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# 1 Introduction

In the postmodern Western world evil has become detached from theology and earlier moral authorities and is a highly ambiguous concept, only ever given meaning by whoever has gained hegemony over its use. Notions of evil are here, as in any period of time, typically baseless but serve a social function. While Peter Thielst explains the labeling of others as evil to have the purpose of confirming oneself as ‘good,’ Howard S. Becker claims that, because people who are perceived of as evil are treated accordingly, such labeling can in itself be evil (Thordsten and Sørensen, 53, 127-128). A rather influential contemporary theorist on the subject, Lars Fr. H. Svendsen, argues: “…*ideas* about evil have caused more evil than just about anything else” (Svendsen, 123). But from where do we get our ideas about evil? As many theorists agree on, in the contemporary Western world, evil is first and foremost understood via its representations in media texts – notably those of Hollywood cinema. Here, the social effects they may entail are more or less overlooked in favor of economical ends, as Neil Bather explains, evil: “…becomes commodified, moulded by the Hollywood industrial complex in order to be bought and sold” (Bather, 48). Consequently, evil becomes a cliché and a pastiche from other media texts with no higher purpose than to meet the expectations of an audience.

This project takes a semiotic and philosophical approach to analyzing how evil may be represented in postmodern, Hollywood cinema. The films *Inglourious Basterds* by Quentin Tarantino (2009), *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick (1971) and *The Patriot* by Roland Emmerich (2000) serve the basis for the empirical material of this analysis. The signs of evil circulating in these films may be identified via preconceived, theological or philosophical concepts, but the meaning they represent can only be fully understood in relation to the fictional story-worlds by which they are represented. Here, filmic instruments serve as tools for forming and distorting concepts of evil so as to make these serve a certain plot-related function. In various ways, such distortion becomes the basis for mythical representations, which not only mythologize concepts of evil, but also, the social groups to which they are applied. Films therefore have the propensity for constructing concepts of evil idiosyncratic to their own story-worlds, which may or may not, notably challenge already existing concepts. Hence, whether the latter may in a postmodern, philosophical perspective be seen as factual or fictional, when represented in films, they frequently become subjected to, as Roy F. Baumeister explains (interpreted by Bather): “…a deeply rooted preference for understanding evil in certain ways (Bather, 63). To explore this preference and therefore, the prevailing signs of evil in the aforementioned films, I suggest the following questions.

## 1.1 Problem Formulation

How do the films *Inglourious Basterds*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Patriot* portray signs of evil? Which of these signs can be said to prevail?

## 1.2 Method

This project deals with three different theoretical fields; that is, theories of semiotics, film and of the different manifestations of evil. While the first is mostly based on Jonathan Bignell’s *Media Semiotics* (1997) and Tony Thwaites’ *introducing cultural and media studies* (2002), the second deals with Torben Grodal’s theories of emotional engagement from his book *Filmoplevelse – en indføring i audiovisuel teori og analyse* (2007). The third concerns philosophical and theological conceptions of evil as explained by amongst others, Neil Bather, Lars Fr. H. Svendsen and Hannah Arendt.

Throughout the analysis, the film *Inglourious Basterds* will first be subjected to an extensive semiotic analysis, focusing on how signs of evil can be said to prevail and illustrate mythical representations. The analyses of *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Patriot* will thereafter illustrate how filmic instruments drawing on the audience’s emotional engagement, may serve to distort preconceived concepts of evil and thereby, apply to them a new, idiosyncratic meaning.

# 2 Theory

## 2.1 A Semiotic Approach

While outlining his theories of semiotics (the study of signs), Charles Sanders Peirce defined signs as: “…something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity…” (Berger, 21) or in other words, as anything that carries meaning. In describing the omnipresent nature of signs, Peirce further explained: “…the universe is perfused [that is, permeated] with signs, if not composed exclusively of signs” (Berger, 9). Arguably, this logically follows from his definition of signs, i.e.: everything we know carries meaning to us; everything that carries meaning is a sign; thus, all things are signs (except things we do not yet know about). Even a referent therefore stands out as merely another sign, and therefore, another cultural product whose ontological status may be negotiated (I will elaborate this point in the section ‘Connotation and Denotation’). Signs therefore represent socially constructed concepts, i.e. ones that do not necessarily coincide with their referent, but are cultural products; usually existing on the basis of a cultural consensus. In the postmodern era, two significant ‘agents’ between which such negotiation of meaning takes place, are the media and the dominant social consensuses within a society – the former being the platform from which signs are often derived, naturalized and reinforced. In the following I describe aspects of semiotic theory which I find relevant for analyzing signs within the media.

2.1.1 The Composition and Function of the Sign: As Ferdinand de Saussure explained in his *Course in General Linguistics*, the sign consists of a signifier, e.g. a sound, word or image, which calls forth the other part of the sign, the signified, which is a concept (figure 1) (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 32). Jonathan Bignell explains this composition of the sign as: “…the inseparable unity of the signifier with the signified, since in fact we never have one without the other” (Bignell, 12). The two components are therefore inseparable and bring forth a certain signification, i.e. a concept invoked by a sensory impression (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 31). In explaining how such concepts/signs attain their signification, Saussure argued:

 **signified**

**sign** = **signification**

 **signifier**

Figure 1

“…concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not” (Berger, 12)

He ascribed this to our propensity for always thinking in oppositional terms e.g. ‘hero and villain’, where hero only takes on meaning in the presence of a villain (whatever shape this villain may take). In short, a sign consists of a signifier (word/sound/image) and a signified (a concept) and it gathers meaning through its difference from other signs.

2.1.2 Addresser, Addressee and the Phatic Function: Signs may be purposely constructed to put forth a message, in which case at least two subjects are involved – an addresser or sender and an addressee or receiver. Tony Thwaites describes these positions as follows:

* The **addresser** of a text is the position it constructs as its source: where it *says* it is from.
* The **sender** is its actual source.
* The **addressee** of a text is the position it constructs as its destination: where it says it is going.
* The **receiver** is its *actual* destination (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 16-17).

While analyzing sign-exchange between culturally constructed agents (addresser and addressee) involves considering dominant cultural concepts, same analysis between sender and receiver prompts the consideration of a sign’s arbitrariness, i.e. how one individual may experience a sign differently from a common, cultural consensus. The latter may apply to a specific case or one beyond the culture of the sign, while the former points toward a general case and can be analyzed through a text’s ‘phatic’ functions, i.e. the codes which it employs and which suggest a certain way of perceiving things, shared between an addresser and an addressee:

“Some sort of phatic function is unavoidable in any sign activity. If an exchange of signs implies a common code within which the exchange can take place, then that exchange will on the broadest scale phatically include those with access to the code and exclude those without it…” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 19)

This is further apparent by the sign’s ‘conative’ function, which is the way in which it constructs the addressee, e.g. a text in a certain language targets speakers of that language (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 18). For the purpose of my analysis, I will be treating sender and receiver as addresser and addressee, enabling me to draw – through an analysis of phatic and conative functions – on the cultural codes embedded in films.

2.1.3 Syntagms and Paradigms: Bignell explains how visual signs are, like all signs: “…arranged in syntagms, and selected from paradigms” (Bignell, 14). In other words, they are chosen from a certain group of signs and placed in a certain arrangement – e.g. the paradigm of ‘formal clothes’ placed in the syntagm of ‘a wedding’. This results in a ‘syntagmatic effect of combination,’ as Thwaites explains: “When placed together, the different signs emphasize the codes they have in common. Codes that are not shared fade back into (but do not disappear from) the text” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 81). In the example above, signs chosen from specific paradigms, such as e.g. formal clothes, a church, flowers and two people in love, would be placed in a syntagm in which their common codes connote ‘wedding’ – consequently discarding or diminishing whatever connotations these signs may carry in other contexts. As will be explained in the following sections, this syntagmatic effect of combination has a metonymic function (one sign stands for an entire concept) constructing myths, with the potential of turning connotations into denotations.

2.1.4 Connotation and Denotation: “Instead of a signifier being paired to a single definite signified, the sign can more accurately be pictured as having a *spread* of signifieds, which we will call its connotations” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 60). In other words, one sound/image/word will invoke not only one, but several concepts. However, as implied above, the legitimacy of the link between the signifieds (the connotations) and their signifier, is continuously negotiated within a culture, as Thwaites explains:

“The set of connotations has something like a gravitational field: some of those possible signifieds are likely to appear of more central significance than others, or to have other connotations clustered about them … At the centre of the field are the most stable meanings of the sign, which we will call its denotations” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 62)

While both connotations and denotations take the form of signifieds, the latter are the most stable and objectively verifiable of a sign’s meaning. However, because their value is not generated by a ‘simple correspondence of signifier and signified,’ but by their difference from other signifieds, denotations are not truisms by nature, but by the culture in which they circulate (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 63). A denotation is thus not the natural, but the naturalized, meaning of a sign. Thwaites suggests such meaning to come about in three possible ways:

1. when a certain common range of meanings is *prevalent* – that is, attributed to the sign by a number of the codes in which it operates;
2. when any of the codes in which it functions is *dominant*; and, in particular,
3. when the sign works within certain *objective or scientific codes* (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 63)

Thwaites further argues that, because a denotation entails that one meaning of a sign comes to stand for all the others, denotation is a form of metonymy (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 65). It therefore has the potential effect of overriding – thereby simplifying and generalizing – an otherwise complex phenomenon with only one or few meanings.

2.1.5 Metonymy and Myth: Günter Radden and Zoltán Kövecses define metonymy as: “…a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model” (Panter and Radden, 21). To draw on an earlier example, ‘formal clothes’ – in this case the vehicle – may metonymically refer to ‘wedding’ – the target – and vice versa (in which case target and vehicle switch places). Metonymy therefore works with culturally established preconceptions of things that usually belong in physical and contextual proximity to one another. George Lakoff argues such proximity to be preconceived within the frames of an ‘Idealized Cognitive Model’ (ICM), which Radden and Kövecses describe the following way: “We have ICMs of everything that is conceptualized, which includes the conceptualization of things and events, word forms and their meanings, and things and events in the real world” (Panter and Radden, 21). In short, metonymy is a process in which one entity within a framework of related entities (an ICM) comes to stand for all the entities within that framework, and this may apply to all things conceptualized. Precisely because of this function, metonymy is an important part of what Roland Barthes termed ‘myth’ – a coding in which, as Thwaites explains:

* a dominant *term* stands metonymically for all terms in the system; and
* a dominant metonymic *relationship* among terms stands metonymically for all relationships (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 67)

Myth therefore not only simplifies sign systems, but also their relationships, which are consequently defined through single definitions (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 67). This may occur through either a ‘binary opposition’ in which: “…all relationships are reduced to a single scale set up between two opposing terms,” or ‘indifferentiation’ which are texts that: “…declare all terms equivalent with respect to … one quality, and … ignore any differences” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 68). In the former case, the myth lies in a simplification of what may otherwise be a complex relationship – such as e.g. two conflicting agents whose relationship is defined purely by the simple dichotomy of good and evil – and in the latter case, myth is created by a radical generalization of what might be an otherwise inhomogeneous group (akin to stereotyping). Bignell explains how Barthes’ definition of myth: “…always involves the distortion or forgetting of alternative messages, so that myth appears to be exclusively true, rather than one of a number of different possible messages” (Bignell, 22). By standing out as ‘obvious’ (and without necessarily explaining why it is obvious), a myth therefore has the effect of naturalizing the meaning it carries so that it may in the end, become a denotation. It is therefore, as Thwaites explains: “…a powerful agent of the *naturalization of meaning*, and is often *the site of struggles over meaning*” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 67). This naturalization, as Bignell argues, makes it difficult to analyze the semiotic construction of myths within the contemporary media of one’s own culture, being that one must look beyond what seems natural (Bignell, 27). The next chapter explains how the construction of ‘new’ meaning is an infinite process.

### 2.1.6 Infinite Semiosis

In the following I describe the theory of ‘infinite semiosis’ framed by Peirce, who, in contrary to Saussure, who regards the referential object as (in Winfried Nöth’s interpretation): “…an amorphous and undetermined mass before signs give form to it” (Nöth, 5), incorporates the object in a triadic sign relation – i.e., a representamen (the sign vehicle), an object (divided into immediate or mediate object)[[1]](#footnote-1) and an interpretant (the meaning given to it by an interpreter) (Nöth, 5). While he thereby implements the element of reality, this reality nevertheless remains unreachable – his conclusion, as Nöth explains, being that the: “…object itself … is perhaps even completely fictitious” (Nöth, 5). This unavoidable space between sign and object, always leaving the former up for negotiation, can be said to be the enabler of an infinite semiosis.

**The reasoning:** The theory of unlimited semiosis springs from the logic that, as Peirce explains: “The only thought … which can possibly be cognized is thought in signs. But thought which cannot be cognized does not exist. All thought, therefore, must necessarily be in signs” (Peirce, 34). He further explains that, if every thought is indeed a sign: “…it follows that every thought must address itself to some other, must determine some other, since that is the essence of a sign” (Peirce, 34). The logic is therefore: because everything is a sign, objects (what signs refer to) are also signs and thus, do not have a sign-object, but sign-sign relation; wherefore, while the nature of the sign is to refer to something, this something will merely be another sign (or a representamen) whose definition is as always, up for negotiation. The result is an infinite chain of signs in which one sign refers to another (an interpreter falsely believing this to be the object), which again, when reinterpreted, refers to another etc. In other words, as Peirce explains: “…every thought must be interpreted in another…” (Peirce, 34) and so, all signs are constructed out of other signs.

**The incorporation into a system of signs:** When a sign is interpreted, it becomes interrelated into a system of signs (the signs already known by the interpreter) wherein it is ‘translated’ into what Peirce calls ‘the final interpretant,’ described by James Jakób Liszka as: “…the state of *information* which the sign (in its relation to other signs) affords” (Liszka, 27). As the system evolves – or as the interpreter gains more knowledge – the status of the information therefore changes. Such changes come about through a process of reasoning or inference, divided by Peirce into deduction, abduction and induction,[[2]](#footnote-2) which, as Liszka explains: “…provide the means by which the system of signs grows, evolves, and develops” (Liszka, 27). Peirce explains abduction, which is his own contribution to the theories of inference, by the following example (cited by Nicole Everaert-Desmedt):

“Imagine that upon entering a room, I see a table with a handful of white beans on it, and next to it, a bag of beans. I observe that this bag contains only white beans. I then formulate the hypothesis that the beans on the table came from this bag” (signosemio.com)

Abduction is thus a reasoning in which a hypothesis is used to explain something as a fact despite the lack of reliable evidence (the white beans might not be from the bag). However, the notion of a fact may also come about through habitual thinking, as described below.

**The final logical interpretant:** While the process of semiosis (construction of signs) is theoretically infinite, in practice it may, and often will, be short-circuited by habit, what Peirce calls ‘the final logical interpretant’ (Liszka, 30). Everaert-Desmedt describes this as a habit that: “…temporarily freezes the infinite recursivity of one sign to other signs, which allows interlocutors to quickly reach consensus on reality in a given communication context” (signosemio.com). In other words, the construction of new signs may be avoided by habitual thinking – i.e., as she further explains: “…the habit of assigning a certain significance to a certain sign in a certain context with which we are familiar” (signosemio.com). The final logical interpretant may, in other words, be thought of as whatever sign we regard as the most denotatively correct regardless of evidence to the contrary (other signs that would otherwise alter the sign).

Thus, while the reasoning that, as mentioned above, the universe is ‘perfused with signs’ prompts an unlimited process of semiosis, this process may be temporarily short-circuited by habitual thinking. Below I shortly describe how the conventions of film may cause such habitual thinking in relation to signs of evil.

### 2.1.7 Habitual Thinking of Evil in Films

“Every film will exist in relation to two contradictory impulses, repetition and difference. To ensure comprehensibility, a film will repeat the signifying practices of other films, their conventional signs and established codes, and conventional narrative structures of disequilibrium and resolution.” (Bignell 196)

This emphasis on comprehensibility suggests that, whenever a receiver interprets representations of evil in film, these representations will provide him with little or no reason for going beyond habitual thinking (unless the differences that a film employs lie precisely in its representations of evil). As will be explained in the section ‘The Emotional Investment,’ identifying evil is usually an easy task of choosing between two opposing forces, one of which is less morally appealing than the other. These forces may, as mentioned, represent simplified and mythical relationships – e.g. Christian/pagan, domestic/savage helpless/dangerous etc. – that are often, as Bignell writes: “…binary and based on the exclusive difference between one set of signs and the other” (Bignell, 192). Thus, according to Bignell, the same signs are repeatedly used for constructing the conventional differences between opposing forces within films. Also, these signs are, as he further explains: “…value laden and have an ideological character” (Bignell, 192) wherefore they are not only determined by other media texts, but by the social consensuses of values and ideologies existing within a society. Arguably, concepts of evil within a film may therefore potentially take on meaning by the influence of three agents: (1) other media texts (2) the director’s own idiosyncratic portrayal of evil (3) the dominant social consensuses. Because (1) usually only repeats what is already there, (2) and (3) are the ones most likely to prevent concepts of evil from being an instance of habitual thinking. In other words, while the process of infinite semiosis ensures an always alterable conception of evil, film, by representing evil in a conventional way, are likely to short-circuit this process. Below I describe the distinction between language-oriented and media-oriented semiotics followed by two things to be mindful of, when working with the latter.

# 3 Conclusion

**The difference between verbal and visual signs:** The concern about using semiotics as a tool for analyzing visual communication is, as Nöth explains, that it suffers from: “…a logo-and linguocentric bias” (Nöth, 6). To counter this problem, Barthes instead suggests visual language to entail what may be called ‘floating chains of signifieds’. While a ‘floating signified’ is an ‘empty’ signifier or one: “…with a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified” (aber.ac.uk), a chain of these is found in visual representations, which, because of the ambiguity they attain through the contexts in which they are placed, are open to many possible interpretations (Grodal, 2007, 254).[[3]](#footnote-3) [[4]](#footnote-4) Christian Metz on the other hand (seen as an influential forerunner for media semiotics), thought of the individual film frame as a sentence, not a word – his example being (cited by Warren Buckland):

“A close-up of a revolver does not mean ‘revolver’ (a purely virtual [non-manifest] lexical unit [morpheme]), but at the very least, and without speaking of connotations, it signifies ‘Here is a revolver!’” (Buckland, 91).

