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Line 18   You shouldn't be here.
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Line 20   This should have gone differently.
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RF

We do not rush toward death, we flee the catastrophe
of birth, survivors struggling to forget it. Fear of death is
merely the projection into the future of a fear which dates
back to our first moment of life.

We are reluctant, of course, to treat birth as a scourge:
has it not been inculcated as the sovereign good—have
we not been told that the worst came at the end, not at
the outset of our lives? Yet evil, the real evil, is behind, not
ahead of us. What escaped Jesus did not escape Buddha:
"If three things did not exist in the world, O disciples, the
Perfect One would not appear in the world . . . ." And ahead
of old age and death he places the fact of birth, source of
every infirmity, every disaster.

—E. M. CIORAN, *The Trouble with Being Born*

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i

i. A film asks this seriously,
asks this *sincerely*:
How hard is it to kill nine-year-olds?

RF

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THREE

Grid, Table,

Failure, Line
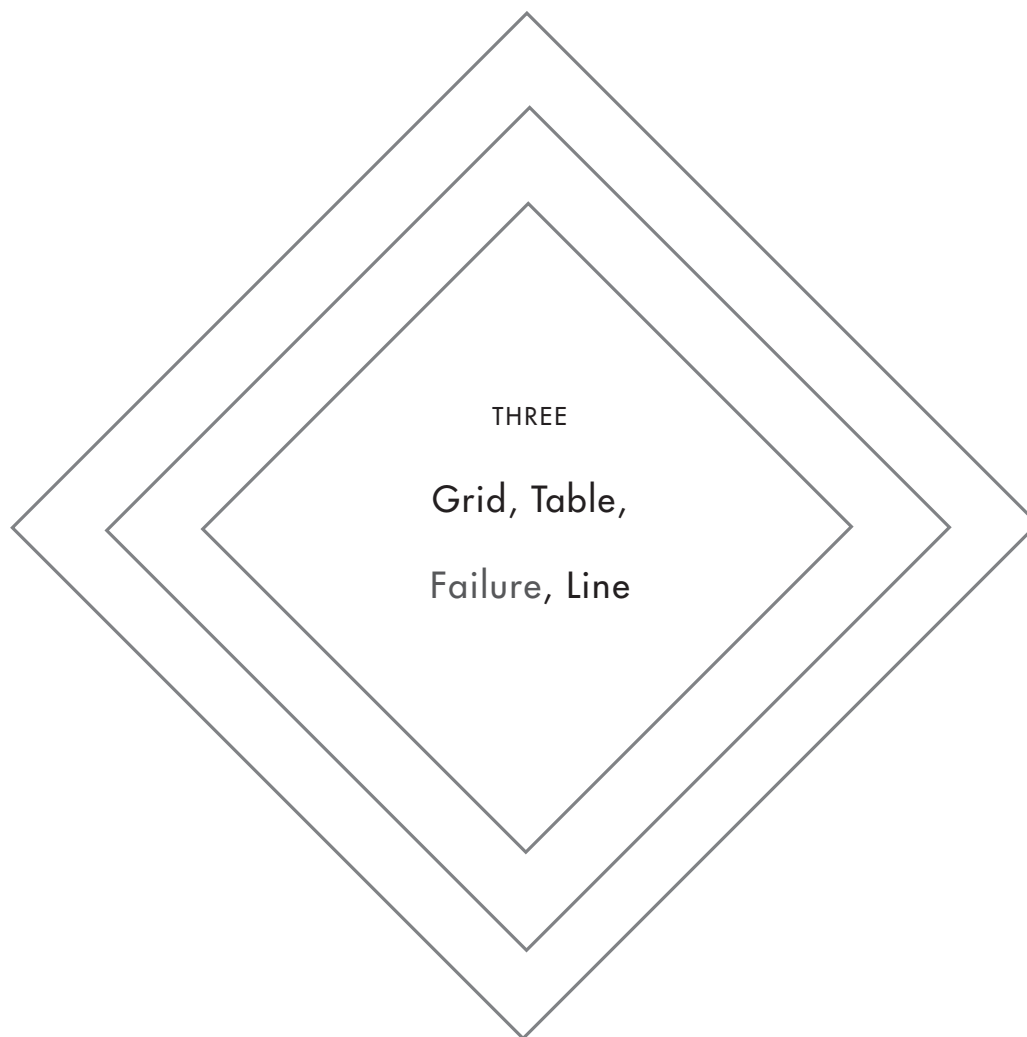
There are only affects, ancients, and bureaucrats, except that there are forms.

By this I mean that Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard's *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011) is nothing else but the interplay of the affective universe of suffering (horror, terror, fear, shock, dismay, a beat resignation) alongside the mythological substrate of giant ancient gods, ritual sacrifice, evocations of "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn," and the metaphysics of evil alongside the surveillance, global positioning, informatics, technical glitches, protocol guidelines, office banalities, and distributed operations of corporative logic. Pain; Prehistory; System. The resolute verticality of the structure, by which the tortured youths in the upmost level are manipulated by the impersonal machinery below them, themselves answering to the sub-

RF

subterranean collective demands of the gods, can be shorthanded as: there is a downstairs to the downstairs. There is a below to what is below. Architectures of declension—caverns, basements, graves, deep waters, descending elevators. (A cinematic universe not of line, but of ray: a part of a line running endpoint to infinity, but only in one direction.) There is no upstairs to the upstairs, no site of transcendence; the cabin-level world reveals no stars. There are only affects, ancients, and bureaucrats all the way down.

Except that there are forms.[ii]

Forms function not as exceptions but as objections to the divisions on which the cinematic universe is constructed. Form neither names nor mediates the differences between upstairs and downstairs, or downstairs and even further downstairs, or late capitalist bureaucracy and ancient mythology, nor does it set in relation affect and system. Form does not passively suffer its appearance, nor is it servant to a metaphoricity of each level. Rather, form intervenes in affect; it intervenes in the ancient; it intervenes in bureaucracy; it puts in place a problem that does not disappear with the total disappearance of being in the eschatology that is the end of the film. Grid, table, database, pool, matrix, array, hexagon, cell, frame, extension, corner, line, part of line . . . *Accept that there are forms.*

THE BUREAUCRAT'S UNCONCEIVED CHILD

This is what we must make sense of: What if violence is very, very difficult to do? What if horror is nearly impossible to bring about? How can that be? — Violence seems so overwhelmingly likely, flesh so self-evidently soft (so raw-meaty, so fleshy). Agatha Christie taught us that *Murder Is Easy*; *Snuff*, that life is cheap; Mouffe, Derrida, Weil, Arendt, Benjamin, Schmitt, Freud, Nietzsche, Hobbes, each offers a form of constitutive archeviolence, an irreducibility of violence that governs every possibility of relation, a foundational risk of violence, sometimes prepolitical, sometimes linked to necessity, sometimes

ii. This formulation is an homage to Badiou's writing in *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, that "*There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths*," which itself is an homage to Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*, and the "*nothing has taken place but the place, except, on high, perhaps, a Constellation*." The philosopher will lose the poet's *on high* and the *perhaps*. The formalist will retain these as lost while adding a new little bit more in the end.

bound to phenomenality itself.[iii] Primary or secondary, divine or mythic or symbolic, state or intimate, structural or unforeseeable, what violence never seems to be is fragile, occasional, deficient, vulnerable to failure, ever at risk of being *inadequately violent*. And yet, what if? But then why would we be so afraid all the time? (And yet; what if?) —All of history seems to contradict even the notion of this thought.[iv]

Two discourses of violence are presented simultaneously in *Cabin in the Woods*, each marked as a form of *possibility*. It is possible for violence to take place. It is also possible for violence to insufficiently take place, for violence to not be violent enough when measured against a prior external standard that objectifies violence: for insufficient pain to be brought; for nonviolence to trouble or disturb violence; for violence to not arrive in the precise order, manner, or intensity desired. For there to have been zero fatalities (for some event to thus have been a total wash). Not a horror (generic, political) espousing the vulnerability and disposability of bodies, but the vulnerability of violence itself to deficiency (material criteria), meagerness (economic criteria), imperfection (aesthetic criteria). Insufficient violence is marked within the bureaucratic level and logic as *failure*, attested to from the earliest minutes of the film by Lin, a member of the chemistry sector who declares with great concern that Stockholm has "gone south"—leaving in play only Japan and the United States, as each of the other possible national rituals has failed to produce the requisite violent sacrifice of the young that will appease the demands of giant, evil, ancient gods.[1]

These alternative global scenarios are visible on multiple diegetic screens in the extensive surveillant operation center that measures, monitors, and intervenes in the cabin-level narrative. After the adolescent protagonists select a young girl's diary—within the constrained options of the artifactual, metonymic objects in the cabin's basement—and read the Latin therein that summons the Buckners—the "zombified pain-worshipping backwoods idiots" with "a hundred-percent clearance rate"—the bureaucrats Hadley and Sitterson turn to their control room's bank of screens, each of which displays a different global location playing out its particular scenario of violence: Berlin, scene of a raging fire; Kyoto, with an *onryō* floating in the middle of a

iii. cf. Heraclitus's Fragment 53, "War is the father of all and king of all"; Ice Cube, "Seems like I'm viewin' a body every other month"; God's burning anger, seeking to destroy, to negate absolutely, in the dialogues with Moses in *Exodus* 32; &c.

iv. And yet. What if?

FIGURE 3.1. *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2011)

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classroom as petrified schoolgirls flee to the margins and bolted doors of the enclosure; Rangoon, showing something like a military encampment. Later, after the failure in Japan, where evil has been defeated and the ghost Kiko's spirit resettled, the film cuts to one of the embedded screens surrounded by a black border, making the nested diegetic image coextensive with the outer screen, thus collapsing the generality of *Cabin in the Woods* with the particularity of each alternative site, flipping channels between the newly (catastrophically) pacified scene in Kyoto and then: Stockholm, where a helicopter flies over a ruined snowy landscape; Buenos Aires, showing a dead and defeated Godzilla; and Madrid, with a burning castle on a mountainside. Each site, captioned by geographic name in the lower middle of the frame, is written over in the center of the image with a repeating, flashing, red typographical marker: FAIL.

Failure, from the Old French *falir*, both to be lacking and to not succeed, to err or make a mistake, and to come to an end, from the Latin *fallire* and *fallere*, to trip, cheat, elude, be defective, moves between a relation to an outcome and a relation to temporality. A disappointment of expectation or purpose, intention or protocol, failure also marks a cessation of function (to run out, to come to an end, to cease being or to become exhausted). In each global horror scenario in *Cabin in the Woods*, violence stumbles, horror disappoints, a violence that would be *sufficiently violent* eludes the event as its protocol

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runs through, and its violence was lacking, was inadequate and insufficient, was not equal to demand—and now time has run out and now time has come to an end. Each national operation thus ends in failure in the sense of both imperfection and cessation. This failure is irrecoverable, irreversible, nonnegotiable, total. Force was averted, its vitality drained away, which is to say that a horror that would be enough to appease a greater horror has not succeeded in taking place, and in this failure to be All, a violence that is not-All has been shown to be *possible*. Sidestepping the essentialist questions (what is horror? what is violence?) and simultaneously sidestepping more modest and situational questions (where is horror? where is violence?), the bureaucratic logic instead attests to an outcome with only two possibilities: wholly successful or absolutely not. The horror scenarios that have failed to take place sufficiently or completely—without residue, partiality, noise, or supplement; which have missed their mark—ultimately leave only the scenario playing out in the United States, which will also ultimately fail to manifest the requisite horror that is the entirety of what is required for radical failure (total human endingness) to fail to take place.

Even the most predictably successful violent scenario—the Zombie Redneck Torture Family, chosen every year by maintenance and shared with Ronald the Intern, the scenario that literally *maintains* and *interns*, preserves the horror formula for the market—will be a formula that is not formulaic enough *this time* (and catastrophe requires only one time) to enact the correct procedure by which sacrifice and substitutionary atonement is successful and violence is All—which is to say, *it is therefore shown to not, in fact, be formulaic* (its set form is shown to be unsettleable). The scenario induces unspeakable pain and suffering in *particular* instances as it runs through its ritual form in this *particular* case, in this *particular* film, and yet it is shown to be insufficient as a general protocol. And yet, precisely because there is a violence that falls short, that is not-All, a violence that *is* All, which will achieve its force with maximal sufficiency, will, in the future, at the edge of the film, take place—with vitality, with triumph, with nothing lacking—in the final, successful arrival of the unappeased wrath of the ancient gods,[v] which is

v. Ancient godly rising purely a consequence of failed protocols, and thus neither for the sake of experiment (epistemic drive) nor from "aesthetic interest alone […] with the world for a canvas," as in Dr. Baines's proposal in James Blish's 1968 *Black Easter* to "let all the major demons out of Hell for one night, turn them loose in the world with no orders and no restrictions."

marked at the edge of the film (beyond it) as the possibility that the film gives rise to (though this possibility is not contained within representation itself), devastating the totality of human life, rendering possible the failure (the end, in time, at the proper and expected time, with success of intention and outcome) of All human being—that which will lose vitality, die away, which will now and forever be marked as a planetary historical failure.

