this quality as the specific capacity to create meaningful cultural experiences void of symbolism and therefore culturally meaningful to a multicultural society composed of various histories. Though she states the potential for organic ornaments to create non-specific affects, she does not explain how this occurs or what, specifically, is meant by meaningful cultural experiences. See Farshid Moussavi, “The Function of Ornament,” The Function of Ornament, eds. Farshid Moussavi and Michael Kubo (Barcelona: Actar, 2006): 8.

52 Massey, “Ornament and Decoration”, 499. For critiques of rococo during its period see my discussion in Chapter One.
In fact, this capacity to create porous boundaries is a key feature of the *rocaille* style and helps to explain why I chose *rocaille* as one of two primary examples in arguing for the potency of radical ornament. It is important to stress, however, that I did not choose *rocaille* simply because it fits my theory. Rather, my theory arose from a study of the period. I observed that, unlike other decorative styles, *rocaille* ornaments in a decorative environment do not frame by enclosure. Due to asymmetry and the constant motion of curve and counter-curve, the nature-inspired ornaments pierce and glide while making shapes and ensembles open-ended. Meanwhile, the visual paths traced by the curves and their multiple mirrored reflections create a sensation of fluidity. At the end of a framing system there is always a little flourish or tendril that makes the system open to further connections and breaks the architectural registers. These visual qualities, which render *rocaille* ornament seemingly slippery, as if gliding and sliding between spaces, explain how radical ornament can form open systems that break boundaries.

This type of open framing system is also present in my contemporary examples. Again, this effect is caused by formal organic elements that, on account of their materialistic presence, create a loose network supporting the film’s narrative. In films, radical ornaments can take the form of props, appendages, and prosthetics and would therefore seem secondary to the main characters and the overall narrative. Yet as the main objects of attraction and affectation, these peripheral and secondary objects simultaneously hold the point of the narrative. In Chapter Two and Three, I shall explain how the affective potential of these ornaments is such that they pierce the boundaries of closed, known identities, like those of the characters, and transform these into open-ended concepts.
My thesis demonstrates how radical shapes continually break the boundaries of subjects both in film and *rocaille*. The radicalism of these ornaments lies in their capacity to be transpiercers of delineated space, to be transitors allowing for a flow of space, to be transgressive in their unknown aspects and sexual undertones, and to be transmutable from one thing to the next. Consequently, this project does not reiterate the official story of the favor and disfavor of ornament as dictated by architectural fads. The story of the demise of ornament following Adolf Loos’s infamous battle cry in 1910 of “Ornament and Crime,” of its repression through modernist architecture, and its revival during the post-modern era is the classic tale of the rise and fall of ornament.\(^{53}\) Such a history assumes a linear perspective based on a restricted view of ornament, of where it can be found, and of its function and potential. It is a view that does not consider affect and the phenomenological response of viewers. Instead, such histories retrace power plays and signs without considering how ornament might alter the experience of a visual, textural field. In recent years, this tale of the modernist banishment of ornament has been challenged.\(^{54}\) Studies have re-considered the work of turn-of-the-century ornament theorists such as Gottfried Semper or architects such as Louis Sullivan; nevertheless, these studies have maintained a very narrow definition of ornament and ornamental discourse. This project seeks to do otherwise. I do not attempt to define what ornament generally is, should be, or can be. This study seeks rather to understand the subversive potential of what appear to be peripheral or decentralized materialities and their affective impact upon subjects.

\(^{53}\) For a summary of the rise and fall of ornament, see Massey, “Ornament and Decoration,” 503-511.  
\(^{54}\) Alina Payne, for instance, acknowledges the loss of architectural ornaments during modernism but proposes it was replaced by a relationship between architecture and the objects chosen to fill its interior. See Alina Payne, *From Object to Ornament, Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012): 8.
To gain a better understanding and interpretation of rococo aesthetics in light of this new view, I first examine little- or never-studied rococo cultural objects. My research focuses on the *rocaille* ornament, a category that has, ironically, received little attention beyond the work of a few key authors. In fact, commentators have struggled to discuss *rocaille* ornaments, and very little has been said on the ornamental theme of *morceau de fantaisie*, a form of collectable print. Yet one particularity of *morceaux de fantasies* is that their typical and extreme *rocaille* ornaments are often the central subject matter, even overwhelming the figures that surround it. My thesis studies this unique trait of the *rocaille* style, thereby helping to understand the extent of ornament’s radicalism.

My research focuses not only on these little-studied objects but also on the work of artists such as François-Thomas Mondon, Pierre-Edmé Babel, and Alexis Peyrotte who have remained obscure since the nineteenth century. This is due in part to the fact that scholars had long relegated to the sidelines of history what was considered decorative, while painting, sculpture, and architecture, which were deemed more

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56 We can find some reproductions of these artists’ work in various exhibition catalogues and articles (see *Boucher et l’art rocaille, Rococo: the Continuing Curve and Taking Shape*). However, little research has been carried out concerning their respective carriers and oeuvres (though Roland Michel did write one short article on Mondon). See Marianne Roland Michel, “François-Thomas Mondon, artiste ‘rocaille’ méconnu,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de l’art français* (1979): 149-158.
important, commanded their attention. Such an attitude towards the study of eighteenth-century visual culture has been rectified since the 1990’s. The work of Marianne Roland Michel, Katie Scott, and Peter Fuhring and subsequent exhibitions such as *Rococo: the Continuing Curve* and *Taking Shape Finding Sculpture in the Decorative Arts* have reasserted the importance of decorative arts to eighteenth-century culture. A broader understanding of the context in which *rocaille* ornament was produced and consumed has begun to emerge, while the study of *rocaille* decorative arts and culture has started to consider the theoretical implications of ornament. A good example of this is the contemporary study of porcelain and material culture in the eighteenth century, in which both Mimi Hellman and Michael Yonan have broached the subject of ornamentation and porcelain in theoretical terms that are challenging. My study of the rococo style and period in Chapter One aligns itself with such theoretical works while also pushing rococo studies further by daring to relate them to contemporary cultural practices.

To understand what is fundamentally different about rococo ornaments and how radical they are, I begin Chapter One with an overview of the etymology of the terms rococo and *rocaille*. This leads me to discuss the various qualifiers used at the time to

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59 For instance, Scott used Alois Riegl’s theories of haptic/optic space in order to explain the illusion of *rocaille* ornament; see Scott, “Figure and Ornament: Notes on the Late Baroque Art Industry,” *Taking Shape. Finding Sculpture in the Decorative Arts*, exh. cat. (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute; Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2009), 166-175.

describe these ornamental shapes, both in advertisements for the *rocaille* prints themselves and by critics of the day. By analyzing the terms used to describe this decoration, I conclude that *rocaille* had certain material qualities, such as asymmetry and unknown organic aspects, that were generally recognized. Using a formal approach, I discuss the ornaments found in certain ornamental prints or on decorated interior panels in and of themselves, outside of context.\(^6\) I then analyze these material qualities of *rocaille*, such as its zoological lexicon, the unknown aspect of its shapes, the type of movements and placements of these, and their tactical disposition. The focus then widens as I reintegrate the ornaments in their decorative context, or decorative environment, amidst other objects such as paintings, mirrors, porcelain, etc. This brings me to consider how the ornamental parts interact together and in space and the kind of framework these form as decorative ensembles. In so doing I seek to understand how the parts relate to the whole and ultimately to elucidate how they participate in constructing the whole. I use the term “decorative environment” as a context for these ornaments since their surroundings functioned like the installations of nowadays where all types of objects are juxtaposed and relate intimately with one another. This type of back and forth between a micro and a macro view is unusual for period studies, which tend either to focus on one type of object secluded from those with which it would have interacted, or to discuss architectural ensembles as a whole without considering minute detail. This approach, however, is necessary to demonstrate how radical ornament may in fact create a shift from periphery to center stage.

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\(^6\) For a new theorization of what could be considered post-formalist approaches to the perception of objects and a history of such perception see Whitney Davis, “What is Post-Formalism? (Or, Das Sehen an Sich Hat Seine KunstGeschichte),” *Nonsite.org*, no. 7 (October, 2012): http://nonsite.org/article/what-is-post-formalism-or-das-sehen-an-sich-hat-seine-kunstgeschichte.
I demonstrate in Chapter One that the lines present in *rocaille* space are not about delineation or containment, but instead about creating visual chaos and breaking boundaries, which ultimately creates structures that move rather than fix. In order to understand the type of open framework created by *rocaille* ornaments, I turn to Jacques Derrida’s notion of the parergon. By comparing *rocaille* ornament’s framework to the work of the parergon I conclude that the shapes of *rocaille* form open systems that allow for fluidity and flexibility. Such an analysis also reveals that *rocaille* framing systems do not define their subjects or circumscribe them within an ordering space. Rather, ornamentation is shown to play with the notions of bound and unbound as well as known (through the identifying and circumscribing process) and unknown (through the simultaneous dismantling of this process).

In the last part of Chapter One, I compare the impact *rocaille* ornament has on what it ornaments to Bataille’s notion of the *informe*. By analyzing the work of the *informe*, I claim that *rocaille* shapes are active *informe* agents that impact in the same way both the space they decorate and the viewers of this space. The concept of the *informe* is the matrix that connects radical ornament in these two different times and media. I rely and extend upon Bataille’s concepts of the *informe*, base materialism, and the heterological foreign body in both Chapter One and Two. Understanding the actions of radical ornament in this way demands that I not subscribe to classical notions of hierarchical art history such as theme, chronology, style, and oeuvre as did Fiske Kimball. In turn this allows me to break with the traditional order of art history even

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further by comparing rococo ornament to the materiality of body-horror films, as I do in Chapter Two.

I begin Chapter Two with a short review of body-horror genre films. Before analyzing the materiality of these films, I first discuss their material common denominator. My analysis then begins with a description of the formal qualities of the elements at hand and a demonstration that these are the same as those of *rocaille*. Through ample examples, I correlate the organic film details with the formal *rocaille* categories I described in the previous chapter, such as organicity, unknown matter, C and S curves, asymmetry, movement, and the formation of cartouches and *morceaux de fantasies*. I go on to suggest that these two materialities are similar not only at the elemental level, but also at the structural level, and, more to the point, at the operational level.

While I stress the importance of film’s material texture, as I did with the rococo period, I also want to understand how these radical forms operate on the film’s narrative central structures and subjects as well as on its spectators. By observing the parts formally and then analyzing their function, we see how the whole is affected beyond geo-time specificities and can learn, in turn, to think beyond these ourselves. Granted other works of art outside film exhibit elements with radical formal qualities, such as the installations of Wim Delvoy, the photography of Annie Baillargeon, and the paintings of David Reed or Victoria Reynolds. These, however, are not adequate counterexamples to *rocaille* as they do not provide a context beyond the frame of an art institution in which to analyze the effect of radical ornament upon structures and subjects. Unlike these
artworks, the films I consider exemplify the operations of radical ornament and demonstrate how the dynamic tension between order and disorder, created by informe actions, operates on the subject. Due to the material quality these films exhibit and the demonstrated effect such materiality has upon both the subject in the narrative of the film as well as the viewing subject of the film, the medium of film allows me to observe the transformative effects of radical ornaments upon narrative structure and subjects.

In the third part of my analysis I move from a discussion of the elements themselves to a consideration of the repercussions these forms have on the subject and on the formation of the structure as a whole. In the films, the informe repercussions of rocaille shapes translates into the actions of the virus. Though I still use Bataille’s theories of base materialism and the heterological foreign body, I also turn to the analogy of the viral because its actions exemplify those of radical ornament and because the theme of invading alien or virus is prevalent in the films under consideration. I establish four types of viral actions: the outbreak, the infection, the transformation, and the symptom. These phases serve to analyze the actions performed by the elements and how these affect the structures in the films. This is why film as a medium in this study functions so well: it provides elements comparable to the shapes of rocaille alongside the context and structures necessary to analyze the effects of such elements upon subjects.

In the last phase of the viral analysis, I consider how viral actions, as symptoms, reveal their effects upon order and, ultimately, identity. This leads me to consider the possibility, using Jane Bennett’s theory of the assemblage, that the radical ornament can be a prosthetic, an add on or augmentation, to the infected subject. The last part of the second chapter explores the affective potential of radical ornament in the responses of
dread and abjection shown by the subjects of viral infections. This leads me to consider the dissolution of the mind/body split as an effect of radical ornament upon its infected subject. Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on flesh and the embodied subject, I discuss how this type of materiality does indeed eradicate the separation between mind and body.

Previous film discourse, as Steven Shaviro comments, was little concerned with the cinematic viewing experience and more so with psychological or feminist points of view. Until the arrival of Dudley Andrew and Noël Carroll, Shaviro explains, psychoanalysis remained the only horizon of serious film discourse. While they do not deny that the film viewing experience can be psychoanalyzed, authors such as Shaviro himself and Vivian Sobchack have turned away from such analysis and focus instead on the sensorial experience of film and its affective potential. Such analysis puts the relationship between viewer and work at the forefront, considering not only aspects of narrative but also the affective potential of a film’s materiality. My research parallels these authors in discussing the affect of film but departs from general film discourse by discussing the potential of the ornamental within film. For instance, when Shaviro discusses the films of Cronenberg, though he mentions gore and flesh, he still has difficulty pointing out precise moments or details that portray these elements. Carroll also makes a point to discuss the monstrous in horror, but again, the discussions veer

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65 Shaviro, *Cinematic Body*, 156.
away from the images shown to contend instead with the text or narrative of the film. The problem is that thus far, most analysis of body-centered horror and sci-fi films is concerned more with narrative aspects than formal ones and how these help construct the narrative. I am concerned first and foremost with the visual aspects of the images shown, and not with reading the film as text. As much as possible, I try to concentrate on the materiality of the film and view gory moments as matter dissociated from symbolic narrative meaning.66 I am attentive to the texture of the film, to the objects shown in detail, and only subsequently to the relation of these to the narrative whole.67

By first considering film as moving images, I can elaborate a new aestheticization of body-centered horror and sci-fi. A surface materiality first appears in this genre of film in the 90’s and becomes progressively more prominent in the 2000’s. This surface materiality can be detached from significance to such a point that it moves to establish its own relations between objects and to mediate the subject’s viewing experience of space, just as in the rococo period. To discuss radical ornament in this way—not only as being

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66 Many commentators will discuss instead the symbolism of such materiality and never the materiality itself. A typical example is Carroll’s analysis of monsters, to which he attributes symbolic meaning based on psychological themes. Though interesting, such interpretations are based on the symbolic narrative role the monsters play rather than the actual materiality presented. Consequently, Carroll’s analysis is not tied to the image presented but to the film’s narrative text. See Noël Carroll, “Nightmare and the Horror Film: The Symbolic Biology of Fantastic Beings,” Film Quarterly 34, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 16-25. While Martin explores the materiality and images of skin, he focuses on a genre different from mine; see Christian Martin, “Skin Deep: Bodies without Limits in Hiroshima mon amour,” French Forum 38, no 1-2, (winter/spring 2013): 267-282. Brophy does not discuss particular images, although he does mention the importance of the visual aspect of body-horror; see Philip Brophy “Horrality—The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films,” Screen 27, No.1/2 (1986): 1-13. Creed’s work is also important in emphasizing the different types of bodies present in body-horror and discussing this type of visuality. See Barbara Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque, The Body-Monstrous,” in Fields of vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography, eds. Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 127-159. See also Jennifer Barker, The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

67 This does not imply, however, that I do not understand how these ornamental relations play a key role in the formation of narrative structures.
present but also as being a substantial element in horror and sci-fi films—further negates the dated notion that ornament’s function is to beautify.

The fact that my reading is materially driven also echoes David Cronenberg’s own materialist use of the body. While I consider only three of his films, his oeuvre is nonetheless one of the main building blocks of this research as well as its catalyst. Though the presence of radical ornament is stronger and more obvious in other films I analyze, Cronenberg’s work is a critical starting point that highlights the radicalism of ornament in film. As I have outlined above, all the key formal qualities and effects we find in rococo radical ornament are also present in his films.

Having analyzed the materiality of radical ornaments and how they affect structures and infected subjects, I turn in Chapter Three to an analysis of the impact of radical ornaments upon their environments. Since informe viral actions perpetually create a state of disorder and dissolve spatial boundaries, I investigate the repercussions of such a dismantling on these spatial boundaries. In other words, Chapter Three examines the consequences of viral informe actions upon space and how these can alter the subject’s relation to and perception of space and personal identity. This chapter takes what has been learnt about the viral actions of heterogeneous organic details as studied in Chapter Two and investigates the impact of radical ornament upon space and identity.

In the first part of Chapter Three I begin with an overview of theories of perception of space and the role of the imagination. I then explain what I term the rococo ornamental relation: a five-tier system set in relation to the viewing subject’s body. I argue that these ornaments act as material visual links between physical space and the imaginary space of the viewer, or as transportation devices linking subject and space. The
last tier of the *rocaille* ornamental relation highlights the use of mirror reflections to incorporate the viewing subject within the decor. This brings me to consider Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on double visibility and how *rocaille* space might both accentuate this condition and make it concrete. I then claim that radical ornament renders its infected subjects aware of their position as both subject and object.

In the second part of Chapter Three I discuss a major consequence of this visual linkage system: the disruption of normal rational space creates a new space where imagination and reality merge. This is one of my most important claims: radical ornament is a relation that can mediate between realities—those of the imagination and those of the physical exterior. It is also a view that conceives of the rococo environment as an ensemble that does not fully exist physically, but rather is partially articulated in the imagination of the viewer. Understanding the participation and imagination of the viewing subject is crucial to understanding this new possibility. I therefore review the different types of imaginary activities, such as daydreaming and fantasizing, and explain how these allow a subject to occupy two spaces at once, the imaginary and the real. I then explore the visual triggers that can spark the viewer’s imagination by studying the interest in curious objects such as shells and the taste for the exotic. I argue that the whole structure of a *rocaille* environment is not found in real three-dimensional space but rather at the juncture where space meets the imaginary projections of the viewing subject. The particular quality of *rocaille* space, I argue, is its creation of an environment full of devices that actively incite transitions in space.

In the last part of Chapter Three, I suggest that such ornaments become prosthetic extensions that induce prosthetic experiences in both the contemporary and *rocaille*
setting, altering not only spatial perceptions but also personal identity. I therefore make
the conjecture that a space filled with such radical ornaments, which can induce
prosthetic experiences such as daydreams and fantasies, can also alter personal identity. I
review current concepts of personal identity such as the ‘big story’ and ‘small story’
alongside eighteenth-century notions of constructing personal identity using the faculties
of the imagination. I also review how an audience can identify with films and, in specific
cases, with the materiality shown in these films. I conclude that radical ornament’s
affective power makes prosthetic experiences not only real but also corporeal as the
viewer embodies the sensations of the object through identification. These effects are so
potent that the separated, ethereal state of the imagination unites with the physical state of
the body. Finally, I claim that radical ornaments make this connection between subject
and object visible by transforming the infected subject into an intersubjective one.

I conclude that radical ornament enables the creation of new spaces where fixed
identities do not exist and where the imagination and real space can meet. Herein lies the
radical nature of such ornament. Thus, radical ornament figuratively illustrates and
facilitates the fluidity of being and creates physical links that enable passage between
being and becoming other. As bodily extensions, radical ornaments create a state of flux
that bridges things and people while simultaneously breaking distinctions, categories, and
degrees of separation. The views this thesis offers recognize the importance of ornament
and reinvest in its capacity to affect perception. The emerging structures of radical
ornament do not categorize reality in constrained frameworks but rather allow for change
through their porous nature. The consequence is such that rational discourse benefits
from the inputs of disorderly imagination, which dares to think beyond what has already
been proven possible. Ultimately the impact of radical ornament on the creation of identity demonstrates the transitory nature of conceptions and their potential to mutate. The dissolution of stable identity, in turn, allows for change and difference to emerge.
Chapter One

1.1: A Brief History of Rococo Studies

To make the argument that rococo ornamentation is a radical form of ornament, I will question what is commonly defined as rococo ornament and how it has been historically understood. How, for instance, has the French rococo period been generally characterized? Can we consider its supposed characteristics as clichés? And if so, why?

One example of a typical characteristic for this period style is its description as ‘feminine.’ After the Goncourt brothers expressed their appreciation of the lavish courtly lifestyle of the eighteenth century and its feminine qualities, Philippe Minguet and William Park reiterated this cliché without ever providing evidence. Frivolous and vapid are other qualifiers used to criticize the rococo style due to its surface materiality.

Such labels have been attributed to the style from its first critics and, in due course, they have deterred the serious study of its cultural forms as more than mere entertainment. Another aspect often described by several authors is that shells and natural forms compose its decoration. However, their organic characteristics are never further probed nor questioned. It is helpful, therefore, to question such generalities in order to reveal what may have been glossed over.

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I begin by summarizing the history of the style’s conceptualization in order to establish its previous definitions. I will briefly examine the etymology of the term rococo and its historical evolution and then position myself in respect to such scholarship so as better to explain how my theory of radical ornamentation impacts the very definition of rococo ornament.

The sources for the word rococo are still debated. However, most specialists agree it was a derogatory word first appearing as an argot term in Jacques-Louis David’s studio around 1796-97. It was used by one of David’s students in order to refer to the Louis XV style as something “baroque” or in its Italian form baroko, intended here as a pejorative qualifier. The word rococo would then be a combination of the French term rocaille (a word used at the time to designate the style of ornamentation of what we now call the rococo period) and the Italian word for baroque to form the combination “roc-oko.” Like the term gothic, rococo was meant to be a qualifying term denoting bad taste and was in use throughout the French nineteenth century. It was meant to designate something as outdated, of the old regency period, and in contrast to the neo-classical late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the first uses of the word rococo were not meant necessarily to designate a style or period but were rather used as a derogatory adjective. Its meaning depended on who used it and from what political spectrum they

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73 Kimball, The Creation of the Rococo, 4.
The period we now call rococo was known in France instead as the style *Régence* in its earlier phase, the style *Louis XV* in its bloom, and the style *Louis XVI* in its most mature phase. In some instances it was even known as the style Pompadour despite the fact, as Fiske Kimball aptly notes, that Pompadour was not at court when Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, Jacques Lajoüe, and Nicolas Pineau were at the height of their fame in the 1730’s. Kimball also explains that French art historians felt the term held such strong connotations of bad taste that they used it to designate only what they deemed the excessive use of florid and meaningless decoration during the Louis XV period. Even when Kimball wrote *The Creation of Rococo* in 1943, a turning point in rococo studies for defining its nomenclature, he still had to dispel rococo’s pejorative connotations of “triviality” and “baseness”. Kimball writes:

> To partake in it [enjoyment of the rococo], we must lay aside the prejudices of our grandfathers and our fathers, even many of our own: the moral prejudices which confounded artistic qualities with presumed moral qualities of the period, as ‘corrupt’ and ‘frivolous’; the older artistic prejudices in favour of purity of self-contained elements, as against dynamic unity of ensembles, the newer artistic prejudices in favour of plastic form and of spatial form as against form in line and surface; the architectural prejudices, older and newer, that confine all merit in buildings to the expression of structure and of ‘function’ in a narrow sense, seeking vainly to exclude from art all free play of form, whether spatial, plastic, or linear.

We discern in Kimball’s words the many prejudices that were expressed towards rococo.

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77 Ibid., 5.
78 Ibid., 3. Park credits Kimball with being the first to define rococo as a separate style, though he finds his definition too restrictive; see Park, *The Idea of Rococo*, 16.
The first use of the term rococo to refer to the period itself as we know it was in Germany. Kimball recounts how German art historians used the word in a mostly positive formal manner. Rococo still held connotations of baseness, however, since Jacob Burckhardt used it as a generic term to describe the ‘degenerative’ phase of any style. Nonetheless, Kimball reports German scholars were the first analyze the style, though they were more concerned with understanding the relation of rococo to baroque architecture in Germany and Italy.

Besides pejorative connotations, rococo studies were faced with a second problem: recognition as a legitimate stylistic period independent from the baroque. Indeed, for a long time scholars perceived the rococo period as only an extension of the last phase of baroque. In fact, much of the scholarship prior to the work of Roland-Michel, Fuhring, and Scott was spent arguing for the legitimacy of discussing the rococo as a separate style in its own right. Philip Minguet’s entire book *L’Esthetique du Rococo* is spent arguing the differences between baroque and rococo and consequently locks rococo into a binary paradigm where it can be understood only in relation to something else. In *L’Esthetique du rococo* many tables attempt to distinguish rococo features from baroque ones by listing oppositions between the two. Even after Kimball’s seminal work, which concentrated on proving that rococo was a French decorative style in its own

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80 Kimball explains the term rococo was used in Germany to denote the style itself as early as the nineteenth century: Kimball, *The Creation of Rococo*, 5.
81 For a short history of the German art historians’ use of the term rococo see Hyde, “Rococo Redux,” 14.
82 The works of both Minguet and Park seek to differentiate rococo from the baroque style; see Minguet, *Esthétique du rococo* and Park, *The idea of Rococo*.
right, scholars such as Minguet and Park had to reiterate the same arguments.\textsuperscript{84} Moreover, such scholarship was concerned not only with making rococo studies independent from baroque studies but also with making a period argument, defining rococo as a style for a whole epoch as perceived in every aspect of life.\textsuperscript{85} If we were ever to discuss rococo subjects without constantly having to argue for its legitimate independence from the baroque, such scholarship was needed. However, such discourses entrench cultural moments within a linear and teleological narration; they always seek to legitimize a period by contrasting it to the past and by situating it within a zeitgeist that operated autonomously on everything and anything.\textsuperscript{86}

Also helping to establish a linear history of the style was the trend to find the origins of rococo and to claim its national identity. Many scholars sought to identify the sources that influenced the development of the style. Both Park and Fuhring argue that rococo is initially of Italian influence, while Kimball sought to prove that rococo was a French invention derived from the arabesque and completely without Italian influence. Kimball is the first, in fact, to have established with precision the origin and development of what was then known as the style Louis XV by attributing its beginning to 1700 and its end to the advent of classicism in the 1770’s.\textsuperscript{87} Kimball’s research, though somewhat dated due to its teleological historical narrative, is nevertheless seminal for having brought to light forgotten artists such as François-Thomas Mondon, Pierre-Quentin

\textsuperscript{84} The argument is made throughout the entirety of their work. See, respectively, Minguet, \textit{Esthétique du Rococo} and Park, \textit{The idea of Rococo}.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid. Another analysis that seeks to establish rococo as a proper period style in all aspects of culture is Patrick Brady, \textit{Rococo Style Versus Enlightenment Novel, with Essays on Letters Persanes, La Vie de Marianne, Candide, La Nouvelle Héloïse, Le Neveu de Rameau} (Genève : Éditions Slatkine, 1984). Kimball finds rococo chiefly in the decorative arts, and above all in the development of ornament; see Kimball, \textit{The Creation of Rococo}, 3.

\textsuperscript{86} Park, for instance, perceives rococo as a zeitgeist which polarizes everything. See Park, \textit{The Idea of Rococo}, 13, 34-37.

\textsuperscript{87} Kimball, \textit{The Creation of Rococo}, 3.
Chedel, and Jean-Bernard Toro. However, his analysis aimed to establish a sequential order of who did what when, who invented what first, and who influenced whom. Though his research is rich in dates and details concerning primary documents, it wholeheartedly subscribes to the idea of the rise and fall of a style.\textsuperscript{88} Again, such scholarship is concerned with a linear conception of history moving from point of origin to point of conclusion.

From the 1980’s onwards, rococo art history has taken a different standpoint and is more concerned with socio-cultural context, viewing the decorative style as a product of class dynamics. Such scholarship understands the production of rococo no longer by seeking a point of origin but rather by viewing it as a product of consumer society. An example of such scholarship is \textit{The Rococo Interior} by Katie Scott, who examined the social dynamics created in part by rococo itself and the reasons for its aristocratic and bourgeois patronage. Rochelle Ziskin’s thorough analysis of the Place Vendôme is another study that explains rococo as the decorative style of choice due to its non-classical associations and its status-conferring potential for the high financier bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{89}

Since the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, rococo scholarship has had a tremendous renewal with exhibitions such as the \textit{Rococo Curve} and \textit{Taking Shape}, as well as numerous publications on Boucher and the period in general, such as Milam’s recent rococo dictionary.\textsuperscript{90} In the \textit{Rococo Curve}, Hyde points out that the term rococo is now

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 225.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Ziskin, \textit{The Place Vendôme}, 133-137.
\item \textsuperscript{90} See Cherry and Scott \textit{Between Luxury and the Everyday}; Martina Droth, \textit{Taking Shape}; Coffin et al., \textit{Rococo: the Continuing Curve}; Cavanaugh, Performing the “Everyday”; Melissa Hyde, \textit{Making up The Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics} (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2006); Colin B. Bailey, Philip Conisbee and Thomas W. Gaëtjens, \textit{The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting}, exh. cat. ed Colin B. Bailey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University
considered to describe more than the age of rococo, the period of Louis XV, or its decorators, ornamentalists, designers, and architects. It is now regarded as “a cultural mode of being, thought, and representation rather than exclusively as a formal idiom.”

The claim I make—that rococo ornamentation is of a special radical kind—links the narrow materialist study of rococo ornament with its wider cultural context by establishing how objects such as rocaille ornaments transform being. My aim is not to argue for the validity of a common style between visually disparate cultural art forms of the same period. I do not debate whether rococo is a style or period as a whole, nor whether it displays discrepancies across various boundaries, nor how to mend the gap between these. I am concerned with what is already accepted and understood to be rocaille and not with the whole artistic production of the period. That is, I am concerned with the French ornaments that, even at the time, were called rocaille. This is why I use the French word rocaille to discuss the ornaments themselves and use the word rococo to designate the period as a whole or its style of decoration.

In the following sections of this chapter I investigate the impact of rocaille ornament’s centrality and what it disrupted during its period of conception and consumption. What caused rocaille to be disruptive, what were these elements, and what precisely did they disrupt? What do the answers reveal about the radical potential of rocaille ornament? Asking such fundamental questions will help me to address areas in rococo scholarship, and the study of rocaille ornament in particular, that have been neglected, such as the relationship of rocaille ornament to body and space.


1.2: Rocaille and its Eighteenth-Century Meanings

So as better to understand the effects of rococo and its radicality, it is helpful to review its conception and perception within its historical context. Since, as we have seen, the word rococo was only in use at the end of the eighteenth century, what language, then, was used to describe and label it before? What can this tell us about its perceptions at the time? During the height of its popularity, rococo was not perceived as a style *per se* but as a taste, or fashion. It was called the *goût modern*, *goût nouveau* (modern or new taste), or the *genre pittoresque* (the picturesque genre), but there was no manifesto or actual defense for it. There were several advertisements for suites of *rocaille* ornamental prints in the *Mercure de France*, as well as eloquent puff pieces in praise of some rococo works, but no actual defense was written to counter the many attacks that began to be levied against it in the 1750’s. While a look at the adjectives used in these advertisements helps to qualify and define the ornaments, we can also look at near contemporary sources that attacked rococo to understand which of its aspects they found faulty. By looking at both these positive and negative terminologies, we can derive a set of rococo characteristics that were perceived at the time. In turn, this will help us move

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93 Scott explains that the *Mercure de France* addressed itself to a wide buying public from nobility to the rich upper bourgeoisie. By advertising suites of rococo ornaments in the *Mercure*, Scott claims rococo was made more available as a style. See Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, 250. See advertisement for Meissonnier’s *Livre d’Ornemens* in *Mercure de France*, March 1734, 558-559; see advertisement for Meissonnier’s Cabinet Bielinski, *Mercure de France*, July 1736, 1691. See advertisement for Mondon’s untitled fourteen pieces of ornamental composition in *Mercure de France*, April 1736, 768.

94 Roland Michel looks extensively and in depth at the vocabulary used in criticizing and describing *rocaille* art from the 1730’s to 1800 in order to establish a recurring vocabulary. She does not, however, examine these terms for the same reasons as I do; See Roland Michel, *Lajoüe et l’art rocaille*, 126-141.
beyond the view of rococo as frivolous and light-hearted so as better to perceive its radicality.\textsuperscript{95}

The French term \textit{rocaille}, from which rococo derives, is more accurate in describing the style’s forms since it was used at the time of its proliferation to designate such forms. Originally, the term \textit{rocaille} had a very specific meaning which referred to the rock and shell work in grottos.\textsuperscript{96} Even though \textit{rocaille} came also to define rococo shapes, this first meaning was retained well into the nineteenth century and is a common definition of the term \textit{rocaille}, as we infer from the \textit{Dictionnaire de Trévoux}:

\begin{quote}
  l’assemblage de plusieurs coquillages avec des peircées inégal\-
  es & mal polies, qui se trouvent autour de rochers, & qui les imitent. C’est une
  composition d’architecture rustique, qui imite les rochers naturels, & qui se
  fait de pierres trouées, de coquillages & de pétrificarions de diverses
  couleurs, comme on en voit aux grottes & bassins des fontaines.\textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}

That \textit{rocaille} originally referred to grotto decorative rock and shell work is a common reference we see again and again in scholarship on the rococo. These studies, however, are usually limited to this first meaning and never delve into why and how the term came to drift in significance towards the various forms of \textit{rocaille} ornementation we have come to know.\textsuperscript{98} Asking how the linguistic transfer occurred will reveal some important ontological traits of \textit{rocaille}.

\textsuperscript{95} On the notion that the rococo era and style is a frivolous one see Denys Sutton, “Frivolity and Reason,” \textit{France in the Eighteenth Century: Winter Exhibition, 1968}, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1968), 13. Weisgerber also claims the eighteenth century was a frivolous era; see Jean Weisgerber, \textit{Le rococo: beaux-arts et littérature}, 10-11, 16.

\textsuperscript{96} Kimball, \textit{The Creation of Rococo}, 4; Fuhring, \textit{Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier}, 70.

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Dictionnaire universel français et latin, vulgairement appelé Dictionnaire de Trévoux: contenant la signification et la définition des mots de l'une et de l'autre langue...} (Paris: 1771), s.v. “rocaille.” Roland Michel claims people still used the term \textit{rocaille} to refer to grotto works in the nineteenth century; see Roland Michel, \textit{Lajoüe et l'art rocaille}, 131 and Kimball, \textit{The Creation of Rococo}, 4.

\textsuperscript{98} For a brief mention of shell presence and origins in \textit{rocaille} art see Blakemore, \textit{History of Interior Design and Furniture}, 228; Erich Hubala, \textit{Baroque And Rococo Art} (New York: Universe Books, 1976), 168. Fuhring does elaborate on the link between shell collecting and \textit{rocaille} art; see Fuhring, \textit{Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier}, 70-77. Yonan also explains the close link between porcelain and shell etymology as well as \textit{rocaille} and shells; see Yonan, “Igneous Architecture,” 77. For a brief mention of the metamorphosis of
While both Kimball and Fuhring are concerned with defining rococo, neither explains this slippage in meaning from *rocaille* as signifying shell/rock-work in decorative grottos to *rocaille* as ornamental rococo designs. However, in Marianne Roland Michel’s monumental work *Lajoüe et L’art rocaille*, we find some insightful comments regarding the visual connection between the two significances. She claims that the descriptive qualities of the rock-work found in grottos are the same descriptive qualities eighteenth-century critiques used in their disapproval of *rocaille* decorative forms. She explains that *rocaille* “ne décrit plus tel aménagement d’une masse rocheuse, mais devient synonyme de ce qu’elle évoquait: désordre, déchirure, difformité, irréalité monstrueuse. Et ce sont ces caractéristiques, ces concepts de la *rocaille*, que retiendront pour les critiquer les opposants du style[…].” The rock formations of decorative grottos, according to Roland Michel, were irregular shapes—tattered, torn, pierced with holes, rugged on the edges—and were the result of artificial assemblage. Roland Michel’s argument is that the same qualities can be found in *rocaille* ornaments and characterize the chaotic, torn aspect of this type of ornamentation. I will go beyond Roland Michel and argue that defining rococo as a set of qualities shared between different forms—natural marine ones and abstract ornamental ones—indicates that *rocaille* is not simply a noun and adjective but also a performative verb. Indeed, these qualities are the visual result of the actions of a radical type of ornamentation.

The *rocaille* rock-work of the grottos shares not only a descriptive vocabulary with *rocaille* ornament but also two material features, the first of which being the use of shells into *rocaille* ornaments see Sheriff, “Seeing Metamorphosis in Sculpture and the Decorative Arts,” 163-164.

99 Roland Michel, *Lajoüe et l'art rocaille*, 131
100 Ibid., 130.
101 Ibid., 131.
shells as part of its decorative elements. An example of this practice is the _Grotta del Buontalenti_ (1583-1593), found in the Boboli Gardens in Florence, where there are many shells embedded everywhere (fig. 1).\(^{102}\) Using shells to decorate the interior walls of the grotto and its water basin was typical of grotto decoration. We understand, then, how the first meaning of *rocaille*, which referred to grotto decorative elements, also referred to the use of shells in its decoration. Similarly, shells are part of the standard rococo vocabulary, a fact mentioned repeatedly by art historians.\(^{103}\) In numerous *rocaille* prints and rococo decorative schemes by Huquier, Boucher, Huet, Lajoüe, and Meissonnier, for example, we find a display of various shells, as well as coral and other sea creatures such as lobsters (figs. 2-7).\(^{104}\) However, the overwhelming presence of shells in rococo work may best be asserted through the relation between shells and the cartouche shape. This shape, which may take various forms, is often reminiscent of the deformed ovoid shapes found in seashells (fig. 8).\(^{105}\) Initially found in grotto works, shells thus drifted from their cavernous surroundings to join the rococo decorative lexicon.

The second decorative grotto feature that finds its way as part of the *rocaille* vocabulary is the fountain. Fountains, water, and the aquatic world were standard decorative features of grotto designs. Fountains are the central element of several of the proposed grotto decorative schemes in the plates of William Wrighte’s *Grotesque*.

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102 For examples of decorated grottos with shells, see William Wrighte, *Grotesque Architecture, or Rural Amusement Consisting of Plans, Elevations, and Sections for...Chinese, Gothic and Natural Grottos, Cascades...*, London, 1767, Plate 9, Plate 19. See also Charles Le Brun, *Masques de coquillages et de rocaillles de la grotte de Thétis à Versailles*, 1676, copper etching, private collection, Brugerolles, Boucher et l’art rocaille, ill. 1, 246.

103 Roland Michel, for example, acknowledges the fundamental presence of shells as part of the *rocaille* lexicon, thought she does not discuss this fact any further. Roland Michel, *Lajoüe et l’art rocaille*, 131.


105 See for instance the ink drawings *Cartouche rocaille*, attributed to Pierre-Edmé Babel in the collection of Ensba (inv. E.B.A. n° O.543, n° O.541). Babel’s sketches demonstrate how closely the cartouche shape seems to be inspired from shell formation since it exhibits contorted shell shapes transforming into cartouche ones.
This association is echoed in many *rocaille morceaux de fantasies*, or rococo decorative objects, in which we find depictions of grottos alongside various bodies of water. Many *morceaux de fantasies* by Lajoüe, Mondon, and Meissonnier depict fountains and hidden grottos (figs. 4, 9-11). Alongside a myriad marine themes and elements, fountains are repeatedly found as part of *rocaille* works. Nevertheless, this feature of *rocaille* is often not acknowledged by art historians. Roland Michel, however, does agree that fountains, cascades, water geysers, dolphins, tritons, naiads, Neptunes, corals, reeds, and shells are part of the regular *rocaille* vocabulary. She pinpoints the source of *rocaille*’s aquatic characteristics in the initial meaning of the word *rocaille*: the elements that constituted the basins of fountains. Not only does she perceive an etymological translation of *rocaille*’s meaning from grotto decoration to ornament, she also perceives a direct visual connection. *Rocaille* was used to describe rococo ornaments and prints not only because, as a qualifier, it identified similar physical qualities, but also because both the grotto and rococo aesthetic featured the marine world: rocks, shells, and fountains.

The word *rocaille* was first applied to this type of ornamentation when a suite of ornaments by Meissonnier was described in the March 1734 edition of the *Mercure de France*:

> Il paroît une suite d’Estampes en large, dans le goût d’Etienne la Belle, qui doivent piquer la curiosité du Public et des Curieux du meilleur goût. Ce sont des Fontaines, des Cascades, des Ruines, des Rocailles, et Coquillages,

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107 See all the pannels from Jacques Lajoüe *Six Panel Screen*, 1735, Petit Palais Musée des beaux-arts de la ville de Paris, Paris, which show fountains and potential grottos underneath. See also Mondon’s *Le Galant Chasseur*, in *Troisième Livre de formes Cartels et Rocailles ornés de figure de Modes*, 1736. Both showcase elaborate *rocaille* fountains replete with spaces. Lastly, see Lajoüe’s *Trône du grand seigneur*, from *Douze morceaux de fantasie*, 1736, (G62-f.373), Ensba, Paris.
109 Ibid., 131.
As we can see in the Title Plate, the term rocaille is applied here as a descriptor referring to elements such as the leaning triton or perhaps the depicted rock-work to the left, which leads into stairs that transform into a subterranean cave or grotto lying underneath the cartouche with the title (fig. 12). Clearly we see here the link between the rocks to the far left and their subsequent visual transformation into the typical swirling rocaille ornament that moves to cover and simultaneously make the implied grotto space. If anything, this cartouche shows the rocaille ornaments literally emerging out of their grotto cavern and, in a sweeping, wave-like motion, transforming into the rocaille ornaments we know. We see this transformation again in Plate 2, where the zigzag rocks become rocaille ornamental shapes and where, at the foot of the basin, a wave literally transforms into a solid swirling ornament (fig. 11). Although, according to Kimball, the word rocaille in this context apparently still refers only to grotto works, I propose we can observe here how grotto and rocaille ornaments visually co-mingle to become a new formation.111

The culmination of these ties between the word rocaille and its marine theme is best exemplified in a sheet for a screen drawn by Boucher entitled Rocaille, which was

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110 According to Kimball, this advertisement for the suite Livre d’ornemens by Meissonnier is the first appearance of the word rocaille used in the context of rococo decoration; see Kimball, The Creation of Rococo, 162. See Mercure de France, March 1734, 558-559.

111 Kimball, The Creation of the Rococo, 162.
engraved and sold at the earliest in 1737 (fig. 3). In this print we see a pile of shells, corals, palm branches, and even two monkeys at the bottom left, arranged in so haphazard fashion as to make the task of identifying these forms very difficult. Behind this arrangement we see a rustic fountain and part of a wall. The shells, marine life, and rock-work are presented literally outside the grotto pavilion, which we may infer is dissimulated behind the large shell, since we can see a quasi opening to the right and because the shell stands against a lower buttress and fountain. This time, however, the rocaille features are at the forefront of the picture; no longer hidden in an inside space, they are exteriorized to become the central subject matter as well as a framing arabesque. In short, elements originally found inside a grotto or around a water basin and fountain are now shown in full bloom, even co-mingling with elements of an exotic lexicon, such as monkeys.

While this example of rocaille does not itself show a transformation into the abstract swirling shapes of Meissonnier, we must consider that this is but one panel in a set of five that make up a screen. This screen puts the word and concept of rocaille in conjunction with other elements that are not strictly marine but that all become conjoined. It illustrates well the slippage in the meaning of rocaille from the initial rock-work and shell decoration on fountains to the rococo formation it later becomes. Starting from the strict confines of the natural marine world, these elements are found again in the panel Leda, in which Boucher constructs the fountain Leda is on out of natural elements such as oyster shells, coral branches, earth mounds covered in long wet grass, and palm tree branches (fig. 13). The same marine elements as those found in the panel Rocaille,

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112 Brugerolles, Boucher et l’art rocaille, 138.
113 Léda is part of a set of five prints for a five-panel folding screen, of which Rocaille (fig. 3) is one.
which were arranged like a bouquet, are reordered in *Leda* into the structural elements of a water basin, cartouche, pedestal and fountain (fig. 3). Specifically, we see how the large shell found at the center of the panel *Rocaille* eventually becomes a fountain canopy above Leda while being further reworked and transformed into a cartouche-like shape, the edges of which curl backwards in the famous counter-undulations of rococo ornaments. The panel *Le Triomphe de Pomone* further reworks the shell shape to become at once fountain, frame, cartouche, and basin and transforms this sum into the usual sprouts of wavelike undulations seen in abstract rococo ornaments (fig. 14). While the title of the panel *Rocaille* can be interpreted as strictly referring to the marine/grotto definition, when juxtaposed with other themes in the series, such as the panel *Hommage Champêtre*, the word and its association become continually exposed to a wider rococo vocabulary. The screen, with its multiple panels that can fold and unfold, literally shows the swaying movement of the *rocaille* ornament’s transformation from a literal marine form to part of a wider rococo context.

According to both Kimball and Roland Michel, however, it is in the title of a 1736 ornamental suite by François-Thomas Mondon, *Troisième Livre de formes Cartels et Rocailles ornés de figures de Modes*, that the word *rocaille* is no longer tied necessarily to decorative grotto rock and shell work, but becomes a general adjective to describe rococo shapes (figs. 9, 17).\(^{114}\) The work of Mondon is little discussed, and there is no catalogue raisonné of his work. A jeweler by trade, he seems to have created some

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\(^{114}\) The first deliberate use of the word *rocaille* to signify more than grotto-work is debated amongst Kimball, Roland Michel, and Fuhring. Kimball claims it first appears in 1734 with a suite of Lajoüe prints entitled *Nouveaux Tableau d'ornements et Rocailles*; See Kimball, *The Creation of Rococo*, 172. Roland Michel disagrees, claiming the date of the suite by Lajoüe is uncertain and could be 1740; see Marianne Roland Michel, *Lajoüe et l'art rocaille*, 130, 135, 347. Kimball concedes the word *rocaille* is first used in 1736 to describe Mondon’s *cartels* and cartouche; see Kimball, *The Creation of Rococo*, 172. Fuhring, on the other hand, claims that in the *menue plaisir* of 1730 there is a description of Meissonnier plates referred to as cartouche with *rocaille*, see Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*. 
rocaille ornamental compositions popular enough that they were made in more than one edition and were replicated in other media.\textsuperscript{115} Although no major study as yet has been devoted to this artist, I believe we must acknowledge that the body of prints he produced is distinct from, and on par with, that of Lajoüe or Meissonnier.\textsuperscript{116} It is important to note scholars’ general refusal to comment on or seriously discuss Mondon’s work. The reason commentators have struggled to discuss his oeuvre may be because it is undated or there is little information concerning him. Or perhaps the reason is because the bulk of his known work consists only of ornamental prints and drawings, unlike Meissonnier, Lajoüe, Cuvilliés, or Oppenord, who all worked as architectural decorators or painters. However, since Mondon qualified his ornamental forms as rocaillesque, it is worth investigating his work to see how such shapes become this new exteriorized form of rocaille.

Although undated, but presumably predating or at least contemporary with his third suite, Mondon’s \textit{Premier Livre de Forme Rocquaille et Cartel} shows the fountains or architectural structures that anchor animals or people in space and construct their scape are now made of overblown rococo shapes, of marine or vegetal origin, that sprout in all directions. These ornaments become the basin, the buttress, the canopy, and the fountain, while simultaneously being an all-encompassing, multitasking structure forming the central composition of the work (fig. 15). In his \textit{Second Livre de Formes Rocailles et Cartels ornés de Figures de Modes} we see, as in the first \textit{Livre}, all types of fountains, pedestals, and architectural garden structures that externalize and blow out of proportion

\textsuperscript{115} For more on the execution of Mondon’s design in objects such as snuff boxes, see Marianne Roland Michel, “François-Thomas Mondon, artiste ‘rocaille’ méconnu,” \textit{Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire de l’Art Français}, 1979, 149-158.

\textsuperscript{116} In the eighteenth century Mondon is referred to by J.-F. Blondel as lesser than Lajoüe and only capable of mediocre imitations of the latter’s work. Ibid., 150.
the initial shell and rock-works. In *Les Petits Maîtres*, we see how the shell shape is now completely abstracted and merged with palm branches to form the back of a seat, which mimics the sprawling branch work of the trees behind (fig. 16). The whole seating apparatus stands above a rudimentary brick arch, which hints at a lower garden structure such as, possibly, and yet again, a decorative grotto. The pleasurable, shaded seating area once found inside the grotto is now completely externalized. In the third *Livre*, however, the *rocaille* structures completely merge with nature, becoming part of nature, not merely an architectural structure within nature. They grow and comingle with nature, similar to what we see in *L’Amant Fidel* (fig. 17). Finally, in the *Quatrième Livre de Formes ornées de Rocailles, cartels, figures, oyseux, et dragons chinois*, 1736, the ornamental shapes merge with an exotic vocabulary made of Oriental characters, mythological dragons, and strange birds, and depict an imaginary Orient made entirely of these structures; here nature is *rocaille* and the two are indistinguishable (fig. 18). To apply the adjective *rocaille* to the forms in these prints is to extend its meaning to include architecture and nature, which together become all-encompassing structures. Regardless of when precisely the word *rocaille* first came to be used as an adjective no longer referring uniquely to grotto decorative work, we can agree with Kimball that this occurred sometime in the 1730’s. It is not coincidental that this is also the most prolific decade in terms of publishing suites of *rocaille* ornaments.\(^\text{117}\) The sources of *rocaille* shapes are found in the

\(^{117}\) Kimball claims rococo attained its maturity in the 1730’s when it was most popular and the term *rocaille* was used to designate it. Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, 174. A comprehensive list of important *rocaille* publications can be found in Roland Michel, *Lajoüe et l’art rocaille*, 394-395. Nonetheless, here are some examples to illustrate the breadth of publication during the 1730’s: Meissonnier, *Livre de Legume* (1732); Lajoüe, *Receuille nouveau de differens cartouche* (1734); Jean-Antoine Fraisse, *Livre de desseins Chinois*, (1735); François Boucher, *Receuil de diverses figures chinoises*, (1735); Lajoüe, *Livre de Nouveau de Douze Morceaux de Fantaise*, (1736); François-Thomas Mondon, 3ième livre de formes cartels et Rocailles ornées de figures de monde, 4ième Livre de formes ornées de rocallies, cartels Figures oyseux et dragons Chinois, 5ièm Livre de Figures et ornemens Chinois, 6ième Livre de formes rocallies et
marine world of grotto and fountain rock-work decoration, and they are exteriorized in rococo decorative schemes, transformed into abstracted ornaments that retain organic echoes of their cavernous origins. That artists, sellers, and commentators named these ornaments *rocaille* at the time of their production acknowledges this link between the two.

*Rocaille*, however, is not the only defining term or adjective that can help disclose the ontology of rococo ornaments. It is also important to understand the other adjectives used to describe this category, since these denote other qualities perceived at the time. Such qualifiers can be found in the title of the works themselves, in their advertisements, as well as in the negative criticism of rococo decoration found in letters or critical reviews.

One term that is reiterated again and again in titles is *nouveau*, meaning novel or new. We often find this qualifier *nouveau* in the titles of Lajoüe’s sets of prints, such as *Receuille nouveau de differens cartouches*, 1734; *Livre Nouveau de Douze Morceaux de Fantaisie*, 1736; *Nouveau tableaux d’Ornements et Rocailles*, ca. 1740. Lajoüe was not alone in qualifying his work as new; Gabriel Huquier qualified as *nouveau* his *Premier Livre de Nouveaux Caprices d’ornements meslés de fleurs et de Fruits*, 1740, and Edmé Babel titled one suite *Cartouche Nouveau* and another *Carteles Nouveaux*. Mondon also named a suite *Nouveaux Dessins de Carosses*; Peyrotte called his Chinese suite *Nouveaux Cartouches Chinois*, and the architect Leroux called a set of architectural prints *Nouveaux Lambris de Galeries Chambre et Cabinets*. In the *Mercure de France* of July...
1736 there is a review describing Meissonnier’s Cabinet for the count Bielinsky, which
cabinet the author qualifies as being of “an absolutely new construction [...]” That there
was such an insistence on the novel quality of the products offered was so fundamental to
their definition that what we now call rococo came to be known at the time as le goût
nouveau, or new taste, as abbé Leblanc so clearly details in a letter to the comte de
Caylus:

on affecte déjà de s’éloigner du goût du Siécle [sic] de Louis XIV, l’âge
d’or des Lettres & des beaux-Arts en France. Rien n’est plus monstrueux,
comme le remarque Horace, que de marier ensemble des Êtres d’une nature
opposée; c’est cependant ce que grand nombre de nos Artistes se font
aujourd’hui gloire de pratiquer. Ils contrastent un Amour avec un Dragon, &
un Coquillage avec une aile de Chauve-Sourirs. Ils ne suivent plus aucun
ordre, aucune vraisemblance dans leurs productions. Ils emmassent avec
confusion des corniches, des bases, des colonnes, des cascades, des joncs,
des rochers; dans quelque coin de ce cahos, ils placeront un Amour
épouvanté, & sur le tout, ils feront régner une guirlande de fleurs…Voilà
pourtant ce que nos Artistes appellent des desseins d’un nouveau goût…
Ceux de nos Artistes qui ont quelque sens, rougissent souvent des choses
qu’ils sont obligés de faire, mais le torrent les entraine; il faut, pour être
employés, qu’ils fassent comme les autres. On leur demande du goût
nouveau, de ces formes qui ne ressemblent à rien, & ils en donnent.118

Abbé Leblanc details to what extent this goût nouveau has gained popularity and
describes goût nouveau as combinations of things with opposing natures and shapes that
resemble nothing all haphazardly thrown together without respect for order.