In other words, treating verbal signs as analogous to visual signs entails the problem of encapsulating additional (floating) meanings provided by the context of the latter. Metz also points at visual signs (especially iconic signs) as less arbitrary than verbal communication, i.e., while the concepts evoked by words are seen as potentially infinite, the concepts evoked by a visual image are believed greatly restrained by the visual details of the signifier. In other words, while detail increases, arbitrariness logically decreases. It therefore follows that visual communication is far more detailed than verbal communication, but also, that applying a semiotic analysis to it, as Metz implies, is an: “…activity of identifying pertinent underlying units (codes) and their rules of combination” (Buckland, 94). Juxtaposing the individual sign with others in its context is thus an important endeavor for a media semiotician (what lets him understand the social codes).

**A synchronic approach:** According to Saussure, a semiotic analysis may either be synchronic, dealing with the meaning of signs in our own historical moment, or diachronic, concerning the evolution of linguistic signs through time, as Bignell explains:

“From a diachronic point of view, we might investigate the way that a particular sign like ‘thou’ used to be used in ordinary language but is now used only in religious contexts. But from a synchronic point of view, it is the place of ‘thou’ in our own historical moment that is of interest, not how it has gained its current role in our language.” (Bignell, 11)

Because a diachronic analysis is, as Saussure explains, useless in giving us an understanding of how signs work for its contemporary users, a synchronic approach must be preferred in the analysis undertaken in this project. Such approach does however, as Daniel Chandler explains, underplay the changes in dynamic media conventions and: “…in the cultural myths which signification both alludes to and helps to shape” (aber.ac.uk). But as Robert Hodge and David Tripp notes, there cannot be: “… an exhaustive semiotic analysis ... because a "complete" analysis... would still be located in particular social and historical circumstances” (aber.ac.uk). While it is thus impossible to do an exhaustive analysis (one cannot step outside one’s own sign system), it is nevertheless, when doing a synchronic analysis, relevant to be mindful of the rapid changes in media conventions and myths – changes which are, as Peirce explains, infinite processes.

**Arbitrariness:** Lastly, because analyzing signs and their signification in different contexts usually (as in this project) prompts a ‘specific-to-general’ case – i.e., one interpreter forcing his/her interpretation onto a general, cultural consensus – the semiotic approach is also, as William Leiss argues: “…heavily dependent upon the skill of the individual analyst” (aber.ac.uk). If a semiotician does not have the perceptions of a wide range of receivers at his disposal, his own cultural competence will thus be what determines the meaning he ascribes to his empirical material. This may prompt what Umberto Eco calls ‘aberrant decoding,’ i.e. (cited by John Fiske): “Whenever there are significant differences between the encoders and decoders of a text, then decoding will necessarily be “aberrant”” (Fiske, 65). Hence, because I (a citizen of a western country and a long-term user of Hollywood films), throughout the course of this project, will be treating myself as an analytical tool, I must be mindful that others may decode things differently – i.e. that the sign is arbitrary and possibly subjected to aberrant decoding.

However, acting as support to my own inputs, below I outline what Peirce might call representaments (the potential meaning before the sign is interpreted) – namely a range of widespread cultural and scientific concepts of evil, which may or may not, wholly or partly be the concepts evoked by a viewer interpreting evil in Hollywood films.

# 4 The Concepts of Evil

In the following I shortly describe the most influential theological and philosophical concepts of evil followed by a more elaborate description of how these apply (or do not apply) to postmodern conceptions. This transition to postmodern evil is generally believed to have rendered the old binary oppositions of good and evil irrelevant, as Neil Bather explains:

“Theology and philosophy sit uneasily in overarching postmodernist discourses, and evil, as an explanation for the actions of individuals or groups of people and particularly as an absolute, can no longer be taken for granted” (Bather, 57)

While this dichotomy of the unquestionably good and evil – and theology in general – has lost its authoritarian position, it nevertheless remains a continuous source in the contemporary era for constructing and reconstructing conceptions of evil, and especially of cinematic evil (Bather, 57). While the latter, which serves as the empirical aspect of my analysis, is inherently fictional, the concepts of evil it employs are only limited by human imagination, and as such, contains a wide variety of what postmodern philosophy regards as both fictional and factual evil. Lars Fr. H. Svendsen mentions four traditional perceptions of what is commonly believed to cause evil:

“…(1) Mennesket bliver besat eller forført af en ond overnaturlig magt, (2) mennesket er ud fra sin natur determineret til en bestemt type adfærd, vi kan kalde ond, (3) mennesket bliver formet af sine omgivelser til at udføre onde handlinger og (4) mennesket er frit og vælger at handle i overensstemmelse med det onde” (Svendsen, 10)

In a contemporary, western perspective (4) is regarded implausible because no actions are believed intentionally evil, whereas (1) is believed solely an element of fiction. Instead, postmodern debates seem to circulate around (2) and (3), which I will therefore also regard as my basis for what defines factual evil (however, with an emphasis on (3)). Regardless of the ontological status of these paradigms of evil, they all play a part in constructing cinematic evil, wherefore I outline some of the more influential below.

## 4.1 Theological and Philosophical Evil

4.1.1 St. Augustine and the Free Choice: In the 4th century Augustine described evil as: “…the absence of good in the same way that darkness is the absence of light” and explained that the “…battle that raged on a spiritual level was not only between good and evil but between Being and non-Being” (Bather, 51). Evil was thus derived of both theological and ontological status because god had created everything and none of his creations were evil. However, evil was possible through the freedom of choice he had bestowed upon humans, who could choose between a greater or lesser good (Svendsen, 35). He then explained the human propensity for an evil choice by referring to The Original Sin in which Adam and Eve, in defying god, make the wrong choice – a choice of a lesser good.

4.1.2 St. Thomas Aquinas: In opposition to Augustine, who argued that evil was merely the corruption of good; Aquinas argued that evil must have a cause. He distinguished between evil *per se* (intrinsical evil), which did not exist because God only created good, and evil *per accidens* (evil as a cause of another good), which he exemplified in the case of a lion eating a lamb:

“This may appear to be evil but the lion eats the lamb to survive, thus maintaining the natural order, as well as the good. The evil act, as perceived by the lamb, is thus an accidental consequence of this devouring.” (Bather, 52).

As such, all that seemed evil in one perspective was merely the consequence of maintaining a greater good, and therefore appeared good from another perspective.

4.1.3 Manichaeism: Manichaeism held that prior to the material world there was a battle between light, which was good, and darkness, which was evil, and for the light to combat evil it created Primal Man, who acted as a physical container in which evil could be encapsulated (Bather, 53). Particles of light were trapped within the human body to combat evil, and were thus trapped within the evil, physical realm, only to be released when the body died. Consequently, evil could be seen as unalterable by humans and: “All manner of evil could, thus, be enacted by the individual with no effect on where the soul goes in the afterlife” (Bather, 53). Morality was therefore not an issue prior to death and the world was a spiritual battleground between good and evil forces.

4.1.4 Kantian Evil: Kant rejected the theological in his philosophical approach and, according to Richard J. Bernstein, claimed that: “…evil was to be found solely within the individual, arising from their moral decisions, and whether they choose to emphasise the self or society in their actions” (Bather, 54). An evil individual was therefore characterized by – in using his free will – choosing self-love over moral law.[[5]](#footnote-5) This monstrous act, which Kant termed ‘radical evil’, could be identified by being incongruous with ‘The Categorical Imperative’, which, among other things, held: “Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it would become a universal law” (philosophy.suite.101.com). A universal law meant a law that also applied to one self, and this law could thereby protect humanity against the evil of self-love. Kant further pointed at a distinction between natural evil, in which the evildoer did not have the knowledge to distinguish between good and evil (such as earthquakes or animals), and human evil, in which evil arose from humans and their free will (Bather, 54).

To summarize the above conceptions in their essential characteristics I suggest the following:

* **Augustine:** The individual has a free will to choose between a greater and lesser good, but has inherited the propensity for the latter from The Original Sin.
* **Aquinas:** All that seem evil is merely a consequence of maintaining a greater good.
* **Manichaeism:** Humans are merely pawns in a spiritual battleground between good and evil forces (presented by light and darkness) and can therefore not be morally judged.
* **Kant:** The individual has a free choice between self-love and moral law, and whenever the former thrives, radical evil occurs (this can only be applied to human evil).

## 4.2 Postmodern evil

Jean Baudrillard explained that in the postmodern, western world: “We can no longer speak evil” (Bather, 4), to which Neil Bather suggests that: “The spectacle of evil is a mosaic made up from irreconcilable fragments of all previous ways of thinking about evil” (Bather, 50). Evil – as a direct opposition to a defined good – has lost its meaning, become detached from theology and earlier moral philosophy and is now a highly arbitrary concept, only ever given meaning by whoever has gained hegemony over its use (Thordsen and Sørensen, 76). These freely circulating concepts of evil have, especially as a respond to the Second World War, been increasingly supplemented or substituted by philosophical, postmodern inputs, two of which I outline in the following.

### 4.2.1 Hannah Arendt, the Banality of Evil and the Agentic State

In her interpretation of the presumed evil character of the German logistician, Adolph Eichmann, Arendt disputed Kant’s theory of the monstrous, self-loving figure, and instead, defined evil as banal:

“Any individual, in the right (or wrong) circumstances, may act evilly without necessarily being evil. Or rather, they could become evil from the most mundane and rational circumstances, including in this case unquestioningly following the orders of their superiors.” (Bather, 55)

This ‘new type of criminal’ was therefore a normal individual whose only flaw was, as Arendt claimed, his “sheer thoughtlessness” or “absence of deliberation or intention” (Osiel, 7-9, 29). Therefore, while Kant’s definition of radical evil meant the individual’s anonymous choice of self-love, for Arendt, it meant the eradication of anonymous thinking, and thus of the individual all together (Svendsen, 106). In Eichmann’s case, moral judgment was replaced by an eagerness for carrying out professional duties with perfection. Herbert Kelman claimed such moral judgment to be eroded when:

“…the violence is *authorized* (by official orders coming from legally entitled quarters), actions are *routinized* (by route – governed practices and exact specification of roles), and the victims of the violence are *dehumanized* (by ideological definitions and indoctrinations)” (Vetlesen, 16)

The empirical basis for this survey and Arendt’s theory of the banal evil is found in the phenomena of totalitarianism, however, is believed applicable to societies of modern culture in general, as Arendt explains: “De afpersonaliserede strukturer i det moderne, hvor politiken og moralen langt hen ad vejen er forvitret, giver ophav til ligegyldighed. Det personlige ansvar og det kritiske er truet og må genrejses” (Svendsen, 106). To prevent becoming a doer of this banal evil, a person must think anonymously (independent of his social surroundings)[[6]](#footnote-6) and avoid surrendering his moral judgment to circumstances that: “…make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong” (Bather, 55). In other terms, he must avoid succumbing to what Stanley Milgram calls the ‘agentic state’, in which he sees himself merely as a cog in a greater scheme enacted by an authority, and is thereby not responsible for and do not experience, the final consequences of his actions (Vetlesen, 18). As such, in the agentic state, banal evil consists in moral responsibility being replaced by a thoughtless, unreflecting will to carry out one’s assigned work efficiently – or in carrying out what one sees as another person’s wishes. Zygmunt Bauman and Arendt concur on the theory of banal evil and that morality may manifest itself in insubordination (or anonymous thinking), to which Bauman further explains that: “…cruelty correlates with certain patterns of social interaction much more closely than it does with personality features or other individual idiosyncrasies of the perpetrators” (Vetlesen, 20). Hence, according to both Arendt and Bauman, cruelty is social in its origin and is possible in the absence of individual thinking. As I explain in the following, this ‘thoughtless evil’ parallels what Svendsen terms ‘the dumb evil’ and can be placed in one of four following categories.

### 4.2.2 Svendsen and The Four Categories of Evil

Jean-Jacques Rousseau distinguished between physical/natural evil, which is human suffering, and moral evil, which is sin. The latter commonly serves the basis on which an evil is defined. Rousseau explains this by the example of a stone accidentally hitting a person only leaving physical suffering contrasted with one purposely thrown at him, also leaving mental suffering (interpreted by Svendsen): “Stenen kan af og til ramme forbi, men hensigten rammer aldrig forbi’” (Svendsen, 61). This focus on intention also characterizes Svendsens approach to conceptualizing evil (however partly absent from ‘dumb evil’),[[7]](#footnote-7) which will be described below, followed by my suggestion for an analytical tool, which will, by using said four concepts of evil, enable me to derive from fictional evildoers of certain movies, the intentions behind their horriffic acts.

* Demonical evil

Svendsen defines demonical evil as an evil that is in itself the sole deliberate intention of an action – doing evil for the sake of evil. He rejects such concept of having roots in reality and instead, refers to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz who claimed that the will can only be motivated by the notion of something good, never something exclusively evil (Svendsen, 80) and Jean-Paul Sartre, who explains that for such evil to be realized one must (interpreted by Svendsen): “...ønske det, du ikke vil, og ikke ville det, du ønsker. Der er tale om at have to modstridende intentioner.” (Svendsen, 80). In what can be argued to parallel Kant’s theory of self-love, Rousseau also rejects demonical evil by claiming that: “…alle forsøger at gøre godt, både den gode og den onde, men den onde er en, som forsøger at gøre godt mod sig selv på andres bekostning.” (Svendsen, 81). Thus, an act of evil emanates from an intention of doing good, either to oneself or one’s social group (as e.g. Bauman and Arendt concur on) and demonical evil is therefore believed purely an element of fiction. Accordingly, Svendsen defines such evil as mainly the product of media and literary representations of fictional, or in some instances factual, perpetrators (Svendsen, 67).

* Instrumental evil

While the instrumental evil is enacted by one who is conscious about the wrongness of his actions, it is not the suffering he inflicts on others that is his objective, but a gain in e.g. financial or social status. Hence he embodies Kant’s radical evil by placing himself above moral law (Svendsen, 82) and evil merely becomes the unfortunate means for reaching his end goal, as Svendsen explains: ”Ondskaben er instrumentel, hvis en aktør ville give afkald på en handling, såfremt det givne mål, for eksempel rigdom, kunne opnås på anden vis” (Svendsen, 63). Victims of such evil are therefore mere instruments in an evildoer’s endeavour to reach his end goals.

* Idealistic evil

This evil defines actions in which a perpetrator causes suffering on people whom he believes to be evil, and therefore, he sees said actions as contributing to good (Svendsen, 24). Such evil becomes possible through socially constructed dichotomies that divide ‘us’ and ‘them’ such as e.g. white/black, jew/arrian or christian/atheist, which are commonly perceieved as assymmetrical (one group feels superior to another) and therefore serve the basis for inequality (Svendsen, 97). The paradox of ascribing evil to any of two conflicting parties is that ‘the evil ones are always believed to be the others,’ wherefore evil in such instances is a consquence unperceieved by the perpetrator who thinks he is instead, fighting evil. As Franz Fanon explains by the example of colonists (interpreted by Svendsen): “Logisk kan det udtrykkes sådan, at kolonistens manikæisme frembringer manikæisme hos den koloniserede. Til teorien om ’den absolut onde indfødte’ svarer teorien om ’den absolut onde kolonist’” (Svendsen, 94). The possible consequence of such dichotonomical divisions is thus the manichaean tendency of perceieving others as demonically evil, and only by total eradication can such evil be defeated, as Svendsen argues: ”Man må ikke dræbe et menneske, men det opfattes ofte som berettiget at dræbe en djævelsk fjende. Derfor er det vigtigt at se mennesket i fjenden” (Svendsen, 97). The degree of hostility is not, as Michael Ignatieff claims, proportional with the extent of inequality between two groups, but can arise from few otherwise insignificant differences – thereby discarding or backgrounding all else these groups have in common (Svendsen, 96). As such, idealistic evil is usually highly irrational.

* Dumb evil

As mentioned, this evil parrallels Arendt’s theory of the banal evil insofar as the perpetrator, in acting on another’s command, renounces responsibility for his own actions and therefore, do not reflect over the consequences of these actions. One can here draw on the essential imperative in Kant’s theory of enlightenment, *sapere aude!* – or ‘dare to discern’ (Svendsen, 133) – which Svendsen believes to be the means for preventing ‘dumb evil’ (to prevent dumb evil one must think):

“*Oplysning er menneskets vej ud af dets selvforskyldte umyndighed. Umyndighed* er den manglende evne til at bruge sin egen forstand uden ledelse af en anden. *Selvforskyldt* er denne umyndighed, når dens årsag ikke ligger i mangel på forstand, men mangel på beslutning og mod til at bruge egen forstand uden ledelse af en anden” (Svendsen, 133)

Thus, for Kant, this renunciation of one’s own responsibility may be a result of lacking the capability to think for oneself or the courage to acknowledge said responsibility, the latter being – like the choice of self-love over moral law – self-induced (one may however argue that, one can neither choose to lack courage nor would if possible). Plato and Socrates argued an evil act to only ever be performed by one who lacks the knowledge of what defines good, and Aristotle claimed such a subject to instead have misinterpreted good (Svendsen, 103). Blaise Pascal perceived it particularly evil to be (as interpreted by Svendsen): “…fuld af fejl uden at ville erkende det, for da forøger vi vores onde med et frivilligt selvbedrag” (Svendsen, 103). The absence of anonymous thinking, which both banal and dumb evil are characterized by, is, according to Giacomo Leopardi, the cause of an endless array of examples in which humans have induced suffering onto other humans, and as he argues (interpreted by Svendsen): “…ubetænksomhed er noget mere sædvanligt blandt mennesker end ondskab, menneskelighed og lignende, og ... den er årsag til mange flere dårlige gerninger…” (Svendsen, 103). As such, dumb evil is characterized by the absence of thinking and accordingly, the absence of intention (apart from the intention of carrying out one’s professional duties). This evil therefore differs from the three aforementioned categories, which are all based on intentions that go beyond taking orders from authorities.

# 5 Conclusion

Of the abovementioned concepts of evil the theological (along with aspects of Kant’s theories) have been ascribed to fiction and superstition: Aquinas’ theory is disputed pragmatically by the claim that, he who believes everything to be justified also justifies evil (Svendsen, 54); Manichaeism is believed purely fictitious based on the lacking evidence for defining individuals as intrinsically either good or evil; Augustine’s theory (evil is the absence of good – good being all god’s creations) was disputed by the claim that it: “…ikke fuldt ud dækker den kaotiske erfaring af det onde, som også rummer et moment af positivitet, af noget, som bliver *givet*, og ikke kun noget, som mangler” (Svendsen, 21) thereby ignoring the good that may arise from evil; and lastly, Kant’s theory of the free human choice (which implies that an individual had chosen a fundamental disposition making him either good or evil) met criticism because he failed to explain how such a choice was possible in the first place (Svendsen, 88). Instead, concepts of good and evil have today lost their absoluteness, and as mentioned, become highly arbitrary concepts. Considering the lost authority of theology, Svendsen explains: ”Snarere end at forkaste det onde sammen med forestillingen om Gud, kan vi sige, at da Gud forsvandt, blev det onde et rent *menneskeligt* problem. Det er *vores* problem” (Svendsen, 55). The various postmodern philosophical approaches usually have the idea of evil being social in its origin in common (Vetlesen, 20). However, some oppose this modern traditional thinking in various ways: while e.g. Baumann turns the usual approach upside down by claiming that: “…the ability to tell right from wrong is ‘ready formed’; hence it is already there, a given, akin to man’s biological constitution” (Vetlesen, 22) and that society is only there to corrupt it, Martin Heidegger claims evil to be more of an ontological rather than a social and moral problem (Svendsen, 22). In my analysis however, I will regard factual evil according to what seems to be the most agreed upon approach today, namely as something social in its origin.