While the cellular unit of each individual instance of the failure of violence to be All is the nation, the cellular unit of the total instance that is *not* a failure of violence—the positive attestation of a violence that *is* All—will be the Anthropocene itself.

This violence that is All will never be marked as an instance of failure—no typographical FAIL is to be superimposed over the United States' scenario—because this failure will function as the limit of appeasement (a failure to stave off its arrival), and therefore the total set of what will thereby arrive as a violence that is All includes as things to be destroyed: the cabin, the corporation, the labs, the red phone, the red system purge button, any remaining bureaucrats, the surveillant technology, the bank of screens, the machinery that renders the typographic superimposition, the pixels that display the word as red; and with the annihilation of all those who live in language and the assemblage of words adjacent to red, also slated for eradication is all, every, each human notion of redness in itself.[vi]

Violence will not fail to arrive this last time, will not become extinct and die out, run short: what will become extinct, die out, run short, will be human life itself, failing because dying, failing as disappointed, what is let down, expiring, Being redefined as that which will perish, that which is no longer to be produced. The *All*, the universal in logic, is the realm of general prop-

vi. —So your blush your rose your crimson and sunset ruby oxblood scarlet, *rood* and *blozend* and *read*, *rouge* and *vermiel*, *ahmar* and *aka* and *rot* and *kokkino*; the site-specific rustiness of *falu*, *rosso* and its long bond to *giallo*; cinnabar and its seductive toxicity, medieval roasted minium; all riding hoods and furious eyes and precious holy wounds; the luscious ugly beauty of ruined strawberries, and the scent and the memory of the scent and the love of the memory of the scent of cumin and smoked paprika and a slight vinegar burn in the oily glisten of the crushed *guindillas* of *mojo rojo*; Macbeth's terror of a green converted in "the multitudinous seas incarnadine"; Plath's execrated tulips; Anne Carson translating Sappho, "As a sweet apple turns red on a high branch, / high on the highest branch and the applepickers forgot— / well, no they didn't forget— were not able to reach / . . . ."*

All that which is at stake in cutting a long story short.

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ositions. If, on the one hand, the violence that is All is brought about by the failure of a sufficient violence to be All in the local and particular contexts of each regional scenario, the ending of the film asks us to regard the generality of the universal in conflict with the particularity of the individual, and to try to imagine a horror that would be universal,[vii] which cannot, however, be represented within the particularity of the scenario as it is still unfolding in real time. A violence that is All, that arrives because some violence was not-All, will not fail to render humanity a failure that is All, that will come to an absolute (total, irreversible, cinematic) end. However, *Cabin in the Woods* offers this structure up via an ethical reorientation, one that proffers disappointment at particular failures of violence and an ironic celebration of its alternative, an exuberance of the universal fleeing the restrictions of the particular in the final arrival of a theological violence that does not fail to be All.

There are two critical ways of regarding the not-All: The first is as lack, deficiency, disappointment (against an originary All that would be knowable, full, sufficient), in which case the not-All would mark a departure from perfection, a diminishment of a prior, given, stable plenitude. The other way of regarding the not-All (the mode that gives rise to Lacan's identification of the term with the *extra* pleasures of feminine jouissance) is that unlike the All, governed by limit, border, and finitude, the not-All has no limit, is not constrained by the essential restrictions of being All, and thereby calls into play possibilities for experimentation, for new relations, for as-yet-unthought newnesses. It, and not totality, promises the boundless, limitless apeiron. The not-All, evading the totalizing logics of the All, leaves open room for excess, noise, residue, disturbance to completion, which is to say: for something unexpected to happen. And indeed it does: on the level of form, the film's unfolding colludes with each national site of horror being not-All against the not-yet-arrived horizon of a violence that would be All. It is precisely the lack of totalization that marks the possibility of the ongoingness of the world and the cinematic inscription that is *Cabin in the Woods* in the context of an only speculative violence that endows it with finitude,

vii. A project of universalization shown to be a feint, given (literal) body *as impossible* in the very particular appearance with which the film ends: the not at all universal anthropomorphic gigantism of a single hand plunging up through the hypotactic world levels with its discernibly national, even New England regional, evocations of a Lovecraftian metaphysics, the hieratic scale of this hand resituating a priority of the human form over the monstrous mutations presented previously.

that borders and shapes and limits its representational and temporal attestation. The violence that is not-All gives rise to the resistant system, the final system purge that spectacularly unfolds the unforeseen possibilities of a catalogue of nightmarish monstrous alternatives. But if there is a conservative aesthetic impulse here, it is that the finitude of a violence that is All will constrain and produce a restriction of the play of possibility in its definitive arrival as a violence that does violence to failed violences, arriving successfully and bringing about an adequate (which is to say: effective) endingness to the ongoingness of the film.

Cabin in the Woods thereby admits the existence of All, Some, or None, but it does not regard them equally. *None* will die (zero fatalities; a total wash—the Japanese scenario); *Some* will die (the American scenario); *All* will die (the endingness of all human life, which is marked as suspended just past the horizon of cinematic representation). Those terms, however, reside in a hierarchy, because the All will include those members of the set None and any remainders belonging to the set Some. Thus no negative term exists for the All—neither Some nor None stand as a rejoinder to completeness. The All is not not; it takes no logic of negation; it works by subsumption. There will be only the unary: all One, no Two. This All names endingness without exception: permadeath of the human experiment. What solely retains a bond to the infinite play of the not-All, the contingent, unstable, fragile possibilities of what is not restricted by finitude, what admits the multiple (is not the One) will therefore arrive within a system that is neutral to violence. The not-All will thus be redirected from the failures of violence to be All into the ongoingness, possibility, play, multiplicity, &c. of form; (—but we are not quite there yet).

Failure, a project of disappointment, a misadventure of expectation, a nonperformance, rendering of something wanting, is also, as a general mode of unsuccessfulness, a kind of *miscarriage* (as goes one definition of *fail* in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*)—what won't work, doesn't work, what might not work. *Cabin in the Woods*, in fact, opens with a presentation of two contexts for failure—the failure of violence to happen with adequacy or sufficiency, extensively enough, its wreckage in the right order or completely (Stockholm: gone south)—and the possibility of the failure of something else altogether. In the opening lines of the film, in medias res, to the bureaucrat Hadley's complaint, "It's hormonal. I mean, I don't usually fall back on, you know, 'it's women's issues,'" his colleague Sitterson asks, "But childproofed how? Gates and stuff?" Hadley's response, "Dude, she did the

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drawers! We don't even know if this whole fertility thing[viii] is gonna work and she's screwed in these little jobbies where you can't even open the drawers." To Sitterson's resigned, "I guess sooner or later," Hadley insists, "Yeah, well a lot later. She did the upper cabinets. Kid'll be thirty before he can reach them. Assuming, you know, we have a kid." From hedging, he consigns himself to negative fortune, insisting, "It's a jinx. It guarantees that we won't get pregnant."[2] *Cabin in the Woods* arrives amid these two instances of failure—put another way, failure is primary, there is no cinematic world prior to this assertion of the possibility of multiple modes of deficiency: the failure of something to happen satisfactorily (the failure of horror's wrecking work being sufficiently *All*), and the failure of something to happen (the child may not be conceived: an event may not take place *at all*). Failure names an economy of excluded fractionality. One cannot be *a little bit* pregnant; one cannot appease ancient gods *partially*. Failure to be All is failure full stop.[ix]

viii. Does it require pointing out that what a fertility treatment is is a manipulation of hormone levels, not unlike the bureaucrats' manipulation of the teenagers' hormones via pheromones? The film is rather transparent on this parallelism, that the world level of the bureaucrats is equally one of surveillance (the Director, of the control center, via the interpellation of the room's red phone), also one of inadvisably ignoring warnings (Mordecai's prophetic warnings to Hadley and Sitterson that Marty the Fool might derail the ritual, which, in the end, he does), also one of choices and of transgression. All this is to say: the All includes the impersonal bureaucracy that monitors and manipulates from below—of course it does: this allnesseverything being the very thing that *All* names. Hadley and Sitterson are not exempt from the world they simultaneously manipulate; downstairs is contained within the system set of which it is a part, and it will thus also be extravagantly destroyed when the violence that is All finally appears.

ix. First complication: from an aphoristic point of view, one cannot be a little bit pregnant, fine. From an epistemic point of view, one can be entirely uncertain whether one is a little bit pregnant, and from the point of view of mensuration one can, in fact, be a little bit pregnant: *and there it is, a positive test, but the numbers aren't looking good and it's probably just a chemical pregnancy—or it* was*, before the bleeding I mean; I guess I know now that that's what it* was*, though I didn't know it at the time and maybe I wish I guess I wish I wish that I didn't know now*.

> [Language lesson: While it might seem as though the present perfect tense is the one in which one *has been* a little bit pregnant, the present perfect tense ought to be used to refer to actions that began in the past and are still in progress. It is therefore preferable to write "was" or "were" to refer to something done in the past that now, and forever, no longer applies, e.g., *I* was *a little bit pregnant*, and not, *I* have been *a little bit pregnant*.]

Or, *How long had it been since the heartbeat was missing, and when was the last beat and*

the beat before the last beat?, or, *What is it called (What am I?* [always the question]*)*
when only the sperm has been implanted or when the embryos have just been transferred
and now it is all about the levels and test after test and when precisely does it feel sure
enough to say Yes, —to believe, to be willing to hope, to imagine that more might come
next? What the bureaucrat's wife—unseen, unnamed, elsewhere, yet there in the cine-
matic world—is doing is *waiting***, waiting to see if the referenced fertility treatments
have worked, or whether—and who knows how long she has waited, how many times
they have tried, whether this is the first, still-optimistic go of a committed long haul or
the final last achingly yearning but by now a nakedly pessimistic gasp—

and bitterly weeping,   *goddamnit*
I just can't do it
   (do it again

—they have failed.*

   * And if they are still trying because the previous time, of however many goes,
   didn't work, did some acquaintance then, smug with unctuous sympathy, say, *Don't*
   worry wife, you can always try one more time. It isn't the end of the world+ *you*
   know, you can always try again.

     + That insistence, always cruel, sometimes, as here, is also not true.^

      ^ (You're wrong, you think; Fuck you, you think; I can't, you think; It must,
      you think; bargains, you think, and *Please*, you think, and whys, you plead,
      and Broken, you think; Damaged, you think; Defective, you think; other
      things, you think, only this, you think; Wasted time, you think; every regret,
      you think; His fault, you think; Thinking not the point, you think; Thinking
      not the point entirely the problem, you think.)

   ** *Waiting* seems to be the lot of certain women in *Cabin in the Woods*—as with
   Anna Patience Buckner, whose very name connotes a submission to the slow pro-
   longations of time, whose failed willingness to endure her name, whose keen drive
   to announce the end of waiting ("I have found it. In the oldest books: the way of
   saving our family") brings about the catastrophes that *await* the teenagers, and
   whose diary entry is about *awaiting* the restoration and the great pain, &c. Waiting
   for the embryo that has been implanted to take—embodying that total but frag-
   ile state of expectation, of uncertainty in which the possible child may have been
   conceived but not being sure yet, not having ascertained whether a treatment, a
   protocol or experiment will work or will fail, whether it will have worked or will
   have failed—the bureaucrat's unconceived child notates a case in which one is also
   not sure what is being killed at the end of the world: nothing, or the very beginning
   of a little something.

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Line 12   Here are some things that she will never know:
Line 13
Line 14   the sour back-of-ear smell
Line 15   the deadweight rump-raised sleep posture
Line 16   a sudden intake of air, inversion of a scream, at some surprising trivial
Line 17   thing giving undiluted joy
Line 18   new fearlessness at having now only one single fear
Line 19   the milkgrease sweaty hairline smell
Line 20
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Line 23   There are others.
Line 24   There will not be any others.
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In Japan, the failure of the horror ritual—the failure of violence to be suffi-
ciently violent—is shown to result from a process of redistribution. Two-thirds
of the way through *Cabin in the Woods*, in the midst of Dana stabbing, and then
fleeing from, the brutal zombie family, the film cuts abruptly from the pitch of
the cabin-level nighttime to a stark white screen and the shrieks of the *onryō*
amid the schoolgirls, singing as they hold hands and form a circle around the
quivering, pacified specter. "The evil is defeated," pronounces the other site's
heroine in the film's other film. "Now Kiko's spirit will live in the happy frog."