We must not restrict the term nouveau to describing and qualifying the rococo,
but must also understand its uses in a wider context. In the same Mercure edition of July
1736, where the Cabinet Bielinsky is described as being “an entirely new construction,”
we also read about foreign news, or nouvelles étrangères, describing what was happening
not in Europe but in Turkey and Persia. We find a tie here between the words “nouveau”
and “étrange” and what were considered exotic places at the time. Although it is not

unusual to describe something innovative as new in an advertisement or in a report and to call news as literally a ‘new item,’ we must remember that, in the context of a journal, these terms are closely juxtaposed in the same literary space. In fact, the context around the art criticism of “an absolutely new construction,” which, we must remember, is called the goût nouveau, is sprinkled with other kinds of ‘new’ things. In this same edition, we also find advertisements for new publications about far away and unknown places such as Japan and the Carolinas. As well, there is also an interesting advertisement for an entirely new kind of machine by Sieur Launois, Machiniste of Monseigneur le Dauphin, which is said to mimic the blood circulation system and is a combination of mechanics, physics, and hydraulics.¹¹⁹

What is interesting here is that, in the context of the journal, the word ‘new’ resonates with and attaches itself to other new items such as scientific advancements, geographical discoveries, foreign events, and far away places and people. This expanded field of associations makes the term nouveau not only a qualifier for the innovative, but also a designator for something not previously known. In the titles of rocaille print work, nouveau refers perhaps to the goût nouveau while also invariably stressing the as yet unknown aspects of these ornaments. Qualifying rocaille ornament and the taste for rocaille as new identifies the style as not only innovative but also as something strange, or étrange, and exotic. This wider context of the term nouveau, it should be noted, is not lost when the term is iterated only in the title of an ornamental suite. This is often true when such a suite also describes what was new at the time, such as anything coming from or relating to the Orient. Peyrotte’s title Nouveaux Cartouches Chinois, for example,

¹¹⁹ Mercure de France, July 1736, 1696.
breaches the gap between all these new phenomena. When considering the breadth of contexts in which *nouveau* is used, we come to read the term as a synonym for what is not known. This reveals that an important and integral aspect of *rocaille* ornamentation at the time was its degree of unknowability, novelty, and strangeness.

It is also important to stress the link between the qualifier *nouveau* and the initial reference to the shell and rock-work of the term *rocaille*. Shells were deemed curious items that were increasingly collected by the *curieux* and became highly sought-after collectables of naturalia. Shell collectors, such as the Duchess of Portland, constantly sought, studied, identified, and named new specimens.\(^{120}\) Shells were curious and new because they were unknown and were the object of scientific inquiry. The shells and marine life found in *rocaille* decoration further enhanced the “new” nature of *rocaille* ornaments. This conchological aspect of *rocaille* shall be addressed again in Chapter Three.

Elements of the *nouveau goût*, or *formes rocailles*, were also qualified as *pittoresque*. The word was not yet used as a name for a style, but rather as a description of how the *rocaille* shapes were arranged in relation to one another.\(^{121}\) In the *Mercure* announcement we previously considered of Meissonnier’s *Livre D’Ornemens* (figs. 11-12, 66), the fountains, cascades, ruins, *rocailles*, shells, and pieces of architecture are said to have ‘pittoresque’ effects: “Ce sont des Fontaines, des Cascades, des Ruines, des Rocailles, et Coquillages, des Morceaux d’Architecture, qui font des effets bizarres, singuliers et pittoresques, par leurs formes piquantes et extraordinaires, dont souvent

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\(^{121}\) Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, 80.
A pittoresque effect is defined here by the fact that the shapes presented are piquant, extraordinary, and, above of all, have no corresponding parts. In other words, the parts are non-symmetrical. Though asymmetry is the term we would apply to describe such an effect, at the time it was not yet in use. Instead, asymmetry, and the pittoresque effect, was defined as contrast or simply a negation of symmetry; we find a description in Blondel’s *L’homme du monde éclairé par les arts*: “Les dedans...sont des plus agréables...les plus variés que j’ai jamais vus...Tout, dans les appartements, présente un contraste admirable. On ne remarque pas une ligne droite, ni dans les plans, ni dans les élévations. La symmetrie en est bannie.” An advertisement in the *Mercure* qualifies the shapes we discussed earlier (figs. 9 and 17) from Mondon’s *Troisième livre de formes cartels et Rocailles* as varied and contrasted: “le sieur Mondon...a aussi beaucoup de génie et de talent pour le Dessein, sur le tout pour des formes singulières, agréables et ingénieuses, comme de trophées, Rocailles, Cartels, le tout enrichi de figures groupées naturellement, variées et contrastées avec goût.”

Asymmetry, or contrast, was understood not only as non-symmetrical but also as diagonally structured shapes; Abbé Le Blanc further complained of the absence of horizontal or perpendicular lines:

Ainsi pour avoir passé le terme, nous sommes revenus à la barbarie des Goths. Peut-être est-il des choses où trop de symétrie est un Défaut [...] Mais qu’en fait d’ornemens nous sommes aujourd’hui loin de ce défaut! Nous ne voulons plus rien de symétrique. Si l’on orne le Frontispice d’un Hôtel des Armes de celui qui fait bâtir, on pose l’Ecu en ligne diagonale, &

122 *Mercure de France*, March 1734, 558-559.
123 For more on the notion of asymmetry see Kimball, *The Creation of Rococo*, 152.
125 *Mercure de France*, April 1736, 768.
la Couronne sur l’un des côtés, de façon qu’elle paroisse prête à tomber. On s’éloigne le plus qu’on peut de la ligne perpendiculaire & de l’horizontale: on ne met plus rien à plomb, ni de niveau […]\textsuperscript{126}

In Pierre-Edmé Babel’s suite *Cartouche Pittoresque* we see that the shapes, described in the title as *pittoresque*, are composed of a central incongruence: irregular, curvilinear shapes made visible by the assemblage of various little parts all different from one another and arranged in a counter-curve juxtaposition forming the closed shape of the cartouche (fig. 19).\textsuperscript{127} The overall effect is a shape that has a slanted axis and which seems about to topple over. The fact that each constituent part is also different from the other stresses the individual aspect of the parts and consequently their singularity. We have seen the term *singulier* used in the *Mercure* of April 1736 to qualify the work of Mondon in his *Troisième Livre* as being “des formes singulières, agréables et ingénieuses.”\textsuperscript{128} The term was used again in the May 1736 edition of the *Mercure*, this time to describe the fantasy subjects of Lajoüë in his *Douze Morceaux de Fantasie*: “des sujets de fantaisies singulières et très élégantes, de la Composition de M. De la Joüe.”\textsuperscript{129}

Alongside *singulière*, *contrast*, and *pittoresque*, we often find the qualifiers *bizzare* and *curieux*.\textsuperscript{130} Again in the announcement of the *Mercure* for Meissonnier’s *Livre D’Ornemens*, we find all these terms: “Il paroît une suite d'Estampes en large, dans le goût d'Etienne la Belle, qui doivent *piquer la curiosité* du Public et des *curieux* du

\textsuperscript{128} *Mercure de France*, April 1736, 768.
\textsuperscript{129} *Mercure de France*, May 1736, 172.
\textsuperscript{130} Roland Michel explains how the adjective *bizard* was used by most authors to describe *rocaille* work, and points out that the word *bizarerie* was meant to be understood as a criticism of a style considered to be the result of an unregulated, almost sick, imagination. She also proposes that a synonym for the word *bizard* or *bizarerie* could be *fantasie* or caprice, terms that both refer to an opposition of rules and regulations imposed by architectural and natural order; see Roland Michel, *Lajoüë et l'art rocaill*, 127-128.
meilleur goût. Ce sont des Fontaines, des Cascades, des Ruines, des Rocailles, et Coquillages, des Morceaux d'Architecture, qui font des effets bizarres, singuliers et pittoresques [...]”

(emphasis mine) In another further example, we see that rocaille attracted curious people since the review of Meissonnier’s cabinet for comte Bielinsky explains that: “les curieux on été voir avec beaucoup de satisfaction [...]”

We can therefore understand how rocaille, which was composed of new items reminiscent of the marine world, attracted, in the same manner as shells, the curious collector and onlooker.

*Pittoresque, contrasté, varié, singulier, bizarre, curieux, extraordinaire, nouveau:* this was the typical language used to describe rocaille shapes. What all these terms tried to qualify was the uniqueness of the totality of assemblages made up of the different rocaille ornaments and their unstructured unpredictability. The dispositions of shapes proposed in these ornamental suites did not create coherent patterns, in which one can expect the next element based on the predictability of symmetry. Rather, the ensembles proposed in the examples shown from the work of Mondon, Meissonnier, or Babel are composed of disparate parts that form novel asymmetrical assemblages. Asymmetry was a novel invention, one that no longer respected the visual linearity and hierarchical system that situated items in what was deemed their proper place.

Asymmetry, as Le Blanc complained, abolished all rectilinear lines.

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131 Mercure de France, March 1734, 558-559.
132 Mercure de France, July 1736, 1696.
133 Gersaint stresses several times the curious aspects of shells and how these will attract the curiosity of les curieux. He suggests shells can be useful to artists as well due to their variety and their capacity to inspire new ideas; see Edmé-François Gersaint, Catalogue Raisonné de coquilles et autres curiosités naturelles, Paris, 1736, 10-13.
134 On the origins of asymmetry see Marianne Roland Michel, Lajoüe et l'art rocaille, 134.
The terminology used to describe *rocaille*, to praise its artists for their ingenuity and its viewers for being curious and showing good taste in purchasing or appreciating it, was the same terminology used by the detractors of the style. In an excerpt from a lecture given by Jacques-François Blondel at his school of architecture, we see how the terms *singulier* and *bizarre* are now used as faulty adjectives in the context of other words such as vicious, absurd, inaccurate, and inappropriate:

Quel avantages ne pourront pas retirer de nos conférences les Ciseleurs, Orfevres, Ebéniste, qui dans la composition de leurs ouvrages sont tous les jours obligés de faire entrer des Colonades, des Portiques, des Temples même, & qui faute des premières notions de l’Architecture, hasardent souvent des formes vicieuses, peu correctes, absurdes, singulières, & encore moins relatives a leur sujet; hardiesses condamnables, licenes odieuses, qui sont la source de la viscissitude qu’on remarque dans les ouvrages de goût, parmi les quels on voit tous les jours succéder une mode baroque à une autre non moins bizarre.\textsuperscript{135}

While in the accolades of the *Mercure* these suites of prints were said to be of *bon goût*, critics such as Abbé Le Blanc, Cochin, Blondel, Boffrand, d’Argenvile, Soufflot, Voltaire, Winckelmann, Laugier, Argenson, and Diderot discredited that same taste, saying it was a practice of *mauvais goût*.\textsuperscript{136} The public, patrons, and artists of *rocaille* were reproached for showing a lack of proper, educated taste in their choice to support or produce this style. Proper taste, as Le Blanc expressed in his letter to Caylus, is represented by the taste of Louis XIV and Versailles and is meant to show a respect for the proper, natural order of things.\textsuperscript{137} In a passage from his *Avant-Propos*, Cochin identifies these rules:

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\textsuperscript{135} Jacques Francois Blondel, *Discours sur la Nécessite de l’étude de l’architecture, dans lequel on essaye de prouver combien il est important pour le progres des Arts [...] que les artistes en approfondissent la théorie & que les artisans s’appliquent au développement du ressort de leur profession* (Paris, 1754), 77-78.

\textsuperscript{136} For a list of critics see Weisgerber, “Qu’est-ce que le rococo?” 14.

\textsuperscript{137} See Le Blanc, *Lettre de Monsieur l’Abbé Le Blanc*, 57-71
\end{flushleft}
Les décorations intérieures, & les meubles, sont les objects sur lequels on croit se pouvoir permettre le plus de licence: cependant ils ont une destination d’utilité ou de commodité; & l’on ne peut nier que l’ornement que l’on y joint, ne doit jamais s’y opposer. La forme primitive des choses est donnée par cette destination, & le reste n’y est ajouté que pour l’enrichir & l’embellir: l’ornement est donc assujetti a des loix de convenance. Les règles générales du goût, établies dans toutes les autres parties de l’art, n’y sont pas moins importantes; la variété, la symmétrie, le repos à côté du travail; l’inégalité dans les masses & dans les parties qui les composent; des rapports de proportion des grandes aux petites, dont l’œil puisse juger, & qui sont reconnus pour être une des principales causes du plaisir que sont les belles choses. Ce sont ces loix, & plusieurs autres qu’on trouve exactement observées dans les ouvrages qui ont acquis l’approbation universelle, qu’on peut poser pour regles, & il est important de sentir le ridicule de tout ce qui s’en éloigne.138

Good taste was practiced by observing antique models and architectural orders, and by selecting decoration appropriate to the subject matter being decorated.139

At the heart of these attacks lay the charge against rococo artists for their lack of respect for such rules. Cochin in his Avant Propos explains that “[q]uelques personnes voudraient soustraire l’ornement aux règles établies dans l’Architecture, & prétendent qu’il ne depend que de l’imagaintion, sans pouvoir être assujetti à l’examen de la raison; qu’ainsi toute liberté peut être admise.”140 Critics such as Cochin thought rocaille infringed on the basic laws of nature because its shapes were unreal, fantastic, imaginary, or impossible (fig. 18). These critics found, ultimately, that ornament had grown too important once it had become its own subject matter. Rocaille ornament was found guilty of overturning the hierarchy of subject matter, bestowing inappropriate importance or


139 For what is considered appropriate taste and how to become educated in the antique model see Cochin, “Avant Propos,” X-XI; see also Blondel for definitions of concepts such as bienseance, symétrie and convenance, Blondel, Discours sur la Nécessite, 41-42, 45.

140 Ibid., XIII-XIV.
signification onto subjects, and usurping architectural rules of order by way of asymmetry.

As a consequence of this defiance against conventions, good taste, and rules, practitioners of *rocaille* were deemed to have an unruly imagination. Under the definition for caprice, Diderot explains in the *Encyclopédie*: “on se sert de ce nom par métaphore, pour exprimer une composition bizarre, quoiqu’ingénieuse, mais qui est éloignée des préceptes de l’Art…par une imagination aussi fertile que déréglée […]”¹⁴¹ Such unruliness and betrayal of order and propriety implied rococo ornaments themselves were disorderly and by extension so too the spaces and things they decorated. Not only was there disorder, there were also incongruent combinations caused by things being literally out of place and not following appropriate conventions; such combinations only increased in number due to asymmetrical formations. We might recall here Abbé Le Blanc’s words:

> rien n’est plus monstrueux, comme le remarque Horace, que de marier ensemble des Êtres d’une nature opposée; c’est cependant ce que grand nombre de nos Artistes se font aujourd’hui gloire de pratiquer. Ils contrastent un Amour avec un Dragon, & un Coquillage avec une aile de Chauve-Sourirs. Ils ne suivent plus aucun ordre, aucune vraisemblance dans leurs productions. Ils emassent avec confusion des corniches, des bases, des colonnes, des cascades, des joncs, des rochers; dans quelque coin de ce cahos, ils placeront un Amour épouvanté, & sur le tout, ils feront régner une guirlande de fleurs¹⁴²

Abbé Le Blanc remarks that monsters are literally the result of this disorder. These *rocaille* creations were thought to drift from reality because they merged reality with imagination, resulting in various implausible combinations. It was also believed that, since *rocaille* shapes resembled nothing real or known, they created a lack of sense or

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knowledge. Indeed, Abbé Le Blanc questions what the exotic rocallé clocks are truly meant to be: “[a] quoi ressemblent ces Pendules devenues si à la mode, qui n’ont ni base ni console, & qui paroissent sortir du lambris où elles sont appliquées! Ces cerfs, ces chiens & ces piqueurs, ou ces figures Chinoises, qu’on distribue d’une façon si bizarre autour d’un cadran, en sont’ils les ornement naturels?”

Rocaille, as I have shown, is a term that emerged from the new and curious aquatic world of shells, fountains, and grottos, carrying with it a multitude of qualifiers used to describe the nature of its shapes and their effects. Asymmetry and contrast were seen as hallmarks of the style and viewed as favorable attributes by its adherents; detractors found the same elements to be affronts to good taste. What was common to both types of commentators is that rocallé ornaments were found to be new and curious, regardless of taste, as well as defying both previous and current conventions. Their shapes were perceived as creating effects that were unexpected—imaginary combinations without logical sense or order.

1.3: Extreme Rocaille Forms

I have briefly reviewed the etymology of the terms rococo and rocallé and the perception of rococo in the eighteenth century. It is important now to step back and formally describe and acknowledge what can be observed of the ornaments themselves in order to understand this specific set of material qualities and see how it may create radical effects. The first observations that can be made lead to the identification of a recognizable lexicon of elements comprising rococo ornaments. As explained above, the

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point of departure seems to have been the *rocaille* rock-work of grottos. The marine world is represented everywhere through derivative shapes of shells and is, for this reason, integrated at all times. We find it in the shells depicted at the bottom of a screen by Lajoüe or at the top of a vase on a decorative frontispiece to Lajoüe’s *Livre de Vase* (figs. 2-7).  

However, the lexicon of recognizable rococo ornaments extends beyond marine life and may even seem to be a melting pot of various elements. However, there are identifiable elements, which reappear often enough to create loose categories. For instance, the rococo lexicon also extends to the vegetal world, moving beyond roses and other common European vegetation to portray, for example, palm trees, such as in the *lambries* of the *Cabinet of Bonnier de La Mosson* (fig. 20). One can even find exotic fruits such as pineapples, which are part of the decorative wall ornaments in a room from a *hôtel particulier*, now at the musée Carnavalet (fig. 21).

Another category consists of exotic animals such as monkeys, elephants, a variety of birds, and mythical creatures, such as dragons, which were quite popular and became part of the compendium of rococo decorative elements (fig. 18). Mondon, for example, names his suite of exotic ornamental imaginary aviaries *Quatrième livre de formes ornés de rocailles, cartels figures, oyseaux, et dragons chinois*, 1736 (fig. 3). Exotic birds of all kinds were popular to such an extent that these were transformed into imaginary

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145 Though D’Hainaut-Zveny does not perceive the *rocaille* vocabulary as pertaining to natural science and the exotic as I do, she does claim elements are mixed together as though in a melting pot; see Brigitte D’Hainaut-Zveny, “Les Décors rocaille essai d’analyse stylistique,” in *Rocaille, rococo, études sur le XVIIIè siècle*, eds. Roland Mortier and Hervé Hasquin, vol. 28 (Bruxelles: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1991), 106.
146 This sculpted pineapple is part of the boiseries decoration for a small ground-floor salon belonging to a now destroyed *hôtel particulier* at 7, rue Varenne. It joined the musée Carnavalet in 1898 and is now located in room 28 of the museum. See François Boucher, *Les Boiseries du musée Carnavalet*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Édition d’Art Charles Moreau, 1928), plates XXIX-XXX.
147 For examples of exotic birds see Mondon’s *Quatrième livre de formes ornés de rocailles*, 1736, which contains several imaginary birds.
creations impossible to identify. Even if these exotic birds are identifiable, the space itself becomes an imaginary aviary. While dragons, plus parrots and other exotic birds, were depicted in other periods, in the rococo, these animals become common in decorative items (fig. 22). Monkeys, in fact, became so popular during the eighteenth century that a decoration sporting them is termed *singerie* (fig. 23). Dragons were prominent decorative elements representing the Far East and could be found in the prints of Mondon, Peyrotte, and Lajoüe (figs. 24-25). Taken together, these animals all shared the trait of being strange, exotic, and relatively unknown to the Western observer. It is important to stress that the overwhelming presence of such animals in the decorative lexicon of the rococo not only represents the strong contemporary interest in zoology but also the general appeal of all things *étrange*, that is, things originating from outside Europe.

On the whole, the recognizable categories comprising the rococo lexicon included marine life, the organic vegetal world, and exotic animals. There was also a marked

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148 For instance, the murals by François Boucher for the *Salon Demarteau* exhibits several species of birds cohabitating the same space simultaneously; see François Boucher, Decorative Panels for the Demarteau Salon, 1765-70, musée Carnavalet, Paris. For other examples of exotic birds used as ornaments see the upper lunettes of the screens in Jacques Lajoüe, Six Panel Screen, 1735, Petit Palais Musée des Beaux Arts de la ville de Paris, Paris; see also the painted rondels of lunettes with various birds, parrots, and monkeys in the small cabinet of the hôtel Parabère at 22, place Vendôme, 1720-23, private collection. For more information on Hôtel Parabère see Ziskin, *The Place Vendôme*, 103-14.

149 See also the *Vase à tête d'éléphant* by Jean-Claude Chambellan Duplessis, 1757-1758, Wallace Collection, London.

150 See, for instance, the ceiling of a cabinet at 26, rue de Condé, Paris, attributed to Claude Audran III, Antoine Watteau, and Lancret. This ceiling also has several examples of exotic birds; see Christelle Inizan, “Découverte à Paris d’un plafond peint à décor de singeries attribué à Claude III Audran, Antoine Watteau et Nicolas Lancret,” *In Situ*, 16 | 2011, (13 March 2014), url: http://insitu.revues.org/805 ; DOI: 10.4000/insitu.805. Christophe Huet was a prolific painter of *singeries*; see Christophe Huet, *Cabinet des singes*, Hotel de Rohan, 1751, Archives National, Paris; *Grand Cabinet*, 1748-49, Château de Champs-sur-Marne, France; *Petite Singerie*, 1735, Musée Condé, Chateau de Chantilly, France; *Grande Singerie*, 1737, Musée Condé, Chateau de Chantilly, France.

151 The appeal for the exotic was expressed throughout the arts. Exotic, far away lands or people were the settings or heroes of novels and *contes* in seemingly every genre: political satire such as Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes* (1721), philosophical tracts such as Voltaire’s *Zadig* (1747), or erotica such as Diderot’s *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (1748) or Crébillon fils’s *Le Sofha* (1740). Ballets such as J. G. Noverre’s *Les Fêtes Chinoises* (1754) and plays like Voltaire’s *L’Orphelin de La Chine* (1755) were performed.
penchant for Oriental scenes, what is now called *chinoiserie* or *turquerie*, as well as the inclusion of architectural structures such as stairs, arches, cascades, and fountains. While many of these items can be named and do form loose categories, it is important to recognize the extent to which these are exotic and originate outside the assumed European center, whether this ‘outside’ was real or imaginary. Although the above composes the lexicon of what can be identified, it does not necessarily follow that these examples were well known or understood, nor even experienced first-hand. In the sense that these elements were not yet well known since they were either exotic or imaginary, we can state that much of the identifiable rococo lexicon was comprised of new elements.

This exotic and unknown aspect present in the marine and vegetal elements was heightened in its capacity as a springboard leading to ever more abstract, non-identifiable rococo ornamental elements. We see this transformation at work in a few examples. A vase designed by Duplessis at the Musée des arts décoratifs depicts leaf-like shapes often found in rococo decoration that are derived from a wave-like watery motion (fig. 26). The same type of ornaments are found in a fantastic fountain designed by Lajoüe, although in a more abstract fashion. These odd shapes, so hard to label and describe, constitute the structure that is the fountain.¹⁵² They seem to include leaves, seaweed, or perhaps even solidified waves. We see that such ornaments are inspired by the marine world, but in this print they have instead become abstract derivatives (fig. 27). In the sculpted ornaments from the *ancien hôtel Carnavalet*, we see what was previously a seaweed leaf transform into other vegetal motifs, not quite marine, but not quite floral either (fig. 28). Although these shapes retain a recognizable organicity, whether inspired by the terrestrial or marine

¹⁵² Roland Michel also admits there is a difficulty in describing *rocaille* shapes; see Roland Michel, *Lajoüe et l'art rocaille*, 131.
world, they cannot be labeled definitively. We can only say that this-or-that sprout resembles this-or-that type of flower.

Many *rocaille* shapes are derivatives abstracted from organic, marine, or vegetal forms. The ‘s’ and ‘c’ shapes are two predominant abstract derivatives, which have been recognized by art historians as the major forms composing rococo ornaments. We see this overwhelming ‘c’ shape in the prints of *Lajoüe*, and the organic ‘s’ shape at the bottom of the wall decoration of the *ancien hôtel Carnavalet* (figs. 27-28). What is interesting and particular to both these forms is that they invariably distort, convulse, and deform shape, while creating a rhythm of curve and counter-curves. It is also important to stress that these shapes cause asymmetry and create irregular contours, which in turn deform the regular rectilinear order found in other types of decoration. The ‘s’ shape in particular is not only an inverted mirror image of itself, but also a contortion, which, when applied to an object, distorts its shape. This distortion also makes understanding the actual overall contours of objects challenging. This is often the case with designs by Meissonnier, as can be seen in his *Modèles d’orfèvrerie* or in the silver *Tureen* and its etchings, which he designed for the Duke of Kingston (figs. 29-31). The ‘s’ contortions found on the flat surface of the prints are in fact the result of the three-dimensional distortion of objects that are then reproduced in two dimensions (figs. 29-31). Many of the curvilinear shapes found in prints and drawings of ornaments depict in two dimensions the actual contortions of carved ornaments and rococo objects, such as the contorted carved ornaments from the wall *lambrie* of the *Salon du Prince* at Soubise (fig. 32). What proves particularly difficult to understand about such contorted shapes is the totality of the object

when expressed in two dimensions. If these are meant to be understood as three-dimensional objects, then transcribing them onto a flat, two-dimensional surface will obviously omit some information. This is why the contortions caused by the ‘s’ shape of the ornaments add to the distortion of interpretation and a clear understanding of what is seen.

Other than the general types and forms of rocaille elements, there are also certain rocaille contexts which exhibit the extreme examples outlined above. These are found in rocaille ornamental prints, sometimes known as morceau de fantasie or caprice, as well as models for cartouches or cartels. The most extreme forms of French rocaille are found during the period which Kimball termed pittoresque, from roughly the late 1720’s to early 1740’s. During this period, ornamental prints became extremely popular and were the form of choice for disseminating the style. It is also in this medium that we find examples of rocaille decoration that are the “most characteristic production of the genre pittoresque.”

Booksellers were often the ones who initiated the making of these sets of engravings, which, unlike the lavishly bound livre d’architecture, were printed on leaflets, numbered, and sometimes very inexpensive. The work during these years in Paris of ornamental print designers and engravers such as Meissonnier, Huquier, Lajoue, Mondon, Babel, Bellay, and Peyrotte has rarely been discussed by art historians, and in some cases has even been overlooked entirely, as have the designs of Huquier, Bellay, and Babel.

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154 On the genre pittoresque, see Kimball, The Creation of Rococo, 152-153.
Rocaille ornamental prints had multiple purposes. Those standalone ornaments devoid of any context served as examples for craftsmen of all kinds, such as woodcarvers, engravers, fan painters, metal workers, and painters. Many such print leaflets mentioned these various professions within their titles as well as the various uses for the ornaments. As for the more fanciful ornaments, such as the morceau de fantasie, these represented an opportunity for creators to showcase their talent and imagination without the usual constraints of patrons or institutions. It is not clear who, precisely, were the buyers. They could have been, as Peter Fuhring has speculated, the people to whom the series were dedicated. Nonetheless, since these items were re-printed more than once, they were certainly collected. Many of these designs were also used for découpage, an occupation of the upper classes who would cut out the designs and paste them onto works such as furniture, screens, fans, ladies’ toilet-cases and gentlemen’s snuffboxes.

If the most innovative and varied works of French rocaille are to found in prints, and yet these have been overlooked as a main object of study, it is in part due to the lack of information concerning their production and consumption. It is also because, however,

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158 Many of the titles for ornamental print suites refer to ‘ouvrages divers,’ which meant these were for various types of works. Roland Michel traces the work of Lajoüe from overdoor paintings to trading cards in Marianne Roland Michel, “De la Gravure comme mode de diffusion des motifs rocaille,” Rocaille, rococo, études sur le XVIIIè siècle, eds. Roland Mortier and Hervé Hasquin, vol. 28 (Bruxelles: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1991), 101-102.

159 Fuhring explains we do not yet understand the use and production of morceau de fantasie, Fuhring, Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, 84. However, Davidson does mention morceaux de fantasies were useful in promoting the talent of artists abroad, helping to secure commissions, and serving as technical tools; see Gail S. Davidson, “Ornament of Bizarre Imagination: Rococo Prints and Drawings from Cooper-Hewitt’s Léon Decloux Collection,” Rococo: the Continuing Curve, 1730-2008, exh. cat. (New York, NY: Smithsonian/Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum: Distributed by Assouline Pub., 2008), 41.

160 Fuhring, Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, 84.

161 This vogue for découpage occurred in the 1720’s and for several subsequent decades; see Scott, The Rococo Interior, 249; see also Laing, “French Ornamental Engravings,” 115. In Crébillion fils, Le Sopha, the sultan is portrayed as preoccupied only with découpage and continually engaging all his courtiers in this activity; see Crébillion fils, Le Sopha (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 31.
these prints are representative of what were called “the minor arts,” and as such were
deemed less important and consequential than architectural ensembles. Moreover, many
of these ornamental print suites were not designed for a specific space belonging to a
specific patron. An analysis of these prints necessarily lacks the added input of the
specificity of locale. *Morceaux de fantasies* were not meant to become realistic
productions. This is why Kimball, despite his opening claims that he will discuss minor
arts that have been overlooked, judges this period to be decadent and a poor derivative of
Meissonnier’s “genius”.162 He glosses over the work of Mondon and Babel and refrains
from discussing these fantastic productions merely because they did not have a practical
architectural outcome and remained imaginary instead. While Roland Michel has carried
out some preliminary research on the work of Mondon, concurrent with her research on
Lajoüe’s prints, neither the subject matter of these prints nor their densely ornamental
nature is examined.163

There are several reasons why the *rocaille* ornaments that show up in these prints
can be deemed extreme *rocaille* forms. Foremost is that the prints’ subject matter is the
ornaments themselves. Ornaments are no longer ornamenting something, but, rather, it is
nature or people that are the ornaments to the *rocaille* shapes. Whereas the subject matter
might reflect the meeting of two protagonists, the ornament can become so omnipresent
and potent within the scene as to reduce the centrality of the characters (figs. 9, 15-18).
Unlike actual architectural projects, which still tend to contain the shapes, these prints
maximize the curves and counter-curves while creating as yet unparalleled, unique
asymmetrical shapes. These structures are also fantastical, since they are a mixture of

vegetal, architectural, and even animal elements that form unknown and undefined chimeras (figs. 24, 25, 27, 33). Finally, it is in these prints that we see to what extent objects flow into one another, without beginning or end, and in which we find spaces that are no longer clearly delineated (figs. 34-36).

What is suggested in these morceaux de fantasies is often an imaginary landscape that is fantastical and implausible. This is precisely the definition of these caprices found in the Encyclopédie.\textsuperscript{164} As noted, a caprice was defined as a fantastical whimsy on the part of the artist and was to be understood as a token of their imagination.\textsuperscript{165} Some morceaux de fantasies and caprices, however, are not labeled as such, unlike, for example, the suite of Livre Nouveau de Douze Morceaux de Fantasie by Lajoüé. Yet these do not need to be designated as such to qualify as vignettes showcasing ornaments. Specific to these types of ornamental prints is the depiction of a fantastical space with, for instance, fountains and trellises intermingled with nature and odd structures; in this fantastical space one does not know the beginning from end, and the foreground and background intermingle (figs. 34-36). If imaginary fantastical structures were previously found in the background of some paintings, in the rocallle morceau de fantasie these became the main subject matter. Unlike rocallle ornaments devoid of context, ornaments in a morceau de fantasie are ‘framed’ by contexts, such as an outside natural setting, people, or exotic lands. Such contexts, however, are not the subject matter but rather the theatrical backdrop to the main story, which is the ornaments.

Produced in the same year as Lajoüé’s Livre Nouveau de Douze Morceaux de Fantasie, and unlike any other work at the time, Mondon’s several Livre de Forme

\textsuperscript{164} Diderot, Encyclopédie, s.v. “caprice”
\textsuperscript{165} Although in terms of visual arts, Diderot meant this as criticism.
Rocaille et cartel (1736) present vignettes in which he pushes the rocaille shape to become the central figure, vessel, or structural apparatus of the scene (figs. 9, 15, 18). In these prints, ornaments are central to such an extent that they become not only an overwhelming structure but, one could argue, a machine for constructing space, since any sense of space or gravity is generated by their presence (fig. 37). Miniaturized people playing within ornament had been seen before in arabesque work, but here the ornament is presented as the overwhelming subject matter, and the human becomes the appendage or decorative element. Though such architectural ornaments construct spaces, these spaces are not physically possible or feasible constructions. Mondon takes advantage of such impossible spaces by exploiting to its limits the theme of the Far East. In his Troisième, Quatrième and Cinquième Livre de formes rocaille, he extends the improbable imaginary setting of the Far East by constructing it out of contorted and gravity-defying rocaille ornaments. In such spaces, Mondon depicts Chinese people inhabiting the ornaments, riding them like vehicles, or even merging with them (figs. 18, 25, 28, 39).

Besides the morceau de fantasie, another type of rocaille ornament that exhibits extreme characteristics is the cartouche, also known as cartel. The cartouche was not invented in the eighteenth century but in the Renaissance, and was meant to represent a map or piece of scroll work explaining what was to follow.\textsuperscript{166} Though rocaille cartouches represented all types of material, such as slabs of stone, wooden boards, or shields, they came to showcase extreme asymmetry and curves and counter-curves, as found in the

\textsuperscript{166} For more on the etymology of the cartouche see Katie Scott, “Figure and Ornament: Notes on the Late Baroque Art Industry,” Taking Shape. Finding Sculpture in the Decorative Arts, exh. cat. (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute; Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2009), 171-172.
cartouches designed by Babel (figs. 19, 40). The general shape of the cartouche, transformed from a traditional scroll into an amalgam of shapes, forms a conjoined whole made of the empty space that forms the cartouche itself. Most of all, the rigid shape of the seventeenth-century cartouche developed in the eighteenth century into an irregular shell-inspired or organ-like shape that is presented at an angle, seemingly flopping and collapsing (figs. 19, 40, 42). These flopping, shapeless, and empty beating organs could be seen to echo the very shape of the mollusk, inhabitant of the shells collected by the curieux of all kinds. The irregularity of the contours of the rocaille cartouche from Lajoüe’s Second Livre de Cartouches and Babel’s Fontaines en forme de Cartouche will remind viewers of the new shells found and catalogued during this period (figs. 40, 42-43). Along with the ‘s’ and ‘c’ shapes of the rocaille ornaments, the rocaille cartouche, too, was infused with organic qualities that rendered it ambivalent both in shape and definition.

Increasingly in the eighteenth century we find that the cartouche no longer merely announces the work that follows, but instead slouches with an empty belly of a surface, becoming its own subject matter. Indeed, the cartouche became the central subject of prints, to the point of being framed by other ornaments (fig. 44). Regardless of whether the cartouche was used for its intended purpose of describing what was to follow or simply as a morceau de fantaisie itself, in both instances it was the central subject matter.

167 See, for example, Pierre-Edmé Babel, Cartouches pour Êtres accompagnés de suports et Trophées, Cartouche Nouveau, Cartouche Pittoresque, and Carteles Nouveau (dates unknown).
168 On the collecting of shells, see Edmé-François Gersaint, Catalogue Raisonné de coquilles et autres curiosités naturelles. For further information on shell collecting and the curieux see also Bettina Dietz and Thomas Nutz, “Collections Curieuses: The Aesthetics of Curiosity and Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” Eighteenth-Century Life 29 (Fall 2005): 44-75.
169 If we recall in his letter to the comte de Caylus, Abbé Le Blanc specifically complains about the asymmetrical slouching cartouche; see Abbé Le Blanc, Lettre de Monsieur l’Abbé Le Blanc, 66-67.
170 Others have also commented on the centrality of the cartouche as subject matter. See Roland Michel, Lajoüe et l'art rocaille, 141; Park, The Idea of Rococo, 26; Weisgerber, “Qu’est-ce que le rococo?,” 18.
What is extreme in *morceaux de fantasies* and cartouches is ornament becoming the subject matter, inverting roles by taking center stage where things rotate and mold against it. It is in such prints that we observe one of the key defining characteristics of *rocaille*: a space where ornament no longer ornaments a subject matter but becomes itself the subject matter. This centrality of the ornament dissolves the divide between subject and frame, while ornamental elements take on gigantic proportions, pushing meaning out of the center.\(^{171}\)

The intended purpose of the cartouche was to transmit information to its viewer. In more abstract terms we can understand the role of the cartouche to be a sort of gateway, or signpost, offering access to what follows (the intended signified). Whether used this way or not, it is interesting to understand the cartouche as a transitional structure meant to offer passage between the plane of visual opacity to that of significance and comprehension. Because of this cartouche function, we might want to question the transitional goal of an empty cartouche. We can hypothesize that the empty space of the cartouche leaves room for the viewer’s imagination to fill it with whatever it desires. In this sense the cartouche still functions as a transitory gateway. This time, however, the cartouche allows viewers to fill its space with their own imaginary wonderings and to play within the space of the fantastical *rocaille* world. Such a feat is possible because the cartouche is empty and the *rocaille* ornaments lack specificity, allowing for the two to build a structure that escapes predetermined meaning. Moreover, since these prints summon imaginary settings, they create a form of meaning that is particular to each viewer, a point to which I shall return in Chapter Three.

\(^{171}\) Others have recognized the dissolution of the barrier between frame and subject whereby the two become somewhat interchangeable. See Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, 72; Laing, “French Ornamental Engravings,” 113; Roland Michel, *Lajoüe et l’art rocaille*, 141.
The lack of specificity generated by the structure of the cartouche also creates a resistance to descriptive language and significant meaning. One can speculate that the reason authors refrained from discussing the extreme ornamental nature of such works was the sheer difficulty of addressing deviant extremism and finding an adequate language to describe these ambiguous shapes. Such ornamental extremism is precisely the reason Diderot, and other commentators such as Abbé Le Blanc, dismissed these works as *bizarceries* and claimed they were the result of twisted imaginations. Ornamental prints may have been popular material objects at the time, but what makes them truly extreme is this difficulty experienced in addressing their subject matter, which is something that further points to their radicality.

In addition to the shapes themselves, their unknown yet organic character, and their play between center and periphery, one of the most particular aspects of *rocaille* style is the relation between shapes and the type of space formed. In essence, this relation is between part-to-part and part-to-whole. As mentioned, what we call asymmetry is a key feature of the formal disposition of *rocaille* elements, but the cause of such asymmetry is the disposition of individual parts to each other. It is important to notice that asymmetry mainly occurs at the level of the micro relations between the individual parts that form an ornamental whole, such as in a cartouche by François Cuvilliés (fig. 45). Although at the macro level we notice patterns emerging from the repetition of motifs, such as appear in ceiling rosettes or in the carved ornaments on the panels of decorated rooms, we nevertheless perceive at the level of each ornament a lack of pattern coherence due to shapes continually growing organically out of each other (figs. 28, 32). Such outgrowths create a disorderly appearance; elements are not disposed in a rectilinear
fashion but rather stand in disequilibrium at a diagonal axis. A good example of such micro asymmetrical relations is the ‘c’ element on the door of an hôtel Bragelongne at 21 rue de l’Université, Paris (fig. 46). The ‘c’ element seems out of place with the others and disrupts the binary symmetry of the door by invading the right side of the paneling. This is similar to the carvings of Nicolas Pineau, who in his later decorative schemes would end wall panel decorations with cartouche motifs or curvilinear undulations of unequal shapes. One of his panel drawings illustrates this well (fig. 47).

A second important feature of element disposition is the responding form. The ‘c’ curves respond to each other, like an echo, as though they were complementary pieces of a puzzle, filling each other’s creases and gaps, yet not fully connecting. In a panel drawing by Pineau, we observe in the smaller panels of the middle section that both top and bottom panels seem to fit like waves responding to each other, while not fully connecting (fig. 48). Such correspondence between elements is found extensively in rocallle space and is seen particularly well in the architectural details of wall decorations for the Cabinet of comte Bielinski by Meissonnier (figs. 49-50). The end of the painted panel in the Cabinet interacts with the bottom dado paneling in a corresponding fashion. The shapes forming the delineation of the putti panel at the very bottom left respond in motion to the curve of the other delineation. Each line in the space of the Cabinet of comte Bielinski responds to another element. Either the element is placed to receive the other’s movement or to contradict it with a counter-curve. This counter-curve disposition of the elements, seen in the middle panel of the Pineau drawing, creates further counter-movements, which in turn can contradict each other (fig. 48, a). In effect, this causes the shapes to seem slippery, gliding between the spaces, which engenders a visual
commotion, sending the viewer’s sight in one direction and then in the opposite. The overall effect is either one of wave-like movement, where curves unfurl and crash through the space, or one of growth, achieved through the sprouting of foliage and organic decoupling.

Another tactical *rocaille* arrangement is the open system. Though a carving outlines and highlights each panel in the Pineau drawing, each of these ‘systems’ is opened up by elements that break off from linearity into irregular curvilinear edges, which then sprout here and there in opposite directions on account of their shapes (fig. 48). The panel second to the far right at the bottom of the Pineau drawing is a good example of open-ended systems created by *rocaille* shapes (see fig. 51, in which I have marked these features as *c*, *i*). We see on the bottom right corner the rectangular system end in a ‘c’ shape, while its counterpart on the left corner ends in a non-symmetrical manner with two ends not fully connected, veering off in opposite directions (fig. 51, *c*, *ii*). The top of this system has rounded ends with one part not fully connected to the whole (fig. 51, *c*, *iii*). The two ends of this last element are distorted ‘s’ shapes that twirl in opposing directions, while other ornamental shapes graft themselves onto the top and begin invading the system’s interior from the opening at the far right. Another Pineau drawing, made for the decoration of a salon, shows the organic ‘c’-shaped elements literally outgrowing the rectilinear space (fig. 52, *i*, *ii*, *iii*). We notice in this example that the lines of the *rocaille* space do not delineate and contain, which they could never do when the *rocaille* shapes are breaking continuity. As a consequence, instead of remaining contained, the pseudo ensembles are loose and incite miscellaneous ornamental shapes to come out of them, come into them, grow, sprout or even graft themselves onto them.
Such a disposition of elements inevitably breaks visual boundaries, which ultimately suggests, as do counter-curves, a sense of movement rather than containment and fixity.

Elements ending in a ‘c’ or ‘s’ shape that are part of an outlining system create visual hooks. In this drawing by Pineau we see the tips of the delineating rectangular systems ending in cartouche-like organic ‘c’ shapes (fig. 53). Such tips seem like open mouths ready to include further elements into their furl (fig. 53, i). As in an organic, evolving, digestive system, we see the shape growing tendrils within itself. These spore-like hooks create visual connections everywhere between all the parts, whether these parts and objects are meant to relate or not. It is with the aid of such visual hooks that the open rocaille system also creates loose networks connecting distant elements together.

Connections between elements belonging to disparate systems occur because the curves in any given system not only respond to each other but also indicate various directions beyond their own system. Consequently, the sight of the viewer can travel from one end of a system to another by, so to speak, connecting the dots. More precisely, our gaze follows an invisible web that visually connects curves and counter-curves to each other, whether or not these are meant to connect. Because we see curves continually responding to each other at the micro level, the level of individual elements, we continue to observe responses between curves at the macro level, the level of interaction between distinct systems or objects. While similarities united in repetitive relationships could be called a pattern, those patterns that do emerge within rocaille systems are continually broken once their unity opens to connect with other systems. This global connection
between various systems at the macro level creates a fluidity in the visual field, which indicates once more the visual presence of a constant movement or commotion.\textsuperscript{172}

In Meissonnier’s print \textit{Un Project de porte pour madame de Besenval}, we observe in another room beyond an open door the glimpse of a chair and desk (fig. 54). Since these elements are lightly etched, they recede in the background in contrast to what is in the foreground, giving the viewer an illusion of depth. Yet the curves of the chair and desk respond with counter movements to the ‘c’-shaped ornaments at the bottom of the right door panel, thereby negating the division between foreground and background. We also notice that the shape of the chair on the left foreground fits with the curves and form of the adjacent mantel as well as the ornamentation on the panel above. These visual connections cause the individual system of the chair to open up and connect with other systems, such as the mantel and the wall paneling. Again, such connections between various wholes create a visual commotion, one that is amplified, in the case of architectural ensembles and prints depicting them, by the presence of large pier glass mirrors, typically included in rococo decors. Mirrors repeatedly reflect the whole decor at different angles, or sometimes simply recursively, as in the example of the \textit{Salon du Prince de Soubise}, and therefore augment the presence of curves and counter-curves, enabling further connections and visual movement (fig. 55). Visual connections such as these can create the perception of a unified and harmonious space. Such an effect, however, does not negate movement or connectivity. To the contrary, it reaffirms how

\textsuperscript{172} Scott perceives a fluidity of syntax in \textit{rocaille} that dissolves and destroys form; see Scott, \textit{The Rococo Interior}, 249. Ankersmit also acknowledges that a salient feature of the style is its suggestion of movement and mobility, but he refrains from explaining why there can be such a perceived sense of movement; see Ankersmit, “Rococo as the Dissipation of Boredom,” 149. Yonan also comments on the capacity of rococo decoration to induce a sense of movement and dissolve boundaries; see Yonan, “Igneous Architecture,” 74.
individual systems morph one into the other and create a sense of a macro whole. Kalnien substantiates my argument when he writes “[c]urves were everywhere. Unity was no longer based on structure but on the interconnection of all the parts through a network of lines. Even the firm separation between wall and ceiling disappeared. Decoration began to flow, and the eye no longer found a point of repose.”

Consider the *Grand salon* from the Château d’Abondant at the Musée du Louvre (fig. 56). Although hardly an extreme example of *rocaille* interior decoration, it nonetheless serves to exemplify the relation between original furniture and its decor. We can observe how the chairs’ legs and the firedogs’ shape all echo the ornaments atop the carved wall panels. One must remember such spaces were meant to be lived in, which explains why, unlike the previous Meissonnier example, the connections here are not immediately perceptible (fig. 54). Indeed, connections between parts and parts, parts and wholes, or even between whole systems are meant to be perceived actively, while one moves and lives within the space. Unlike the furniture placed in a closed circle in *Reading from Molière* by Jean-François De Troy, the chairs in the Château d’Abondant’s *Grand salon* have been placed too formally by the museum to represent a lived-in interior (fig. 57). The De Troy painting illustrates how furniture would have been moved about and thereby have created counter-curving angles instead of rectilinear ones. Such angles would break the closed linearity of systems and create further connections between the different elements and objects.

In another example, a print of Meissonnier’s set of tureens for the Duke of Kingston, we observe how wave-like shapes of leaves at the bottom of the tureen

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perfectly resonate with and connect to the ornaments that constitute the frame of the pier
glass mirror in the background (fig. 31). Further still, the crawfish atop the left side of the
tureen seems to form part of a cartouche when it visually connects with the background
ornaments on the wall panels behind it. We see, then, how the individuality of forms can
be lost when the parts morph with different systems. An example of this is found in
Meissonnier’s print of a *Canapé executé pour le comte Bielenski*, where we see the
canapé function not only as a sofa, but also as a further outward extension into the space
of the wall ornaments (fig. 58). While the sofa remains an individual entity, the
ornaments that constitute its frame nevertheless relate, correspond, and connect to the
surrounding wall ornaments. When speaking generally on the rococo style, Patrick Brady
in *Rococo Style Versus Enlightenment Novel* agrees that the distinction erodes between
entities when “table and wall are no longer distinguishable, each separately and each
from the other, for the table is grafted onto the wall, the table is part of the wall, the table
is the wall: who is to say whether a two-legged rococo console is a table or a wall-
ornament?” 174 Despite the asymmetrical and *informe* aspects of *rocaille* shapes, these
ornamental elements can still find echoes of one another through such connective
strategies. These examples demonstrate how *rocaille* connections break the independent
unity of each part, system, ensemble, or even signified, reaching beyond spatial
boundaries to reassemble these and create new and momentary chimeric ensembles.
Elements and systems of the *rocaille* are not closed and separate entities, but rather they
are moments of conjoining during which elements are constantly dismantled and re-
assembled.

In extreme *rocaille* examples, such as the *morceau de fantaisie* by Meissonnier previously discussed, the different elements such as stairs, curved buttresses, wall partitions, lunettes, and sprouts all come together to connect and form an impromptu cartouche (fig. 10). If we accept that the above can be a cartouche, then a cartouche is not only the sum of elements intentionally assembled together to form it, but also the joining of various elements responding to each other and forming a visually loose connected whole. Cartouches can also form at a moment’s notice through the connection of different, haphazard parts, which form macro wholes rising from the perceived networks. Such connective wholes are not solidly fixed entities but rather the result of the viewer’s perception of a constant movement between the parts.

The eighteenth-century viewer not only perceived such impromptu ensembles but could also become a part of them, since the body of the participants could connect to these wholes in several ways. As Joan DeJean explains in *The Age of Comfort*, rococo furniture was designed in a new way meant to promote comfort by accommodating the stance of the users’ bodies according to their specific activity. With such new designs the curves of the furniture responded to the curves of the body. While the curves of the furniture adapted to those of the body, the curves of the *rocaille* ornaments mimicked human gestures: a graceful bend in an elaborate pirouette meant as a salutation or artful
hand movements when talking.\textsuperscript{176} The sprouting curvilinear ornaments also imitated the dancing patterns formed by people in ballrooms.\textsuperscript{177}

Finally, the elaborate ornamental designs on clothing, as well as the shapes formed by the materials, further integrated participants into ornamental networks. De Troy\’s painting \textit{Reading from Molière} perfectly illustrates how women\’s clothing in particular could integrate the network of ornaments (fig. 57). The \textit{robe volante} dresses depicted in \textit{Reading from Molière} not only showcase elaborate floral patterns, but also illustrate how abstract and distorted \textquoteleft s\textquoteleft- and \textquoteleft c\textquoteleft- shaped ornaments are created out of the creases and pliable texture of the dresses\’ material. More so than the patterns on the dresses, the voluminous gathers and folds of the dresses mimic the shapes of the sculpted wall ornaments in the background, such as those near the mantelpiece in the left corner or the faintly discernable ones on the screen to the right. Most remarkable of all, this painting serves as an extreme example of how the body can totally dissolve and become a \textit{rocaille} ornament itself. The actual shape of the women\’s bodies seems to dissolve underneath this sea of textiles, causing the women to be become giant twisting textile ornaments. As in the cartouches of Babel, Lajoüe, and Cuvilliés, which are amalgams of various elements, the dresses\’ twists and crevasses abstractly combine to form an impromptu cartouche (figs. 40, 42 and 45). By following the common outline of the combined dresses, a single ragged curvilinear shape emerges with the same abstract, flopping, slippery, and unformed qualities that the cartouches exhibit. Although we

\textsuperscript{176} Sarah Cohen was the first to discuss the close links between aristocratic dance patterns and the arabesques found in tracery garden and painted wall ornaments by the likes of Jean Berain, Claude Audran III, and Watteau at the turn of the eighteenth century; see Sarah R. Cohen, \textit{Art, Dance, and the Body in French Culture of the Ancien Régime} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 102, 112, 123, 187. \textsuperscript{177} Cohen explains that the development of arabesque at the end of the seventeenth century happened in tandem with dance patterns in an interdisciplinary exchange; see Cohen, \textit{Art, Dance and the Body}, 89.
perceive signifieds in this painting (women in dresses) and know full well they are not abstract ornaments such as those in the cartouches of Lajoüe, Babel, or Cuvilliés, the signification erodes as the bodies transform into rocaille ornaments by means of the visual connection with the ornamental network. As we shall see in the following chapter, the outcome is not unlike the chimeric creatures in John Carpenter’s The Thing (1982).

The body was not only placed in constant and direct contact with rocaille ornaments in its proximity to furniture, but through dancing, politeness, and dress, it also performed and transformed into the very curves and counter-curves of the ornaments. In this way, the body could easily be assimilated and incorporated into impromptu cartouches.

