Ib Margido Grønmo

Mother! and the Cue Approach

Cues, Emotions, and Mood

Master's thesis in FILM3090
Supervisor: Eva Bakøy

June 2021

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Ib Margido Grønmo

Mother! **and the Cue Approach**

Cues, Emotions, and Mood

◻ NTNU

Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Abstract

In this thesis, my primary aim is to examine important aspects of what makes *Mother!* (Aronofsky, 2017) an emotionally engaging film, but in order to do this in a nuanced and effective way, I have decided to integrate three theoretical perspectives about emotional engagement (narrative engagement theory, character engagement theory, and mood theory) into an analytical framework that is capable of analyzing different aspects of a film's emotional appeal. I call this analytical framework the *cue approach*, and by combining different insights from several cognitive film theorists, the cue approach is designed to be able to examine a variety of *cues* (signals) that can elicit a variety of emotional responses, including story-directed emotions (curiosity and suspense), character-directed emotions (sympathy, empathy, and feelings of closeness), and mood. Overall, I will argue that *Mother!* is structured to elicit a high degree of curiosity, suspense, feelings of closeness, embodied empathy, sympathy, and an eerie and anxious focalized mood, and I will argue that these elements are important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film.

Number of words: 39706

Sammendrag

I denne tesen, så er hovedmålet mitt å utforske viktige aspekter av hva som gjør *Mother!* (Aronofsky, 2017) til en emosjonelt engasjerende film. For å kunne gjøre dette på en nyansert og effektiv måte, så har jeg bestemt meg for å integrere tre teoretiske perspektiv som handler om emosjonelt engasjement (narrativt engasjement teori, karakter engasjement teori, og stemnings-teori) inn i et analytisk rammeverk som er i stand til å analysere ulike aspekter av en films emosjonelle appell. Jeg kaller dette analytiske rammeverket for «the *cue approach*», og ved å kombinere innsikt fra flere kognitive film-teoretikere, så er «the cue approach» designet for å kunne undersøke en variasjon med «*cues*» (signaler) som kan lokke frem en variasjon av emosjonelle responser, inkludert historie-rettede emosjoner (nysgjerrighet og suspens), karakter-rettede emosjoner (sympati, empati, og følelser av nærhet), og stemning. Alt i alt, så vil jeg argumentere for at *Mother!* er strukturert for å lokke frem en høy grad av nysgjerrighet, suspens, følelser av nærhet, kroppslig empati, sympati, og en uhyggelig og engstelig stemning, og jeg vil argumentere for at disse elementene er viktige aspekter av hva som gjør *Mother!* til en emosjonelt engasjerende film.

Antall ord: 39706

Table of Contents

1 Chapter 1: Introduction

For as long as I can remember, I have been drawn to movies because of their ability to evoke powerful emotions in me. I have a particularly vivid memory from my childhood, where my mother took me to the cinema to see the animated feature film *Beauty and the Beast* (Trousdale & Wise, 1991). I was only four years old, it was my first time at the cinema, and I had no idea what was in store for me. My eyes and ears followed Belle (Paige O'Hara) with great interest, as she entered the castle's forbidden and mysterious west wing, even though the Beast (Robby Benson) had explicitly told her not to go in there. This west wing scene consists of several elements that, at the time, made a strong impression on me: the broken mirror, the powerful and strange music, the darkness, the destroyed objects, the general state of disarray, Belle's expressive curiosity, the torn picture of a man, the beautiful and enchanted rose that stood in stark contrast to the bleak environment, and lastly, the anger of the Beast as he catches Belle red-handed. These elements combined to form a powerful expression that frightened me so much that I ran out of the auditorium in a crying fit. My mother caught up to me just outside the entrance, and after some effective hysterics, and a few sneak peeks through the doorway to satisfy my curiosity, my mother conceded, and we left Belle in the dust. I was simply too scared to continue watching, even though I wanted to see more. However, we still ended up talking about the movie for the rest of the day, about how fun, mysterious, exciting, and frightening it was. Of course, we went back to see it later that week, and we both thought the film was amazing. From that moment on, I wanted to watch movies every week.

So, what's the point of this story? When I am writing a thesis of this magnitude, I find it important to remind myself of where I come from, where my relationship with movies began, and why I love them so much. Certainly, there are many reasons why I love movies, but the primary reason is that I simply love to feel. Movies invite us to feel a variety of emotions and bodily feelings, and through these affects, we can learn something about ourselves. Through our curiosity, fear, disgust, anger, sadness, happiness, and laughter, we learn something about what is important to us. Moreover, because we get to experience these affects in a safe environment, these emotions and feelings can be fun and exciting in themselves, even though we would rather not experience many of them in real life. Thus, it seems clear to me that the emotional appeal of a film is an important attraction in itself, and that most filmmakers will strive towards creating emotional experiences that spectators can appreciate. In general, I think that this emotional appeal is a large part of what makes movies engaging for most spectators, and that our emotional engagement in movies is an important topic that deserves to be investigated closely. Now, many years have passed since my initial experience with the cinema, and I have had the pleasure of being touched and terrified by a myriad of films, and these experiences have probably shaped me in more ways than I know. It is this background that has fueled my interest in film studies, and more specifically, my interest in the relationship between movies and spectators. Because of this, most of my time – as a film student - has been devoted to learning more about emotions, moods, feelings, and how movies can elicit such responses in spectators. Over the years, I have also paid particular attention to movies that have had a powerful emotional impact on me, and I have asked myself why and how this came to be.

A few years back, I felt a powerful affective experience when I saw *Mother!* (Aronofsky, 2017) for the first time in the cinema. In *Mother!*, we follow the protagonist Mother (Jennifer Lawrence), who is living a peaceful and tranquil life in a secluded forest mansion with her husband Him (Javier Bardem). Mother is happily renovating their home, and Him

is a write/poet that is struggling with writer's block. Suddenly, Mother's tranquil existence is interrupted by the arrival of two unannounced visitors: Man (Ed Harris) and Woman (Michelle Pfeiffer). They seem to have stumbled upon Mother's home by accident, and for some reason, Him invites them to stay for as long as they want, despite Mother's clear distress signals. What follows is a series of strange, uncomfortable, and frightening events, where Mother's home is gradually invaded by more and more strangers that become increasingly unreasonable and vile. We begin to understand that these strangers are actually crazy fans of Him, and for some reason, Him wants all of the strangers to stay, regardless of their inappropriate behaviour. Mother's fear and anxiety continues to grow while she slowly but surely loses control over the situation, and it doesn't take long before she loses everything she holds dear. The home invasion escalates into a completely chaotic and nightmarish scenario, and by the time Mother realizes what is going on, it's too late for her to escape her cruel fate.

Without going into great detail about the discourse that surrounds the film, a central point of interest has been to uncover and explain the film's many mysteries, and of course, this is often the case with movies that leave a lot of questions unanswered. A quick glance at parts of the film's reception context reveals this. For example, several film critics and journalists point to the film's heavy use of symbols, metaphors, and allegories, in an effort to explain what it all means. Supposedly, Him represents *God*, Mother represents *Mother Earth*, Man and Woman represents *Adam* and *Eve*, Him's crystal represents the *Tree of Knowledge*, the horde of visitors represents *humanity*, and the list goes on. The general gist of these interpretations is that *Mother!* is a mystery/horror story about God, creation, and humanity's careless destruction of our shared habitat, viewed from the perspective of Mother Earth (see, e.g., Goldberg, 2017; Miller, 2017; Wilkinson, 2017). From this perspective, the film can be understood as a critique of humanity's unsustainable behaviour, and as a cry for change: we should take better care of our planet, our home, our *Mother*. This understanding of the film seems to resonate with the intentions of the film's director, Darren Aronofsky, as he has repeatedly told interviewers that *Mother!* is a home invasion horror story from the perspective of *Mother Nature*. For Aronofsky, the horrifying events of *Mother!* is meant to reveal how badly we treat our planet, and it is intended to be a sort of wake-up call, a cautionary tale that can inspire change and action (see, e.g., Dockterman, 2017; TIFF Originals, 2017; MovieZine, 2017).

This allegory interpretation is certainly interesting, but what fascinates me even more about Aronofsky's oeuvre is that there is a sort of brutal "scare them straight" aesthetic running through several of his films. In *Requiem for a Dream* (Aronofsky, 2000), we follow four drug addicts that completely succumb to their addictions, which ends up destroying their lives in horribly graphic ways. In *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010), we follow a ballet dancer who becomes more than a little obsessed with keeping and perfecting her role as the Swan Queen. Her obsession spirals out of control, she gradually loses her sanity, and she mortally wounds herself during one of her hallucinations. And now, there's *Mother!*, an apocalyptic horror story that foregrounds the despicable actions humanity visits upon Mother Nature. None of these films have happy endings, and it seems to me that they are structured to elicit a great deal of stress, tension, anxiety, fear, and pity, and that these negative responses have a considerable effect on how we view the subject matter. For example, after seeing *Requiem for a Dream*, it became perfectly clear to me that addiction is gruesome. After seeing *Black Swan*, I certainly dialed down my own ideals, obsessions, and desires for perfection. Similarly, *Mother!* made me reflect on how badly we treat our environment, and how pitiful it is that in the end, we are only destroying ourselves. These

films seem to thrust anxiety, fear, pain, and suffering into our faces to make us reflect and grow through our own suffering. In other words, we are invited to feel strong negative emotions in an effort to scare us straight.