This faint, light-disturbing *yūrei* is a dead child: still wearing a white burial
kimono, her youthful face tortured by the unrest of the bloodless, she is con-
verted from a haunting menace to a peaceful enshrinement. She receives, in
other words, in this other film, in this other national cinema, in this other
scenario of terror, a proper placement through funerary, mournful rites and
rituals, given a lodging in the afterlife through being encircled by the children
and their singing of "Donguri korokoro," a song about a rolling acorn and a
loach who play together until the acorn is homesick, finally redirecting the
spirit into the frog at the line, "Bocchan issho ni asobimashō"—"Young one,
let's play together!" The invitation to communal life, embodied in the circu-
lar community of gripped hands, is an ethical enactment of being-with, and
it ultimately defeats evil—which is to say that it renders the Japanese horror
scenario a failure from the point of view of the sacrifice protocol. Unlike the
betting pool of the bureaucrats—a game of collectivity in which each member
is in competition against each other—the circle formed by the schoolchildren
involves playing together, inviting the tortured ghost into the fold and thereby
transforming an antagonistic spirit into the generality of cooperative spirit. In
so doing, the positive commitments of a relational ethics and the redistribu-
tion of care produce a failure of violence to be All. Friendship thereby names
a residual *insufficiency* of violence. Following on the critical tradition that re-
gards the not-All as that which is not restricted by the finitude of the All, the
Japanese scenario's relation to a violence that is not-All opens up a creative
line of flight into other genres altogether. Like the conversion of malevolent
to peaceful spirit, horror is converted into a story about political possibility
(collectivity, cooperation, transformation, ongoingness, a relation of the hu-
man to the animal); destruction and vengeance are replaced with magical
thinking, which becomes the grounds for channeling (territorializing) a new
social organization, with an attendant conversion of forms (the centrifugal
dispersion of shrieking bodies versus the centripetal holding of hands in a
ring); and terror and panic are affectively converted into love and celebration.

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To Sitterson's furious question, "How hard is it to kill nine-year-olds?" the answer is: it is at least somewhat hard. (It is not not hard.)

The bureaucrat's child may or may not have been conceived (it is only ever possible), but it is never to have been born. The violence that is absolute, certain, and definitive is the eschatological horror that annihilates every human life on the planet, including the bureaucrat's possible child and his wife who yearns to conceive that child—and carry and trial in labor and safeguard for, and love and teach and laugh clean care sick for, pick up [ ] put down [ ] and feed hand right to left to mouth and clean hand left to right to mouth pick up [ ] put down [ ] and loud and less again again—and all the children who are, and all the conceived and unconceived children whose conditions of possibility, generation, and regeneration are thereby extinguished. Also to be killed are these nine-year-old schoolgirls who survived the tortured spirit but will survive neither the day nor the end of the world, who will die at the hands of ancient gods despite having appeased the horror that they directly faced. They did not, in the end, avoid violence, their redistribution of horror but some rearranged deck chairs amid a catastrophe newly arranged by their scenario's failure, which is to say, by that very rearrangement—joyful triumph now exposed as delusion.

The structural analogue to the systemic fact that in *Cabin in the Woods* there is a downstairs to the downstairs is that *there can be a failure of a failure*. The temporal analogue to the fact that there is a downstairs to the downstairs and that there can be a failure of a failure is that *there is a younger to the youths*. Marty and Dana, as much as they are punished for being young, so tells the Director of the logic of the violent ritual sacrifice, also punish the younger to the younger (the children; the unconceived child). *There is no possibility of any one evading violence that is All as it definitively arrives, nor is there a possibility of evading a doing of violence to someone else in the passivity whereby a violence that is All is allowed to arrive.*

Cabin in the Woods thus offers one way of thinking planetary disaster and total extinction, given in this maxim: It may be very difficult to kill some nine-year-olds; it is rather easy to annihilate everyone.

Easy, because it is, all told, inactivity that brings about the violence that is All—Dana's failure to shoot Marty to complete the ritual, her refusal of a decision, her apology for a weak attempt, her insistence that "I probably wouldn't have," his unwillingness to offer himself in sacrificial exchange for the on-

goingness of humanity. Dana and Marty do not teleologically suspend the ethical for a greater leap of faith in the possibility of ongoingness; the youths merely slump against a wall and *wait* for the endingness of the human experiment, letting the last horror ritual fail, thus allowing the great violence that would be All to successfully take place. Marty and Dana are neither evil nor treacherous, but they are resigned. Able to act with minimal agency to prevent the arrival of a violence that is All, they weakly refuse. Not-doing is the great determinant of catastrophe. But why? Friendship, of course. Who kills their friends?

But if one mode of friendship is opposed to violence, friendship itself does not take a stable predictive relation in *Cabin in the Woods*. It is, after all, the offering of an invitation to play together—the promise of a new and communal form of amity—that ensures the failure of the Japanese ritual and creates the condition of possibility for a future bringing-about of a violence that is All. Friendship in this case does not resist violence but enables and produces it. Likewise, Marty and Dana's ethics of friendship, her refusal to kill him and render a requisite order of deaths that would stave off the failure of an otherwise successful American ritual, induces the violence that is All, fails the ritual but succeeds in bringing about the endingness of being (for all humankind, all history, all futurity). The encircling by the schoolchildren recalls a complaint Marty voices about the system of the social: that far from crumbling, it is consolidating, fortifying, enclosing; it is *binding*. Cooperative schoolchildren, like bureaucrats, are on the side of the continuity of existence: they, as much as the quasi-governmental agency manipulating the components of Foucauldian biopower, aim at the ongoingness of life (not for All, but at least for Some). It is the Virgin and the Fool, Dana and Marty, who remain on the side of antipreservation, anti-violence-that-would-not-be-All. Marty's critique of the social, that it has not produced sufficiently rapid—adequately devastating—upheaval, is in full support of the violence that is All in the context of a scenario in which he simultaneously imagines that violence as his antagonist. Marty refuses to die in order for Dana *or for any one else* to go on.[x]

x. Not for his friends elsewhere, or for the schoolchildren, or for any other children, or for his parents (who he worries will think he is a burnout when they see the surveillance footage that, of course, they will not and never see for they are included in the total set of those who will die—whom he will *let* die), or for untold strangers. Nor for the sake of ideals or abstractions: recall that the first images of the cabin-level world are Dana's dormitory room littered with her drawings on the wall, her sketchbook charcoals of the professor with whom she is in love; —so Art, Love, Family, none function

Relational ethics thus functions as no guarantee of nonviolence.

All this is to say: in this film's schema, one cannot *generalize* friendship's relation to violence. And as a result, one cannot generalize an ethics: an ethics of friendship bonded to nonviolence is a possibility (which retains its promise of new relations and the generation of differences, alternative arrangements), and an ethics of friendship bonded to violence is a possibility (what will arrive, as necessity, concretely, in the here and now of the final eschatology, the event that will definitively end a *generality* of all human life because of one *particular* friendship). The ethical as such thus comes to name contingency and not necessity—particularity, and not what is in the realm of the universal.

Horror more broadly attests to a vision of politics that is really an inconsistency-tolerant ethics. It follows out its consequences strictly, seriously, and above all *to the end*.

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as metanarratives of being, in the end, something to live for. The most potentially seductive lure is epistemophilia—Dana and Marty's final stated curiosity* about yearning to have been able to see the "giant evil gods"—and yet that impossibility also voids any commitment to any other reception or production of knowledge that might rescind the passive commitment to the imminent endingness of everything.

* The film's greatest feint is the impossible witnessing of the instant of one's own death: Dana's "I wish I could have seen them" (the enormous malevolent beings), and Marty's reply, "I know." It is the case that the film itself will see past the obliteration of these speakers, will take a metaphysical position above the cabin (related feint: camera purports to occupy the structural position of missing stars), being there to see the plunging of the monstrous hands projectively grasping toward the final obliteration of representation of all that *is*, which includes the field of the spectatorial zone, prior to the radical cut to black, thereby realizing Dana and Marty's wish for the sake of a future *someone else*, illustrating the deceit by which a final term hypothetically remains behind the annihilation of All in order to bear witness to it. This is reminiscent of the double structure in Blanchot's lines at the strange lightness of an evaded execution in *L'instant de ma mort*: "I imagine that this unanalyzable feeling changed what there remained for him of existence. As if the death outside of him could only henceforth collide with the death in him. 'I am alive. No, you are dead.'" To remain to see the endingness of All is to be dead yet to be still alive, to be alive to see how very dead one is at that very instant. This is what the concluding shot assures in a false flattering of ongoingness. And yet the film does not reveal the in-itself violence that is All, but rather, by positively testifying to its showing, the film unconceals precisely the perpetual *abeyance* of a violence that would be All. Thus does a representational violence that is All never arrive except as deceit, cheat, counterfeit, inadequacy—except as yet another (here, cinematic) failure.

Cabin in the Woods documents a logic whereby, for the explicit sake of the friend, one will not sacrifice oneself for the friend. A violence that is All, that includes within its All the agonizing death of the friend, as well as the deaths of all possible friends, is defended precisely for the sake of the category of the friend. Neither Merman nor Angry Molesting Tree nor Dismemberment Goblins nor {   }. . . *friendship* is the ur-horror in this catalogue of multiple possible horrors. Friendship is the nightmare for ethics. Not in Kierkegaard's sense that in the suspension of the ethical the individual asserts herself "over against the universal," acting as "the particular" (as in Abraham's acting in the "form" of sin) and making the self the exception to the universal; rather, the friend functions as a failure of a general ethics, without the positive gesture of acting as the particular.[3] In *Cabin in the Woods*, friendship neutralizes a certain stance, it voids the universal without positing a particular. It does not show anything *in common* among types of friendships (what it means to evade the universal: what applies to everyone and applies every time), and in that way, friendship comes to name something unrepeatable, paraconsistent, purely contingent, and without any generation of a concept. The ultimate philosophical consequence of horror is thus an attestation and formalization of a state in which an ethics of nonviolence would be something wholly accidental.

In the final confrontation between the Director and the two remaining protagonists, well after the deaths of their other friends, right after the deaths of the bureaucrats, the Director explains what is at stake: "The other rituals have all failed. The sun is coming up in eight minutes; if you live to see it, the world will end." To Marty's retort, "Maybe that's the way it should be. If you've got to kill all my friends to survive, maybe it's time for a change," the Director replies, "We're not talking about change. We're talking about the agonizing death of every human soul on the planet. Including you. You can die with them. Or you can die for them." (Marty: "Gosh, they're both so enticing.") In this exchange, the Director is both right and wrong: right, this end is not a change in the sense of turn-taking within a logic of the Same or a substitution of like, as in any barter or exchange, but wrong, this change *is* a change in the sense of undergoing a formal alteration, making something other than what it was. The agonizing death of every human soul on the planet is not change in the sense of a progression of liberal politics, but it is change in the sense of the difference of a difference. Thus, for all that *Cabin in the Woods* can be regarded as both member and critic of postmodern horror for its reflexivity and

depth of allusions—suggesting comparisons to the *Scream* franchise; *John Dies at the End*; *Tucker & Dale vs. Evil*; the meta-horror of *The Final Girls* or *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon*; the abstraction of *It Follows*; and literary works like Thomas Olde Heuvelt's novel *Hex*, in which surveillance networks confront ancient mythos—in many ways the film is less invested in the constraints of genre than in problems of the general as the question of contemporary politics and ethics (general failure, general violence, general change, a general ethics, general annihilation, &c.).[4] This is particularly visible in the last judgment pronounced by a wounded Dana, slumped next to Marty, the Director now dead, the world now conscripted to endingness from the failure of a sufficient violence that ensures the arrival of the violence that will be All. Her general verdict: "Humanity. It's time to give someone else a chance."[xi] In this final conversation, Dana and Marty end up ventriloquizing a version of the late-twentieth-century doctrine of accelerationism: that the world would be better off being forced to a rapid combustion of its worst tendencies. As Steven Shaviro words it, "Accelerationism is best defined—in political, aesthetic, and philosophical terms—as the argument that the only way out is the way through. [. . .] The hope is that, by exacerbating our current conditions of existence, we will finally be able to make them explode, and thereby move beyond them."[5]

The film's protagonists declare allegiance, however, to a very particular strand of the concept. The term initially came from Roger Zelazny's 1967 novel, *Lord of Light*, in which a group of revolutionaries called the Accelerationists seek to take society "to a higher level" through rapidly transforming social relationships to technology, with an explicitly political aim: "There would no longer be any gods, only men." In the novel, accelerationism is described as "a simple doctrine of sharing" and "an act of charity" that "would be directed to the end of raising their condition of existence to a higher level,