In order for the body to become part of a decorative whole, De Troy consciously flattened the bodies of his female protagonists to such a degree that, in the process, the divide between foreground and background collapsed. It is this perception of the macro network being formed by the relation between all parts which results in a vision of collapsing and dissolving boundaries between three-dimensional and two-dimensional space as well as between frame and framed. This collapse can be seen in a print by Lajoüe, where architectural elements slip from foreground to background in an impossible manner (fig. 59). At first the twirling, meandering, and ludic ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes clearly appear to be elements that frame the upper left side of the landscape depicted within the print. Indeed, the ornaments delimit a space between the landscape’s sky and what seems like textured wood panelling. But as we move towards the bottom of the print, we find tree foliage and water entering the ornamental space, while the ornaments themselves no longer frame the landscape. Instead, at the bottom right corner, the ornaments become the architectural structures, such as the fountains and cascades that
make up the landscape. This Lajoüe print perfectly demonstrates how rocaille shapes have the capacity not only to further connect elements but also to interpenetrate all boundaries between spaces. Extreme morceaux de fantasies serve to illustrate how rocaille space is both permeable and fluid rather than hierarchical and dividing.  

1.4: Framing Systems and Parergonality

I have discussed the lexicon of rocaille forms, their particular shapes, as well as extreme examples such as the morceau de fantasie and cartouche. I also described the disposition of rocaille shapes to each other and how these create open systems that allow elements to flow in and out. I then demonstrated how a network of connections emerges, linking disparate systems together and, in the process, infringing upon boundaries. Extrapolating from such observations, I will now explore their theoretical implications. Rocaille ornaments characteristically dissolve the boundary between what is framed and the frame itself and between the outer boundaries of the frame and what lies beyond. We find boundary infringements such as these in a Lajoüe print (fig. 59). Here ornaments grow in and out of each other thereby piercing rigid linearity and creating an effusive effect where ornaments shift positions from traditional periphery to central subject matter (fig. 59). Also aiding in this task are the visual dispositions discussed.

178 Others have also acknowledged rocaille’s capacity to construct space, although not to the extent that I will examine the relation between subject and rocaille space in Chapter Three. For instance, Ankersmit acknowledges that, due to its organic disposition, which is unlike rhythmic ornament, rocaille ornament forms space itself; see Ankersmit, “Rococo as the Dissipation of Boredom,” 150. D’Hainaut-Zveny also recognizes that in rocaille space everything becomes linked and fluid. However, her remarks are limited to architectural space and ensembles and do not consider the notion of frame and framed or the inclusion of the viewer within space; see D’Hainaut-Zveny, “Les Décor rocaille,” 110. Scott also perceives rocaille ornament as part of space rather than something applied to it. As well, she claims, like I do, that rocaille ornament has the capacity to construct space; see Scott, “Figure and Ornament,” 168.
above, such as the ornament’s capacity to create open-ended systems and its motion through corresponding curves and counter-curves. These tactical *rocaille* arrangements allow *rocaille* ornaments to dissolve the binary frame/framed, preventing the general operation of framing or containment by enclosure. Unlike a closed framing system, which asserts the divide between frame and framed, periphery and center, *rocaille* ornaments form an open type of holistic, non-framing system.

Since *rocaille* ornaments form such a particular framing system, it is important to understand, first, the general function of a framing system. Frame theory has been explored thoroughly in cognitive psychology and linguistics and has been used in the fields of discourse analysis, cognition theory, psychology, artificial intelligence research, and socio-linguistics. Frame theorist Werner Wolf defines frames as metaconcepts that are cultural constructs with mediating functions allowing for interpretation. According to Wolf, frames play a key role in selecting phenomena and labeling things and assembling them together in order to construct knowledge as a meaningful whole. Wolf views frames as “basic orientational aids” that “function as preconditions to interpretation.” Heller-Andrist’s definition concurs with Wolf’s. Frames, for Heller-Andrist, “occur around something, framing another entity, embedding other material or data in a whole and usually doing something to the thing they surround.”

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181 Ibid., 6.

182 Ibid., 5.

such a definition, the difference between what is framed and the frame is clear and may even include an entrenched separation, since “frames also control the framed.”

I define the typical act of framing as the imposition of a closed boundary that contains or defines the vastness of what is framed in order to arrive at interpretative knowledge. This definition does not only describe literal frames but also any boundary or enclosure imposed on elements from any reality so as to create a method of identification and, consequently, knowledge. Based on the my previous description of the open *rocaille* framing system, we see how the permeable frontiers of *rocaille* frames do not function in the same manner as the typical framing system. It is important to distinguish to what degree the *rocaille* framing system differs from the typical functions ascribed to frames. The tactical dispositions of *rocaille* elements, their qualities, and their effects, work in a vastly different manner than creating an interpretive structure that anchors solid knowledge. In other words, the *rocaille* framing system does not help to gather phenomena and put them in a meaningful whole. Rather, as I shall argue in Chapter Three, it gathers into one space the viewer and everything else in the vicinity and lets the viewer create its own tentative wholes.

One frame theory that can better explain *rocaille* framing systems is Jacques Derrida’s work on the parergon. Developed in his book *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida’s essays on the parergon are based on a deconstruction of Kant’s own use of the term in his *Third Critique*. In *The Truth in Painting* Derrida describes the frame as being a parergon, something that is secondary to the work (the ergon) and yet essential to its whole. A parergon is part of an object (the ergon), without being an intrinsic part, and is viewed as

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more of an external complement to the object, such as a frame would be.\footnote{Derrida remarks: “Now what is the parergon? It is the concept of the remark, of this “General Remark,” insofar as it defines what comes to be added to Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone without being a part of it and yet without being absolutely extrinsic to it.” See Jacques Derrida, The Truth in Painting, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 55. On the secondary nature of the parergon see also Irene E. Harvey, “Derrida, Kant, and the Performance of Parergonality,” in Derrida and Deconstruction, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York; London: Routledge, 1989), 57.} We might say that the parergon has a status that is peripheral to the central status of the work itself. Since the parergon is not the actual work, but rather secondary to the ergon, located on its border, we pay it no attention, making it invisible.\footnote{For a succinct explanation of this Derridian concept see Robin Marriner, “Derrida and the Parergon,” A Companion to Art Theory, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 349-359.} Though the frame signals the presence of the ergon, and enables the ergon, it itself is not visible.\footnote{Derrida’s reading of Kant’s text is itself an example of parergonality. Even though Derrida treats Kant’s text as a parergon, in reading Kant’s text Derrida’s gesture is one of parergonality. See Harvey, “Derrida, Kant, and the Performance of Parergonality,” 58-59.} For Derrida, the parergon is not necessarily what is obviously outside the work, such as the art world, museum, or church, but also what is seemingly part of it.\footnote{Marriner, “Derrida and the Parergon,” 349.} In terms of art, the parergon would be the wooden frame surrounding a work, just as in literature we might consider the table of contents and the book jacket to be, amongst other features, parergons of the literary text.\footnote{Encyclopedia of Postmodernism, eds. Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), s.v. “parergon.”} 

Derrida’s discussion of a frame as a parergon is useful because it attributes to the frame a particular interior zone where the construction of the limits between the work and the outside of the work is considered.\footnote{For an understanding of the transference of the concept of parergon as elaborated by Derrida and applied to literature see Heller-Andrist, The Friction of the Frame, 12-13.} By attributing an intellectual space to the parergon, or, in Derrida’s words, a “thickness,” Derrida allows for a closer inspection of what occurs at edges and limits. He begins by questioning the nature of a frame: “Where
does the frame take place. Does it take place. Where does it begin. Where does it end. What is its internal limit. Its external limit. And its surface between the two limits.”

These questions allow Derrida to emphasize that a frame is a structure that delimits or establishes limits and that definition is not something that occurs in and of itself but is a process. Not only does Derrida question the definition and limits of a frame, he also questions the ambiguous position the parergon occupies as both part of the work and yet at the limit of what is considered to be the work. He states, “we cannot determine exactly where the work ends and where parerga begins, and where parerga end and where extraneous background begins.” Since the parergon is necessary to the ergon, it is difficult to separate and limit the edges between the two. This ambiguous position, as neither work nor none-work, causes the parergon, for Derrida, to disrupt the integrity of the work. The point emphasizes the problematic of identifying the limits of a work, or any ergon, and, we might even add, limits in general. By discussing the position parerga occupy, Derrida’s purpose is to bring to light the fact that frames are present and that things are framed but that there is an ambiguity in identifying edges and limits that apply to them.

In questioning the process of establishing limits and the ambiguity of separating the parergon from its exterior and interior limits, we expose how we distinguish things one from the other and the differences this conveys. Both difference and Derrida’s term

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191 Ibid., 63.
192 “A frame is essentially constructed and therefore fragile: such would be the essence or truth of the frame. If it had any.” See ibid., 73. On limits of the parergon see ibid., 54. See also Encyclopedia of Postmodernism, s.v. “parergon.” For Derrida, the idea that identity, in terms of identifying and labeling something, should be resolved and stable is not possible since identity is always in a process of identification; see Nicholas Royle, Jacques Derrida (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 59.
193 Encyclopedia of Postmodernism, s.v. “parergon.”
194 Ibid., s.v. “parergon.”
*différance* are the result of the lack (gap) the ergon manifests in its need to have a parergon. This lack or gap can be detected due to the mere presence of the parergon, which is meant to fill it. For Derrida, this gap is what generates the difference between this and that, since it allows things to relate to one another and to distinguishing themselves from one another. The Derridian frame is the element that imposes a space in between things; it delimits things, allowing for a differentiation to occur between the things it separates and relates. It is this relation that creates distinctions and differences and that consequently allows for the perception of the things themselves to emerge.

For Derrida, differentiation occurs in a framing relation within the binary dynamic between parergon and ergon. We must extend this view, however, to consider how the frame also regroups its framed constituents in relation to one another to create a common identity. In a typical closed framing system what is excluded is placed outside the frame’s boundaries and differentiation, segmentation, and fragmentation occur only between the frame and what is placed outside its limits. Typical framing boundaries attempt to limit ambiguity, labeling what they bind and, through binding, preventing more expansive definitions. As we have seen, however, *rocaille* systems visually allow elements to enter or exit, and they allow their ornamental shapes to straddle boundaries. Unlike the defining boundaries of closed framing systems, *rocaille* ornamental borders are porous,

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196 Derrida states that “[w]ithout this lack, the *ergon* would have no need of a *parergon*. The *ergon*'s lack is the lack of a *parergon*.” Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 59-60.

197 “It is lacking in something and it is lacking from itself,” ibid., 56. See also ibid., 57, 59; Harvey, “Derrida, Kant, and the Performance of Parergonality,” 68; Marriner, “Derrida and the Parergon,” under “Derrida-Parergon.”

198 On the parergon as creating *différance* see Marriner, “Derrida and the Parergon,” 352. For Derrida, the lack cannot be recognized as such; we are only aware of its presence through its effects, which is the parergon itself. In other words, we know there is a void not because it is void but because it is filled. For a discussion of the invisibility of the lack see Harvey, “Derrida, Kant, and the Performance of Parergonality,” 68.


200 Ibid., under “Derrida-Parergon.”
leading to a state not only of visual mobility but also of semantic mobility, where there exists a flexibility in definitions. In such open systems, therefore, knowledge or identity is no longer fixed.

At first glance Derrida’s description of the parergon does not seem to help understand the rocaille open framing system. The parergon is supposed to be secondary to the ergon, not visible, defining limits and instilling difference. But the attention Derrida brings to the ambiguous place of the parergon and its inability to set clear limits between it and the ergon or beyond its frame, demonstrates his belief that all framing systems attempt to set limits that cannot possibly be impermeable. At close range the parergon shows itself as neither inside nor outside the work but as something straddling the border between in and out, highlighting the relation between these positions.\(^{201}\)

Although the parergon for Derrida calls attention to division and what seems like the creation of categories, it is ultimately a space where movement occurs, shifting between outside and inside positions.\(^{202}\) Derrida calls attention to what lies outside the frame and its relation to the frame.\(^{203}\) If the relation between the frame and the framed is ambiguous, since it is hard to separate the two to the extent that one is clearly not the other, the same goes for the frame and the exterior of the frame. Derrida states that

the parergonal frame stands out against two grounds [fonds], but with respect to each of those two grounds, it merges [se fond] into the other. With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall, and then, gradually, into the general text. With respect to the

\(^{201}\) “A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the ergon, the work done [fait], the fact [le fait], the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board [au bord, a bard]. It is first of all the on (the) bo(a)rd(er) [il est d’abord l’ a-bard].” See Derrida, *The Thruth in Painting*, 54.

\(^{202}\) Heller-Andrist discusses the movement that occurs through the parergon; see Heller-Andrist, *The Friction of the Frame*, 27.

\(^{203}\) Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 55.
background which the general text is, it merges into the work which stands out against the general background.\textsuperscript{204}

Derrida then explains in full detail the dissolving and emerging mechanisms of the frame. We are aware of the work because of the frame, at which moment the frame dissolves into the wall; when we look at the wall and the work, the frame emerges out of the wall to mesh with the work, at which point both stand off the wall. This movement causes the parergon to be always merging with either the outside or with the inside of the work. Significantly, Derrida argues for a framing system that is not impermeable and where both inside and outside spaces can meet and merge.\textsuperscript{205}

The issue between what is on the inside and what is on the outside and which of these creates the difference between related elements is the same issue between what is central and what, on the surface, is peripheral. This relation is called parergonality, which, for Derrida, exposes the difficulty in determining where limits lie and where the edges of one thing end to become something else.\textsuperscript{206} What parergonality questions is the point at which something is considered ornamental to something else, when it becomes the frame, the appendage, secondary, or peripheral to something central, a work, a framed, or an ergon.\textsuperscript{207} Parergonality also questions the balance of power between what is seemingly secondary, yet necessary, and what is central. This power relation is what Derrida calls the logic of the parergon.\textsuperscript{208} Although Derrida considers things to be always

\begin{footnotes}
\item[204] Ibid., 61.
\item[205] Ibid., 61.
\item[206] Deconstruction problematizes the relation between ergon and parergon, and in Derrida’s analysis of Kant’s writings, Derrida’s analysis is the parergon while Kant’s work is the ergon. This reveals that what makes the relation between these two entities possible is parergonality itself. Harvey, “Derrida, Kant, and the Performance of Parergonality,” 63. Harvey further explains that the logic of parergonality “is the inadequation of any form to content, of the frame to the framed, of framing at all, if taken strictly, that characterizes the nature or logic of parergonality.” See ibid., 64.
\item[207] Ibid., 68.
\item[208] Derrida, \textit{The Truth in Painting}, 73.
\end{footnotes}
in such a type of relation, the ambiguity of limits between the parergon and the ergon and the instability of their positions display an erosion at the edges and of the power relation between center and periphery. Eventually paragonality demonstrates that the boundaries between inside/outside, exterior/interior, center/periphery are not secure and are instead contaminated by what they are meant to preclude.

The dissolution of boundaries in the rocaille framing system is the reason that what is on the edge and peripheral can become central. Since, as we have seen, all parts create connections, these connections transcend boundaries and hierarchies and continually displace centrality. Such shifts in position destabilize the hierarchies of subject matter, such as a character’s importance versus ornament’s secondary role and tectonic orders, while also questioning what should be central (figs. 9, 15-18, 37-39). These positional shifts are also a key destabilizing tactic of rocaille decorative works and ensembles. Mimi Hellman agrees that a shift in position occurs when what is considered “garnish” and peripheral has the capacity to play a central role, such as in the prints by Lajoüe (figs. 33-36). We see now how commentators such as Cochin and Abbé Le Blanc were justified in their complaints that rocaille works upset the rules of good taste and the natural order of things. The Mondon prints discussed earlier demonstrate the extreme degree to which ornaments become the central subject matter of the works (figs. 37-39). And, should ornaments not be the central subject matter of the work, they are nonetheless at the very least of equal importance to the narrative, since in effect they enable the narrative scene to occur by constructing the space in which it takes place. They

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209 “This delimitation of the center and the integrity of the representation, of its inside and its outside, might already seem strange. One wonders, too, where to have clothing commence. Where does a parergon begin and end.” See ibid., 57.


do not construct this space by elaborating a framing structure around it, but by actually becoming the architectural structures themselves, something that is unique to the *morceau de fantaisie*. *Rocaille* ornaments’ role is central, not peripheral, to constructing fluid porous structures, even though at first they may appear to be only simple, superfluous decorative elements (figs. 35, 50, 53, 59).  

Another outcome of *rocaille*’s porous framing system is that it allows for components from ‘outside’ its boundaries to come within. We can see this confusion between inside and outside in the overwhelming number of references to organic natural elements in rococo domestic spaces. Another indicator of the invasion into interior decors of outside ‘contaminators’ is the integration of mirrors to reflect exterior views. Decorative paintings or panels, which often depicted idealized landscapes in nature, were integral parts of interior decoration and further highlight the presence of references to exterior nature (figs. 60-61). Lastly, exotic *chinoiserie* decoration and objects permitted the constant allusion to exotic societies, far away lands, and fauna and flora, which, though distant and unfamiliar, were nonetheless prominently incorporated within *rocaille* interior spaces (figs. 2, 7, 21-23). Such invasions from the outside sphere into the inside sphere of *rocaille* framing systems highlight their permeability and eliminate the divide between inside/outside, transforming it into a continual form of play and play of form.

The fact that elements referring to the outside, such as exotic scenes, come inside the open *rocaille* system and yet are still considered ‘outsiders’ of that system, since they are understood as exotic, means that these elements are both known and unknown to the

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212 Hellman explains well the modernist tunnel vision that prevents us from perceiving ornament as more than superfluous decoration; see ibid., 40.
system, both integral and foreign to it. These scenes and elements remain foreign in the sense that their initial significance is not known to the system, and in turn the system does not serve to define such outside references. This is corroborated by the varied lexicon and shapes of *rocaille* components, which are largely composed of unknown amalgams of strange organic forms, as previously described. Accordingly, another consequence of the open *rocaille* framing system is that it does not define the components that it frames.

Derrida’s ideas about the parergon serve to demonstrate how framing systems can be construed as other than intrinsic, categorical, and inflexible structures.\(^{213}\) The open framing systems created by *rocaille* ornaments amplify certain features of parergonality. Rather than stabilizing boundaries and defining what it binds, *rocaille* magnifies the murkiness of parergonal boundaries. It does not distinguish or separate the work from the wall, for it is the wall and the work. I have also pointed out that another main characteristics of *rocaille* ornaments is their new and little known appearence; while they are often abstract deviations of organic matter, they remain frequently impossible to identify. This quality of the *rocaille* is similar to the Derridian gap, his *différance*, which differs meaning from being attributed to anything with certainty. This void—the ergon—displays in its need for the parergon a constant differal of signification, similar to the absence in signification we find in *rocaille* and, I shall argue, similar to what we also find in *rocaille*’s contemporary counterpart. Like parergonality, *rocaille* inflates the shift in power positions between center and periphery; it magnifies this shift not only by becoming the central element, as in the work of Mondon, but also, at times, by eviscerating the work and becoming both parergon and ergon at once. In this sense

\(^{213}\) Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 57.
rocaille ornaments exacerbate the central role the parergon can play and render explicit
the work of the parergon and its importance. Rocaille exposes how, in Derridian terms,
the parergon takes over, and can literally become the work. Both the parergon and
rocaille ornaments point to the blurred nature of limits and boundaries, with the
exception that rocaille literalizes this condition for the viewer. As parerga, rocaille
ornaments not only amplify the ambiguous limits of the work, they also question our
definition of artworks by reversing the dynamics of periphery/center and inside/outside
and putting such reversals on center stage.

The consequences of lacking rigid, impermeable boundaries—such as a reversal
of hierarchies of subject matter and periphery/center, the dissolution of a substantial
divide between outside and inside spaces and their references, and the lack of clearly
defined elements—can be interpreted as being the same consequences resulting from the
operations of the informe. With the definition of informe that follows, I will establish how
rocaille elements perform informe operations.

1.5: Informe and Rocaille

Georges Bataille first articulated the notion of the informe in 1929 in the column
he wrote called Dictionnaire critique in the French journal Documents, which he
managed in his role as general secretary. Documents offered articles on a wide variety
of topics including jazz music, archeological finds, contemporary artists of the period,
such as Picasso and Joan Gris, exhibition reviews, and ethnographical pieces. It also included articles on various art historical subjects, such as baroque architecture in Mexico. Subsequent to this publication, the notion of *informe* returned to the academic world in 1996, when the journal *October* published a special issue on it. The subject was broached again in the publication of *Formless a User’s Guide* by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois in 1997. Following these innovative studies, several other texts have discussed Bataille’s notion of the *informe* and what, exactly, as Paul Hegarty said, “Bataille really meant” by *informe*.²¹⁶

Contrary to other entries in *Documents*’s peculiar dictionary, *informe* has only a short paragraph dedicated to it. However, as stated by Bois, it serves as the program for the dictionary as a whole and would be the equivalent to the entry ‘encyclopedia’ or ‘dictionary’ in either of the two volumes.²¹⁷ However, unlike the expected limpid definitions of normal dictionary entries, these, and specifically the one on *informe*, are not perspicuous. Instead, they are confounding, circular, and obtuse:

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus *formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its own form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Paul Hegarty, “As Above, So Below: Informe/Sublime/Abject,” *The Beast at Heaven’s Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, ed. Andrew Hussey (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006), 74. See also the following exhibition catalogue, which sought to revive the original context of *Documents* where fine arts were juxtaposed to popular culture: Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, eds. *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and DOCUMENTS* (London: Hayward Gallery; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).
Similar to the non-defining entry for *informe* itself, the dictionary as a whole, too, presented in short installments throughout the issues of *Documents*, has no organizational order. Entries appear in non-alphabetical order, while there are also multiple entries for the same term. Readers may also feel the uneven texture created by the dissonant voices of the various authors contributing to the entries. As Bois explains, this dictionary was not meant as an exhaustive enterprise, but, rather, to be left as an unfinished work.\textsuperscript{219} Just like the open framing systems of *rocaille*, this dictionary is left open, in transition, with meanings meandering and never fully pinning anything down.

Since *informe* is purposefully meant to be a non-defining entry, it is a paradox and a challenge to understand what Bataille meant by such a concept, and indeed the very act of defining it defeats its intended purpose.\textsuperscript{220} Nonetheless, several authors have attempted to clarify the concept of the *informe* and to construct their own theory of it. Before turning to others’ interpretations, I wish to examine more closely Bataille’s entry. What is *informe* for Bataille? If I paraphrase his text, Bataille first explains that *informe* is an adjective of which the purpose is to de-rank. We are then told that what it designates is thought to be unworthy of meaning or sense. Whatever *informe* does designate, according to Bataille, it is treated like an unwanted pestilence that nonetheless retains some form of instrumentality, since it must be terminated and removed. We can infer that for Bataille,

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\begin{itemize}
  \item translation, Allan Stoekl translated Bataille’s original term *déclasser* as to “bring things down in the world.” There is no adequate English equivalent to *déclasser*, but neither is Stoekl’s translation conveying properly the whole meaning of the term. Other translations of the term could be downgraded, to get out of order, lowering, or to displace. Of importance to this discussion is that this term stresses a dismantlement of rank, class and order. Although I use Stoekl’s translation, it is important to understand that Bataille wanted to stress the capacity of *informe* to dismantle hierarchy.
  \item Hegarty discusses the paradox of defining the *informe*; see Paul Hegarty, “As Above, So Below,” 76.
\end{itemize}
there is a ranking to the world, which is established through sense-making and meaning, and that these attribute worth.

Subsequently, Bataille’s definition abruptly changes topic, moving from a discussion of the actions of the *informe* to the demands of form. He states that academics and philosophy both demand that things (the universe) take shape, or be explained in such a manner as to make sense, which is what he implies is the purpose of this mathematical overcoat. It is possible, therefore, to equate this mantle he refers to with the acts of giving shape to matter and making sense of it. We can also infer that form comes with meaning, while, as stated at the beginning of the entry, *informe* does not. However, Bataille clearly states that things do not have an inherent meaning, and that it is rather the overcoat which gives it to them. Because the meaning of things is not inherent to them, meaning is only a covering, a way to make sense, such as mathematical sense. Bataille concludes that declaring the universe to be *informe* is equivalent to calling it a gob of spit or a spider. It lowers the universe to something that has no rights, no mathematical properties, and is less than nothing. To call the universe *informe* is to say it is without intelligibility, meaning, or hierarchical order, and that such order is not an inherent quality of the universe, but rather one imposed by man. In effect, it becomes obvious that the term *informe* for Bataille is meant to be a leveling term that creates horizontality rather than vertical hierarchical orders.

Bataille’s short text has two simultaneous discourses: the first discusses the purpose or action of the *informe*, while the second pits *informe* against form and discusses the demands of form. This latter discourse attempts to understand *informe* in opposition to the notion of form, as well as the role of *informe* in the wider context of the dictionary.
It is right then to ask what Bataille implies by form? Opening with the statement that a dictionary should be concerned with the actions of words and not their meaning, Bataille implies that other dictionaries define things. Consequently, the notion that the universe should be given shape—or form—refers specifically to the act of attributing meaning or defining things just as dictionaries do. If something can be defined and explained, it also follows that it becomes circumscribed within a set meaning. Bataille explains that meaning is but an overcoat because set meaning, which gives form, seems to create a stable defining structure that is arrested. In this case, form seemingly gives the appearance that it is not moving, or part of a flux, or capable of flexibility or change. We can understand defining form, then, as a process that arrests what it defines. Moreover, if form is giving sense or meaning, it is also showing the potential to be understood. It is because form can be understood that, for Bataille, it implies structures of knowledge that are arrested and yield restricted understanding. Since things lacking sense are removed and crushed out of the ordering system, it is only by giving form—which affords meaning to things—that they gain importance, attention, and rank. Form can be understood then as not only creating stable, arrested structures, but also as giving order and position to the things of this world.

*Informe*, by contrast, is meant to be resistant to definition and “does not have rights to any ‘meaning’. “\(^{221}\) It is defined through its actions, which are twofold: to devalue and to de-rank. By using the orthodox structure of the dictionary, a structure which refers to a method of classification and ordering elaborated in the eighteenth century, Bataille dismantles this very structure by inserting a ‘quack’, a concept that,

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\(^{221}\) Bataille, “Informe,” 382.
through its undefined contours, succeeds in corrupting definition. A dictionary imposes order and form onto concepts and forces things into set boundaries of what it determines is, can be, or cannot be. As a vague concept inserted into the stable structure of the dictionary, informe looses the noose of definition and explodes the structure of classification, rank, and order. In other words, the de-ranking Bataille refers to as being the operation of the informe is the destruction of structure and order. Secondly, informe for Bataille can also devalue things by destroying their established hierarchical order and rank, which means that the establishment of something as lower or higher in relation to another thing is no longer valid.

The consequence of the destruction of order is disorder. In opposition to form, the actions of the informe create instability in any system. It is not that the informe rids structures of meaning, but rather that it creates instability: meaning is no longer fixed by a set of defined rigid terms. Meaning can be understood to be in motion, subject to change and fluctuation. It is my contention that this brings the actions of the informe into flux and makes it an active agent that transforms closed systems into dynamic, open ones.

222 Scientists and enthusiasts alike in the eighteenth century attempted to understand the entire natural world, and man’s place within it, by means of ordering systems such as systematics; see John E. Lesch, “Systematics and the Geometrical Spirit,” The Quantifying Spirit in the Eighteenth Century, eds. Tore Frängsmyr, J.L. Heilbron, and Robin E. Rider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 74-113. Bois explains that Bataille’s use of informe in the dictionary column is his first act of sabotage against the academic world and ordering systems; see Bois, “To Introduce a User’s Guide,” 25. He further explains quacks or ‘ink spots’ are Bataille’s method of inserting dismantling informe actions within structures. Such operations are part of his larger movement of heterology; see Bois, “To Introduce a User’s Guide,” 25-26. Hegarty also agrees that, as it appeared in the dictionary, the concept of informe was meant to criticize the very form of the dictionary and its ordering structures; see Hegarty, “As Above, So Below,” 75.

223 Bois also agrees that informe is “not so much a stable motif to which we can refer, a symbolizable theme, a given quality, as it is a term allowing one to operate a declassification, in the double sense of lowering and of taxonomic disorder.” See Bois, “To Introduce a User’s Guide,” 29. For Williams, de-ordering is rather a process of losing form. Should we accept, however, that form attributes sense, defines and assigns a position, then losing form, in opposition, creates disorder. Therefore, although Williams and I use different terms, we come to the same conclusion; see Williams, “Informe and Anti-Form,” 144.
Since the work of Bataille, others have made use of the *informe* and have elaborated upon it. According to Paul Hegarty *informe* is essentially a paradox, since by its very nature it cannot be discussed or defined. Unlike Bataille, who understands the *informe* as a specific process that lowers its objects, Hegarty conceives of *informe* as the underlying process behind all form. Hegarty is also categorical in stating that the *informe* can never have a visible output, since for him *informe* is the residue left over after something has gone through the process of taking shape. Because it has no shape, Hegarty suggests, we cannot perceive it.

Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, on the other hand, use the idea of the *informe* to create the concept of an artistic modernist ‘formless’ set against the Greenbergian definition of a grand, formal type of modernism. The goal of their exhibition, *Formless: A User’s Guide*, was to dismantle the dichotomy of form and content that had been imposed on modernist works of art. Formless art, for Bois and Krauss, is neither something that is just form nor just content. Bois in fact argues that one of Bataille’s main concerns in his writings on Manet’s *Olympia* is the possibility for something to displace both form and content. A formless object, Bois and Krauss argue, can break the modernist dichotomy of form versus content. Specifically, unlike

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224 Hegarty, “As Above, So Below,” 76.
225 Ibid., 75-76.
226 Ibid., 75-76.
227 Bois’s and Krauss’s project sought to destroy old hierarchical classifications of art history such as theme, chronology, style, and oeuvre; see Bois “To Introduce a User’s Guide,” 32.
228 According to Bois, Bataille wanted to use displacement to rid form of both subject matter and formalistic concerns; see Bois “To Introduce a User’s Guide,” 24.
Hegarty who sees the *informe* as all process, Bois and Krauss, with the formless, restrict the *informe* to a process that removes and attacks form.\(^{230}\)

Contrary to Hegarty, who argues for the invisibility of the *informe*, Krauss and Bois attribute a visual characteristic to the formless and base its appearance on Michel Leiris’s definition for spittle in *Documents*’s dictionary.\(^{231}\) Leiris describes spit as something without definite contours and of relative imprecision of color or consistency (it must also be remembered, as Bois and Krauss point out, that in his entry for *informe* Bataille makes direct reference to Leiris’s definition of spit as a potential visual expression of the *informe*).\(^{232}\) Unlike Hegarty and like Krauss and Bois, I believe it is not because the purpose of the *informe* is to dismantle order that there can be no visual evidence or perception of such actions or their repercussions.

Despite the paradox of the indefinable *informe*, we can and do discuss what it is because, as a concept, we are aware of its actions. It is not because it resists definition or being known that we cannot perceive it. The idea that something disrupts order and rational systems, both succeeding in removing meaning from a stable position and creating disorder, is something that Bataille, Krauss, and Bois state we can visually perceive. I would argue, however, that that which is formless and performing *informe* operations cannot be classified or defined due to its ontological viscosity. If *informe* represents the actions or the operations of certain things rather than their meaning, these actions are performed by things that do have a materiality and the consequences of *informe* operations also have material repercussions. The conundrum comes when we must rationalize the *informe* through discourse and language. Despite the fact that

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language and labeling give rational visibility to things, these things can still be
experienced before language is applied to them. The experience of something prior to a
linguistic rationalization may give the appearance that such things are invisible, when in
fact they are only invisible to the system of language and discourse. I contend that this is
exactly what Bataille meant when he wrote that all universe is informe once the overcoat
of definition is discarded. This does not mean that there is nothing, or that nothing is
perceptible.

If, as I have explained, informe muddles the structures of knowledge and creates
movement and flux by disrupting stability, this in turn disrupts framed knowledge and,
consequently, any certainty of knowing. The informe operation is an action that is
particularly capable of breaking systems of framing, which, in the larger sense of
framing, create enclosures and structures of knowledge. One consequence of such
operations is that a state of confusion arises; informe operations, therefore, serve to bring
us face to face with the unknown, unidentifiable void and movement. The question
remains whether we can identify, know, or recognize the visual shape of the agents
causing informe operations if their result is still the unknowable. These agents instigate a
state of flux because, even though these are material objects, they are not fully formed,
and as a result they further disrupt form. These objects are not without form, nor are they
anti-form, but rather they are in the process of forming, which may or may not be
perpetual. What can perform informe operations is, therefore, something we do not know
or recognize, although we can attest to the visual consequence of the informe actions by
the lack of present form. The visual result is that semantic incongruent juxtapositions
create illogical forms that are largely unknown.
These juxtapositions are not only incongruent but they also form connections. Although Bataille does not discuss this potential, informe not only dismantles forms, but, by doing so, it also creates new forms or new entities not yet formed. Hence, the informe operation not only dismantles knowledge but it also connects, bridges, and relates things. This connecting and creative process is something that Benjamin Buchloh mentions and recognizes in “The Politics of the Signifier II,” in which he conceives of the informe as a connection between the body and the social. For him, informe is no longer tied to an origin but has the capacity to bridge the gap between various entities that are separate, such as the act of spitting in one’s soup where the spit ties the body and the soup together. By rupturing the boundaries of knowledge, the informe action also creates links between things that would otherwise be separate.

The similarities between informe actions and rocaille shapes, dispositions, and framing systems are striking. Can we equate rocaille operations with those of the informe? It would be proper here to iterate the similarities. As I have previously explained, using examples of decorative rocaille ensembles by Pineau, the space created by rocaille ornament does not contain or bind elements within it, since the rocaille shapes continually break boundaries (figs. 47-48, 51-53). I have also argued that a typical rocaille effect is the collapse of any spatial boundaries in order to create a space that is fluid rather than hierarchical and dividing (fig. 59). I have qualified the type of system that arises from the micro and macro connections as one that is open. In all these instances rocaille shapes and the overall resulting open structure break order, which I contend is also the primary operation of the informe.

All the authors of “The Politics of the Signifier II” also agree that the result of informe actions is to transgress the status quo. In other words, informe not only instigates the rupture of order, it specifically attacks the established forms of order and hierarchy. As discussed in my remarks on contemporary comments, rocaille, like informe, certainly disturbed the status quo. Detractors found that rocaille artists disrespected rules, such as the architectural orders, antique models, and proper associations of subject matter and its decoration. Asymmetry was one means of disrupting rank, order, and hierarchy. It should also be recalled that Diderot insulted the imagination of rococo artists by calling the style ‘unruly’. In other words, artists’ imaginations operated outside a set of normalizing rules. As a result, critics of the period accused rocaille of adding disorderly and cacophonous elements, both visually and significantly, to the artistic conventions of the period. Meanwhile I used extreme rocaille examples such as the cartouche to demonstrate that rocaille shapes are not symbolic, and that, as such, they can establish a non-signifying order. In other words, these shapes often disrupt the symbolism of other shapes by injecting ‘noise’ into the system and consequently corrupting its meaning (fig. 62). Like operations of the informe, the architectural rocaille ornamental system does not define or classify. We see, then, how the complaints of Le Blanc, Cochin, Blondel, or Diderot, are those of writers who deplored the corruption of hierarchical order and classifying systems, which could be seen as being dismantled by the informe operations of rocaille shapes.

We have also seen, in a letter by Abbé Le Blanc, that critics of the period reproached rocaille decorative arts for over-accentuating the role of ornaments in relation to the central role that subject matter should play. I have pointed out several examples by Buchloh et al., “The Politics of the Signifier II,” 21.
Mondon where the role of the ornament shifts from a peripheral position to that of the central subject matter or the main structuring apparatus (figs. 9, 15-18, 37-39). I have discussed how rocaille ornaments typically bring on a motion of continual play between positions of center and periphery, and have given examples of rocaille ornaments taking such gigantic proportions as to push meaning out of its center (figs. 35, 40, 42, 63-65). Similarly, informe disrupts the dichotomy of form and subject matter, as argued by Krauss and Bois, and succeeds in evicting both. In this regard, both rocaille and informe actions continually displace meaningful subject matter from a central position and consequently evict hierarchical status quo positions. Just as informe operations create a state of flux, movement, and instability, the continual displacement between positions of periphery and center, the motion brought on by the curve and counter-curves, and the intrusion of elements both coming into or out of systems also indicate the visual presence of a constant commotion induced by rocaille operations (figs. 10-11, 34-35, 48, 50, 52-53, 59). Thus like informe, rocaille operations create a state of flux where there is no fixity to elements.

Movement and disorder are not only caused by open structures or shifts between center and periphery alone, but also by the type of shapes presented by rocaille ornaments. If, according to Bataille, Krauss, and Bois, informe is supposed to resemble spittle, something that is unpredictable and cannot keep a regular shape, the same can be said of some extreme rocaille ornaments. These are also visually composed of irregular contours and disposed in an asymmetrical manner that disrupts rhythmic visual patterns of repetition (figs. 32, 35, 40, 42, 44-46). By introducing dissimilarity, singularity, and unexpectedness in the visual field, the shapes distort and convulse ordered rhythms. They
also present fantastical assemblages mixing vegetal, architectural, and animal parts, which form unknown agglomerations we could understand as chimeras (figs. 18, 24-25, 27, 33, 39). Essentially, however, it is because these shapes are semantically uncontained and undefined by knowledge or labels that they successfully corrupt systems, just like spit, which escapes determination and breaches boundaries.

In line with Buchloh, who argues informe is inherently tied to the body, I have discussed how rocaille ornaments often have an unidentified organic aspect, inspired by the vegetal, animal, and marine worlds. Yet despite their organicity, these forms remain unidentifiable. I have demonstrated that ‘newness’ was often used to qualify rocaille shapes, and that this was synonymous with their unknown nature. Consequently, it is because these shapes are unknown that they (paradoxically) become outsiders. Once they enter any known context, they perform the same intrusion as the unknown operations of the informe within structures of knowledge. Like the informe, then, rocaille also brings us face to face with the unknown. This is not only because we face the unknown but because rocaille, with its unidentifiable shapes, like the paradox of the informe, resists descriptive language.

This potential organic aspect of the informe that Buchloh mentions is an important one. Buchloh explains that the informe can create bridges, and so an organic type of informe action has the capacity to bind together the material to the human. This consequence of informe operations is paralleled in the connections created by rocaille operations previously discussed. I showed how rocaille shapes, with their tendrils and their disposition in a manner that creates visual hooks, connect disparate elements in order to create a network whereby singular entities are suddenly joined together (figs. 35,
59). Rocaille connections can also be seen to create chimeric shapes out of the incongruent assemblages of different elements, such as those mentioned by Abbé Le Blanc. Thus we find, in the chimeric assemblage by Mondon previously analyzed, the informe connection Buchloh perceives between the body and the material.

Rococo ornaments in and of themselves cannot be qualified as informe, but their operations are those of the informe actions. We can also understand the state of the rocaille open system as one resulting from the operations of the informe. Many factors, from the disruption of closed systems, boundaries, and the status quo, to the creation of disorder within order, the evacuation of either a center or periphery and the mobility created, the unknown shape of rocaille elements and their resistance to systems of order, and the resulting connections created out of the rupture of closed systems, all encourage me to describe rocaille operations as radical, since they are those of the informe, a transhistorical process. The disorder, the destruction of boundaries, the introduction of singularity, and the simultaneous creation of unity through the very dissolution of such singular entities, are all the result of the introduction into a given context of rocaille shapes and of the relation they have with one another. We can conclude that the actions of the informe rocaille are to corrupt and corrode closed systems, order, and knowledge. Another manner in which we can understand such actions is to qualify them as having a virus-like behavior, an analogy I will use to discuss the operations at work in the contemporary film examples in the following chapter.
Chapter Two

2.1: Body-Horror and the HOD

As suggested in my Introduction, to better understand the potential affect of rocaille ornamental operations, I draw a comparison to several body-centered contemporary films. This comparison appears dissonant at first, since it disrupts the expected linear, historical narrative and crosses media boundaries. How is it possible that two very different cultural productions separated by enormous specificities have anything in common? I am not claiming that their commonality lies in their historical production and social purposes but, rather, in their similar formal aspects and dispositions first and, second, in the theoretical implications resulting from such physical aspects and dispositions. I begin the second chapter of this thesis by demonstrating how the materialities of rocaille and body-horror are visually similar by examining the formal categories of rocaille established in Chapter One and showing how my contemporary examples fit within these. Secondly, I return to my argument that we can understand rocaille as informe and demonstrate how the contemporary heterogeneous organic detail (HOD) also operates in this manner.\(^{235}\) Their similar mode of operation is the crux of this

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\(^{235}\) To understand the sexual bias that shaped the history of detail and the hermeneutics of detail see Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987). Schor’s research brought attention to detail and its gendering, but what values detail for Schor is semantic meaning. In this case, content, or the signification of detail—however displaced—is privileged over form. I am also shedding light on a type of materiality that was relegated to the edges. Unlike Schor, however, I chose not to approach this subject by using psychoanalytical theories of displacement. In regards to my study of radical ornament, such an approach would have dismissed the experience of form that is without meaning. My approach to radical ornament privileges instead its affective potential upon the experiencer.
link. I demonstrate this connection by using the trope of the virus to discuss how the
informe of rocaille and body-horror actions is part of a larger theory of base materialism.

I have selected films that represent the range of the heterogeneous organic detail
across various bodies of work. Though not purely horror films as such, these films do
present a fascination with the distorted body, and so they are all affiliated, to varying
degrees, with what is called the body-horror genre. In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s
it was recognized that a new type of horror genre had developed out of the slasher and
splatter movies of the 1960’s. With films such as Ridley Scott’s Alien (1979), David
Lynch’s Eraser Head (1977), and David Cronenberg’s early cinema, such as The Brood
(1979) or Scanners (1981), this new type of horror came to be identified in various ways:
“new horror genre” by Jerselv, “horrality” by Philip Brophy, and Horror New Wave by
Ian Cornich, who also described it as “a desire for producing spectacular set-pieces
designed to parade the fantastic anatomical creations of special effects technicians.”

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236 Philip Brophy remarks that body-horror genre films have a sort of campy, humorous quality to them, deriving more from the grotesque and the carnivalesque than from the horrific. See Brophy “Horrality,” 12. On the notion of the grotesque and humour in these films see Creed, “Horror and the Carnivalesque, 132. Several researchers interpret body-horror as a form of psychological symptoms expressing psychosis. For understanding how body-horror as a sub-genre constructs the body as a visual sign for the particular young male audience using Julia Kristeva’s theories see Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 18-33. Though my own analysis steers away from any symbolic interpretation, for a psychoanalytic analysis of characters in Cronenberg’s films see William Beard, “Cronenberg, Flynn, and the Other-self,” Cinéma: Journal of Film Studies 4, no 2 (1994): 153-173. Williams’s article is an early consideration of the concept of the body genre film as films which exhibit excessive bodies in convulsion and uncontrolled ecstasies. She identifies ‘weepy’ melodramas, pornography, and horror types of films that, though different in intended audiences and narratives, have in common their portrayal of such excessive bodies. The effects upon the spectators of these different types of films are also considered similar since the spectators mimic the same emotions as those shown on the screen, such as ecstasy, fright, or sadness and express these through an embodied response. William uses a psychoanalytic approach to explain that these films construct and question gender while the pleasure they offer to their audiences varies according to different perverse fantasies such as sadism, sadomasochism, or masochism. See Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” Film Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Summer, 1991): 2-13.

237 Jerslev recognizes that the body-horror genre developed out of slasher horror films such those by George Romero; see Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 26.

238 Conrich, “An Aesthetic Sense,” 36; Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 18; Brophy pin-points 1978-1979 as years when new horror films redefined the horror genre with newcomers such as Carpenter, Scott, and Cronenberg; see Brophy “Horrality,” 3-4. During the late 70’s and early 80’s Cronenberg was quickly
the center of this type of horror is the monstrous body.\textsuperscript{239} As Jerselv explains, the "monster is the monstrous body not the monstrous character."\textsuperscript{240} These films explore in a graphic style the ultimate fear of one's body and loss of control over one's body.\textsuperscript{241}

Barbara Creed agrees that the representation of the body in contemporary horror changed:

[the] body and its parts have become the locus for various forms of physical transgression. The body is cut, slashed, dismembered, infested, skinned, and cannibalized. The destruction of the body is emphasized with close-up shots of gore, blood, body parts, torsos, limbs, eyeballs, offal. Everything and every part of the body has become horrifying. Special effects technology can create realistic images of human tissue in a variety of states of disintegration and destruction.\textsuperscript{242}

Although most of the films under study are considered part of the body-horror genre, it is not this potentially horrifying or dreadful quality that forms the common denominator of their heterogeneous organic detail. Despite the potentially horrifying aspects of the body-horror genre, it was understood from the onset that the body monstrous, like the body beautiful, was meant to create a cinema of attraction.\textsuperscript{243} Films, such as those of Carpenter and Cronenberg in the later 1970’s and early 1980’s, were meant to be spectacular feats of special effects, thereby attracting audiences.\textsuperscript{244} As modern spectators, we may not be as impressed by the special effects of those times, but

\textsuperscript{239} Brophy names as examples of these new types of body-horror oriented films those of John Carpenter, such as \textit{Halloween} (1978), Scott’s \textit{Alien}, George Romero’s \textit{Dawn of the Dead} (1979), and Cronenberg’s \textit{The Brood}; see Brophy “Horrality,” 4.
\textsuperscript{240} Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 18.
\textsuperscript{241} Brophy, “Horrality,” 8.
\textsuperscript{242} Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque,” 143.
\textsuperscript{243} Conrich argues there is a similarity in consuming the displayed body in porno posters found in the magazine \textit{Playboy} at the time and those found in the centerfold posters of gore magazine \textit{Fangoria}. See Conrich, “An Aesthetic Sense,” 43, 45.
\textsuperscript{244} Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 23.
part of their initial attraction was their capacity to show extreme close-ups of realistically portrayed materiality. Ian Conrich explains that “Cronenberg’s interest in body-horror—his perception of the anomalies and transformations that an infected, purulent and corrupted body may exhibit—presented considerable opportunities for experimentation with foam latex application and for the ever-innovative design of prosthetics.”245 We can argue that this materiality, although no longer dazzling for its technical realism, is still captivating for the otherness it presents.246 What distinguishes these films from others is the development of a narrative based on organic matter, and what characterizes this body-horror genre is “the priority of visual excess and, by extension, special effects, over narrative development and progression.”247

The question of genre is a difficult cul-de-sac. Cronenberg’s films are a good example of the difficulty in classifying such films into specific genres. Some authors perceive his early work as part of exploitation horror, while some of his later films are considered part of the science-fiction genre.248 Another particularity of the films chosen is that, although affiliated with the horror genre, several also belong to the realm of science-fiction: District 9, Neill Blomkamp, 2009; eXistenZ, David Cronenberg, 1999; Splice, Vencenzo Natali, 2009; Alien, The Thing, John Carpenter, 1982; Tokyo Gore Police, Yoshihiro Nishimura, 2008. In the films chosen, if scientists are not always the main

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245 Conrich, “An Aesthetic Sense,” 36. Albeit the ideas for the physical anomalies and deformations came directly from Cronenberg (see Conrich, “An Aesthetic Sense,” 44), Conrich explains he worked with special effects artists who rendered such visions possible, such as Joe Blasco who worked on Shivers and Rabid, Chris Walas who worked on Scanners and The Fly (1986), Dick Smith who also worked on Scanners, and Rick Baker who worked on Videodrome. See Conrich, “An Aesthetic Sense,” 36.

246 At the time Brophy wrote this article he spoke of the dazzling special effects of close-ups, specifically in The Thing, and recognized such close-ups as one of the main visual elements setting such films apart from others; see Brophy “Horrality,” 11.


characters, scientific research and development is often at the heart of the unfolding events (Splice, Alien, The Thing, Tokyo Gore Police, Planet Terror, Robert Rodríguez, 2007; District 9, eXistenZ, and Videodrome, David Cronenberg, 1983). I will not, however, further consider the question of a film’s genre since what is important here is, rather, the films’ common graphic and visual emphasis on organic materiality.

What these films have in common is not a shared genre as such, but, as I will demonstrate, it is, firstly, a marked display of a certain organic materiality and, secondly, the manner in which this materiality is presented. The particular kind of organic materiality displayed in these films is what I call the heterogeneous organic details and what Jerselv has termed the “organ body”. She defines the organ body as “a body without skin - metaphorically as well as literally - a non-organized amorphous mass of biological matter without gender distinction, a body that discloses interior substances for which there is, so to speak, nothing exterior.” It is organic matter, as I will argue, that is no longer bound; Jerselv further defines it as “a body without firm outlines; on the contrary, it is constantly transforming from one shape into another, as its unreliable innards all of a sudden break through the skin to start a life of their own.”

Dylan Trigg defines as being central to the body-horror genre “the sense of the body dissolving boundaries between inside and out, self and other, and the living and the dead.” Typical of both the body-horror genre, and of all the films selected here, is the presentation of the boundaries of body and organic matter as dissolving or dissolved. As I will argue below, the same porousness of boundaries present in the rococo framing

249 Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 19.
250 Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 19.
251 Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 18.
system is also present in the organic matter of these films. Boundaries, which restrain
organic matter and define it, are, in both rocaille and these films, dissolved to the point of
conflating notions of outside/inside, innards/outwards, self/other. The films selected are
particular in that they capture this “organ body,” the porousness of organic boundaries,
and show in detail the organic matter in all its transformations and movements.

The visual emphasis on organic matter in these films is unique in that it exhibits
the transformation of matter. The films chosen do not only expose gory bodily excretions,
they also display organic details as specifically deformed, transformed, and
unrecognizable shapes, in a manner similar to rocaille ornamental details. A further
defining trait of these films is that this organic transformation of props or characters is
not timelapsed but explicitly displayed.253 As I will argue below, metamorphosing
organic matter is one of the defining qualities of the HOD. What makes the medium of
film interesting is that, unlike still photography, it can portray the movement of this
transformation over time. The films I have chosen all present examples of a moment
lasting a few seconds (and thus moving forward in time) that nevertheless evokes the
captured time of photography. The form in which this material data is presented,
therefore, is another common thread among these films. There are many types of horror
iconographies that show quick cuts between shots instead of sustained shots.254 The
heterogeneous organic detail is presented, rather, in extreme close-up shots lasting
several seconds, allowing the viewer to peruse the materiality displayed. David

253 Brophy, “Horrality,” 9. Creed perceives the display of bodily transformations to be one of the hallmarks
of the body-horror genre. See Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque,” 137.
254 Albeit the series Fringe (Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci 2008-2013), or the more recent Hannibal
(Bryan Fuller 2013-present), do present blood spatters and body wounds, these are not presented in the
same manner as the HOD in the films selected. The shots do not emphasize nor linger on the organic matter
at hand.
Cronenberg’s films, such as *eXistenZ*, *Crash* (1996), and *Videodrome*, are replete with such shots where the camera almost flirts with and skims the surface of these organic details. A consequence of these lengthy close-up shots is that the materiality displayed acquires a tactile quality. Although materiality in the films is experienced visually, it still evokes a sense of touch.\(^\text{255}\) This quality, labeled by Marks as haptic, is described by Martin as a “careful attention to tactile surfaces and textures.”\(^\text{256}\) The haptic quality of images showing heterogeneous organic details arouses or invites the viewer to respond to the image as though it were a tactile experience. Presenting such materiality is in fact using “vision as though it were a sense of touch.”\(^\text{257}\)

These films are not only similar in the type of materiality they exhibit and the manner in which they do so, but also in their thematic narratives. All discuss some kind of disease or infestation, though sometimes it may manifest itself in less traditional ways, such as in *Splice*, where the infestation is a new genetically modified being seeking to reproduce. Several sub-themes recur from film to film, such as the question of identity (*District 9, Planet Terror, Tokyo Gore Police, Splice, The Thing*) or the scientific quest for advancing knowledge and uncovering the unknown (*Alien, The Thing, Splice, Tokyo Gore Police*). The contexts (or texts), the narrative environments in which forms relate to each other and to the context itself, also present commonly-themed actions or performances, which result in the presence of the heterogeneous details themselves. It


\(^{256}\) Martin, “Skin Deep,” 268.

must be noted, however, that other films or television series could have been included here, but that I have restricted myself to the nine following films because they best exemplify the possible range of this materiality and its operations: \textit{Alien}, \textit{The Thing}, \textit{Planet Terror}, \textit{District 9}, \textit{eXistenZ}, \textit{Crash} (David Cronenberg, 1996), \textit{Splice}, \textit{Tokyo Gore Police}, and \textit{Videodrome} (David Cronenberg, 1983).258

Finally, the themes of these films often result from the function or actions performed by these heterogeneous organic details. Because there is such an emphasis on corporeal materiality, a reversal of position occurs in which what should be peripheral detail becomes the central agent of the story’s narrative. It is specifically this instrumentality of radical ornament that these films exhibit in their materiality’s capacity to transform, affect, and create specific consequences. I will also argue that these chosen examples use a certain materiality that operates, like \textit{rocaille} ornaments, in an \textit{informe} manner. One certainly may find, in several other films, traditional splatter effects, such as the flinging of body parts and the splattering of blood all over, but these moments often function in the manner of traditional ornamentation by decorating or enhancing certain aspects of a genre or idea. Although HOD moments may at times seem to be presented less frequently than main characters, they do not simply enhance the films’ stylistic appearance, but are in fact what drives and ignites the films’ plot. These visually impactful, haptic images are what connect the viewer to the film and act as a conduit for the viewer to experience the film space. Instead of being contained within the narrative of the story, heterogeneous organic details frame the narrative and provide a means for the

\footnotesize{258 Other films that exhibit heterogeneous organic details are: \textit{Rabid} (Cronenberg, 1977), \textit{The Brood} (Cronenberg, 1979), \textit{Dead Ringers} (Cronenberg, 1988), \textit{Bad Biology} (Frank Henenlotter, 2008), and the series \textit{The Walking Dead} (Frank Darabont, 2010). There may also be other films of which I am, as of yet, unaware; however, the nine chosen films are chosen across a range of styles and genres that exhibited to the highest degree the outcomes caused by the actions of heterogeneous organic details.}
viewer to embark into the fictional world described. Particularly, the moments showing grotesque and deformed organic matter (often flesh) in extreme close-ups cause the viewer to lose sense of any signification or meaning. As I will argue, these moments act like *rocaille* ornaments, linking the narrative and easing our way into the fictional insanity of the disease and through the transformations that take place. The details in these films become explicit players in the re-assembly of the characters or story. Put another way, I will demonstrate how, as in *rocaille*, these *informe* details can be considered verbs.