Now, this thesis is not meant to be a thematic analysis or an auteur study, and the larger point I am making here is that emotions and affects are important parts of what makes movies engaging. These affects are attractions in themselves, and they motivate our thoughts and reflections. Therefore, I think it's important to examine how movies are structured to elicit emotions, and I think that while a lot of attention has been paid to solving the *Mother!*'s many mysteries, very little attention has been paid to how *Mother!* elicits emotions, including the emotion that has motivated this inquisitive search for answers to begin with: curiosity. Certainly, *Mother!* seeks to elicit a high degree of curiosity, but it also seeks to elicit other emotions and affects. For me, the film was an incredibly anxiety-inducing experience that left me somewhat devastated. I felt a great deal of curiosity, suspense, fear, pity, and other affects, and afterwards, I was left wondering how the film was able to provoke such a strong emotional response in me. It is with all of this in mind, that I approach this film with a sense of wonder and curiosity. I think *Mother!* deserves to be investigated closely, and I want to examine how the film is structured to elicit emotional responses.

With this in mind, my task in this thesis is twofold. My primary aim in this thesis is to examine important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film, but in order to do this in a nuanced and effective way, I have decided to integrate three theoretical perspectives about emotional engagement into an analytical framework that is capable of analyzing different aspects of a film's emotional appeal. I write *important aspects*, because movies are emotionally engaging for a large variety of reasons, and spectators may respond in completely different ways to the same movie, so it's virtually impossible to cover every aspect of a film's emotional appeal. Despite this, I think it's important to examine a film from more than one perspective, because movies can elicit a wide range of emotional responses. Because of this, the purpose of my analytical framework, which I call the *cue approach*, is quite simple. By combining different insights from several cognitive film theorists, my cue approach is designed to be able to examine a variety of *cues* (signals) that can elicit a variety of emotional responses, including story-directed emotions (curiosity and suspense), character-directed emotions (sympathy, empathy, and feelings of closeness), and mood. Hopefully, by utilizing the cue approach, I should be able to uncover important aspects of *Mother!*'s emotional appeal. Of course, I will go into detail about this later.

In the following segment (1.1), I briefly discuss the method I will be using in this thesis. The following chapter is a theory chapter (chapter 2), and the purpose of that chapter is to define and clarify key terms and theoretical concepts, and to integrate different theoretical perspectives about emotional engagement into an approach that I will use to analyze *Mother!* in the following chapter. I will begin with a short discussion about why I have chosen to rely solely on cognitive film theory for this thesis. Following this, I will examine what emotions are, how we can respond emotionally to fiction film, and how we can categorize different types of emotional responses to movies.

Afterwards, I will discuss three theoretical perspectives about emotional engagement in-depth: narrative engagement theory, character engagement theory, and mood theory. In the narrative engagement theory section, I explore some basic narrative terms and concepts, Noël Carroll's theory about *erotetic narration* and *variable framing*, and lastly, I

go into some detail about two important story-directed emotions: *curiosity* and *suspense*. In the character engagement theory section, I examine what I call the *identification, sympathy, and empathy debate* within cognitive film theory, before I discuss Murray Smith's *sympathy structure approach*, and modify it by including Margrethe Bruun Vaage's *embodied empathy* concept, and Jens Eder's *closeness* concept. In the mood theory section, I discuss Greg Smith's *mood-cue approach*, and I go on to modify his approach by including three additional perspectives on mood: Noël Carroll's mood theory, Carl Plantinga's mood theory, and Robert Sinnerbrink's mood theory.

In the last section of the theory chapter, I integrate the aforementioned perspectives (including my modifications) into an analytical framework that I call the *cue approach*. Here, I discuss what cues are, I explain what the cue approach is, and what I want to achieve with it. In general, the cue approach is meant to be a nuanced mixed-perspective approach that examines a film's emotional appeal from three theoretical perspectives. In this way, it's designed to be able to highlight different and important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film.

In the next chapter (chapter 3), I will utilize my cue approach to analyze *Mother!*. I will examine a variety of cues, and I will argue that specific cues are intended to elicit specific responses: story-directed emotions, character-directed emotions, and mood. I will dedicate one segment to curiosity, one segment to suspense, one segment to alignment, closeness, and embodied empathy, one segment to sympathy, and the last segment to mood, in an effort to provide a detailed and in-depth analysis of how the film is structured to elicit several emotional and affective responses.

I start by examining how the film is structured to elicit curiosity, and I pay particular attention to how scenes are structured to raise questions in the mind of the spectator. Afterwards, I analyze how scenes are structured to make it seem as if something bad is going to happen, in an effort to elicit suspense. Following this, I explore how the film is structured to elicit feelings of closeness and embodied empathy through the film's exclusive alignment. Then, I pay close attention to how the film is structured to elicit sympathy for Mother by foregrounding a set of morally desirable and undesirable traits and actions. Lastly, I analyze how the film is structured to elicit and sustain mood, by exploring the affective qualities of various stylistic cues, diffuse cues, backgrounded cues, and emotion markers.

In the last chapter (chapter 4), I have dedicated one segment to reflections on *Mother!* and the cue approach. Here I will reflect on some important aspects that I have not been able to include in my approach. Lastly, I will summarize my findings in the conclusion segment.

1.1 Method

In this thesis, I am going to write a close analysis (in-depth/textual analysis) of *Mother!*. I will examine specific scenes and larger narrative movements in the film, from the perspective of cognitive film theory. My aim is to illuminate how scenes are structured to elicit emotional and affective responses in spectators.

2 Chapter 2: Theory

For the sake of clarity, I will reiterate the purpose of this chapter, and provide an overview of the content within this chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to define and clarify key terms and theoretical concepts, and to integrate different theoretical perspectives about emotional engagement into an approach that I will use to analyze *Mother!* in the following chapter.

I will begin with a short discussion about why I have chosen to rely solely on cognitive film theory for this thesis. Following this, I will examine what emotions are, how we can respond emotionally to fiction film, and how we can categorize different types of emotional responses to movies.

Afterwards, I will discuss three theoretical perspectives about emotional engagement in-depth: narrative engagement theory, character engagement theory, and mood theory. In the narrative engagement theory section, I explore some basic narrative terms and concepts, Noël Carroll's theory about *erotetic narration* and *variable framing*, and lastly, I go into some detail about two important story-directed emotions: *curiosity* and *suspense*. In the character engagement theory section, I examine what I call the *identification, sympathy, and empathy debate* within cognitive film theory, before I discuss Murray Smith's *sympathy structure approach*, and modify it by including Margrethe Bruun Vaage's *embodied empathy* concept, and Jens Eder's *closeness* concept. In the mood theory section, I discuss Greg Smith's *mood-cue approach*, and I go on to modify his approach by including three additional perspectives on mood: Noël Carroll's mood theory, Carl Plantinga's mood theory, and Robert Sinnerbrink's mood theory.

In the last section of this chapter, I integrate the aforementioned perspectives (including my modifications) into an analytical framework that I call the *cue approach*. Here, I discuss what cues are, I explain what the cue approach is, and what I want to achieve with it. In general, the cue approach is meant to be a nuanced mixed-perspective approach that examines a film's emotional appeal from three theoretical perspectives. In this way, it's designed to be able to highlight different and important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film.

2.1 Cognitive Film Theory: Emotion, Fiction, and Emotion Categories

2.1.1 Why Cognitive Film Theory?

Given that there is a vast sea of literature that promotes a variety of perspectives on our emotional engagement with movies, and given that the literature on emotions - and the closely related terms desires, feelings, affects, and mood - spans across several theoretical fields within film studies, including cognitive film theory, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and so on, one may wonder why I have chosen to rely solely on cognitive film theory for this thesis.