# 6 Analyzing Inconspicuous Intentions

Identifying intentions employed by fictional characters of postmodern Hollywood films on the basis of postmodern philosophy prompts at least two complications worth taking into account. These will be outlined below followed by an analytical tool for analyzing filmic depictions of intention.

Firstly, the characters subjected to analysis do not represent behavior symptomatic of real people, but rather a constructed behavior, concentrated on delivering whatever message a sender intends to communicate to an addressee. While this then prompts modern philosophical theories of evil basically inapplicable to an analysis of actual behavior in films (all filmic representations of behavior being fictional), such approach must be regarded as dealing with fictional behavior, and can therefore, instead be seen as a way of highlighting whatever gap may exist between fictional and factual depictions. Also, treating film characters as purely fictitious and purposely constructed representations is, as Thwaites explains in separating addresser (fictional sender) from sender (actual sender): ”…what lets us do semiotics rather than psychology” (Thwaites, 18). It is therefore obvious that, when analyzing the intentions of characters, one must treat these as a mere possibility, not a fact.

Secondly, because most Hollywood films today, as Bather explains, do not draw on: “…a system of ethics but a visual language” (Bather, 58) in their representations of evil, it may be a difficult task to even comprehend the intentions and underlying ideologies that are supposed to motivate the actions of fictional characters:

“…on the one hand, the simplified view of the world in Hollywood cinema, divided as it is into binary oppositions, provides society with the means to view and understand the world … and on the other, providing the vast spectacle required to satisfy modern audiences, without having to supply the villain with ideological motivation” (Bather, 63)

As such, meaning has been shoved out by visual spectacle, or, in semiotic terms: while the original signifieds have been exchanged by simplified definitions of evil, the signifiers (the visual aspects) remain unchanged. While postmodern, cinematic representations of evil, frequently do engage with theological and philosophical aspects, they use these: “…not as a means to define specific forms of evil but to create visual representations of evil, specific to each film, that defy meaning beyond being simply evil” (Bather, 6). This implies the antagonist to be of no further interest to the receiver beyond that of understanding the binary oppositions at play (see the chapter ‘Evil as a Necessary Ingredient’), rendering intention inconspicuous.

Fictionally based definitions of evil are therefore prevalent in Hollywood films, while the postmodern, intention-based definitions are largely effaced, caused by a profound absence of representations of ideological motivation.

6.1 The Analytical Tool for Analyzing Intention:In order to extract what remain of these otherwise inconspicuous signs of intention, I suggest dividing character-actions into four possible categories of evil based on the aforementioned theories by Arendt and Svendsen, as seen in the figure above (figure 2). While avoiding the visual aspects, this figure will schematize the various occurrences of postmodern, intention-based evil, making it possible to identify the prevailing concepts, whether fictional (demonic evil) or factual.

Above I have outlined a semiotic and philosophical approach to encapsulating cinematic representations of evil, however, in order to pursue this task more sufficiently; I propose a third and final level of analysis – namely an analysis of the receivers’ emotional investment in the characters of the story world. This approach, developed by Grodal, deals with how filmic instruments construct an awareness of evil in a receiver which is not based on preconceived cultural or philosophical concepts, but on emotional experiences.

# 7 The Emotional Experience of Evil

Modern film theorists suggest, as Grodal explains, that we have a natural desire for making use of every part of our repertoire of feelings – what is called homeostasis[[8]](#footnote-8) – and that we may do so by watching films. For instance, if we are under-stimulated by a static, everyday life, we might watch action films, but if we are instead, over-stimulated by a dynamic life, we may substitute such genres with melodramas (Grodal, 71). The strong emotions – e.g. of hatred, desire or bravery – are thus what is sought after by a receiver, whose motivation for watching a certain genre depends on his stimulation of feelings. Below I outline a theoretical apparatus, developed by amongst others, Grodal, useful for analyzing the emotional experience of evil in film.

**The receiver’s first impression:** Grodal claims that when a receiver at first comprehends a movie scene he initially does so with a natural empathy towards living things, after which the determinants for placing empathy are e.g. species, gender, nationality and/or behavior etc. (Grodal, 175). Thus, a receiver has already (and almost instantaneously), when having first been represented for the mise-en-scène within the initial frames of a film, placed his empathy on a living thing (i.e. if living things are present). Conversely, one can regard this process of selection as a process of exclusion, e.g. if an initial scene features a group of seemingly disagreeable characters, a receiver may be empathetic towards those that are least disagreeable, however, only by excluding the remainder on the basis of an instantaneous, moral judgment. As the narrative progresses, this initial judgment will either be disregarded or confirmed – the former if a character proves insignificant to moral judgment (e.g. if he is excluded from the remainder of the narrative) or has more or less questionable morals, and the latter if a character activates feelings of sympathy in a receiver. These judgments will come about through a process of ‘character centralization’ (Grodal, 89).

**The final impression – character centralization, allegiance and alignment:** When a character has been centralized in the scenes of a film during a longer period of time (i.e. what Grodal calls character centralization), a receiver will begin to take an interest in him. While the receiver is here yet unable to identify with said character, he will nevertheless, be empathetic towards this character’s situation, what Murray Smith calls ‘alignment’ (Grodal, 89). As the narrative progresses, alignment may either remain or turn into ‘allegiance’ – the latter if the receiver finds he is able to morally identify and therefore sympathize with the character, whose wellbeing he will consequently feel nervousness, happiness or fear on behalf of. The more centralizing characters there are, the less a receiver will establish alignment or allegiance with them individually (Grodal, 90).

**Events and emotions:** The type of films, in which such drawing on emotions is especially predominant, usually employ what Gitte Rose and H.C. Christiansen calls an ‘action-and-goal driven’ narrative (original term: ‘handlings-og-målstyret film’) (Rose and Christiansen, 154). In these narratives, which are typical for mainstream Hollywood films, the events driving the plot onward are based on the goals and actions of the characters (usually the protagonists) – i.e. the progression from the point at which a character sets up a goal and until he either succeeds or fails in achieving it. A centralizing character may, on the other hand, encounter situations that are not part of the ‘global course of events,’ but are ‘local’ and therefore, insignificant to his goals and the progression of the plot. In this case, the receiver’s arousal (his emotional investment) will be ‘satisfied’ (original term: mættet), and he will therefore only invest vague feelings focused on the immediate, diegetic content of the scene – e.g. simulated feelings of pain from seeing someone subjected to physical violence (Grodal, 65). When a scene is plot-related however, a receiver will – depending on whether he has alignment or allegiance with the characters presented – experience a more or less strong, emotional investment, build up over the entire narrative (Grodal, 69).

**The approach:** Thus, when a receiver places his emotional labels of good and evil, the former will usually be a case of allegiance, whereas the latter may be either insignificant to moral judgment or in the form of alignment. Also, depending on the characters and whether an event is plot-related, the receiver’s emotional involvement will be either satisfied or strong. This theory will be employed in my analysis with the aim of:

* identifying the significant characters’ goals and actions,
* identifying what characters – via filmic instruments – are constructed to draw on a receiver’s sympathetic and empathetic emotions,
* and lastly, to identify the elements threatening said characters, and thereby, whom/what the receiver emotionally experience as bad/evil.

My analytical approach will therefore be tripartite, focusing on the emotional- cultural- and philosophical aspects of how an audience may identify evil in its various filmic representations. In addition to evil being important as an element drawing on the emotions of a receiver (i.e. in posing threads to those whom the receiver is sympathetic towards), below I outline two further arguments of why evil is significant, if not necessary, to most films.

# 8 Evil as a Necessary Ingredient

In this chapter I put forth the two following arguments of why evil is an important ingredient in the majority of films: (1) the aversive qualities of evil are attractive to the viewer (2) evil is essential to the comprehensibility of the plot. Note: I will be regarding an antagonist (or antagonistic force) as something/someone representing various degrees of evil.

(1) This argument is based on the many theorists pursuing answers to the question of how we, as viewers of films (notably horror films), can be attracted to or curious about, that which we find repulsive or threatening, what Nöel Carroll calls ‘the second paradox of the heart’ (the first being how we can fear that which we know does not exist) (Carroll, 10). Amongst these answers Carroll emphasizes four, which claim an attraction to:

* the releasing of repressed fantasies (Sigmund Freud) (Freud, 3-4, 1)
* the awe embedded in ‘cosmic fear’ (Howard Phillip Lovecraft) (Carroll, 162)
* the breaking down of oppressive cultural categories (Rosemary Jackson) (Carroll, 175)
* seeing the end of a narrative (Nöel Carroll) (Carroll, 185)

Carroll mainly attributes these to the fantastical[[9]](#footnote-9) story world of horror fiction, but explains that the paradox itself generally pertains to films in which: “…the artistic presentation of normally aversive events and objects can give rise to pleasure or can compel our interests” (Carroll, 161). In explaining the horrifying (or ‘unheimlich’), Freud refers to Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling’s definition: “…*the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . hidden and secret and has become visible*” (Freud, 3-4). Whenever these things become visible, Freud adds, it releases repression, which is believed desirable. In that same way, Jackson regards cultural concepts to be oppressive, and therefore, bring forth a desirable, emancipating feeling whenever broken down (and e.g. taboos are brought into the light). Lovecraft on the other hand, suggests the attraction to horror to be a feeling of awe generated when one confronts unknown forces, and he therefore also, as Jackson, draws on the attraction to something out of the ordinary, or something ‘new’ (Carroll, 162). Freud however, explains that:

“Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening … We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny; some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny” (Freud, 2)

In interpreting E.T.A Hoffmann’s *The Sandmann*, which gives the reader the impression that a fantastical evil creature (the sandman), who collects eyes, exists in the story-world, Freud claims that: “…the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes” (Freud, 7). He therefore implies fear not only to be generated by an intellectual uncertainty (e.g. uncertainty about how to conceptualize an ontologically impossible concept) but also from physical threads. However, while antagonists posing physical threads are a common ingredient within many film genres, for Jackson and Lovecraft the uncanny requires a fantastical element to be attractive. One may here argue that many genres dealing with physically threatening antagonists also employ many of the same visual elements as horror; that is, Jackson and Lovecraft’s approaches – in relying on visual spectacle – can be said to deal with a fear of something (a fantastical being) that traditionally surrounds itself with non-fantastical, horrific characteristics (e.g. dark areas) which, when applied to a non-fantastical genre, may metonymically evoke the same fear (and to a certain extent, concept) in a receiver as they do in a horror film. In other words, because non-fantastical visual aspects of the horror genre may transcend into other genres, they also have the ability to evoke the same fear patterns in these other genres as they do in the horror genre – regardless of how misplaced this evocation may be. The attraction to a horrific element may thus, even in Jackson and Lovecraft’s definitions, transcend into other genres than horror.

Lastly, to explain how Carroll’s non-visual but plot-based theory – what he calls *a complex discovery plot* (Carroll, 99)[[10]](#footnote-10) – may transgress into other genres, one may think of it in terms of the progressive-regressive plot of non-fantastical crime fiction:

“…our interest in it resides, first and foremost, in the process of discovery, proof, and confirmation that horror fictions employ. The disclosure of the existence of the horrific being and of its properties is the central source of pleasure in the genre…” (Carroll, 185)

A receiver watching a crime fiction will (in correlation with the protagonists), as in horror fiction, undergo a process of guessing and discovery – the object of interest not being a supernatural creature, but events of the past (Grodal, 142). One could also regard this as a desire for suspense in Eric Rabkin’s broad definition of the term, i.e. (as interpreted by Carroll): “…anything that draws a reader through a story” (Carroll, 129). The attraction may therefore lie, not only in the particularities of an antagonist, but also in the process of discovery of those particularities – again pointing towards the necessity of an antagonistic force as the enabler of attraction.

 (2) This argument is based on the grammatical approach employed by structualists in explaining how a vast range of different stories use the same rules, as Grodal explains:

”I fortællingens syntagmer er der nogle bestemte pladser såsom subjekt, verbum og objekt, der bestemmes af en syntaks ... Enhver af disse pladser kan så udfyldes ved at udvælge et element fra den mængde af fænomener, der kan indtage den givne plads. En sådan mængde af fænomener ... kaldte strukturalisterne et paradigme” (Grodal, 247)

This theory – commonly known in its form of Algirdas Julien Greimas’ ’actantial-model’ (signosemio.com) – underlines the rules employed for creating conflict within a narrative, e.g. the protagonist (the subject) wants to save (the verb) the princess (the object) but is hindered by the antagonist. Bignell describes such rise and fall of conflict, which features in the majority of film narratives, as: “…the movement from an initially stable equilibrium, through disorder and conflict, to a new equilibrium” (Bignell, 191), thereby underlining the central importance of conflict, and thus of the antagonist, in the plot. Because these actantal oppositions have been subjected to such extensive and recurrent use, they have created certain story- (Grodal, 115) [[11]](#footnote-11) and person-schemata (Rose and Christiansen, 153)[[12]](#footnote-12) by which films are commonly understood and are therefore useful because they ensure a certain degree of comprehensibility.

However, there are some things to consider when dealing with the arguments above. Firstly, the premise in (1) that a receiver will – while watching a non-fantastical film – metonymically (through a visual or audible element) evoke a concept normally pertaining to horror-fiction, may be more or less hindered by the genre label of a film, i.e. a contract between film and receiver (Grodal, 139) promising a non-fantastical story world. As Hans Robert Jauss implies, a receiver will approach a text with a ‘horizon of expectation,’ which designates (as interpreted by Ann Woodlief and Marcel Cornis-Pope): “…an area of “collective” assumptions, genre conventions and cultural ideologies shared by texts and readers” (vcu.edu). Amongst other things, such expectations depend on the genre label of a film, and if this label implies a non-fantastical universe, the receiver’s hypothesizing about the nature of the antagonist is also likely to remain within the boundaries of an ontologically correct world. Also, the second argument (2) prompts consideration of recent studies by amongst others, Mark Turner and George Lakoff, claiming that narratives employ mental schemata that are not language based, but constructed through our interacting with the real world (Grodal, 247). While this makes possible a less restricted set of plot rules, the actantal positions nevertheless remain useful for portraying a common tendency in story-telling appealing to widespread concepts of story-schemata.

# 9 Analysis

The following is an analysis of representations of evil in the films *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *The Patriot* (2000). Each analysis employs a tripartite approach, dealing with evil as registered emotionally, visually and through the utterances of fictional characters. The latter two are semiotic approaches based upon the interplay between two analytical tools: ICMs and a model for describing the process of semiosis (see figure 3). While the former serve to encapsulate the extent to which a fictional character has been conceptualized (henceforth known as character ICMs), the latter describes the process by which we understand the fictional depictions of evil. Whenever such sign of evil has been conceptualized, a receiver will apply it to the character ICM it is combined to, and thereby, illustrate an ongoing process of semiosis. The semiosis in figure 3 can be outlined as follows: a pre-conceived sign (signifier/signified) is placed in a syntagmatic combination of signs within a story-world infusing it with a specific, constructed meaning, while at the same time, combining it to a character ICM portraying a fictional denotation of evil.

Because the sign is arbitrary the amount of signifieds it pertains to is potentially infinite, wherefore they will in this case, be conveniently limited to the aforementioned philosophical and theological concepts coupled with well known, intertextual references to other media texts or cultural concepts in general. For a sign of evil to be combined with a fictional character (a character ICM), such character must e.g.: use or wear the sign, describe himself in terms of the sign, behave according to the sign or fit into a syntagmatic combination of signs automatically combining him to a sign. Such instances will therefore, serve the basis for determining what signs belong to which characters.

Lastly, as Bignell explains: “What is evil in one film may not be evil in another” (Bignell, 6), thereby implying the possibility that a film employs self-constructed, possibly idiosyncratic, moral codes. Arguably, such moral codes may show themselves in the gap between the two-fold recognition of evil; how it is registered emotionally as a result of character centralization (an addresser deliberately constructing a narrative to either draw strongly or vaguely on emotions) and through preconceived, cultural concepts, not specific to the film. There may be inconsistencies between these two recognitions, i.e. while a receiver may experience one thing emotionally he may detect another visually, thereby letting his feelings, which can be said to overrule his visual experiences, define the moral codes of the story-world. This is, as Grodal explains, only possible through our consistent awareness of the intervening element of fiction – what prevents us from running horrified out of the cinema (Grodal, 92). Hence, the element of fiction is what enables us to label good that which may otherwise ‘objectively’ be defined evil. While the analysis of *Inglourious Basterds* will be the most extensive, focusing on signifiers mostly unaffected by the emotional engagement (the emotional engagement in this film is rather vague), how the latter results in the aforementioned idiosyncratic, moral codes, is instead explored in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Patriot*. In the following I initiate by describing some noteworthy characteristics of *Inglourious Basterds.*

## 9.1 Inglourious Basterds

Two things important to keep in mind concerning the specific case of this counterfactual, World War II film, are its inability for drawing on strong emotional investments and the problems it entails defining its universe as Manichaean. One critic, Anne Thomsen, writes of it: “You don't jump into the world of the film in a participatory way; you watch it from a distance, appreciating the references and the masterful mise en scène” (canmag.com). Arguably, this is indicatory of a certain emphasis recurring in Tarantino’s films (excepting *Kill Bill I* and *Kill Bill II*) in which a receiver is required to spread his attention over a great range of characters – thereby only experiencing a vague, emotional engagement (in this case, reinforced by a comical element). It therefore does not fall into Rose and Christiansen’s definition of what characterizes mainstream, Hollywood productions (as defined in 2006) (Rose and Christiansen, 155),[[13]](#footnote-13) but instead, places emphasis on the immediate diegetic and non-diegetic contents[[14]](#footnote-14) of the scenes. This consequently prompts a downplaying of the traditional emphasis on global narratives.

In regards to the second problem, Liel Liebowitz explains the film to represent: “…a magical and Manichaean world where we needn’t worry about the complexities of morality…” (ziarecords.com). However, one could argue that, while such world deals with the binary opposition between good and evil, this film is clearly permeated by the latter, rendering the former either uninteresting or difficult to identify. The special case of this movie thus prompts the question: if only evil is represented, which of the opposing groups, if any, are then constructed as protagonists/antagonists? In pursuit of answers to amongst others, such questions, below I initiate by briefly describing how the abovementioned emotional engagement manifests itself.