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xi. Dana, however, is absolutely wrong in her interpretation of the scenario at hand: it is not time to give someone else a chance. The endingness of all human life is not *time* (not contained within time—it signals the anarchival and the end of historical time), not for some *one*, not a horizon that admits *someone else*, and not *chance*. Her declaration feigns a futural possibility foreclosed by the horror that will be All, for Marty and Dana's passivity is not vested in producing a new world: destruction is guaranteed, not contingent; All, not partial with the possibility of excess or residue; not about the unthought or surprise or the new. Rather, there is no political or aesthetic plan for what might come beyond or after the violence that is All.

akin to that which we ourselves occupy."[6] This utopian impulse toward transformation and elevation is retained in some contemporary forms of critical thought, including this final tenet, for example, of *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*:

> 24. The future needs to be constructed. It has been demolished by neoliberal capitalism and reduced to a cut-price promise of greater inequality, conflict, and chaos. This collapse in the idea of the future is symptomatic of the regressive historical status of our age, rather than, as cynics across the political spectrum would have us believe, a sign of sceptical maturity. What accelerationism pushes towards is a future that is more modern—an alternative modernity that neoliberalism is inherently unable to generate. The future must be cracked open once again, unfastening our horizons towards the universal possibilities of the Outside.[7]

This version of sharing and unfastening recalls the Japanese schoolchildren's drive toward a different arrangement of the social in their redistribution of spirit and promise to play together—a reconstruction of the future, a making-new of what is to come. Marty and Dana's advocacy of accelerationist logics, however, hews far more to the nihilistic version found in works like Benjamin Noys's *Persistence of the Negative* and *Malign Velocities*. There is no sense of the better world to come in Dana and Marty's passivity that allows all human life to be violently ended, and they loan sympathy instead to something like philosopher Nick Land's account of the "thermospasmic shock wave" as "undilute chaos," such that "disorder must increase, that regional increases in negentropy still imply an aggregate increase in entropy." Land's vision, a mash-up of death-drive theories and nihilism via Bataille, culminates in a model whereby "any process of organization is necessarily aberrational within the general economy, a mere complexity or detour in the inexorable death-flow, a current in the informational motor, energy cascading downstream, dissipation."[8] Or, as Marty rants earlier in the film: Society is "filling in the cracks with concrete. Everything's filed or recorded or blogged. Chips in our kids' heads so they won't get lost. Society needs to crumble. We're all just too chickenshit to let it."

By affiliating with this particular strand of accelerationism, Dana and Marty are also part of (the end of) the project Badiou identifies with the twentieth century writ large—what he dubs the *passion du réel*, the passion for the real, "the idea that things had to take place, here and now, that they had to *come about*, to *realize* themselves [. . .]. For instance, the notion of the ap-

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pearing of a new humanity, or that of a total revolutionary overthrow of existing societies, or the creation of a new world."[9] This drive involves an unfolding series of purifications: "In order to arrive at the real, to produce it, a method was needed to eliminate the old world, to eliminate all the habits and things of old. In my view, a large part of the violence of the century, the extreme political cruelty that dominated its first sixty years or so, was rooted in the conviction that ultimately no price is too high for an absolute beginning."[10] Badiou links this passion for the real to a "will to formalization," a drive to attain a "radical simplification that would allow one to extract the kernel of the opposition between the new and the old in its purest form."[11] When Badiou argues that one consequence of this formalization is a devastation of the local (local difference, local differentiation) under the total weight of the global, he seems to perfectly describe the mode by which the specific *mise-en-abîme* representational economies of particular national film traditions—Europe, Latin America, Japan—each fail (contain horror; that is, are not sufficiently violent) in relation to the broader arrival of a pretention toward universalism via the American genre scenario. If, however, the brutal simplifications of politics, homologized for Badiou in the stark simplifications and extreme formalizations of avant-garde practices of the previous century, are given shape here—in that the film's ending gives body, as it were, to "the conviction that ultimately no price is too high for an absolute beginning," that the agonizing death of every human on the planet is not too high a price to pay for an absolute beginning of a difference—it is the postmodern horror touch that deprives this conviction of conviction, that renders it a *passivity* as opposed to a political *project*. That the "absolute beginning of history" would involve resigning oneself to the resurgence of ancient, formerly omnipotent, gods—that is, of the absolute nonbeginning of history but rather its vengeful return—suggests that a twenty-first-century rereading of the twentieth century ends less in a will to formalization than with a will-less *whatever*. A radical simplification of the "give someone else a chance" that is capable of the same extreme cruelty and indifference to the cost of eliminating the whole of the present, now old, now former world. No bang, few whimpers. A little stoned, a shrug.

Except that there are forms.

INFINITE POSSIBLE CONTINGENCIES (EXTENSION)

A human is that being which prefers to represent itself within finitude,
whose sign is death, rather than knowing itself to be entirely traversed
and encircled by the omnipresence of infinity.
— Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*

Topology is not "designed to guide us" in structure. It is this structure.
— Jacques Lacan, "Second Turn: The Discourse of the Analyst and Interpretation"

> *Horror is not only about violence, and violence isn't only about violence.*
> *Both are also about the processes of the formalization of abstractions.*

Every architectural-structural-textual level of *Cabin in the Woods* gives aesthetic body to a schematic or arrangement proper to it: the hexagonal network grid of the cabin level; the three-dimensional matrix grid of glass cubes in the architecture directly below that level; the written table organizing the betting pool of potential options for the American scenario's agent of violence in the control room; and the subterranean gods' appeasement or disappointment bonded to intaglio and hollow lines of stone-sculpted relief filled in, partially and ultimately inadequately, with the sacrifices' blood, its incisions forced with the course of a viscous pigment, thus converting a form of sculpture to something more evocative of printmaking. Although the vertical hypotactic levels of enunciation in *Cabin in the Woods* have been read as a formalization of the metatextual (the puppeteers, bureaucrats, and Director taken to reflexively stand in for the machinery of cinematic production and the marketplace of horror film as formulaic commodity), the film is far more akin to a *textualization of the meta-formal*. Above all else, the film is about the properties of varying formal systems. These forms are not metaphors—for society, or information, or power, biopower, the necropolitical, &c.—; they are the structures themselves.[12] There are forms.

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1. THE GRID (GPS & THE BEE AS GEOMETER)

The grid arrives in *Cabin in the Woods* as both metaphor and visual material; as figure and as graphic; as anxiogenic, abstracted symbol of a totalizing disciplinary/surveillant regime and as an illuminated network of intersecting lines. Its double invocation takes different spatial topologies: *that which one seeks to get off of* (a cartographic model in which evasion, which is to say grid *failure*, is possible), and *that which one cannot avoid encountering as force* (an affecting-affected form of sufficiency, which does not admit failure or exception or off-ness). In the language of the logic of violence, the former is a grid that retains the possibility of being not-All; the latter is a grid that is marked by being All.

The first grid is invoked early in the film. Only minutes after the introduction of the upper textual cabin-level narrative, as the college students begin their generically familiar departure of suburban and familiar setting for the (unknown, rural, differently classed, &c.) escape, Jules announces a cartographic failure: "I hope this is the right road. It doesn't even show up on the GPS. It is unworthy of global positioning." To this worry, Marty insists on the positive value of software breakdown: "That's the whole point," he rants. "Get off the grid, right? No cell phone reception; no traffic cameras; go someplace for one goddamn weekend where they can't globally position my ass." This first grid is lodged within epistemologies of geolocation and technologies of identification, connected to matters of precision and adequacy, but also of failure: of which it is possible for error or nonperformance to render one *off* the grid. The second grid is an illuminated material network, a hexagonal electrical grid that Curt forcefully encounters during the climax of the cabin-level narrative when trying (and failing) to escape the predations of violence by leaping an abyssal canyon on a motorcycle, and which is foreshadowed earlier in the film by a soaring bird's staticky confrontation with its voltaic network of lines.

These two grids do not name the same object, episteme, or form. The grid Marty invokes, which he celebrates getting and being *off of*, is inextricably linked to techniques of mapping and the long history of navigation. But the world of the protagonists in *Cabin in the Woods* involves a distinctly modern mode of positioning; as Marty notes, there are no stars in the blackest sky above them, which is to say that missing are the astronomical markers that guided the ancient exploration of territory,[xii] particularly maritime ex-

xii. Before they are those to be tortured, to be killed, to be ritually sacrificed, in taking to the road for the sake of displacement from suburban campus to rural cabin, the college

ploration, now lacking the determinations that might orient one in and at and in relation to the underfoot earth. The instruments in play are thus not fifteenth- and sixteenth-century astral observations and measurements, nor seventeenth- and eighteenth-century charts and maps and clocks, nor nineteenth- and early twentieth-century radiogoniometry and positioning via transmission signals, but the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century regime of GPS, a Global Navigation Satellite System reliant on US military satellites made available for commercial use and enabled by and integrated with the disseminated receivers endemic to an era of mobile privatization. Ineluctably bound to the language of recovery and failure, and the possibility of getting lost (the problem, historically mortal, of lostness for which such positioning was a designed solution), global positioning traffics in information, data that can be converted to applications: determinations of velocity or localization, with attendant conversions to forms of monitoring, tracking,

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students initially are evaders of geographical limit. In that sense, though not quite navigators, they are akin to explorers, and their transgression is initially that of cartographic boundary. Because the structure of the film is the departure from a starting place and the attempt to return to it (announced in the lyrics of OK Go's "White Knuckles," which plays at the first rupture between textual levels: "You'll never get that taste, out of your mouth / You'll never get the paw prints, out of the hen house now / And you can't go back, same way you came / Round all the pieces up, but they just don't fit the same"), the film's long line is an iteration of the ancient narrative form of a *nostos*,* albeit here a failed** one.

* The history of navigation is more broadly the history of the affects of *nostos*—terror or rage at a lack of orientation, deep grief at the possibility of a failure to return+ home. *Nostos*, whose frequent bond to *algos*, *algia*, pain, elides the multiplicity of affective attachments—ranging from longing to disgust, doubt to heroic certainty—was always already an aesthetically mediated question of the felt practices of navigation: as Anna Bonifazi puts it, "In Homer, *nostos* means first and foremost 'return home from Troy by sea.' It refers both to the return itself as experienced by the Achaean heroes and to the poetic telling of that experience."

+ This return, however, being conceptualized differently in ancient and modern regimes of longing; James Phillips neatly summarizes the opposing forms as, "Odysseus longs for home; Proust is in search of lost time."^

^ And of course, one could also argue that in reasserting monstrosity in the form of giant, evil, ancient gods, the horror film qua generic template is here nostalgic for a lost affectivity bound up with sensible and monstrative forms prior to the reflexive ironizing of the postmodern era, a textual longing for lost, now drowned, modes of horror representation.

** —because they die, a common, though not exclusive, reason for such failures—

Line 1	surveilling, finding, refinding, failing to lose. In the cabin-level world of the
Line 2	film, optical measurement systems are thus explicitly negated in favor of algo-
Line 3	rithmic systems: a replacement of drawn angle with code.
Line 4	The complex global positioning system under which the protagonists op-
Line 5	erate evokes omnipresent regimes of tracking and surveillance (under the
Line 6	guise of navigational guidance and ideologies of service and security), but it
Line 7	simultaneously contains within itself numerous modes and varieties of de-
Line 8	ficiency. Failure is not of the order of the One (possible or not; *a* failure, *the*
Line 9	failure) but is multiple:
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Line 11	inaccuracies
Line 12	gaps in coverage
Line 13	unanticipated unavailability
Line 14	lowered power
Line 15	inadequate receivers
Line 16	a lack of reliability
Line 17	difficulties with density
Line 18	margins of error (a twelve-foot radius; a three-foot radius)
Line 19	the possibility of missing signals
Line 20	glitches
Line 21	frauds and spoofs
Line 22	jamming
Line 23	cyberattacks
Line 24	timing flaws and desynchronized time stamps
Line 25	search domains confronted with their limit
Line 26	intervals and diversions
Line 27	variations in satellite geometry
Line 28	possibilities of atmospheric interference
Line 29	design change or error
Line 30	signal blockages
Line 31	mislabeling
Line 32	missing addresses
Line 33	delay effects
Line 34	multipath errors from local obstructions
Line 35	systems that can multiply fail
Line 36	systems with limited fault tolerance
Line 37	systems that can multiply fail amid systems with limited fault tolerance
Line 38	crashes

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The promise of exhaustive mapping is given form[xiii] against the necessary inclusion of the minimal miscalculation that inserts a limit in the ideology of the total. It is only because one can fall off of it that the positive assertion of the grid Marty jubilantly celebrates is possible.[xiv] Accordingly, this grid is central to the regime that contains the "electrical glitch," the power reroute from "upstairs" that signals Marty's evasion of the Buckner family's torture (or, rather, evasion of their violence being All)[xv] and his ruining of the bureaucratic plan for a successful sacrifice—his manipulation of the electrical network that (initially) prevents the cave being blown in and (initially) subverts (opens up, enables, maps a successful route for) possibilities of escape for the remaining survivors. The vulnerability of this grid is precisely what renders the failure of the American scenario, heralding both the imminent system purge's cacophony of extraordinary horrors and the violence that is All that ends everything whatsoever.