I'm not going to provide the reader with a detailed history lesson here, about how cognitive film theory came into being in the 1980s as a reaction to the somewhat mystical, obscure, and diffuse theories about film spectatorship found in "psycho-semiotic theory" or "screen theory", because this story has already been written several times (for a discussion on the birth of cognitive film theory, see, e.g., Stam, 2000, pp. 235-240; Plantinga, 2002, pp. 16-20). Instead, I want to focus, briefly, on what defines cognitive film theory, and why I think that cognitive film theory is well-equipped to handle questions concerning our emotional engagement with movies. Film scholar Carl Plantinga (2002) has argued that "At the broadest level, cognitive theorists are committed to clarity of exposition and argument" (p. 20), and that most cognitivists "tend to favor naturalistic explanations of filmic phenomena that assume that we make sense of films in many of the same ways we make sense of the real world" (p. 22). Film scholar Robert Stam (2000) emphasizes that cognitivists promote the idea that spectators are similar in a lot of ways: that we share cognitive commonalities, and that we are active and thinking spectators that utilize perception, reasoning, and schemata to make sense of narratives (pp. 236-237, 242). Lastly, although early cognitive film theories emphasized explaining our cognitive engagement with movies, film scholars Ted Nannicelli and Paul Taberham (2014) point out that cognitive film theorists have gradually moved from "a focus on 'cold' cognition (information-driven mental processes described in terms of inferential and computational models) to 'hot cognition' (affect-driven mental processes)" (p. 5), and that cognitivists "share a general interest in how viewers respond to moving image artworks and why they respond as they do" (p. 8).

In other words, within cognitive film theory, our emotional responses to movies have been central research topics for quite some time now, and personally, I sympathize with these cognitivist concerns (emphasis on detailed and naturalistic arguments and explanations, a focus on spectator similarities, and a general interest in how spectators respond to movies). To my knowledge, there is no other theoretical field that examines our emotional and affective engagement with movies as thoroughly as cognitive film theorists. Of course, I might seem biased here, and to some degree, I probably am, but for good reasons. Cognitive film theorists tend to provide very detailed descriptions and explanations of specific phenomena, and in my opinion, this care for detail leads to quite clear, reasonable, and convincing arguments. Secondly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, another reason why I think cognitive film theory is well-equipped to explain emotional engagement, is that emotions and affects are intimately linked to perceptions and cognitions, and cognitive film theory has a lot to say about those connections. Because of these factors, I will be using cognitive film theory in this thesis. In the segments that follow, I think that my arguments about detailed descriptions and close connections will become more evident.

2.1.2 Defining Emotions: Concern-Based Construals

Cognitive film theorists tend to agree that *emotions* are combinations of *affect* and *cognition*, and that *prototypical emotions* are *rational*, *functional*, and *object-oriented*. However, there are some disagreements about what exactly counts as an emotion, because some theorists argue that not all emotions depend on higher cognitive functions. In this section I will provide a rough overview of emotion definitions, and I will argue that emotions are best thought of as *concern-based construals* (following Carl Plantinga).

The psychologist and film scholar Ed Tan (1995) has argued for a functional view of the emotions by stating that "Emotions can be seen as functional to realizing the needs of the individual in its transaction with the world" (p. 8), and that emotion "underlines the things that matter to the individual in a given situation and how they matter" (p. 8). For Tan, emotions occur when people *appraise* the relevance of a situation in relation to their *concerns*, which leads to *action tendencies*, or an urge to act in a certain way. Humans, generally speaking, have concerns for their own well-being (survival, safety, happiness, etc.), and the well-being of others. In our worldly travels, we regularly appraise (evaluate, assess, construe) the situations we are in to see whether or not they are relevant for our concerns. If we construe a situation to be harmful to our well-being, this can produce an emotion that urges us to act appropriately. For example, on one of my walks through the forest, I suddenly see a wolf pack staring right at me. I interpret the situation to be dangerous (my knowledge about wolves tells me that they usually hunt in packs; they have sharp teeth, and they eat meat), which can produce the emotion of fear (for my safety/survival). This in turn can lead to action tendencies appropriate to the fear emotion, for example, an urge to flee or hide. It can therefore be argued, as Tan does, that emotions consist of concerns, appraisals and action tendencies. From this perspective, emotions are understood as rational and functional, precisely because it provides an affective charge that urges us to act in dire situations, and provides saliency in non-urgent situations. Therefore, Tan views emotions as goal-oriented processes that are aimed at enhancing our well-being (Tan, 1995, pp. 8-9; see also Tan & Frijda, 1999, pp. 51-52).

The above theory is usually called the *appraisal theory* of the emotions, and it is echoed by several cognitive film theorists. The philosopher and film scholar Noël Carroll conceptualizes emotions in a similar manner. Carroll (1999) distinguishes between bodily affects and full-fledged emotions, by pointing out that full-fledged emotions like fear, anger and pity are usually directed towards some object that fulfills certain criteria of appropriateness. Because of this, he argues that "Emotions proper require a cognitive component" (p. 26), and that "among the cognitions that are essential for the formation of emotional states are those that subsume the objects of the state under certain relevant categories or conceive of said objects as meeting certain criteria" (p. 27). For Carroll, cognitions generally precede emotions in the causal chain (Carroll, 1999, pp. 25-27). Similarly, the film scholar Murray Smith (1995) has argued that emotions are "composed of affect and cognition" (pp. 59-60). Carl Plantinga and film scholar Greg Smith (1999) also emphasize that cognitivists "tend to describe emotion as a combination of feelings, physiological changes, and cognitions" (p. 2). The larger point here is that appraisal theorists usually agree that emotions are intimately linked to cognitions, that emotions are rational, functional, and motivate us to act in certain ways (emotions are goal-oriented), and that emotions have causes and are directed at specific objects. On a side note, it's important to recognize that *objects* - in this context - entails more than just physical objects. It also encompasses immaterial objects, like the contents of our own imaginations and beliefs (Plantinga & Smith, 1999, p. 6). For example, I might imagine

that a psychopath is stalking me while I walk down a dark alley, and I might begin to fear for my well-being. In this case, my fear emotion is directed at my imagination.

The emotion descriptions I have discussed above make up what is generally called the *emotion prototype*: emotions are typically recognized as having certain characteristics, like the characteristics mentioned above (cause, directedness, goal etc.). However, Greg Smith (2003) argues that not all emotions fit neatly into such prototypical descriptions. Some emotions, he writes, "require neither an object or a goal. Emotion can be elicited by extremely diffuse stimuli, like a dreary day, and can have nondirected expression (like depression)" (p. 22). For Smith, conscious thought may be required for prototypical emotions that are consciously felt and experienced, but not for all emotions. He points out that we can associate diffuse stimuli with emotions, and that associations can occur automatically (associations don't have to be conscious). Therefore, Smith points out that associations "open up the possibility of nonprototypical emotions" (p. 23). In a similar manner, Carl Plantinga also disagrees with the view that emotions always require prior cognitions, because emotions often occur as a result of automatic unconscious information processing. Plantinga (2009) argues that automatic responses are "not carefully considered but rather immediate, as though they were programmed into us. Such patterns, whether innate, established through experience, or the result of cognitive 'framing,' enable humans to respond to their environment quickly and efficiently" (p. 51). While many crucial processes for our survival are automatic, like breathing, Plantinga points out that we can also be said to program parts of our own automatic behavior, because we can "consciously form habits of mind and behavior that alter our automatic responses" (p. 52). With this in mind, Plantinga defines emotions as *concern-based construals*: we feel emotions when we construe (interpret, appraise) a situation to be highly relevant to our concerns. This definition is quite similar to the definitions proposed by Tan and Carroll, but Plantinga is quick to point out that construals need not be conscious, and that they can occur automatically and/or through associations of memory. From Plantinga's point of view, our emotions are directed at objects even if we are not consciously aware of the connection, but he argues that unconscious construals are not cognitively impenetrable, and that they can be accessed through introspection (Plantinga, 2009, pp. 49-54, 56-58).

There is undoubtably much more to say about how we can define emotions, but for this thesis, I think the above discussion will suffice. I will follow Plantinga's definition of emotions, as it accounts for the most salient parts of the emotion prototype (concern, appraisal/construal, action tendency, goal-orientation, directedness), but his definition also keeps the door open to automatic appraisals. Certainly, there are times when we respond emotionally to sensory data in an immediate and automatic fashion, and then consciously recognize our emotional response shortly after or much later.

2.1.3 The Paradox of Fiction: Emotion and Fiction

Before examining the different types of emotional engagement that viewers can experience while watching movies, I will briefly discuss the so-called *paradox of fiction*. The problem can be summarized as follows: If spectators know that the events and characters they are watching are fictional, and therefore not real, how can they respond emotionally to them? Discussing this paradox is important for a few reasons. First, if we can't respond emotionally to fiction film, then what am I doing writing this thesis? Secondly, the paradox of fiction reveals certain assumptions about emotions and what is considered to be appropriate objects for our emotions.