### 9.1.1 The Centralized Characters

To illustrate the extent to which the significant fictional characters establish alignment/allegiance, below I juxtapose each with the amount of time they are centralized throughout the film. The scene numbers listed follow the chronological order of the narrative (for their place in the film, see appendix 1):

* **Hans Landa (alignment)**: 1 (18 min); 5 (5 min); 10 (2 min); 12 (10 min); 14 (4 min); 16 (1 min); 17 (6 min); 18 (2 min); 20 (4 min)
* **Aldo Raine (alignment)**: 2 (3 min); 3 (8 min); 7 (2 min); 9 (7 min); 12 (4 min); 14 (0:30 min); 15 (0:30 min): 16 (2 min); 17 (6 min); 18 (2 min); 20 (4 min)
* **Shoshanna Dreyfus/Emmanuelle Mimieux (allegiance)**: 4 (8 min); 5 (13 min); 6 (3 min); 11 (4 min); 13 (1 min); 18 (0:30 min); 19 (5 min)
* **Fredrick Zoller (alignment)**: 4 (8 min); 5 (5 min); 19 (6 min)
* **Bridget von Hammersmark (alignment)**: 8 (25 min); 9 (7 min); 12 (4 min); 14 (4 min)
* **Pierre LaPadite (allegiance)**: 1 (18 min)

The interesting aspect here is that, while the usual Hollywood WWII film typically employs a narrative biased towards one of two conflicting parties (usually whoever fights the Nazis), this narrative instead, distributes an almost equal alignment to the two leading characters from both sides of the conflict – i.e. to Landa and Raine. How these two only establish alignment whereas the French farmer Pierre LaPadite (whose function is solely that of a foil) establishes a vague form of allegiance is a semiotic task undertaken in the following sections. For now, the above findings suggest a film that, by keeping the audience from establishing any strong allegiance, does only little to let evil be defined emotionally. Instead, as Thomsen suggests, the focus lies in the mise-en-scène.


### 9.1.2 The Semiotic Content

#### 9.1.2.1 Landa ICM (Scene 1)

Tarantino explains about this first scene: “The opening feels like a spaghetti western, but with WWII iconography” (festival-cannes.com). This results from signs characteristic of the topography of the American West; an unusual presence of buttes and a rolling landscape (festival-cannes.com). Together with non-diegetic music in the style of Ennio Morricone (and a version of Beethoven’s *Für Elise*) a syntagmatic effect renders these signs signifiers connoting the story-world of a Spaghetti Western (the mise-en-scène may also be seen as an intertextual reference to Robert Wise’s *The Sound of Music*). Consequently, the receiver metonymically gains access to the simplified and Manichaean categories of evil usually pertaining to such films – e.g. in the case of *The Good The Bad, and The Ugly* (1966) – which then become connotations manifested in the centralized characters, in this case (as will be explained in the section below) prior to them having been thoroughly introduced. In the sense that, as Saussure explains, signs only take on meaning through their differences from others, one could argue these categories of good and evil, in being binary oppositions, to always act as foils for one another – i.e., one has the function of enhancing the characteristics of the other by being what the other is not. To define evil in this first scene is therefore a task of also defining good, which, as briefly explored in the section ‘Evil as Defined in Opposition to Good,’ is represented by the character with whom we have allegiance, namely LaPadite. However, before exploring this further, below I explain how the preconceived evil of Nazi signs initially plays a predominant role.

##### 9.1.2.1.1 Evil as Defined through Cultural Concepts

The conative function of this scene is rendered explicit by the entrance of two widely known, intertextual references – i.e., as indicated above, Nazi signs and the dueling music traditional of Spaghetti Westerns. How the combination of these signs results in the syntagmatic effect of only one fictional denotation of evil, is explained below.

The Syntagmatic Effect of Combination (henceforth known as ‘SEC’): In this first scene, the predominant enabler of evil is the entrance of a possibly unfathomable amount of predefined, cultural signifieds, evoked by the signifiers of e.g. Landa’s Nazi uniform and his introduction of himself as: “Colonel Hans Landa of the SS” (IB: 00:04:14) and later as: “The Jew Hunter” (IB: 00:13:28). Most receivers will here draw on intertextual references (having no real life experience of WWII) and a common historical consensus thereof is that Nazis, as according to Encyclopædia Britannica Online: “…sought the … murder of all Jews— men, women, and children—and their eradication from the human race …” (search.eb.com.zorac.aub.aau.dk). Because typically neither a common consensus nor cinematic depictions of such Nazi ideologies are coupled with explanations of how they come about, they often connote a somewhat groundless evil. Such evil therefore pertains to Landa prior to a thorough introduction of him, i.e. while he is solely defined by Nazi signs (his uniform and introduction of himself); he connotes a radical, groundless form of evil.

This evil can be said to be rendered unambiguous and even demonical by the notion of a Manichaean universe metonymically evoked by the aforementioned signifier of non-diegetic, dueling music. As Thwaites explains: “When placed together, the different signs emphasize the codes they have in common” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 81). Therefore, when both Nazis and signs of a Manichaean world are placed in the same syntagm, they emphasize codes of evil which consequently merge with, and reinforce, one another. As illustrated in the semiosis below, the SEC therefore results in the fictional denotation of Nazis being Manichaean- and therefore somewhat demonical- evil.

**Signifiers:**

Dueling music

**Signifieds:**

Manichaean world

Nazis are Manichaean/ demonical evil

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

The Nazi soldier Landa is Manichaean/ demonical evil

Nazi signs

The radical evil pertaining to Nazi concepts

Landa: through a simultaneous onset of Landa and dueling music

Because the syntagmatic combination of signs do not counter already established concepts of Nazis throughout this onset, these concepts – apart from being applied connotations of demonical evil – remain largely unaltered as fictional denotations (as explained in the chapter ‘Basterds/Raine ICM (scene 3)’, demonical evil does however, only unambiguously come about through visual signifiers). The latter can however, be said to conflict with various signs of other evils applied to the Landa ICM (as will be explained in the concluding chapter), some of which are verbal signs outlined in the following.

##### 9.1.2.1.2 Evil as Defined through Verbal Signs

Signifiers of Dumb/Banal Evil: Having been inquired as to his knowledge of Landa’s occupation and endeavor, LaPadite replies: “I’ve heard that the Führer has put you in charge of rounding up the Jews in France, who are either hiding or passing for Gentile” (IB: 00:08:03). This indicates an agentic state (a carrying out of another’s orders) applying onto Landa connotations of dumb/banal evil. Acting supportive to this is the signifier of a routinized (routine being one out of three criteria for dumb/banal evil[[15]](#footnote-15)) method of inquiry, when he further asks of LaPadite: “Having never met the Dreyfuses, would you confirm for me the exact members of the household and their names?” (IB: 00:10:58). While dumb/banal evil is highly plausible as a concept pertaining to Landa – i.e. a soldier serving a totalitarian regime – and is therefore not altered by the SEC (beyond that of being applied to Landa), this intentionless evil is however, somewhat disproved as it, during further inquiries, takes on an ideological character.

Signifiers of Idealistic Evil: In making an analogue between rats and Jews, Landa inquires of LaPadite: “If a rat were to scamper through your front door, right now, would you greet it with hostility?” (IB: 00:14:56). While such dehumanization represents one out of three traits for eroding moral judgment (for dumb/banal evil) the signified can instead, here be said to transcend into idealistic evil when Landa concludes about Jews: “You don’t really know why you don’t like them. All you know is you find them repulsive” (IB: 00:16:06). His motivation thus transforms from an intentionless, thoughtless will to carry out orders, into the signified of a deliberate wish for extinguishing Jews. Also, while his dialectics do not follow any rational mode of inference but instead, is a case of begging the question – i.e. explaining the conclusion via the conclusion (he does ‘not like Jews’ because he ‘finds Jews repulsive’) – another signifier represents itself characteristic of idealistic evil, namely irrational thinking. His intention thus becomes one of acting out his own, idealistic and irrational will.

While both dumb/banal and idealistic evil are in this case easily applicable, the latter will wholly exclude the former on the basis of a signifier not shared between them, namely ‘repulsion.’ That is, when Landa expresses repulsion towards Jews, the Landa ICM becomes infused with a higher (ideological) purpose than merely that of carrying out orders, and the notion of dumb/banal evil is therefore eroded. Consequently, the SEC can be said to render the verbally expressed fictional denotation of evil an idealistic one, as indicated in the semiosis below.

**Signifiers:**

Acting on orders, routine, dehumanization

**Signifieds:**

Dumb/Banal evil

A Nazi is idealistic evil (eroding dumb/banal evil)

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

The Nazi soldier Landa is idealistic evil

Irrationality, repulsion, dehumanization

Idealistic evil

Landa: the signifiers being descriptions of him

As such, because the concept of idealistic evil is applicable to anyone regarding his own social group as somewhat superior to another (i.e. an asymmetrical relationship – Nazi/Jew), it is also applicable to the Landa ICM however, as will be explained in the conclusion, meets complications as a fictional denotation in terms of the overall SEC. The reason for this is found in the visual signs of evil, some of which are outlined below.

##### 9.1.2.1.3 Evil as Defined through Visual Signs

While one visual signifier of evil is the aforementioned Nazi uniform, two others worth mentioning here are the signifiers of a routinized job and a sheer pleasure in killing. The former shows itself e.g. when Landa gets the answer: “Amos was nine or ten” (IB: 00:12:11) when inquiring LaPadite about the ages of the Jews he seeks and simultaneously writes ‘nine-ten’ into a notebook (see appendix 2, image 1). Thus, in accord with the aforementioned verbal signifiers of an agentic state, this connotes dumb/banal evil by the signifier of a routinized approach to seeking and killing Jews. Also, treating the latter as products measurable by numbers connotes an emotionally devoid rationality often recurring in depictions of cinematic evil, as Bather explains: “Evil villains do not feel love or kindness towards others, but instead a cold intelligence overpowers and suppresses all other emotions or motivations” (Bather, 78). In general, being a state in which one invests no sympathy (resulting from the absence of thinking), dumb/banal evil is easily applicable to emotional coldness.

However, all evils having thus far been applied to Landa can be said to be rendered somewhat inconspicuous when he, having had his troops kill four Jews, seconds later expresses sheer pleasure in aiming his gun at Dreyfus while she escapes (see appendix 2, image 2). This signifier of pleasure connotes horrific acts as ends in themselves, and therefore, corresponds to demonical evil. The initial notion of a Manichaean world is therefore reinforced by rendering evil absolute. Arguably, because demonical evil is an unexplained, supernatural force, it cannot be altered by the SEC, but is an all determining force instead altering whatever it is applied to (this is elaborated in the concluding chapter). The resulting semiosis is seen below.

**Signifier:**

A pleasure in killing

**Signifieds:**

Demonical evil

Blurring out all other evils, Landa appears demonical evil

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

Landa: by expressing pleasure in aiming his gun at Dreyfus

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

Landa the Nazi soldier is demonical evil

While the evils above are signs connoting evil by themselves, below I explain how otherwise morally unambiguous signs may, through the binary opposition of the evil of Landa and the good of LaPadite (the latter with whom we have allegiance), be morally labeled and thereby, relegated to one of these conflicting parties.

##### 9.1.2.1.4 Evil as Defined in Opposition to Good

Thwaites explains all signs pertaining to either side of a binary relationship (as the Manichaean world of this first scene represents) to be: “…reduced to a single scale set up between two opposing terms” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 67). Arguably, this renders the two binary terms in this scene, evil and good, to reflect the Augustinian notion, being that the former, represented by Landa and Nazi signs, may be said to be the absence of the latter, represented by LaPadite. These two characters and all signs pertaining to them – even the otherwise morally indifferent ones (as explained below) – thus become infused with connotations of evil in the absence of good. As Bignell explains about the Manichaean notion in fiction: “…the world is inherently evil and out to destroy its inhabitants” (Bignell, 85). Evil – especially throughout this film – is likewise, as mentioned, somewhat the rule and not the exception. In this scene it takes the widely known preconceived concept of Nazis in order to know when good is absent, and therefore, evil present. Accordingly, as I argue below, only when good and evil have become unambiguous by the intervening element of Nazis, will the otherwise morally ambiguous signs take on meaning through one another – i.e., as implied by Saussure, in being what the others are not. The resulting semiosis applied in the following may thus, be outlined as: signs from the LaPadite ICM are transformed into their antonyms and placed in the Landa ICM and vice versa. However, below I initiate by describing how the LaPadite ICM at first, through a reluctant behavior, attains connotations of good.

**LaPadite ICM:** There can be said to be three categories of signs significant for defining the moral status of the LaPadite ICM:

1. signs connoting a ‘patriarchal, humble farmer’
2. signs connoting ‘unease, hatred and reluctance’
3. signs connoting the evil of ‘Nazi soldiers’

While the signs of (1) are in themselves devoid of explicit moral connotations, it is the behavioral signs of (2) that render LaPadite’s moral values conspicuous – i.e., when directed towards the preconceived evil of Nazi soldiers (3). In being hostile towards what a receiver already knows is evil (2) therefore become signifiers connoting good onto their agent.

(2) Signs of Reluctance, Hatred or Unease: LaPadite at first exhibits such signs in an attempt to make them inconspicuous: as the Nazis approach, he wipes the sweat off his face (see appendix 2, image 3) and after his daughter brings him water, tells her: “…now go inside with your sisters … don’t run” (IB: 00:03:34). He further hesitates to shake hands with Landa (see appendix 2, image 4) but eventually does so seemingly to keep this reluctance inexplicit. While these signifiers have hitherto been of his own doing, as he sits with Landa at the living room table, it is instead the daughter Charlotte who, in being a product of LaPadite (evidenced by her unflinching obedience to him), becomes the signifier for his morals and values. Thus, as she throws Landa a hateful stare and thereupon, looks at LaPadite for a reaction (see appendix 2, image 5), it reflects upon the latter with connotations of an anti-Nazi disposition. How these signs combined with a character who has yet done nothing morally questionable thus connotes good onto the LaPadite ICM, is indicated in the semiosis below.

**Signifier:**

Signs of reluctance, hatred or unease

**Signifieds:**

Good as opposed to the evil of Nazis

A French farmer illustrates good morals through signs of reluctance

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of good:**

LaPadite is good as opposed to Nazis

To LaPadite: through the physical behavior of himself and his daughters

As such, it here takes the intervening, pre-conceptualized concept of Nazis, in order to easily render explicit – through signs of reluctance – the two conflicting and thus far Manichaean parties of the story-world (arguably, without signs of reluctance, LaPadite might instead appear collaborative with Nazis). As mentioned, this consequently renders otherwise morally indifferent signs to be measured by the single scale of good and evil, as explained below.

(1) The Morally Ambiguous signs: While the signs of (1) e.g. outworn clothes, hard work and an obedient daughter, are at first ambiguous in terms of morals (e.g. an obedient daughter may connote a father’s propensity for physical abuse), when later coupled with signs of reluctance towards Nazis, the SEC is consequently one applying connotations of good to the LaPadite ICM (e.g. raising one’s daughters with good values). Signs that may have been morally indifferent or evil in other contexts therefore instead, become good when applied to the LaPadite ICM. The result is a binary opposition in which the signs of one party infuse meaning to those of the other, as exemplified in the figure to the right. Both the LaPadite and Landa ICMs are therefore attributed additional connotations by morally being what the other is not – an effect enabled by the entrance of predefined, Nazi concepts. Before explaining how this binary relationship and the concepts of dumb/banal and idealistic evil, throughout this first scene, are subjected to myth, in the following I briefly describe how the emotional investment may illustrate a certain self-constructed, idiosyncratic moral code.

Humble, poor

Assertive, greedy

**Good**

**Evil**

Dishonest work, deceitful

Hard, honest work

Ugly, guilty

Beautiful, innocent (daughters)

##### 9.1.2.1.5 Emotional Investment and a Self-constructed, Idiosyncratic Moral Code

Only in a scene as this one, in which the conflicting parties make up the combination ‘allegiance vs. alignment,’ can a Manichaean world be recognized. The combination ‘alignment vs. alignment,’ which largely characterizes the remainder of this film, on the other hand, makes difficult the labeling of good/evil with the effect of one part not being able to, by the signs it bears, define the other. Thus, because allegiance is absent from the remainder of the narrative (apart from a few scenes featuring Dreyfus, in which it is arguably vague) the Manichaean notion is somewhat only confined to this first scene. As such, a receiver’s sympathetic emotions are likewise more or less absent from other scenes and may therefore, only in this instance, be illustrative of a self-constructed, moral code, as briefly explained in the following.

Because such moral code may not, in this scene, be found in a gap between the ways in which we recognize evil – i.e. because these recognitions are compatible; we know, see and feel Nazis to be evil – we may instead, approach this scene objectively, or in other words, seek to disregard the allegiance established (thereby avoiding the taking of sides forced upon us by the addresser). By doing so, another evil comes to the fore, namely one corresponding to Aquinas’ evil per accidens (evil as the cause of a greater good). By eventually accepting the offer that his family will: “…cease to be harassed in any way by the German military” (IB: 00:18:00) in exchange for information leading to the Jews, LaPadite, as emotionally registered, chooses a greater good. However, without the element of allegiance, this choice may arguably, instead apply to him connotations of cowardice or a Kantian self-love; being harassed objectively seems a small price to pay to prevent the death of five Jews. In other words, the self-constructed, moral code, here made possible by allegiance, enables LaPadite to carry out morally questionable acts without his morals being questioned. As will be discussed below, this emotional labeling may in some way, more or less be an enabler of myth.

#### 9.1.2.2 Partial Conclusion

Throughout this first scene the Landa ICM has been applied signs of dumb/banal, idealistic, demonical and Nazi evil coupled with evil as manifested in the antonyms of signs pertaining to the LaPadite ICM. As I argue in the following, this results in the construction of myth in three following ways; (1) one concept of evil overshadows the others (2) a binary relationship simplifies concepts and (3) an emotional labeling excludes connotations.