### 2.2: Formal Comparative Analysis of Rocaille and Contemporary Heterogeneous Organic Details in Film

We have seen how eighteenth-century *rocaille* ornaments can be agglomerated under the loose category of organic forms. I have also discussed how the vocabulary of the *rocaille* can range from exotic zoological, vegetal, and marine themes. Similarly, we can find contemporary examples of loose families of organic materials. I previously identified as families of organic materials exotic creatures (either real or imaginary), marine life, the vegetal, and above all, the human/fleshy. Although this last type may at first appear to have no corresponding eighteenth-century *rocaille* ornament, this is not the case. It is, in fact, within this human/fleshy type of organic material family that we locate most of the abstract organic forms from both time periods. While I may have loosely identified and labeled this type of organic materiality, it is difficult, as in the case of many rocaille inventions, to associate these with any definitive type of materiality. As I
shall discuss below, though these forms are all derived from aspects of known ones, they cannot be precisely recognized as known materials.

Most of the animals that comprise the *rocaille* ornamental lexicon, such as birds, elephants, monkeys, parrots, and dragons, were all considered either exotic or to possess some degree of unfamiliarity, which, in the case of the dragon, might even have been mythical (figs. 18, 22, 24-25, 39, 63-64). Likewise, the presence of exotic creatures in my selected films is also overwhelming. In *Splice* we have two new creatures, named Ginger and Fred, formed from genetic manipulation and whose bodies evoke the twists and turns of the dragon in a *morceau de fantasie* by Alexis Peyrotte (figs. 24, 66). In another reference to Peyrotte is found in the creature Dren, one of the main characters of *Splice* and the genetic outcome of the work of her two scientific parents. Strands drawn from all types of genetic materials were mixed together with human DNA to produce an unexpected and unpredictable creature. Dren, in her first few weeks, resembles a beaver/squirrel/rat/kangaroo that is not unlike the unidentifiable creature perched on the branches of *chinoiserie* fantasies by Peyrotte (figs. 63-64, 67). Other creatures, such as the infant alien bursting from a stomach in *Alien* or the little two-headed dragon in *eXistenZ*, are reminiscent of the taxidermy animals studied by naturalists and amateurs and collected in cabinets of natural science (figs. 68-70). These animals were juxtaposed with *rocaille* ornaments and elements, as we see in the print by Courtonne of the *Natural History Cabinet de Bonnier de La Mosson* or in the frontispiece for the *Catalogue Raisonné de Cocquilles et autres Curiosités Naturelles* by Boucher (figs. 68, 71). Strange chimeras were also commonly exhibited in the form of firedogs. Such objects portrayed chimeric combinations of animals and humans and were placed next to fireplaces for
decorative purposes (fig. 73). In their chimeric composition of both human and animal, the crocodile-woman and the snail-woman in *Tokyo Gore Police* recall these rococo firedogs (figs. 74-75). Other parallels are found in the little two-headed dragon figure in *eXistenZ* as well as the composite creature made of wolves and dogs in *The Thing*, which are both similar to the multiple dragon-like animals and animal compounds found in *rocaille* examples such as Duplessis’s *Vase à tête d'éléphant* or the prints of Peyrotte and Mondon (figs. 24-25, 70, 72, 76). Finally, the strange pod creature in *eXistenZ* found at the trout farm resembles animal cartouches by Gilles-Marie Oppenord (figs. 77-78). Like the elephant cartouche, the trout-farm pod has a strange undular and asymmetrical body. It is also flanked with arms or eyes, in the same way that the cartouche ends with an elephant head and tentacle volute *rocaille* arms.

As in the eighteenth century, marine elements are also present in the films discussed. The aliens in *District 9* are derogatorily called prawns, while the alien face-hugger in *Alien* is reminiscent of a crab-like creature. Both these examples are also comparable to the crustaceans found on Meissonnier’s set of silver Tureens for the Duke of Kingston or in a drawing of a shell and marine life by Lajoüe (figs. 5, 30-31, 79-80). In fact, the Alien face-hugger would not look out of place were it incorporated as one of the elements that compose the assembly of marine life in the small *morceau de fantasie* by Meissonnier or that of the Lajoüe’s composition (figs. 5-6). Furthermore, the snail-woman of *Tokyo Gore Police* would not look so askew were she to to join the array of shells and snails found at the bottom of Boucher’s *Frontispiece* or the *rocaille Pediment* above the porte-cochère to the entrance of the hôtel de Thoix (figs. 81-82). Finally, the dead amphibians shown throughout the sequence at the trout farm in *eXistenZ* are similar
to the masses of amphibians stored away in the vials lining the background of the
frontispiece by Boucher for Gersaint’s *Catalogue Raisonné*; they are also similar to the
amphibians present in the drawing by Lajoüe of *La Prosternation chinoise* (figs. 71, 83-
84).

The vegetal category, which has an overwhelming place in the *rocaille* lexicon, is
not so present in the contemporary version of this organic materiality. But there are two
noteworthy exceptions. In *Splice*, when the creatures Fred and Ginger meet for the first
time to imprint in a lab tank, these two worm-like creatures merge their vegetal tongues
and form the same type of *rocaille* ornaments as those found in a salon of *l’ancien hôtel
Carnavalet* exhibited at the musée Carnavalet in Paris (figs. 28, 85).259 The second
example is the plate of food from which Pikul eats at the Chinese restaurant in *eXistenZ.*
Pikul sifts through the scattered bits and pieces of food to reveal the parts of the bone-
gun, which he then instinctively reconstructs. Similar to these dismembered bits of food
and bones are the organic elements that compose the ceiling of the Princess’s *Small
Bedroom* at Soubise (figs. 86-87). In both cases we find bits of unrecognizable organic
vegetal material at once scattered and inter-connected. Pikul holds what seems like the
carcass of some half-eaten amphibian, which, with its ribs exposed, resembles the
vertebral armature of the ornament found at the top left of figure 87.

The last of the organic families is made up of anything exhibiting fleshy parts,
bulbous skin, veins, organs, bowels, bones, and slimy corporeal features. Again, although
it might appear as though, unlike the examples above, there is no equivalent to these

259 Unfortunately, still shots from the film do not render the range of motion filmed and consequently the
different undulating curves and counter-curves the tongues make. When viewed as a scene, the meeting of
the two creatures’ tongues resemble the effervescent commotion that is present in the ornaments of the
*ancien hôtel Carnavalet.*
elements in the *rocaille* lexicon of forms, this is not the case. *Rocaille* ornamental shapes may appear to be organic abstract derivatives partly because they are normally considered outside their initial signifying context. When compared directly to the fleshy organic details from the films, however, we see that they do indeed have similar forms. The number of examples provided here may at first seem overwhelming, but it is important that we insist on building this physical, material correspondence so that it may become clear how these two seemingly divergent materialities are in fact quite closely linked.

Many instances of fleshy materiality are shown in *Alien*, such as the open alien eggs, the walls in the mysterious ship where the nest of aliens was found, and the overall general aspect of the ship itself. In this respect, the soft pink ornaments of the *Cabinet des fables de la fontaine* from hôtel Dangé resemble the opened and exposed eggs in *Alien* (figs. 62, 88). Specifically, the original tender pink color of the *rocaille* ornament is reminiscent of fleshy tones, the shape of the central cartouche with its undulous ovoid form is similar to the tender one inside the alien egg, and, lastly, both shapes are flanked by opening petal-like structures. In another example, the dark fleshy insides of the alien ship conceived by H.R. Giger and his associates closely resemble the parts constructing the cartouche-like architectural structure in *Le Repas Champêtre* by Mondon, both being undulating membranes of a similar curvilinear form (figs. 37, 89). The ship’s membrane could also be considered a close-up of one of the organic membranes composing the cartouche in Lajoüe’s *Livre de Vases* (fig. 27). If we consider the bottom tail of this cartouche, we find that any of its elements could be part of the alien ship’s composition. Lastly, this membrane also resembles the ornaments making the *boiserie* in Meissonnier’s *Canapé exécuté pour le comte Bielenski* (fig. 58). If we look closely at the
wall ornaments right above the canapé, we find the same curvilinear, undulating, and repeating fragments as those in the ship.

In the case of *Crash*, although moments showing fleshy organic details are sparse, these are displayed with great detail and care and share many similarities with ornaments by Cuvilliés. The scar found on the neck of the main character, James Ballar, resembles the same jagged outlines and irregular contours that form the ornamental composition of polymorphous edges in Cuvilliés’s *Caprice a divers useages* as well as the flesh-like frayed edges of the *agraffes* in his *Dessins d’agraffes* (figs. 65, 90, 94). It is the bumpy and bulbous nature of the scar, where the skin has been sewn together, that mimics the same shape as the elements in the Cuvilliés ornaments. Similarly, the deep scar on the leg of Gabrielle recalls the leaf-like elements in Babel’s *Study for a Cartouche* (figs. 91-92). Specifically, these are composed of small counter-curves with deep chiaroscuro effects, indicating creases and different depths. Likewise, Gabrielle’s scar, with its fractured flesh, is also composed of little sinuous rotund lines with deep chiaroscuro creases. As would a human and fleshy close-up of the Cuvilliés or Balbel Rocaille ornaments, the new flesh on Gabrielle’s scar creates bulbous effects. Lastly, Gabrielle’s scar also evokes the leaf-like petals bordering the empty Lajoüe cartouche, while the depth of the scar and its creases resemble the same sculpted creases we find in this Meissonnier wall bracket (figs. 42, 93).

Many examples can also be found in *Planet Terror, Splice, Tokyo Gore Police,* and *Videodrome*. If we look closely, the erupting, viral, bulbous faces of many characters in *Planet Terror* resemble the undulating ovoid form of the empty center of Lajoüe’s cartouche (figs. 42, 95-96). Consider also how the curve and counter-curve effect created...
on the faces of Lt. Muldoon and the patient in the hospital resembles the same undulating
effect of the ‘c’ curves found in several of the *morceaux de fantasies* by Lajoüé (figs. 34-
36, 42, 59). In *Splice*, we find a fleshy correspondence between the twisting bodies of
Fred and Ginger and the twisting and twirling features of the Meissonnier engraving of a
candlestick from *Modèles d’orfèvrerie* as well as those of Babel’s *Study for a Cartouche*
(figs. 29, 92, 97). The Fred and Ginger creatures both resemble twisted organs or
muscles, and we find their parallels in the undulating, chiseled twists of the Meissonnier
candlestick with its texture of deeply detailed creases composed of several folds. The
many fleshy extrusions shown in *Tokyo Gore Police*, with their slimy, cavernous, folded,
and corrugated textures—the cancerous viral key tumor, for example, or the fleshy
bulbous appendage of the phallic gun on the policeman, or the fleshy appendage hand of
the electric saw man—all correspond to the jagged shapes of the elements composing a
Cuvilliés cartouche, which are meant to be vegetal elements or *rocallle* corals and stones
(figs. 45, 65, 98-101, 104). With their deep creases and folds, creating shadows and areas
of convex light, these fleshy extrusions also resemble the detailed ends of Cuvilliés’
*Dessins d’agraffes*, which are meant to be the ends of either frames or boiserie ornaments
(fig. 94). These creases also echo those found in the dresses of the De Troy painting
*Reading from Molière* or on the Meissonnier bracket (figs. 58, 93). Furthermore, the
bumpy details of inflated balloon-like skin on the woman-chair in *Tokyo Gore Police* are
similar to the Lajoüé cartouche, with its myriad details and its central, inflated cartouche
shape (figs. 42, 100). The endless curves and counter-curves of the blisters on the chair
also create the same space as do the counter linear curves found in several *morceaux de
fantasies* by Lajoüé (figs. 35, 59). In *Videodrome*, we find that the hallucinogenic tape,
with its swirls and bulbous texture, is one of many instances that echo the swirls found in a *morceau de fantasie* by Lajoüe (fig. 102). We also notice corresponding elements between the videotape and the swirls of ornaments in the Dangé *Cabinet*, the curly ends of the Babel *Study for a Cartouche*, or the deep creases and swirls of the foliage in the Meissonnier bracket (figs. 92-93, 102-103). Not only are the forms similar between the Dangé *Cabinet* ornaments and those of the videotape, but so too are the colors: the gradation from dark to light of the tape’s fleshy tones echoes the coloring of the Dangé ornaments.

It is in the pod-playing console of *eXistenZ*, however, that we find an overwhelming number of visual similarities with *rocaille* forms. We notice that the deep undulous concave ponds that constitute the shape of the pod create the same effect as the space in the *morceau de fantasie* fountain by Meissonnier. Both have ‘c’-shaped shadowy, recessive areas, while other areas bulge outwards in opposition to each other (figs. 10, 105). All surfaces seem to be undulating, filled with holes and undisclosed spaces within folds, which can be viewed through the gaps. The pod’s protrusions, meant to reference mammalian breasts, are echoed in the furling ends of the ‘c’ ornaments in the print. The umbicord, meant as a wire between the pod and the gamer, is also placed so as to create undulating shapes and curls, furthering the analogy between the two spaces by accentuating the number of curves and counter-curves (fig. 106). The pod’s features also resemble the shapes of the ornaments in the Dangé *Cabinet*, not only on account of their pinkish, fleshy variations in coloring but also because they present the same undulating swirls and deep pockets of reflecting wave-like shapes (fig. 103). It is this constant contrast of convex and concave shapes is a determining feature of both. The space the
pod occupies and creates in this particular film frame is similar to the space formed by
the ornaments on the ceiling of the Small Bedroom of the Princess in Soubise. These both
have swirling arabesque shapes of different depths, crisscrossed by passing twirling
strands of growths—in one case the umbicord and in the other the vegetal shoots (figs.
87, 106). There is also a marked resemblance between the pod and its cord and the
Meissonnier wall bracket (figs. 93, 106). Both have deep creases and create different
levels of pockets, while the lines curl in opposite directions and the ends refold onto
themselves. Such movement is also found in the micro pod that is inserted inside the
bodies of both Pikul and Allegra (fig. 107). Its shape is the exact shape of the upwards ‘c’
at the top of the upper-end of Meissonnier’s bracket (fig. 93). It is also the same shape as
all the ‘c’-shaped ornaments in the Lajoüe Morceaux de fantasies discussed above, or the
undulating ‘c’-shape of the bulging ornaments that make the shelves of the Cabinet des
livres at hôtel Soubise (figs. 34-36, 59, 107-108).

The pod that becomes sick also evokes striking connotations of the rocaille
ornament in a Cuvilliés morceau de fantasie (figs. 104, 109). Both are incongruous
shapes of double ovoid form with surfaces made of intricate details of different depths,
which both recede and protrude and result in creases and folds that create deep shadows
and light surface areas. It is, however, due to the pod’s asymmetrical and poly-edged
shape that the similarities are most striking. We can also draw a comparison with another
Cuvilliés work, the frontispiece for his Neu Inventierte (figs. 109-110). The cartouche-
like shape in the frontispiece offers bits and ends of shoots that are similar to waves
furling back onto themselves in a serpentine manner. The sick pod’s purple and
protruding edges echo this movement. The tonal qualities of both also range from
highlights of bulbous shapes to dark shadowy cavities created by folds and creases. In this manner, both textured materialities indicate movement. Without going into further detail, it should nevertheless be noted that the sick pod’s form is also similar to that of Meissonnier’s wall bracket, Babel’s *Study for a Cartouche*, and the ceiling ornaments of the Princess’s *Small Bedroom* at Soubise (figs. 87, 92-93).

We find additional similarities when considering the sick pod’s entrails shown on the operating table. Dissected and opened up into gruesome bits and pieces, the pod displays an array of unfamiliar fleshy organic details. Again a resemblance can be found in the Cuvilliés title page for his *Neu Inventierte* (figs. 110-111). While the elements in this cartouche have been placed within a reasonable distance from each other, allowing the viewer to distinguish their individuality, the overall effect, when one takes the whole into account, is an indistinguishable mass of small details spread in every direction and seemingly lacking any pattern or logic. The same effect is felt when we look at the bowels of the pod. Organs, or organic game console components in this case, are shown without order or discernable logic. The disheveled, chaotic effect of the placement of *rocaille* ornaments within an ensemble, such as in Lajoüe’s *morceaux de fantasies* or his vase compositions, or in the wall ornaments of the *Salon du Prince* at Soubise, echoes the disarray of details and shapes revealed whenever entrails or insides are shown, such as those of the harvested amphibians in *eXistenZ* (figs. 32-36, 59, 112).

This plethora of examples demonstrates how body-horror’s materiality, whether animal, marine, vegetal, or bodily-derived, is organic in nature, much like the overwhelming majority of *rocaille* ornaments. It is of no consequence whether we can identify the origin of shapes as being human or animal in one realm, or vegetal in
another, since in all cases the forms and shapes drift from their origins to become similar organic derivatives. Moreover, since both these materialities deviate from an original significance, we find them to be further compatible in that both can be qualified as unknowns.

I have discussed how *rocaille* ornaments are largely organic, abstract, and unknown derivatives, and that, even when we *can* identify them as certain types of exotic animals or plants, the exoticism of the subject itself is an indication of its little-known identity. I also demonstrated that as *informe* performers, *rocaille* shapes are also fundamentally unclassifiable. This is another trait shared by both the contemporary heterogeneous organic detail and *rocaille* ornaments. This unknown aspect arises in these films from the difficulty, as with *rocaille*, to identify or classify with any certainty the heterogeneous organic details shown. Indeed, we may know that the bowels of humans are shown, that these are entrails or this is swelling skin, but the visual artifact shown is still an unknown. For instance, we do not know what lies inside the *eXistenZ* gamepod, what exactly the membranes of the bone-gun are for, or what are the lumps on the woman-chair in *Tokyo Gore Police* (figs. 86, 100, 111). In all cases we are shown visual data that we cannot classify: we cannot determine the function or role of this data within the whole of its ensemble. Although the very act of classifying and explaining such materiality defies and nullifies to some degree the nature of its unknown aspect, I have nevertheless chosen to identify four types of these unknown aspects. First, we often encounter a semantic unknown when the subject matter is a mysterious creature, as in *Alien* or *The Thing*. Second, as a sub-category of the semantic unknown, there is the unknown assemblage. This is an amalgam created of different parts which may be
recognizable but which together form a chimeric whole that is unclassifiable. Third is a proliferation of visual material data, which upon close inspection become absolutely unidentifiable abstract components, seemingly without purpose or function. Last, there is a form of contemporary *papillotage*, which creates visual abstract zones by the reflection of light on materiality, blocking the viewers’ gaze and preventing them from fully understanding the visual data presented.

The semantic unknown is present when there is a general lack of understanding of the narrative subject matter. This is the case when we are faced with the exotic signified, such as creatures originating from outside the bounds of knowledge. For example, the character Dren in *Splice* is a laboratory creature composed of different genes and whose properties and qualities are unknown to its scientist makers (fig. 67). In the film, the creature is first referred to as an ‘it’ and given a subject number. This reference changes to a “she” and it is given a name when “she” gains some degree of identity once her sex is determined to be female. However, the film ends with the revelation that the creature remains strange and unidentifiable since, as it grows, it changes sex and acquires wings (fig. 113). Similarly to *Alien*, the title of *The Thing* also refers to an unknown and unspecified subject. The extraterrestrial being in *The Thing* is first encountered when an American scientific team goes to a Norwegian scientific camp and discovers burnt creatures, which they bring back to their camp to examine. Copper then exclaims: “Is that a man in there, or something?”

The dialogue that follows proves the unknown nature of the subject under observation. The scientist cannot determine what exactly it is: a man, part man? Mac, the protagonist, calls it “this thing” (fig. 114). Like the alien creature in

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Alien, the ‘thing’ also lacks an attributable origin. It is conjectured to be from outer space, beyond any known territory of the universe, and it is for this reason, Mac concludes, that it must be different from “us.” Thus the creatures in both films are each thought to be of exotic and undetermined origin and semantically unknowable.

Such is also the case with the serial killers, named engineers, in Tokyo Gore Police. As the main character Ruka narrates, the engineers’ purpose and origins are unknown. Similarly, in District 9, fictional experts explain in mockumentary fashion that not much is known of the alien “Prawns.” As the experts recount, it was never known where the Prawns came from or what exactly they wanted. Interviews reveal that experts could only speculate that the aliens must have had an accident and wanted assistance. In Videodrome, the cause of the transformation of the main character, Max, and the source of the many heterogeneous organic details, is not a creature per se but a signal. For much of the film, Max tries to capture and understand from where it originates. Once exposed to the signal he then attempts to uncover its nature. Like every other semantic unknown in the other films, the signal’s source cannot be pinpointed. In Planet Terror, the semantic unknown, like the videodrome signal, is an invisible virus transmitted by a green gas and that causes people to turn into zombies. Finally, in eXistenZ, the purpose of the game itself is the unclear element, and in order to understand the game and the sickness that has assailed the pod, Allegra and Pikul must play the game eXistenZ.

In most of these films, therefore, we are shown creatures that are unidentifiable and undecipherable, either because they are from unknown exotic origins (Alien, The Thing, District 9), because they have lost any origins (Splice, eXistenZ, Tokyo Gore Police), or because they are the effect of some invisible and unknown third party
(Videodrome, Planet Terror). The result is an array of beings and things we cannot identify, such as the sick pod lying in the pond and the two-headed dragon creature in eXistenZ, the monstrous swollen and blistering former army man in Planet Terror, or the multiple creatures, such as the human-headed spider, in The Thing (figs. 70, 76-77, 115-116). These creatures are semantically unknown, just like the many exotic creatures, and oftentimes mythical ones, such as the phoenix or dragon, of the rocaille lexicon, or the various unidentifiable organic shapes the ornaments take.

A sub-category of the semantic unknown is the re-assembled patchwork, which is the result of the juxtaposition of various parts to create an assemblage. This is a merger of sometimes identifiable parts that, once juxtaposed, form a chimeric whole, that is often a new and uncategorizable formation. Such is the case in The Thing with the human-headed spider, the worm-like human-headed creature, or the wolf-dog monster (figs. 76, 116-117). I have already mentioned the example of Dren in Splice, who has a woman’s body (and later a man’s) combined with a tail and wings (figs. 113). In Tokyo Gore Police we are almost always shown only assembled characters, such as the crocodile-woman, the snail-woman, the woman-chair, the phallic gun policeman, the electric saw man, or Ruka herself, who acquires a grotesque robotic-organic eye (figs. 74-75, 99-101, 118). In many of the latter cases, these combinations are not of different known parts forming a new whole, but, as in the example of Ruka, they are of totally unidentifiable parts combined with identifiable ones. This is also something that occurs to Max and his grotesque gun-hand in Videodrome, or to Wikus in District 9, who slowly transforms into a prawn (figs. 119-120). These assembled combinations of known parts forming unknown wholes is not unlike the many rocaille firedogs, which combine humans bodies with those of animals
or ornaments (fig. 73). So too is the combination of unidentifiable parts with recognizable ones, like several of the Mondon and Lajoüe prints I have discussed above (figs. 25, 27, 33). In *Le Rendez-vous* the bodies of the protagonists are partly hidden from view and are truncated by the unidentifiable ornaments (fig. 9). Together as a whole, they form a weirdly monstrous agglomeration that is also uncategorizable.

It is, however, in the organic and fleshy details I have enumerated, which compose many of these assemblages, that the visual data, its function, and its origin are often least known and difficult to label with certainty. This unknown nature is especially similar to the *rocaille* organic abstract derivatives. These visual instances are shown purposefully in close-ups and as such are abstracted from any general context that might lend them a signifying framework. Often, it is the insides of things that are shown, or the insides are literally exteriorized. We are shown folds, crevices, bulbous, blistering shapes, liquid surfaces, flaps, and ridges. These parts act as “noise” in the flow of signifying information. Since we cannot really identify what we see, or attribute a specific function or categorization to these innumerable details, their presence contributes to rendering a general unknown aspect. This is illustrated in the bulbous blisters of the woman-chair or the folds and re-folds of the phallic gun on the policeman in *Tokyo Gore Police*, which are shown as extreme close-ups, with the result that their complex materialities becomes completely unknown surfaces (figs. 100-101). Extreme close-up sequences of chaotic organic matter are also shown several times in *The Thing* and *Tokyo Gore Police* (figs. 121-123). These shots fill the frame of the film with such total decontextualized masses of crevasses, flaps, hollows, nooks, lumps, and globular textures, that these elements become completely indeterminate and, consequently, only contribute to furthering the
semantic mystery of their source, which in *The Thing* is the alien and in *Tokyo Gore Police* the cancerous key. This is also the case with the close-up shots of the baby prawn-making shack in *District 9*, which at first show a mayhem of wiring, tubes, and organic matter. The film then shows extreme close-ups of this materiality, which subsequently becomes utterly meaningless and abstract, not only because it is at this point devoid of any significant narrative context, but because it shows parts and shapes that are unrecognizable, except for the fact that these are probably organic as a result of their glistening mucous textures and non-linear form (fig. 124). Moreover, the alien face-hugger in *Alien*, the dissected pod in *eXistenZ*, and the examined body of James Ballard in *Crash* all exhibit incomprehensible insides, while in other films, the subjects are probed or explode to reveal their insides (figs. 80, 90, 111). This is the case when the faces and bodies of people explode in *Planet Terror*, when Fred and Ginger explode in *Splice*, when the television screen in *Videodrome* explodes body parts and flesh, or the when body of the android in *Alien* lies open and twitching (figs. 96, 125-126). In all these cases the heterogeneous organic details, like organic *rocaille* ornaments, not only exhibit organic matter in detail but also display their unknown nature.

The last aspect that contributes to creating an unknown character for this contemporary materiality is its incorporation of small moments of *papillotage*. I borrow this term from the eighteenth century, and its later articulation by art historians of the period, and use the sense given to it by Mary D. Sherriff: “a technique that keeps the viewer’s eye moving over the surface of an image or object.” In the context of eighteenth-century metalwork (*orfèvrerie*), Sheriff describes the effect of *papillotage* on the gleaming metals as “highlighted here and there with light reflections dispersed over

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the pictorial field, creating an effect of *papillotage.*"\(^{262}\) This effect of light reflecting off materials in a flickering manner is meant to refer to shimmering butterfly wings, which flutter here and there, catching the light as they go.\(^{263}\) We can observe this effect in the paintings by De Troy depicting gallant subjects, such as *The Declaration of Love* (1724) and *Dame à sa toilette recevant un cavalier* (1734), (figs. 41, 127). In both paintings we see the background *boiserie* ornaments highlighted with small, sharp touches of light, as are the metalwork and *chinoiserie* in the corner shelves of the *Dame à sa toilette.* Just like *rocaille* gilded ornaments or metalwork, the contemporary heterogeneous organic materiality is also often highlighted by small flickering touches of light. Such moments are seen over and over again in the close-up shots of matter in *The Thing, Videodrome* or *Tokyo Gore Police* (figs. 100-102, 114, 119, 121-122). In *The Thing,* we see light glimmering off the shiny and slimy surface of the monster’s carcass lying on the examination table. The same specks of light sparkle off the Videodrome videotape or Max’s gun-hand (figs. 102, 114, 128). This visual *rocaille* effect is used to help further block the viewer’s gaze from perusing the objects shown. The light specks thus become infinitesimally small areas of abstract data that arrest any penetrating gaze and instead reflect it back. Although we are shown insides or details of things, which in theory should reveal their composition or constitution and enable the viewer to understand the subject viewed, such a visual trick in effect blocks the knowing gaze.

In *Planet Terror,* this contemporary effect of *papillotage* takes on extreme forms, merging with moments of bulbous heterogeneous details, only for the two to become one and the same, and ultimately attacking the form and narrative of the film. During the

\(^{262}\) Ibid., 159.
\(^{263}\) On the butterfly effect see Yonan, “The Wieskirche,” 5.
lovemaking scene between Cherry and Wray, the scene is suddenly interrupted by what appear to be great burn marks in the film roll, which let the light from the (fictive) projectors seep through and create gigantic *papillotage* effects (figs. 129-130). The shapes of the *papillotage* act as a blocking device preventing us from viewing the film and at the same time mimic the shapes and forms of the heterogeneous organic details, further enhancing the effect of zones of abstract unknown matter. This *papillotage* moment visually and physically transforms into *rocaille* cartouches and ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes (figs. 19, 40, 42, 45, 59).

These ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes are another salient feature of *rocaille* ornaments found in the heterogeneous organic detail. It will be recalled that these hallmark *rocaille* shapes were found throughout eighteenth-century visual culture, as in the examples of Meissonnier’s *Canapé executé pour le comte Bielenski*, where the ‘s’ shape appears in the form of the legs of the sofa, while ‘c’ shapes abound in all sizes, complementing each other in counter movements (fig. 58). The heterogeneous organic details also display curves on account of being organic matter, which in the fleshy and vegetal realm, is composed of curves. We find these specific ‘c’ and ‘s’ curves throughout all nine films discussed in this dissertation.

We find these shapes in the form of the objects themselves, such as the micro pod in *eXistenZ*, which is an exact ‘c’ shape similar to those found in the wall ornaments of the *Dangé Cabinet* or the *Cabinet des Livres* (figs. 103, 107-108). The imprinting tongues of Fred and Ginger in *Splice* are also literally curves that make both ‘s’ and ‘c’ shapes, similar to those of the Meissonnier wall bracket (figs. 85, 93). We find these forms most frequently in the close-up details of the body appendages in *Tokyo Gore Police*, such as
in the myriad little curves and counter-curves created by the body and the sinuous and bulging flesh of the crocodile-woman (figs. 74, 98-101). The same small curves also construct the form of the infected videotape in Videodrome, or the details of Gabrielle’s scar in Crash (figs. 91, 102). The general curves constituting the form of the sick pod in eXistenZ create various circular movements in different directions, similar to the amalgam of curves and counter-curves in Mondon’s morceau de fantaisie, which together also form an incoherent whole (figs. 15, 39, 109).

In certain instances the presence of the ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes is so overwhelming that they fill the entire screen and form a sort of landscape. We see this in detailed shots of bursting and ripping flesh in Tokyo Gore Polie (figs. 122-123). Other examples include the tremendous blisters invading the skins of people in Planet Terror and the burn marks on the film’s roll, all of which form invading little mounds of curving ‘c’ shapes literally taking over the surface of characters and the film alike (figs. 95-96, 129-130). In both these films the ‘c’ and ‘s’ forms compose and transform the space in the same manner as certain morceaux de fantasies by Lajoüe, in which the space is so littered with these forms that they constitute the space itself (fig. 59).

Finally, we find in eXistenZ the overwhelming presence of the umbicords and pods, which, like the ‘c’ and ‘s’ curves composing the decorative space of Meissonier’s Projet de porte d’appartement pour madame de Bezenval, interlace the space with the presence of these shapes (figs. 54, 106). The highly emphasized organic nature of the umbicords and the pods creates a constant presence of arabesques within the space of the film, acting as literal links between spaces. Furthermore, the umbicords, like the ‘c’ and
‘s’ curves of the sketches for decorative ensembles by Pineau, also act as hooks, literally linking the pods and characters physically together (figs. 131-132).

Heterogeneous organic details are mainly composed of ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes. Like the rocaille forms, the interesting quality of these shapes is that their presence deforms and contorts the general shape of the objects of which they are part. Such distortion is present on the faces of people in Planet Terror, contorted as they are by blisters (figs. 95-96). In Tokyo Gore Police, skin bulges complicate the general shape of the characters (figs. 74, 99, 118). Likewise for Max’s gun-hand in Videodrome, or the pod in eXistenZ, which becomes an extension of its user since the two are connected through the umbicord (figs. 119, 132). The result is often the transformed, deformed, and contorted overall shape of these objects, of which the contours are composed of irregular curves that create an effect of general asymmetry. Because these objects are not flat images but are filmed to show the various facets of their volumetric composition, we understand that they are not simply flat ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes, but rather that they have been twisted and squeezed to give a rendering of these shapes. Such is the case with the pod that has to be repeatedly squeezed while playing: its three-dimensional form is similar to the contortions of ornaments found at the bottom of some paneling in the prince of Soubise chambers (figs. 32, 105-106, 109). In fact, many of the rocaille drawings and etchings, as mentioned, do not represent flat forms but attempt instead to depict three-dimensional shapes that contort onto themselves in the exact manner as the contemporary heterogeneous details (figs. 24-25, 29, 31, 92).

Since such contortions create objects or characters with irregular and asymmetrical contours and a lack of formal regularity, they also make these objects and
characters difficult to comprehend, as I demonstrated with rocallle ornaments. Since we cannot discern the general shape of these, we often do not know what exactly they resemble as a whole, as is the case with the Duke of Kingston’s Tureen Set (fig. 31). In the aforementioned films, the paramount examples of this are the different corpses of the creatures in The Thing (fig. 114). Since the camera circles over the corpses, the viewer should come to an understanding of the totality of these things. Yet because these are absolutely asymmetrical, like a rocallle ornament or the Duke of Kingston’s Tureen Set, we never comprehend their full form. We are always guessing at what is not shown. Even if the camera moves slowly over the corpse, always giving us glimpses of a few more angles, nothing is ever revealed of the totality of what the thing is. By inducing a lack of pattern, symmetry, and regularity, contortions and asymmetry create a space in which viewers have difficulty grasping the space’s totality or its objects. As a result we are constantly confronted with objects whose form we cannot comprehend, which, once again, strengthens their unknown nature.

The asymmetry present in the contemporary examples occurs, as in its rocallle counterpart, both at the level of the individual parts and at that of the objects or characters. Of course, the ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes create an infinite amount of asymmetry at the detailed level of the close-ups. However, if we consider also the characters and objects themselves as small parts in the overall texture of the film, these also present lopsided asymmetrical forms, such as those found in Pineau’s drawings for wall panel decorations or Cuvilliés’s title page for his Livre de Cartouche (figs. 45, 47, 51, 110). One example is the face of Ruka in Tokyo Gore Police, which becomes asymmetrical once it acquires this organic/bionic eye (fig. 118). The face of one of the corpses in The Thing is also a good
example of a distorted asymmetry (fig. 133). In part, this is due to the overwhelming
presence in many of the films of prostheses or appendages, such as Cherry’s gun-leg in
*Planet Terror*, Max’s gun-hand in *Videodrome*, or Wikus’s prawn arm in *District 9* (figs.
119, 134-135). These not only distort but also transform the initial form of the characters
into new asymmetrical beings.

We should recall that such eighteenth-century commentators as Abbé Le Blanc
loathed asymmetry and considered it a mistake that not only vulgarized its objects but
also rendered these ugly and monstrous: “Rien n’est plus monstrueux, comme le
remarque Horace, que de marier ensemble des Étres d’une nature opposée; c’est
cependant ce que grand nombre de nos Artistes se font aujourd’hui gloire de pratiquer. Ils
contrastent un Amour avec un Dragon, & un Coquillage avec une aile de Chauve-
Souris.”

It is noteworthy that in the case of the films discussed here, the typical
devices used to create effects of horrible, grotesque, or strange visual qualities are also,
like the *rocaille*, deformed shapes that become irregular and asymmetrical. A possible
reason why asymmetry and distortion create such visually strange effects in these films
may be that the resulting visual information presented to viewers cannot be properly
understood by them and classified into some form of meaningful category. The lack of
knowledge generated by such forms, therefore, may induce feelings of fear, repulsion, or,
in some instances, curiosity.

In a similar manner, the dislike for *rocaille* ornaments at
the time of their production may also have been caused not only by the fact that they defy

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265 Clifton suggests, for instance, that representations of inverted faces in art create displeasure and
sometimes even feelings of fear due to an inability to properly ‘read’ the information presented and
consequently identify and know it. See James Clifton, “The Face of a Fiend: Convulsion, Inversion, and the
hierarchies of *bon goût* and rules of proper taste, but also by their unreadable quality due to this asymmetry and distortion of shapes.

The many ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes in *rocaille* ornaments form sets of curve and counter-curve, while their contortions and asymmetry demand multiple viewing angles. Together, these factors contribute to creating the impression that there is visual movement and commotion among the *rocaille* ornaments. Since I have just argued that the contemporary heterogeneous organic detail has all of the above-listed qualities, it follows that it, too, induces visual movement when we look at the still of a film frame. However, unlike eighteenth-century static depictions or motionless objects, film can capture the actual movements of the heterogeneous details. We might even say that the contemporary version animates what its eighteenth-century counterpart insinuates but cannot explicitly activate.

Instances of blatant movement abound in these films. There are, for example, the heavy breathing videotape and the swelling television screen in *Videodrome* or the facial blisters in *Planet Terror*, which constantly bulge and deflate on the faces of the soldiers (figs. 95-96, 102, 136). The pod in *eXistenZ* can also be squeezed, petted, squirted, and, as Allegra explains, it can move of its own volition, since it is a breathing organism. In particular, we see the pods in commotion when a ceiling pan shot of the church shows them squirming in small squeezed increments while resting on the lap of the video trial volunteers. Such motion in the pods seems to put into literal action the potential animation hinted at in a cartouche by Lajoüe (fig. 42). Another example is the resemblance in texture between the contorted ornaments in a cartouche by Babel and the contorted, twisted bodies of Fred and Ginger in *Splice* (figs. 66, 92, 97). We could
imagine that, were we to inject life into the membranes of these ornaments, they too would twist and squirm like the two creatures in *Splice* or the pods in *eXistenZ.*

There are few significations discernable in *rocaille* ornaments. One is that *rocaille* ornaments point to organic and often vegetal things that appear to be in motion by growing out of and around each other. Another is that they often depict animals, sea life, and fantastical creatures that are all meant to be alive and also, consequently, moving. Their contemporary counterparts also show this life in transformative motion and the actual growth of such organic matter. The monsters in *The Thing* represent a constant commotion in which things are changing, transforming, moving, popping out, and growing out of each other (figs. 76, 114, 116-117, 121, 137). We can, for example, see the wolf-dog composite monster as a chimeric ensemble resembling Mondon’s *Puzza tenant son fils Horus* and Peyrotte’s *Winged Griffon on a Rocaille Bracket* composition (figs. 14, 25, 76). Both of these *rocaille* examples show a composite of ornamental and human/animal creature parts with outgrowths going in all directions. Both artists seem to have in effect captured and immortalized one moment out of a series of motions that these imaginary creatures performed. The contemporary counterpart creatures in *The Thing* show us what the action of these chimeric assemblages might have been like had they been caught on tape. The parts of the wolf-dog monster constantly move and transform, while close-ups of the ‘thing’ throughout the film show us shoots spurting from its body (fig. 137). Similarly, we can imagine how the next take from Mondon or Peyrotte’s drawing would show us all the ornamental parts in yet other directions, convulsions, and contortions than those presented in the current print.
The contemporary heterogeneous organic detail, however, is not in motion only when a creature is alive or its shape creates visual motion. There is also the viscous texture of its constitutive material. If the *rocaille* forms seem to slip and move off one another in a wave-like manner, the contemporary details in the films showcase slime or a liquid viscous texture that inhibits friction and promotes slipperiness. The forms are constantly represented as being in a liquid state, implying a state of fluctuating motion. We see this in the bone-gun as it is being reconstructed out of the food plate at the Chinese restaurant in *eXistenZ,* in the slime of the face-hugger as it bursts out of its egg in *Alien,* in the slimy surface of the organic matter of the appendages in *Tokyo Gore Police,* or in the dripping slime that envelopes the gun-hand and the videotape in *Videodrome* (figs. 86, 88, 99-102, 138). This slimy texture in effect expresses the slippery movement of the *rocaille* curves and counter-curves we encounter so often in the works of Meissonnier (figs. 49-50, 54, 58). It is due to these glistening fluids shown in strong light and dark contrasts that the bronze-like *papillotage* effects of *rocaille* ornaments are achieved in the contemporary films. *Papillotage* not only serves to block from view what is shown but, by indicating a slimy texture, it also signifies the slipperiness of motion. As such, the contemporary *papillotage* functions in much the same manner as that of the *rocaille:* the flickering commotion of its reflective light spots creates an effect of visual movement.

There is one last item in the contemporary films that indicates to the viewer that things are in motion. The sounds emanating from many of the heterogeneous details indicate that something, like the pod, is being probed, squished, or squeezed. The sounds produced by the face-hugger about to burst out of the egg in *Alien* or by the transforming
creatures in *The Thing* are all signifying sounds, indicative of material squirting, slipping, squirming, squishing, pressure, or transformation. Within the films these sounds serve to indicate the commotion at hand.

Heterogeneous organic shapes not only resemble the form and motion of *rocallle* ornaments, they also assemble together to form bigger sets, such as a cartouche or *morceau de fantasie*, similar in manner to the extreme forms of *rocallle* I discussed earlier. I have explained how the *rocallle* cartouche can be an assembly of small parts united to form a whole, as are the cartouches of Babel, and that the center of this whole is an empty space often of ovoid shape, such as a figure eight or a pear. Let us also recall that a cartouche can simply represent the result of the space inside the assembly, which then becomes an asymmetrical array of various edges and peninsulas, such as the cartouches by Cuvilliés (figs. 45, 110). It is, however, not only a negative space that can be formed by this assembly. A cartouche can also be an actual form that seems organ-like in nature, as the shading on its sides can give it some form of volume, such as in the examples of Babel, Lajoüe, Cuvilliés and Mondon. (figs. 39-40, 42, 45). As noted earlier, the tender heart in this type of cartouche often seems to have been left bare. In sum, a cartouche has a heterogeneous composition and can be anything onto which something can be inscribed, such as the examples of Oppenord (fig. 78). These various examples are united by their desire to allow for a surface to be the support for some kind of inscription or message. Lastly, it is important to note that the function of the cartouche was to be a gateway to signification, but that its medium often became the message, the very center of the work and subject matter itself without necessarily entailing signification.
There are several parallels between such rocaille cartouches and these contemporary examples of heterogeneous organic detail. Based entirely on visual resemblance, a noteworthy example is a camera shot of one of the characters in \textit{Alien} walking inside the Alien spaceship. The organic walls that constitute the ship undulate in such a way as to become a sort of archway framing the empty space into that of the interior ovoid negative space of a cartouche, such as this particular one by Babel (figs. 139-140). One can also argue that the various parts of the dissected amphibian on the operating table in \textit{eXistenZ} forms a cartouche (fig. 112). Though the parts here are not necessarily touching each other, these still form a set. Since a cartouche is formed by the interaction of different parts together to form a greater whole, we can also consider the interaction of the amphibian’s dissected parts. Regardless of whether these parts are literally touching or not, they do form a whole since there are connections between the parts. The various bits scattered here and there on the table are visually connected by means of their similar forms, texture, and appearance, such as their bloody viscosity and the flutter of the \textit{papillotage} specks of light. The amphibian parts connect in the same manner as curves and counter-curves in rocaille space. The connections built between these heterogeneous bits of organic matter form a laxly connective whole, a type of loose and visually flexible cartouche. This cartouche becomes a tableau laid out on the dissecting table for the delectation of the voyeuristic viewer, in the same manner that we might marvel at the arrangement of elements in Cuvilliés’s work (fig. 110). And as in Cuvilliés’s cartouche, the negative space formed in its loose interior is made of ragged edges and coastal peninsulas. In short it is an asymmetrical polymorphous space.
We also find elements corresponding to the kind of *rocaille* cartouche that presents at its center an empty, almost animated organ. The open egg in *Alien* resembles the tender, fleshy, pink center of the cartouche-like shape from the *Dangé Cabinet*, since both seem to have unfolding petal-like shells surrounding their centers (figs. 62, 88). While the center of the alien egg seems to have a more uneven texture due to the seemingly white cartilage or tendons coursing through its surface, a close-up of the hôtel Dangé *Cabinet*’s inverted pear-shaped cartouche also reveals an uneven surface. Another such cartouche-organ, also in *Alien*, is the face-hugger. Since both the face-hugger and another of Cuvilliés’s cartouches have flopping centers with tendrils on their sides, it could easily be imagined that it is Cuvilliés’s cartouche being examined (figs. 80, 110). Yet another glaring example is the pod from *eXistenZ*. From its healthy form to its sick form, it resembles various cartouches. We can compare the sick pod with that of the Lajoüe or Cuvilliés cartouches, since both have contorted ovoid shapes and several layers of flapping protruding skin (figs. 42, 109-110). Lastly, we find several other smaller occurrences in *Planet Terror*, such as the zombie bite wounds on the arm of a patient in the hospital or the spilled jar of testicles (figs. 141-142).

The pod, however, is not only formally similar to the cartouche; like the cartouche, it is also meant to act as a gateway to signification. Here, similar to the game console, the pod is meant to be a transporter or conduit, bringing the player to the space of the virtual game named *eXistenZ*. However, as Pikul complains, we do not know the point of this particular game or whether one is even playing the game, since it is hard to distinguish between real life and the virtual reality of the game space. *eXistenZ* is a game that mimics real life to the point that the architecture in its game space is the same as that
in real life, and so players only know with difficulty whether they are really playing or not. We as viewers are never aware of a specific moment in the film when the ‘real life’ presented in the film is distinguished from the ‘virtual’ game space. It is only revealed at the end of the film that the whole story was set in the virtual reality of the game and the game itself. What serve instead as clues for the viewer to indicate that this is a ‘game’ space are those things which are presented to the viewer as singular, irregular, and intriguing, such as the game console itself or the other heterogeneous organic instances of the amphibians or the bone-gun. This transporting machine, therefore, meant to act as a bridge between player and game, becomes, as it is progressively infected, the subject and the whole purpose of the game due to its unknown and strange shape. Just as the empty beating organ of the cartouche becomes the whole purpose of a cartouche, the gamepod becomes the center and subject in and of itself. In other words, as in a rocaille cartouche, the mode of presentation is privileged and becomes central over the semantic mode.

Another noteworthy instance of reversal between periphery and center is the case of the burn marks on the film roll in Planet Terror (figs. 129-130). Not only are they similar in shape as those of the central organ-like cartouche shape of Mondon’s prints, but they also act as anti-linear connecting devices (fig. 39). They interrupt the linear narrative sequence of the film while bringing viewers to an altogether different sequence of events, which further disrupts the linear storytelling flow, all while acting as enormous cartouches filling up the screen.

The interconnections between various disparate elements can also form, besides cartouches, morceaux de fantasies. Morceaux de fantasies, as I discussed, can be many things. However, as we saw in the examples of extreme rocaille, there are three
distinctive modes of operation, which are also found in the contemporary counterparts. First, the *rocaille* elements in the *morceau de fantasies* not only come to construct the entire space depicted but also the relations between characters within the space. The characters that people the vignettes, if there are any, become part of the ensemble and are themselves ornaments within the ensemble, as they are miniaturized in stature and seem to play throughout the structures (figs. 9, 16, 39, 63-64). Although the visual parallel is not as direct as previous correlations, there are instances in these films that present the characters as becoming part of, and forming an ensemble with, a set of heterogeneous organic elements. These ensembles, however, for the most part result from the visual juxtaposition of the characters with the overwhelming presence of this organicity. An example of such visual juxtaposition is when the characters around the dissected corpses in *The Thing* become slightly belittled by the overwhelming structure of the organic elements. Their physical relationship, as in the *morceaux de fantasies*, is mediated by the presence of the organic elements (fig. 114).

Chimeric assemblage is a second mode of operation common to both the *rocaille* *morceaux de fantasies* and these films. Whether by literally depicting a chimeric monster or creating one by truncating parts of the body, such as in *Le Rendez-vous*, *morceaux de fantasie* often presented mish-mashes of extraordinary creatures merged with *rocaille* ornaments (figs. 9, 24-25). Already discussed as a type of exotic animal, the chimeric monsters presented in the films also directly correspond to this type of fantasy vignette. We can recall the crocodile-woman from *Tokyo Gore Police*, as well as several other characters from this film, and the chimeric monsters of *The Thing* (figs. 74-76, 99, 116-118). The chimeric monsters in the film examples mentioned in this chapter were created
with intention, as were the eighteenth-century prints by Mondon and Peyrotte. However, it does happen that such assemblages are also created through the act of visual juxtaposition. As viewers, however, we project a particular significance onto what we see, and therefore we negate the chimeric effect created. Let us consider, for example, the several close-up shots in eXistenZ showing truncated body parts of characters juxtaposed against gigantic heterogeneous organic details, such as part of Pikul’s hand next to the bone-gun, or Allegra’s hand next to the pod (figs. 105-107, 143-144). Although unintentionally, these juxtapositions of body parts do connect to form a larger whole, set, or ensemble where all parts work to form a type of chimeric assemblage, which might also be construed as morceaux de fantasies vignettes.

Lastly, one key aspect of morceaux de fantasies is the central position ornaments occupy within the composition. As is the case with many of the Mondon prints in which ornamental structure is of disproportionate size and becomes house, vehicle, space divider, castle, etc., ornaments can even become the subject matter of the morceau de fantasie (figs. 9, 15-18, 25, 37, 39). In the films, the props, objects, appendages, or heterogeneous details are shown in such a disproportionate manner that we become aware of and sensitive to their materiality. In eXisenZ, because both the bone-gun and the gamepod are shown again and again in close-ups, this materiality becomes a central feature of the narrative and visual surface of the films (figs. 86, 105-107, 109, 143-144). Like the centrality of the informe rocaille ornaments in morceaux de fantasies, the heterogeneous matter in these films becomes central. It can be stated, therefore, that in certain frames, the manner in which the heterogeneous organic details are filmed creates
relations between parts that mimic the modes of relation between the parts of a rocaille cartouche or morceau de fantasie.