Noël Carroll points out that different theories have attempted to solve this paradox, namely the *illusion theory of fiction* and the *pretend theory of fiction*. Carroll (1990) notes that according to the *illusion theory of fiction*, "cinematic techniques of verisimilitude so overwhelm us that we are deceived into believing that a monster really looms before us" (p. 63). The idea here is that the spectator is under the illusion that what she/he is seeing is real. However, this seems unlikely given that spectators do not typically respond with action tendencies appropriate to such an appraisal (we rarely flee the cinema in a fearful fit or hide behind chairs in the auditorium). Secondly, Carroll points out that according to the *pretend theory* of fiction, we do not actually believe that what we are seeing and hearing is real; we engage in a game of make-believe, a playful act that is pleasurable. Carroll criticizes this theory for throwing out the possibility of genuine emotional response to fiction, and he criticizes both of the aforementioned theories for assuming that genuine emotions require a belief in the existence of character (x) or event (y). Carroll goes on to argue that the *thought theory of fiction* is a better solution to the paradox, because according to this theory, we can respond emotionally to the content of our thoughts, ideas, and imaginations, without actually believing in the existence of that content (Carroll, 1990, pp. 63, 70-71, 74, 76-80). Similarly, Plantinga (2009) argues that we can respond emotionally to "unasserted thoughts, such as imagining losing a loved one or imagining winning the lottery. Imagine smashing your thumb with a hammer; the more vivid your imaginative picture, the more likely you are to respond" (p. 66).

Although I agree with the notion that our thoughts and imaginations can generate emotional responses, it should also be made clear that we do not simply *imagine* what we see and hear in a movie; we actually see and hear what we see and hear (regardless of our evaluation of the reality status of those perceptions). The film scholar Torben Grodal (2009) points out that we "use exactly the same eyes and brain structures when we are watching films and watching the real unmediated world" (p. 183), and that our total processing of audiovisual data consists of both lower-level processes and higher-level cognitive evaluations about the reality status of that data. Because such lower-level processes are cognitively impenetrable, we partly respond to audiovisual data as if it were real, even if our cognitive evaluations of the reality status of that data tempers our response. Therefore, Grodal (2009) argues that "images, sounds, and words are claims of existence because they simulate the world, although our reason most of the time successfully controls their reality status" (p. 185). However, it can be hard to reduce the impact of audiovisual data given that, from Grodal's evolutionary perspective, the "architecture of the brain was made at a time when incoming data were essentially true" (p. 185). In other words, animals rarely evaluate the reality status of their perceptions, because they rarely deal with simulations. The same can be said for our distant ancestors. This leads Grodal to the conclusion that our responses to fiction do not entail a *suspension of disbelief*, but a *suspension of belief*. This is not to say that belief is required for emotional response (as Carroll's thought theory shows), but that we do partly react emotionally to fictions as if they were real (Grodal, 2009, pp. 183-185).

With these perspectives in mind, the paradox of fiction seems less paradoxical. We can respond emotionally to fictions without having higher-order existence beliefs, because we can respond emotionally to nonassertive thoughts, like ideas and imaginings. However, we partly process audiovisual data as if they were real, which can produce emotional responses (some cognitivists would probably contend that these are affective responses). These responses are in turn tempered (and I suspect amplified) by our cognitive evaluations of their reality status. In any case, it seems clear to me that movies can elicit

emotions, and as we shall see, there are several types of emotional responses that viewers can experience in response to movies.

2.1.4 Categorizing Types of Emotional Engagement

Our emotional engagement with film has been examined from a variety of perspectives. Some theorists have argued for the importance of narrative engagement (see, e.g., Carroll, 1985; Currie, 1999), while others have argued for the importance of character engagement (see, e.g., Smith, 1995; Vaage, 2008), and/or low-level emotional states like moods (see, e.g., Smith, 2003; Plantinga, 2012). In fact, so much has been written about emotional engagement that it would be quite the feat to have a complete grasp on the literature. That being said, my goal in this segment is not to provide a complete overview of possible emotional responses, but to highlight the most salient types of emotional engagement that viewers can experience while watching fiction films: the forms of engagement that are most commonly elicited by movies.

Carl Plantinga has made a *typology of emotions* that viewers can experience when watching fiction film, and apart from a few caveats, I largely agree with his emotion categories. He distinguishes between *global* and *local* emotions; *fiction* and *artifact* emotions; *direct*, *sympathetic/antipathetic* and *meta* emotions. Global and local emotions denote the temporal dimension of our emotions; whether they are long-lasting, or brief and intense. Additionally, the distinction also says something about the function of those emotions. Plantinga argues that global emotions (long-lasting) - like *suspense* and *curiosity* - keep spectators focused and interested in the film, while local emotions (brief and intense) - like *surprise* and *startle* responses – are more thrilling emotional payoffs that can sustain the global emotions. As such, global and local emotions can work together to create a unified emotional experience. The fiction and artifact concepts refer to emotions that are either directed at something within the fiction (for example, *suspense* directed at possible narrative outcomes or sympathetic emotions [*pity* or *fear*] directed at characters within the diegesis), or the film itself as a constructed artifact (for example, *admiration* or *disdain* directed at the film's style). Lastly, direct emotions are specifically directed at the story (for example, suspense or curiosity directed at the story); sympathetic/antipathetic emotions are specifically directed at characters within the story (for example, *happiness* or *anger* directed at a character); meta-emotions are specifically directed at the spectator's own responses (for example, *pride* or *shame* directed at the spectator's own thoughts and emotions). (Plantinga, 2009, pp. 68-74; see also Plantinga, 2013, p. 96).

Several of the emotion types mentioned above are listed in more than one category here. This is because some of these categories are not as exclusive as others. Global/local emotions are usually both fiction and direct emotions, but fiction emotions are not artifact emotions, etc. Although I agree with Plantinga's emotion categories that are directed at specific objects (direct, sympathetic/antipathetic, meta, fiction, artifact), I think the global/local categories are better conceptualized as temporal aspects of emotions, rather than types of emotions. For example, curiosity is usually directed at the story (a fiction and direct emotion type), and the emotion is usually long-lasting (temporal aspect) if the film sustains the viewer's curiosity. Secondly, I think that some of these categories are unnecessarily confusing. Plantinga seems to want to create a detailed and easy-to-understand typology of emotions: he writes about the different objects they are directed at in a clear and unambiguous manner, but creates unnecessary confusion with concepts like "direct emotions" in a theoretical space where *directedness* is more or less a part of every emotion. If the directedness of emotions are a big part of what defines them (as

Plantinga suggests), why not make that directedness clear in the category itself? For example, instead of calling emotions directed at the story "direct emotions", I think it's better to categorize them as *story-directed emotions*. Instead of "sympathetic/antipathetic emotions", I categorize such emotions as *character-directed* emotions, and so on (*artifact-directed emotions*, *self-directed emotions*, etc.). I borrow these first two labels (story-directed and character-directed emotions) from the philosopher and film scholar Berys Gaut, who uses them in an introduction to one of his articles (see Gaut, 2010, p. 136). Lastly, another problem I have with Plantinga's typology is that he does not list empathy as an emotion directed at characters. This is probably because Plantinga thinks that sympathy and empathy are congruent emotions that are often mixed together, so he just uses sympathy to refer to both (see Plantinga, 2009, pp. 99-101). I have no qualms with Plantinga's arguments about congruency, but I prefer to differentiate between empathy and sympathy, so I will add empathy to my character-directed emotions category. Lastly, in addition to these categories, I will add mood as a low-level form of emotional engagement, because many movies are intended to elicit a low-level orienting emotional state: a mood (I examine mood in-depth in one of the following theory sections, so I will come back to this important topic later).

With all of this in mind, I will also note that our emotional responses to movies can be quite complex. Spectators may respond with completely different emotions and affects to movies, depending on our interests, values, affiliations, associations, and genetic dispositions. So one wonders, how can filmmakers reliably elicit intended emotional experiences across a wide range of spectators, when spectators bring their own unique and idiosyncratic responses? I will argue that, in general, filmmakers will try to elicit emotions by focusing on spectator similarities, like common concerns that a wide variety of spectators share, because it's impossible to appeal to the specific individual interests of each audience member (this is a view shared by most cognitive film theorists). To increase the likelihood of emotional impact across a wide range of spectators, filmmakers have had to rely on trial and error: intuitions, folk psychology, diverse theories about the human mind, and common sense notions about what people care about. Secondly, from an economic perspective, appealing to a wide range of spectators can also be profitable, so it makes sense that filmmakers over the years have placed emphasis on appealing to human universals, cultural norms/values, and common concerns when they try to elicit emotions and affects. Lastly, movies are constructed artifacts that usually contain a *narrative* that revolves around the goals and actions of *characters*, and filmmakers tend to utilize *formal elements* and *film style* to infuse their film with a certain *mood*. Given the centrality of these elements – narrative, characters, and mood - to the general movie experience, filmmakers will usually try to elicit story-directed emotions, character-directed emotions, and mood in spectators. In this thesis, I will focus on these three elements.

2.2 Narrative Engagement Theory

In this theory section, I will examine important terms and concepts related to our emotional engagement with narratives. I will start by examining how spectators make sense of narratives, what a narrative is, and how narratives tend to be structured to engage spectators. Secondly, I will follow Noël Carroll and philosopher William Seeley in arguing that most movies rely on *erotetic narration* to generate interest/curiosity in the viewer, and that this model of narration is usually coupled with *variable framing* to guide viewer attention to salient details in narratives. Lastly, I will discuss two story-directed emotions associated with narrative engagement, namely *curiosity* and *suspense*, and I will discuss how these story-directed emotions can be elicited by erotetic narratives.