(1) Myth via Overshadowing Concepts: To explain which of the concepts of evil hitherto applied to the Landa ICM predominate, one may suggest the following; dumb/banal evil is eroded by idealistic evil which is instead, blurred out by the supernatural intervention of demonical evil, the latter which is further reinforced by the Manichaean notion of Nazi concepts and antonyms of good. Because demonical evil is the only evil without a cause, it may, in contrary to other evils, be applied to any case without complications. This consequently has the effect of blurring out or completely eroding all other possible intentions (demonical evil being evil for the sake of evil) behind the actions of a character, wherefore dumb/banal and idealistic evil in this case, as implied in the figure above (figure 5), are rendered inconspicuous. In other words, in being predominant, demonical evil becomes the metonymical point of reference by which the remainder of the Landa ICM is evoked. Hence, because the concepts above the dividing line (in figure 5) do not exclude one another (apart from the possibility that some receivers conceive of Nazis as not innately evil) they instead merge and reinforce the codes they all, to a certain degree, have in common; those connoting demonical evil. Those below the dividing line however, get formed by these prevailing signs and consequently, the notion of an idealistic motivation of e.g. working towards ‘the final solution to the Jewish question’ instead, attains connotations of doing evil for the sake of evil. The fictional denotation of evil applied to the Landa ICM in this scene is thus, in philosophical terms, also one of a fictional origin. In the following I briefly explain how myth also manifests itself in a simplified relationship.

**Demonical evil**

**Manichaean evil**

**Nazi evil**

**Evil as antonyms of good**

Idealistic evil

Dumb/Banal evil

Landa ICM (Figure 5)

(2) Myth via a Binary Opposition: The notion of demonical evil, as implied above, simplifies all the possible reasons that characters, had they not been fictional and constructed, may have otherwise had, to the presence of a single motivation of simply doing evil. Myth in this instance is not only confined to the character of Landa, but to what he represents i.e. Nazi Germans. Thus, by applying the Manichaean dichotomy – metonymically evoked by demonical evil – to the conflict between Nazis and their adversaries, all intentions beyond those of doing either good or evil are left out. As such, while LaPadite’s daughters attain connotations of good, the three German soldiers acting on Landa’s commands are instead, subjected to the category of evil. In the following I briefly argue how seeing one thing but feeling another may, by excluding certain connotations, suggest the making of myth.

(3) Myth via Emotional Labeling: A receiver will, because he establishes allegiance with LaPadite, be inclined towards connotations evoking sympathetic feelings, while other connotations – which may have been predominant in other contexts (with another SEC) – can be said to be marginalized or wholly excluded. Allegiance in other words, has the effect of highlighting one part of an ICM while downplaying another (the latter which instead, if not completely excluded, becomes more or less infused with connotations of good). Hence, in accord with Barthes, by reinforcing the ability for certain terms to stand metonymically for all terms within an ICM, allegiance is in this instance (if not always), an important part of mythmaking. While not serving the basis for mythmaking (something confined to the audiovisual signifiers) allegiance nevertheless pinpoints a certain way of perceiving characters reinforcing the mythical effect (an effect similar to that of the ‘actantal narrative schema,’ as explained in the chapter ‘Myth via Actantal Positions’). In this case the effect is one of ensuring that the possible notions of evil are perceived of as good. Myth can thus, be said to be reinforced via an emotional labeling. In the following I explain how the evil hitherto embedded in the Landa ICM, nearing the end of the narrative, takes a radical turn.

#### 9.1.2.3 Landa ICM (scene 17 and 18)

The vague connotations of idealistic evil hitherto applied to the Landa ICM are in this scene – as Landa betrays the Third Reich to meet own ends – substituted by instrumental evil. Svendsen explains that, while both these evils are based on good: “…the idealistic evil agent desires that which he considers to be objectively good, while the instrumental evil agent pursues what he considers to be subjectively good” (Svendsen, 110). The latter case entails self-love over moral law, which stands as a common denominator for Kantian and instrumental evil. What separates these latter two however, is Kant’s notion of an original choice of evil which, as Svendsen explains: “…he has not managed to demonstrate … exists in the first place” (Svendsen, 120). How both evils are applicable to the Landa ICM (although one less so than the other) throughout this scene, is explained in the following.

##### 9.1.2.3.1 Instrumental and Kantian Evil

Signifiers of a Subjective Good: Having been described by the nickname ‘Jew Hunter,’ Landa claims: “Finding people is my specialty, so naturally, I worked for the Nazis finding people. And yes, some of them were Jews. But Jew Hunter?” (IB: 02:04:42). By thus explaining – in stark opposition to the first scene – that it is his job and not a loathing of Jews that serves his motivation, he more or less transgresses back into dumb/banal evil. This is however, moments after substituted by instrumental/Kantian evil as he explains his terms for toppling the Third Reich:

“I want my full military pension and benefits under my proper rank. I want to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor … And I would like the United States of America to purchase property for me on Nantucket Island” (IB: 02:14:49).

Here, the consequential defeat of Germany becomes a means for reaching Landa’s own ends and therefore, a subjective good. How he further exhibits signs of such evil through an awareness of moral codices, is explained below.

Signifiers of Moral Awareness: Kant claimed (interpreted by Svendsen): “…radical evil … takes place when we recognize the *authority* of moral law, but at the same time ignore its precepts” (Svendsen, 110). Throughout the narrative and as implied above, Landa illustrates such awareness of moral laws. However, because he picks and chooses between them to meet own ends, he does not regard them as ethical guidelines, but as means for reaching a subjective good. He is thus, in accord with Kant’s notion of radical evil, aware of his own wrongs. A signifier for this awareness stands out as he, in outlining his terms for a fake alibi (for having worked with the Nazis) explains: “...anything I’ve done in my guise as an SS agent was sanctioned by the OSS as a necessary evil to establish my cover with the Germans” (IB: 02:14:12). Hence, while he acknowledges his own actions as evil, the only means to justify these ‘choices of a lesser good’ is to, in accord with Aquinas’ evil per accidens, instead explain them as a cause of a greater good – i.e. for Germany to be defeated Jews have to die. In this case, instrumental/Kantian evil therefore not only manifests itself in bringing misery to others in order to reach own ends, but also, in an explicit manipulation of moral codices (of raising oneself above moral laws), as indicated in the semiosis below.

**Signifiers:**

Using Jews, Nazis and moral laws as instruments for reaching own ends

**Signifieds:**

Instrumental evil

A Nazi manipulates moral codices and betrays Germany for own ends

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

Landa chooses a subjective good, rendering him instrumental and Kantian evil

To Landa: the disregarding of moral laws pertains to him

Kantian evil

Below I briefly explain which of these two fictional denotations of evil, on the basis of what is not shared between them (i.e. an original choice of evil), can be said to predominate.

The Prevailing Kantian Evil: While Kantian evil, in implying a groundless, free choice of a propensity toward evil, can be said to connote a demonic behavior, Svendsen’s instrumental evil instead, explains this propensity as socially constructed and therefore, based on an agent’s social competence (not taking into account pathological cases) (Svendsen, 121). In other words, Kant disregards the social competence or lack of same that, in modern philosophy, are said to result from a person’s social history. On such basis, Svendsen’s evil, while not excluded, can in this case be said to be the least applicable. This is due to the aforementioned recurrent tendency in Hollywood cinema, in which elaborate descriptions of a character’s history are avoided – as Bather explains about such films:

“Evil characters or entities have no history of ever being good, and no possibility of ever being good in the future. They are constructed as having always been evil, either specifically given a malevolent back story … or not given a history at all” (Bather, 93).

In this case, a history that might explain Landa’s behavior is completely avoided and instrumental evil is therefore, overshadowed by Kantian evil.

Lastly, in contrary to the above, one could instead, in accord with Arendt’s interpretation of Eichmann, regard Landa as somewhat contributing to an objective good. That is, while Eichmann was believed evil for following Nazi laws, Landa may instead, be regarded good for breaking them.[[16]](#footnote-16) Breaking societal laws is in this case, in other words, given the wrongness of these laws, less evil than not doing so (as Arendt claims). However, as Landa’s intentions of a subjective good remain, so do demonical connotations of Kantian evil (the intention, not the act, is what defines evil). Even so, it is amongst other things, this breaking of Nazi laws that enables a receiver to eventually, despite Landa’s wrongdoings, wish him unharmed (as explained in the chapter ’10 Final Conclusion’). Conclusively, throughout this scene, all connotations of idealistic evil stand out as mere instruments for reaching a subjective good, and are thus, replaced by instrumental and Kantian evil. While the former is in some aspects inapplicable, the latter is instead, rendered predominant through the notion of a deliberate choice of evil. This dovetails with the overall SEC, which, as elaborated below, couples the fictional denotations with a general and predominant, demonic behavior.

#### 9.1.2.4 Partial Conclusion

In the following I outline the full extent of the Landa ICM and explain its final denotations of evil followed by a discussion of how Nazi signs can be said to be marginalized. As I further explain, the latter is an important factor for the first of the three following ways of constructing myth in connection to the Landa ICM; (1) connotations of absolute evil overshadow Nazi concepts (2) Kantian evil excludes aspects of instrumental evil and (3) actantal positions simplify an otherwise complex relationship.

|  |
| --- |
| **Hans Landa (Figure 6)** |
| **Scene** | **Instrumental or Kantian evil** | **Demonical/Fictional evil** | **Idealistic evil** | **Dumb/Banal evil** |
| **1** |  |  |  |  |
| **5** |  |  |  |  |
| **10** |  |  |  |  |
| **12** |  |  |  |  |
| **14** |  |  |  |  |
| **16** |  |  |  |  |
| **17** |  |  |  |  |
| **18** |  |  |  |  |
| **20** |  |  |  |  |

The figure to the right (figure 6) outlines the different signs of philosophically based evil appearing throughout the narrative in connection with the Landa ICM. Here, concepts of evil are assumed to remain until either downplayed or disproven. Therefore, because demonical evil appears in the first scene and is only reinforced, not contradicted, throughout the remainder of the narrative, it can be said to be the most pervasive. The factual concepts of evil are however, eventually narrowed down to only one, as illustrated in the following process; dumb/banal evil is initially eroded by idealistic intention which predominates until briefly disproved by banal/dumb evil after which all evils (excepting demonical evil) are revealed to be mere tools in an endeavor of instrumental evil. As explained above, the latter is however, blurred out by the arguably fictional element of a Kantian free choice. We therefore eventually end up with the fictional denotation of an SS Colonel, Landa, who is demonical and radical evil. In the following I argue how Nazi signs (and thus connotations pertaining to the signifier of an SS Colonel) are downplayed and Landa’s personal characteristics instead, come to the fore.

A Marginalizing of Nazi Signs: One important factor for the construction of myth within the Landa ICM is the transition from an initial understanding of Landa via Nazi signs to perceiving him through personal characteristics. That is, while Nazi connotations initially prevail, they are eventually rendered more or less insignificant and only, in connection to Landa, evoked not through behavioral traits, but ‘static signifiers’ such as his Nazi uniform. This comes about in two phases; an effacement of idealistic motivation (of loathing towards Jews) and a marginalizing of Nazi authority through a comical element. While the former completely detaches Landa from Nazi ideology (as explained in the chapter ‘Instrumental and Kantian Evil’), the latter manifests itself in a mythical depiction of the (ironically) peripheral characters of Adolph Hitler and Joseph Goebbels as mere parodies of what they represent (i.e. of the traditional, authoritarian concepts of Hitler and Goebbels). Two such comical signifiers are Hitler’s white cape (see appendix 3, image 1) giving him a cartoonish, superhero-like aura, and Goebbels’ teasing of Fredrick Zoller by hitting him with a napkin (see appendix 3, image 2), connoting a childlike immaturity. One can say that, whenever these characters, representing the core of the Third Reich, briefly appear, they always do so as comical reliefs. Thus, while Nazi signs are an important plot element (they provide an understanding of the conflict) their status as an antagonistic force in this film is reduced to an insignificant magnitude. They are therefore rendered a subcategory of the Landa ICM (having initially been a main signifier) consequently not mythologizing, but being mythologized, by the prevailing fictional signs, as explained in the following.

(1) Myth via Absolute Evil: In addition to the two evils in the first scene, we may now, as indicated in the figure to the right (figure 7), add Nazi and instrumental evil as concepts subjected to myth (those beneath the dividing line), whereas the fictional variant of radical evil has instead, become a predominant element (placed above the dividing line). Again, the signs prevailing do so because they in one way or another exclude or blur out the remainder, however, not one another. In general, one could say that, those below the line are subjected to myth because they are metonymically evoked by the prevailing signs, whereas these remain unaltered in their, in this case, already fictional forms. While the common denominator for all of the pervasive signs is the, in philosophical terms, fictional element of ‘doing evil for the sake of evil’ (or unexplained evil), although Nazi evil also contains such element it can nevertheless, given the abovementioned reasons, be said to be blurred out. Hence, in this film, Nazi concepts are accessed through signs of absolute evil, consequently removing all other possible motivations for the actions of Nazis beyond that of a deliberate intention of doing evil. The myth constructed here is thus, one of strictly juxtaposing Nazi signs with sheer evil. By rendering all other connotations than those of such evil – e.g. concepts of socially constructed behavior – inconspicuous, the possible ambiguity of Nazi concepts is in other words, made less ambiguous. This filmic depiction of Nazis, which is arguably a recurrent theme in Hollywood cinema, thus contradicts Svendsen and Arendt’s theories of evil as not being of a deliberate choice, but of a social origin. How this mythologizing of socially constructed behavior is further enabled through a downplaying of instrumental evil by Kantian evil, is briefly (having already been partly explained) discussed in the following.

Landa ICM (Figure 7)

**Demonical evil**

**Manichaean evil**

**Evil as antonyms of good**

**Radical evil (Kantian evil)**

Nazi evil

Idealistic evil

Instrumental evil

Dumb/Banal evil

(2) Myth via Kantian Evil: While the Kantian original free choice of evil, as mentioned, blurs out Svendsen’s notion of such choice being of a social origin, these two theories do however, amongst other things, share a variant of absolute evil, as Svendsen explains:

“When people do evil, they do so trying to attain some form of good—either for themselves or for the group; demonic evil must be associated with instrumental evil because of the self-awareness implied by the latter category” (Svendsen, 109-110).

Thus, by the common denominator of being aware that one’s actions are evil, both Kantian and instrumental evil contain an element of the demonical. However, while Svendsen’s evil remains explainable as a socially constructed behavior, Kant’s evil becomes absolute. As such, when Landa (in scene 17) expresses an awareness of his evil actions, because the prevailing signs connote absolute evil, they, as mentioned, merge with Kantian evil but somewhat exclude instrumental evil. Myth in this case therefore consists in applying a single, fictional, groundless explanation of behavior, onto a vast range of potential, social reasons. In the following I suggest how mythical relationships may, on a widespread scale (here exemplified in *Inglourious Basterds*), be said to be reinforced by traditional narrative forms.

(3) Myth via Actantal Positions: I here argue that the notion of Greimas’ actantial oppositions, which apply to the story-schemata of most receivers, acts as a general enhancer of mythical depictions. That is, because a character is first and foremost understood by his function in the plot (his actantal position), the metonymical point of reference to his ICM, which usually entails his intentions and motivations, will also be reinforced, as indicated below:

* Subject; Aldo Raine. Verb (intention); fighting Nazis. Object (motivation); to ensure the demise of the Third Reich (idealistic evil).
* Opponent; Hans Landa. Verb; carrying out orders as a Nazi soldier (from scene one to seventeen). Object; to execute ‘the final solution’ (idealistic evil).
* Subject; Hans Landa. Verb; enabling the demise of the Third Reich (from scene eighteen and onward). Object; to meet own ends e.g. to own property on Nantucket Island (instrumental evil).

I here categorize characters as subjects when their actions (verbs) contribute to ensuring a new equilibrium (despite their motivations) – i.e. to bringing down the antagonistic force of the Third Reich. Because a receiver recognizes the actantal categories through an object-to-verb relation, he will likewise metonymically evoke the characters subjected to these categories through their intentions and motivations. In this case, Landa and Raine’s motivations connote idealistic and instrumental evil, which therefore becomes the concepts through which they are, in accord with the receiver’s knowledge of story-schemata, most likely to be understood. The notion of actantal oppositions therefore has the effect of reinforcing the intentions/motivations, or in this case, the evils, by which characters are metonymically evoked (marginalizing other possible connotations). Lastly, one could argue that, because of these actantal oppositions, the relationships between characters become simplified on a scale upon which they stand out to one another as opponents, subjects or helpers, based on what the receiver desires for the pending equilibrium. Both characters and the relationships between them thus become mythologized in being understood in accord with whether or not they work towards or against a new equilibrium. As such, while notions of actantal positions are not the basis upon which myth is constructed, they nevertheless help to reinforce whatever myths may arise in relation to characters within the boundaries of a narrative. In order to encapsulate how both sides of such mythical relationship in this case represent evil, in the following I subject the Basterds/Raine ICM to analysis.

#### 9.2 Basterds/Raine ICM (scene 2)

Because the Basterds constitute a rather homogenous and simplified group of characters, I here subject them to one ICM with Raine as a main signifier. When signs enter this ICM, they can be regarded to merge with all others within its boundaries, applying connotations onto the Basterds as a group with one motivation and one set of morals. A noticeable difference between the two scenes analyzed here is a transition from evil being defined first via verbal signifiers (scene 2) and then via visual signifiers (scene 3). In this case, two different approaches are accordingly relevant. While one will undertake the methods hitherto applied, the other will, because of the excessive violence embedded in the visual signifiers, take into account Grodal’s theory of ‘synaesthesia’ (this is explained in the chapter ‘Evil as Defined through Visual Signifiers’). This will enable a comparison to be made between the reaction of a receiver and that of a fictional character, and thus, between their moral statuses. Lastly, because the scenes analyzed indicate a mythologizing of at least two different, widely known, cultural concepts (excepting the concepts of Nazis), it is here relevant to take into account what Barthes calls ‘second-order-signifiers’ (explained in the chapter ‘Partial Conclusion’ below). This will explain how myth is not only constructed within the Basterds ICM, but also within the cultural concepts drawn upon. In the scene analyzed below, Raine, being the only acting agent, functions as a metonymical point of reference – i.e. that through which the remainder of the Basterds are determined. Here, verbal signs play the greatest part.

Tarantino borrowed the idea of what he calls ‘men on the move’ (the Basterds) from Robert Aldrich’s film *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), in which twelve convicted criminals get a chance to elude their sentences by fighting Nazis. The most noticeable intertextual reference hereof (apart from the similarity in themes) appears in the misè-en-scene of this onset of the Basterds, where Raine explains the mission to the remainder of the crew (for visual comparison, see appendix 3, image 3 and 4). Hence, the phatic function here implied is one addressing those with the knowledge of a certain code (of Aldrich’s film) – the implied addressees – who may already here, by this intertextual reference, understand the Basterds through connotations of hard criminals, i.e. by juxtaposing them with the Dirty Dozen. However, while they are not criminals, their job is nevertheless, carried out in the excessively violent manner of a savage, as implied in the following.