2.3: A Viral Analogy

2.3.1: Analogies of Illness and Contagion

I have argued how similar in form and disposition the rocaille ornaments and heterogeneous organic details are. In Chapter One, I explained how these visual aspects and dispositions operate like the Bataillesque informe. The question now becomes whether the theoretical implications of such forms are the same for both rocaille and contemporary ones. I propose to investigate the operations of the contemporary heterogeneous organic details by considering these through the theme of the virus. The organic details present in these films express certain narrative themes, while simultaneously generating them; one such theme is that of the infesting disease, or virus, and it is one which links most of the films. Not coincidentally, the virus is also a concept that has been used to describe the thoughts of Bataille and Derrida.266 Benjamin Noys states that “Bataille’s achievement is to create an unstable discourse which communicates this possibility of matter as difference, and to provide a culture medium to carry the contagion of base matter, in the same way that a virus or a bacteria are grown and developed Bataille is developing an infectious thought.”267 Noys is comparing Bataille’s notion of the actions of base matter to that of a virus. If we accept Bois’s premise that

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266 Royle writes that the concept of the supplement in Derrida’s work “is like a virus. It infects everything. ‘The virulence of this concept,’ Derrida declares, is such that it is impossible ‘to arrest it, domesticate it, tame it...’ As Derrida says elsewhere: ‘the virus will have been the only object of my work.’” Royle further explains that Derrida perceived the work of deconstruction as viral. Royle, Jacques Derrida, 50.

informe is the most outward instance of base materialism, or, in other words, the action of base matter, and if we consider that base materialism imitates the behavior of a virus, then we shall soon see how the virus becomes the perfect analogy for understanding the potential informe operations of organic details.²⁶⁸

Base matter, for Bataille, is a term meant to lower, declassify, and debase things from an ideal conceptualization.²⁶⁹ It is a term meant to encompass everything that has not been unified under a type of defined matter. Bois and Krauss explain the lowering action of base materialism as “the job of de-class(ify)ing, which is to say, simultaneously lowering and liberating from all ontological prisms, from any ‘devoir être’ (role model). It is principally a matter of de-classing matter, of extracting it from the philosophical clutches of classical materialism, which is nothing but idealism in disguise […].”²⁷⁰ The actions of base materialism can be understood as liberating and unleashing matter from the bounds of any formal comprehensive unity. If we refer back to what I have proposed as a definition for informe, we see how informe is an instance of base matter in action. However, instead of confining base materialism to a hierarchical binary opposition between it and ideal matter, I propose to describe base matter as what is undefined and therefore unknown. Base matter remains in a dynamic of opposition, however, instead of being trapped in a higher-to-lower binary movement, I see it in opposition to that which is defined. Henceforth, the threat posed by base matter is no longer the risk of being degraded from an ideal position but rather the transformation from a known position to an unknown one.

²⁶⁸ Bois and Krauss, Formless, 53
²⁷⁰ Bois and Krauss, Formless, 53.
The films under study show many instances of organic matter in close-up, so that it fills the entire screen, precluding any defining context that might help to determine what is viewed in that moment. Such instances have already been considered in *Tokyo Gore Police* and *The Thing*, as well as in the many examples of explosive organic parts in *Videodrome* and *Splice* (figs. 121-124). When scrutinized in detail, such heterogenous organic materiality is unknown and can therefore be considered base matter. In terms of Bataille’s notion that base material has a lowering action, this heterogeneous material can indeed lower ideals. Specifically, it lowers the concept of a confined, perfectly preserved, and sanctified body, moving from its smooth contained surface to one filled with excretions and protuberances. Base matter in these films corrupts the initial body to such degrees that it is transformed. This is the case when it transforms characters of *Tokyo Gore Police* from confined bodies and identities to a liberated and uncontrollable heterogeneity. We can even go so far as to consider the flesh of the zombies from *Planet Terror* as base material corrupting the very roll of the film and acting as a transforming/deteriorating agent on and in the main linear narrative structure of the film. The burn marks on the fictive reel of *Planet Terror* can also be considered base material in action, transforming and short circuiting the narrative itself, like a *rocaille* ornament that becomes asymmetrical (figs. 130-131).²⁷¹

The virus and its connotations—such as contagion, plague, infestation, and illness—have been used as metaphors to beleaguer some concept or other, interpret a

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²⁷¹ Allan Cameron explains that to find technological and communications equipment to be malfunctioning in zombie films is a common theme to the genre. He argues that the engagement between media and the zombie infestation and the ensuing apocalypse is extended to the actual materiality of the recording of the film. See Allan Cameron, “Zombie Media: Transmission, Reproduction, and the Digital Dead,” *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 67-68.
cultural phenomenon, or understand socio-historical events.\textsuperscript{272} One famous stand against
the use of illness as metaphorical language is Susan Sontag’s \textit{Illness as Metaphor}.
\textsuperscript{273} Sontag wrote her famous essay based on her own experience battling cancer in the wake
of the AIDS epidemic. She realized that using illness as a metaphor was itself a diseased
form of writing.\textsuperscript{274} For Sontag, the “pernicious influence of disease metaphors” skewed
the illness experience of cancer patients because it “rendered the illness disgraceful.”\textsuperscript{275}
Sontag’s point was that cancer patients felt ostracized because they associated themselves
with such metaphors and so feared cancer even further, refusing to seek better treatments.
Sontag believed that the misuse of illness as a metaphor literally killed sufferers, and so
advised to suppress such metaphors completely.\textsuperscript{276} Sontag’s strong admonishments
against the use of illness language as metaphors have, however, been criticized. Cynthia
Davis explains how Sontag suggested gangrene as a more adequate, none-threatening
metaphor. Davis then argues that Ernest Hemingway used gangrene in just as corrosive a
manner as Sontag complained illness was being used.\textsuperscript{277} This highlights how the dangers
of metaphorical language are not only tied to the dangers of the concept itself, such as
illness, but also to the use made of that concept. Sontag is right to decry the exploitation
of cancer and illnesses in general as degrading metaphors that further tarnish the
sufferer’s plight. It can marginalize groups in ways similar to what was done in the

\textsuperscript{272} Pernick explains that the origins of the word contagion come from the latin ‘touching’. It has been
understood historically as something communicable between liquids, humans, objects, and as a spread. A
contagion was not something that was well understood since it could be halted by putting people in
quarantine. See Martin S. Pernick, “Contagion and Culture,” \textit{American Literary History} 14, no. 4 (winter
2002): 858-859. For a retrospective look at the meanings of contagion see Pernick, “Contagion and
Culture,” 858-865.
Barbara Clow, “Who’s Afraid of Susan Sontag? Or, the Myths and Metaphors of Cancer Reconsidered,”
\textsuperscript{275} Clow, “Who’s Afraid of Susan Sontag?,” 297.
\textsuperscript{276} Davis, “Contagion as Metaphor,” 835.
1920’s and 1930’s to European Jews “or Blacks and gays in American culture.”

However, Clow argues that Sontag’s assertions are not fully persuasive, since these are “substantiated mainly by her personal confrontation with cancer and her limited exposure to other victims of the disease.”

Sontag cautions against using diseases as metaphors because it mystifies illnesses, but the viral analogy I use is not about a precise illness, such as cancer, AIDS, or Ebola. The use of the viral concept helps me to understand a certain type of materiality and how its effects are similar to those of a viral attack. In order to discuss the cultural phenomenon of radical ornament, it is appropriate first to borrow from the lexicon of contagion and infectious diseases, since, as Pernick claims, culture itself is thought to spread contagiously.

As Pernick explains, “cultures are communicated person to person like a contagion, from the socialization of newcomers into an existing culture to the diffusion of new practices from one culture to another.” Using a viral analogy could risk belittling the impact and effects of true infections, but as stated earlier, one of the common themes throughout the selected films is literally the viral attack. I do not intend to study or analyze how plague and infection stand as metaphors in these films, nor why these tropes are re-used. Instead, my analysis seeks to uncover the materialities emerging from the work of infection in these films. By using the viral analogy as a method of investigation to understand the effects of the heterogeneous

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279 Clow, “Who’s Afraid of Susan Sontag?,” 294. Through thorough archival research Clow points out the fallacies in Sontag’s facts, and then proves it was not the case, as Sontag claims, that all cancer patients were misguided or afraid to face such diagnoses; Clow, “Who’s Afraid of Susan Sontag?,” 304.
organic details, I consider the virus from a distant, fictional point of view, where its actions and its repercussions are not as disastrous as those that would occur in real life.

Another objection to using infection analogy is that it claims to offer a seemingly objective point of view. Although I do treat the categories of the viral attack in as objective a manner as I can, I do not apply this view to understanding real-world events. While the characters in the fictions I analyze are quite literally being attacked by viruses, it is important to remember that the films are fictional accounts of viral contagions and feature loose interpretations of contagion scenarios with highly inaccurate and fictionalized aspects. To analyze the actions and effects of the viral attack in such cases is not to dismiss human suffering, but merely to consider the fiction in the form it is presented. My analysis attempts to understand what the subjects (be they character or prop) of the viral infections in the films undergo through the materiality shown.

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283 For a cautionary use of microbiological narratives that diminish the human plight factor see Catherine Francis Belling, “Microbiography and Resistance in the Human Culture Medium, Literature and Medicine 22, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 84-101.

284 Heather Schell has called germ theory the tendency of certain theorists to analyze social activities such as military expansion and political movements through the analogy of disease, but in the process, Schell claims, this removes implications such as patriarchy. Heather Schell, “The Sexist Gene: Science Fiction and the Germ Theory of History,” American Literary History 14, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 805. Using a viral analogy could be construed as being part of what Arnold Weinstein describes as plague ideology, but such ideology seeks to construe certain marginalized groups as plagues, which, though I do describe zombies as infectors, is not meant to marginalize any group. See Arnold Weinstein “Afterword: Infection as Metaphor,” 104.


286 In the following four phases of the virus I write of the subject of the virus. This can either be a person or a living, or inanimate, thing. What qualifies something to be subject of the virus, therefore, is its subjection to the virus and consequent infection by it. The infected is that which performs the actions of the viral, whereas the object is the intended infected, whether this be literally a material object (a thing) or a person. When speaking of the object of the virus, this is the objective towards which the virus engages and intends to infect. In psychoanalytical terms, the object is what is exterior to the ‘I’, located outside the person, and detached from the person. By having exterior objects to the subject, this renders the person an entity of its own, detached from the ‘mother’. To be in a world of subjects and objects implies that in this world the ‘I’ has emerged to understand the difference between itself and what is exterior to itself, a world where the ego can form. A perceived difference between subject and object implies a clear separation between interiority and exteriority. I will speak further on of the merging between the subject-object and the lack of barriers
doing so, however, by no means am I trying to diminish or make light of the plights of humans suffering from real and deadly viral attacks.

Although I use the analogy of the virus as a framework to understand the effects of the heterogeneous details, the contagious monsters of these films, as Noël Carroll claims, can also be interpreted as symbolic forms of the fantastic monster. The effects of the viral contagion, which itself is invisible, are to transform organic materiality into fantastic creatures, such as the aliens of *Alien*, the engineers in *Tokyo Gore Police*, the monsters of *the thing*, or the body transformations in *Videodrome* and *Planet Terror*. Such fantastic transformations are, for Carroll, what convey the horrific or science-fiction elements of the films. Carroll proposes to consider the fantastic monster or creature as “symbolic formations that organize conflicting themes into figures that are simultaneously attractive and repulsive.” The virus here is a monstrous figure that brings in both of the major symbolic structures elaborated by Carroll—fission and fusion. Carroll explains that in fusion “the conflicting themes are yoked together in one, spatio-temporally unified figure,” while in fission “the conflicting themes are distributed - over

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between the two. This represents an erasure of the barrier between both the infectious subject and intended to be infected object, and between the subject ‘I’ and the exterior object ‘you’ (whether ‘you’ is animate or inanimate). It is true that by adding inanimate prostheses to characters, such as a gun to Max’s hand or a machine gun to Cherry’s Leg, the characters can seem to appear as though transforming into more ‘object-like’ things. But this does not alter the fact that, once infected, they remain ‘active’, subject to the virus which is capable of spreading on. Ince discusses the formation of the ego and specifically how identification of the viewers of films is not necessarily tied to characters, but can also be to the materiality of the film itself. See Kate Ince, “Bringing Bodies Back In: For a Phenomenological and Psychoanalytic Film Criticism of Embodied Cultural Identity,” *Film-Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2011): 3. In discussing abjection Kristeva also discusses the differentiation and lack of it, in the separation between subject-object. See Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 1. On formation of the ego see Jacques Lacan, “Some Reflections on the Ego,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 24 (1953): 11-17. See also *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Alain de Mijolla (Detroit, Mich.: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), s.v. “subject.” For the formation of space between object-subject, see D.W. Winnicott, “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena—A Study of the First Not-Me Possession,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953): 89-97.

space or time - among more than one figure." We see that the virus, when embodied in
the form of the heterogeneous detail, is a moment of fusion, but, when it is invisible,
disembodied, and contaminator, it is fission. Unlike Carroll, I am not concerned with the
figure of the monster per se, but rather with moments of transformed organic materiality
and how, as we have seen, these have the capacity, with their unknown nature and within
undefined contexts, to dissociate from symbolic meaning. However, Carroll’s concept of
fusion and fission as structural modes is useful here in understanding the contagion of the
virus as a mode of fission, spreading over the span of the film and among its subjects.

Many of these films showcase stories of viral infestations, such as Planet Terror,
in which a mysterious gas infects the local population; Tokyo Gore Police concerns a
tumorous key inserted into its victims and contaminating them; Videodrome revolves
around a contagious signal; there is the sick and virus-infected pod in eXistenZ, and, in
The Thing, the alien captures its victim and transforms it into a perfect copy of its
monstrous self. It can be argued that the narratives of the four remaining films also deal
with contagion, transformation, and change. The viral contagion and its actions are thus
prevalent themes in these films and they also perfectly embody the actions of informe
base matter: like the informe, which cannot be seen since it is all action, the virus,
minuscule and imperceptible, wreaks havoc by transforming its subjects. The informe, as
we have seen, breaks unity while simultaneously creating new connections and
formations. Likewise the virus, in its various film incarnations, invades the closed unity
of its victims to transform their bodies into something entirely different. In its quest to
infect, the virus, like the informe, seeks to make new connections. Based on the
similarities between the actions of the virus and those of the informe, we can draw a

288 Carroll, “Nightmare and the Horror Film,” 19.
parallel between the two. Through such an analogy, we can understand how contemporary *informe* is viral, since it transforms its subject from its initial state into something that is uncatégorizable.

I have identified four phases that are part of the cyclical actions of the virus, which we can use to understand the actions of the *informe*. These are: stage one, “the outbreak;” stage two, “infection;” stage three, “transformation;” and stage four, “symptoms.” The designation of these stages is by no means definitive, since I am sure there are many other stages to infection and the spread of a virus. Nevertheless, the specific terminology I use to describe the four stages of the actions of the virus seems to be well suited to explain those of the *informe* heterogeneous organic detail in the films. Although I have set up the categories of the virus in a seemingly ascending order, one should note that in fact everything occurs simultaneously. It must be noted as well that the disposition of elements in the contemporary examples is not exactly the same as those of the *rocaille*. These dispositional tactics are better understood if we view these through viral operations. We can find the discussion of open systems in *rocaille* and the dissolution of the binary inside/outside lodged within stage one, “outbreak.” Visual hooks, connections, and networks are now part of the connectivity found in stage two, “infection.” Lastly, the relation of parts to whole, integrated body parts, and collapsed space are all found in stage four, “symptoms.”
2.3.2: Outbreak

The viral outbreak is first and foremost the simple breaking of a boundary. Like the *rocaille* shapes that perform *informe* actions, the viral outbreak also creates ruptures and destroys structures, bringing about a state of disorder and instability. What was contained within boundaries during the viral outbreak now becomes unleashed. As during the actions of the *informe*, the structures of reason, power, closed systems, and entities come apart. The outbreak signifies the destruction of such structures of knowledge, power, and control. The bound structures are ruptured from their confinement or definition and torn apart. A disintegration of the closed whole or unified entity ensues, while the result is the creation of heterogeneous organic detail and a chaotic state. In these films, the outbreak occurs both at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, the films present the outbreak phase literally, with ruptured bodies and physical tears. This is the same attack brought about by the *informe* on defined forms. At the macro level of the outbreak, we witness the implications of the micro tears upon structures. In other words, during the viral outbreak there occurs an explosive state which creates, particularly in these films, three types of structural ruptures: the rupture of closed unified identities, the dissolve of the inside/outside divide, and the collapse of structures of state, science, and society.

The heterogeneous organic details presented in these films are released through the literal rupture of the material boundaries composing the body or organic entity. We see over and over again sequences showing us tearing, exploding, and rupturing of both flesh and organic material. Jerslve qualifies this boundless body as one “excessively open
and lacking outlines, it is an uncoordinated and undifferentiated mass of limbs and bowels.” 289 This explosive state is the result of the pressures of the virus upon the defined form. In *Tokyo Gore Police* Ruka’s arm is torn apart in order for the tumorous key to be inserted in her (fig. 146). In *Alien*, Kane’s chest bursts outwards on the table as the alien releases itself from his body; it then runs away to wreak havoc and transform the ship (fig. 147). In *District 9*, Wikus’s flesh is constantly torn as he transforms into a prawn, while in *Planet Terror* we are shown the constant bursting flesh of zombies and soldiers (figs. 95, 115, 120, 135, 142). Added to this, although *Crash* never shows the car’s metal tearing and bruising the flesh of its passengers, we do see the results of such tears upon the passengers (figs. 90-91). In *The Thing*, we are continually shown flesh transforming, twisting, and breaking free of its original definition (figs. 76, 133-137). During such transformation scenes in *The Thing*, the surrounding noises are also indicative of breakage; the sounds of popping and cracking wood signal the total shattering of the victim’s bone structure. And, once the victim is transformed into the wolf-dog, like the virus that it is, the creature then breaks free of the kennel to spread further.

*Splice* presents another literal outbreak. Director Vincenzo Natali shows us the rupturing of the BETI placenta tank out of which Dren emerges, while at the same time spilling out a ton of water, natal fluids, and organic flesh (fig. 148). Another such release in *Splice* is the mutual massacre of the creatures Fred and Ginger, when their completely informe shapes merge and attack each other, resulting in a literal blood bath that explodes out of the container and spills flesh, parts, and liquids onto the onlooking crowd (fig. 149). One can also interpret the merging of the genetic data in *Splice* as a brewing of

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forces that cannot be contained within defining social structures, such as scientific discourse and study.

Lastly, David Cronenberg repeatedly shows us the boundaries of the body being ripped apart as flesh is transpierced in both *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*. I am not alone in commenting on Cronenberg’s outbreak of body boundaries. Steven Shaviro in *The Cinematic Body* comments on Cronenberg’s use of the body and flesh:

The polymorphousness of living tissue has the capacity to traverse all boundaries, to undo the rigidities of organic function and symbolic articulation. New arrangements of the flesh break down traditional binary oppositions between mind and matter, image and object, self and other, inside and outside, male and female, nature and culture, human and inhuman, organic and mechanical.290

Indeed, in *Videodrome*, the flesh of Barry Convex, the antagonist of the story, slowly opens up and explodes when Max shoots him (fig. 151). Max’s own body also becomes a videotape player and breaks apart, revealing what appears to be a vaginal opening in the middle of his torso, absorbing the organic tape and gun (fig. 150). The closed boundary of the body is also burst open in *eXistenZ*, when Pikul’s lower back is fitted with a “bio-port” in order to connect to the umbicord linking him to the gamepod (fig. 152).291

Pikul’s reticence in opening to others the boundaries of his unified and ‘untouched’ body is vigorously expressed a few times in the film when he tells Allegra: “I have this phobia about having my body penetrated surgically.”292

These corporeal ruptures ultimately translate into the destruction and explosion of a well-defined self identity. One example is the transpiercing of Wikus’s flesh, which is

291 For Jerslev, the organ body erases the demarcations in gender and sexuality and transforms the body into one that is boundless in both genders. See Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 19.
292 Jude Law, “It’s my Pink Fone,” *eXistenZ*, directed by David Cronenberg (1999, Roxkwood Conservation Area, Ontario, Alliance Atlantis Communications, 1999), DVD.
indicative of the real transformation of his identity from a human into an unknown human-prawn mixture. Such species contaminations and transgressions are also what the authorities in Johannesburg fear, as explained at the beginning of the film. The destruction of a well-defined self also occurs in Alien when the face-hugger merges and seeds with Kane. His erupting body becomes the representation of his transformation into the alien, which comes out of him. Once identity is subjected to a viral outbreak, as with the actions of the informe, it is no longer a closed unity or defined concept. When identity is no longer rigid, following the ruptures caused by the outbreak, it becomes fluid and can represent the merger of self with other, as in The Thing, or, ultimately, of becoming other, as in Alien or District 9.

We can understand how this ‘liquification’ of identity is possible when we consider Didier Anzieu’s psychoanalytic concept of the skin-ego. The skin-ego has several functions. It asserts the division between the interior of the body and the outside environment; it keeps the outside out and the insides in while allowing communication between the two.\textsuperscript{293} The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis defines the skin-ego as the “interface between inside and outside, and is the foundation of the container/contained relationship.”\textsuperscript{294} The skin-ego is also, according to Anzieu, where


\textsuperscript{294} International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, ed. Alain de Mijolla (Detroit, Mich.: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), s.v. “skin ego.”
and how the ego forms and how we may obtain a sense of individual self.\textsuperscript{295} Formed through the tactile interactions that we have as small children with the exterior world, the skin-ego acts as a psychic envelope that not only keeps our innards inside but also our egos within bounds, while creating a bridge between our interior world and the exterior one. Since this frame between inside and outside is loose, as is the \textit{rocaille} framing system, it can communicate affects.\textsuperscript{296} The skin-ego is therefore the place where the skin registers traces of communication with the outside world, and feels and contains affects.\textsuperscript{297} If we consider the skin-ego as the outer material reaches of the ego, then we can understand how ripping the boundary of the skin or the organic surface changes the ego, or identity. Once the viral outbreak pierces the skin, the bounds of identity have been breached; identity is therefore no longer a closed unity, a defined, rigid concept but becomes instead fluid and can merge with the other. As we see in \textit{The Thing}, \textit{Alien}, \textit{District 9}, and \textit{Planet Terror}, once the skin-ego is ruptured, change in identity cannot be avoided. Transformed by the viral outbreak, the skin-ego, which, like the parergon, always allowed for communication between the outer and inner worlds, has been liquefied.\textsuperscript{298} The multiple spills, gushes, liquification, and constant viscosity of the HOD are, in these films, the literalization of the skin-ego turning soluble (figs. 69, 112, 114, 122-123). This liquid-like state of the skin-ego allows for the ego to transpire and touch the exterior world to the point of possibly merging with the other.

\textsuperscript{295} Martin, “Skin Deep,” 274.
\textsuperscript{296} \textit{International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis}, s.v. “skin ego.”
\textsuperscript{297} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{298} Frank Macke proposes that phenomenology has awakened subjectivity to an experience of the flesh and of becoming conscious through flesh. In other words, we have become aware of our ‘Anzian’ skin-ego and its importance to communication. He suggests that “flesh might best be understood as an intersubjective plasma, as complex of fluid elements that are just as capable of harness as they are of liquidity.” See Frank J. Macke, “Body, Liquidity and Flesh, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, and the Elements of Interpersonal Communication,” \textit{Philosophy Today} 51, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 401.
Becoming other and alien to one’s original self is also what happens to Cherry in *Planet Terror* as she changes into a composite android. The same happens to Wikus in *District 9*, who merges with the Prawns’s new technology, and to Ruka in *Tokyo Gore Police*, as she gains her bionic eye and arm (figs. 118, 120, 134). We have examples here of the self merging with the machine, which is, incidentally, also the theme in *Crash*: the bodies in the car ultimately seek to merge with the car as their bodies smash into it. The breaking of boundaries therefore creates malleable identities, such as Dren, who is male, female, and multiply types of animal, or Pikul and Max, who, by obtaining obvious feminine openings, are also feminized (figs. 150, 152). The feelings of dread, disgust, or abjection we may experience as viewers when presented with the exploding visceral corporeality of ruptured bodies may stem from the fact that this materiality is a literal expression of the loss of contained identity to global flux, a notion I will address further on.

The corporeal material outbreak also dissolves the barrier beween inside and outside, just as the open system of the *rocaille* creates a porous state. The virus, for instance, which can range from a literal one, such as in *Planet Terror*, to an invading alien, as in *The Thing* and *Alien*, invades from the inside out. By invading both the inside of the ship as well as the bodies of crew members, the Alien in *Alien* ruptures the pristine insides of the structure and opens them to the danger of contamination from the exotic alien outside world. The virus can also locate itself within the body and thereby turn its

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299 For an analysis of Cronenberg’s more recent films and gender role reversals within these see Aron Dunlap and Joshua Delpech-Ramey “Grotesque Normals: Cronenberg’s Recent Men and Women,” *Discourse* 32, no. 3 (fall 2010): 321-337.
300 The infringement of the barriers between the inside and outside in body-horror films has also been noted by Creed. See Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque,” 136.
bowels inside out by exteriorizing these.\textsuperscript{301} This is exactly the case with the wolf-dog monster in \textit{The Thing}, which has the face of a canine-like animal and yet is all muscle and glistening, new, naked flesh (fig. 76). Another case would be the virus in \textit{Planet Terror}, which presents itself by externalizing the insides of its victims as their flesh and blisters explode from the inside out (figs. 95-96, 115, 142). In \textit{Crash}, the viral-like inner desire of the car crash participants externalizes their innards as their bodies collide with cars. Moreover, we can consider all the slime, liquids, and mucus present in multiple scenes as the release of inside fluids into the outside world. When subjected to the viral outbreak, therefore, hidden bowels are exteriorized. Just like the exotic exterior, which invades the \textit{rocaille} interior and erases the divide between the two, the viral outbreak causes that which was meant to be kept inside the corporeal envelope to liquefy and transform into a viscous substance that can glide from inside to outside without restraint.

The outbreak is not only represented by the wound that slices through the body, but also by the release of what the bound body contained. This release in turn breaks the structures of social control and knowledge. Similar to the result of \textit{informe} operations, the result of outbreak is a chaotic disorderly state expressed through the lack of control over the heterogeneous organic detail and its viral proliferations. Such films present us then with autonomous bodies without ego or control, subjected instead to the transformations of viral operations. A case in point is the aimless wandering in \textit{Planet Terror} of savage zombies, which are the epitome of the body uncontrolled by the mind (since the zombie mind has been eradicated by the virus) (fig. 153). \textit{Alien} also exemplifies the destruction

\textsuperscript{301} Jerslve also notes that body-horror films do not define or demarcate the interior from the exterior of the body because there is a lack of clear body boundaries. This absence of a protective envelope, Jerslve argues, results in a lack of distinction between male and female, innards and outwards, and shows the body in constant metamorphosis. See Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 18.
of social structures by the proliferation of a virus, which in this case is the reproductive alien itself. The slimy, neon-green liquid spilling out of the wounded alien breaks boundaries as its acidity dissolves the very structure of the ship (fig. 154). Science, as embodied by Weyland-Yutani, the company that sent the team, seeks to contain, study, label, and understand this alien, but clearly fails to do so as the alien escapes even the intellectual grasp of the android, Ash. The scientific structure seeks to frame and contain the alien by studying and identifying it, but ultimately fails in its attempt. Instead, it is the alien that breaks the boundaries of the scientific team as it absorbs and transforms each team member. Although the alien creature does perish in the end, the result is still that the ship, and with it, the scientific team assigned to recuperate an alien specimen, explodes in space. Another example is seen in *Splice* when the two scientists decide to stop following accepted procedure in order to produce Dren, thereby defying science and its investigative structures. The creation of the heterogeneous Dren necessitates the infringement of scientific protocols and rules, just as *rocaille informe* shapes break from the traditional architectural rules of good taste.

The dissolution of structures brought about by the viral outbreak also impacts the social state, which in *Tokyo Gore Police* utterly collapses. The engineers are viewed as viral sociopathic agents of disorder who rampantly murder without any apparent motive. Ultimately, the private Tokyo police force trying to contain this epidemic becomes diseased. *Tokyo Gore Police* demonstrates how the viral outbreak unleashes forces that rip apart controlling power structures, such as the police force. *Planet Terror* is another example of social structures dissolving on account of a virus, as the social boundaries that previously dictated each person’s place in the social order collapse in the ensuing chaos.
The rebel becomes leader and the stripper becomes savior, while the sheriff and his men lose power. Lastly, in *The Thing*, as in *Alien*, we witness the collapse of team unity and structure, which are fragmented by the unpredictability of those infected. Just as the *rocaille informe* creates open systems that unhinge the positions of knowledge and identity, the viral outbreak bursts open boundaries, initiating a porous state in which the heterogeneous detail can spill out and corrode any form of containment.

### 2.3.3: Infection

Phase one of a viral attack is represented by the pressure the virus exerts to explode and release itself from the gates that contain it. Phase two is characterised by the movement of contagion, infection, and invasion that seeks to propagate further this explosion and its ensuing transformation. It is during this phase that we observe visual cues indicating the presence of a drive to contaminate.\(^\text{302}\) It is also the phase that corresponds to the moment when ornaments communicate visually with one another. As I argued, ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes, contortions, asymmetry, cartouches, movement, and slipperiness are all visual devices that interconnect elements. It is these same visual devices that, within the trope of the virus, let us perceive the virus as it spreads from the infectious to the intended infected. The virus spreads through a communicative contact between infected subject and intended object, transforming the latter into another infected subject.

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\(^{302}\) Jen Webb and Sam Byrnand use Freud’s concept of drives to argue that zombies do not have a desire or need to eat, but are driven, for unknown reasons, to eat. I here examine the ‘drive’ of the virus to propagate and contaminate. See Jen Webb and Sam Byrnand, “Some Kind of Virus: The Zombie as Body and as Trope,” *Body & Society* 14, no. 2 (2008): 87.
This phase, in other words, demonstrates how base material, which is unknown and uncontained, is inserted into another system and thereby transforms it. We have seen that the heterogeneous matter in these films can perform informe actions, such as destroying enclosed wholes; it is at these moments that it also makes connections that transmit the virus. The visual bridges created connect and relate things together, spreading the transformation. Let us recall the example that Benjamin Buchloh gives of the spit in the soup, which bridges human and soup.\textsuperscript{303} Such examples are often found when slime connects various elements. However, connective actions can also be more invasive and threatening. The main threat is transforming into the subject of the virus and becoming part of disorder. The transgressions of the body in these films reflect the invasive nature of the transformative virus, even when the virus itself is invisible.

It is important to point out that the viruses causing all this mayhem are most often, like the concept of the informe, imperceptible. Their effects, however, are perceptible. For instance, the alien in \textit{The Thing} is never visible in its own form; the virus in \textit{Planet Terror} is seen only as a green gas; the DNA that creates Dren, Fred, and Ginger in \textit{Splice} is not perceptible; the virus infecting the pod in \textit{eXistenZ} is also imperceptible; the signal in \textit{Videodrome} is invisible; the transformative agent in \textit{District 9} that affects Wikus is only embodied as some black liquid; and finally, the desire that pushes people to participate in car accidents in \textit{Crash} is also intangible.

Although we do not necessarily see the viral culprit, the connections between subjects and objects are created through modes of connection or connectors that are perceptible. These are the tendrils, outgrowths, hanging bits of matter, the movements, the slimy filaments, the liquids, and even, in \textit{Crash}, the sexual encounters, all acting as

agents bridging gaps and creating new connections, or, in this case, infected subjects. We see in eXistenZ such material connections in the serpentine umbicords that connect elements between infectious and infectable subjects (fig. 131). These fleshy, twisted tendrils are inserted from pod into subject, connecting the two physically. In this manner they transmit the feared virus from one to the other. In one close-up of this connection, we see Allegra’s hand holding the cord while pushing to insert its nub into Pikul’s lower-back bio-port. The bio-port seems already to have been infected from its installation onto Pikul’s back, and, via this new connection, it will transmit the disease to Allegra’s pod once they are networked (fig. 155). Not only do the cords serve to link the characters and pods together, they also traverse the screen, undulating from place to place, creating visual links between objects, like Buchloh’s spit in the soup (fig. 132).

Probably one of the best examples of visual connectors from these films is the attack of a wolf-dog in The Thing. When a dog in the kennel tries to evade the now monstrous creature that is ‘the thing’, the wolf-dog shoots out long entwining tendrils that, like vines, capture the dog and transpierce it (figs. 137, 156). These long arching ‘c’ and ‘s’ tendrils reach out and ultimately invade the other dog. The new transformed dog will eventually escape the enclosure of the kennel to contaminate further and spread the alien transformative virus. Here, tendrils, tentacles, elongated arms, and filaments are what reach from one to the other, communicating the effects of the transformation or merge. We see other examples of visual connectors in the entwining tongues of Fred and Ginger in Splice, and in Dren’s arched, spiky tail, in the tentacle arms and tongue of the aliens in Alien, or in the bits shooting out of growing flesh from the degenerating monster portrayed by Quentin Tarantino in Planet Terror (figs. 69, 80, 85, 113, 115, 157).
Another form of connector is the fluid flowing throughout the films. In *Planet Terror* we have the multiple gushings of the infected blisters that burst and spray others with their infectious liquids (figs. 96, 153). In *The Thing*, blood and liquids abound when the human head of an otherwise monstrous *thing* bursts open and sprays green goo (fig. 137). In *Tokyo Gore Police*, blood is used to such an extent that it becomes campy.

Nonetheless, there are copious amounts of viscous liquids, such as a girl spraying green liquid out of her now-transformed bionic breasts (fig. 158). Another instance is the mucus dripping from Max’s gun-hand in *Videodrome* (figs. 125, 138). It is this liquidness that creates filamentary textures of materiality flowing from one entity to another, acting like bridging connectors. Simon J. Williams also recognizes the transpiercing nature of bodily fluids: “it is this literal and metaphorical power of bodily fluids to traverse borders and boundaries, which again points to the transgressive nature of human corporeality.”

Once the boundaries of the object of infection have been breached by different modes of connection, the infection then moves onwards and outwards to conquer and contaminate further. The spread of the virus is externalized through the continual growth of materiality and its occupation of the film space. The monsters of *The Thing*, for example, act like *rocaille* chimeras, continually growing body parts that spread in every direction. Their movements are a continual motion outwards, away from its center, unfurling towards the other. If we consider the human-headed spider creature, its head extends outwards, grows and pops out while it tries to grab another victim with its tendril tongue (figs. 117, 159). The same is true of the creature in *Alien* and its telescopic muzzle that extends ever outwards towards its intended victim. The spread of the virus, then,

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does not only participate in the narrative, infecting characters and, ultimately, the events of the film, it also, to a certain degree, takes over the screen and even spreads beyond it. This is possible when we consider that the visceral materiality that spreads through *Planet Terror* could potentially have such an impact on its viewers that they, too, might extend their material fluids outwards by gagging, crying, or displaying any other bodily reaction, thus essentially extending organic materiality beyond the screen.

The same loose, open system of interconnections that is present in *rocaille* and is a result of the *informe* at work, is also present in films, a result of the spread and proliferation of the virus. The different hanging bits of heterogeneous materiality, like the hanging bit of residual flesh in *Alien*, invade the film space and create open networks between the various elements, similar to the cartouche and *morceau de fantasie* (fig. 160). Throughout the span of the films, the heterogeneous material parts find correspondences to one another and consequently create a network.

### 2.3.4: Transformation

We have looked at both how barriers explode and how the viral is communicated. I now turn to the infected and how it transforms from an object into a subject. This stage is concerned with the particular moments of transformation when the object, which has just been infected, transforms into the infected subject. In this instance, I am analyzing what happens once we leave the actions of the infectious and turn to the transformation of the infected subject. During transformation, the unknown viral agent enters the known object and infects it by corrupting its initial state of objecthood and transforming it into a
contaminated subject. Consequently, the contaminated area is corrupted and corroded out of its initial known state. The transformative stage illustrates the movements and actions that occur between the state of departure, previous to infection, and the state of becoming infected. It is in effect the becoming stage, which is illustrated through ample examples of heterogenous details. The transformative stage highlights how the infection is a transformative act that neither defines nor contains, forcing the infected into a state of flux and movement.

However, before turning to the transformation itself, I must elaborate on the corruption of the object infected. The corruption at work is nothing less than transformation itself, but we can also understand such transformative actions in Bataillesque terms as the corrosive effects of base materials on ideals, or, as in this case, on the definition of concepts. Since the virus corrupts by deteriorating knowledge and form, it lowers elements from their known categories to the point of transforming them into visual and semantic things that are slippery and undefined, resulting in chaos and disorder. If the results of such corruption are similar to those of breaking boundaries, it is because corruption is the cause of broken boundaries.

The zombies in *Planet Terror*, for instance, lower the human by transforming it into base material, since, as a zombie, the human is no longer a reasoning creature: its walk is deformed, it acts on the sole impulse of feeding, and it is no longer the socialized being it once was. Everything that defined the individual as a person, separate from the whole and with the appearance of agency, has dissapeared. Instead, zombies act on more primal instincts based on consumption and destruction. The virus corrupts the individual’s personality and disintegrates it to the extent that, in Freudian terms, the body
operates under the sole command of the id. We see the corruption of the virus also at work in *Tokyo Gore Police* when the ideal body is deformed by the tumorous virus and turned into a chimeric cyborg monster (figs. 74-75, 99, 118). In *Planet Terror*, moreover, when Cherry’s perfect stripper body is amputated, it too becomes corrupted and deteriorates from its original ideal symmetrical form (fig. 134). Even the film experience of *Planet Terror* itself is corrupted by the fictive burn marks imposed upon it. Since the fake burn marks on the film roll interrupt any suspension of disbelief, they halt the narrative and jerk the viewers into remembering that this is a film. The ideal fictive space that the movie creates is interrupted, reminding viewers that this is indeed a film. In this sense, the viral burn marks corrupt the film experience. Meanwhile in *The Thing*, no one can be trusted to be who they say they are, for fear they may be an alien personification of themselves. In the end, it is the integrity of the person which is corrupted. Lastly, one could suggest that in *eXistenZ* the virus enters the only uninfected copy of the game, which corrupts and destroys the perfect ideal world that Allegra Geller sought to create.

This corruption caused by viral actions is not simply a lowering of ideals, however, but also a transformative act. The transformative stage is one of flux and motion, where the subjects in question are under the operations of the *informe*. They are transformed into active heterogeneous matter that is also itself capable of *informe* operations, unleashing further such materiality. We see such transformation at work in *District 9*, during Wikus’s mutation from a human into a prawn. In certain shots we are shown explicit details of his skin peeling away and revealing the crustacean appearance of his arms and back (fig. 135). Such moments display the broken and pierced concept that is Wikus. Wikus is no longer a cooperative employee of the MNU. In fact, he is as
good as dead, as his father-in-law explains to Wikus’s wife. As a result of his transformation, Wikus becomes an unknown hybrid. He can manipulate alien technology, yet he is still human. Thus, while the transformative stage can be understood in pejorative terms as a lowering of ideals, it is, in fact, a transformative act, neither negative nor positive. Rather, it is only because the ideals and concepts change into undefined positions that such transformations are viewed in a negative light. When Wikus is rejected by both the MNU and his father-in-law, it is not because he has transformed into a Prawn but because, as a prawn, he is perceived as a mystery: something completely misunderstood.

_The Thing_ also provides many illustrations of the transformative stage. For example, whenever the viral alien seizes a person or animal, although the victim eventually changes into the alien (which is an exact replica of the initial organism it invaded), it first undergoes a set of commotions, displaying the subject in the throws of movement, contortions, and growths, all the while transforming into a multiplicity of chimeras that are difficult even to attempt to name, so multifaceted are they (figs. 76, 144, 116-117, 133). Since such sequences display all manner of unformed matter in constant motion, they embody the stage of transformation. Another sequence gruesomely detailing transformation is in _Videodrome_, when Max’s hand ties itself to a gun so that it may transform into a bodily extension (fig. 138). This sequence, filmed in close-up and lasting almost a minute, emphasizes the transformation of metal penetrating skin by first showing a glistening liquid linking the hand and gun into a new combination. Max’s fingernails subsequently become joined with metal tubing that transpierces the hand, only to re-enter at his wrist (fig. 161). By showing this close-up and by making the sequence
last for several moments, Cronenberg allows the viewer to see in detail how the body actually merges with something that is entirely foreign and exterior to it.

In instances such as those described above, it can be said that the subject rips itself apart from its initial non-infected state so as to move into its new, transformed, infected one. Although we can still recognize some of the original characteristics of Max’s hand and Wikus’s body once infected, which indicate a transformation has occurred, it is during the actual transformation itself that we witness the shift from original to infected state. Because there is a shift in state from uninfected to infected, the transformative stage requires a lot of movement, which serves to illustrate the commotion of bodies in mutation and their release of heterogeneous materiality. The transformative stage reveals the non-definitive state that is the flux of the informe. Simultaneously, as we have seen in the case of Wikus, the transformative stage also operates on identity in such a manner as to eliminate any of its stable boundaries.

2.3.5: Symptom

The last phase of the viral attack is symptomatic in nature. It is at this point that the informe culminates its transformative operations. Although these last two stages are quite similar, the transformative stage shows the details of the shift from one state to the other, while the symptomatic phase illustrates the transformed subject now into its other state. While the subject has shifted into another state of being, one that is entirely different and foreign in nature, it is important to stress that this new state remains undefined and in flux. In the symptomatic phase, we no longer perceive the initial state of
the subject, but, rather, we perceive the result of the full transformation. The difference in
the two stages can be understood using the case of Max’s gun-hand in *Videodrome*. In the
transformative stage, Max’s gun-hand is shown in a sequence, literally demonstrating the
transformation of the hand turning into the gruesome gun-hand (figs. 138, 161). In the
symptomatic phase, Max walks around with a new hand that is neither gun nor its
original form, but some altogether new element (fig. 119). This new member attached to
Max not only transforms his hand but also transforms him from what he initially was into
something entirely other. The symptom phase is by no means a definitive state, but is
rather the realization that those infected are indeed infected in the recognition of their
symptoms. This is visually embodied when viewers no longer see the transformation into
the monster, but rather are faced with the monster that has formed. The symptoms can be
understood, then, as outward signs pointing to the new connections, corruptive
transformations, reconstructions, and re-assemblages that are the result of the viral attack.

I have mentioned that there is no ascending order to the viral phases; indeed, the
symptom phase simultaneously displays the means by which the viral infection seeks to
infect and make further connections. Consequently, the symptoms of the infected also
indicate the presence of the outbreak, and by acknowledging these symptoms we
simultaneously witness the occurrence of an outbreak. By recognizing the symptoms we
also acknowledge what has been unleashed in the outbreak as well as the potential of
these viral connections and the transformations of the infected. In considering these
outward symptoms, we find that the infected has drifted from its initial form to create
extensions of the self, mergings of disparate parts that together form new compositions
not unlike the *rocaille morceau de fantasie*. 
A concept that is useful to understand what the infected has transformed into is Bataille’s notion of the heterogeneous foreign body as elaborated in his text *The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade.* It brings together two notions: heterogeneous matter and the foreign body. For Bataille, heterogeneous matter is matter released after the de-ordering or de-valuation caused by base materialism. Unlike base matter, heterogeneous matter for Bataille is the designation of what has already been excluded by idealism, capitalism, organized religions and so on. Since base material, or in our case *informe*, operates to de-order matter, the exploded boundaries subsequently release heterogeneous matter, a form that is unclassified and, for Bataille, no longer operating. When one is positioned within boundaries and therefore outside the release zone of heterogeneous matter, the latter is then perceived as a foreign body. The foreign body for Bataille highlights the subjective categorization of matter according to one’s position in relation to it. A foreign body is uncategorized and unknown matter that, for Bataille, incorporates and reconciles distant types of matter, such as the sacred and the excremental which, when released as heterogeneous matter, become the same. Furthermore, unlike a regular body, which consumes and absorbs matter within its bounds, Bataille’s foreign body explicitly excretes matter, since excretion “presents itself as the result of a heterogeneity, and can move in the direction of an ever greater heterogeneity, liberating impulses whose ambivalence is more and more pronounced.” For example, Bataille perceives the sacrifice of van Gogh’s ear as a gesture, the consequence of which is to rupture the

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307 Ibid., 53.
309 Ibid., 95.
homogeneity of the self while simultaneously introducing the heterogeneity of life to the self.  

This is why, for Bataille, the sacrificial body or ruptured homogeneous body is capable both of excreting, through the release of guts, torn tissues, blood, and spilt liquids, and of being sacred. The sacrificial act of spilling the entrails from a sacred vessel or body, such as the one represented in the Passion of Jesus Christ when Jesus is stabbed with a soldier’s lance while on the cross, unites what is both putrid (his spilling guts and blood on the cross) and sacred (his believers’ concept of Jesus as Saviour). The Bataillesque heterogeneous foreign body is one that, after its outbreak, releases matter, creating a flow of heterogeneity, which can, like the tentacles of the monsters in The Thing, link entities together. In Bataille’s theory of the heterogeneous foreign body we find the means of further tying together rocallle ornaments with the contemporary heterogeneous organic materiality of the films. Architectural ornaments, in particular, can be viewed as descendants of sacred tokens held up for veneration, in the same manner that George L. Hersey argues that architectural ornaments in Greek temples were symbolic substitutes and derivatives of the residues of sacrificial offerings.  

From its privileged position on walls, traditional architectural ornamentation like the egg-and-dart motif operates in such a way as to segment space, attribute status to space, and highlight what it ornaments. However, as we have seen, the rocallle ornament’s mode of operation, in contrast, serves to highlight nothing but itself, nor does it separate and segment space or attribute status to it. Yet rocallle ornaments are not so explicitly excretal as to be

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310 John Lechte, Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: from Structuralism to Post-Humanism (London: Routledge, 2008), 368.

deemed gory; they can, however, still be viewed as the mysterious foreign sacred. We do not know which forms, exactly, make up the ornaments at the bottom of the panels of the Salon du Prince at Soubise or those of the Dangé Cabinet (figs. 32, 62). They are foreign due to their unknown character, but they are sacred as well due to their being wall ornaments. The sacred and excremental, therefore, are tied together through the concept of the heterogeneous foreign body since both are constituted of unknown, unleashed materials. Within the scope of this concept, both can be considered foreign bodies.

Although Bataille’s heterology was an anti-project meant to destroy, amongst other things, controlling political agendas, his notions of the heterogeneous foreign body, alongside the informe and base materialism, do parallel the various phases of the virus. Like Bataille’s heterogeneous matter, the fourth phase of the viral attack includes matter unleashed and out of bounds: the symptoms. As a result of informe operations, or the viral infection and invasion, the confines of homogeneity are breached so that heterogeneous elements are released from restrictive unifying confines. And like the sacrificed and torn foreign body, which links the sacred and the excretal, the torn corporeal materiality in these films also creates links—visual links. This is because, as explained, the symptoms of the infected body create connectors, such as outgrowths, tendrils, and ‘c’ and ‘s’ shapes, that traverse space to create networks sealing together the object and subject (figs. 137, 152, 156-157, 159).

In the context of this viral analogy, the heterogeneous foreign body does not result from perverse action, as Bataille would claim, but it results rather from the metaphoric assault of the virus, whatever its shape. The material is foreign not only as a result of being uncategorizable, but also of being unknown to the subject under attack. We can
understand this shift towards a foreign position as also being a shift away from a known position, since matter has been pried from its previous position in a bound, homogenous identity. The symptomatic body is also foreign to the actual person or thing displaying symptoms. It designates, for example, the new transformed body of Wikus in District 9; Wikus is unaware of the capacities of his new body, as in the scene when he is surprised to discover that he is capable of firing alien guns. The foreign body can also act in surprising ways because the subject does not own or control that which is foreign. For instance, zombie bodies act of their own volition, no longer controlled by the super ego of their owners. In Planet Terror, the zombies have let go of everything inasmuch as they are utterly unrepessed beings no longer caring about appearances or the fact that they are degenerating. Lastly, the heterogeneous foreign body is also excluded from structures, such as in District 9 when Wikus is expelled from the social structure of the MNU and from society as a whole.

The concepts of heterogeneous foreign body and symptomatic subject are closely linked. Unlike Bataille, however, I do not perceive a total opposition between heterogeneous bodies and homogeneous ones. What I propose, rather, is a continual shift in the state of matter between bound and unbound, connected and disconnected; for the foreign body is also, in my view, a connective body. Furthermore, unlike Bataille, I do not think that heterogeneous organic details, here viewed as the release of base matter, cease to operate. I propose that as symptoms, these are simultaneously connectors and, as such, they still perform informe actions. The result of informe actions, such as excreting matter and initiating new connections, is the outward extension of the initial self in the act of creating collages with the body and other parts. The self is thereby no longer a
closed entity but a connecting and connective one. The same result also occurs when rococo individual parts, such as the sofa by Meissonnier, lose their individuality to the connective whole and become unknown amalgams (fig. 58). In *eXistenZ*, this occurs when Allegra needs to connect to her pod. By means of the umbicord, she becomes part of an assemblage with the pod. This connection is literally expressed when the pod grows sick, causing the connected Allegra to contract the disease as well (fig. 131). This results in Allegra not only forming a network with the pod, but also an extended body and self (fig. 132). As a material notion, Allegra is no longer a closed unified body, but an extended, connective one. It connects to foreign elements, like prostheses, that are not part of her body’s original make-up, but rather part of this composite Allegra-amalgam.

### 2.3.6: Prosthesis

Just like the analogy of the virus, which is omnipresent in these films, the presence of the prosthesis is also difficult to ignore. Prostheses in the films are not hidden but openly recognized and, in the case of *Crash*, even revered (fig. 162). They are abundantly represented in *Crash* in the form of Daniel’s clamps and crutches, and in *Planet Terror* by Cherry’s replaced gun-leg (fig. 134). Although a part of certain people’s reality, the prosthesis has also become a social trope, as Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra claim, that can help us understand what it means to be post-human.\(^{312}\) What the prosthesis fundamentally questions is the integrity of an impermeable whole or closed unit. It demands that we question what can be integrated into the whole and yet not

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entirely subverted by it, what it means to be a closed whole, what it means to have an identity, and what can change and reshape that identity. It further questions the notion of origin and brings to the forefront the idea that we may all be assemblages—composite beings. Indeed, I agree with Robert Williamson, who argues that the prosthesis blurs the edges of being; by not revealing where identity begins and ends, prostheses extend and stretch the definition of a unified identity into a multiplicity of beings.\textsuperscript{313}

Moreover, prostheses question the idea of human extensions, and what constitutes these, at the point of friction or meeting between object and subject. Specifically, Williamson identifies something as prosthetic when it can be recognized as not part of a homogenized whole since it retains its own operating system.\textsuperscript{314} For myself, I do not only consider prostheses as the replacement of a body’s defect in the conventional sense, but as an add-on, an augmentation and extension of the capabilities of the body. In this light, we can consider that for Pikul and Allegra the pod is a prosthesis, that all the body transformations in \textit{Tokyo Gore Police} are prostheses, and that so is Wikus’s alien arm in \textit{District 9}. In these films, the prosthesis is the result of viral actions, a symptom of the virus and, simultaneously, an infector and connector, communicating the viral changes as it crosses boundaries. Accordingly, prosthetic symptoms are elements capable of connecting the two distinct systems of subject and object, and, by virtue of being symptomatic, they are also capable of breaching the distinction between these.

But the prosthesis is not just a technological implement that is a go-between, it is also heterogeneous matter, foreign matter capable of attaching itself to our private systems and rendering the oppositions of private/public and self/other more fluid. My


\textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 243.
concern here is with our interaction with such enablers and how they can potentially alter us. Once the subject is symptomatic, and acquires the marks of viral prostheses, we must then determine how this new state alters the whole and its initial unity. The idea of the prosthesis also questions in these films the integrity of the concept of what it is to be human. Consequently, I propose that we consider heterogeneous organic performing details and *rocaille* ornaments as go-between prostheses. However, I consider these not simply as replacements of other parts, but, rather, and more importantly, as extensions of the body that achieve mergers or connections.

If one of the characteristics of a prosthesis is its ability to bridge and breach the boundaries of two separate systems, then extreme *rocaille* ornaments and heterogeneous organic details are prosthetic, since these also create networks that bridge entirely separate systems. We have seen how a *morceau de fantaisie* and *rocaille* space can encapsulate the body of the viewer; prosthetic symptoms likewise demand that we question the consequence of such proximity of ornament to the body and how it might also work to bridge entities. We should first point out that just as physical contact is not necessary for initiating connections between the body and *rocaille* ornament, so too is it unnecessary for the symptomatic prosthesis to initiate and sustain mergers or assemblages. That is to say that although sometimes the physical connection is literally expressed, as in the case of the umbicord, bio-ports, and gamepods in *ExistenZ*, all of which directly touch the body, the heterogeneous organic detail, like *rocaille* ornaments, does not need to be physically connected in order to make connections. Connections are made through the connective potential of these symptoms. Since all heterogeneous matter is symptomatic, and in my view functions also as an active agent, it has the potential to
create and initiate further connections. It is this aspect of heterogeneous organic details which makes them infectious. Further connections are then made by the viewer, who links the heterogeneous matter together and weaves a web from one connective member to the other.

We observe such connective potential at work in the heterogeneous materiality that spreads outwards in the films. The amphibian creatures throughout eXistenZ, or the exploded body parts polluting Videodrome’s film frame at the end of the movie, relate to each other to form loose networks throughout the film; like the ‘c’ and ‘s’ forms of rocaille ornaments, they connect through visual hooks and curve/counter-curve movements (figs. 77, 83, 112, 125). I previously demonstrated how rocaille cartouches can form haphazardly when various elements that respond to one another loosely connect into macro wholes; likewise, the films’ materiality does not physically need to touch in order to create infectious connections (fig. 10). As a result of these connections being constantly made and un-made, wholes in rocaille space form and come apart in an instant, while still encompassing the elements within. Similarly, the symptomatic prostheses peppered throughout the films also form at various times into loose networks, or momentary cartouches, ultimately acting as giant morceaux de fantasies. Another way to understand such connective relations between non-touching parts is to evoke the notion of assemblage.