2.2.1 The Active Spectator, Narratives, and Narration

My understanding of the term *narrative* is largely based on the *principles of narrative form* provided by the film scholars David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith. They argue that spectators come equipped with expectations and assumptions about narrative form, expectations formed through our previous experiences with stories, and that we actively engage with movies to make sense of them: "While watching the film, the viewer picks up cues, recalls information, anticipates what will follow, and generally participates in the creation of the film's form" (Bordwell et al., 2017, p. 72). These arguments are rooted in an understanding of the spectator as an active and thinking observer that utilizes *schemata* (thought frameworks based on prior knowledge and experience) to build *expectations*, *inferences*, and *hypotheses* about what's going to happen in the story (for a detailed discussion on the active spectator, see, e.g., Bordwell, 1985, pp. 29-39). Secondly, Bordwell et al. (2017) define narrative as a "*chain of events linked by cause and effect and occurring in time and space*" (p. 73). They also distinguish between the terms *story* (the chronological order of events) and *plot* (how the story is presented to us), because the same story may be told in different ways, depending on what effects the filmmaker wants to achieve. For example, if the audience is shown the ending of a film first, that may elicit curiosity about what has happened in the past. So, in order for us to make sense of a narrative, we try to construct the correct causal chain of events (the chronological flow of causes and effects that make up the story) from the information presented to us in the plot. To do this we try to follow *when* (in time) and *where* (in space) things are happening. If we are missing important pieces of information, we may fill in the gaps with inferences and expectations about what is going to happen, cognitions that can be confirmed or disconfirmed by later story revelations. Narratives, given their causal nature, usually have a beginning, a middle, and an end, wherein each section has some underlying function for the narrative as a whole. For example, the beginning often establishes a primary cause, an initial situation, that leads to a series of events (the middle), and then possibly to a *climax* (a climactic high-point usually structured to elicit intense emotions), and the final situation (the end). Although storytelling is not an exact science, there are a plethora of storytelling conventions/tropes that both spectators and filmmakers are familiar with. The most famous and widespread one being the *classical Hollywood narrative model*, wherein the narrative often centers around a *protagonist* (the main character) with a clear *goal* that leads the character on a journey. On the journey, the character is confronted by a series of *problems* she must overcome, the character often goes through some form of significant *change* to attain her goal, and there is a strong degree of *closure* at the end of the film, usually in the form of a happy ending. This is, of course, only one of the existing narrative models, but it is a popular one (Bordwell et al., 2017, pp. 74-75, 85-86, 97-99).

However, even within this classical narrative paradigm, filmmakers will stretch and bend the norms of established storytelling conventions, which in turn can thwart the expectations of audiences by, for example, creating surprising twists and turns in the narrative, and/or by structuring the plot in a unique way. To achieve such effects, filmmakers will play with variations in *causality* and *narration*, among other things. Bordwell et al. point out that because viewers search for causal motivation, the filmmaker can hide/withhold causes and/or effects to elicit intended cognitive and emotional responses from the audience. For example, the filmmaker can manipulate *temporal* (time-related) aspects of the story, like *story order*, by rearranging the order of events. Through time-jumps like *flashbacks* (a jump back in time) and *flashforwards* (a jump forward in time), the filmmaker can supply or withhold crucial story information that will change our engagement with different parts of the plot drastically. Indeed, filmmakers have to decide on how to regulate the *flow of story information* that the audience has access to. Should we know more than the protagonist, less, or exactly the same? If we only see and hear things from the perspective of the protagonist, we are restricted to the knowledge of that character. If the filmmaker, for example, routinely cross-cuts to the perspective of the *antagonist* (the adversary of the protagonist), who is in a different place, conducting some nefarious scheme, we know more than the protagonist. Narration can therefore be said to be a matter of the *range* and *depth* of information available to the spectator. The range of information can be *restricted* (letting us know less) or *unrestricted* (letting us know more), or somewhere in between (knowing less or more at different points in the plot). The restricted form of narration can elicit more curiosity and surprise in spectators, as we uncover information with the protagonist, while the unrestricted form of narration can elicit more anticipation and suspense in spectators, as we, for example, already know about the antagonist's evil plan, and we are excited or anxious about whether or not the protagonist will overcome the challenge. Secondly, the depth of story information has to do with *objective* narration (for example, what characters actually say and do from a third-person perspective) and *subjective* narration (for example, what a single character perceives, thinks, and feels at a given moment). Filmmakers will often utilize film techniques to place us close to a character's *perceptual subjectivity* (through optical point-of-view shots, reaction shots, loud ringing sounds, etc.) and *mental subjectivity* (through internal monologues, representations of memories, dreams, and hallucinations, etc.). In general, filmmakers are confronted with a range of decisions about how to structure the narrative to elicit both cognitive and emotional engagement from the audience (Bordwell et al., 2017, pp. 78-80, 87-91). With these basic narrative terms and concepts described, I will now discuss some important theories for this thesis, starting with Noël Carroll's theory of *erotetic narration*.

2.2.2 Erotetic Narration, Variable Framing, and Burning Questions

Noël Carroll argues that most movies employ a question/answer model of narration by structuring scenes in the plot so that they *raise questions* in the mind of the spectator, questions that the spectator *desires answers* to. These questions (raised relatively early in the plot) can then be sustained throughout the movie, and be partly/incompletely or completely answered by later scenes. Some scenes can also answer one question, but raise another question, and some questions may never be answered at all. For Carroll (1985), erotetic narration accounts for our narrative expectations, as we expect answers to these questions, which in turn helps to explain our "widespread, intense engagement with movies" (p. 97). Carroll points out that these questions come in the form of *macro-questions* and *micro-questions*. Macro-questions are the large questions that often bind the entire movie together, and they are usually raised at the beginning and answered at

the end. Micro-questions, on the other hand, are the smaller questions that bind scenes and sequences together, and they are usually raised and answered in quick succession. Lastly, Carroll notes that not all scenes follow the erotetic structure, but he argues that such scenes are digressions that have some other purpose than to advance the plot (Carroll, 1985, pp. 96-98; see also Carroll, 1990, pp. 130-136; Seeley and Carroll, 2014, pp. 240-242).

Carroll and philosopher William Seeley argue that erotetic narration is usually coordinated with *variable framing* to guide viewer attention towards important story information, and to raise questions visually. Variable framing, according to Seeley and Carroll (2014), is a "mechanism for changing the viewing position" (p. 238), and it's used to "direct attention to salient information by changing the viewer's visual perspective on depicted objects, states of affairs, events, and actions" (p. 238). Variable framing has three distinct functions: *indexing* (focusing our attention on something by pointing at it), *scaling* (focusing our attention on something by changing the size of it), and *bracketing* (focusing our attention by including something in the frame, while excluding other things from the frame). These functions are accomplished through specific film techniques. For example, camera movement and framing (panning, tilting, tracking, zooming, close-ups, reaction-shots, etc.), and editing (cutting to a new viewing position, and point-of-view structures). Thus, variable framing is used to highlight important story information, to visually raise questions, and to guide the viewer's perceptual and cognitive engagement (Seeley and Carroll, 2014, pp. 238-243; see also Carroll and Seeley, 2013, pp. 62-67). However, variable framing is also used to elicit emotional responses in spectators. Given that emotional responses can be triggered by events and actions that fulfill certain appropriate criteria, movies can be *criterially prefocused* (I will discuss this concept later) to highlight such criteria through variable framing (Carroll and Seeley, 2013, p. 68).

For the purposes of this thesis, the important thing to notice about erotetic narration is that these questions are not just a matter of cognitive play and problem solving, they are often, as film scholar Dirk Eitzen (1999) points out, "not just questions, but burning questions. They always carry with them a strong emotional charge. They have to do with situations that have grave consequences for the physical or emotional well-being of characters in the movie" (p. 88). In other words, we tend to seek answers to questions that we care about, because we are concerned and have desires about the possible outcomes. For example, in a hypothetical horror film, early scenes may raise the question: will the protagonist survive and escape her deranged captors? Although a later scene will reveal the answer to this question, I certainly may wish for one outcome over another, depending on my sympathetic engagement with the protagonist, and my wishes for the narrative as a whole. The outcome may be in conflict with my desires, and the filmmaker can make it seem more or less likely that a desired outcome will happen. Indeed, filmmakers will often play with our desires by withholding their fulfillments throughout the movie. Secondly, we can also have separate and conflicting *narrative desires*, as philosopher Gregory Currie argues. I may wish for the well-being of the protagonist, but I may also wish that the horror film is sufficiently horrifying. So, being the hypocrite I am, although I want the protagonist to be safe, I also want her to be in danger. With that being said, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed account of narrative desire (for a discussion on narrative desire, see, e.g., Currie, 1999, pp. 183-199; Plantinga, 2009, pp. 40-47). The larger point here is that erotetic narration in combination with variable framing has some bearing on the possible range of expectations, inferences, hypotheses, concerns, and emotional responses in the audience. It is an effective way of putting

spectators in the same boat by guiding our attention towards the same objects, and by prompting us to ask questions and form expectations that we become emotionally invested in. Thus, being engaged by a narrative certainly entails a degree of cognitive play and problem solving, but it also entails curiosity, suspense, and other story-directed emotions.