#####

##### 9.2.1 Evil as Defined Through Verbal Signifiers

In this onset of the Basterds we are informed about (1) their intentions (2) motivation and (3) the manner in which they will carry out their orders, as outlined below.

(1) Signifiers of Intention: A signifier of intention represents itself as Raine explains: “Once we're in enemy territory, as a bushwhacking guerrilla army, we're going to be doing one thing and one thing only. Killing Nazis” (IB: 00:21:53). Here, the signifier of ‘guerilla armies’ is attached to the Basterds/Raine ICM infusing it with connotations of a dishonest, possibly cruel manner of fighting that disregards the laws of war (e.g. the acceptance of surrender and avoidance of unnecessary suffering). The goal of such endeavor, Raine further explains, is to induce fear in the minds of the German: “…when the German closes their eyes at night and they’re tortured by their subconscious for the evil they have done, it will be with thoughts of us that they are tortured with” (IB: 00:22: 41). Here, excessive violence is justified as a means for fighting evil. This dovetails with the conception that, as Svendsen explains: “…people do evil because they hate evil” (Svendsen, 123) and the common idea that absolute evil (here manifested in Nazis) is only removable via total eradication (Thordsten and Sørensen, 140). All rules therefore apply, and whatever horrors may result thereof are justified as means for reaching a greater good. Below I briefly outline the motivation upon which this endeavor is enacted.

(2) Signifier of Motivation: The signifier for motivation renders the above intentions an instance of idealistic evil, as Raine explains: “Nazi ain’t got no humanity. They’re the foot soldiers of a Jew-hating, mass-murdering maniac and they need to be destroyed” (IB: 00:22:22). The intentions are thus, as Landa’s in the introductory scene, based on highly irrational reasons only explainable in shallow terms. In the following I explain the methods in which they will carry out their mission and thereupon, how a process of semiosis results in a fictional denotation of evil.

(3) Signifiers of Evil Actions: In addition to the war conduct of a guerilla army, Raine further draws on signifiers of American Indians as he, in claiming to be the direct descendent of Jim Bridger, says: “…our battle plan will be that of an Apache resistance” (IB: 00:22:47). In rounding off his speech, this signifier is coupled with an explanation of what such battle plan entails: “Each and every man under my command owes me 100 Nazi scalps. And I want my scalps” (IB: 00:23:55). Hence, in alluding to both Indians and guerilla warfare, the Basterds/Raine ICM attains connotations of savagery and a dishonest war conduct. These signifiers are, as mentioned, because of the preconceived concepts of demonic Nazis, in accord with Aquinas, easily conceived of as means for achieving a greater good. This is indicated in the semiosis below.

**Signifiers:**

Fighting evil with evil evidenced in the war conducts of guerilla armies and Indians (e.g. scalping) and connoted by a reference to The Dirty Dozen

**Signifieds:**

Idealistic evil

A group of Jewish American soldiers are excessively violent and disregard war conducts in order to fight evil Nazis

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

The Basterds are idealistic evil: using excessive violence to fight Nazi evil

To the Basterds: by being a description of their ideals and endeavor

Aquinas’ evil (a cause of a greater good)

Savagery and a disregarding of the laws of war

As such, the fictional denotation here implies an idealistic evil that easily dovetails with Aguinas’ evil per accidens, i.e. most receivers will have already, prior to watching this film, established some form of justification for revenge against Nazis. This therefore entails the notion of what Bather calls a ‘revenge-narrative,’ in which he distinguishes between justice and revenge:

“Justice is the socially and judicially permissible use of violence to end evil, while revenge is the selfish act of one who believes that they have been wronged. Because the act of revenge falls outside societal forms of justice it becomes a characteristic of evil” (Bather, 87)

The receiver thus accepts what falls outside the societal forms of justice as a justifiable revenge, wherefore he also accepts evil. This justification is then believed to be the lesser of two evils. How this eye-for-an-eye motivation visually takes on demonical connotations through its execution, is explained in the following.

#### 9.3 Basterds/Raine ICM (scene 3)

Svendsen explains that, while we are likely to find violence repulsive we may also, through the aesthetic aspects of its fictional representations, find it attractive and consequently: “its moral qualities fall by the wayside” (Svendsen, 98)[[17]](#footnote-17). Because the aesthetic quality thus, with its distortion of reality, retracts our propensity for moral judgment, it also follows that the opposite case instead, prompts it. Such moral engagement (present when things appear ‘real’), or absence of same (when things appear ‘unreal’), I argue to be of special importance when the signifiers of evil, as in this scene, are mostly visual. While all forms of signifiers may result in both cognition (the receiver conceptualizes something) and emotion (the receiver reacts to something conceptualized) one may claim the latter to be the most prominent when the signifiers are visual. One could say that, while words are highly arbitrary and harmless, visual signifiers instead, tend to represent an actual, irredeemable and unambiguous threat, which causes an emotional labeling of evil.[[18]](#footnote-18) I therefore argue a receivers emotional reaction to be that which first and foremost determines the recognition of evil throughout this scene. To explain how a receiver’s moral judgment is prompted at the moments of excessive violence and how this further enables him to, through a comparison between his own reaction and that of the agent causing it, understand the latter through connotations of a radical evil, in the following I draw on Grodal’s theory of synaesthesia.

##### 9.3.1 Evil as Defined through Visual Signifiers

Signifiers of Evil through Repulsion: As Grodal explains, the more senses a film is able to activate on the basis of one (what is called synaesthesia) the more real the events activating them will feel. This is due to our experiences being based on what psychologists call ‘modality-synthesis,’ in which the activation of senses determines our measuring of reality (Grodal, 41). As in most films, this scene activates several senses on the basis of visual and audible signifiers. While these measure the level of modality, and thus of moral engagement, they also provide the basis upon which a receiver reacts to the events in the scene.

Hence, as we are initially represented to what seems an unmediated display of one scalping the head of a dead, German soldier, this scalping, by its disgusting visual signifiers accompanied with cutting sounds (see appendix 3, image 5), can be said to first and foremost activate our senses of sight and hearing, and through these, touch and smell, wherefore we label our experience with high modality. Because there are no overtly aesthetic elements to counter this modality, our moral engagement will be rather strong. While the signifier of ‘scalping’ itself connotes a form of evil, such notion is rendered unambiguous in the gap between a receiver’s own reaction of repulsion and that of a seemingly impassive one of the agent causing it. Because these do not coincide, the latter – although not explicitly enjoying scalping – becomes a variant of demonical evil (arguably, had he displayed signifiers of repulsion corresponding to the receiver’s, his moral status would likewise do so). In the following I argue how Tarantino, in extracting aesthetic elements at the moments of violence, ensures the receiver’s moral judgment and both the emotionally and conceptually based labeling of demonical evil.

Signifiers of Evil through Excessive Violence: As the Nazi sergeant, Werner Rachtman, refuses to provide information as to the whereabouts of another group of Nazis, Raine calls on Donny Donowitz who, as he explains: “…bashes … brains in with a baseball bat” (IB: 00:31:51). In the same instance we hear the sound of a club pounding on bricks from within a bunker followed by the non-diegetic, dueling music of Morricone (in this case, the music is arguably an instance of pastiche bearing similarities with the melody *The Ecstasy of Gold*), which carries on until Donowitz finally emerges from the bunker with club in hand. The aesthetic elements here thus consist of non-diegetic music coupled with a SEC analogous to the scenario of a baseball game (i.e. a baseball player entering a baseball field, ready to hit for the batting team). Within an instance however, everything becomes extremely real and violent through the seemingly unmediated visual and audible signifiers of excessive violence as Donowitz’s club hits Rachtman’s face (see appendix 3, image 6). The music stops instantly and is substituted by the crackling sound of the latter’s skull, leaving the receiver somewhat surprised by the sudden requirement for moral engagement and loss of aesthetics. The audiovisual signifiers will here evoke senses of e.g. a simulated pain and the reaction will be one of repulsion and indignation not only incompatible with the behavioral signifiers of Donowitz, but also with the remainder of the (cheering) group, the former who, after the deed, yells: “Teddy Fucking Williams knocks it out of the park! Fenway Park is on its feet for Teddy Fucking Ballgame!” (IB: 00:34:57). In juxtaposing this event with a sport, Donowitz thus exhibits the signifier of one whose emotional indifference manifests itself in a general, distorted conception of reality, and who takes pleasure in horrific acts. This, together with a cheering audience, connotes pleasure (incompatible with that of the receiver) and therefore, a state of demonical evil. This is indicated in the semiosis below.

**Signifiers:**

Emotional indifference towards otherwise repulsive things (the scalping) and a pleasure in killing

**Signifieds:**

Demonical evil

American Jews kill Nazis in cold blood and with pleasure

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

The Basterds are demonically evil

To the Basterds: the emotional state described pertains to them

|  |
| --- |
| **The Basterds/Aldo Raine (Figure 8)** |
| **Scene** | **Instrumental or Kantian evil** | **Demonical/Fictional evil** | **Idealistic evil** | **Dumb/Banal evil** |
| **2** |  |  |  |  |
| **3** |  |  |  |  |
| **19** |  |  |  |  |
| **20** |  |  |  |  |

As implied above, the emotional reaction does not exclude, but is rather a result of, the evil recognized through preconceived concepts. In this case, such recognition is the predominant determinant for the fictional denotation of evil. The tendency for demonical evil, as seen throughout the above analysis, to only apply unambiguously via visual signifiers is briefly discussed in the conclusion below.

#### 9.4 Partial Conclusion

The figure to the right (figure 8) indicates the evil status of the Basterds to only alter as its initial verbal signifiers take their visual, rather unambiguous forms (in scene 3). The extreme violence coupled with an emotional coldness not compatible with the receiver’s causes idealistic evil to side with a variant of demonical, which carries on throughout the remainder of the narrative. This indicates that demonical evil, in not being evoked in the first scene (scene 2) through verbal signifiers, only comes about through visual signifiers – a tendency argued below.

Demonical Evil as Unambiguous and Irredeemable: As Metz Implies, visual signifiers are, in their single and immediate forms, less arbitrary than verbal signifiers (the context in which they are placed does however, entail a great deal of arbitrariness). On this basis, one may argue that, because demonical evil is conceived of as an irredeemable, absolute state of being, it does not allow for the mistaken characterizations that may occur through verbal signifiers (e.g. while Landa remains demonical evil through visual signifiers, the arbitrariness of verbal signifiers allows him to transcend from idealistic into instrumental evil). Instead, for such signs to be valid, they must not only be described, but visually illustrated. As such, while Landa does not become demonical evil until he exhibits behavioral signifiers of pleasure (when taking aim at Shosanna), the Basterds likewise become so not through verbal (as those of scene 2), but visual signifiers (those of scene 3) of horrific things. As soon as demonical evil enters the ICMs of both Landa and the Basterds, because it is unambiguous and irredeemable, it remains throughout the remainder of the narrative. Consequently, idealistic evil and certain preconceived, cultural concepts are subjected to myth through a demonical notion, as explained in the following.

Mythologizing Cultural Concepts:To explain how myth occurs when cultural concepts, such as the ones outlined above, are used for constructing other concepts (in this case the Basterds), one may draw on Judith Williamson who explains such transfer of meaning as a ‘metastructure’: “…where meaning is not just ‘decoded’ within one structure, but transferred to create another…” (Goldman and Stephen, 3). This is, however, a two-way process resulting in what Barthes calls ‘second-order-signifier’ (Goldman and Stephen, 9), in which a signifier not only transfers meaning into a new context, but also attains new meaning (connotations) from the SEC of this context. The connotations here attained can then, to various degrees, challenge whatever denotation that may at the time, pertain to the cultural concept drawn upon. As such, myth may here arise from the blending of two (or more) otherwise independent concepts, whose connotations are transferred to one another.

Accordingly, below I propose two ways in which myth is created by the Basterds ICM: (1) through a second-order-signifier and (2) by having one signifier stand as a metonymical point of reference to the remainder of a cultural concept, or the Basterds ICM.

(1) Myth via Second-Order-Signifiers: The figure to the right (figure 9) indicates the process by which second-order-signifiers carry new meaning onto their original concepts in relation to the Basterds/Raine ICM. The boxes with solid frames indicate connotations already present in the concept (which may however, be reinforced by similar signifieds present in the two other concepts), whereas the boxes with dashed frames imply connotations that have been transferred from other concepts. Here, the Basterds/Raine ICM can be said to be an instance of what Barthes calls a floating signified; that is, as mentioned, it is: “…highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent” (aber.ac.uk). It is therefore not easily subjected to the influence of second-order-signifiers (i.e. there is no concept for the signifier to reflect back upon). Instead, it has a propensity to become whatever its signifiers connote and its box frames are therefore solid. In being the common ground for the two remainder concepts, the Basterds ICM also enables these to intermingle with one another, wherefore signifiers of guerilla armies attain the connotation ‘scalping of victims’ and American Indians have connotations of ‘a dishonest war conduct’ reinforced. Especially noticeable however, are the connotations constructed by the Basterds ICM itself, namely those of ‘demonical evil’ and ‘emotional coldness,’ which become second-order-signifiers transferring meaning onto the two preconceived concepts. The myths implied here are therefore ones not only fusing concepts of American Indians and guerilla armies, but also infusing these with connotations of emotional coldness and demonical evil. How the easily alterable floating signified of the Basterds/Raine ICM results in myth by only being evocable via a few signifiers, is briefly explained below.

Savagery

Scalping of victims

Emotional coldness

**American Indians**

**The Basterds ICM**

**Guerilla Army**

Emotional coldness

Savagery

Scalping of victims

Savagery

Emotional coldness

Demonical evil

Demonical evil

Scalping of victims

Demonical evil

A dishonest war conduct

A dishonest war conduct

A dishonest war conduct

’Second-order signifiers’ (figure 9)

(2) Myth via a Metonymical Point of Reference: As indicated in the figure above, only certain connotations of the cultural concepts are drawn into the Basterds ICM. These consequently become the signifiers, or metonymical points of reference, through which a receiver evokes the concepts they originally pertain to. While American Indians are therefore understood through the concept of ‘scalping one’s victims,’ guerilla armies are likewise evoked by the single definition of a ‘dishonest war conduct.’ Akin to the mythologizing of Nazi signs, this has the potential for overshadowing or possibly ruling out other connotations (e.g. of ‘the peaceful aspects of Indians’). Furthermore, by having these single definitions attain connotations of demonical evil, myth in this case, becomes one of subjecting two cultural concepts to the category of irredeemable evil, evidenced in savagery and disregarding of laws of war, as indicated in the figure above (figure 10). As such, because the connotations drawn from the cultural concepts are not rendered inconspicuous (or excluded) but instead, easily merge with the remainder of the Basterds ICM, they here stay above the dividing line. The concepts from which they are drawn are however, placed below the line and subjected to myth.

Basterds/Raine ICM (Figure 10)

**Demonical evil**

**Savagery of Indians (e.g. scalping)**

**War conduct of a guerilla army**

Idealistic evil

American Indians

Guerilla Armies

Amongst other things, the following conclusion suggests an answer to the aforementioned question that: if the world of *Ingourious Basterds* is not a Manichaean one (given that it is largely permeated by evil), which of the conflicting parties may then be regarded as antagonist/protagonist?

## 10 Final Conclusion

In addition to the signifiers above, Tarantino can be said to make use of at least two less explicit remedies for priming the evil of both of the conflicting parties. The first produces an effect similar to the foil character of LaPadite and may be found in the German soldier, Butz, who, in replying to the question of what he will do if he gets home, says (in scene 3): “I will hug my mother like I’ve never hugged her before” (IB: 00:36:48). The vague allegiance here established with Butz enhances the evil of the Basterds as they, in the manner of the aforementioned emotional coldness, thereafter carve a Swastika into his forehead. A foil is thus used for priming the evil of both parties. The second remedy is, I argue, an instance of pastiche drawn from and constructed within other cinematic representations and story-telling in general; that is, having the signifier of ‘consumption in general or in a tense and horrific situation’ connote either greed or that an otherwise tense and horrific situation does not come about as such, to the character consuming.[[19]](#footnote-19) This is a signifier also seen in films such as *Dances With Wolves* (1990), in which the ‘evil’ Pawnee Indians eat while killing a white guy (Timmons), and in *The Lord of the Rings: the Return of the King* (2003), in which the rich Denethor is seen eating in a gross and greedy manner while his son, whom he has no love for, dies tragically. In *Inglourious Basterds* such signifier is displayed both by Landa, who (in scene 1 and 5) exhibits an overt tendency to be picky as to what he consumes, and by Raine, who eats before the spectacle of excessive violence, the beating of Rachtman (see appendix 3, image 1). On such basis, and in the light of the above analysis, Tarantino can thus be said to distribute signifiers of evil somewhat equally to both parties giving us the notion that, as one critic, Landon Palmer, observes:

“…the Basterds seemed so brutal and inhumane in their acts to gain notoriety and success in the war that they no longer held great moral authority over the allegedly evil enemy they were combating—that they became evil in order to fight evil” (filmschoolrejects.com)

It thus seems that it takes evil to fight evil, and to represent the conflict in this film as such requires many similarities in signifiers of evil applied to both of its parties. One must instead turn to the rather few differences between signifiers of moral statuses in order to determine who a receiver is likely to side with, as done in the following.

Who is the Antagonist/Protagonist?: I here briefly argue that, while demonical evil is common to both the Landa and the Raine ICMs it is instead, the nature of the motivation entailed in their additional and rather inconspicuous evils – i.e. Kantian (Landa) and idealistic (Raine) evil – that eventually prompts the receiver to side with Landa. As mentioned, while idealistic evil is an irrational loathing of another group of people Kantian evil is (akin to instrumental evil) in this instance, the indifference of the misery brought to others while seeking one’s own ends. Likewise, as Raine’s evil is based on loathing and therefore remains when the conflict is over – when a new equilibrium is established – Landa’s instead somewhat subside after he has reached his goal. Landa is as such less evil than Raine in the end. Thus, when the latter (in the end scene) cuts a Swastika into Landa’s forehead it comes about as an irrational, unnecessary use of violence when violence is no longer needed. Arguably, the sympathy the receiver here feels for Landa is also somewhat a testament to his eventual recognition of the latter as the lesser of two evils (a recognition and vague allegiance also made possible by ‘last minute’ signifiers of unselfish acts and a personal loathing towards Nazi ideology[[20]](#footnote-20)).

Thus, in ‘taking Nazis out of the equation’ the conflict can be said to transcend from what might be called a macro level, being Nazis versus their adversaries, into a micro level, being Landa versus Raine. Because of the difference in these two character’s motivations (and a vague allegiance established with Landa) Landa eventually becomes the one with whom the receiver will, if not explicitly then emotionally, recognize as what comes closest to a protagonist.[[21]](#footnote-21) The ICMs of these two characters entail mythical representations of both evil and other cultural concepts, some of which are briefly outlined below.