I mentioned earlier the presence of chimeric assemblages when I referred to the merging of distinct parts in order to form a creature, such as those found in Mondon’s print or the many chimeric monsters of The Thing and Tokyo Gore Police (figs. 9, 25, 74-76, 99, 116-118). Such assemblages, however, can also arise from entities grouped into
loose wholes held together by what I have called the heterogeneous organic details or symptomatic prostheses. Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*, proposes that an assemblage consists of what she calls a working group, or, if one likes, an association of the human with the non-human, where the non-human element, like the human element, also has agency. Her main idea is that bodies enhance their own power through assemblages, since things tend to affect each other. Our bodies are, in other words, the culmination of different changing elements reacting to all that surrounds us. Consequently, the conception of self in Bennett’s theory can also be enlarged to encompass other objects. Although she does not label them as prostheses, she sees how ‘things’ participate in our make-up: “I here begin to defend a conception of self, developed in later chapters, as itself an impure, human-nonhuman assemblage.” Using Spinoza’s theory of modes, she further explains that we are made of modes, which account for the changing nature of our beings or wholes and for how things have the capacity to influence us: “What it means to be a ‘mode,’ then, is to form alliances and enter assemblages: it is to mod(e)ify and be modified by others. The process of modification is not under the control of anyone mode—no mode is an agent in the hierarchical sense.” Bennett perceives, as I do, that our self-unity, which is breached by heterogeneous matters or symptoms, is exposed to being modified, or, as I label it, infected. Bennett would also call what I have termed the virus an ‘actant.’ Borrowing this term from Bruno Latour, she describes an actant as “that which by virtue of its particular

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315 Bennett develops a working terminology that borrows terms such as assemblage from Deleuze and Guattari, but she transforms their meanings to discuss the potential agency of human and non-human working groups; see Jane Bennett, Preface to *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xvii.
317 Bennett, Preface, xvii.
318 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 22.
location in an assemblage and the fortuity of being in the right place at the right time, makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event.\(^{319}\) Using Bennett’s concept of the assemblage, we see that various things in the same set, in this case represented by the film, or even the scene, can be considered working groups influencing each other. More importantly, the assemblage describes the inner workings of important ‘things,’ which have the capacity to be actants and agents enabling change. In effect, the actant assemblage parallels the virus and its various phases at work, such as when it transforms the infected into the infectious and creates links to other ‘things.’ I thus define an assemblage as something that is an incongruous juxtaposition of parts in relation to each other at close or distant physical proximity, forming an open set or global permeable whole. The virus, as the assemblage, has particular agency, and by using Bennett’s idea of the role of the actant in assemblages, I can explain the particular agency or power of the prosthesis-symptom to effect change in the infected. The films under consideration interpret the notion that we are assemblages in a literal manner thereby pushing the notion to the extreme.

2.3.7: HOD and Negative Emotions

The symptomatic subject, infected by viral prostheses and exuding viral prostheses, is transformed into an undetermined assemblage. Although I claim that the transformation and symptom stages are not pejorative in and of themselves, they do nevertheless cause dread, horror, abjection, and disgust to be felt by the audience or the characters in the films. Although it is not the aim of this study to carry out empirical

\(^{319}\) Ibid., 9.
research concerning the viewer’s potential emotional or corporeal reactions when faced with the HOD, since the HOD does emerge from a primarily horror-based genre, it is worth exploring how the HOD can potentially engender such reactions. The emotional and bodily responses felt towards the HOD, such as pleasure, a shudder, dread, abjection, revulsion, disgust, horror, fascination, and curiosity (among countless others), depend upon the tastes, life experiences, and value judgments of the viewers and characters of the film. Cronenberg attests to such ambivalence: “I have to tell people that some of the things they think are repulsive in my films are meant to be repulsive, yes, but there’s a beautiful aspect to them as well. There’s true beauty in some things that others find repulsive.” In the case of film characters, it is easier to discuss their reactions and emotions since these are disclosed to the viewers. In Crash Vaughan’s post-crash response to the ensuing bodily transformations and symptoms, such as bruises and wounds, is fascination, attraction (as well as sexual attraction and desire), and even reverence. In Planet Terror, Tokyo Gore Police, or Videodrome, none of the infected characters are repulsed by their symptomatic nature. Cherry, Ruka, and Max all seem to accept their new transformed selves. While it is true that in The Thing and Alien characters such as MacReady or Ripley are repulsed by the heterogeneous organic nature of the aliens, Carroll posits that horror films “cannot be construed as completely repelling or completely appealing,” and that monsters are capable of both attracting and repulsing their audience. Steven Jay Schneider also argues in Murder as Art/The Art of Murder

320 For instance, Wilson thinks disgust is a psycho-visceral concept that moves the mind even more so than the body and is entirely subjective to the viewer’s psychological dispositions. See Wilson, “Cyber(Body)Parts,” 247.
322 Carroll, “Nightmare and the Horror Film,” 18. While Carroll uses psychoanalysis to argue such potential binary responses, I do not. See ibid., 20.
that contemporary horror sometimes takes on an aestheticized form that gives viewers a certain distance. He explains that in films such as *Halloween*, there is an aesthetic distance remote enough for the viewer, unlike the protagonist, to feel out of danger and consequently able to enjoy the decadent aesthetic pleasures of the horrific artistic installation. For dread to be felt by viewers, Schneider explains that they have to identify with the wounded, fearful protagonist or victim. Some horror films, however, offer *mise-en-scènes* in which the bodies are arranged by the director and set designer in such a way as to become installation art; in such cases, Schneider argues, the connection with the viewer does not occur. If bodily and emotional reactions felt towards body-horror are ambivalent and depend on the audience identifying with the protagonists, or on the *mise-en-scène* of the director, or the psychological mindset of the viewer, the HOD has nonetheless the capacity to ignite such reactions due to certain of its dispositions.

The condition which enables the HOD to give rise to negative reactions is that it comes with a potentially a threatening element that could change the condition of the uninfected to that of infected. This threat is first seen in the breaking of boundaries, as in the outbreak phase of the viral attack. It is the threat of disturbing and freeing that which systems, order, rationality, identity, and the skin-ego kept contained. One of the

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323 Steven Jay Schneider, “Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticizing Violence in Modern Cinematic Horror,” in *Dark Thoughts Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, eds. Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 182.
324 Ibid., 182.
325 In “Toward a Poetics of Cinematic Disgust,” Hanich argues there is also an aesthetic to the disgusting and proposes categories in order to understand how this is achieved by film makers. For more concerning the emotion of disgust in current cinema and the means by which it can be evoked in audiences see Julian Hanich, “Toward a Poetics of Cinematic Disgust,” *Film-Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2011): 11-35; Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Julian Hanich, “Dis/Liking Disgust: The Revulsion Experience at the Movies,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 293-309.
possible effects of materiality being unleashed in the breaking of barriers is abjection. In Kristevan terms, the abject is what is expelled from us and what comes out of bounds, like the materiality unleashed in the outbreak phase. Abjection is a reaction felt when the notion of self, definitions, and identity are threatened to be dismantled, which is exactly what occurs in the outbreak phase of the viral attack, as well as in the following phases during which the victim is infected and transformed. Creed explains that the grotesque body in films, such as those discussed, “lacks boundaries; it is not “completed,” “calm,” or “stable.” Instead the flesh is decaying and deformed, presumably falling from the bodies, connecting them to the earth […] Here the abject is created in the collapsing of boundaries between the living and the decaying or putrefying flesh.

Wilson corroborates this when he states that the “dissolving traces [muck, ooze, and slime] point ahead to the central fact of horror. The monster, or the monstrous event, that you begin to anticipate will constitute an assault upon your integrity. Boundaries turn liquid in horror.” Jerslev also perceives a lack of boundaries as a sign of the potential for abjection: “Abjection thus signifies a floating, and at the same time unbearable and

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For Kristeva’s theory of abjection has strong similarities to my discussion of the heterogeneous organic detail, since she also discusses states of heterogeneity, and even the symptom, much of her analysis depends upon the infantile stage of the subject and the child’s detachment from the mother. The emerging Kristevan concept of abjection is too contingent upon a psychoanalytic approach that locates in the separation from the mother all source of behavior and formation of identity and self. See Kristeva, Ibid., 12-13, 69. On symptoms and abjection see Kristeva, ibid., 11. For a new interpretation of abjection in terms of the opposition pure/impure see Robbie Duschinsky, “Abjection and Self-Identity: Towards a Revised Account of Purity and Impurity,” The Sociological Review 61, no. 4 (2013): 709-727.

For Kristeva, the abject is in opposition to the I. See Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 1. Creed notes that “Kristeva draws on her notion of the abject to explain the way in which cultures establish themselves by expelling everything that threatens their existence and naming it as abject, that which must be located on the other side of the border.” For more on the use of abjection in the body-horror film genre see Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque,” 149-150. Jerslev states: “The abject is the unfamiliar, the expelled, what the subject neither can nor will contain.” See Jerslev, “The Horror Film,” 21.

Wilson, “Cyber(Body)Parts,” 247. Williams suggests one reason we fear and are disgusted by bodily liquids coming out of orifices is that these are viewed as dirt or pollution, which in turn are transgressive of body boundaries. See Simon J. Williams, “Bodily Dys-Order: Desire, Excess and the Transgression of Corporeal Boundaries,” Body & Society 4, no. 2 (1998): 67.
pleasurable state in-between, always pointing psychologically to the lack of boundaries. The lack of boundaries during the outbreak of the contagion is the condition that allows for effects of abjection and dread to emerge. But why is this materiality, broken free from bounds, so threatening to the impending subject of infection? This fear and threat is that of being contaminated and transformed into a symptomatic subject-object with viral prostheses.

And why should becoming symptomatic be scary? The unleashed HOD, which infects by infecting, invariably affects change within the infected, which transforms from an initial state of uninfected to that of symptomatic. This impending change towards the symptomatic can induce dread and abjection because the symptomatic state is unknown. By the very fact that it is infected and transformed by the heterogeneous organic detail, the infected, too, becomes a heterogeneous organic detail and, by extension, something that is difficult to categorize. This fear of changing is therefore a fear of facing, and changing into and towards, the unknown. For Creed, horror is also generated out of an incapacity to make distinctions, or in other words to identify and know. Creed explains how the collapse of boundaries between human and alien makes it “impossible to distinguish one from the other. Again horror is generated because of an inability to distinguish the human from the ‘thing.’” Carroll agrees that the theme “of knowing/not knowing is important to horror films along many different dimensions,” since it can

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331 Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque,” 145.
332 Ibid., 145.
create a state of anxiety or horror.\(^{333}\) Meanwhile, Clifton argues that, when faced with a lack of signifying representation, we do not recognize and so we fear.\(^{334}\)

The possibility of transforming into something composite, no longer only human but an assemblage, also generates potential feelings of dread and abjection. Creed is explicit on the subject when she states that “the abject is produced when a body crosses the boundary between the human and nonhuman or takes up a borderline position in relation to a definition of what it means to be human.”\(^{335}\) The viral transformation process is feared because it implies that one is connecting with the other, whatever that ‘other’ may be, and in the process is losing one’s initial identity.\(^{336}\) William Beard explains that the transformations and metamorphoses present in Cronenberg’s films “may be seen as changes in identity, and their horrific qualities as deriving from a process of changing from self to other.”\(^{337}\) Beard further contends that the “collapse of stable ego boundaries, loss of self, is the ultimate fear” in Cronenberg’s films.\(^{338}\) If dread is felt, it is towards transforming into this unknown ‘other’.\(^{339}\) And what is this transformed other, this symptomatic, infected, assemblage thing? It is not fully human (Max in *Videodrome*, Wikus in *District 9*, Dren in *Splice*), it is sometimes not fully organic (Cherry in *Planet Carroll, “Nightmare and the Horror Film,” 25. For Carroll the moment in the plot when we do not recognize whether a monster is or is not one is what he calls the unsure zone. This unsure zone for Carroll is the one which has the most plots and subplots as well as suspense. It is for him the zone between knowing and not knowing, acknowledgment and non-acknowledgement. See Carroll, “Nightmare and Horror Film,” 23.


\(^{334}\) Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque,” 136.

\(^{335}\) Trigg points out that bodies in Cronenberg’s films are so independent that they beg the question ‘where is the I located?’ Trigg, “The Return of the New Flesh,” 89.


\(^{337}\) Ibid., 158-159.

\(^{338}\) Yvonne Leffler perceives the horror monster as seldom an entity external to us “but something that takes over from within, reshaping the human mind and body as the Other.” See Yvonne Leffler, *Horror as Pleasure: the Aesthetics of Horror Fiction*, trans. Sarah Death (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2000), 162.
Terror, Ruka in Tokyo Gore Police), it is not fully alive (the zombies of Planet Terror, the body-chair in Tokyo Gore Police), it is composite: part organ, part object, part subject, and part of us (the pod in eXistenZ).³⁴⁰

Ultimately, transforming into this composite other means the dissolution of the self as a bound, homogeneous entity.³⁴¹ The dissolution of a stable, contained ‘I’ occurs because the border between the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ (as in the other, whether human, material, or alien) is erased by the infecting, connecting, prosthetic heterogeneous organic detail.³⁴² Many of the characters in the films studied dissolve their initial selves to become informe mergers: Wikus changing into a prawn in District 9, Cherry with her gun-leg in Planet Terror, all the characters of Crash who seek to merge with cars, the connection of Pikul and Allegra to the pod in eXistenZ, Max and his gun-hand in Videodrome, the crocodile-girl and chainsaw-man of Tokyo Gore Police, and the transformation of Kane into an alien in Alien or that of the many characters in The Thing. Trigg suggests that the horror in Cronenberg films is “the horror of becoming no one.”³⁴³ Being someone requires a certain amount of definition, whereas becoming a symptomatic subject of the HOD is to become nothing definable.

³⁴⁰ For Creed, metamorphosis of the body in horror films points to the anxiety about being human. See Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque,” 138. Kristeva also perceives the abject as something that is in opposition to the ‘I’, not subject but neither object because it is not yet defined as an object. See Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 1.

³⁴¹ Speaking on prostheses, Wilson explains that disgust is felt not towards the actual new external body part being added, but at the idea of a prosthesis—something that punctures the initial whole that was the body previous to the attachment of a prosthesis. See Wilson, “Cyber(Body)Parts,” 247.

³⁴² Leffler also thinks that in the horror genre, the boundary between the monster and the I is dissolved. She writes, “for the majority of main protagonists in the horror story, the encounter with the monster dissolves the boundary between the self and the monster. The self becomes the other, just as the other becomes the self.” See Leffler, Horror as Pleasure, 154.

³⁴³ Trigg, “The Return of the New Flesh,” 97. Trigg also suggests that in Cronenberg, the “I” feels alien in its body and that the independence of the body is put at odds with the subject’s independence, specifically in the Fly. See ibid., 90.
Perhaps what contributes to feelings of dread, horror, and abjection even more than transforming into something unknown is the loss of control resulting from the dissolution of the self. Being symptomatic is also being in a state of flux, which is indeterminate and, as such, difficult to control. The bodies of Dren, Fred, and Ginger in *Splice* are always mutating and out of control, which is why the latter two kill each other and Dren escapes. These films exhibit how the conscious self can become subordinate to autonomous flesh, where the id becomes a free sensory experiencer while the ego loses control and reason. Writing on the body-horror genre of film, Brophy also perceived how much of its horror is derived from a lack of control of one’s own body: “The contemporary Horror film tends to play not so much on the broad fear of Death, but more precisely on the fear of one’s own body, of how one controls and relates to it.”

Trigg suggests that in Cronenberg’s films this loss of consciousness over the body is the subordination of what he calls the ‘lived body’ to the physical ‘flesh’ body. The interiority that was kept within the bounds of the homogeneous body is exteriorized once the body is subjected to the outbreak and unleashes materiality that is no longer controlled. We see this in the figure of the zombie, such as the monstrous, decomposing ones of *Planet Terror*. Once they have become all flesh and heterogeneous excreting matter, these figures no longer seem to have any capacity for decision making or to be of independent mind. Operating out of an uncontrolled id, the *Planet Terror* zombies ramble in the countryside and the hospital, in search of human food. It is this lack of an instrumental ego which can generate fear. We see this autonomy of the flesh at work in Cronenberg when Allegra needs to connect using the infected umbicords, or when the

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micro pod enters Pikul’s body. Or again, once connected to the pod and now immersed in the game eXistenZ, both Allegra and Pikul are inexorably compelled to ‘act out’ certain scenes or actions because the characters they play demand it. Their selves and bodies beyond their control, both Pikul and Allegra fulfill the demands of the game and kiss. We see these body urges at work also in Videodrome, when Max pulls the gun from his body, in Crash when James Ballard or Hellen Remington engage in car crashes, or in District 9 when Wikus cannot stop himself from enjoying cat food. Such autonomous body actions could be labeled zombie actions. To be a zombie one need not literally be undead. Rather than be defined as the undead, the zombie can be viewed as a being whose body has been separated from instrumental consciousness and reigns supreme over the mind.

This separation of the mind from the body is not necessarily a total separation. This notion that the mind inhabits the body, controls the body yet is separate from the body arises from eighteenth-century debates that questioned the body/mind split. The majority of eighteenth-century philosophers argued for a body/mind split since it would otherwise be impossible for a Christian redemption of the soul on judgment day once the body perished. Lia Hotchkiss proposes that such a split between mind and body is not present in Cronenberg films and rather that Cronenberg locates the mind within the body, which is certainly the case with Professor Brian O’Blivion whose mind is now located entirely in videotapes. Trigg also argues Cronenberg brings awareness to the body as a

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346 Trigg explains that Cronenberg perceives the body as autonomous in its metamorphosis: “it is a world in which the body becomes a strange fusion of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, both alien materiality and center of lived experience.” See Trigg, “The Return of the New Flesh,” 90.


348 Lia M. Hotchkiss, “‘Still in the Game’: Cybertransformation of the ‘New Flesh’ in David Cronenberg’s eXistenZ,” The Velvet Light Trap, no. 52 (Fall 2003): 16.
site of independence, “developing its own history, habits, and affects.” In Trigg’s terms, Cronenberg uses the body to show how we are embodied beings, or embodied subjects. Trigg’s point is to suggest that the body “can exist in a conscious state independently of the mind,” as I suggest we see in the figure of the zombie. The idea of an embodied being, or subject, intimates that it is not just one’s consciousness which is within and experiencing the body, but that the body itself is the site of perception. It is the body which is the vehicle of first-hand experiences, as the skin-ego is the first location of material experience. The concept of the embodied subject chips away at the dialectic of mind and body and proposes a greater unity between mind and body which cannot be so easily dissected. The embodied subject is not only defined by flesh and materiality, but it does allow for flesh and materiality to define us.

Such films also remind us how it is possible for the body to urge us towards certain behaviors, and for it potentially to take control over our conscious selves. The ‘normal’, uninfected bodies we encounter are under constant pressure from the bounds imposed by the mind or the ego. Without such controlling bounds, the body has no barrier: it can shake uncontrollably, it can explode, spill, grow and operate out of bounds.

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350 Trigg suggests Cronenberg’s work can be viewed as philosophical essays in embodied cognition. Trigg, “The Return of the New Flesh,” 83. Embodied subjectivity is a term used by phenomenologists. For Frank Macke, phenomenology “awakened the modern mind to the possibility of embodied subjectivity, of reason grounded in experience of a vital, fleshly consciousness.” See Frank J. Macke, “Body, Liquidity and Flesh,” 401.
352 Ibid., 84.
353 Ibid., 84.
354 Ibid., 84.
355 One concrete example, taken from the author’s own experience, is the sufferer of cataplexy who does not control the body while assailed by a cataplectic seizure and yet has consciousness of the events, unlike epileptic seizures. During a cataplectic seizure, the body can undergo spasms and contortions operating independently while the sufferer cannot control or subjugate the body to ‘behave’. For an interesting consideration of the body in convulsion in Renaissance paintings and in horror films see James Clifton, “The Face of a Fiend,” 373 -392.
It is, to borrow a term from Christian Martin, a body without limits, a terrifying notion we see expressed in the monsters of *The Thing*.\[^{356}\] Thus, the heterogeneous organic detail can trigger two fears: the fear of facing the unknown and the impending dissolution of the self into another, and the fear of losing agency in the power shift from an embodied subjectivity to a subject nullified and completely submerged in a body operating of its own volition.

The assemblage characters of the films and the heterogeneous materiality shown everywhere converge to express not only embodied subjectivity but also the dissolution of the split between subject/object and mind/body. Merleau-Ponty’s writings on flesh and the body explain how the body can unite both the subject and the object, that we may be both conscious and phenomenological or object.\[^{357}\] The body is both sentient and sensed, can both feel and be felt; it is sensed in the world because it is flesh and part of it, yet it is also sentient as it senses the world.\[^{358}\] By acknowledging this dual position occupied by the body as both subject (sensing) and object (sensed), Merleau-Ponty is capable of bridging the rift between the two.\[^{359}\] Flesh in particular embodies for Merleau-Ponty a textural membrane, both seeing and seen, an elemental substance that makes the world:\[^{360}\]

> [it] is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.\[^{361}\]

\[^{358}\] Ibid., 254.
\[^{359}\] Ibid., 255.
\[^{360}\] Ibid., 256.
\[^{361}\] Ibid., 256.
The heterogeneous organic materiality shown in the films, often liquefied and communicative, is flesh. It manifests itself in the larger sense of the term, the Merleau-Pontyan sense, “because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh.” HOD fragments invade, transform, prostheseize, and create bodies without limits, a flesh that eradicates the sense of a subject separate from its objectified body. The flesh of the pod in eXistenZ is exactly this type of dual subject-object flesh, one that is both sensitive and reactive to touch, and one that is sentient yet still object. Phenomenology is useful here in that it can ground consciousness within this heterogeneous organic flesh, as we see in the breathing tape in Videodrome, and it can, in the act of watching such films, awaken subjectivity to the experience of the flesh. The HOD brings consciousness through flesh. Professor O’Blivion expresses this perfectly in Videodrome when he states: “I could feel the vision coalesce and become flesh, uncontrollable flesh.”

I have argued that rocaille ornaments and contemporary heterogeneous viral elements are similar to each other not only formally and in their details, but also in their performatve informe actions. Both types of materiality are linked through their behavior and their potential to affect. Such language lends agency to seemingly inanimate matter, true, but by understanding the materiality’s actions as viral and by following Bennett’s notion of an assemblage, we have seen how possible it is in fact to grant agency to materiality and we watch, therefore, as it alters and changes the viewer or body caught in a moment’s cartouche or in a loose, grand morceau de fantasie. The next and final chapter will explain two specific outcomes of the viral effects of rocaille and

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362 Ibid., 254.
contemporary heterogeneous matter and reveal to what these infectious prostheses may connect us.
Chapter Three

The previous chapter ended with the suggestion that *rocaille* ornaments and HOD can be symptoms expressed as prosthetic inter-connecting subjects that dissolve the divide between subject/object. The subject of the infection is transformed by the ensuing connections, but to what do these prostheses connect the infected subject, and towards what does the subject extend? What are the ramifications for one who is subjected to the prosthetic ornament? I will explore two potential effects of the symptomatic prosthetic ornament: its impact on a being’s spatial experience and relation to surrounding space, and its impact on personal identity formation. I have already discussed the destruction of spatial boundaries and the collapse of normal space, both in the *rocaille* and contemporary examples, and that, in both cases, impromptu *morceaux de fantasies* and open networks arise that incorporate the subject. *Rocaille* distorts space to create impossible fantasies, as in the many examples from Lajoüe, Mondon, and Meissonnier (figs. 9-11, 15-17, 34-37, 59). Spatial relations are altered as the infected subject integrates into the connected whole and transforms into a player within the *morceau de fantasie*. The infected subject, however, also connects to other entities, and to what I will argue are prosthetic experiences, a process which impacts its personal identity. We will ultimately determine how *informe* ornaments transform and articulate space for viewers, and potentially change their relation to it as well as affect their personal identity.

In the first chapter I discussed how contemporary critics of the rococo thought it was an unruly form of decoration that brought about disorder. Subsequently, I discussed
the disruption of closed systems of decoration and the collapse of the barrier between
two- and three-dimensional space in rocaille prints. Using the theory of the informe and
the analogy of the virus to explain the actions of rocaille ornaments and HOD, I proposed
that these viral radical forms impact the ordering structures of knowledge, sense making,
and form, and inevitably explode any type of impermeable boundary. I identified the
result as a state of flux, fluidity, and movement lacking fixed boundaries. As a
consequence of this disorder, spatial boundaries dissolve, allowing subjects to become
part of a macro whole. I should stress that the disorder arising from the collapse of
boundaries is also its cause and instigator. In a disorderly state, the relation of the subject
to space can therefore change, and this change is not only one of spatial perceptions but
also one of spatial relations. What can be altered is not only how we perceive space but
how we relate to it.

As we have seen, once spatial boundaries collapse, ornaments can slip into
different systems, while subjects can become part of assemblages and morceaux de
fantasies. Such a collapse of spatial boundaries suggests the potential for a new type of
space, or new types of relations to space. In their many prints, Mondon, Lajoüe, and
Meissonier propose a type of space which illustrates the interconnectivity of the body
with rocaille ornaments and the symptomatic phase of viral ornamental actions. Mondon
in particular made explicit the link between sociability and interior decoration by creating
what we could deem a rocaille fantasyscape, where the living merges with rocaille space
to become one and the same. In the prints Les Tendres accords, Le Rendez-vous, Le
Repas champêtre, Les Petits maîtres, L’Amant aimé, L’Amant fidèle, and L’Heureux

Scott states that “Mondon combined extravagant cartouches with genre scenes, making explicit the
connections between a style of ornamentation and the social existence it embellished and supported.” Scott,
The Rococo Interior, 251.
moments, Mondon depicts the subject merging with ornaments in order to illustrate the fantasies that, I shall argue, occur in the mirror’s reflections (figs. 9, 15-17, 37, 163-167). Consequently, such fantasy prints illustrate the merging of imagination with real space, and show how such rocaille spaces might potentially be perceived when experienced as wholes through interconnection with the ornaments.

Katie Scott argues that this kind of proximity between rocaille ornament and lifestyle, as illustrated in Mondon’s prints, cannot reflect real life; for Scott, such prints are illusions and fantasies of unfeasible architecture and unrealistic representations of bodies entwined with ornamentation. Nonetheless, I contend that to deny the instantiation of such depicted spaces is to assume an objective, preconceived notion of space. It assumes space is something exterior to ourselves, a three-dimensional world held together by the laws of physics and gravitational forces and in which our bodies reside, and not something constructed, at least in part, by our imaginative projections. Since Scott dismisses these prints as mere illusions in *The Rococo Interior*, she does not fully consider the imaginary spaces depicted in rococo *morceaux de fantasies*. I contend instead that it is through the imagination that a synthesis of the print’s intimated environment is carried into the interior space of the viewer. If the imagination of the perceiving subject is so central in creating rocaille space, its role must be better understood.

My suppositions on the notion of rocaille space question those of past scholarship. A number of scholars in recent years have recognized rocaille decorative

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366 Scott is concerned with the decor itself and not the illusions of a type of rococo lifestyle offered by rocaille prints, ibid., 252.
systems’ potential impact on spatial conceptions.\textsuperscript{367} One must wonder, however, whether their theories are not limited by conventional conceptions of space, pre-phenomenological notions that hark back to the conception of space as solely made of matter and approached through mathematical expression.\textsuperscript{368} Edward Casey explains that prior to the Post-Modern period (although excluding the Ancient World), space was understood, by the likes of Newton, More, Gassendi, Descartes, and Galileo, as a “formal essence” made from matter, as set of pure relations between mathematical entities, something homogeneous, isotropic, isometric, and infinite.\textsuperscript{369} Such views do not consider types of space—such as interior or imaginative—nor do they consider that space may be constituted by its perception.\textsuperscript{370} What if we considered rocaille space as more than its actualization in a concrete three-dimensional material environment? What would constitute this new space, or what could this new space propose? More precisely, how do rocaille informe ornaments enable a relation to space and what is the role of imagination in constructing such space? I am concerned here with the type of rocaillesque and imaginary life suggested in certain prints, such as those of Mondon, Lajoüe, and Meissonnier, and how these articulate a type of space that is actualized in the subject’s imagination.

\textsuperscript{367} Scott considers rocaille ornaments to be sculptural and part of the very space they not only inhabit but also construct. See Scott, “Figure and Ornament,” 168. Yonan perceives in rocaille ornament the capacity also to bridge real and imaginary space; see Yonan, “Igneous Architecture,” 74. Ankersmit in his analysis of rocaille ornament suggest it not only achieves an illusion of space but also serves to carry the spectator into real space; see Ankersmit, “Rococo as the Dissipation of Boredom,” 152. \textsuperscript{368} Edward Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,” \textit{Senses of Place}, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 1996), 19-20. \textsuperscript{369} Ibid., 19-20. Casey explains, however, that the Kantian model of space does differ from the above since it is not conceived of as infinite but finite. Nonetheless, in the Kantian model, because everything is contained and defined with measurable limits, things are located in a specific space and are not influenced by the “idiosyncrasies of actual experiencing.” See Edward Casey, “Space,” in \textit{The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology}, eds. Sebastian Luft and Søren Overgaard (New York: Routledge, 2012), 203. \textsuperscript{370} Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 20.
I will consider rococo space by using a phenomenological approach. Such an approach considers how the viewers of a rococo space might have perceived this space by determining the role ornaments play as enablers of the experience. There is an experiential dimension to our perception of space which is not accounted for in the scholarship of eighteenth-century rococo space. For phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, and Casey space is experienced as more than a location. It is something experienced affectively, sensuously as place. Place, Edward Casey explains, is where the interior self joins with the exterior to form a subjective space that has a sense of continuity between the self and space. My interpretation of rococo space is inscribed in this late phenomenologist tradition that looks to the body and experience to understand space. Merleau-Ponty thought that what is visible is only the surface or skin of things, meaning rococo space would have layers of invisible depth. Merleau-Ponty explains that what is visible is “a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a

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372 Two noteworthy exceptions are Scott’s phenomenological approach to Mme de Pompadour’s use of space and Hellman’s discussion of the interactions of the elite bodies with rococo furniture and the social spaces these created. See See Scott, “Framing Ambition,” 110-152; 110-152; Hellman, “Furniture, Sociability,” 415-445.

373 Casey, “Space,” 205-206. Casey explains that both Husserl and Bachelard believed in the importance of first-person experience and the “unfolding vistas of the perceived or imagined world.” See ibid., 204.

374 For a phenomenological interpretation of the difference between ‘place’ and ‘space’ and a history of the concept of space see Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

375 Casey explains that it is due to the work of Husserl and Bachelard that a link between the self and space was constructed. See Casey, “Space,” 204. Although Casey’s work on place is interesting, I am not concerned with the epistemological difference between space and place. However, my understanding of space would be Casey’s definition of place. For a succinct explanation of the distinction Casey perceives between the two terms; see ibid., 205-206.
wave of Being.” The totality of things is “always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it” and its access is only possible, for Merleau-Ponty, through experience. Like Merleau-Ponty, Casey also defines place as something that is “not just something seen—as visuocentric models would imply—but something felt, sensed, undergone. A place is dynamically gained, and is in part generated by the actions of the lived-moving body of the person or animal in that place.” Such depth cannot be explained but it can be experienced through the embodied subject. My aim here is to explain how rococo space re-embodies the subject and destroys binaries such as subject-object to create a space that is a continuity between self and space. I am not attempting to relate eighteenth-century theories of space, nor can I explain “the experientially personal, that which only I as a sensing subject can take in.” I do, however, attempt to consider how the sensing body of the viewers and their imagination are central to the perception of rococo space.

Rococo space cannot fully be understood if we do not first consider how the subject’s body was positioned within its space and within the ornaments’ mise-en-scène. This is why I try to explain how the “lived-body” interacts within space and to identify the emerging relations formed between it and space. In the first section of this chapter I explain, much like Casey, how for the viewer “being in a place is being in a

377 Ibid., 253.
380 Casey, “Space,” 204.
381 Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 24.
382 Casey defines lived space as “space as it is experienced in the first person and in one’s own body.” See Casey, “Space,” 205.
configurative complex of things.”\textsuperscript{383} This also entails accounting for the participation of the intimate, interior dimension of the subject’s space in the perception and construction of exterior space.\textsuperscript{384} I shall try to demonstrate how rococo space leaves ample room for such interiority of the self to participate in constructing its space.\textsuperscript{385} Gaston Bachelard in \textit{The Poetics of Space} also argues that space can be experienced intimately. Bachelard brings attention to the subjective experience of space and the role, he claims, imagination plays in shaping it.\textsuperscript{386} For Bachelard, both interior, intimate space and exterior, infinite space are bound together and joined through the experience of art (or, in his examples, poetry), which can enable “an extension of our intimate space” onto the exterior one.\textsuperscript{387} Of course, all art requires a degree of engagement from the viewer’s imagination. The connecting, viral, and unknown nature of radical ornament, however, actively engages the imagination in the specific form of thoughts, daydreams, fantasies, memories, and imaginings. This is why we must understand how interior imaginings connect to and superimpose upon exterior space.

To say that a space necessitates the engaged imagination to activate it can be met with skepticism when we consider the status and role of the imagination. Locke, for example, viewed the imagination as something associated with women, children, mad men—a faculty of no value at all.\textsuperscript{388} But the concept of a space such as Bachelard proposes that merges the inner world of the perceiver with the exterior world has been

\textsuperscript{383} Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 25.
\textsuperscript{384} For Casey, “exteriority and interiority, held apart on earlier paradigms, conjoin in the experience of a house.” See Casey, “Space,” 205.
\textsuperscript{385} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{387} Ibid., 199.
theorized. Mihai Spariosu has called such a space liminal. Using different scholars’ research, Spariosu explains how fictive worlds can become real and how the imagination helps construct alternate states of affairs.\(^{389}\) Spariosu explains that liminal worlds are “indeterminate ontological landscapes or gray areas.”\(^{390}\) He describes these as the worlds of art, festivals, games, novels, dreams, and dream-like states, amongst others.\(^{391}\) Maria Beatrice Bittarello argues that virtual reality is in fact a space that merges both the imaginary and the real. She makes the point that virtual worlds are also the imaginary lands and religious and ancient myths, such as the Arthurian world and utopias.\(^{392}\) She also argues that artists, chroniclers, and story tellers made such worlds part of the everyday by representing and talking about the characters of these virtual imaginary worlds.\(^{393}\) For Bittarello, therefore, virtual worlds are not separate from the real world but are part of the everyday.\(^{394}\)

Describing virtual worlds, Renée de Vall suggests that the phenomenological characteristics of cyberspace are not only determined by the technological possibilities of existing hardware and software to create virtual worlds but also by the conditions of the reception of these worlds. Rather than speaking of virtual as opposed to real spaces, I would speak of a plurality of spaces that are all in different degrees partly real and partly virtual.\(^{395}\)

D. W. Winnicott has called the conflation of imaginary space and reality ‘potential space.’\(^{396}\) Working from psychoanalytic theory and the special bond between mother and


\(^{390}\) Ibid., 68.

\(^{391}\) Ibid., 68.


\(^{393}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{394}\) Ibid., 3.


\(^{396}\) D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971). See also Ogden’s article which elaborates on the theories of Winnicott and congeals Winnicott’s work into a more cohesive theory.
infant, he described the concept of potential space as an indeterminate space where one can experience both fantasy and reality at the same time.\textsuperscript{397} Winnicott explains that potential space “is not \textit{inside} by any use of the word […] Nor is it \textit{outside}, that is to say, it is not part of the repudiated world, the not-me […]”\textsuperscript{398} Potential space, according to Ogden, who further develops Winnicott’s work, lies between our psychic interiority and the actual external reality of a person.\textsuperscript{399} As we can see, the concept of a space where both the interior imaginary world of the viewer co-mingles with the exterior to form a new type of space has already been proposed. What remains to be considered, however, is how such a space emerges from the viral actions of \textit{rocaille} ornaments.

Although it is impossible to determine the actual inner experiences of eighteenth-century viewers of rococo works, I can nonetheless consider the greater context to which the rococo print belonged. Casey argues that “bodies not only perceive but know places. Perceiving bodies are knowing bodies, and is inseparable from what they know is culture as it imbues and shapes particular places.”\textsuperscript{400} Casey suggests we perceive not just with the passive phenomenal data we receive but also with what we have already within us, that is with “cultural and social structures that sediment themselves into the deepest level of perception.”\textsuperscript{401} For Casey, culture and society are not “separable contents of our being and experience: these givens become infusions into the infrastructures of perception itself.”\textsuperscript{402} This culture of fantasyscapes, exotic locales, strange and curious objects is part

\textsuperscript{398} Ogden, “On Potential Space,” 129.
\textsuperscript{400} Ogden, “On Potential Space,” 129.
\textsuperscript{401} Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 34.
\textsuperscript{402} Ibid., 19.
of the knowing body of the eighteenth-century viewer, Casey would argue. It is a knowing body that understands these ornaments, that can read them, and that knows their unknowability and the games they play. Using a phenomenological approach can help uncover how the intimate, interior space of the viewer may be solicited to participate in experiencing rococo space. I cannot investigate the actual inner imaginings of viewers, past or present, but I can and do consider the triggers that might engender such imaginings and attempt to reconstruct potential rocaille visions that beholders could have experienced.

In this first part of the chapter I propose that rocaille ornaments act as a transitional vehicle helping subjects or viewers perceive this new spatial formation constituted of both real and imaginary space. In other words, rocaille ornaments act as a linking system between the observer and this ‘potential space’, to borrow a term from Winnicott. This is possible because of the ornaments’ formal qualities, their arrangements, and the actions they perpetrate, all of which I have described. Hence, the mergers or connections initiated by the infectious nature of rocaille ornament create links and bridges to what Bittarello and de Vall would label virtual spaces. I am not alone in perceiving that rocaille ornaments can perform such a role and that imagination is an integral part to rocaille space. Michael Yonan also perceives this potential for rocaille ornament to alter space, but feels that specific conditions unique to each building determine this potential. In line with my argument, Yonan’s also considers such ornaments as transitional elements; he sees this specifically between the physical space of the Cabinet chinois at Palace Shönbrunn in Vienna and the imaginary space of the Orient

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depicted on the room’s lacquer panels.404 He attributes this achievement to the fact that two depths are depicted: that of the three-dimensional porcelain vases decorating the Cabinet chinois, and that of the receding images on the lacquer panels decorating the walls. However, this argument works for one room only, whereas I believe that rocaille ornaments create bridges in most instances. Although in this particular instance Yonan claims that ornaments bridge the space between physical Europe and imaginary China, he does not argue, as I shall, that these elements can connect observers to an imaginary space of their own making. Furthermore, unlike Yonan, I explain how the ornaments perform such connections.

I propose also that rocaille space can be understood as the symptomatic phase of the virus in which we find the perpetual actions of the other viral phases all working simultaneously to create this constant symptomatic phase. As such, the whole of rocaille space is perceived in the merger of the subject with that space, as the space engulfs the subject through its viral connections, transformative powers of assemblage, and morceaux de fantasies. The end result of these fusions, I argue, is a complete understanding of the whole space by means of its interaction with the viewer’s imagination. Rocaille space, then, is highly subjective since it is made possible, in part, by the active participation of the viewer’s mind. Yonan and I share common ground on this point as well. In his article on the Wieskirche located in southern rural Bavaria, Yonan proposes that this particular space uses rocaille style to merge the real physical space of the church with the intangible one of the Christian faith, which, he argues, is

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ultimately located inside the imagination of the viewer. Since ornaments, by their very nature and through their actions, break the spatial boundaries separating subject and object, these are also capable of defusing the demarcations between interior notions of space, the imagination, and physical space. The whole space of rocaille, which merges physical objects, subjectivity, and imaginary impositions, becomes in effect real, and affects viewers by incorporating them within the fantasy. We can understand this type of space as relational because it arises out of the relation between distinctions, such as subject and object, while the viral informe actions at play dissolve these distinctions.

3.1: The Construction of Rocaille Space

I discussed in the first chapter how rocaille ornaments’ formal arrangements, such as their asymmetrical disposition and their shapes, transpierce physical space in order to make visual connections and create a visual network. I also discussed this connective potential through the concept of the informe and viral actions. I will now describe how, with these qualities, ornaments are capable of connecting viewers, their imaginations, and the space around them to form new spaces. Such ornamental connections or relations occur due to the cumulative effect of the viral, informe actions of these ornaments throughout various levels of interaction. The first such level of interaction is between the

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405 In the particular case of the Wieskirche the potential to merge physical surroundings with the viewer’s own interior visions is also argued. Specifically, Yonan locates the completion of rocaille space in the viewer’s imagination. He argues this is possible since, due to the faith of the pilgrim, the resolution of the church-going experience actually occurs in the imagination of the pilgrim. In this particular instance, Yonan and I do indeed perceive the same potential in rocaille ornaments, with the exception that his argument is based on Christian faith and not the capabilities of the viewer’s imagination or the ornaments’ inherent qualities to stimulate it. See Yonan, “The Wieskirche,” 16-18.

406 Ankersmit also argues that “Not only does rococo ornament achieve an illusion of space that no other ornament succeeds in producing in us, but it actually carries the spectator into real space, thus affecting the actual experience of the real world.” See Ankersmit, “Rococo as the Dissipation of Boredom,” 152
body of the viewer/subject and the real physical ornament in three-dimensional space, such as the sculpted ornaments in the lambris of the Salon du Prince at Soubise (fig. 32). Here the ornaments can even be considered sculptural, since they literally project from the walls and are three-dimensional. Such objects can physically be touched and consequently occupy three-dimensional space. But three-dimensional rocaille ornaments are not only found as part of wall-panel decorations. These were also present—and still are—as wall sconces, wall brackets, the legs of elaborate side tables (and all furniture for that matter), the frames of pier mirrors, the casing around lacquer panels on side tables, candelabras, firedogs, the toilette service, snuff boxes, surtout de table, porcelain figures, bronze casings of fine china, and frames that held wall paintings (figs. 26, 29, 41, 55-56, 58, 72, 93, 127, 169, 172, 174-175). Three-dimensional rocaille ornaments were everywhere and often near the body itself: as Mimi Hellman explained, the table de toilette was an extension of its user’s body.407 People literally touched rocaille ornaments when resting a hand on a sofa’s arm, or picking up a snuff box or brush, or re-arranging porcelain trinkets on the mantle. We can understand why, then, the first link between subjects and rocaille ornaments is the three-dimensional realm they both inhabit.

The three-dimensional ornaments also act as a bridge between the body of the participant and the two-dimensional ornaments depicted within the frames of the wall decoration, as those of the Dangé Cabinet des fables or of the Cabinet des singes at hôtel de Rohan (figs. 61, 103, 168). Such two-dimensional rocaille ornaments were also found in prints, paraphernalia such as trading cards, porcelain decoration, wall hangings, and all

407 For instance, Hellman states “furniture in eighteenth-century France was prosthetic, an artificial extension of the body that enabled its management of physical and social space.” See Hellman, “Furniture, Sociability,” 430.
kinds of furniture fabrics. Two-dimensional ornaments were also painted on furniture and printed on clothing. In the case of wall-panel decorations, these small, painted two-dimensional ornaments literally connect to their three-dimensional counterparts, which also frame them, as we see in the Cabinet des fables from l’hôtel Dangé. Since, however, as I argued earlier, the rocaille framing system is one of permeability, the spaces between three and two dimensions are not clearly delineated. These spaces can be breached by the connective arrangements of the ornaments, such as the ‘c’ and ‘s’ hooks. In one of the only restored Dangé panels, we clearly see the interaction of the two levels at work (fig. 103, 169). Looking at the bottom left of the panel, we see one of the twisted three-dimensional ornamental leaves encroach upon the frame, almost touching the painted ornaments. While it appears as though emerging from the sculpted frame, the painted illusory ornaments are in fact laid against the frame, so that, in effect, the third dimension extends into the second, illusory one. The shapes of the painted ornaments also follow the contours of the sculpted frame, extending the illusion that it is the outer, three-dimensional ornaments that have deployed and bloomed into two-dimensional, multicolored ones. More precisely, the ease with which the glance of the viewer may glide into the two-dimensional space is achieved by the echo of the curves and counter-curves seen at the bottom corners of the panel. The frame is here infected by these unknown organic shapes, vegetal grafts that simultaneously attach to, transgress, and transform the frame, in effect rendering it permeable and obviating its function of delineating and separating spaces.

Lastly, in the case of the Cabinet des fables from l’hôtel Dangé, the painted two-dimensional ornaments also surround the central piece of narrative action, a moment in
Les Fables de la Fontaine. The leaves and twigs of grass jut out in arches at the very edges of the vignette, connecting and touching the rocaille ornaments. If we follow the curves of the blades of grass, which lead us into the vignette, we perpetuate the circular movement of the blue arabesque ‘c’-shaped ornament (figs. 103, 169). In this case, rocaille ornaments gently interact with the vignette’s fantasy to lead us into its narrative imaginary space. In slightly later phases of the style, however, rocaille ornaments no longer simply surround narrative fictional vignettes, they literally compose and constitute their space.408

In the wall decoration by Christophe Huet, completed for Louis-Cézar duc de la Vallière at Champs-sur-Marne in 1748-49,409 we see the imaginary narrative and exotic elements integrating with the ornamental frame itself (fig. 22). In effect, we can understand this as rocaille ornaments constructing and constituting loose cartouches which, by merging with exotic narrative elements, become themselves part of the imaginary fantasy space (figs. 22, 170). In the example of the demoiselle crane and the red macaw panel, the birds both inhabit the design as narrative elements and simultaneously help to constitute the structural framing ensemble. These two birds belong to a cast of elements comprising a cartouche, together with a scallop-like shell that opens at the bottom left corner, sprigs, blossoms, an Oriental vine, and a fan-like fin/hook shape. Unlike the typical rocaille cartouches by Babel, we have in this case only the

408 We can compare the work of Nicolas Lancret and Claude Audran III done for the Corner Cabinet of l’hôtel Peyrenc de Moras at 23, Place Vendôme in 1724 with the later work of Christophe Huet for the Cabinet Bleu executed at Château de Champs-sur-Marne in 1748-49. The Lancret panels do have rocaille ornaments that lead us into the narrative of the panel, but the Huet panels show ornaments merging with animals and plants to become the very narrative of the panel. Concerning the Hôtel Peyrenc de Moras see Ziskin, The Place Vendôme, 110. Concerning the work of Huet at Champs-sur-Marne, see Nicole Garnier-Pelle, Anne Forray-Cardier, and Marie-Christine Anselm, Singeries et Exotisme chez Christophe Huet (Saint-Rémy-en-L’Eau: M. Hayot; Paris: Arts décoratifs, 2010), 97-98.
409 Here, the painted decorations have been juxtaposed to prior boiseries done in 1703 by the architect Bullet de Chamblain; see Garnier-Pelle, Forray-Cardier and Anselm, Singeries et Exotisme, 97-98.
general outline of a misformed hourglass shape in which the elements are less condensed (fig. 40). We do not have a sense of a closed-off shape, but rather of an outline from whose upper right corner we may come and go as we please. Meanwhile the ornaments in the *Grand cabinet bleu* from Champs-sur-Marne do not connect with their three-dimensional counterparts because these were previously executed by a different artist of an earlier period. The openness of the cartouches, however, still compels viewers to enter the imaginary space. Furthermore, since these ornaments already functioned at the time as interstitial devices piercing boundaries, it is no stretch to argue that these capacities could have been enabled by a viewer familiar with such ornaments.

The infringement of *rocaille* ornament onto narrative space, and its penchant to form the narrative space, is most evident in Mondon’s work. In *La contante villageoise*, the ornaments, which begin as a framing cartouche at the bottom of the engraving, suddenly enter the narrative space of the *villageoise* herself (fig. 171). Her skirt in fact hangs in front of one of the buttressing ‘c’ curves, clearly indicating that she is marching outwards beyond the engraving and towards the viewer inspecting the piece. These viral ornaments come to infringe, pierce, enter, and ultimately even constitute a third level of space, that of the imaginary narrative. As an example of the degradation between separate levels of space, we can consider the ornamental relation in a Japanese lacquer side table (fig. 172). Japanese lacquer panels were cut from screens to fit specific areas, thereby

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410 For further information on the side table see Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide and Jeffrey Munger, *The Wrightsman Galleries for French Decorative Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), 70. The *Cabinet Chinois* was built by the architect Victoire Thierry Dailly for Marie-Thérèse Gouffier, granddaughter to the duc de Luynes, and who became marquise du Châtel when she married Louis-François, eldest son of Antoine Crozat, in 1722. For more information on this hôtel see Ziskin, *The Place Vendôme*, 115.
The genres of Japanese lacquer and *rocaille* ornament may seem to clash, but in fact we can view their combination as *rocaille* ensembles or permeable wholes. Granted the initial exotic element of the lacquer has been cut and distorted and therefore does not retain its initial meaning or shape. If, however, we consider the lacquer as forming a whole in combination with the *rocaille* ornament, then the lacquer is reshaped into something new. As such, the asymmetry and unidentifiable shapes of *rocaille* ornaments constitute a bridge between the real space of the viewer and the unknown exterior space to which the lacquer alludes. Such connection is possible because the ornamental shapes on the lacquer table penetrate both into the space of the lacquer and simultaneously out onto the wood of the table. In terms of viral informe operations, the growing leaves and vines twirl inside and outside the space of the lacquer, eroding the inside-outside binary. Although the *rocaille* ornaments seem to frame the lacquer, the tendrils nonetheless act as tentacles, like those of the monsters in *The Thing*, reaching both inside the alluded world of the lacquer and outside to the real world of the viewer, joining the two. It is important to recall here that *rocaille* ornaments do not frame by containing but by permeability. This is why it is possible in this case to connect the observer to the imaginary exotic land referenced in the space of the lacquer, and even to the space located outside the interrupted edges of the cut lacquer. The viewer’s involvement within the fantasy goes a step further as the viral transformative operations of *rocaille* continue. For even the central narrative panels, which at first appear to be the main visual narrative, act as a secondary framing device to the ultimate narrative: that of the viewing subject.

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This fourth spatial effect is not so much caused by the fictitious narrative of the decor, when such painted narratives are present, but rather by the reflections of large pier glass mirrors, which at the time were a technological innovation.\textsuperscript{412} Reception rooms or cabinets with decors could contain up to three pier mirrors, making it inevitable to see one’s own reflection or that of another person.\textsuperscript{413} The mirrors not only served to reflect the light and render a room brighter and more luxurious but also to permit the indirect gazing of oneself or others and, I contend, to incorporate the viewer into the decoration.\textsuperscript{414} According to Mimi Hellman, pier mirrors were indeed used as observation tools for the elites.\textsuperscript{415} Hellman explains that to gaze at and overtly praise people and their surroundings was deemed extremely vulgar and common: “elites simultaneously watched one another and presented themselves as objects of delectation. Paradoxically, however, this strategic deployment of vision was supposed to be unobtrusive and apparently natural. Overt modes of looking such as squinting and staring distorted the pleasing body and implied social inferiority.”\textsuperscript{416} Yet one still had to stare at other people in order to assess and acquire knowledge of them and consequently advance in the game of elite

\textsuperscript{412} For the cost of manufacturing mirrors and their high demand see Scott, \textit{Rococo Interior}, 31.
\textsuperscript{414} On the use of reflections to observe others see Mimi Hellman, “Enchanted Night: Decoration, Sociability and Visuality after Dark,” \textit{Paris: Life & Luxury in The Eighteenth Century}, ed. Charissa Bremer-David (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 95. At the end of the eighteenth century, Jacques Louis David made use of mirror reflections to present his painting \textit{the Intervention of the Sabine Women} (year) in his studio in the Louvre to the paying public. The viewer would gaze at their reflection while the painting served as backdrop, thus incorporating the viewer within the fiction of the painting. For a discussion of the presentation of this painting in relation to the use of mirrors see Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, \textit{Necklines: the Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror} (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 136-139, 152-162. See also Ewa. Lajer-Burcharth, “David's Sabine Women: Body, Gender and Republican Culture under the Directory,” \textit{Art History} 14, no. 3 (September 1991): 97-430.
\textsuperscript{416} Hellman, “Enchanted Night,” 95.
social interactions. An elite type of gazing developed, one that was coy, covert, and indirect; pier mirrors aided greatly in this task. Hellman explains that “[e]lite visuality was characterized not by a sustained, totalizing gaze but rather by mobile, fleeting, covert glances. Navigating the decorated interior was a matter of noticing and responding without actually appearing to see. In another article, Hellman gives the example of a piece of furniture, a canapé à confidents, conceived so that people did not have to stare directly at one another, but then neither could they visually exchange directly with one another. However, in the reflection of pier mirrors, sitters could either see each other or stare at the object of their covert discussion.