2.2.3 Story-directed Emotions: Curiosity and Suspense

Although I have previously alluded to ways in which narratives can be structured to elicit curiosity and suspense, I have not yet sufficiently explained what these emotions are. These cognitive-emotional responses are quite complex, they often *contain* other feelings, and their *valences* are somewhat mixed depending on the situation/context, and therefore require further explanation.

Let's begin with *curiosity*. According to psychologists Todd Kashdan and Paul Silvia (2009), curiosity is synonymous with *interest* because they both refer to a "positive motivational-emotional state associated with exploration" (p. 367). Secondly, they define curiosity as "the recognition, pursuit, and intense desire to explore novel, challenging, and uncertain events" (p. 368). Furthermore, Silvia argues that there are three major strands of thought on the nature of curiosity (two of which I will discuss here). The first strand of thought proposes that curiosity is aimed at reducing novelty and unpleasant feelings of *uncertainty* by filling in information gaps. On this view, curiosity is a means to an end, a tool used to attain knowledge so as to reduce unpleasant feelings. According to Silvia, the uncertainty-reduction model partly explains curiosity, but fails to address the intrinsic motivation of curiosity. The second strand of thought proposes that curiosity is motivating in itself. On this view, we love to explore and attain knowledge regardless of the punishments or rewards it may bring. Thus, novelty and uncertainty is often met with *interest* and *excitement* (Silvia, 2019, pp. 157-159, 161). Similarly, psychologist Jordan Litman argues that curiosity can either be a *feeling-of-deprivation* (CFD curiosity hereafter), or a *feeling-of-interest* (CFI curiosity hereafter). Litman proposes that CFD curiosity occurs when people feel that they lack important and/or valuable information, while CFI curiosity occurs when people feel that discovering something new would be enjoyable. For Litman (2005), "CFI is related to the anticipated pleasure from finding out information of a more casual, unessential, entertaining, or aesthetically pleasing nature, such as juicy gossip, an amusing anecdote, or an entertaining story" (pp. 799-800). When we experience CFD curiosity, on the other hand, it's a more serious *need-to-know experience* that involves unpleasant feelings of anxiety and tension, because we feel deprived of information that could, for example, be important for our well-being or the well-being of people we care about. Thus, curiosity can be enjoyable and/or unpleasant, depending on the context (Litman, 2005, pp. 799-800, 802). I will follow Litman's integrated interest/deprivation model of curiosity in this thesis, as it accounts for both forms of this emotional response.

In terms of our emotional engagement with narratives, the questions prompted by erotetic narration are certainly meant to elicit curiosity. Depending on the narrative context, we can feel light-hearted CFI curiosity, which contains feelings of interest and excitement (positive valence), or we can feel unpleasant CFD curiosity, which contains feelings of anxiety and tension (negative valence). More specifically, I will argue that this distinction is quite relevant when we start to become concerned about narrative outcomes. For example, while we may experience an initial pleasurable form of CFI curiosity in regards to questions posed early on in a film, pressing matters in the narrative could alter the intensity and valence of our curiosity drastically. This could go hand in hand with feelings of suspense, sympathy, and stylistic cues. For example, if we are sufficiently concerned

about the well-being of the protagonist in the horror film, and the protagonist is in a dire situation (for example, a werewolf is close by; variable framing draws our attention to the character's frightened face; the camera cuts to a shot of the full moon, while we hear the protagonist's heart beat faster and a howl in the distance), we may start to feel CFD curiosity: a *need-to-know* the whereabouts of the werewolf, and *how to escape/defeat it*, because it is threatening someone we care about, and we feel deprived of important information that could potentially "help" the protagonist, or give us more control over the situation. Secondly, given that filmmakers can delay answers to questions until the end of the film, or never provide an answer at all, our curiosity may grow in strength and change valence throughout the film. In general, it seems likely that both CFI curiosity and CFD curiosity function like guiding emotions that partly sustain our interest/excitement or anxiety/tension throughout narratives.

Whereas curiosity entails a desire to know, *suspense* can be understood as a specific form of anticipation. Suspense is a mixed feeling of hope, fear, uncertainty, excitement, frustration, anxiety, and tension directed at a future outcome. According to Noël Carroll, suspense is a *future-oriented emotion* (directed at an imagined future event) that occurs when the spectator has a *desire* about a narrative outcome that seems *improbable*. Carroll argues that to elicit suspense in the audience, the filmmaker needs to find some common concern in the audience, so that the audience desires more or less the same outcome. Morality will often be used for this purpose, as most viewers typically share a stable set of cultural values and norms. Thus, the filmmaker can elicit suspense from the audience by making the *morally good outcome* (desired outcome)seem unlikely, and the *morally evil outcome* (undesired outcome) seem likely. This is, of course, especially salient if we have, for example, allied ourselves with a sympathetic protagonist who is fighting against people we oppose. According to Carroll, movies can be criterially prefocused to elicit suspense by foregrounding this tension between desire and probability. In other words, suspense can be elicited by scenes and sequences that are structured to make it seem as if something bad is going to happen. For example, and as Carroll (1990) argues, a scene can be structured to raise a question that we care about, while also making it seem like something bad is going to happen: "To take a shopworn example, the heroine is tied to the railroad tracks; the locomotive is steaming at her. Will she be crushed or saved?" (p. 137). Thus, Carroll argues that suspense often occurs in tandem with the questions posed by erotetic narratives, because these questions often invite us to expect what's going to happen (Carroll, 1999, pp. 43-46; see also Carroll, 1990, pp. 137-138).

Although this definition of suspense seems unproblematic at first glance, scholars have identified a problem called *the paradox of suspense*. Philosopher Aaron Smuts points out that the standard account of suspense holds that the emotion is composed of *hope* (hoping for a good outcome), *fear* (fearing a bad outcome), and *uncertainty* (being uncertain about the outcome). On this view, the intensity of suspense depends on the degree of uncertainty and what is at stake. Secondly, Smuts argues that this reliance on uncertainty is problematic because spectators can still feel suspense when they are watching a movie for the second time (repeat viewings). Thus, if we already know the outcome (and are certain of it), and uncertainty is required for suspense, we shouldn't feel suspense at all, hence the paradox. Furthermore, why would we hope or fear for something if we already know what's going to happen? To solve the paradox, Smuts (2008) argues that uncertainty is usually not required for suspense, and he proposes a *desire-frustration theory of suspense*: "The desire-frustration theory of suspense holds that the frustration of a strong desire to affect the outcome of an imminent event is necessary and sufficient for suspense"

(p. 284). For Smuts, the primary reason why non-interactive narratives are effective at eliciting suspense is because we are not able to do anything to affect the outcome. Thus, when we are given critical story information that could save the protagonist, our strong desire to help is inevitably frustrated by the fact that we can't help them (Smuts, 2008, pp. 281-285, 289). On this view, we may feel even more suspense during repeat viewings, where we know that an undesired outcome is going to happen. In addition to Smuts' theory, several other solutions have been proposed, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive discussion on this debate (for an in-depth discussion on the paradox of suspense, see, e.g., Smuts, 2009; Lehne and Koelsch, 2015, pp. 4-6; Delatorre et al., 2018, pp. 3-5).

As of this writing, the paradox has yet to be solved. However, there seems to be no disagreement that uncertainty can lead to anxiety and tension, and these are affective components of suspense. My earlier discussion about the interest/deprivation model of curiosity also supports this (CFD curiosity involves uncertainty and the unpleasant feelings of anxiety and tension). So, if suspense contains feelings of tension and anxiety about some outcome, uncertainty should at least contribute to this affective state regardless of whether or not it is a requirement for it. More importantly, and although I mostly agree with Smuts' line of reasoning, his desire-frustration theory doesn't really exclude uncertainty as a factor, only as a requirement. Frustration or a lack of control, in my view, is an important factor that can increase suspense, but it's not incompatible with uncertainty. This is because uncertainty can itself lead to frustration, as any past or present college student writing a timed exam paper can attest to. In many situations, our lack of knowledge impedes our ability to achieve a desired outcome, and this can lead to frustration, anxiety and tension. Thus, when we are uncertain about a future outcome, or think that a bad outcome is very probable, we are still not in any position to help the protagonist - in fact, we are in a worse position. Therefore, it seems to me that the desire-frustration theory benefits from the uncertainty/probability concept, because it helps us explain how many movies partly generate suspense in primary viewings, and in the absence of certain outcomes.