It is fitting that this electrical glitch, a failure of infrastructure and network that fails to blow the tunnel and collapse the cave at the crucial moment of potential escape, occurs amid the scale and scope of the mountain range, road, and abyss, sites that intervene between the world from which the youths have departed and the rural setting from which they will, to a one, not return. The natural grandeur of this particular locale, though seemingly an eighteenth-century figure of classical Kantian sublimity—reason intimately interacting with sensation, with the concept's attendant notions of vastness,

xiii. The Latin *forma*, for all that it meant figure, shape, appearance, plan, also, at one point, very long ago, referred to a surveyor's map.

xiv. This promise is always an inadequacy as a positive internal requirement, for a true adequacy of map would cease to function as representation—as glimpsed in Borges's thought experiment in "On Exactitude in Science" (itself a reimagining of Lewis Carroll's "Sylvie and Bruno Concluded"), in which cartographic art was eventually able to create a "Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, which coincided point for point with it."

xv. A violence to the formulaic certainty of their generic form, a devastation of their "one-hundred-percent clearance rate"—which is to say: an insertion of the statistical noise dubbed a margin of error,* the smallest allowed amount of miscalculation of that percentage.

* Although an allowable miscalculation, margin of error, of course, is routinely responsible for the catastrophic consequences of the accident, the crash, the explosion, the wreck, &c.+

+ In the previous sentence, what precisely does *allowable* mean?

boundlessness, and power—is, via the electrical malfunction, transformed into the twenty-first-century notion of "the technological sublime," a contradictory structure in which, as David Nye frames it, the observer interprets "a sudden expansion of perceptual experience as the corollary to an expansion of human power and yet simultaneously evokes the sense of individual insignificance and powerlessness."[13] The glitch reorients the film from natural sublimity to the digital sublime via the affective operation of technological failure.[xvi] As Eugénie Shinkle writes on the question of material breakdown in gaming: the technological sublime is explicitly marked by "a collapse of con-

xvi. It is worth recalling the crucial role of failure already operative in Kant's theory of the sublime in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Briefly, we know that Kant distinguishes between two kinds of sublimity that overwhelm disinterestedness, are "absolutely great" (*schlechthin groß*), and are beyond all comparison (Kant writes "absolute, non comparative magnum"): mathematical and dynamical. In the former, sublimity is linked to the problem of comprehending vastness and magnitude (snow-gray, periphery-exceeding "shapeless mountain masses towering above one another in wild disorder with their pyramids of ice"); in the latter, it is a question of force, potency, power, dominance [*Gewalt*], as in "volcanoes with their all-destroying violence," or a "boundless ocean set into a rage." In either case, the imagination, in attempting to apprehend the object of such power or scale, *fails*: "This idea of the supersensible [. . .] is awakened in us by means of an object the aesthetic judging of which stretches imagination to its limit, whether that of enlargement (mathematically) or of its power over the mind (dynamically)." Reason's drive for imagination to represent the object absolutely (as a whole impression, as an absolute magnitude, as a totality of power) is frustrated, and the object is therefore contrapurposive for the imagination. This failure, however, constitutes a negative exhibition and makes the sublime (newly; subjectively) purposive: it is thus "a pleasure to find every standard of sensibility inadequate for the ideas of the understanding." Hence the negative affective pleasure of the sublime: displeasure at imagination's failure is tinged with pleasure that imagination is inadequate to reason, exposing a greater freedom (above, transcending, beyond [mere] sensibility; above, transcending, beyond [mere] nature). The negative pleasure of the sublime rests on this failure; the affect "pleases immediately through its resistance to the interest of the senses." The sublime involves a "feeling of the deprivation of the freedom of the imagination by itself, insofar as it is purposively determined in accordance with a law other than that of empirical use." A failure of imagination to be All, we might say in the vocabulary of violence's possibilities, involves the expansion of itself, inducing an affect that is All: "Imagination, although it certainly finds nothing beyond the sensible to which it can attach itself, nevertheless* feels itself to be unbounded precisely because of this elimination of the limits of sensibility." Failure exposes, and is required for, this generation of the beyond.

  * Are we too shy to say what is nakedly happening here, what this "nevertheless" really means? Reason is humiliating imagination—and a taken-aback imagination finds that it likes it. Gets a taste for it. It will, in fact, come to *crave* it.

trol and meaning, and it is felt when gameplay is brought to an abrupt halt by the *failure* of interface. Failure events in videogames can take the form of minor hardware malfunctions like bugs, glitches, slow running, poorly designed artificial intelligences (AIs), and so on." More catastrophic failures, "such as crashes, random memory corruption and irrecoverable hardware failure [. . .] have more serious consequences for the subject."[14] In the case of the latter sort of failure event, she writes, "the unimaginably large, extroverted, operative sublime—which many videogames attempt to simulate visually—is replaced by an unimaginably complex 'introverted' sublime, which is incapable of presentation to the senses."[15] Failures of interface rupture perceptual experience to such a degree, Shinkle argues, that the result is a subject who is "disabled and dispersed—no longer part of the gameworld." What appears in this encounter is "not a meaningful game form and extension of reason, but an inexpressive intelligence, a pure, depersonalized power, a technological other."[16] In the encounter with this inhuman other, the sublime experience "is emptied of the transcendence that the term originally comprised."[17]

There is, however, in *Cabin in the Woods*, that second grid. This other grid neither admits nor requires exception; it functions negatively in relation to the possibility of failure. There is no getting off of this grid: it is only ever (and only ever again, and only over and over) encountered as the sufficiency of its form, because the irreducible givenness of this grid rests on the adequacy of line. This grid will not, cannot, fail to be All. There is an unfreedom to this grid. In formalizing its own presence, it is something akin to Levinas's *il y a* (the "there is")—an impersonal, anonymous, unavoidable, resolutely insistent form. While Marty celebrates the prospect of getting off of the grid, for Curt it is just the case that *There is a grid*.

Comprising a mere fifteen seconds of screen duration, the sequence in which Curt encounters grid (so amenable to a reading in relation to genre convention—here, a mock-heroic action-adventure climax) begins with a reduction of the film's visual material to the difference between a field of darkness and a single point of light. When Curt revs the engine of his motorcycle, as he turns it to face the canyon, the camera's frontal position, aligned with the abyss he purports to leap, displays the round unity of a single blinding headlight against a detail-obliterated background. Light will pose the primary question of the emptiness or fullness of this space, the thingness of the negative, a matter that will be hystericized within diegetic seconds by Curt's subsequent crashing encounter with an electrical grid, at which Holden frantically sputters: "He hit something. There's nothing." The question of whether

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there is *nothing or something* will be a question that light uniquely unconceals: diagramming, giving form to, the lines of a grid that reiterate that paradox, illumination bearing out the violence of the broader structure in which the teenagers in the upper level find themselves. There *is* nothing. And yet Curt hits something. He brutally, body-destroyingly encounters a formal arrangement, which is not a thing—which *is* nothing—and yet which enacts total force on him at discrete moments of a junctured, mutually affecting encounter. He hits something, yet there's nothing. He dies because he hit something. There is nothing.

At the moment of the initial leap, the motorcycle is shown in perspective, its right to left movement emphasizing the horizontality of the mythology of escape (and of progress: toward the law, hope, rescue, return, home, &c.), the screen a homogeneous field of darkness, the soundtrack saccharine, soaring. Then, the suddenness of the life-ruining encounter of bike and grid. It is given in a sonic and luminous violence: a loud static crackle that obliterates musical line; a brutal visual collision that devastates kinetic line. At the impact, horizontality and its varied ideologies are replaced with a resolute verticality, a partially illuminated electrical grid shown in an oblique, canted perpendicular and extending beyond the borders of the cinematic frame. The grid is not illuminated as a single or homogenous form, but as a dynamic and internally divisible series of lines of electric flow: where Curt directly contacts it, the full expanse of lines blazes and scatters light, sparking ferociously across the frame. The negative space of the potential for crossing—the openness of the abyss, previously signaling the possibility for new forms of movement—is thereby filled with the positive aesthetic force of electrical discharge, whose bright spitglints overtake that empty space. Amid this first contact, there are extensive blank patches, the lines only shadowly visible, and discrete threads of electrical activity running a jagged and sharp up-and-down graph of varied amplitudes and uneven distributions across the compositional field.

The film cuts to Dana screaming and then cuts back to the grid from her perspective, a newly frontal view that transforms the grating into a recognizably ordered and organized pattern, illuminated in patches of adjacent hexagons in the local area of Curt's repeated impact as he falls farther into the abyss of the canyon. That frontal view is made oblique once more through a series of shots from Dana and Holden's elevated vantage point as the grid is reencountered again and again in smaller, because more distant, patches until the grid lines return to pure attestations of the presence of light: small pulsations receding into the space, not of an expansive mountain road but of
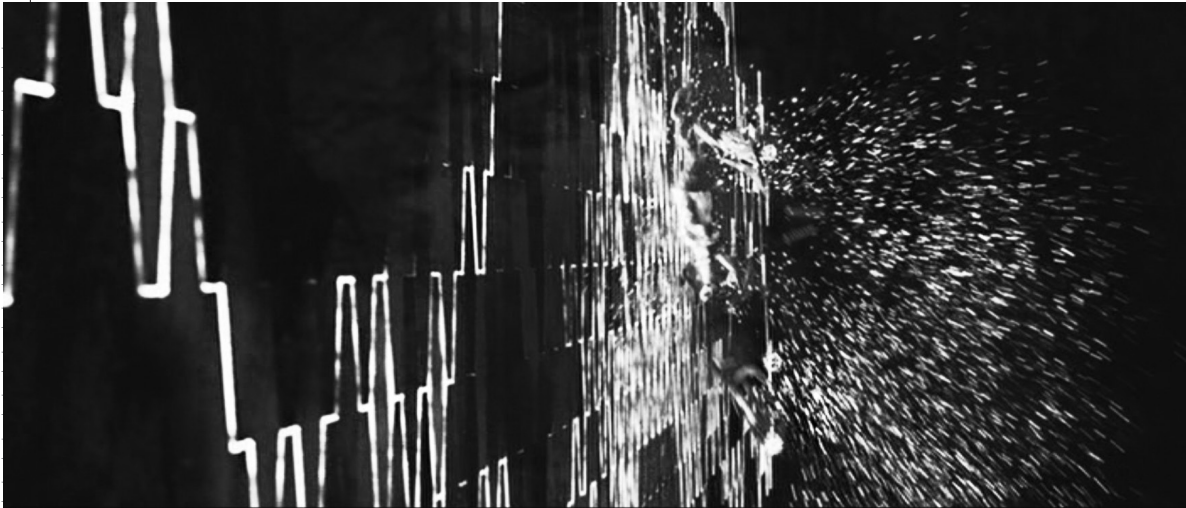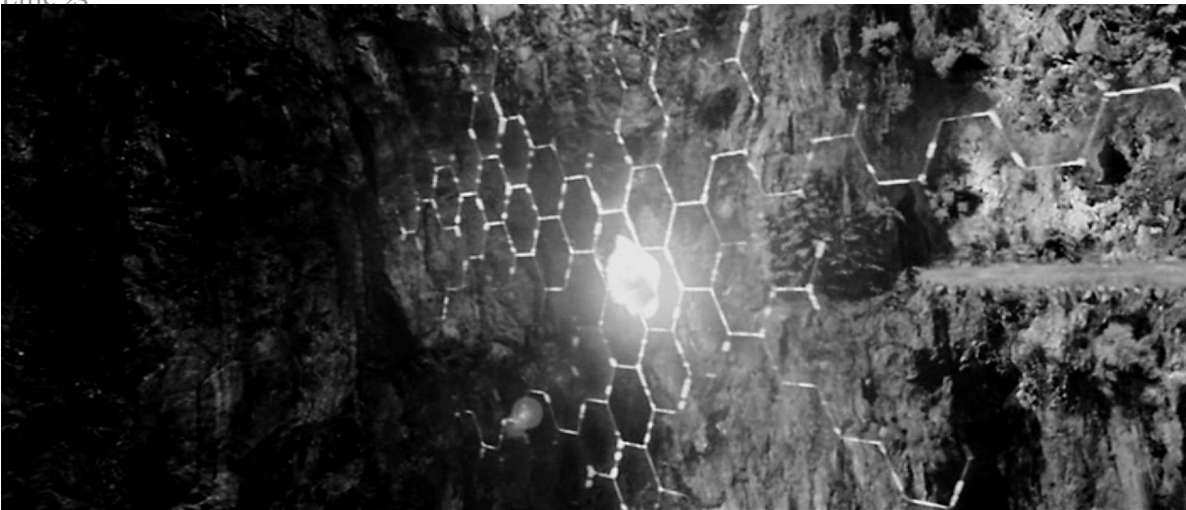
FIGURES 3.2–3.4. *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2011)

a deep mountain maw. The sole uncanted grid—what offers the most non-oblique image of its repeating hexagonal form—appears only once in a single frontal point of view, the vantage at the instant of Dana's shrieking "No!" The formal purity of the grid is thus aligned with a negative horror at its positive realization.