Myths of *Inglourious Basterds*: Throughout the narrative, myths within and in connection to the Landa ICM have taken the forms of:

(Scene 1)

* Having demonical and Manichaean evil render connotations of idealistic motivation inconspicuous.
* Having all signs and the relationships between them become measured upon a single scale of good and evil.

(Scene 2 and 3)

* Having two cultural concepts attain connotations from the Basterds/Raine ICM (in the form of demonical evil) and one another through second-order-signifiers, possibly influencing current denotations.

(Scene 17 and 18)

* Having Nazi concepts marginalized and metonymically evoked through a single definition of demonical evil downplaying all other possible evils.
* Having the social implications of instrumental evil overshadowed by the demonical notion of Kantial evil (a free choice of evil).

Both Landa and the Basterds are initially applied signifiers of demonical evil, which, because of their irredeemable, baseless and unambiguous nature, are either coupled with and overshadow or wholly exclude the remainder of signifiers entering their ICMs. If not excluded, all other evils thus take the form of a mythical radicalism. This has the effect of excluding following connotations: social reasons for a deviant behavior (through Kantian evil), the idea that all evils have an aspect of good (through a Manichaean opposition in the first scene) and whatever good may otherwise pertain to the usually idealistic nature of the cultural concepts of Nazis, enemies of Nazis, American Indians and guerilla armies. The latter two are both drawn into the fictional world through the Basterds/Raine ICM, which, in being a floating signifier, functions as a free zone into which all signs can potentially enter, merge with one another and ‘leave’ with new connotations that may or may not, challenge their present denotations. Lastly, acting as remedies for such myths to come about are the cinematic or narrative tools alluding to a receiver’s emotional investment and story-schemata (i.e. his understanding of characters through actantal oppositions). While these do not, as signs, make up the substance of which myths are constructed, they instead, ensure a highlighting of certain connotations within an ICM while rendering others inconspicuous. As exemplified by the character of LaPadite, the emotional investment may result in idiosyncratic, moral codes – an effect further explored in the two following analyses.

## 11 Idiosyncratic Moral Codes

The following two analyses aim at drawing out the idiosyncratic, moral codes that, as mentioned, may be found in the gap between the two-fold recognition of evil; how we experience evil emotionally and as a concept. What I here intend to illustrate is how filmic instruments, especially the narrative, ‘fabulaic’ order (Grodal, 119),[[22]](#footnote-22) may in one film enable a receiver’s loathing of horrific acts, but prompt an acceptance of them in another. As exemplified above (through the character of LaPadite) such acceptance can only come about when a character, by having exhibited signifiers of morals compatible with those of the receiver, has established allegiance with a receiver. Accordingly, the two films here subjected to analysis may be categorized as ‘a narrative in which the protagonist initially does wrong (and only establishes alignment), but whose suffering draw on our sympathetic emotions when these wrongs are thereafter paid for (after having established allegiance)’ (*A Clockwork Orange*) and ‘a narrative in which the protagonist is initially wronged (and initially establishes allegiance) and whose wrongdoings we accept when he thereafter takes revenge’ (*The Patriot*). The difference between these is therefore one of establishing allegiance at the onset and of instead doing so *in medias res*, after having initially kept the protagonist morally incompatible with the receiver. As will be elaborated, in contrary to the case of *Inglourious Basterds*, the latter thus, by putting the protagonist through a drastic transformation, which establishes allegiance, illustrates how emotional coldness or the notion of an otherwise irredeemable, demonical evil, may be excluded from an ICM (as explained, such transformation is however, only possible through a somewhat ‘fantastical’ process or by being heavily invested with idealistic motivation). In the following I initiate by analyzing the emotional investment and signs of evil in *A Clockwork Orange*.

### 11.1 When Revenge is Evil

#### 11.1.1 A Clockwork Orange

The fictional universe of this film is akin to that of *Inglourious Basterds* on the basis of evil being represented as the rule rather than the exception. What here distinguishes perpetrators from victims is not so much an innate desire for deviant behavior (for such behavior is common to all), but instead, the inability to suppress such behavior in accord with societal laws. This conflict between natural desires and acceptable behavior is explicitly represented by the protagonist, Alex DeLarge, whose signifiers connote good, moral correctness and high class – e.g. his innocent appearance, his sometimes polite behavior and his love for Beethoven’s *Symphony Nine* – and a general propensity for taking pleasure in horrific endeavors. In the following I explain how the special case of absence and presence of allegiance throughout this narrative (allegiance is only established in part two) enables the receiver to emotionally recognize horrific actions, regardless of whether they are of a somewhat justified vengeance, as evil.

##### 11.1.1.1 Part one: A State of Alignment

The protagonist DeLarge is, apart from a few exceptions, centralized throughout the entire narrative and therefore generates a strong alignment. Already in the introductory scene he portrays signifiers clearly meant to keep the receiver’s engagement one based solely on interest, not on sympathy. Here, he initially appears in a medium-shot where he, with an unflinching and somewhat pathological gaze upon the receiver (into the camera) (see appendix 4, image 2), in the form of a voice-over narrator explains that the ‘drugs’ he and his crew are taking: “…would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of the old ultra-violence” (ACO: 00:02:04). The following is a rather systematic analysis exploring how the visual signifiers of this violence, which ensure that alignment is maintained with the receiver, initially enable three horrific actions to be seen as evil (in part one) after which an established allegiance ensures that the later retaliation of these actions (in part two), are likewise perceived of as evil – thereby revealing the presence of three idiosyncratic, moral codes.

(1) The Beating of an Old Beggar:

* **The recognition of evil as a concept:** In this scene, the voice-over narrator (henceforth referring to DeLarge) provides the signifier for motivation as he explains: “One thing I could never stand was to see a filthy dirty old drunkie…” (ACO: 00:02:25).In being a highly irrational ideal this corresponds to the category of idealistic evil (irrational loathing towards another group). This evil is however, downplayed as DeLarge and his group thereafter beat up an old beggar while cheering and laughing. In thus taking pleasure in violence demonical evil instead, comes to the fore.
* **The emotional engagement and the moral code:** Alignment with DeLarge is here maintained via signifiers of demonical evil. While this emotional recognition of evil corresponds to a common, cultural conception (or to a philosophically based conception), one may likewise say that what is registered subjectively as evil is also objectively valid as being so. These two recognitions of evil therefore consent on this scene being an instance of ‘a group of evil boys torturing a helpless old man,’ wherefore the moral codes here hinted at are not an idiosyncratic characteristic of this film.

(2) The Crippling of an Old Writer and Raping of his Wife:

* **The recognition of evil as a concept:** While driving recklessly on the road the narrator explains: “What we were after now, was the old surprise visit. That was a real kick and good for laughs and lashings of the old ultra-violence” (ACO: 00:08:28). Because this signifier entails a desire for ‘kicks’ and ‘laughs’ via the misery of others it also connotes demonical evil (demonical evil is here easily applicable through verbal signifiers because the DeLarge ICM already contains connotations of such evil). This evil is thereafter rendered unambiguous via the signifiers of DeLarge beating up an old man (a writer) while singing *Singin’ in the Rain* (from the musical of the same name by Gene Kelly) after which he rapes the victim’s wife (see appendix 4, image 3). Because pleasure is thus exhibited during the act the connotations are here of demonical evil.
* **The emotional engagement and the moral code:** Alignment is again maintained through signifiers of demonical evil. Both an emotional and conceptually based registration of evil can here be said to consent on this scene being an instance of ‘a group of evil boys torturing a helpless old man and raping his wife,’ and the moral code is therefore again not an idiosyncratic characteristic of this film.

(3) The Beating of the two Group Members Dim and Georgie:

* **The recognition of evil as a concept:** DeLarge is here singled out from the rest of the group as being the only one with a strict, demonical motivation (contradicting most films portraying a potential reality, which usually side such motivation with another evil), as the two mutinous group members, Dim and Georgie, tell him: “We go around shop crasting and the like, coming out with a pitiful rookerfull of money each … The big, big money is available…” (ACO: 00:30:45). In connoting a desire for economical gain through their actions, this stands as a signifier for instrumental evil whilst DeLarge’s motivation remains demonical in answering: “Have you not everything you need?” (ACO: 00:31:07). To regain his lost authority, as they all thereafter walk along the ‘Flatblock marina,’ DeLarge shoves Dim and Georgie into the water and with a gaze connoting great pleasure, cuts Dim’s hand as he tries to get back up (see appendix 4, image 4). Again, as pleasure accompanies the act, the connotations become ones of demonical evil.
* **The emotional engagement and the moral code:** Alignment is again maintained via signifiers of demonical evil. Because evil is both emotionally and objectively registered as ‘an evil boy cutting the hand of another evil boy,’ the moral codes are again not an idiosyncratic characteristic. The resulting semiosis of the three instances above is seen below.

**Signifiers:**

A taking pleasure in otherwise violent and repulsive things

**Signifieds:**

Demonical evil

The leader of a youth gang in Britain takes pleasure in violence

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

DeLarge is demonical evil (establishing alignment)

To DeLarge: the behavior pertains to him.

Throughout this first part of the film, the DeLarge ICM has thus through amongst others, the abovementioned signifiers, attained the fictional denotation of demonical evil. While such evil is not compatible with the moral state of the receiver, the emotional engagement remains one of alignment. The vague allegiance at the same time invested in the victims is noticeable in (1) and (2) while being excluded in (3) due to this being an instance in which both the perpetrator and the victims are evil (and only establish alignment). How the emotional labels switch places and the victims instead, become emotionally registered as perpetrators resulting in idiosyncratic, moral codes, is explained in the following.

##### 11.1.1.2 Part two: A State of Allegiance

The process of excluding demonical evil is, as mentioned, a somewhat fantastical one in which DeLarge is forced to watch numerous film clips of excessive violence. He consequently loses his ability (but not his will) to do violence and is therefore left defenseless at the mercy of a corrupt world. In accord with Grodal, because of the receiver’s awareness of the intervening element of fiction, he will easily, through a few signifiers connoting ‘goodness,’ forgive DeLarge and turn the above alignment into allegiance. One such signifier represents itself as DeLarge gives the old beggar (who at first does not recognize him) a ‘cutter’ despite having almost nothing to spare (ACO: 01:33:00). This, together with signifiers of a polite behavior is enough to make the receiver establish an allegiance, which in this instance, is reinforced by the alignment already invested. From this point on however, the allegiance is not upheld so much on the basis of signifiers connoting a sympathetic behavior (although there are a few) but on our, as Grodal explains, natural empathy towards living things (Grodal, 175). In other words, the ‘unlabeling’ of evil and sympathy for DeLarge is henceforth mostly a result of a loathing and labeling of the evil of others. Such signifiers, rendering the former victims evil as they take their revenge, are outlined in the three following instances.

(1) The Revenge of an Old Beggar:

* **The recognition of evil as a concept:** The old beggar recognizes DeLarge after having received a ‘cutter’ from him, wherefore he yells to his friends: “This is the poisonous young swine that nearly done me in” (ACO: 01:34:04). On the basis of this signifier of motivation, the old beggar thereafter becomes idealistic evil (feeling hatred towards another) as he and his friends take revenge by beating up DeLarge.
* **The emotional engagement and the moral code:** Because our sympathy for DeLarge is not at this point compatible with the beggar’s, the latter loses the vague allegiance he had initially established with the receiver (in part one) and instead, becomes emotionally recognized as evil. The fictional denotation of the beggar’s moral status has thereby transformed from a harmless victim of crime to a dangerous, idealistic evil character – a transition made possible through the emotional engagement. Here, what may objectively be seen as ‘an old man taking a justified revenge’ (if ‘an-eye-for-an-eye’ can be seen as justifiable) is instead, emotionally registered as ‘an evil old man beating up a helpless victim.’ The idiosyncratic moral code here hinted at is therefore one of rendering a justified revenge unjust.

(2) The Revenge of an Old Writer:

* **The recognition of evil as a concept:** The old writer who is now a cripple and whose wife is dead as a result of his earlier, violent encounter with DeLarge, is here initially represented with signifiers of a pathological stare – akin to DeLarge’s in the introductory scene (see appendix 4, image 5) – and a neurotic behavior connoting him somewhat mentally unstable. However, as he suddenly recognizes who DeLarge is (he recognizes Delarge’s voice as he sings *Singin’ in the Rain*) these signifiers of a neurotic state culminate in a behavioral transition akin to one being possessed by a demon (see appendix 4, image 6). From this point on his motives become ones of revenge and his behavior sinister. He therefore locks DeLarge into an upper room and plays Beethoven’s *Symphony Nine* (which has a sickening effect on DeLarge as a result of his treatment). The pleasure he here takes in listening to DeLarge suffer coupled with a sinister expression (see appendix 5, image 1) connotes demonical evil.
* **The emotional engagement and the moral code:** Here, the emotionally and conceptually based recognitions of evil do not coincide – i.e. while the events may objectively be seen as ‘one to whom a great wrong has been done seeking a mild retribution for said wrong’ they are instead, emotionally registered as ‘one who is demonical evil torturing a helpless victim.’ If allegiance were to switch places from victim to perpetrator however, the temporary torture here inflicted would seem an infinitely small price to pay for the crippling of a person and the killing of his wife, thereby implying an idiosyncratic, moral code.

(3) The Revenge of Dim and Georgie:

* **The recognition of evil as a concept:** Dim and Georgie have in this scene become police officers and beat DeLarge up with the intention, as they explain to him, of making: “…sure you stay cured” (ACO: 01:36:40). While this seems an ironic statement and cannot be seen as a signifier for intention it instead, connotes their awareness of DeLarge’s defenseless state (an awareness they also make explicit in other ways). This, together with their cheers and laughs as they thereafter beat up DeLarge, connotes a demonical state of evil.
* **The emotional engagement and the moral code:** Here, the receiver’s sympathy with DeLarge as a helpless victim is incompatible with that of the perpetrators’, wherefore the latter are emotionally recognized as evil. Thus, what is emotionally justified as ‘evil boys torturing a good, helpless victim,’ can instead objectively be perceived of as ‘evil boys torturing an evil, helpless victim.’ The idiosyncratic moral code here implied is therefore one of downplaying the otherwise evil nature of DeLarge and of easily forgiving him for his horrific crimes. The semiosis resulting from the three instances of retaliation described above in connection to the protagonist is seen below.

**Signifiers:**

Sparing a ‘cutter’ to a beggar and being helpless in an otherwise corrupt world.

**Signifieds:**

Generous, good, helpless

A former violent person has been ‘cured’ and is now good and generous, but helpless

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

DeLarge is good and generous (establishing allegiance)

To DeLarge: the behavior pertains to him.

The fictional denotation of good is here enabled by only a few signifiers but greatly intensified via the interest already taken in the protagonist (the alignment made possible through character centralization) prior to these signifiers entering the DeLarge ICM. This interest is one not benefited from by the characters seeking revenge in part two (they have not been centralized) wherefore their revengeful acts, in bringing misery to the character with whom the receiver has allegiance, do not draw on sympathy, but loathing. In the ‘process of exclusion,’ whereby a receiver avoids those with whom he is not morally compatible with, he will here e.g. discard signifiers of perversity (connoted by the prison priest), of a demonical behavior (connoted by the old writer) and even of the moral authorities (connoted by Dim and Georgie’s jobs as police officers). This narrows the receiver’s choice of where to place his sympathy down to an easy one of establishing and maintaining allegiance with DeLarge. In the following I briefly explain how the unusual chronological order of the events of this narrative, in contrary to a ‘revenge-narrative,’ keeps the receiver from emotionally accepting revenge as good.

### 11.2 Partial Conclusion

The moral codes implied above can be said to be idiosyncratic because without the established allegiance, the recognition of evil would be different. Accordingly, where allegiance has not yet been established with neither perpetrator nor victim, a receiver will judge wrongdoings more objectively and unbiased – i.e. as a person stepping into a fight between two unknown people. In such case, the taking of sides will instead be determined by the ‘immediate’ signifiers of good and evil represented. On this basis I argue that, because allegiance determines which character the receiver sides with the point at which it is established is also crucial to whether or not this character’s wrongdoings are emotionally experienced as ‘rights.’ The initial alignment and eventual transition to allegiance throughout the narrative of this film is seen below (in figure 11). Here, because allegiance is first established with DeLarge in part two, the wrongdoings he carries out in part one are also perceived of as evil. If on the other hand, part one and two switch places and the protagonist is therefore initially wronged and establishes allegiance at the onset, the actions he thereafter carries out (typically in the form of revenge) are not emotionally recognized as evil – i.e. as in contrary to the revenge of the old writer and the beggar. This has the effect of effacing a state of alignment (part one above) altogether. On such basis, allegiance can be seen as a ‘moral filter’ turning all connotations that may have otherwise been of evil into good as they enter the ICM of the protagonist. An example of this effect is seen in the revenge-narrative of the film *The Patriot*, which is analyzed in the following.


### 11.3 When Revenge is Good

#### 11.3.1 The Patriot

Vengeance narratives such as *The Patriot* are, as Bather explains, common to contemporary Hollywood cinema and: “…allow audiences to enjoy acts of torture and murder that we normally would not condone under other circumstances” (Bather, 88). As I argue, such enjoyment is only possible if the protagonist exhibits signifiers of a sympathetic behavior throughout the onset and thereby, initially establishes allegiance with the receiver. In this film (concerning the American war of independence) the protagonist, Benjamin Martin, who has initially established allegiance, likewise seeks vengeance after having had one of his sons killed, his house burned down and his family threatened – all by the same, demonical evil antagonist, the English Colonel William Tavington. This results in a binary opposition akin to the one in the introductory scene of *Inglourious Basterds*, in which the vast and otherwise complex relationship between two opposing groups (the English and the American) is reduced to and becomes metonymically evocable by, a single scale of good and evil (Martin and Tavington). Consequently, the death and torturing of all that stand between ‘good’ and its revenge on ‘evil’ is emotionally recognized as being acceptable. How signifiers of good morals initially establish allegiance is explained in the following.