With this in mind, I will argue that a movie's potential to elicit suspense depends on its ability to either suggest the possibility of an undesirable outcome, and/or make us think/feel that something bad/terrible is either going to happen, or that it is probable. When a scene raises questions about what's going to happen, and when we start to think/feel that an undesired outcome is probable, we often begin to feel suspense. The intensity of the suspense often mirrors the perceived probability and undesirability of the outcome, and the filmmaker can withhold the answer to the question and keep us in the dark (uncertain), while playing with the probability and undesirability of the outcome as the narrative unfolds. That is, we begin to feel a concoction of hope, fear, uncertainty, excitement, frustration, anxiety, and tension, because we don't want outcome (x) to happen, but we don't know for certain what's going to happen, and we can't do anything about it – we can only wait and see: we are kept in suspense. Now, there are several filmic cues that can elicit suspense. For example, scenes can be structured to provide us with a *surplus of information*, so that we are "in the know", while the protagonist is not (as discussed earlier; Bordwell's *unrestricted narration* term). Scenes can also be structured to *foreshadow* (hint, suggest, indicate) that something undesirable is going to happen, while restricting the flow of story information. Scenes can also be structured to make it seem more and more probable that something terrible is going to happen. Lastly, because we experience suspense in a safe environment when we watch movies, the emotion can

nonetheless be *exciting* to experience. In primary viewings, this is also reinforced by the uncertainty of the outcome; there is always the chance that the desired outcome we hope for will happen, and the uncertainty creates a mixed feeling of anxiety, excitement, and tension between two competing possibilities. Suspense, then, is an emotion with a mixed valence, and it functions alongside curiosity to sustain viewer interest in the narrative. Together, these emotions are a big part of what makes many narratives emotionally engaging, and these responses usually occur in tandem within erotetic narrative structures.

2.3 Character Engagement Theory

Although characters clearly are an important part of most narratives, and usually are the driving force behind their causal chains, it makes sense to distinguish between narrative engagement and character engagement, because there is a clear difference between story-directed emotions and character-directed emotions. However, the distinction made here is by no means an attempt to separate characters from narratives, the distinction is made to draw attention to the ways in which we are emotionally engaged by characters.

In this theory section, I will examine important terms and concepts related to our emotional engagement with characters. For this thesis, the most important concepts are *sympathy* and *empathy*, two character-directed emotions that are generally understood as *feeling for* (sympathy) and *feeling with* (empathy) characters. However, there is a long debate within cognitive film theory about the nature of our emotional responses to characters, and whether or not this type of emotional engagement typically consists of some form of identification, sympathy, or empathy with characters. I will first address and discuss what I call the *identification, sympathy, and empathy debate*, and clarify my view on the matter. Secondly, I will discuss Murray Smith's *structure of sympathy approach*, and in this thesis, I will use Smith's approach to analyze how *Mother!* is structured to elicit character-directed emotions. However, I will also modify Smith's approach to include Margrethe Bruun Vaage's theory about *embodied empathy*, and Jens Eder's theory about how we can *feel close* to characters.

2.3.1 The Identification, Sympathy, and Empathy Debate

Within cognitive film theory, there have been several disagreements about how we usually respond to characters, which in turn sparked a debate that I will call the *identification, sympathy, and empathy debate*. The debate can be said to have started with Noël Carroll's critique of *identification* – a term widely used in psychoanalytic film theory to, among other things, suggest a fusion between spectators and characters. Carroll argues that the identification term is too diffuse, and that it can be used to denote any number of meanings. This could be liking a character; feeling sympathy for a character; feeling empathy with a character; recognizing similarities or identical thoughts/feelings; total fusion or mind-meld with a character, and so on. Furthermore, Carroll specifically objects to total fusion and empathy, because there is a clear *asymmetry* between the spectator and the protagonist. For example, Carroll (1990) points out that there is little chance of *mental and emotional duplication*, given that the information available to the spectator is usually quite different from the information available to the protagonist, which leads spectators to have different appraisals and emotions: "When the heroine is splashing about with abandon as, unbeknownst to her, a killer shark is zooming in for the kill, we feel concern for her. But that is not what she is feeling. She's feeling delighted" (Carroll, 1990, p. 90). Carroll's larger point here is that, generally speaking, the emotions experienced by the audience are not similar to the emotions experienced by the character, because the audience and the character often have different levels of information, different objects for their emotions, and different beliefs about the reality status of the situation. Thus, rather than identify with characters, Carroll argues that we assimilate/comprehend their situation, by understanding the character's appraisal of the situation and understanding why that appraisal makes sense within the narrative context. For Carroll, it is easy for us to understand characters and their concerns, because they are usually placed within cultural/social contexts that are intelligible to us. In other words, we can somewhat reliably infer the character's interior state through assimilation, without the need to identify with her/him. From this perspective, we usually respond sympathetically to characters from an

external observer position (Carroll, 1990, pp. 89-93, 95-96). Thus, sympathy is generally understood as a *pro-attitude* towards a character and a *feeling for* the character (happiness, sadness, pity, fear, anger, etc.), because we have come to *care about* the character's well-being (Carroll, 2013, pp. 50-54; see also Plantinga, 2009, pp. 72-73; Grodal, 2009, pp. 199-200).

In a similar fashion, film scholar Murray Smith draws attention to Richard Wollheim's distinction between *central* and *acentral imagining*. Central imagining entails imagining from the inside, as if we transport ourselves imaginatively into the position of a character or point-of-view within the diegesis. Acentral imagining, however, does not prompt this transportation. The distinction can therefore be understood as imagining from the inside (linked to identification/empathy) and imagining from the outside (linked to sympathy). Smith argues that identification, as a concept in film theory, has in large part revolved around central imagining, and he points out that Carroll's objections to identification, are objections to empathy. Smith follows Carroll in arguing that we usually imagine narrative events from an acentral observer position, and that our dominant emotional response tends to be one of sympathetic concern. However, Smith allows for a weaker version of central imagining, one in which we don't mistake ourselves for the character. More specifically, Smith allows for empathy as voluntary *emotional simulation* (where we set aside our own characteristics and imagine having characteristics that fit the character, in order to predict and understand her behaviour) and involuntary *affective mimicry* (automatic affective responses to facial and body expressions that bypass imagination) as subroutines within his *structure of sympathy* (Smith, 1995, pp. 76-81, 96-103; for another discussion on central/acentral imagining, see, e.g., Vaage, 2008, pp. 24-25, 124-128).

Although Carroll, Smith, and Plantinga (see Plantinga, 2009, pp. 103-104) argue that identification is ill-suited to explain our emotional engagement with characters, philosopher and film scholar Berys Gaut argues that the concept should instead be refined. According to Gaut (1999), identification does not entail emotional duplication or total fusion with characters, but instead is a matter of *imagination*: "Once we construe identification as a matter of imagining oneself in a character's situation, the issue becomes pertinent of *which aspects* of the character's situation one imagines oneself in" (pp. 204-205). For Gaut, identification is always *aspective identification*. The idea here being that characters have a vast number of physical and psychological properties that we can identify with, and that it is virtually impossible to identify with all of them. Thus, Gaut argues that while we can, for example, identify with a character's visual and aural *perception* (imagining seeing what the character sees), that does not necessarily entail identifying with her *affectively* (imagining feeling what the character feels), *motivationally* (imagining wanting what the character wants), *epistemically* (imagining knowing what the character knows), or *empathically* (imagining feeling and actually feeling what the character feels). (Gaut, 1999, pp. 201-206; see also Gaut, 2010, p. 137-138).

Although I agree with Gaut's line of reasoning, we should also consider the function of imaginative engagement. For example, we usually entertain the thought of fictional events "as if" they were real, and this enables us to respond cognitively and emotionally to them (as I have discussed in the *paradox of fiction* section). The function of this type of imaginative engagement is simple; fiction by definition is not real, so we employ our imagination to make it more engaging – to imagine it as if it were real. Now, we can also entertain the thought of aspectively being in a character's situation (central imagining), but what would the function of this type of imaginative engagement be? We are already entertaining the thought of the fiction as real, and we certainly don't need to imagine the

fiction centrally to do this, so why would we take this extra imaginative step? Additionally, and as I have discussed earlier, watching a movie is not only a matter of imagining seeing and hearing things – we also actually see and hear things. So the question arises, why would we want or need to imagine seeing what a character sees when we actually see it? Gaut (1999) ties the point-of-view shot and reaction-shot to perceptual identification (pp. 208-209), but to my mind, only his reaction-shot example seems to foster central imagining. More specifically, a point-of-view shot actually shows me what the character fictionally sees from her perspective. Why would this engage central imagination? On the other hand, a reaction-shot that foregrounds a horrified facial expression, without showing me what the character actually sees, could certainly encourage me to imagine seeing what the character is seeing. Of course, I am here assuming that central imagining is a functional activity that we often utilize when we lack the necessary information to understand a character or situation, and not just a matter of entertaining thoughts. Perhaps central imagining is less likely in movies that are densely informative, and more likely in movies that restrict spectator knowledge or deny access to the internal states of characters? This is, roughly speaking, what film scholar Margrethe Bruun Vaage argues for when she ties her *imaginative empathy* (central imagining) concept to *dedramatized films*, by pointing out that in the absence of salient information, we can centrally imagine what characters are seeing, feeling, and thinking, in order to understand them better (Vaage, 2010, pp. 172-176; see also Choi, 2005, pp. 19-23; Smith, 1995, pp. 97-98). Thus, if characters wear their thoughts and emotions on their sleeves, and what they see and hear is readily available to us, it seems unlikely that we would utilize this type of imaginative engagement. The larger point here is that Gaut is right in arguing that we can aspectively identify with characters, but the probability of such a response is tempered by our desire or need to do so. In general, I agree with Carroll, Plantinga, and Smith's criticism of the identification term: it's too diffuse and imprecise. Because of this, I won't be using the identification term in my analysis.