Earlier, when the soaring bird encounters it as fore-announcement, the grid is shown also canted from the side, but with an approach from the left, continuing the film's interest in an extensive visualization of this grid as a form that is involved in demarcations of space, with which things interact with force, and yet which *is not itself a thing.*

Bird is neither sign nor symbol; it is nothing but the occasion to display the lines of the grid (in that precise sense then, of course, it is—or rather it thereby becomes—something, the something of *something is happening*).

And what does that bird hit? It hits something. There's nothing.[xvii]

This bird is not a pigeon. But a pigeon is also a bird.
Much later, well after we have left horror behind,
only, perhaps, to rediscover something of it in the midst
of a thinking of love—
although what else motivates Curt to take this leap other than tenderness
for the friends he yearns to save from future harm—
these two avian figures materializing in light
may,
as it were,
come to resonate with each other.

Curt's death sequence de-abstracts the grid's sense of a distributed network of satellites and information data applications and spatial protocols for transmission, identification, specification, positioning, and targeting by putting materiality and light back into the grid. With this gesture of re-electrification, the hexagonal forms also thereby enable a writing of *line* back into grid, recalling the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of "an arrangement of parallel bars with openings between them; a grating."[18] This sense of grid is inextricably bound to the formal quality of crossed bars: the syntax of an infrastructural framework; the designed grids (and gridlock) of urban planning; what

xvii. (Except that there are forms.)

distributes and controls[xviii] a flow of something in its quality of being "a net-work of lines, esp. two series of regularly spaced lines crossing one another at right angles; *spec.* one provided on a map as a means of specifying the location of places and objects."[19] The encountered grid therefore leaps back to the origins of the word as a shortened form of *gridiron* and *griddle*, utensils for cooking and broiling, and also medieval instruments of torture by fire.

Force is not allegorized in the hexagonal electrical grid; it is *geometrized*. And this question of the form of force paradoxically makes Curt's encounter with grid a properly affective one, not for any sense of an emotive property (of hope, courage, horror), but rather, as a case of *affectus* to the letter: the scene stages the mutual intensities and interacting forces of some A and some B.[xix]

xviii. Which is one reason why Bernhard Siegert declares of the grid that it is a cultural technique unique to modernity,* capable of "turning humans into retrievable objects." He continues: "The ontological effect of the grid is that modern concept of place and being-in-one's-place [. . .]. In other words, it presupposes the ability to write absence, that is, to deal equally efficiently with both occupied and empty spaces. This concept of place is thus inextricably tied to the notion of order."

    * If not modernity writ large, there is critical agreement on the grid's relation to at least modernism. As in Le Corbusier's polemic for rigid symmetrical grids and intersecting lines in the foreword to his 1924 *Urbanisme* (*The City of To-morrow and Its Planning*): "Modern art and thought—after a century of analysis—are now seeking beyond+ what is merely accidental; geometry leads them to mathematical forms, a more and more generalized attitude." Here, grid is inextricably linked to transparency, reason, rationality, rationalization, industrial efficiency, scientific management, &c.

        + Le Corbusier's polemic is reminiscent of Dana and Marty's final drive to nihi-late and start over—their deluded deixis to the "someone else" imagined to have a chance—as in the architect's insistence, "WE MUST BUILD ON A CLEAR SITE.^ The city of today is dying because it is not constructed geometrically. To build on a clear site is to replace the 'accidental' layout of the ground, the only one that exists today, by the formal layout."

            ^ That the grid is continually linked to clearing fields, to *newness*, is reit-erated in Rosalind Krauss's famous essay on the subject and its relation to modern art: "By 'discovering' the grid, cubism, de Stijl, Mondrian, Malevich … land in a place that was out of reach of everything that had gone before. Which is to say, they landed in the present and everything else was declared to be past."

xix. In the terminology Grégoire Chamayou offers in an exquisitely long footnote in *Théorie du drone*, Curt and the grid do not *co-exist* so much as they are *co-present* in a field of reciprocal if not symmetrical effects on each other. Co-existence, for Chamayou,

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This hexagonal grid has two[xx] salient formal qualities: First, it is a grid repeat pattern, which is to say that it extends without visible border in four directions (up and down, left and right) beyond the edges of the cinematic frame. Second, its hexagonal cell texture is seamless, lacking gaps[xxi] or negative space

merely requires that two terms exist at the same time. "Co-presence," however, "assumes more than that, namely the possibility for one term to affect the other or to be affected by it (a relation of causality). In other words, co-presence is defined by an instantaneous but not necessarily actualized possibility of a real relationship. Yet another way of putting this is to say that co-presence is defined by the accessibility of one term to the other. To be co-present they must be within reach of each other." This, from a book about the question of the drone and the explicit forms of violence enabled by a co-presence that is nevertheless not symmetrical; for Chamayou, therefore, the concept is always a question of force and *range*. Which is to say, it is an explicitly formal question of areas of variation between limits on some given scale: Curt and the grid are *in range* of each other. What it means for there to be a grid that one will not **fail** to locate oneself *on*—that one cannot fall off of—is that *there is at least one grid* whose range is infinite. Co-presence* does not require reciprocal awareness; it merely requires sharing in common an extent of territory.

> * Chamayou: "The prey and its predator lurking in the shadows are co-present even if the former is not yet aware of this (or even if the prey cannot yet see the predator). For there to be co-presence, all that is necessary is that one of the terms involved should be included in at least one field in range of the other. There are paradoxical forms of unilateral co-presence in which entity A can act upon or be affected by entity B, while entity B is not in a reciprocal position. Here, the prefix 'co-' indicates no reciprocity in the relationship but simply a common inclusion."+

>> + Other in-common inclusions in *Cabin in the Woods* include the multiple textual worlds and levels (cabin level affected by and affecting bureaucratic level and sub-subterranean level; sub-subterranean ancient theological level affected by and affecting bureaucratic level and cabin level). Each level is not reciprocally or symmetrical visible to every other, but each term is *within range* of the others. Also co-present to each other are the various fields of forms of violences, and although the climax's glass matrix suggests a co-existence of discrete monstrous alternatives, the system purge is what makes them into a network of co-present atrocities, able to nonreciprocally and asymmetrically affect each other. They may have occupied adjacent cells in the glass matrix, but proximity is not the sole factor; it is the system purge that puts them *within range* of each other.

xx. There are many more than that.

xxi. One compelling formal aspect of the grid—any grid—is its reductive, radical simplification, its effort to constrain, and to not merely reallocate but redescribe the complexity of some system. The grid's stark indifference to complexity, its simplicity both of line and angle but also of conceit (as opposed to network, as opposed to system, both of which can accommodate, even court, complexity), involves a paring down to barest

internal to the grid, given in the form of hexagonal tessellation: a regular tiling (meaning edge to edge by congruent polygons) in which three hexagons meet at each vertex.

There are thus two modes by which the image of this grid lacks interruption: the grid extends to infinity in every direction; and hexagonal tiling itself is a maximally optimal, seamless mode of tessellation.[20] In metric geometry, as we have known since the sixth century, only three polygons can tile a plane: squares, (equilateral) triangles, and (regular) hexagons. Let me put this another way. Close your eyes. Cram your darkness full with as many circles as possible. Now do the worst imaginable violence to these vulnerable shapes. Stretch, bend, push, bludgeon, assault, and terrorize their edges to maximally fit in more, to shove and cram and squeeze them on your mind's screen. Leave no dark gap unfilled; permit not even the tiniest sliver of space. These shapes of yours will have distorted under all that pressure, but symmetrically so. And hexagonal tiling will name the result: the densest way to arrange circles in two dimensions. This seamlessness gives rise to the idealism of the form, one linked to questions of sufficiency, saturation, density, and discourses of natural efficiency (visible, as the form is, in bees' honeycomb,[xxii] snowflakes, bubbles, graphene, crystals, &c.). From these associations arose a long-standing metaphysical and theological interest in hexagonal tiling in contemplations of perfection, harmony, and teleology.

Every—any—grid pattern lacks a center. (Krauss: "The absolute stasis of the grid, its lack of hierarchy, of center, of inflection, emphasizes not only its anti-referential character, but—more importantly—its hostility to narrative.")[21] This cinematic hexagonal grid extends outward from the local junctural point of contact with Curt, but any other site of force would have likewise radiated and made visible the repeating pattern and infinite extension of the grid. Nonhierarchical, boundless, the grid's pattern is one of extending distribution and total saturation. The abyss is in this way double and self-contradicting: at once empty (full of nothing, negative space, a bottomless ex-

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graphic elements. The hexagonal grid is the minimally present form whose extension induces a maximal (optimal) sufficiency and density of tessellated space.

xxii. In "The Honeycomb Conjecture," the paper giving a general proof of the proposal that "any partition of the plane into regions of equal area has perimeter at least that of the regular hexagonal honeycomb tiling," Thomas C. Hales goes so far as to write, "In part because of the isoperimetric property of the honeycomb, there is a vast literature throughout the centuries mentioning the bee as a geometer."

pansive pit; the *Afgrund*, without ground, void) and entirely full (completely saturated by the form of the grid); it is the empty set, empty, which is to say *nothing*, what is open to nothing and exposes and frames it, and yet it is also still a set, also, that is to say, *something*.

As a form, hexagonal tessellation is one of general optimality and economy. One of the curious foundations for the honeycomb conjecture in its invocation in biology is that its starting place involves a presumption of scarcity,[xxiii] an anxiogenic relation to issues of quantity: it rests on the assumption that, as the philosopher of mathematics Mark Colyvan words it, "bees have a limited supply of wax and need to conserve it while maximising honey storage space." In other words, "hives built under such constraints *must* have a hexagonal structure."[22] But what constraint induces the hexagonal structure of the grid that Curt encounters? It is a constraint of system, not sugar. What is in limited supply is not storage for honey but the stowage of the image. The restrictive system is the boundedness of framing, the parameters of screen, a limitation to the visual extension of space, which comes to a finite end in the material ground of the mediated image. Put another way: what constrains is cinematic form itself. The solution for which is also formal. Because the grid is a schema of maximal density, the full saturation of its formal properties and capacities is not only enabled by the finitude of screen but required by it. The regular hexagon—marked by the highest degree of symmetry, in both equilateral and equiangular directions—does not represent but unconceals optimal saturation, with neither noise nor error, and with no lack or vulnerability, no possibility of failure. Because the hexagonal repeat pattern is a problem of intensity and density given via the problem of measurement, it names the general abstraction of any model of maximal extension. *It does not geometrically, which is to say graphically, which is to say formally, admit a possibility of getting off or evading the seamless extension of this grid*. This negation is the positive condition for the grid within the constraints of cinematic form.

Cabin in the Woods makes a geometric-aesthetic study of the arrangement of the grid; its formalism is, properly, an investigation, an exploration of

xxiii. Darwin describes the structure thusly in *The Origin of Species*, in a passage lavishly praising the hive-bee: "The motive power of the process of natural selection having been economy of wax; that individual swarm which wasted least honey in the secretion of wax, having succeeded best, and having transmitted by inheritance its newly acquired economical instinct to new swarms, which in their turn will have had the best chance of succeeding in the struggle for existence."

the properties of these arranged lines—of which the frontal view is only one among the infinite potential perspectives that framing might have, and yet did not—but yet might have—provided. Obliquity does not evade the totalization of grid—that the infinite extension of line is coextensive with a violence that will not fail to be All—but it does introduce a possible second-order transposition: it submits the possibility that other forms will be co-present *with* this form, that those forms will mutually affect each other, setting loose speculative possibilities belonging to neither realm alone. Which is to say that it is not the case that discrete forms are lodged in *Cabin in the Woods* (ready in wait like so many underbed threats) so much as the film itself is a tessellation of dispersed, yet interacting, complex, and mutually affecting and mutually interpreting forms, which themselves generate and give rise to further ones. This horror film in its own large-scale formal structure is itself a network, a number of systems themselves connected in a grid topology in which individual aspects of the large-scale form are connected via others in multiple and distributed dimensions.