In his entry in the Encyclopédie on the cheminée (fireplace), Blondel remarks that the correct height for a fireplace in salons or rooms for entertaining is less than three and a half feet “afin que ceux qui forment cercle autour du foyer y étant assis, puissent se voir dans les glaces & y remarquer ce qui se passe.” Jennifer Milam also explains that the eighteenth-century architect Charles-François Daviler “notes that mirrors enabled the viewer to check his appearance while at the same time observing others as they entered and exited the apartment.” Another useful source, albeit fictitious, is the architectural romance La petite maison written by Jean-François de Bastide in 1758. This story provides two noteworthy examples of mirrors being used in the interactions of its protagonists, the Marquis de Trémicourt and the object of his affection, the charming Mélite.

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417 For an ampler explanation of elite gazing see ibid., 95.  
418 Ibid., 95.  
420 “[S]o that those sitting in circle formation around a fireplace may see themselves in the mirrors as well as note what is happening,” my translation, see Jacques-François Blondel, Encyclopédie, s.v. “Cheminée.”  
The day was drawing to a close and the light waned; a valet came to light the thirty candles held by a chandelier and by girandoles of Sèvres porcelain artfully arranged in their brackets of gilded bronze. These thirty candles reflected in the mirrors, and this added brilliance made the salon seem larger and restated the object of Trémicour’s impatient desires.422

Bastide points out the use of mirrors is not only to contribute in lighting the room and in creating the illusion of its bigger size but also to reflect its occupants, in this case Trémicour’s object of affection—Mélite. In another example, Bastide is more direct in illustrating the deflected, coy glances Hellmann argues the elite would practice:

To dispel this fearful thought, Mélite moved away from the Marquis toward one of the mirrors, pretending to readjust a pin in her coiffure. Trémicour stood in front of the opposite mirror, and with the help of this trick was able to watch her even more tenderly, without her having to look away. In seeking a moment’s respite from Trémicour’s charms, Mélite had fallen into an even deeper trap.

“That’s enough!” she snapped, realizing her mistake,

“Please stop looking at me! This is becoming quite tiresome.”423

These excerpts from La petite maison, alongside Blondel’s comments in the Encyclopédie and those of Daviler, demonstrate it was probably common practice to stare at the reflection of others or oneself in the décor’s pier mirrors. The very large number of mirrors made such reflections omnipresent, and so we must question how these could contribute to, or change, the decorative vision offered to the subject viewing the whole environment. I contend that mirrors not only served as observational devices, but that their reflected images directly incorporated the occupants of a room within the décor, which images were in turn observed by the occupants (figs. 173-174).424

423 de Bastide, The Little House, 78-79.
424 Scott also commented on the use of mirrors incorporating eighteenth-century viewers within the décor:

“Moreover, the pier-glasses and mirror-faced overmantel must have functioned to project their reflected selves among the painted China-men and -women on the walls, so that, like so many Gullivers, they came momentarily to inhabit an alternative, exotic world.” See Scott, “Playing Game with Otherness,” 225.
The incorporation of the viewing subject into the decor occurs in several steps. In the first step, mirrors offer a reflection, which is not a direct gaze but always an altered, rerouted, or reframed vision, since the gaze of the viewer must pass through another medium. Unlike the gaze of a viewer aimed directly at an object, the reflection is mediated. It reframes that which is reflected into a flattened image contained within the specular space, in a way that is similar to the projection of film on a flat surface. The comparison is all the more apt when one considers that the reflected image is not at rest, as with a drawing or painting, but moving. If one stared at the projected reflections, it would be the equivalent of us staring at a film projected on a screen. In the second step, mirrors remove the object of vision from actual reality, as their interpretive medium flattens the object onto an illusory surface. The effect of this removal of the object is to eliminate surplus sensory data that would otherwise hinder the type of concentrated vision the mirrors offer. In such rooms, one would be engulfed in the mirrors’ refracted reflections and recast into a flat image at the center of the decoration, which was also reflected. More precisely, the subject’s reflection located within the more restrained, mediated, and flattened space of the mirror narrows and focuses the vision onto the subject, easing its integration into the fantasy of the decor. We can understand this last level of cumulative spatial effects as the insertion of the viewers or participants of the space within a virtual fantasy created in the reflections of mirrors.

Such a virtual fantasy is created by reflecting and flattening real space and participants into another dimension mediated by the ornaments that constitute the frame of the mirrors. The Salon du Prince at Soubise is a good example of mirrors reflecting and flattening the ornaments within the room, as well as any participant who might stand
in the right spot (fig. 55). In this example of a mirror reflection from the *Salon du Prince*, we see first that the pier mirror reflects the ornaments of the room, such as the ceiling rosette and the sculptural reliefs in the frieze. Once captured within the reflection, the ornaments are removed from a three-dimensional space to a two-dimensional image. Then we note the reflection of the photographer. The distance between the person and the wall ornaments is no longer important, as both are flattened into an image encapsulated within the palmate frame of the mirror. Consequently, the real ornaments in the room, along with those in the mirrors, re-frame the participants to become part of a merger between the real space of the room and the reflected, imaginary space in the mirrors. We can consider such reflections as illustrating imaginary space, since they are flat and become images removed from real space. They are also interpretive mediations that transform reality to incorporate the participants within the flat decor, as though also figures within it. Reflected bodies thus assemble with the ornaments and, just as in the Mondon prints, merge with *rocaillesque* ornaments (figs. 9, 17, 37, 163-167, 171). We see this in the *Chambre de parade de la Princess* where part of the photographer’s body is captured and severed by the ornaments (fig. 175). Its reflection is merged with the outside ornaments of the frame as well as those of the background ornaments. Just as in Mondon’s print *l’Heureux Moments* or *La Contante Villagoise*, the reflected body recedes into the planes of space, and its only anchors to the seemingly real space are the *rocaille* ornaments of the mirror frame with which the body interacts (figs. 164, 171). The real ornaments of the room frame the reflected bodies, offering real-life tableaus of the events unfolding in these spaces, exactly like the *rocaille* ornaments in *Les Heures du Jours* by Mondon (fig. 176).
In *Le Tems de la Soirée*, Mondon illustrates quite explicitly how *rocaille* forms can seamlessly transition without any visual interruptions from their position as framing structures. They mark the difference between frame and fictional space as well as the transformation into the architectural structures and furniture within the framed fictional room. In the full set of four prints *Les Heures du Jour*, to which this print belongs, Mondon illustrates the ability of radical ornaments to create effects that merge different levels of space, such as the three-dimensional space, the two-dimensional, the fictional, and the reflective. By exposing a flexible ornamental framework that fuses different levels of space, the prints demonstrate how pier glass mirrors reflect the daily, real-life activity of the elite and recast it as part of the decorative whole. Mondon consequently illustrates how radical ornaments’ viral actions establish pathways, means of communications, that act as a transit system for the viewing subject to access various spaces.

Lastly, by re-framing viewing subjects so that they become flattened decorative characters themselves, the mirrors remove viewers from three-dimensional space and transform them into active participants of the ornamental environment. Like the painted characters that are integral to the decorative scheme, such as *La Pélerine* or *Le Turc Amoureux* by Nicolas Lancret or the work of Jean-Baptiste Oudry for the château de Voré, the reflected subject, en-framed by the reflected ornaments, becomes a participating character integral to the ornamental scheme (figs. 60, 177-178). In such painted decorative panels, characters occupy a particularly central position framed by delicate arabesques that inter-weave between the space of the panel and that of the fictional, illusory scene, as in *La Promenade* and *Le Repos* by Oudry (figs. 179-180).
Similar to these examples, the reflections of the room’s occupants are also ensconced in ornament. As such, they become part of fictional vignettes, in which characters are set apart from real space and yet, by way of the ornaments, are nonetheless still connected to it. By means of the reflections and ornaments viewers are sutured to a fictional space, where they become the main narrative subject within it. Through this process, we understand how the reflected images of the mirrors become like films watched by avid, elite participants, who coyly gaze at them from distant and hidden angles, just as the Marquis de Trémicourt connivingly watched Mélite’s reflection. Through the reflections of the mirror, the viewing subject is not only the new subject matter of the decoration but also becomes another object in the decor.\footnote{Hellman also concludes that, “[t]hus arranged, literally anchored within the decorative scheme of the room, the occupants of the canape were simultaneously observers and potential objects of observation.” See Hellman, “Furniture, Sociability,” 430.}

The concept of flesh developed by Merleau-Ponty can help us further understand how the viewing subject comes to participate in the decor and become part of a \textit{morceau de fantasie}. First, we must understand that, for Merleau-Ponty, sight has the capacity not only to see but also to palpate, envelope, and espouse visible things. In other words, sight touches.\footnote{Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Visible and the Invisible}, 250.} This is an important point as it implies that the viewing subject of both \textit{rocaille} and the HOD can touch by the mere act of seeing. It is therefore by seeing that the subject is linked to the three-dimensional ornaments or the HOD. Merleau-Ponty explains that, by the simple fact that we are capable of seeing, we also have a corporeality that can be seen:

\begin{quote}
[H]e who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at. As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me,
\end{quote}
installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain
spot...It suffices for us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot
possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it* [...]*427*

Should one be capable of seeing implies that one participates in the real world, and that
one is also a palpable entity that can be seen. For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, vision
embodies us, and because we are embodied beings, made of a visible outer layer, we are
linked to other bodies, other objects. Merleau-Ponty writes that “the body unites us
directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two
outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the
sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open.”*428*

For Merleau-Ponty, the concept of visibility—vision as in viewing and vision as in being
viewed—is that we are at once both seen and seeing beings. *429* Merleau-Ponty’s concept
of double visibility is key here because this inherent condition of being, this visibility, is
exaggerated in rococo space. In the *rocaille* space, the mirrors transform the seer from
seeing to being seen. Our reflections in the mirrors make explicit and exaggerate our
condition of double visibility. By being incorporated within the decor through the
mirror’s reflections, the viewing subjects are not only seeing but being seen. As such,
they also become objectified. We could say that mirrors in *rocaille* space present to the
viewing subject a vision of how the visible world sees them. *430*

The term Merleau-Ponty uses to express his concept of double visibility is flesh.
He understands flesh as a sort of frame, a means of perceiving, both a lens that allows us
to sense and see and an outer surface materiality that allows us to be seen, “so that the

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*427* Ibid., 252.
*428* Ibid., 253.
*429* Ibid., 256.
*430* Ibid., 256.
seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it.”

For Merleau-Ponty, the concept of flesh “is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.”

A difficult concept to define, the Merleau-Pontyan flesh is sensing and sensed, both visible and partly invisible; it links the subject to the object, embodies our minds into our outer material selves; it creates links to the outer visible world. Flesh is not the degree of separation between things, but what unites us to things: “it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.” It is the degree of closeness of communication. This flesh is like that of the pod in eXistenZ. The pod and its flesh are sensitive to the touch and sense Allegra’s caresses and emotions, while also being sensed by Allegra as an exterior object to herself (figs. 106, 132). In this case, we can say that the flesh of the pod is ‘s-object.’

The radicality of rocaille is its ability to makes us aware of the state of sensitivity and sensing by transforming subjects into simultaneous objects—into being ‘s-object.’ It effaces the demarcation between the two. One of the effects of radical ornament is to make us aware of the double quality of flesh.

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431 Ibid., 256.
432 Ibid., 256.
433 Ibid., 253.
434 Ibid., 252.
435 Ibid., 252.
436 Ibid., 254.
3.2: Rocaille Space and the Imagination

I have described four steps of cumulative relational effects (the body with the three-dimensional ornaments, the tree-dimensional ornaments with the two-dimensional ones, the two-dimensional ornaments with the fictional space of vignettes, and the reflective space of mirrors incorporating subjects into the decors), and how, through these four steps, ornaments act as a linking system between the observer and a new conception that can be considered rocaille space. Ornaments are the means by which this new spatial formation is both created and perceived. But what constitutes this potential, liminal spatial formation? It must first be understood not as real three-dimensional space, but rather as the consumation of all these relational effects, which, with the participation of the viewer’s imagination, result in a combination of both real and imaginary space. It is a space, then, activated through the merging of the subject’s perception and the continual formation of morceaux de fantasies that result from the cumulative relational effects, such as the mirrors’ reflections. In effect, rocaille space is not simply the space we first glance at when entering a room. It is, rather, a participatory space requiring the input of its viewing subject in order to be perceived or activated as a whole. This participatory action on the part of the viewer is the activation and engagement of the viewer’s imagination within the space. The whole of rocaille space is activated and perceived through the subjective wanderings of the participant’s imagination. We must understand the imagination as an active agent and having an important role in the creation of this type of space. The fifth relational effect is thus the reconciliation of all these effects in the
viewer’s mind, as the viewer merges with the whole of *rocaille* space and becomes one of its active components. Ultimately, the use of one’s imagination is necessary in order to experience *rocaille* space to its fullest extent, which is to perpetuate a constant state of *morceau de fantaisie*, an active *tableau vivant*. The totality of *rocaille* space is indeed highly subjective, found as it is at the conflation of imaginary space and three-dimensional space and requiring the participation of the viewer’s imagination, but it is nonetheless as real a space as three-dimensional space.

I am not alone in stressing the importance of the relation between *rocaille* and the imagination. As we saw in the first chapter, critics of the day attacked the style of *rocaille* because, among other things, it demonstrated the unbridled flights of fancy of its creator’s imagination. Although Kant “accorded great metaphysical significance to the imagination,” both empirical and materialist thinkers of the eighteenth century thought imagination brought disorder and was even a potential threat to world order, as did the critics of *rocaille*.\(^{437}\) Notwithstanding the different eighteenth-century positions on the meaning of imagination and its use, the phenomenological approach of this thesis investigates how *rocaille* ornaments might have engaged the imagination of an eighteenth-century subject. In order to understand this, let us first briefly review which faculties of the imagination are engaged and how these work.

*Rocaille* induces in the viewing subject different kinds of perceptive experiences, allowing the subject to see beyond objects located in the three-dimensional exterior world. This is possible because the viewing subject’s faculties of imagination are called into play. Casey explains that when we experience imaginings we perceive two states of

affairs concurrently—the imagined one and the real one. Whether imaginings are the result of hallucinations, musings, memories, fantasies, or daydreams, the imaginative faculties of the viewing subject are engaged to perceive things that are not currently present in the space. But imaginings, contrary to hallucinations, do not compete with the reality perceived. Imaginings allow one to perceive what one is imagining all the while still perceiving actual reality. This is similar to how children play imaginary games and alter space by superimposing their own internal vision onto it, which results, one could say, in what might be termed a type of augmented interactive reality. Amongst the many possible meanderings of subjective experience, such as memories, hallucinations, musings, fantasies, daydreams, and imaginings, it is not quite clear whether imagining is in fact the faculty engaged in generating such experiences or whether it, too, is a sub-category. Of concern here, however, is that two types of imaginary musings in particular seem to be induced by radical ornaments: fantasies and daydreams. This does not preclude memories, hallucinations, or abstract imaginings from happening, but rocaille space does induce fantasies or daydreams more easily in its viewing subjects. Fantasies can vary, from bordering on hallucination to actual daydreams and passing fancies. Casey defines fantasies as narratives based on a storyline, unlike

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439 Ibid., 86.
441 Within the context of memories, hallucinations, musings, fantasies, and daydreams, imaginings are defined by Pateman as a restrained form of abstract thinking. He defines these as inventions separate from the inventor, musings that are not attached to the subject inventing these. See Trevor Pateman, “Space for the imagination,” Journal of Aesthetic Education 31, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 5. For a clear distinction between these experiences see the article by Casey, “Imagination,” 65-91.
442 Casey, “Imagination,” 79.
hallucinations and imaginings which tend to have fragmentary characters.\textsuperscript{443} When the fantasizing subject controls the fantasy, it is a lot closer to imaginings.\textsuperscript{444} But unlike imaginings, fantasies are not utterly controlled, since they have a waywardness about them and “set forth situations that, by their very nature, represent the fulfillment of wishes.”\textsuperscript{445} Although fantasies are wish fulfilling in that they may give pleasure to those fantasizing, this does not entail that in real life these desires would give actual pleasure to the fantasizing subject.\textsuperscript{446} This is why fantasies may grant a certain freedom, since the fantasist can imagine wishes without having these materialize. As Casey explains, “Where actual enactment might well bring consternation or horror, enactment in fantasy gives rise to pleasure.”\textsuperscript{447} Both the film experience and the rocaille space can offer its viewers the possibility for wish fulfillment. In the case of the body-horror film, the spectator can revel in the HOD’s materiality without literally undergoing bodily harm. In the rocaille space, however, as I shall discuss later, there is the further possibility to imagine and fantasize oneself as other or in another setting.

Daydreaming, according to James Morley, is a category of imaginary thought that has not been thoroughly studied on account of the daydreamer’s half-conscious state.\textsuperscript{448} The neglect of research into daydreaming as an activity of consciousness has led to the omission of considering the potential state of consciousness of the daydreamer. By

\textsuperscript{443} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid., 83. Casey bases his definition of fantasy on the psychoanalytic one of Freud’s. This is why fantasies are not literary works since the latter have a well circumscribed format and the former have only content. See ibid., 81. Psychoanalytically, fantasies are viewed as projections of displaced feelings onto something else. This capability is traced back to the infant’s feelings of anxiety towards the mother. For the psychoanalytic roots of fantasy see Pateman, “Space for the Imagination,” 5.
\textsuperscript{446} Casey, “Imagination,” 84.
\textsuperscript{447} Ibid., 84.
carrying out an empirical study based on subject experience, Morley was able to define
the actions and effects of daydreaming. One interesting effect of daydreaming, like
imagining and fantasizing, is that it allows the subject to occupy two places at once by
splitting consciousness between states of dreaming and reality.\textsuperscript{449} Also like fantasizing,
Morley’s research found that daydreamers fulfill a lack through daydreaming.\textsuperscript{450} They
leave their current reality in order to experience scenarios in which desires are fulfilled.\textsuperscript{451}
Morley explains that “[s]ubjects leave the lacking world to posit and affectively invest
themselves in a daydream scenario which is an idealized presentation, the enactment and
fulfillment of what was previously restricted desires.”\textsuperscript{452} Daydreamers are able to exist in
a split state of consciousness, leaving the “shared” intersubjective world because they are
in a present situation that does not require all of their immediate attention.\textsuperscript{453} The position
the daydreaming subject comes to occupy in the daydream is a particular one. Morley
points out that the daydreamer may be both spectator of and also a full participant in the
daydream.\textsuperscript{454} This is one way, I propose, to account for the experience of viewing a
film.\textsuperscript{455} When watching a film, the viewer identifies with the protagonist and lives
vicariously through this avatar. This does not imply that the viewer has abandoned itself.
Like the daydreamer, the film spectator occupies two conscious states at once: that of the

\textsuperscript{449} Morley, “The Private Theater,” 117.
\textsuperscript{450} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{451} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{452} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{453} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{454} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{455} The film experience is defined by Davies as the role the viewer’s imagination plays in the experience of
the fiction of the cinema. See David Davies, “The Imaged, the Imagined, and the Imaginary,” in
\textit{Imagination, Philosophy and the Arts}, eds. M. Kieran and D.M. Lopes (London; New York: Routledge,
2003), 225. Film viewing and its experience is part of a larger debate that questions the role of the viewer’s
imagination in constructing the experience of film watching for the viewer. There is a range of theories,
from cognitive models to the concept of the theory of illusion, which questions whether such an experience
is real, or an illusion. Davies reviews the opposing views of Gregory Currie—–who established a cognitive
model—–with those of Richard Allen—who argues cinema presents an illusion to its viewers who then
experience what they perceive as real and undergo a real experience.\textsuperscript{455} See ibid., 225-244.
participant in the film/daydream and that of the spectator. Morley contends that the
daydreamer’s position as a subject involves a series of transformations of one’s relation
to self, world, and others. This is caused by the multiple positions the subject can occupy
both in terms of watching itself in the daydream and simultaneously participating in the
daydream.\textsuperscript{456} The multiple positioning of the subject as both spectator and participant of
the daydream is paralleled in the viewing subject of a rococo space that comprises
mirrors. By occupying the dual position of spectator (subject) and spectacle (object), film
spectators, rococo viewing subjects, and daydreamers all become both subject and object.
This is why Morley claims the daydream state is one that collapses dualisms such as
subject/object, real/imaginary, and mind/body.\textsuperscript{457}

While eighteenth-century critics believed it was the artist’s imagination which had
gone awry, some modern researchers now claim the viewer’s imagination is also
involved in the work of \textit{rocaille} ornaments. Mary D. Sheriff asserts that \textit{rocaille}
ornaments illustrate a state of motion or metamorphosis, only perceptible to viewers once
the ornaments activate their imagination.\textsuperscript{458} Jennifer Milam, for her part, thinks rococo
ornaments have the capacity to set the imagination into a form of Kantian free play.\textsuperscript{459} In
his case study on the \textit{Cabinet chinois}, Michael Yonan argues that the goal of the
decoration is to create in the viewer’s mind the vision of an imaginary room made
entirely of porcelain.\textsuperscript{460} All three authors, like myself, perceive a capacity in \textit{rocaille}
ornaments to trigger the interaction of the viewer’s imagination. It is not enough,

\textsuperscript{456} Morley, “The Private Theater,” 132.
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{458} Sheriff, “Seeing Metamorphosis,” 164.
\textsuperscript{459} Milam, “Miming Play ,” 49-50.
\textsuperscript{460} Yonan, “Igneous Architecture,” 80.
however, to state that the imagination is engaged; we must also ask how *rocaille* ornaments trigger such engagement.

Kieran and Lopes suggest that all representations, abstract or not, are like “props in games of make-believe.” As such, they generate fictional truths. These are “what players of games of make-believe are prescribed to imagine” in order for the game to be played. This is why, for Kieran and Lopes, “representations function to prescribe imaginings.” If all representations can ignite imaginings—as is the case in art—then they do so to varying degrees. I propose that certain qualities of radical ornaments engage the imagination of the viewing subject to a high degree, even so far as to affect and transform the subject.

If, in order to have a fuller experience, viewers of a *rocaille* space need to have their imagination engaged, how then do the ornaments engage it? First, as previously argued, the ornaments visually help engage the viewer to enter the fictional narrative space of vignettes or mirror reflections. Second, these ornaments are also able to trigger imaginings by means of their very nature. Specifically, the *informe* nature and actions of *rocaille* ornaments and heterogeneous organic details create spaces of non-recognition where categories are confounded, thereby carving out a territory for the imagination. The presence of such unrecognizable spaces indicates that a semantic flexibility is at work. It is this unknowable aspect of *rocaille* and its semantic flexibility that allows for viewers to imagine and impose subjective significations.

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462 Ibid., 2.
463 Ibid., 2.
464 The use of the imagination of the viewer was a great cause for debate in the eighteenth century, and the capacity for *rocaille* ornament to titillate the imagination of the viewer may be one of the culprits which
At a practical level, conditions of patronage, lighting, and etiquette ensured that rocaille ornament was never locked into a unitary signification. While many elements in architectural decorative schemes, of course, served to reference various aspects of their owners, as Scott proved in regard to the Château de la Muette’s room decorated by Antoine Watteau, such references often did not signify, either due to the death of the owner, the selling of the building, or its rental (such rooms were often never inhabited by the owners themselves). An accurate interpretation of the specific references to a specific patron is irrelevant in such cases when trying to understand the experience of a room’s decor, since the room’s various occupants, both then and now, may not have been aware of the patron’s identity. Mimi Hellman points out in Paris Luxury two further factors that prevented a clear reading of a room’s decoration. Firstly, it was against the rules of bienseance to stare outright at the decoration. As mentioned earlier, the elite gaze was a furtive and covert one. Secondly, Hellman argues that the rooms were poorly lit in comparison to the present day and consequently that viewing their precise decorative elements was a much more arduous task. Poor lighting coupled with the etiquette of the elite allowed viewers only glimpses of the various ornaments. More often than not, occupants of a rocaille-decorated space perceived only tidbits of information speckled like distant pieces of a puzzle. But this lack of proper visibility, combined with the unformed nature of rocaille shapes, created space in which the viewer’s subjective

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466 Hellman, “Enchanted Night,” 95.
467 More precisely, Hellman argues candlelight was bound up with power dynamics because it controlled what people could and could not see. By controlling the lighting or shading, hosts could also control what was seen. She also points out that by emphasizing the visibility of decoration and its social meanings at the time, we forget that there was the practical question of its degree of visibility. Consequently, Hellman argues we should take into account the unreadability of rocaille decoration. See Hellman, “Enchanted Night,” 98-99, 111.
interpretations could be superimposed onto the whole. In turn, this allowed the mind to construct its own narrative and prompt further exploration.

Ironically, though proper etiquette at the time frowned upon outright staring and lighting may have been more often than not less than adequate, visual inspection and delectation were nonetheless one of the chief occupations of the higher bourgeoisie and elite. Daniela Bleichmar explains that “[c]ollecting and classifying, the twin obsessions of eighteenth-century natural history, were predicated on the ability of the trained eye to assess, possess and order.”

Bleichmar explains that vision was a primary tool of investigation and the best method for identifying and knowing. Joseph Addison, in The Pleasures of the Imagination (1712), explains that vision is the sense which can link objects and the real world to the interior world of the observer’s imagination. In a scientific, naturalist context, images, specifically in compendia and reference works, but also the specimens themselves, were perceived as primary source data. Bleichmar explains that in “the eighteenth century, images provided an entry point to the exploration of nature, functioned as a key instrument for producing knowledge, and constituted the foremost result of natural investigation.” Images acted as primary resources that could be observed and out of which information could be derived or imagination could be inspired. This is why, despite the impediments of social behavior and adequate viewing

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469 Sight and vision were thought to be the best means to transmit and understand information, regardless of subject matter. Bleichmar, “Training the Naturalist’s Eye,” 8.
470 Kathleen Lubey explains that Joseph Addison perceived the body as central to the way the senses can be stimulated by and therefore stimulate the imagination. Specifically, it is the eye which is thought to be the main courier between the material world and our mind. See Kathleen Lubey, “Erotic Interiors in Joseph Addison's Imagination,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction 20, no. 3 (2008): 419-420.
conditions, I believe rocaille decoration would have been understood as visual data meant to be observed.

An eighteenth-century elite and erudite audience would have been familiar with the type of imagery offered by rocaille decoration and ornamentation. They were familiar with the themes we discussed, such as the exotic, shells, and the marine world, which might have prompted the viewer’s curiosity and, subsequently, imagination. As we discovered, marine and shell-derived ornaments were at the source of the name rocaille. These were also items frequently found in rocaille morceaux de fantasies and decors, such as the sculpted rocaille pediment above the porte-cochère to the entrance of the hôtel de Thoix, the depicted shells at the bottom of a screen by Lajoüe, the corals and shells painted by Huet on a wall panel in the Grande singerie at Chantilly, or in many prints by most rocaille artists discussed so far (figs. 3-8, 82).472 Shells and marine life, such as corals, are particularly interesting, since they were not only part of rococo decorative ensembles, rocaille ornaments, and decorative items in prints, but were also assiduously collected and prized objects kept in coquille, which were special cabinets to house such specimens. Many prominent Parisian collectors of natural science, such as Bonnier de La Mosson, voraciously collected shells and artifacts of marine life.473

472 The Hôtel de Thoix, located at 56, rue Varenne, was constructed for Hariette de Kéroualle, previously countess of Pembroke, who remarried in 1685 Thimolón Gouffier marquis of Thoix and became marquise de Thoix. She bought the site in 1719 and the hôtel became habitable in 1728. Unfortunately, she died the same year at the age of 73, quickly followed by her husband a few months later. The decoration of the hôtel merges both late seventeenth-century style and modern chinoiserie elements and the large rocaille shell of the portico. The pediment decoration shows madrepore, corals, whelk shells, tun shells, cowry shells, sea urchin, and several others and attests to the taste in shells at the time. Fuhring attributes a date of 1727-28 to the pediment, but this is uncertain. For a description of the interior decoration of the hôtel as well as the porte-cochère see Françoise de Catheu, “La Décoration intérieure des hôtels parisiens au début du XVIIIe siècle,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts 1, (1957): 282-284. For dating see Furhring, Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, 71. See also F. Magny et al, Le Faubourg Saint-Germain: la rue de Varenne, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée Rodin, 1981), 24-26.

473 For instance, in his shell catalogue of 1736, Gersaint lists all prominent shell collectors in Paris and the Netherlands, see Gersaint, Catalogue Raisonné de coquilles, 30-45.
Indeed, the rise of shell collecting in Paris came about at the same period as rocaille ornamental prints and rococo decoration.\(^474\) It appears the collection of shells was prompted by the efforts of Edmé-François Gersaint, who also promoted Watteau’s art, commissioned frontispieces by Boucher for his shell sales catalogues, and had a boutique called *A La Pagode*, which sold everything from shells to porcelain pieces (fig. 71).\(^475\) In his shell catalogue of 1736, Gersaint justifies shell collecting as something that is worthy of attention, and states that these objects, much like rocaille ornaments, are curious, new and, for these reasons, necessitate close inspection:

En effet, rien n’est plus séduisant que la vue d’un tiroir de Coquilles bien émaillées; le Parterre le mieux fleuri n’est pas plus agréable, & l’œil est frappé si merveilleusement, que l’on a de la peine à pouvoir se fixer : l’embaras est de savoir ce que l’on doit admirer le plus, ou de la perfection du travail de celle-ci ou de la vivacité des couleurs de celle-là; de la simétrie merveilleuse de cette autre, ou de l’irrégularité harmonieuse de cette dernière. Enfin tout étonne […] Que de variété dans leurs formes! […] Enfin sans entrer dans le détail des variétés de leurs couleurs, qui vont à l’infini, leurs formes seules ont entre elles un très-grand nombre de différences, qu’il est presque impossible de décrire exactement.\(^476\)

Shells appealed to the curious, or the *curieux*, because they were largely unknown, unclassified elements. Despite the fact that Carl Linnaeus published the tenth edition of his *Systema Naturae* in 1758, a compendium which sought to categorize and order shells as well as all living and non-living kingdoms, shells remained an area of speculation

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\(^{474}\) Between 1736 and 1750, Gersaint published nine catalogues on shells; see Barbara Maria Stafford and Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001), 167. For more on Gersaint’s activities as an auctioneer and promoter of both shell and rococo objects see Andrew McClellan, “Watteau’s Dealer: Gersaint and the Marketing of Art in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *The Art Bulletin* 78, No. 3 (September 1996): 446. If we recall, several rocaille suites of prints are advertised in the *Mercure de France* during the same years, as, for example, Meissonnier’s *Livre d’Ornemens* in *Mercure de France*, March 1734, 558-559; the advertisement for Meissonnier’s *Cabinet Bielinski, Mercure de France*, July 1736, 1691; an advertisement for Mondon’s untitled fourteen pieces of ornamental compositions in *Mercure de France*, April 1736, 768.


\(^{476}\) Gersaint, *Catalogue Raisonné de coquilles*, 7-9. As well, Gersaint further explains that such objects are not only beautiful to observe in their differences, but that many questions concerning their scientific aspects may also appeal to the interest of the naturalist; see ibid., 10.
depending on the system one subscribed to. Even today, the study of marine life largely remains an area in which scientists and enthusiasts alike continue to observe and identify new species: there are still species of marine life that have yet to be identified.

In typical eighteenth-century naturalist fashion, for instance, the Duchess of Portland became more than just an enthusiast, but an actual naturalist who identified new types of shells. Furthermore, coral, often found and depicted in rocaille ornamentation, as in a fan design by Huquier or in Huet’s Grande Singerie decoration at Chantilly, was especially intriguing, straddling as it did both the animal and plant worlds (figs. 2, 7). The fascination for coral lay in its ambiguity and capacity to overlap clear boundaries of categories. Due to this concrete lack of information concerning shells and marine life, these elements represented for an eighteenth-century audience the as-yet unknown and

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477 On the Linnaean binominal system of nomenclature for conchology, see Peter Dance, *A History of Shell Collecting* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 45-47. Daugeron explains that, based on Linnaeus’s work, some cabinets separated objects amongst the three categories of animal, vegetal, and mineral. However, this was one distinct manner to classify naturalia. In opposition, Buffon believed it was impossible to categorize and order all of life’s variations. Therefore, Buffon’s *Histoire Naturel* does not reflect Linnaeus’s categorization of life; see Bertrand Daugeron, *Collections naturalistes: entre science et empires, 1763-1804* (Paris: Publications scientifiques du Musée national d’histoire naturelle, 2009), 81,100. The ordering of shells and their identification in collections was also a matter of debate depending on which system and authority one subscribed to. For instance, Michel Adanson, a French biologist and naturalist, asked that the collector put aside the question of the shell’s beauty and, instead, consider the animal within it, in this manner encouraging a more scientific approach; see E. C. Sparry, “Scientific Symmetries,” *History of Science* 42, (2004): 20. Adanson also criticized Linnaeus’s method of identification, which was based on an arbitrary set of qualities, in this case the sexual organs. Adanson, on the other hand, proposed the natural method, which considered all parts of a subject from its roots to its reproductive system. Consequently, shell nomenclature was a subject of dissent. For the differences and similarities between the two systems of identification see John E. Lesch, “Systematics and the Geometrical Spirit” in *The Quantifying Spirit in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Tore Frangsmyr, J. L. Heilbron, and Robin E. Rider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 80.

478 For an estimate of marine species left to be found and identified see W. Appelhans et al. ‘The magnitude of global marine species diversity,’ *Current Biology* 22, no. 23 (2012): 2189–2202.


480 In *Lithologie et la Conchylieologie* (1742) by Antoine Dezallier d’Argenville the “first part of the treatise, about a quarter of the volume, is devoted to lithologie, a term which should not be equated with the modern ‘lithology’. Here it covers a variety of mineral forms, fossils, corals as well as pseudo-organic forms which do not readily fit into the rudimentary divisions of animal, vegetable and mineral.” See C. R. Hill, “The cabinet of Bonnier de la Mosson (1702-1744),” *Annals of Science* 43, no. 2 (1986): 153.
heterogeneous world, beckoning the curieux to identify and wonder at its qualities and potential. Although shells were part of artistic discourse and referenced the aquatic world, most importantly they served to recall for the elite and bourgeoisie the curious object to be collected and closely inspected.

Consequently, in a rocaille context, elements such as shells and corals, which were part of the natural and naturalist’s world, further fuelled the curiosity, imagination, and wonderings of the curieux and compelled them to investigate the state of disorder in which these elements were displayed. For in such a context, shells and marine life were not arranged in an orderly fashion but rather, as we see in the Boucher print for the Gersaint catalogue, in disarray (fig. 71). Like the arrangement for his four-sheet screen, Boucher’s frontispiece to the sale catalogue presented the paraphernalia of marine life as an arbitrary bouquet of rocaillesque marine life (fig. 3). Shells, corals, mandrepores, and algae are all presented in no particular order, as if the sea had swept these into the foreground of the print. In his depiction of such a state, Boucher can present us with the “beautiful” qualities of these objects, which Gersaint discusses at length in the catalogue.481 The disorderly presentation invites the curieux to investigate these further, to take apart each object one by one, and, in effect, submit elements to the prying, investigating, and ordering gaze of natural science. Meanwhile the sequestered and aligned flasks on the shelves in the background provide the contrast of ordering systems to the disheveled bouquet of marine life. Submitted to some form of categorization, the objects in the flasks are much less informe than those presented in a rocaille state of pell-mell disorder. Unlike naturalist catalogues, such as that of Dezallier D’Argenville, in which the objects are clearly delineated in the space for best viewing, rocaille disorder

481 Gersaint, Catalogue Raisonné de coquilles, 7-9.
prevents this. While the *rocaille* view does not offer proper conditions to compare specimens and derive information to categorize them, it does offer a state of affairs meant to attract and appeal to curiosity. The *informe* disorder of *rocaille* presents and mimics life’s disheveled outgrowths and proliferations in a chaotic fashion. Such a mode of presentation offers objects in a state of unknowability and mystery, as they are first encountered outside of the naturalist’s compendium and cabinets.

As discussed in the section on contemporary film, a state of disorder also arises from the production of heterogeneous organicity and the breaching of boundaries, a result of the actions of the viral HOD. As in the eighteenth century, this state of disorder also contrasts with the investigative endeavors of science. If the HOD are not directly created out of a scientific experiment gone awry, as in *Splice, Planet Terror, Tokyo Gore Police, Videodrome*, and *eXistenZ*, they are the object of study of science, as in *Alien, District 9*, and *The Thing*. In all these cases, HOD’s proliferations escape the orderly discourse and categorization of science. A lack both of knowledge and of a proper view to facilitate identification creates space for the imagination to work upon both materialities. Thus, both *rocaille* and contemporary HOD offer elements that grant the opportunity to observe, provide delight, and appeal to curiosity and the imagination.

In the eighteenth century, imagination may have been most at play when interacting with the curious lexicon of the exotic Far East and Orient. Although distant places such as China, Japan, and Turkey were in contact with the Western world, at the beginning of the eighteenth century Europeans had little factual information concerning the customs and peoples of these distant lands. This caused the Orient to be represented
in sweeping and vague descriptions, mostly consisting of stereotypes.\textsuperscript{482} The unusual and the odd was read about, perhaps glanced at, but not understood within its original context.\textsuperscript{483} Although the exotic was consumed, the exotic subject was still not known first hand, or rarely so, and consequently information was easily and happily mixed with fiction.\textsuperscript{484}

Exoticism was omnipresent in the culture of eighteenth-century France, which partly explains why it was so intimately linked to \textit{rocaille} ornamentation. Imported exotic luxury goods such as Japanese lacquer, Asian wares, and porcelain were prized objects of curiosity and collected by prominent court aristocrats, such as the Duke of Bourbon and the Viscount of Fonstespuis.\textsuperscript{485} However, not all forms of cultural exoticism in eighteenth-century France were imports. Exotic imports and what little information about the East came through had an overwhelming influence on literature, theater, ballet, opera, furniture, gardening, decoration, architecture, ceramics, sculpture, and painting. Some of


\textsuperscript{483}Rousseau and Porter agree that the exotic is made of unknown elements. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, “Introduction,” in \textit{Exoticism in the Enlightenment}, eds. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester, UK: Manchester University, 1990), 4. There were \textit{les jardins du roi}, where plants and exotic fauna could be seen, but again, not in their original contexts; see Château de Versailles, \textit{Sciences & curiosités à la cour de Versailles} exh. cat. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux; Château de Versailles, 2010), 109.

\textsuperscript{484}Concerning the Western perception of the East see Frances Mannsåker, “Elegancy and Wildness: Reflections of the East in Eighteenth-Century Imagination,” in \textit{Exoticism in the Enlightenment}, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester, UK: Manchester University, 1990), 177. Some visitors from the East were brought back or, in an official capacity, visited European courts. For instance, the Jesuit father Couplet brought back to France a young Chinese man in 1684; Georges Brunel, \textit{Pagodes et dragons: exotisme et fantaisie dans l'Europe rococo, 1720-1770: Musée Cernuschi} exh. cat. (Paris: Paris-Musées, 2007), 29. There were also the famous Turkish and Persian embassies that visited the French court in the eighteenth century. However, these visits, few and far between, were not sufficient for the population to acquire an understanding of these distant lands and people.

\textsuperscript{485}Louis-Henri duc de Bourbon and prince de Condé had both a natural science cabinet at his Château of Chantilly and an extensive porcelain collection. He also started soft paste porcelain manufacture in 1725 after being exiled from court; see Garnier-Pelle, Forray-Carlier and Anselm, \textit{Singeries et exotisme}, 50-51. Regarding Louis-Augustin Angran de Fonspertuis’s porcelain collection at his hôtel particulier of 21 place Vendôme, see Ziskin, \textit{The Place Vendôme}, 104. Also see Andrew McClellan’s article on Pierre Edmé Gersaint for a discussion of the sales catalogue of the Fonspertuis collection in 1747; McClellan, “Watteau’s Dealer,” 449-450. Fonspertuis also owned at least seventy porcelain pagods; see Danielle Kisluk-Grosheide, “The Reign of Magots and Pagods,” \textit{Metropolitan Museum Journal} 37 (2002): 181.
the most prominent artists of the century—François Boucher, Christophe Huet, Antoine Watteau, François-Thomas Mondon, Alexis Peyrotte, George Pillement, and Jacques Lajoüe—specialized in interpreting and depicting exotic subjects. The result was that most exotic cultural forms were not imported but produced in France, or elsewhere in Europe, and were a mixture of Eastern influence and Western culture. Consequently, exotically themed Western artistic products resulted from the merging of foreign oddities, based on fanciful reports and semi-facts, with quite a lot of fantasy. Whether imported or European, exotic rocaille products were also perceived, like rocaille, as foreign, bizarre, new, modern, curious, out of the ordinary and made of unknowns.486

We see exotic subject matter and elements comingle with rocaille in a drawing by Jacques Lajoüe, La Prosternation chinoise (fig. 84). On a throne we perceive what seems like an emperor, sitting atop a strange animal, which, on the basis of its ears, stance, and whiskers, I can only identify as a mouse/bear hybrid. Next to this central figure stands a tall crane-like bird, and to the right a standing bear leans against a pole; below, magot-like men are prostrate.487 The flora and fauna is composed of palm trees, crocodiles, strange fishes, and birds. Towards the left of the structure that holds the scene together is an odd mixture of rocaille elements transformed into Chinese-esque temple roofing. This example perfectly illustrates the strangeness that results from the meeting of East and

486 For instance, Gersaint’s trade card (engraved by Boucher) for his shop À la Pagode reads “Sells all sorts of new and tasteful hardware, jewelry, mirrors, cabinet pictures, pagods, lacquers and porcelain from Japan, shells and other natural history specimens, stones, agates, and generally all sorts of curious and foreign merchandise.” We see here that both rocaille objects and exotic imports fall under the terms “curious and foreign merchandise” and “new” commodities. See the trade card by François Boucher, À la Pagode, 1740, The Rothschild Collection, Waddesdon.

487 Magot is defined in the Encyclopédie thus: “Figure made of clay, plaster, copper or porcelain that is bizarre and that we regard as representing either Chinese or Indians. Our living quarters are decorated with such. These are precious trinkets that this nation is taken with, and are absent from homes where ornaments are of a much better taste. This is the reign of the magot.” Encyclopédie vol. 9, 1772, s.v. “Magot,” 861-62, (my translation). Kisluk-Grosheide explains that magot was used interchangeably with the wider ranging term pagode which described mortals or immortals of the Far East, or temple-like structures. See Kisluk-Grosheide, “The Reign of Magots and Pagods,” 177.
West. The difficulty one faces in trying to decipher and understand the scene exemplifies the characteristic tension in exotic work between what is clearly known and what is unknown. The ambiguity of such a scene and its elements is made possible precisely because the East was not known on a first-hand basis. The fundamental ignorance of foreign customs and the incomprehension felt towards them made it possible to conceive of something so completely unrealistic and different. It is also due to this lack of concrete information concerning the East that it was possible for its imagery to focus on imaginary and fantastical scenes. The exotic represents, then, ambivalent information that is not clearly in the domain of the known or the unknown.

In another example—a decorative room panel by François Cuvilliés—we see how the exotic was meant to be located inside the home while referring to the outside and unknown world (fig. 181). We perceive a Turk’s head in this panel amidst Berainesque grotesqueries, vines, branches, rocaille ornamentation, and Chinese rectangular volutes. Along with the Chinese volutes, this token Turk’s head acts as a symbol of the exotic. Although this exotic could be experienced in this way, we must remember that it was not objectively known. It is not made up of sound knowledge of the realities of the

488 There were several accounts by embassy envoys and Jesuit missionaries circulating since the seventeenth century such as father Athanase Kircher’s La Chine illustrée (1670), the Nouveaux Mémoires sur l’état Présent de la Chine (1696) by father Louis le Comte, and La Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique de l’empire de Chine et de tartarie Chinoise (1735) from father du Halde. Although these were widely read, and thoroughly descriptive, they favored certain subjects such as the details of ceremonies, court rites, and interior decoration over other aspects of Chinese culture, such as prostitution and female reclusion, which were merely mentioned but according to Détie were intriguing for the reader and left room for the European artist’s imagination. Though China was described by its few visitors, it was still not a first-hand experience for the readers of such descriptions, the outcome being that it was highly idealized. See Muriel Détie, “L’image de la Chine dans les récits des voyageurs occidentaux,” in Pagodes et dragons, 24-28.
Orient, but of transformed legends, whispers, and rumours.\textsuperscript{490} Were this panel to decorate an actual space, the Turk’s head and the Chinese volutes, as references to an unknown, foreign world, would somewhat exoticize that space. The Turk’s head serves as a token reminder to the viewer of the imaginary notion of a Turk and more so of the Arabian Nights so popular at the time.\textsuperscript{491} The Chinese elements in the upper corners and the Turk’s head do not mean anything precise that can be linked to a specific patron. This is especially the case when we consider that this panel is but one proposed design amidst many possible decorative panels. In its conception, therefore, this design is not site-specific. The Chinese volutes and Turk’s head can be seen rather as token signs flavoring the space with their associations. Even when used so sparingly, they alter the space and give it an air of foreign otherness.

These two examples from Lajoüe and Cuvilliés present us with an unknown territory, ripe with everything that is foreign to France, and serving as the perfect place in which to sow fantasies of all kinds. The West’s general ignorance of the intimate customs and realities of lands beyond Europe made the East a perfect springboard for imagining all sorts of lands peopled with fairies, dragons, sages, and strange animals. As Porter and Rousseau state, “Europe traded on precisely the ambiguity created by the dialectical interplay of diachronic history (fact) and imagination (fiction). The exotic was the

\textsuperscript{490} I am referring here to rumors such as those generated when the ambassador of Persia Mehmed Riza Bey came to the court of France in 1715; Douthwaite, Exotic Women, 78.

\textsuperscript{491} It was also a reminder of Ferriol’s well-known and much-circulated Recueil de cens estampes représentant différentes nations du levant (1713). In 1699 the then ambassador to Constantinople, the marquis de Ferriol, ordered the artist Jean-Baptiste Vanmour to make a hundred portraits of the various costumes and occupants of the Levant. Several editions were printed and it was a great source of information concerning the Ottoman Empire even though, as Stein has argued, many of the images are in fact based on Western iconographical tropes. See Perrin Stein, “Exoticism as Metaphor: Turquerie in Eighteenth-Century French Art” (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1997), 58-59.
fantastic realized beyond the horizons of the normal everyday world the European knew.\textsuperscript{492} The East became a canvas onto which fantasies could be painted.

It is important to note that the lack of concrete information concerning the East was also at times the result of an actual desire to remain ignorant. David Porter, in an article on the English taste for Asian porcelain, argues that there was a desire on the part of the consumer to remain ignorant of the significance of the exotic object in its previous context.\textsuperscript{493} In her lengthy and thorough analysis of Watteau’s \textit{chinoiserie} work at the Château La Muette, Scott similarly argues that there was a lack of desire to represent Chinese people realistically even though there existed visual evidence from which Watteau could have drawn inspiration.\textsuperscript{494} As Scott points out, the \textit{rocaille} ornaments surrounding the Chinese divinity isolate the divinity from any real geographical and ethnographical meaning.\textsuperscript{495}

Artists and consumers of cultural goods in the first half of the eighteenth century lacked the motivation to understand the exotic in an ethnographical manner.\textsuperscript{496} Added to this was a lack of specificity on the part of the artist or writer, which allowed for the

\textsuperscript{492} Rousseau and Porter, “Introduction,” 15.
\textsuperscript{493} Amongst other reasons, David Porter argues that in Britain \textit{chinoiserie} was consumed because there was a taste for the exotic which was revealed by “a distinct pleasure […] in illegibility, in the contemplation of artifacts one recognizes as resplendent with meanings that, as a result of cultural distance, one cannot begin to penetrate.” See David Porter, “Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste,” \textit{Eighteenth Century Studies} 35, no. 3 (2002): 405.
\textsuperscript{494} Scott mentions the visit of Siam’s ambassador in 1686 as well as print books with representations of Chinese. She argues Watteau deliberately choose as a form of humor to portray Chinese goddesses in a \textit{Fête Champêtre} setting; see Scott “Playing Game with Otherness,” 212.
\textsuperscript{495} Ibid., 207. Odell discusses how Europeans lacked the adequate knowledge to understand the specific symbolic meanings of Chinese porcelain that was relevant to the culture of literati bourgeois elites in China. Dawn Odell, “Porcelain, Print Culture and Mercantile Aesthetics,” in \textit{The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain}, ed. Alden Cavanagh, Michael E. Yonan (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 146.
\textsuperscript{496} A counter-example to this attitude was that of Captain James Cook. Stereotyping of the Orient was a point that frustrated him when he tried to correct the ‘gossip’ concerning the Polynesians and instead advocated looking at the particulars of a situation. See Roy Porter, “The Exotic as Erotic: Captain Cook at Tahiti,” in \textit{Exoticism in the Enlightenment}, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester, UK: Manchester University, 1990), 129.
imagination of the viewers and readers to complete the picture. In exotic Western cultural productions, either visual or literary, there sometimes lacked descriptive detail informing viewers about locale, time frame, ethnographic landscape, or physical appearance and potentially helping them to form a clear picture and understanding of the object at hand. Such is the case, for example, in Voltaire’s literary exotic *conte Zadig* (1747). One wonders which elements make this story exotic. There are the names of the heroes, such as Zadig and Astarte, the mention of different locales, a few pieces of clothing relevant to the plot, and sometimes odd behaviour (such as immolating widows). But for the most part, the exotic aspect of the *conte* rests in its setting of Babylon and Egypt, both far away Eastern lands. Although it is mentioned that Zadig goes to Egypt, lives in a tent, or is a guest in a castle, no descriptive details are given so as precisely to inform the reader of what such settings are meant to look like. Neither the landscape nor the architecture is ever described. We are told also that both Zadig and Astarte are beautiful, yet Queen Astarte’s face is veiled and never described in the story and so she remains unknown to the reader. In fact, no descriptions whatsoever are offered of towns, people, or dress. If Voltaire left out any descriptive elements in his story, it was either because such details were irrelevant for showcasing the underlying moral of his *conte*, or because adding them would not have adhered to his chosen mode of storytelling. Whichever the reason, such a lack of descriptive detail, in my view, inevitably leaves room for the reader to imagine at will.

In an example from Peyrotte, we see at work both this lack of specific descriptive detail and a blatant misapprehension of these unknown cultures. In his fantastical work *Second livre de cartouches chinois*, Peyrotte depicts the Chinese as miniature Eastern
creatures roaming nature and climbing the branches of gigantic flowers (figs. 63-64).

In one print specifically we see a young person, whose sex is unclear, perched atop a rocaille buttress playing a triangle (fig. 64). The nature surrounding this person, and what looks like an older Chinese man, is larger than is realistically possible. Rocaille ornaments intermingle with tree branches, so that both ornament and nature seem to be part of each other while bending to one another’s rhythms. At the far left corner, a dragon twines its tail around a twig ornament. On the right, opposite to it, is perched a hybrid that is part monkey and part unidentifiable. This creature sits in a contorted pose while holding the overarching ornament that forms the cartouche.

This example serves to illustrate how imaginary constructs of fantastic realms were the result of a lack on the part of the general population of solid information concerning the daily practices of inhabitants of the East and concerning their fauna, mixed with the idealization of a people thought to lead a life free and equal, ruled by a philosopher sovereign. In land such as these where European viewers can lose themselves in time and place, nature is imagined as disproportionate, miniaturizing the inhabitants into child-like figures. Similarly to Zadig, the lack of definition here does not permit the viewer/reader to identify these strange elements. We are left instead to interpret at will and to impose our own views. The unknown in the rocaille-exotic can be understood, then, as a key element for stimulating the viewer’s imagination and allowing room for it to fill in the gaps.

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497 Europeans constructed different histories and hierarchies in order to incorporate the presence of the Chinese. On the positive and idealistic end they were perceived as the remnants of a lost golden age, which was the pure childhood phase of mankind. Otherwise they were perceived, as Knellwolf explains, as having “the crude mindlessness of the animal.” See Christa Knellwolf, “The Exotic Frontier of the Imperial Imagination,” in “Exoticism and the Culture of Exploration,” ed. Robert P. MacCubbin and Christa Knellwolf, special issue, Eighteenth-Century Life 26, no. 3 (2002): 21. Peyrotte’s work could be interpreted as expressing such an idealized history.