Signifiers Establishing Allegiance: In order to encapsulate a wide target group Hollywood cinema must be mindful of the phatic functions it employs, and thus, as Bather explains, of: “…both the ‘American-ness’ of its product, and more specifically of its villains and the ways in which any stereotypical depictions … offend an important sector of the global market” (Bather, 9). The moral codes of *The Patriot* likewise target a contemporary audience while ensuring that none of the conflicting parties, i.e. the English and the American, are subjected to negative stereotypes – e.g. akin to Landa’s detachment from Nazis in *Inglourious Basterds*, the irredeemably evil antagonist, Tavington, is here detached from ‘Englishness’ altogether because other Englishmen find him ruthless. The phatic function establishing allegiance with Martin (which mainly occurs throughout the initial thirty minutes of the narrative) can be said to employ similar codes. The signifiers Martin exhibits connote ideals of equality between all people regardless of race and nationality. The Black people working on his farm are therefore not slaves (even though slaves were common at the time), as they explain: “We work this land. We’re freed men” (TP: 00:26:55) and instead of only treating injured American soldiers, he also treats the English (TP: 00:24:54). As such, he does not perceive of the English as irredeemably evil and therefore, to draw on Bather, believes that they can be dealt with in other ways than via total eradication, as he says: “There are alternatives to war. We take our case before the King. We plead with him” (TP: 00:13:17). The resulting semiosis of these signifiers of good morals can be seen below.

**Signifiers:**

Regarding all people as equals regardless of race and nationality.

**Signifieds:**

Good morals

An American, who is a retired soldier, regards all men equal during the war of independence

**Syntagmatic effect of combination:**

**Combined to character through:**

**Fictional denotation of evil:**

Martin has good moral values (establishing allegiance)

To Martin: the ideals pertain to him

Thus, by dealing with amongst many others, the abovementioned signifiers as means for establishing allegiance with Martin, the phatic function clearly stands out as one targeting a contemporary, Western audience. In the following I briefly explain how signifiers of evil represent themselves as Tavington initially, through horrific deeds, provides the basis for Martin’s violent, but emotionally justified revenge.

The Revenge of Benjamin Martin: We initially see Tavington approach Martin’s farm accompanied by the signifier of non-diegetic, sinister music, unambiguously connoting danger in his presence. Signifiers of emotional coldness thereafter permeate his expression as he orders the farm burnt down and Martin’s son hanged for being an American soldier. This prompts another of Martin’s sons to physically assault an English soldier, wherefore Tavington, with a slight hint of pleasure, shoots him and says: “Stupid Boy” (00:29:45). Both emotionally and visually will a receiver here recognize evil as manifested in Tavington. The signifiers of evil exhibited during this scene serve the foundation for accepting the forthcoming horrors that Martin, from this point on, inflicts upon the English army. An example of this ‘justified’ revenge is given below.

* **The recognition of evil as a concept:** In this scene Martin and two of his sons pursue the English soldiers in order to rescue the captured son from being hanged. Here, after in an ambush having at first killed several English soldiers, Martin endeavors to – with signifiers of a ferocious, violent nature – kill the remaining nine men with an axe. Even though the battle has thereafter been won and there is no need for further violence, Martin nevertheless throws his axe in the back of a fleeing, English soldier, which, by connoting ‘unnecessary’ violence, stands as a signifier for demonical evil. With the signifiers of a blood-soaked face expressing ferocity and again, emotional coldness, he then pursues to repeatedly stab the corpse of the now dead soldier (see appendix 5, image 2).
* **The emotional engagement and the moral code:** As allegiance is here established with the perpetrator, all otherwise horrific actions are, as mentioned, to pass through a moral filter rendering them emotionally recognized as ‘good’ prior to entering the Martin ICM. One may argue that, because the signifiers of this otherwise atrocious deed are represented aesthetically (as in contrary to scene 3 of *Inglourious Basterds*) via slow-motion effects and non-diegetic ‘thrill music,’ the receiver’s propensity for moral judgment is rather diminished by the seeming absence of reality. This biased and morally rather passive approach to this scene consequently prompts the receiver to accept the death of twenty English soldiers (with whom the protagonist has no quarrel beyond that of them being in his way) and the unnecessary killing of a fleeing soldier (connoting a demonical motivation) as means for reaching a good man’s ends. Again, if allegiance was to switch places to any of the English soldiers, Martin can be said to instead, stand out as a demonical evil perpetrator executing horrific acts on good characters. Thus, the idiosyncratic moral code can in this instance, be found in the gap between the concept-based recognition of ‘a demonical evil man ferociously slaughtering twenty English soldiers’ and ‘a good man killing English soldiers as a means for the greater good of saving his son’ – the latter made possible through the established allegiance.In light of the findings above, in the following I conclude amongst other things, by explaining how the narrative order of this film thus allows for an acceptance of evil.

## 11.4 Final Conclusion

As implied in the two above analyses, even though easily recognizable cultural concepts of evil frequently appear throughout *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Patriot*, the meanings these carry to the receiver are nevertheless partly determined by filmic instruments such as e.g. character centralization and the allegiance established via signifiers of good morals – all alluding to a somewhat subjective perception. As Grodal implies, the awareness of the intervening element of fiction enables a receiver to favor such rather subjective perception over possible, concept-based recognitions of evil, consequently resulting in idiosyncratic, moral codes.

Because allegiance in *A Clockwork Orange* is established *in medias res*, the receiver will not throughout the first part of the narrative, perceive of the protagonist’s horrific actions as good, whereas if it is instead, as in *The Patriot*, established at the onset, such otherwise horrific acts may be seen as merely the cause of a greater good – thereby effacing alignment altogether (see figure 12). Allegiance may however be argued to be eroded if the protagonist’s horrific actions are not accompanied by a somewhat understandable motivation, which, as Bather explains, often takes the form of revenge in Hollywood cinema. One could argue that it is this propensity for revenge that often separates a fictional, good character, from an absolute evil one – the latter’s motivation instead, being foundationless. One may here allude to amongst others, David B. Morris, who suggests that in the postmodern era (interpreted by Svendsen): “…evil can no longer be understood as the cause of suffering: Instead, suffering in itself should be regarded as evil” (Svendsen, 23). Evil is thereby separated from the individual’s responsibility and is merely the cause of an effect. Likewise, revenge is not believed to be evil but merely a consequence of evil (there are only evils suffered) and is thus, a phenomenon with an origin found elsewhere than within the agent causing it. In contrary, Tavington is an example of evil without an origin, or unjust evil; analogously, he carries a ‘ball of evil’ which he throws to Martin via horrific acts, and the latter, who is not evil without the ball, is hence justified in throwing it back via horrific acts. When people throw the ball of evil onto others, it is only because someone has passed it onto them in the first place. But if one has not, as in the case of Tavington, been handed this ball despite being the agent enabling an evil, the horrific deeds one carries out must be seen as innate, coming solely from within oneself and therefore, as absolute evil.

Likewise, as mentioned, if part one and two in the narrative of *A Clockwork Orange* were to switch places, the audience would understand DeLarge’s evil as one originating from elsewhere than his own, sinister nature. For him to be understood as ‘good’ however, as evidenced by the three instances of characters seeking revenge (whose revenge was registered as evil), he must establish an allegiance based on a strong alignment (character centralization). Conclusively, in contrast to most scenes of *Inglourious Basterds*, the rather strong emotional engagement throughout the two films analyzed here, rendering revenge justified in one instance (when allegiance is established) and unjust in another (when only alignment is established), allows for the employment of idiosyncratic moral codes, and thereby, the distortion of cultural concepts of evil.

# 12 Conclusion

The Signifiers of Evil: Common to the films analyzed above is the prevalence of signifiers connoting demonical evil as a means for portraying the thereby, rather foundationless motivation of a villain; the absence of a social history and therefore, of a point from which whatever evil is carried out may originate. As such, signifiers connoting irredeemable evil marginalize what in postmodern, philosophical terms are seen as realistic intentions – i.e. those of dumb/banal, idealistic and instrumental evil – and instead, the fictional based conceptions of a Manichaean, Kantian (the notion of a free choice) and absolute evil come to the fore. Two reasons for the overshadowing nature of demonical evil may be suggested. First, because it is more or less only represented via unambiguous and irredeemable, visual signifiers, it cannot be contradicted or disproved by the redeemable, verbal signifiers of other evils. Second, when it has at first entered a character ICM its baseless form tends to marginalize or wholly exclude all other evils, which are, in a postmodern philosophical perspective, believed to entail some form of origin. Demonical evil consequently creates and stands on top of a hierarchy within the ICMs to which it applies, modifying all evils beneath it and only leaving explicit those entailing evil as absolute. However, as these enter the story-worlds of films, they may be subjected to a SEC giving them a new, idiosyncratic meaning, which may come about through a receiver’s emotional engagement, as mentioned in the following.

The Emotional Recognition of Evil and Revenge-narratives: Perceiving of a concept of evil through an emotionally biased perspective may lead to a distortion of its meaning. This may trigger a new meaning in stark opposition to its original one. That is, when a state of allegiance has been established with a character, it functions as a moral filter through which all connotations of evil are transformed into ‘good’ as they enter this character’s ICM. While this effect is only explicit in *Inglourious Basterds* via the characters of LaPadite and Dreyfus, in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Patriot* it is instead, an extensive phenomenon engendered by motivations of revenge.

**The revenge:** To explain how revenge manifests itself, one can draw on Bather who claims Hollywood revenge-narratives to often deal with the notion of an Elizabethan revenger, who, in contrast to the vengeful justice of the Christian, where the revenger is regretful of his actions, instead: “…gains satisfaction from … revenge and it is this satisfaction that is sinful” (Bather, 88).[[23]](#footnote-23) In that same way, in *A* *Clockwork Orange*, because Dim, Georgie and the old writer exhibit signifiers of pleasure as they take their revenge on DeLarge (connoting demonical evil), they can be seen of as sinful. *The Patriot* however, entails the case of vengeful, Christian justice as Martin’s horrific acts, although ferocious, are never coupled with signifiers of pleasure (the ferocity and emotional coldness he displays may however, be said to transcend into demonical evil). Also, revenge becomes morally acceptable when the evil it entails do not originate from the revenger himself, but from some external force. Evil in such case becomes a concept detached from its agent and merely the cause of an effect. Therefore, as Martin’s revenge in *The Patriot* causes an evil initially handed to him by Tavington and therefore, originates from an external force, he is not perceived of as evil. Tavington on the other hand, is not granted this explanation for his evil deeds, wherefore evil must be seen to originate from himself as an innate characteristic.

**The overshadowing emotional engagement:** As evidenced via the special narrative of *A Clockwork Orange*, the greatest determinant for the labeling of a revengeful act as either good or evil is however, whether or not the agent carrying it out has established allegiance. While signifiers of good and evil, justified or unjustified, Christian or Elizabethan revenge, may be the enablers of allegiance, whether the latter allows for a receiver to side with a certain character depends on how strong the alignment (or the interest taken in this character) is. Illustrative of such effect is the difference between the revengeful acts of the old writer in *A Clockwork Orange* (a character with whom a strong alignment has not been established), which are emotionally recognized as evils, whereas those of Martin in *The Patriot* (a character with whom allegiance based on a strong alignment has been established) are instead, emotionally recognized as the cause of a greater good. In both cases, the acts of revenge thus distort the connotations usually embedded in the signifiers of the evil they portray so as to either represent good or radical evil – thereby implying idiosyncratic, moral codes. Via an acceptance of something that is normally good as evil, such effect can be said to be a mythologizing one. How *Inglourious Basterds* results in such myths is briefly elaborated below, followed by some concluding observations.

Myths: Because evil is determined via a character’s intentions and motivations, the mythical depictions of evil in *Inglourious Basterds* also spring from the character ICMs. In being floating signifiers – and therefore harboring indefinite meanings – these ICMs act as free zones into which preconceived concepts (with definite meanings) can easily enter. As they do so, the SEC of these ICMs may infuse them with new connotations that can to various extents, in the form of second-order-signifiers, challenge their current denotations. As mentioned above, because a common denominator for these character ICMs is a demonical motivation, this results in the cultural concepts of Nazis, enemies of Nazis, American Indians and guerilla armies potentially attaining connotations of absolute, irredeemable evil. In general, as implied by the mythical exclusion of instrumental evil by Kantian evil, the most noticeable mythologizing of evil above (and as Bather implies, in the majority of media texts) is the marginalizing or exclusion of social history and logical intentions by the presence of absolute and foundationless, demonical evil. Amongst other things, the final discussion below briefly takes the extensive use of this fictional denotation into consideration.

Final Observations: “Cinematic evil becomes a pastiche of itself, a purely stylistic exercise, and ultimately a simulacrum, a representation without an original. Movies engage with this in order, not to interrogate evil, but to create the kinds of spectacle that are required to foster and sustain the cinematic experience” (Bather, 189).

On the basis of this reference to Baudrillard’s ‘simulacrum,’[[24]](#footnote-24) one may argue that evil within cinematic representations becomes akin to Barthes’ floating signifier – i.e. a signifier with no definite meaning (or no referent) – wherefore it can easily be applied to anything within the boundaries of a fictional world. With the loss of an origin, Baudrillard explains, things cannot: “…develop logically or dialectically any more, but only chaotically or randomly” (Baudrillard, 9). This dovetails with the ‘empty,’ floating signifiers of (demonical) evil prevailing in the ICMs above, i.e. signifiers with an illogical existence; phenomena devoid of origin, actions devoid of motivation, behavior and ideals devoid of a social history. Instead, the meaning these signifiers harbor is, as mentioned, solely derived from their intertextual references (in the form of pastiche) to other cinematic representations of evil. As such, the never ending ‘search’ for a reality behind the representation, or for a referent (i.e. the infinite process of semiosis), of evil within Hollywood cinema, only ever prompts another representation. Because of the cliché like propensity for depictions of absolute, irredeemable evil, this representation is likely to be equally devoid of a logical existence. With Baudrillard’s simulacrum in mind, such fictional denotations, which are exemplified throughout the films above, merge with reality and may easily substitute the denotations of what we perceive of as ontologically correct. If perceiving of evil as demonical is or becomes an instance of habitual thinking, the otherwise infinite semiosis of conceptualizing evil may be shot-circuited, leaving its definition one determined solely by media texts with hegemony over its use.A habit of thinking about evil as an absolute may thus be constructed and held intact by the media. As Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Keith Tester explains, only through the selective nature of the media, which this project clearly gives examples of, do the majority of people in Western countries even experience evil (Thordsten and Sørensen, 75).

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1. While the immediate object is a mental representation of an object that may be equivalent to the object as it exists in reality, the mediate object is beyond the sign, i.e. unreachable (Nöth, 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. While induction is a result of the facts, deduction is a rule that may be imposed on the facts (signosemio.com). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Barthes further explains that, to limit these interpretations, the picture is often coupled with a text explaining how to interpret it (Grodal, 254). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. One could in other words, think of this as the ability of visual signifiers to refer to numerous signifieds and what signified is referred to, depends on the context of the signifier (Grodal, 254). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. While this paradigm excludes the theological, it can nevertheless be said to parallel the Augustinian free choice and the propensity for humans to corrupt the good as implied by the Original Sin (however, the consequences of the Original Sin is a heritage not chosen by the individual, whereas Kant’s self-love is an individual choice (plato.stanford.edu)). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In defining what it meant to ’think’ and thereby prevent banal evil, Arendt , drawing on Kant, suggested three maxims; (1) to think anonymously (2) to put yourself in others’ position (3) to always think consistently (Svendsen, 132). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Svendsen further excludes pathologically based evil because it entails the absence of the human possibility of selecting between multiple choices. Instead, he focuses on evil enacted by the case of a common person (Svendsen, 71) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Homeostasis is developed from Aristotle’s ’catharsis,’ which is believed to be a purification one gets after having experienced strong feelings – e.g. from watching a tragedy (Grodal, 71) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. To describe the ‘fantastic,’ Carroll draws on Tzvetan Todorov’s study *The Fantastic,* in which fantastical realms are said to: “…not abide by scientific laws as we know them but have their own laws” (Carroll, 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This plot structure consists of four stages: ’onset’, in which the monster’s existence is revealed, ‘discovery’, in which the characters seek information about the monster, ‘confirmation’, in which the discoverers of the monster are to convince others of its existence and ‘’confrontation’, in which the monster is confronted (Carroll, 99). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In this case, a story-schema is a general concept of a film narrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. A general concept of what constitutes a certain type of person [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. That is, films drawing strongly on sympathetic emotions. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. While the diegetic content is everything represented within a fictive universe, the non-diegetic content has its source outside this universe e.g. in the form of background music (Grodal, 40). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The remainder being that victims are dehumanized and violence authorized (Vetlesen, 16) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. According to Arendt, Eichmann portrayed the opposite case, i.e. while he openly claimed to act according to the categorical imperative, he regarded universal laws not as ones applicable to all people, but as those of his society (those of the Third Reich). He could therefore, despite his intentions, be regarded as contributing to Kantian evil (i.e. to Hitler’s ‘the final solution’) (Laustsen and Rendtorff, 157). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In support of this argument, Svendsen refers to Plato, who claimed that: “The aesthetic object is dangerous because it’s irrational” (Svendsen, 97-98). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. One could also argue that, while verbal signifiers are highly arbitrary and therefore require a certain amount of cognition, visual signifiers instead, being handed to the receiver somewhat ready formed, makes more room for emotional reaction. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. To argue the connotations of ’greed,’ one may suggest a general tendency which, in accord with Thorstein Veblen, springs from the general notion that (conspicuous) consumption is a characteristic of the wealthy (greedy) (Veblen, 22-23, 58). In a more scientific way, the signifier of ‘eating in a horrific situation’ connotes an unnatural behavior because, as Grodal mentions, the bodily reaction to ‘fight or flight’ causes the stomach muscles to retract, making it impossible to eat (Grodal, 64). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. That is, when Landa wants the Basterds to all receive Congressional Medals of Honor and when he personally places a bomb beneath Hitler and Goebbels’ seats in the cinema. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In accord with Greimas’ actantial model however, because both characters work towards a new equilibrium, they may both be seen as protagonists, wherefore Nazis would be the antagonists. But because Nazis do not take an active part in the conflict they instead, merely become the basis for an object (the object of bringing down the Third Reich) and Landa and Rain must as such, be seen as the actual conflicting parties. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. While fabula is, as Grodal explains, a canonical narrative told in a chronological order, syuzhet is instead, one told in an unchronological order (Grodal, 119). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Craig Harris explains the Elizabethan revenger to be: “...entirely self-conscious, and entirely black, a complete embodiment of evil” (Bather, 88). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Baudrillard explains simulacrum as a depiction: “…detached from notions of mimesis and representation…” creating its own reality without an origin (Lane, 84). He further explains that, in the postmodern, Western world, all representations are devoid of such origin – what are ‘behind’ them are other representations. It is to be noted that, Baudrillard’s theories have been widely criticized by amongst others, Douglas Kellner, who explains that they represent a contradictory, epistemological confusion in at the same time claiming both the existence and absence of reality (in discussing the nature of reality, Baudrillard assumes that in contrary to others, he knows what that reality is) (Kellner, 185-186). Kellner does however emphasize their usefulness for pointing out the key player, the media, in social change. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)