The film's formalism is a hyperformalism. These forms reciprocally interact, rendering multiple, unstable, unpredictable, in-flux new forms. Accordingly, the text itself is a model of the absolute necessity of a radical formalism. In its staging of forms interpreting and engaging with other forms to generate unforeseen possibilities, it gives rise to a nonanthropomorphic, antihumanist model in which forms and structures speculatively grapple with other logics, including those of violence and endingness—and do all this solely in and via the realm of the aesthetic. All the theoretical terms in play—possibility, not-All, being All, finitude, infinitude, indifference, impersonality, offness, failure, selection (the someone else, the another, to be given a chance; the *You shouldn't be here*; the *This should have gone differently*)—every one of which is essential for any thinking of ethics and violence in *Cabin in the Woods*, and all of which are equally essential for any thinking of the versions of critique (accelerationist, antifutural) with which the film sympathizes—require nothing other than lingering with and extravagantly reading the geometries and forms and structures that themselves theorize, encounter, and give rise to these very terms. The seriousness of every speculative claim about these stakes will derive *from* a resolutely formalist approach—not despite it.

Cabin in the Woods is thus not to be read from the point of view of an applied, secondary formalism that engenders speculative thought about an ethics of violence, force, destruction. Rather, the film *is* a formalism that engenders speculative thought about a violence that *it itself* regards wholly formally.

The seamlessness of the hexagonal repeat pattern, such that there are no gaps in coverage, no margin for error, no offness—it *does something*; there *is* nothing—itself is the radical formalism of optimal violence, one that is indifferent to the representational world, glimpsed only in moments of co-presence and mutual affection. This second grid is what invites the comparison of the divergent senses of the word: as what stands for force, power, discipline, surveillance, extensive bureaucratic manipulation, and what takes material-graphic shape as a network of lines and the properties of a form under varying conditions and constraints. Getting off of the first grid is a matter of subject positioning as a question of technological inscription and its possible successful evasion; but hitting the grid is a question of displacement to other parts of a formal field with no possibility for evasion. Marty's avowed triumph is exposed as only ever an illusion: grid as line emphasizes the *thereisness* and the coercions of the grid.

However, there is no "the" grid.

Rather, it is more apt to say that cinematic language takes the optimality of the isoperimetric honeycomb form and actively subverts it, deploying the cinematic potential of framing to feign a honeycomb that would in fact take unequal lengths and cede its relation to total saturation—torquing the grid in order to morph its regular form into something mutable, unpredictable, visually dynamic—only to brutally reassert the idealism of the form in the single frontal point of view that reiterates the optimal tessellation of the grid. If the rigidity of grid remains on the side of violence—that system is inclusive—the dynamism of the grid is purely located in the realm by which cinematic form visually, extensibly, geometrically negotiates the form of the grid. That its lines extend beyond the edges of the cinematic image suggests that the former is not completely contained within the latter but extends beyond the margins of the work.

What puts pressure on grid, what attempts to imagine it as not-All, is thus a secondary navigation: cinematic form, whose framing and reframing and canted and oblique lines and angles induce a speculation of the possible not-Allness of the grid. Cinematic language is thus not in collusion with the to-

talization of grid form; rather, it deploys framing to continually reapproach its offlessness. The Allness of the grid, its infinite extension, its diagrammatic obliteration of offness, is the givenness of a violence that is unavoidable, that unimpeachably reasserts itself, that is assertive. There is no—and there never will be any—*off the grid*: or, rather, what is off the grid is yet another grid:[xxiv] an

xxiv. If the grid of cinematic form is one[xx] of the grids off the grid—such that there is no *off the grid*—there are two main others: the betting table[***] and the matrix[****] of glass cubes from which alternative selections for the agent of scenario's violence might have been selected. Horror arrives in a world already interceded by form, what gives rise to the condition of possibility for violence to at least potentially be All, even if any given selection fails to be All. The (grid, table[***], matrix[****], bank of cells) is not a metaphor[*] that would function as a fixed symbol for "culture industry" or "horror film"; rather, these forms are the manipulation of flexibility and infinitude that formalizes the radical impersonality of different, other, potential selections.[**]

* Nothing is underneath or behind the grid, it does not loan or transfer its sense to anything else[+]; the grid is only its formal extension and optimal saturation. This is the law of insisting that the grid not be taken as metaphor. Grid taken as metaphor is the grid mistaken for *monster*: as demonstrating, displaying, warning, showing a figurative sign of an elsewhere, prior, external X (power, the scope of disciplinary society, &c.). Rather, the grid is monstration without a referring system of signs: it does not demonstrate or show something else, it is the (infra)structure that it is. The film thus follows the course of modern psychoanalysis, attesting to a replacement of mythology with topology: like Lacan's Möbius strip, Klein bottle, cross-cap, or Borromean knots, structure is neither illustration nor metaphor nor convenient heuristic, example, or pedagogical tool: structure does neither more nor less than manifest the structure that the structure is.

+ The Greek *metapherein*, to transfer, carry over; to change or alter; from *meta*, over, across; from *pherein*, to carry or produce or convey.[^]

^ also, "to bear children" (cf. *matrix*, der. from *mater*[****])

** Take, as just one example of that formalization, the table[***]: what is nothing else but its capacity to add, grow, subtract, exchange, and the linkages and relations between possibilities that it puts into play. The table is different from metaphor[*] because its flat, dehierarchized form does not transfer meaning to other sites, but attests to the indifferent selection between an array of possible cells, as one is as present as equally as another. It holds in place the refusal to subordinate one sense to another by the form's blank, flat, dehierarchized insistence on any cell's possibility of being selected. The table, put another way, is *metaphor rewritten from the standpoint of geometry*—metaphor without the modification of meaning: a *transfer* of diagrammatic position, a *change* or *alteration* in coordinates that is, however, neutral to any conversion of sense.

*** What is a table, generally? And what is a table, precisely, here, in which it names

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orthogonal extensive one that forecloses the routes of egress or evasion that the former holds out as lure. The grid is exposed as a strident flatness: nothing under or behind, just extension of line and pattern. Violence ultimately, unavoidably, definitively arrives. And yet, in the midst of this, the possibility of a not-

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the whiteboard written up to track the parimutuel betting of the bureaucrats and chemists and maintenance workers and interns in the downstairs level? And how is any table, or this particular table, like or unlike a matrix****, a database, a grid? For one, *table* is the oldest of the words, the twelfth-century slab or board or plate (as in *tabula*: plank; writing table; but also list, picture, panel). From the tablet of stone, what bears inscription (as in laws; commandments—those of Solon, those of Moses), by the fourteenth century it will mean "arrangement of numbers or other figures on a tabular surface for convenience" and by the fifteenth, well, a great deal more,[+] and with convenience duly set aside. The table shares with the matrix**** the formal property of the display of data from a data set into cells[++] that are organized in rows and columns that are flexible and not predetermined.
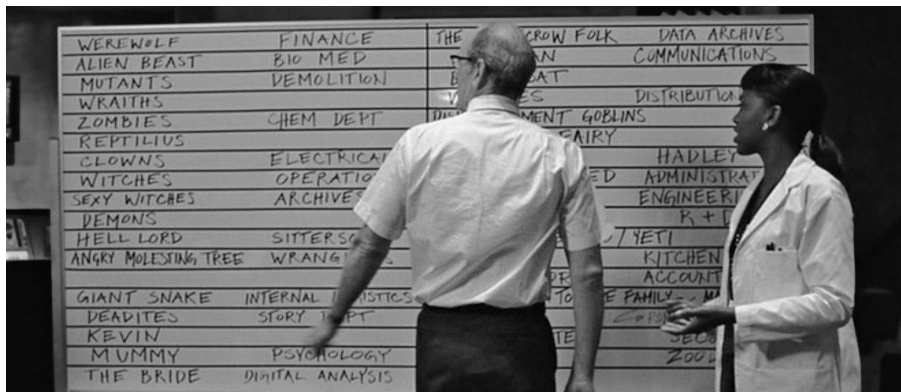

FIGURE 3.5. *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2011)

The whiteboard table of betting options is a coordination of two sets of variables: the choice selection of monstrosity linked to objects available as possible sources of horror in the cabin basement (Dismemberment Goblins, The Scarecrow Folk, The Bride, &c.), and in a corresponding, chromatically variable register, wagering on that contingent selection by a department or designation of a collective (Data Archives, Zoology, Engineering, &c.). Some selections are not claimed; others are claimed twice,[+++] a growth in collective membership that proportionally minimizes the value of such a selection. This table is resonant with its usage in computing, per the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "A collection of data organized in a notional set of rows and columns; *spec.* one stored in memory in the form of a series of records each of which has a unique key stored with it," each unique key here being a different selection of possible sources of horror from the larger data set of all

All neutral to violence but that can at least speculate a future beyond or *oblique* to violence is given in the cinematic formal navigation of grid form. And yet, even so, however, cinematic form is also, of course, constrained by its own debt to finitude: the ineluctable assertiveness of line at the border of the image.

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possible agents of violence (which is to say: anything that could properly be called an *agent* at all). The whiteboard table notates the possible betting options for the contingent selection of the means by which these particular adolescents will particularly die in this particular scenario (which retains its unexceptional status at this point, despite the fact that it will be exceptional, above all, for failing to be All, for therefore being the last and final—the last and final being what is not like anything else precisely for its foreclosure of another selection or a different choice or someone else's possible turn at a contingent particularity).

+ *table*, fifteenth century, "a systematic arrangement of numbers, words, symbols, etc., in a definite and compact form so as to show clearly some set of facts or relations; esp. an arrangement in rows and columns, typically occupying a single page or sheet. Formerly occasionally: an orderly^ arrangement^^ of particulars,^^^ a list; a list of rivals or competitors showing their positions relative to one another, arranged in descending order of ranking; a league table"; "details in a concise form; a synopsis, a conspectus"; a sketch,^^^^ a plan, a model.

^ Then again, tables being what are so often *turned*.

^^ Tables being what are regularly *set*.‡

‡ Then again then again, tables being what are so often turned.

^^^ Table: the conjunction of image and law. If a statement of particulars, is there such a thing at all as a table in general?***

^^^^ *Tabula*: a board or plank, a writing table, a picture, one painted panel; that small flat slab just *waiting*, waiting like a waiting woman waits: waiting for writing, or for writing that might come again after the writing marks that did come were expunged. *Rasa*, fem. past participle of *radere*, to scrape away, erase. Proto-Indo-European roots meaning to scrape or scratch also mean to gnaw, to eat away, to abrade, corrode, *destroy*.

++ a small room in a monastery, a small monastery, a small room; a store room, a hut, a unit of a prison or asylum, a compartment, a grave; an excavated cavity, a chamber in a building, "typically intended for or inhabited by a single person": hence a form of isolation, restriction, separation, individuation, a form of not-togetherness, not-with, not-among, not-many^; what results from dividing a surface by linear partitions, cutting it up, breaking it down; and all those small rooms in a monastery, small monasteries, small rooms, from *cella*, from *celare*, to hide, conceal, via the *kel*- tree of terms for cover, conceal, save from exposure, shield from big and public spaces, share this root, also, as well, with *shame*. (The latter also is, or at least can be, a way of dividing a larger structure.)

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This sequence of the encounter of body and grid is thus not a narrative climax in which escape is thwarted and hope devastated for a subject so much as it is a *formal climax* in which cinematic form—and nothing else—interprets the form of the grid, which is given as a series of formal attestations. The vi-

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^ In relation to the whiteboard table, the bureaucrats have formed a betting *pool*: what puts resources into common stock, what is shared in common‡ and combined for common benefit. The money collated forms a collective stake, and in the particular case of the particular selection from the particular choice made by the particular protagonists in this particular scenario, the dividends must be shared, split further, put in common even after the winner has undone the being-in-common of the pool with its redistribution of the common benefit to the new benefit of only a few.

‡ What is shared most in common in *Cabin in the Woods*, what puts in common the All of humanity, is the endingness of humanity: the purest form of being-with at the instant of the annihilation of (all) being, and thus of withness too.

+++ This table induces overt disagreements about what it means to be chosen once versus to be chosen twice. At the reading of the Latin^ from Patience Buckner's diary and the corresponding selection of the Zombie Redneck Torture Family, won and thus split by maintenance and Ronald the Intern, Sitterson points to the winning tabular cell, this finger functioning as an index to the interpretability of table and thus game; he later extends both hands in deictic^^ function to distinguish, to a voiced objection, the categorical distinction^^^ of Zombies from the Zombie Redneck Torture Family, insisting they are not the same (in other words, that a choosing of one is not a choosing of two).

^ Via this Latin book, *Cabin in the Woods* can be regarded as a showdown between the *grimoire* and the *grammaire*: between an account of violence as ineluctably, necessarily bonded to ancient ritual and its invocation through the bad book of magic spells (what the reading of the Latin performs as source of horror; what is recognizable, which is to say grounds for laughter, in Marty's protestation, "I'm drawing a line‡ in the fucking sand here. Do not read the Latin!") versus a grammar of horror, a general study of the morphological properties and rules by which (any) ordering of horror is possible, of which the grimoire is merely the contingent one in this particular scenario—such that any other would have functioned *syntactically* as equivalent.