498 On the perception of the Chinese emperor and Chinese see Détrie, “L’image de la Chine,” 27.
Consequently, *rocaille* ornaments, with their representation of shells, corals, and the exotic, were structures with the semantic flexibility to construct an imaginary space neither here nor there and that remains undefined. An example of this is found in Peyrotte’s engraving of the triangle player. The *rocaille* ornament falls like a giant leaf in a toppled ‘c’ shape, bridging stone slabs to the left and right (fig. 64). The *rocaille* marine leaves that typically make up cartouches lie in counter-curve to the other central one. In such a setting, the *rocaille* ornament is blown up to gigantic proportions and placed in such a manner that it merges with and appears as part of nature. It is as if, in this imaginary world of Siam, *rocaille* ornament sprouts naturally out of the ground and surrounding nature to form structures that interconnect with each other. And yet, although *rocaille* ornament structures the scene to give it quasi-architectural support, it does not anchor it in any specific geography. Such an example illustrates how *rocaille* ornament can help support and construct such a fabulous world, where there exist odd ambiguous creatures and where man is smaller than flowers.

In the following small vignettes, we see how *rocaille* ornaments can be essential structures in building imaginary spaces as well as in prompting the viewer’s imagination to connect to these fantasy scapes. Vignettes, such as these by Lajoüe and Jacques Bellay, and the exotic nowhere spaces constructed by Peyrotte and Mondon, all merge elements from the *rocaille informe* vocabulary with natural, architectural elements to create fabulous dream-like spaces (figs. 182-183). But imaginary promptings such as these, or such as those found in the Chinese-themed room from l’hôtel de la Riboisière at 62, rue de Bondy (now at the musée Carnavalet), not only intimate an imaginary fantastical space
(fig. 184). The imaginary space becomes real, as it is experienced and constructed by the viewing subject, who then merges this space with real three-dimensional space.

I propose that *rocaille* imaginary daydream spaces prompt real experiences in the viewer. If we accept that ornaments and the HOD are not only prostheses that attach to the subject, but that they also engender, as demonstrated, imaginary wanderings that serve as prosthetic experiences, then the subject of radical ornament experiences reality beyond physical three-dimensions. We must then wonder whether the imaginary reveries expressed in the work of Mondon, Lajoüe, Huet, Bellay, and Peyrotte, could first be experienced by the viewer and then literally become part of the viewer’s spatial experience. This leads me to ask whether it is possible for *rocaille* space to be composed of the viewing subject’s imaginary internal space merged with and superimposed onto the real, exterior, three-dimensional *rocaille* space.

### 3.3: Effects of Radical Ornament upon Personal Identity

Using Alison Landsberg’s concept of prosthetic memories, I suggest that *rocaille* ornaments and the HOD are more than just prosthetic bridges and connectors. As prosthetic memories, they also lend imaginary fantasies and help actualize these for the viewers. Landsberg argues that it is possible for fabricated memories to become part of one’s own experience. She explains that film and television can provide fake ‘prosthetic’ memories for viewers, which in turn become real experiences for them. Landsberg also

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499 Prosthetic memories could resemble Freud’s screen memories, which substitute themselves as real ones. However, screen memories are meant to ‘hide’ or conceal other repressed memories whereas prosthetic memories are not camouflage; rather, they are enhancements to our own memories or, in this case, lived experiences. Furthermore, Landsberg does not refer to Freud’s concept of screen memories. See Sigmund
claims there exists a lack of original experience, since, as according to Baudrillard, all experiences today are mediated. However, instead of criticizing this state of affairs, as Baudrillard does, Landsberg explores in it the possibility that “[w]hat individuals see might affect them so significantly that the images actually become part of their personal archive of experience.”\textsuperscript{500} She therefore suggests the idea that film experience can decenter the lived experience of viewers and might be so potent even as to influence their future and, ultimately, participate in the construction or destruction of their identity.\textsuperscript{501} The potential power of prosthetic experiences is possible if we allow for a conception of reality that is not based solely on the notion of the body sifting through incoming data experienced in the exterior world. If we allow ‘data’ to include ghost imaginings—sensations and artificial experiences lived through an avatar in a film or a literary work—then such ghostly echoes come to be part of our own textured reality. In the post-modern world of hyper-simulacra, Landsberg defends the position that it no longer matters whether there is an original experience: “whether those memories come from lived experience or whether they are prosthetic seems to make very little difference. Either way, we use them to construct narratives for ourselves, visions for our future.”\textsuperscript{502} For Landsberg, the “distinction between ‘real’ memories and prosthetic memories—memories which might be technologically disseminated by the mass media and worn by its consumers—might ultimately be unintelligible.”\textsuperscript{503}

\textsuperscript{502} Ibid., 180.
\textsuperscript{503} Ibid., 183.
That prosthetic experiences should originate from outside the subject, as those generated in the *rocaille* space, implies that they join together space and formation of self. As we have seen in the previous section, the subject of the viral contagion is transformed, not only affecting the subject’s perception of space but also, potentially, the subject’s self. Before I explain further how this is possible, I will briefly review notions of personal identity. To begin, the notion of self as a “well-defined, stable, unique, centered self” is not a universal, trans-historical phenomenon. Bamberg attributes to the development of the concept of self the emergence of nations, local communities, cities, forms of knowledge and reflections, feelings and perceptions, subjectivity, as well as increased interiority and psychology. The idea that the self is well defined and a confined entity is not a fact but a concept that developed with the advent, in the eighteenth century, of a personal, private space for the elites.

Related to the notion of personal identity and a sense of self, though not necessarily linked to its development, was the eighteenth-century debate that questioned whether the “self” resided in the immateriality of the soul or in the material

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consciousness of the body.\textsuperscript{507} For John Locke, the thoughts, actions, and certain inherent traits of a person constituted personal identity.\textsuperscript{508} These resided in consciousness and the awareness of the self in the past. Particularly for Locke, what created a sense of a unified self over time was one’s conscious relation to one’s past, the awareness that one was connected to one’s past experiences.\textsuperscript{509} Unlike Locke, David Hume argued that we are more than a collection of memories.\textsuperscript{510} Deborah Knight explains that Hume “proposed that persons are composites of such things as memories, current beliefs and desires, and short- and long-range plans. For Hume, personhood cashed out in bundles: the amalgam of features of a given person as currently disposed.”\textsuperscript{511} Whether such philosophical debates helped shape notions of self-identity for the elite or not, what certainly was central to discovering the self, as Thomas Kavanagh argues, was the act of experiencing through the senses. Using the novel by Jean-Baptiste de Boyer Marquis d’Argens \textit{Thérèse Philosophe}, (1748) as an example, Kavanagh explains how consciousness became tied to the material body in the idea that the ‘soul’—whatever it may be—is moved by a sensate body and the pleasures it procures.\textsuperscript{512} \textit{Thérèse Philosophe} is a libertine novel ultimately

\textsuperscript{507}Thiel, “Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity,” 296. Many philosophers thought personal identity resided in either consciousness or memory and that positions changed depending on whether one was materialist or immaterialist. See ibid., 297. Concerning the eighteenth-century debate on the nature of the soul and its materiality or immateriality, see Raymond Martin and John Barresi, \textit{Naturalization of the Soul, Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century} (London: Routledge, 2000).

\textsuperscript{508}Ibid., 298. Many theological arguments were put forward against this Lockian position since it did not promote personal identity as an immaterial substance. See ibid., 298. Thiel remarks that the French were less concerned with the problem of personal identity through time. See ibid., 306.

\textsuperscript{509}Ibid., 298.


\textsuperscript{512} Thomas M. Kavanagh, \textit{Enlightened Pleasures: Eighteenth-Century France and the New Epicureanism} (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 52.
about the reconciliation of the soul with the materiality of the body, and it offers a
version of selfhood grounded in materialistic pragmatism.\textsuperscript{513} For the eighteenth-century
elite, personal identity could be developed through the sensing of materiality.\textsuperscript{514} In \textit{La
petite maison}, we see how Mélite discovers her desires for the Marquis de Trémicourt
and comes to know her own heart because her feelings are aroused as her senses interact
with the evocative and sensuous little house. Her consciousness is touched, in other
words, by the voluptuous materiality of the decoration of the house.

Similar to David Hume’s theory that personal identity is not only shaped by the
recollection of our past memories, recent theories in behavioral psychology posit that we
narrate a sense of self to ourselves and to outside audiences. Such theories of identity are
based on what are termed life stories. Life story theory accounts for how we can both
modulate ourselves according to various experiences, social demands, and conflicts while
also maintaining a sense of continuity and permanence of the self.\textsuperscript{515} What’s more, the
life story model allows for a variety of selves that change according to context and the
period in one’s life.\textsuperscript{516} In other words, though there is a sense of continuity and unity to
the self, our personality is modular and can change over time. The life story can be
understood as a form of narration used to create a sense of continuity of the self by
reconciling our different changing selves through time.\textsuperscript{517}

\textsuperscript{513} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{514} On the importance of materiality in the eighteenth century Hellman remarks that the idea of a “modern
concept of a “true” inner self was not yet pervasive” and so “appearances constituted identities and objects
were avidly noticed.” See Hellman, “Enchanted Night,” 94.
\textsuperscript{515} William L. Dunlop and Lawrence J. Walker, “The Life Story: Its Development and Relation to
Narration and Personal Identity,” \textit{International Journal of Behavioral Development} 37, no. 3 (May 2013):
235.
\textsuperscript{516} Ibid., 237.
\textsuperscript{517} Ibid., 237. Not all researchers in the field of narrative inquiry adopt the view that personal identity is
entirely constructed by life stories. Dunlop and Walker, for instance, believe there are core characteristics
of personality that are not modulated and are instead inherent to one’s personality. See ibid., 242. Dunlop
Theorists in the field of narrative inquiry (a field which investigates the idea of self
narratives) posit that there are two kinds of life stories: big stories and small stories. 518
Big story narratives are “considerations of broad, well-formulated recounts, most
commonly delivered to a receptive and largely passive audience,” and concern the interior
identity of the self. 519 Small story narratives are “more interactive, discussion-based
narratives occurring in the context of everyday life,” and are about the social dimension
of the self. 520 The big story narrative is concerned with unifying the self, whereas small
story narrative is concerned with the formation of identity as a dialogical process in an
interactive space between participants, where identities are performed and
consolidated. 521 Bamberg brings to attention how big and small story narratives can
contradict one another. 522 On the one hand, a big story narrative accounts for anchorage,
stability, and continuity for the subject. Small story narratives, on the other hand, account
for how personal identity changes and moves. It is important for Bamberg that these
differences be reconciled in order for identity not to be “confined by just one societal
discourse but open to change.” 523 Bamberg proposes that narrative story be viewed as an
open structure that is both a “bodily mediated and highly interactive process” and that
“neither self (or sense of self) nor identity is defined (or definable) in terms of fixed
positions that are a priori, pre-discursively, rationally defined.” 524 Bamberg also advances

518 For a recapitulation of narrative psychology theories see ibid., 236.
519 Ibid., 241.
520 Ibid., 241.
521 Ibid., 241.
522 Ibid., 241.
524 Ibid., 10.
524 Ibid., 16. Bamberg also points out that small narratives are not just audiovisual or verbal, but also
located in the body and performed in the body. Small narrative practices can reside in bodily practices, and
are not just talk, but embodied talk. See ibid., 16.
the idea that a sense of self does not exclusively come from narrated events and could, like prosthetic experiences, come from fictitious events “with the potential to transgress traditional boundaries and test out novel identities.”

Narrative identity theory accounts for how the self can potentially change and modulate through one’s own agency in the act of narrating big or small stories. The idea of self-narration, in other words, permits self-modification. By acknowledging that exterior fictitious narratives can construct us, Bamberg’s proposition also accounts for how prosthetic experiences and daydreams participate in the construction of self-narratives. Bamberg also explores where the agency lies in the creation of self-narratives, whether it is located in our bodies and brains or in exterior socio-forces and contexts. We can see both these agencies—interior (the self) and exterior (social world)—at work in the rococo space of the elite. Faced with the social pressures and demands of court and family obligations, expected duties, and social etiquette, big life stories were narrated and fashioned in response to the agency of these exterior factors. For instance, Dewald explains that although a sense of self was instilled in aristocratic children in seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century France, it clashed with the fulfillment of duties and prescribed roles expected of them. Young aristocrats quickly discovered that they had to marry someone they did not want to and act in prescribed roles. But the rococo space, with its viral and infecting insubordination, could convey prosthetic experiences that allowed one to negotiate and gain agency in the telling of one’s small stories. The

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525 Ibid., 7.
526 Bamberg also points out that there is an opposition as to where the agency lies in creating self-narratives, whether it is located in our bodies and brains or in exterior socio-forces and contexts. See ibid., 9.
527 Ibid., 9.
529 Ibid., 74-75.
agency to fashion one’s own story could thus be gained by way of daydreaming and fantasizing, which we have seen are wish-fulfilling activities, and through the prosthetic imaginary experiences played out at balls, amateur theaters, and other social events.

Landsberg argues it is possible for the source of our memories, or in this case experiences, to be beyond ourselves and instead an external point provided by other media. *Rocaille* ornamentation and decoration, along with the HOD in films, can suggest and induce such imaginary experiences. The imaginary prosthetic experience is prosthetic in the sense that it originates from promptings or borrowings from outside the subject, and like Landsberg’s notion of prosthetic memories, it is not secondary but real. And like the *rocaille* ornament and HOD prostheses, the imaginary experience is not a replacement experience but an added one, an augmentation and extension of the experiences of the self. By extending the subject’s realm of experiences, these imaginary suggestions explode any notion of a unified self, allowing for that greater breadth or notion of self which Bamberg urges. As well, since imaginary prosthetic experiences are induced and constructed by the viral *informe*, such as HOD and *rocaille* prostheses, they are also symptoms of the *informe*. In turn, they are themselves infectors, as they ultimately cross the boundaries between subject and imaginary space in order to become part of the subjects’ own life experience, thereby communicating and connecting with the subject to transform it. This is best exemplified by the pod in *eXistenZ*. As mentioned earlier, since the pod is attached to the bodies of Pikul and Allegra, it is a physical prosthesis extending their bodies into the imaginary game space (fig. 132). But it not only acts as a linking device, it also prompts them to live alternate identities and,
consequently, experiences. In this sense, the pod is not only a material prosthetic extension, it is also an inducer of virtual experiences.

In _rocaille_ the unknown _informe_ elements and what the curious or exotic signifiers allude to have the infecting power to encroach upon viewers and stimulate their imaginations. This induces daydreams and wonderings out of which imaginary space is constructed. As Gaston Bachelard states in _The Poetics of Reverie_, “[w]ith an image which is not ours, sometimes with a very singular image, we are called to dream in depth.” We see then how the small dream-like spaces created by Lajoüe, Mondon, Bellay, Meissonnier, and Peyrotte, and emulated everywhere following the dissemination of their prints, offer the perfect harbor in which to anchor the wonderings of the viewer and create an imaginary no-where space (figs. 9-11, 15-18, 34-39, 59, 63-64, 84, 163-167, 171, 176, 182-183). Though actual _rocaille_ spaces were not as farfetched creations as those presented in the prints, their ornaments still alluded and referred to the imaginary spaces of the prints and _morceaux de fantasies_, while also beckoning the viewer to enter the reflections of the mirrors and become the very protagonists of such fantasies. Such an imaginary architecture is perfect for allowing the viewer into a daydream.

In _La petite maison_ the protagonist, the marquis de Trémicour, wishes to convey love, and his capacity for truly loving, via the effect of the decoration of his little house. The little house, then, is supposed to work as a device capable of stimulating imaginary

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531 In Lajoüe’s _Livre de divers Esquices et Grifonemens_ (date unknown), we see several small vignettes of odd and fantastic architectural structures composed of shells, fountains, Chinese pavilions, bridges, stairs and exotic vegetation. None of these structures can be identified, since they are fantastical and are not located in a real geographical space. Such structures, too unknown to be understood and labeled, contribute to building an imaginary space. For a description of the etchings see Roland Michell, _Lajoüe et l’Art Rocaille_, 350.
experiences for the subject (Mélite) that would affect her to the point of inspiring and changing her. If successful, the little house transforms the subject, with the result that the experiences felt becomes one’s own—Mélite feels the love of the Marquis and love for the Marquis through the imaginary induced experiences of this rococo house. We know the little house has the capacity to induce and transform the subject when Bastide describes Mélite as lost in a daydream caused by the house’s luscious *rocaille* decoration. The Marquis then enquires, “But you are distracted—what are you dreaming of?”  

*Rocaille* three-dimensional spaces can become stages—receptacles—where one’s fantasy can be enacted, or reflected, and where the ornaments act like props and cues, enabling the viewer to react or activate a form of daydreaming.  

Daydreaming according to Morley is a means by which people can work on their personal identity and even come to form it. The daydream helps focus the daydreamer's identity because it deals with a reorganization of “one's anticipated relation toward self, world, and others.” Not only is daydreaming allowing one to be in a space where imagination and real space merge but it also allows one to resolve conflicts with one’s identity. Morley proposes that the daydream scenario offers a counter world to the deficient world of the daydreamer. In this sense, the space of the daydream offers alternate possibilities of fashioning one’s personal identity according to one’s desires. The daydream has such an affective potential because, according to Morley, it is an “imaged emotion, that is, a way of being-affected that blends the imaginary and the real

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534 Ibid., 132.  
535 Ibid., 133.
in an integral manner.”  As we see with Mélite in La petite maison, “the accent of reality or “belief” in the daydream scenario is intensified, and the subject’s affective conviction is furthered through sensory-imaginal engagement with an alternate reality or world scenario.”  We do not know which daydream the little house induced in Mélite, but it affected her to the point of feeling the prosthetic experience of love for the marquis.

Elena Russo also argues that the use of one’s imagination was at work in shaping one’s personal identity in the eighteenth century. For Russo the eighteenth-century self “has no essence, no stable definition: it exists and it acquires an identity only insofar as it can circulate among other selves.”  She sees the eighteenth-century self as “a social and relational entity that emerges to consciousness through a process of identification with the other where the imagination plays an essential part.”  Russo perceives personal identity to be created through social interactions and proves this using the work of Marivaux and Hume, who both conceived of self not as an autonomous substance but as relational, that is, fashioned through the opinions of others and the looks of the public.  Moreover, Russo points out that both Marivaux and Hume stressed the importance of fiction in the construction of selves.  Russo understands the role of imagination in the

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536 Ibid., 132. Bachelard also described the space of the daydream as philosophically infinite. See Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 183.
538 Meredith Martin notes that the work of Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières was dedicated to developing a character for architecture that could elicit sensations in viewers beyond that of people in their respective class. Le Camus’s ideas were based on the work of Étienne de Bonno de Condillac and the garden theorist Claude-Henri Watelt. The idea was that architecture gave sensations. See Meredith Martin, “The Ascendancy of the Interior in Eighteenth-Century French Architectural Theory,” in Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe Constructing Identities and Interiors, eds. Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 27.
539 Russo, “The Self, Real and Imaginary,” 147.
540 Ibid., 138.
541 Ibid., 137.
542 Ibid., 144.
eighteenth century as a means to craft one’s personality in order to advance in particular social games where recognition was everything. Using Pierre de Marivaux’s *The Life of Marianne* (1731-1745) as an example, she argues that imagination was used to make the story of oneself.\(^{543}\) The eighteenth-century self is portrayed by Russo as a product of self-creation, an imaginary self that is an ideal, projected, and socialized self realized for the benefit of others and in accordance with the demands of both moral and social conditions.\(^{544}\) Russo posits that an idealized, imaginary self was crafted, like the big life story, in response to the demands of an outside audience.\(^{545}\) Unlike her, however, I do not believe that the small story negotiations, the daydream fantasies, were only answers to the moral demands and outside social pressures.

On the contrary, I am of the opinion that these fantasies made it possible to play with and shape one’s personal identity, for however brief a moment, according to one’s desires in order to escape the big story of who one had to be. Russo does argue however, as I do, that imagination had a role to play in crafting one’s personal identity. If, then, it was possible for an audience to modify behavior and character through imagination, then might there not also have been the possibility to use escapist fantasies in crafting imaginary lives free of social obligation? Jennifer Milam has argued that rococo space offered a form of play in its costumes, *fête champêtre*, and gardens that allowed for the self to be reconstructed and deconstructed at will.\(^{546}\) Milam suggests the lack of

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\(^{543}\) Russo argues Marivaux depicts Marianne as a character who can shape her own destiny by inventing herself. See ibid., 133.

\(^{544}\) Ibid., 129.

\(^{545}\) Denise Amy Baxter also argues that eighteenth-century interior spaces where the elites could craft one’s personality and even enact a role of oneself. See Denise Amy Baxter “Introduction: Constructing Space and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Interior,” in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe Constructing Identities and Interiors*, eds. Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 3.

\(^{546}\) Milam, “Miming Play,” 52.
references to the outside world, as in the decoration at Chantilly, permits rococo spaces to be arenas for play because meaning is not over determined. The aim of such art for Milam is not to represent social life but rather to engage the viewer to transform social life through social games, where identity and self identity are put in play. In the rococo decorative space, which affords the aristocracy with play, Milam sees the self not quite there, not fully defined, and hence in continual shift. Hellman claims elite personal identities were forged and states they were “an ephemeral product that was as highly crafted as any artful object.” By investigating the interaction of objects with bodies, Hellman identified the role eighteenth-century furniture played in producing elite social personae. Like Milam, Meredith Martin also shows how rococo spaces helped to construct personal identity. Martin argues that Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières’s architectural writings stressed the importance of the privacy of space, as found in the boudoir for example, which was designated as a space for the imagination and the self to develop. The boudoir was “a synaesthetic inner world, a place in which to cultivate a more distinct and original sense of self.” For Le Camus, Martin explains that architecture had a role to play in the construction of new forms of identities and subjectivities.

547 Ibid., 57.
548 Ibid., 59.
550 Ibid., 416.
551 Martin also explains how interior spaces become predominantly discussed in architectural theoretical texts of the period and that their display becomes more prominent. See Martin, “The Ascendancy of the Interior,” 19. Architects were aware, Martin claims, that “residential spaces offered elite clients a means to express social identity and shape the self.” See ibid., 15.
552 Ibid., 28.
553 Ibid., 28. Le Camus, according to Martin, believed an owner’s identity was “shaped both by his or her architectural surroundings and by the responses these surroundings elicit in others.” See ibid., 28-29. For a fuller discussion of Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières’ Le génie de l’architecture ou l’analogie de cet art avec nos sensations (1780) see also Martin’s article.
Whether the rococo space enabled one to fashion a personal identity for social purposes in the manner of a ‘big story’ or for personal subjective development of the private self, as Martin claims, we see that imagination was invariably a faculty at work, and that the rocaille space facilitated the use of the imagination in constructing one’s personal identity. Whether responding to moral and social demands, as Russo indicates, or to personal desires for social play, as Milam claims, elite eighteenth-century French society seemed enticed by the possibility of being other. At the heart of such transformation into another imaginary self we see the desire for being other than what one was.

We see this desire for being other expressed in the immense appreciation for and participation in theater during the French eighteenth century. Theater was very popular at all levels of society and permeated the everyday to such a point that it was not limited to the “exclusive domain of professional actors.” The term theatromania was used to describe the extent to which theater permeated the lives of everyone; it was the “composing, staging, and acting in plays that manifested itself across all sectors of French society—bourgeois as well as aristocratic, provincial as well as Parisian.”

Kavanagh explains that we must think of the practice of theater as

not in terms of such august institutions as the Comedie-Française, but as an astoundingly widespread cultural practice, a form of conviviality and socializing that found its place at all levels of society. From rowdy pantomimes inspired by the public foires to private performances in the homes of the highest aristocracy, donning a costume and playing a role was an essential part of the eighteenth-century social life.

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554 Kavanagh, Enlightened Pleasures, 173.
555 Ibid., 173.
556 Ibid., 171.
Besides the Comédie-Française, there was also the Comédie-Commique, the opera, the
Comédie-Italienne, the mimes, the acrobats from the foire Saint-Germain to the foire
Saint-Laurent, and the théâtre de société.\textsuperscript{557} Théâtre de société was an important mode of
socialization for the aristocrats and elites since they were at once the actors and the
audiences.\textsuperscript{558}

Aristocrats were trained at an early age in the theatrical arts both at school, such
as the Jesuit College, and at home, where professional actors came to tutor them.\textsuperscript{559}
Kavanagh compares the importance of the event of a young elite girl’s first theatrical
performance to that of a debutante’s ball.\textsuperscript{560} Moreover, as though establishing a double
personal identity, the name of one’s first role often became one’s nickname.\textsuperscript{561} As
Kavanagh states, “for women and men, the role one happened to play during those events
from adolescence often provided a nickname that remained with them for life.”\textsuperscript{562} The
reason theatrical performances were so important, Kavanagh claims, is that they prepared
young aristocrats for the culture of display that was the aristocratic life.\textsuperscript{563}

In around 1710, the elite began to emulate the impromptu mode of performance of
the parades and sketches of the Italian comedy.\textsuperscript{564} Parades were initially the free, small,

\textsuperscript{557} Ibid., 173.
\textsuperscript{558} Ibid., 173. Pompadour was a famous theater enthusiast and actress herself. At Versailles, she
transformed a gallery into the theater of the petits cabinets. She later on had a theater built at Belleville. At
Choisy, Marie-Antoinette had a theater, where she played both classical and farce poissard genres and had
another one at the Trianon. The comte d’Artois (brother to King Louis XV) had two private theaters. See
ibid., 173-174. Voltaire had his own private theater where he often first tested his plays or at that of the
duchess du Maine. See ibid., 179. For more on théâtre de société see Plagnol-Diéval, Marie-Emmanuelle
and Dominique Quéro, eds. Les théâtres de société au XVIIIe siècle, Étude sur le XVIIIè siècle, vol. 33
(Bruxelles: Éditions de l'université de Bruxelles, 2005).
\textsuperscript{559} Ibid., 176-177.
\textsuperscript{560} Ibid., 176-177.
\textsuperscript{561} Ibid., 176-177.
\textsuperscript{562} Ibid., 177.
\textsuperscript{563} Ibid., 177.
\textsuperscript{564} Notable people who participated in such parades are Thomas-Simon Gueullette (instigator of many
parades), the Princess of Conti (daughter to Louis XIV), the Duc de Vallière (who brought it to the
buffoonish farces performed on balconies in order to attract the public to plays. The parade was a genre without rules, in which anything was permitted, and that evaded the hierarchy of genre altogether. The non-professional actors of the aristocracy could mimic the genre given its lack of rules and the fact that its often erotic, base, flirtatious, even scatological themes demanded no serious interpretation. Parades and sketches were popular in the salon, along with theater in general, due to their brevity and wit, but also because they allowed for spur-of-the-moment acting and relied on improvisation and surprise, something much appreciated during the period. One of the reasons suggested to account for the popularity of the parade genre in society theater is that parades may have served as an outlet to an overly regulated elitist society. Danciu proposes that parades were a form of release for a society that was tied up in obligations and the negation of personal desire. Similarly to rocallle ornaments, which, as we have seen, disrupt systems of order and hierarchies, parades reversed the order of importance, created upheaval, and played with the limits of what was accepted.


Crow, Painters and Public Life, 54. Parades, Kavanagh explains, were for the amateur a pretext to launch into free-flowing improvisations of both comic and erotic scenarios. See Kavanagh, Enlightened Pleasures, 175.

Kavanagh, Enlightened Pleasures, 179. In society theaters, the parade becomes the structural piece of consistency. See Danciu, “La Parade de société,” 198.


Ibid., 210.

Ibid., 202.
Also attesting to the elite’s preference for performing otherness was their taste for dress-up and masquerades. Landweber explains that part of the pleasure in dressing up for the masquerade was the act of becoming other and of impersonification.\(^{571}\) Identity, Landweber argues, could be experimented with using costume, which might have “included dressing beneath or above one’s real social status, dressing across genders, and, as in the case of turquerie, dressing across national and cultural boundaries.”\(^{572}\)

Dressing up was not just an experimentation across boundaries but also a serious form of play to construct “both personal and national identities in ancien régime France.”\(^{573}\)

The taste for dressing-up, masquerading, performing, and theatrics attests to the need to escape one’s own condition by donning another’s skin. Like rocaille ornament, such practices could also be considered controversial and transgressive: parades had no rules and masquerades defied gender, national, and hierarchical boundaries. This concept of performing ‘other’ not only permeated the everyday lives of the elites but also their relations to each other and to the space in which they performed. Part of their everyday was to perform and play an aspect of themselves, whether as part of an impromptu theater sketch, parade, play, or, as Russo suggests, an imagined self-fashioned personality responding to moral and societal demands. The need to transgress one’s self-fashioned boundaries and the limits of personal identity in order to be other is an area that needs


\(^{572}\) Ibid., 177. For instance, turquerie offered a thrilling frisson because it referred to risk of captivity and forced conversion. See ibid., 177.

\(^{573}\) Ibid., 176. On donning Turkish identity and identity construction see Lajer Burchard’s essay “Jean-Etienne Liotard’s Envelopes of the Self.” Burchard points to the inconsistency that Liotard was both called a painter of truth and yet constructed and crafted exotic personas through attire and costume dressing. She discusses how the self was perceived as a material surface that could be constructed. Ewa Lajer Burchard, “Jean-Etienne Liotard’s Envelopes of the Self,” in *Cultures of Forgery Making Nations, Making Selves*, eds. Judith Ryan and Alfred Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2003), 127-143.
further exploration, but for the moment I conjecture that it might have afforded elite players a release from the ‘big story’ which they were expected to live. I offered this summary of performance to demonstrate that the practices of constructing one’s identity and being other were conscious efforts in the eighteenth century. At the same time, I have been arguing that rocaille space allows for connecting with one’s fantasies and for daydreaming, a use of the imaginative faculties that fulfills one’s desires. If we consider that a space for privacy and the cultivation of personal identity developed at the same time as theatromania, we see how rocaille space fit the trend, offering a place to fashion the self by incorporating subjects within its real-life morceau de fantasie. If the upper-bourgeois elites and aristocrats were used to perform ‘otherness’ and construct self-identities to respond to the social demands foisted upon them, then surely in the space of the daydream, which responds to one’s desire, they could self-fashion a private space for their intimate ‘small stories’. The imaginary fantasies and escapist spaces suggested in the vignettes, in the work of Mondon, Bellay, Lajoüe, Meissonnier, Peyrotte, and in the exotic lexicon of the singerie, turquerie, and chinoiserie, allowed for a self-fashioning by

574 Swiderski, Massé, Rubellin et al also suggest that the reason why parades were so popular was because these afforded a form of release for a society that was tied up in obligations. See Swiderski, Massé, Rubellin et al, *Ris, masques et tréteaux*, 210.
575 For a discussion of the making of private space in architectural texts of the period see Martin, “The Ascendancy of the Interior.” For a discussion on the privacy of the boudoir see Ed Lilley, “The Name of the Boudoir,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53, no. 2 (1994): 93-8. Hellman also comments on the spectacle of the elite’s social interactions taking place in interior space: “From their position, interior space opened before them like a stage, with the social interactions of others as its spectacle. Conversely, from the perspective of a viewer within that space, they themselves formed a living tableau, a picturesque composition of heads and torsos posed at different angles within the frame of the object and the frame of the background mural.” See Hellman, “Furniture, Sociability,” 430. Scott also argues that for the eighteenth-century French elite identity was tied to space and spatial production. See Katie Scott, “Framing Ambition: The Interior Politics of Mme de Pompadour,” in *Between Luxury and the Everyday: Decorative Arts in Eighteenth-Century France*, eds. Katie Scott and Deborah Cherry (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 110-152. Baxter explains how historians of the eighteenth century recognize the early-modern capacity for self-fashioning and how space plays with the possibility of self-fashioning. See Baxter, “Introduction,” 2.
triggering a daydream and an imaginary elsewhere that did not necessarily succumb to the societal demands of rank and establishment. In such spaces, where boundaries evaporated between the real and the imaginary, personal identity could be dreamt, negotiated, and re-negotiated.

The prosthetic experiences, the daydreams and fantasies, that can emerge from an encounter with the materiality of rococo space not only transform the perception of rocaille space but can also grant a certain agency to viewing subjects and transform them into whatever theater of the self they desire. Personal identity as created within the rocaille space can reconcile the inside personal identity of the subject with that of the outside, projected person since the rocaille space offers the chance both to create and forge one’s personal small story and/or to lose one’s identity by transforming the self and merging with the decor. In such a space, modulations of the self are possible and played out. What the eighteenth-century rococo room offers is the possibility of a self in flux, affected by materiality.

In a parallel manner, the films selected also offer a vision of personal identity that is open to transformation and to which the spectator can also connect. This is achieved first by showing heterogeneous organic materiality that transforms and infects the characters and, second, by having the spectators identify with this materiality. Spectator identification with film characters has been studied in cognitive film theory

Knight explains how “films that closely track central characters can help us to understand the enigma of personal identity.” Deborah Knight, “Personal Identity,” 619. For a succinct explanation of engagement of spectators with film characters and their identifying with these see the following essay by Coplan. Coplan reviews both psychoanalytic and cognitive film theories concerning spectator engagement. Amy Coplan, “Empathy and Character Engagement,” in The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film, eds. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 97-110.
under the category of mirroring processes. Such processes increase the spectators’ “level of bodily excitement and can intensify their emotional responses.” Identifying with the characters on screen can mean various things. It does not necessarily imply that one imagines oneself to be this or that character but rather that one imagines oneself to be in the same situation as that character. Coplan explains that such a type of identification is aspectual, since “it involves neither a total replication of another’s experience, nor a loss of identity” on the part of the spectator. We achieve this aspectual identification through emotional contagion.

 Emotional contagion is a mirroring process that engages the viewer to “automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person.” One does not need to “depend on any conscious evaluation or interpretation of the other’s emotions or external events” in order to feel the affect of the affecting body.

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578 Ibid., 105.


580 Coplan, “Empathy and Character Engagement,” 105. Emotions of spectators at the movies are found to be like those of a witness, or someone who is a side participant. The spectator is involved but is not the main person who is emotor. See Carl Plantiga, “Emotion and Affect,” in The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film, eds. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 88.


582 Ibid., 105.
contagion to occur must center on the characters or objects to be mirrored so that emotional empathy may occur. Close-ups create emotional empathy because they “contain several eliciting conditions of emotional contagion. Most important is attention, since contagion responses require that a spectator’s attention be fixed on a character’s facial expressions. Filmmakers achieve this through the use of extreme close-ups, shallow focus, and various point-of-view structures and by using progressively closer shots of a character’s face and expressions.” By seeing close-ups of characters’ faces we identify with their emotion, which creates emotional empathy in the viewer. Of course in the case of the films under discussion, the close-ups in question have not been on characters’ faces per se but on the HOD (with the exception of those times when the HOD is located on a character’s face, as with Wikus or Ruka). But the same technique of showing progressively closer shots has been applied in filming the HOD, especially in the case of Cronenberg’s films eXistenZ, Videodrome, and Crash, where the camera shows in extreme close-ups the materiality and movements of the pod, the bone-gun, the breathing videotape, the gun-hand or the multiple scars (figs. 90-91, 102, 105-106, 109, 143-145).

The emotional empathic response elicited may not be limited to disgust, horror, or abjection, but may also involve a more embodied reaction to the materiality shown.

Identification beyond characters is possible if, as Ince suggests, we leave behind the Lacanian model of always identifying through the mirror stage and of always seeing characters. Sobchack has suggested that we can also identify with a film’s materiality when its focus is not the “secondary engagement with and recognition of either ‘subject positions’ or characters,” but rather “our primary engagement (and the film’s) with the

583 Ibid., 105.
sense and sensibility of materiality itself.” 585 Ince suggests that a sensorial type of association with materiality leaves the door open to associate with marginalized types of identities. 586 As in the rococo space of fantasy and daydreaming, which allows for difference to be constructed, the materiality of the HOD and the characters and viewers transformed by this materiality also offer a space for a fluid type of personal identity created by viewers and characters alike. As the characters in the films are transformed by the HOD, they are no longer definable, and this quality ensures a flexibility that allows for self-defining and self-refining on the scale of the small story.

Creed explains that classic Hollywood cinema often constructs viewers into an illusion that presents them as unified, rational subjects since its narratives drive the dominant societal values, while tidying all loose ends into ‘happy’ endings. 587 In the horror genre, however, Creed suggests that films construct the spectator by means of a different process. Creed explains how the temporality, bodily destruction, and ambiguous nature of monsters “cannot construct in the viewer a comforting or lasting sense of unity and coherence in relation to the ideal ego and the symbolic body.” 588 According to Creed, the horror genre in film challenges the unity of self by preventing the viewer from forming a unified concept of self through identification with the characters, since these are the opposite of unified. 589 Whether voyeuristic, masochistic, or even aesthetic, the gaze of the viewer of these films is meant to identify with the HOD. 590 This is not only a

585 Sobchack, Carnal Thoughts, 65.
587 Creed explains this is called the screen-spectatorship relationship. Creed, “Horror and the Carnavalesque,” 155.
588 Ibid., 155.
589 Ibid., 155.
590 Creed questions with whom the viewer identifies and the type of gaze the viewer bestows, whether that may be voyeuristic or masochistic or whether she or he identifies with the attacker or victim. She
result of the close-ups, which generate affect in the viewer, but also because viewers can identify with the bodily, organic nature of the HOD as a dismembered part of themselves. In watching horror films, and more particularly body-horror films, the viewing subject is not reified as a subject but is re-embodied.

As viewers of the film eXistenZ, we step into this fantasy because we are affected by the visceral nature of the pod. Like the rocaille ornaments of a room, the viscerality of the pod affects our bodies and subjects us to the experience of the film. This is due to the power of the informe heterogeneous detail that infects, and we can understand this communicated infection and transformation as the power to affect. In other words, HOD helps the imaginary prosthetic experiences induced by film to become real and, even more so, corporeal. Because we identify with this materiality, our bodies embody the sensations of the object which then become part of our own body sensations. In the selected contemporary examples, the heterogeneous organic details affect viewers to such an extent that they re-embody them. Steven Shaviro in The Cinematic Body discusses the use of flesh in Cronenberg’s films and explains that “when the flesh is pushed to such an extremity, we are affected by a physical shock, touched by the image at a distance, violated in the space of our own mental privacy[…].” Shaviro sees in Cronenberg films in particular what we also see in rocaille ornaments: the capacity of the “new arrangements of the flesh” to break boundaries and to break those of the mind and body

591 Carl Plantinga defines affects as “a broader category than “emotion.” Affects are any felt bodily state, including a wide range of phenomena, including emotions, moods, reflex actions, autonomic responses, mirror reflexes, desires, pleasures, etc.” See Plantinga, “Emotion and Affect,” 87.  
593 Shaviro, Cinematic Body, 137.
above all.\footnote{Ibid., 130.} In other words, in the symptomatic phase, the effects of the heterogeneous organic details in Cronenberg films, or of the other films discussed in this thesis, destroy the separated states of the imagination (the mind) and reality (the body). However much bodies are torn apart in these contemporary films and organic material is shown in flux, where innards are outwards, the effect on the viewer is not one of dis-embodiment but, rather, re-embodiment. Connecting with the sight of this dismembered materiality can elicit feelings of horror, fright, repulsion, and abjection. However, these feelings are not only processed through the mind but are also felt in a corporeal manner through the body’s association with the materiality on the screen. The prosthetic experiences induced by a film are made real and palpable because these take effect in the body of the viewer.

Through the HOD and its flesh—in the Merleau-Pontyan sense of the term—the viewing subject and film characters become aware of their corporeality. For Macke, the concept of Merleau-Pontyan flesh “makes visible the imaginary of transformative experience.”\footnote{Macke, “Body, Liquidity and Flesh,” 406.} That is, the transformative experiences that occur in the viral stage and in the rococo space are made literally visible through the presence of radical ornament. The Merleau-Pontyan flesh of the HOD and 

\textit{rocaille} ornaments renders visible for the viewer the experience of transformation or fluctuation of personal identity through the connection of subject with object. What radical ornament highlights for its affected subject is that the difference and the degrees of separation between entities and identities are not so great. By connecting to imaginary spaces, malleable identities, and the strange otherness of the radical ornament, we become much more connected to otherness than we perhaps ever believed possible. Merleau-Ponty argues, as previously discussed, that flesh
is the means to breach the distance between things: “It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeality; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.” Flesh is not a degree of separation between things, but rather, for Merleau-Ponty, what unites us, makes us real, and allows us to communicate. It is the degree of closeness of communication. By being in communication with other things we are, for Merleau-Ponty, intersubjective, though such intersubjectivity is invisible. The radical ornaments in the form of the HOD or *rocaille* give visibility to this intersubjectivity: the fluidity of their movement and motion give material embodiment to the lines of connection that transform us and make us intersubjective. The liquid quality of the HOD does not weaken the characters or the objects infected but rather, as Macke argues, opens them to communication and transformation. For Macke what gives semiotic representation to these exchanges of communication and the resulting transformation is also the fluidity, viscosity, and organicity of flesh. The HOD and *rocaille* ornaments demonstrate that for the subject to be intersubjective, or ‘s-object’, it needs to open up, flow out of bounds, rupture itself to crash into other bodies and affect these to become aware of their own materiality.

598 Ibid., 409. On the nature of flesh Macke writes “…flesh might best be understood as an *intersubjective* plasma, as a complex of fluid elements that are just as capable of hardness as they are of liquidity.” See ibid., 401.
Conclusion

The Radicality of Radical Ornament and its Implications

What is radical about radical ornament? Unlike non-radical decoration, radical ornaments do not establish order, rank, or social positions. They do not position themselves on the periphery around a given central subject, nor do they enhance or define it further. Rather, they displace hierarchies and the centrality of subject matter. Radical ornaments are defined by their actions, which are the viral and the informe. In both their HOD and rocaille guise, these operate like special machines, prostheses that spew out informe, viral actions. And it is these actions, their verb-like nature, and their ensuing repercussions that separate such ornaments from non-radical ones. The affects and effects of radical ornaments have implications. The first implication of radical ornament is upon the two subjects used as examples here. There follows from their comparison a mutual re-assessment, even to the extent of seeing and imagining anew both the radical side of rocaille and the radical presence of the heterogeneous organic details in body-horror genre films. But the areas of greatest implication of radical ornaments are their impact on the subject’s perception of space and the subject’s identity.

Rocaille ornaments and decoration and HOD have such a degree of affective seduction that they allow us to connect to imaginary space and transform ourselves to become other via these prosthetic imaginary experiences. The result of experiencing imaginary rocaille or a film’s fantastic space is that these envisioned spaces, in the moment in which they are experienced, become real spaces for the subject. The
imaginary experience of seeing ourselves as part of the decorative ensemble, or as living the film experience, necessarily alters our perception of space. Imaginary prosthetic experiences, for the subject, are internalized only to be re-projected outwards, outside of the subject, onto real space. It is through this internalization-externalization process that subjects project their own fantasies and daydreams onto real three-dimensional space and comes to alter their perception of it.

Thus, prosthetic imaginary experiences give us the power to re-shape spatial perceptions. If prosthetic imaginary experiences are possible and their re-projection onto space via the subject can occur, then space is not only made of solid outside three-dimensional structures, but also of our inside visions projected onto the outside world and perceived as such. In this sense, our internal visions re-projected onto space provide our very own personalized augmented state of reality. In accordance with this, *rocaille* space is not a dictating space but one that is extremely subjective, ephemeral, fleeting, and shifting, since it is effectively resolved in the viewer’s imagination.\(^5\) The philosophy of Professor Oblivion in *Videodrome* explains how visions induced by the television can, in this case, become flesh:

> The Battle for the mind of North America will be fought in the video arena, the videodrome. The television screen is the retina of the mind’s eye. Therefore the television screen is part of the physical structure of the brain. Therefore, whatever appears on the television screen emerges as raw experience for those who watch it. Therefore, television is reality and reality is less than television.\(^6\)

I do not share the extreme point of view of Professor Oblivion, who believes that the film experience is more real than common-sense reality itself. However, like the film and

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5. In the specific case of the Wieskirche, Yonan argues the church-going experience of the pilgrim is only resolved in his or her imagination. Yonan, “The Wieskirche,” 16-17.

television screen, *rocaille* ornaments are the retina of the mind’s eye, helping the subjects’ imaginary visions to coalesce. The projected *rocaille* visions onto space are like the transformation of Max into the videodrome or like Professor Oblivion, whose body becomes a videotape. In fact, Professor Oblivion states that he “could feel the vision coalesce and become flesh, uncontrollable flesh.” As in *Videodrome*, visions which become symptomatic flesh, such as the moving videotape or Max’s gun-hand, or the depictions in *rocaille morceaux de fantasies*, vignettes, or ornamental decoration, become real once the viewer is connected, infected, and transformed by them (figs. 102, 119).

But radical ornaments do not only allow for imaginary space to germinate. Ultimately, since the viewer is incorporated within the space, both being touched by it and moving in it, a combination of imagined and real space—a new relation to space—is enacted. Radical ornaments can be understood as spatial connectors and intermediaries, working for a conflation of interior and exterior spaces to merge. They act as an open linking system between subject, imagination, and exterior three-dimensional space. Finally, not only do these permit the creation and revelation of the interior space of the viewer’s imagination via projection onto reality, but they are, in effect, a form of transportation device, transpiercing and transgressing boundaries, transforming subjects, in order to bring them to new spatial formations and even create for them, potentially, new identities.

As discussed, the actions of radical ornament create a type of fluid space where definitions and boundaries are absent and rational (defined) form is lessened. This heterogeneous state is one where there is in fact a loss of stable identity, since the viral ornament’s performance invariably transforms the initial identity of the infected. When

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601 Ibid., “The Battle for the Mind.”
viewing subjects of *rocaille* are infected and brought into ornamental relations, their individuality is breached and merges with other things, just as aliens, machines, and parasites in the films breach the inner sanctum of the characters. Here the object/subject divide is dissolved by connective and transformative actions. Such actions result in assemblages that allow for a merging with “otherness,” such as the prosthetic radical ornament. The result is the destruction of the notion of a fully defined, closed, original self. Instead, the notion of self in the *morceau de fantasie*, or shown in the space of the HOD, is lost to a global flux of undefined materiality and transformed into constantly becoming-other, in the sense of the other as unknown. This becoming-other is expressed as alien, monster, android, cyborg, extra-human, non-human, and composite. It is the very merging of the body with the non-human and therefore the corruption of the notion of a ‘pure’ human.

Radical ornaments allow for a new type of identity to take place. These transient identities are enabled by the equally transitory nature of radical ornaments, such as their capacity to transpierce delineated space, act as transitors by allowing a flow of space and a connection between disparate entities, be transgressive in their unknown aspect and sexual undertones (*Crash*, *eXistenZ* for instance), and to transmute things. This nature of radical ornaments allows for a type of identity that is transitory, one that is constantly morphing, a neither-nor (neither man nor machine, human nor alien, person nor decor), always on the borders of definitions and always destabilizing them.

Today in particular, the HOD helps articulate for us the plurality of possibilities of being by helping us realize that we are part of assemblages and that identity is in flux. Radical ornaments not only create a state of flux, due to the constant commotion of their
materiality, they also illustrate and facilitate a fluid state of being, or intersubjectivity. In fact, one can speculate that the responsive feelings of horror when viewing body-horror genre films are perhaps brought about because the HOD expresses fully the loss of initial self, its destruction, its merger with other, its full transformation, and finally, its dissolution within a global flux. The HOD therefore serves to express metaphorically, and at times quite literally, a fluidity of being. A fluidity of being is ultimately about the erasure of the concept of a unitary closed identity and, like the rocaille open system, is also itself an open entity. By creating links between entities, the infectious connective affect of radical ornaments helps achieve such alterity. In terms of identity, the ultimate transgression committed by radical ornaments is to transgress the notion of a pure and hermetically contained self while helping identity assume its new ‘trans’itory nature.

The films I have considered here can help us investigate such questions. *Videodrome, Tokyo Gore Police, eXistenZ, and Planet Terror* all demonstrate the merging of the human with the non-human object world and, more precisely, with the machine. Most explicitly, it is in *Crash* that we see J. G. Ballard’s ideas, expressed through Cronenberg’s film, concerning a dystopic merger between man and machine. When describing Catherine after an accident, Ballard writes that “[e]very aspect of Catherine at this time seemed a model of something else, endlessly extending the possibilities of her body and personality.”

602 The project of Vaughan, one of *Crash*’s protagonists, is in fact the reshaping of the human body by modern technology, something most of us are intimately familiar with. 603 But it is through and by the HOD’s

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603 For instance, the constant use of smart phones, laptops, audio voice recognition, the continual digitization of ourselves through posted videos and anecdotes on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and blogs,
actions in these films that such questions can be raised and investigated, since these actions continually challenge the definition of personhood and its boundaries. Radical contemporary ornament, in other words, brings us to the forefront of what can constitute identity and what it can possibly mean to be post-human by challenging and extending the concept of identity.

**Avenues of Further Investigation**

The effect of the HOD on the viewer alongside the effect of its viral operations on the subjects in the films, that is, transforming them into symptomatic assemblages, offer us the possibility to question our relations to objects and how these can define both our bodies and our identities today. Questions such as the transformation, extension, and limiting of definitions of the body and personhood by technology have been explored in previous scholarship, notably in Haraway’s essay on cyborgism. But with the influx of

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new wearable technologies, such as Google Glass (by Google), HoloLens (by Microsoft), biometric bracelets and watches, and smart headbands, the reach of technology has extended even further. More importantly than does the current prosthetic extent of technology, these new technologies construct a space that allows for a flexible narration of personal identity. Through blogging, ‘selfies,’ and countless ‘apps’ that can visually re-shape who we are (such as ZombieBooth, which allows one to “zombify” oneself) we can narrate ourselves into different identities.\textsuperscript{605} Perhaps now, more so than ever before, it is pertinent to revisit such questions.

There are several avenues of further investigation opened up by this dissertation. As mentioned earlier, there is the impact of rocallle ornament on the development of flexible identities among the French elites. There is also, resulting from the research for this dissertation, the intricately bound relation between shells, marine life, exoticism, naturalism, and rocallle art, considering many of the consumers and creators of rocallle were also avid collectors of naturalia.\textsuperscript{606} From further investigation of the social practices of collecting, there emerges the portrait of a close relationship between the natural sciences and the development of the rocallle style, although it is by no means a parallel relationship. Rather, it seems to have been a diametrically opposed, yet fruitful, relationship, in which rocallle exhibited naturalia in a state of disorder, as did Boucher’s

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\textsuperscript{606} Specifically, François Boucher also had a collection of shells, while Bonnier de la Mosson commissioned the work of Lajoüe and had a famous natural science cabinet. On Boucher see Dietz & Thomas Nutz, “Collections Curieuses,” 65. On Bonnier de la Mosson see Hill, “The cabinet of Bonnier de la Mosson,” 161.
prints for the sales catalogues of Gersaint, and science sought to bring order and
definition to the natural world (fig. 71). Radical *rocaille* ornament, which destroys order
and hierarchies, thus seems directly opposed to this eighteenth-century desire to
systematize and bring order to the world. 607 Yet both these opposite systems were
engaged and often in the same spaces and by the same people. Since the *rocaille* system
is one that I have qualified as ‘open’, it is my intention to explore further the notion of
‘open’ systems of disorder with that of emerging systems of order in the eighteenth-
century context of the sciences and *rocaille* culture.

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607 On the systemization and ordering of the natural world see Lesch, “Systematics and the Geometrical
Spirit,” 74-113.
7. a, b. Christophe Huet, *Grande Singerie*, 1737, Musée Condé, Chateau de Chantilly, France.
10. Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier *Plate 1*, from *Cinquième livre d’ornements*, 1734, CCA, Montreal.
11. Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, Plate 2, from Livre d’Ornements, 1734 found in Quatrième livre de l’oeuvre de Meissonnier, CCA, Montreal.
44. F.X. Haberman, *Receuil de motifs et compositions rocailles*, re-print 1889, CCA, Montreal.
45. François de Cuvilliés, *Cartouche* from *Quatres sortes d’écoissons*, CCA, Montreal.
46. Front Door, *Hôtel de Bragelongne*, 21 rue de l’Université, Paris
57. Jean-François De Troy, *Reading from Molière*, 1728, private collection, Britain.
62. Detail from Boiseries of the Cabinet des fables de la fontaine, c. 1750-1755, originally from hôtel Dangé, 9 place Vendôme, Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris.
71. François Boucher, *Still Life of Shells Corals etch*, 1736, Frontispiece from Edmé-François Gersaint’s *Catalogue Raisonné de cocquilles et autres curiosités naturelles.*
103. *Detail from Boiseries of the Cabinet des fables de la fontaine*, c. 1750-1755, originally from hôtel Dangé, 9 place Vendôme, Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris.
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