‡ Marty here is voicing the essential logic of the cinematic◊: the film, *formally*, being nothing but the multiple drawing of various modes of lines.

◊ And not for the first time. Though Dana's reading of the diary calls up the particular violence of the Buckners, which will ultimately fail as local scenario to be All, it is the case that the film honors the law

olence of violence is speculatively available solely at the site at which *form is reading form*. But there is an additional movement, and thus it would be more appropriate to write that the film is (cinematically) formalizing a (cinematic) formalizing of (grid) form. It is *formalizing formalizing form*. This reflexive

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of violence whereby the victims choose how they die by way of the object in the cabin basement with which they most robustly interact. For Marty, the figure who ultimately decides how he (and Dana, and all who are) will die, touches the object that is ultimately successful in bringing about the violence that is All: he unspools a roll of celluloid. And it is ultimately the film itself that will kill off human life in its need for a violence that is sufficiently All that its representational on-goingness can finally end.

^^ *Deixis*, to the letter, a drawing attention to something by means of point-ing (a reference by way of gesture by way of body, specifically by way of extending digit) is one of a network of interests in the film in the question of the hand, including the fingertip delicacy of rolling a joint, the caressing of hands against the pelt of an open-mawed stuffed wolf, hands whaling on glass in furious rage: and it is, of course, the touching—the picking up and turning, the holding, flipping, playing, sorting, stretching, unspooling of the objects in the basement that determines the arbitrary selection of the nonarbitrary manner of future death. The hand is more abstractly but no less powerfully invoked at the Director's explanation of the ritual's reliance on ancient archetypes of the Whore, the Athlete, the Scholar, the Fool, the Virgin. To Dana's rejoinder that she is not in possession of the requisite vir-ginity, the Director replies, "We work with what we have"; there is, in other words, an exploitation of what is available, a naming of the essentially im-provisatory form of *bricolage*,‡ the using of materials *found at hand*.‡‡ This artisanal inheritance of media and materials useful for being proximate, for being ready to use, for serendipitously appearing for use, also, of course, is reminiscent of the *mise-en-abîme* ontologies, intertextual references, found footage splicing (on the bank of screens of other national scenarios) and slurry of signs‡‡‡ that is *Cabin in the Woods*, not inventing concepts ab ovo, but using the generic, textual tools of those who have come before, which carry with them traces of their past cinematic appearances and which pro-duce the disarranged, even chaotic and cluttered effect of the film as a prox-imity of different periods and styles (Lovecraftian mythology set alongside contemporary surveillance technologies, &c.‡‡‡‡).

‡ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*: "In its old sense the verb 'bricoler' applied to ball games and billiards, to hunting, shooting and riding. It was however always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct

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multi-meta-formalism bears out the obligatoriness of the grid—the brutal and radical impersonality of its thereisness, its assertion, extension, and inescapability—while simultaneously speculating through the canting of line, and in a mode that is itself indifferent to violence, about the possibility, just the mur-

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course to avoid an obstacle. And in our own time the 'bricoleur' is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman."

‡‡ Lévi-Strauss, continued. Of the *bricoleur*, "His universe of instruments is closed◊ and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand,' that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destruction."

◊ a universe, we might say, without stars

‡‡‡ Lévi-Strauss, continued: "Both the scientist and 'bricoleur' might therefore be said to be constantly on the look out for 'messages.' Those which the 'bricoleur' collects are, however, ones which have to some extent been transmitted in advance."◊

◊ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences": "If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*."

‡‡‡‡ cf. Evocations of the *Twilight Zone*'s "Five Characters in Search of an Exit."◊ Enclosed in that cylinder: "Clown, hobo, ballet dancer, bagpiper, and an army major—a collection of question marks. Five improbable entities stuck together into a pit of darkness. No logic, no reason, no explanation; just a prolonged nightmare in which fear, loneliness, and the unexplainable walk hand in hand through the shadows. In a moment, we'll start collecting clues as to the whys, the whats, and the wheres. We will not end the nightmare, we'll only explain it—because this is the Twilight Zone."

◊ cf. Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.§

§ cf. Baudelaire, Poe, Baudelaire's translations of Poe (i.e., modernism<)

< cf. German aesthetic theory's influence on modernism>

> cf. &c.

^^^ Nothing but a manic proliferation of multiple distinctions: that is what the film multiply is :: Japan versus the United States; failure versus success;

muring possibility, of a different configuration, which itself will remain uncertain and yet will have been momentarily conceivable, which is to say imaginable, which is to say visible, as what something yet nothing, thinnest lines of light, from a certain angle, and except for the briefest of moments, has revealed.

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upstairs versus downstairs; ancient versus modern; enough versus not enough; first as opposed to last; grid but not table; the virgin or the whore; being from a nightmare and being that which nightmares are from; &c. Truman, the new security guard who arrives for this particular scenario's run, whose appearance allows occasions for pedagogy and explanation (of the ritual; of the betting pool), declares that he has been "prepped" for what will occur during the ritual, to which Hadley responds, "Did they tell you that being prepped is not the same thing as being prepared?" *Prepped*, as in trained, practiced, made ready for, versus *prepared*, brought into a condition for some future action, inclined or disposed beforehand; the one more a matter of habitus, the other a state of mental readiness; the one a preliminary to a trial, the other an able adaptation to precisely what one was not given to be expected as a preliminary to that very same trial.‡

> ‡ *Use the distinction in a sentence*: one can be *prepped* for violence (as trained in response, as likelihood for which one is ready); one is never *prepared* for violence (as its wrecking work works by failing to arrive as the future action one expects).

**** A matrix is the specific type of structured grid that stores or displays data.+ The dimensional structured format that displays the raw data of horror's agency—the "not something from a nightmare," but the "something nightmares are from"—is the downstairs-level bank of glass cubes that extends in all directions, each cube/cell containing an individual figure for violence, materializing the abstraction of selection, the another, another chance, contingency, the indifference of the selection of violence (violence *formally* unapproachable without the concept of *selection*) against the nonneutral difference of a scenario (any scenario) that succeeds and the particular one that catastrophically fails. (Unlike the table's column-row logic of expansion constrained by the finitude of the edges of the whiteboard, this extension exceeds the boundaries of cinematic frame, suggesting the ongoingness of list, which is to say: infinitude.) This glass cube matrix is in motion, endlessly unfolding new forms of adjacency: the cells slide, push, recede, project, they reorder themselves—hyper and frenzied, they are *energized*, rushing toward and away from the spectator, up and down and left and right. Less Sol LeWitt *Color Grids, Using Straight, Not-Straight, and Broken Lines in All Vertical & Horizontal Combinations*, more Aleksandr Rodchenko *Hanging Spatial Construction*; less Carl Andre, more Sarah Morris. That violence is particular and discrete, each agent isolated in a cell, is clear from the mode of egress: the "access drop"++ in which any one of these cells—or, ultimately, many of them at once—are moved either to the upstairs of the

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downstairs (the cabin-level world) or to the center of the downstairs (the control-level world). Marty and Dana themselves are trapped in a cube, shown to also be a selection, an option, an alternative for the origin of violence—and, indeed, they are the ones who, if they fail to be All in the ritual sacrifice logic of local appeasement violence, do successfully bring about the violence that is All through that very failure, demonstrating once more that there is no outside to the grid,[xxiv] which here is the same thing as declaring that there is no possible position that is located beyond the extensive structure of violence.

FIGURE 3.6. *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2011)

+ For this reason, among others, the term *matrix* is often used synonymously^ with *table*.***

^ While a matrix, which structures data by storing and displaying it, can have horizontal rows and vertical columns exactly like a table, it can also, by being a broader term for the storing and display of data, take and store and display said data in a range of forms.‡

‡ Accordingly, matrices are generally considered far more flexible◊ than tables◊◊; the latter conventionally has a set number of those horizontal rows and vertical columns, whereas a matrix may vary in size dynamically, even name a table with multiple columns within a single row, to which new rows and new columns may infinitely—which is to say not destroying form, difference (variation, alteration, newness) being what *enables form* and what *form enables*—be added.

◊ Uterus, womb, origin, in the fourteenth century, from the Latin *matrix*, pregnant animal, or put another way: from *mater*, mother.§

"Place or medium where something is developed," "supporting or enclosing structure," and only centuries later, an "array§§ of possible combinations of truth-values."

§ A film about a mother who will no matter what not be a mother despite wanting, we are told, very badly to become, to be a mother, adjacent to a formal matrix that cannot help but be a matrix: source of some form being originated and produced; the other, not and never.

§§ "What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity." (Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History")

◊◊ As a verb, *to* table, also, of course, is to postpone consideration of a matter or a resolution, to shelve§ what had just moments before been *on* the table, to entomb in a drawer, for the sake of another urgency, and also to do so indefinitely.

§ *Table*: what is submitted in the same gesture by which it is put aside.

++ This language of *access* a further bond of matrix to database,^ which is likewise a structured set of data, with the added sense, however, of what is accessed or manipulated by means of software. Databases are systems; they above all have to be *managed*.

^ Itself from the twelfth-century *base*, "a notional structure or entity conceived of as underlying‡ some system of activity or operations; the resources on which something draws or depends for its operation."

‡ What lies *under* the system of activity that is the film's resolutely vertical structure, what builds upward from the manipulative bureaucrats to the sacrificed youths, is, of course, the lowest reach of malevolent ancients, whose formal register of satisfaction or its un- is the wall-carved figures of the archetypes of sacrifice—the Whore, the Athlete, the Scholar, the Fool, the Virgin—whose indented outlines◊ do or do not fill with sufficient blood-as-pigment.

FIGURE 3.7. *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2011), detail.

◊ The carvings, formally minimalist, maximally restrictive (literal enclosures for some quantity of something that flows), minimally ornamental yet maximally differentiated, resemble the aesthetic technique of intaglio.§

§ Intaglio, more precisely, names a range of techniques, including etching and drypoint, but their common denominator is that an image is engraved< or incised<< into a hard surface and the sunken register, for example in printmaking, holds the ink. This image type is the opposite of sunken relief—the sculptural technique that removes the background (e.g., of wood or stone), lowering the field against which the sculptured material appears to be raised, and which required and was bonded to the vicissitudes of sunlight, exploiting strong light to reveal hard-edged outlines and shifting shadow formations. By contrast, in this subterranean world, a world without sun, these spare depressions take on no depth: they cast no shadows (cf. the aboveground being a world without stars). Not the elevations of relief (*relevo*: to raise), these thin trails thus constitute yet another of the film's sunken forms, a minimal descent or declension from plane, here of material,

homology to staircase, elevator, subordinated narrative levels, temporal pastness, &c. The intagliated hollows of these faceless outlines, eyeless and blank, instead are filled with a coursing forking blood—or they are not, as in the case of a violence that fails because it is not-All, in which blood is redescribed as insufficient pigment, inadequacy in relation to depth and reach of pigment, the violence that is not-All a catastrophe of border and hollow and line. What is chiseled into stone each time are continuous contours defining the basic shape of a human body but with stylized variations in pose and gesture: each figure is erect but in a contorted posture: a leg raised in leaping merriment; a head downbowed in modesty. There is an exhaustion of line within the constraint of a local system (which is to say line rejoins with itself, is not a broken or segmented line: one that might, in material terms, spill or leak its stuff). A graphic generality exists in the carvings: figures that play with the form of the human but are resolutely working through a process of abstraction, reducing the complexity of the anthropomorphic to the simplest possible morphic forms. These outlines sit alongside equally simplified tropic forms, for each continuous line of each carving makes a diagram of the body's formal bond to objects (to fabric, to dress, to spear, to book and pen), thus showing the human form as *in* culture, as *in* history, as *in* the world—as static and drawn (i.e., as dead), but as writing, fighting, seducing, refusing (i.e., as alive). Figures, but figures who do things. Who do specific things. And do not do others. And who soon do nothing else. Human life in its vital and interactive and relational liveliness is transposed, that is, to nothing but line, line made hollow tube, hollowness made nothing but map for the trajection of any dark fluid. Line not merely the medium of drawing, not extension or Euclid's "breadthless depth"; here line is converted into channel edging the promise of the open: that in which something courses, runs, goes. In which something circulates or goes in a new, different direction, which is to say: goes somewhere where it is currently not.

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< from *grave*, v., to dig, to scratch, to scrape; n., an excavation in earth; both from *gravis*, what is heavy, loaded, burdensome, teeming, distended>

> lit. and fig.: pregnant

<< *incisus*, to cut into, as in stone or marble, or as in skin, as in surgery; what may, therefore, at some future point, far off or perhaps sooner than expected, require a few carefully placed stitches>

> a prick, a puncture, a stab; sudden local pain; but also contortions of laughter; a single motion in sewing; or the movement of a needle through the edges of a wound—