In addition to the conceptual confusion surrounding identification, theorists have repeatedly conceptualized empathy in different ways, and empathy has often been relegated to a trivial role within character engagement. As we have seen, Carroll has tied empathy to identification and central imagining, as a duplication of emotion. Several theorists disagree with this understanding of empathy, and responses to Carroll are so numerous (see, e.g., Gaut, 1999, pp. 207-208; Coplan, 2004, pp. 147-149; Vaage, 2008, pp. 179-210; Grodal, 2009, pp. 181-182) that it might as well be a ritual within character engagement theory to criticize Carroll's objections to empathy. For example, Margrethe Bruun Vaage categorizes Carroll's objections to empathy under three points: *the observer objection*, *the incongruence objection*, and *the redundancy objection* (I won't discuss the latter here). The *observer objection* emphasizes that we respond emotionally from a position external to that of the character. From this position, we also take the character into account, and are therefore more likely to sympathize than empathize with the character. However, Vaage argues that empathy is clearly also an observer position, because empathy is also directed at the character, and she points out that empathy is never a total fusion with the character: we can only *feel and share aspects* of what the character is feeling, just as we can only feel and share aspects of what people are feeling when we empathize with them in real life. Secondly, the *incongruence objection* entails that the differences between the spectator and the character are so large that it creates an asymmetry problem (different objects for our emotions, different levels of information, different beliefs and desires). For Vaage, this argument also stems from the misconception that empathy entails a total fusion with a character, and these differences do not exclude

empathy. Instead, with imaginative empathy, we momentarily bracket our own knowledge and desires, and imagine the situation from the other's point of view. In other words, adopting another's perspective does not entail a loss of self. Lastly, Vaage points out that Carroll's criticism of empathy is a criticism of imaginative empathy, as he allows for automatic empathic responses through mirror mechanisms (Vaage, 2008, pp. 185-193; for Carroll's view on mirror reflexes, see, e.g., Carroll, 2013, pp. 54-57).

It's important to recognize that this sympathy and empathy debate is rooted in two "rival" theories about how we perceive and understand other people. These theories are generally called *theory of mind* (or *theory-theory*) and *simulation theory*. Margrethe Bruun Vaage points out that theory of mind theorists argue that we understand others through theoretical reasoning, by applying tacit folk psychological laws, schemata, inferences, and hypotheses. On this view, I can infer that a character is afraid of (x), because common sense and my accumulated knowledge tells me that most people within a society/culture are afraid of (x), and the character's facial expression matches the faces I have seen in other cases where I know that people have been scared. I can then feel sympathy from a third-person perspective, if I care about the character. On the other hand, Vaage points out that simulation theorists argue that we often adopt a first-person perspective by imaginatively placing ourselves in other people's situation to try to understand what that feels like, and therefore experience empathy. Vaage argues that although reasoning is an important tool to understanding others, simulation and empathy can also provide valuable information by letting us partly *feel what it is like* to be them (Vaage, 2008, pp. 78-79)**.** In a similar fashion, Katalin Bálint and Ed Tan (2019) point out that spectators utilize *mind modelling* (cognitive processes utilized to infer mental states in others; schemata, but also voluntary simulations) and *embodied simulation* (automatic and involuntary processes; affective and motor mimicry) to comprehend and to be engaged by characters (pp. 211-212). Torben Grodal (2009) also argues that we utilize both theory of mind and simulation to understand others (p. 187). Thus, one can certainly be a pluralist, and argue for the importance of both of these ways of understanding.

In this thesis, I will focus on empathy as *embodied simulation*, or what Margrethe Bruun Vaage calls *embodied empathy*. Vaage (2008) points out that from a phenomenological perspective, we are thought to have "a fundamental ability to sense what the other's bodily state is like because our constitution as subjects is developed in constant interplay with other subjects" (p. 44). In other words, we partly learn about and understand our own feelings by watching expressions of those feelings in others. Embodied empathy does not depend on higher cognitive functions, and it can give us direct access to the affective and bodily feelings of others, because embodied empathy entails latching onto these feelings through automatic processes (*mirror neurons*, affective mimicry, and facial feedback). Vaage argues that embodied empathy has a solid empirical foundation in neuroscience, because of the discovery of *mirror neurons* in the brain, by Rizzolatti and Gallese in the 1990s. According to Vaage, when we watch someone else perform an action, these neurons light up in a similar way to the one who is doing the action, as if we were close to doing the same action ourselves. This also extends to watching tactile experiences (being touched) and watching affective states (emotional facial and body expressions). In this way, we can partly experience the emotions of others in a direct and automatic fashion, just by looking at them. This process can be understood as a low-level simulation that bypasses cognition/imagination. Secondly, Vaage argues that embodied empathy has two modal forms: empathy as a *process of understanding* and as an *emotional output*. The idea here is that we can latch onto the other's emotional state, and either pre-

reflectively understand this as the other's state, or experience this state as a shared, conscious feeling (Vaage, 2010, pp. 163-165, 167; see also Vaage, 2008, pp. 44-48, 51, 56-58, 66-69; for additional discussions on mirror neurons, see, e.g., Smith, 2014, pp. 37-40; Grodal & Kramer, 2010, pp. 24-26; Iacobani, 2009, pp. 659-667).

There are probably several perspectives on this debate that I haven't been able to fully explore, but I think that both sympathy and embodied empathy are two important aspects of what makes characters emotionally engaging, and in this sense, I am a pluralist. However, I also think that there is one aspect of our emotional engagement with characters that is somewhat absent from this debate, and that is that movies are also designed to make us feel various degrees of *closeness* to characters. This line of thinking is perhaps implied by both Gaut and Vaage, in their respective theories. Gaut writes about identifying with aspects of a character (perceptual, epistemic, and affective identification, etc.), and Vaage writes about experiencing *what it feels like* to be in a character's situation. My thoughts about closeness are rooted in the writings of film scholar Jens Eder (2006), and he argues that "films are able to create unique ways of being close to characters. They are able to intensify feelings of closeness or to bring forth reflective distance" (p. 69), and that "Some of the power of films lies in their ability to produce closeness or distance to characters and combine different ways of being close to them" (p. 69). I think Eder is right about this, and I will come back to his theory later, after I have discussed Smith's *structure of sympathy approach*.

2.3.2 Murray Smith's Structure of Sympathy Approach

Murray Smith's *structure of sympathy* consists of three steps that are necessary for our sympathetic engagement with characters: *recognition*, *alignment*, and *allegiance*. I will focus on the last two steps here, because recognition of characters and their traits tends to be a simple process in most movies (for a detailed discussion on recognition, see Smith, 1995, pp. 21, 47-48, 82, 110-114; Smith, 2010, pp. 247-251).

Smith argues that *alignment* is closely related to the concept of narration, and that the concept refers to how we are placed in relation to characters, which in turn gives us a degree of information about narrative events, including the feelings, knowledge, and actions of specific characters. Smith points out that alignment has two components, s*patio-temporal attachment* and *subjective access*. First, spatio-temporal attachment entails being bound to one or more characters in space and time, and this attachment can either be exclusive (bound to a single character) or dynamic (bound to several characters). These attachments provide different degrees of information to the spectator. For example, if we are exclusively attached to the protagonist, we are provided with information about actions and events that happen on the protagonist's spatio-temporal path, while a dynamic attachment can give us information about actions and events in several spatio-temporal paths. Secondly, subjective access has to do with the degree of access we have to the interior states of characters, and characters can be transparent (easy to access) or opaque (hard to access). For example, a film can employ several techniques to provide subjective access: *dialogue, monologue*, and *narrators* (a character can tell us or other characters what they feel or think); *close-ups and reaction-shots of facial or bodily expressions* (emotional expressions that we understand as expressing feelings and thoughts about the situation the character is in). If a character uses a muted acting style, does not reveal or share thoughts and feelings, or the film employs techniques to hide character subjectivity, the character is much harder to access. As such, alignment is ultimately about information, and it should be noted that alignment does not in itself lead to sympathetic engagement.

However, alignment can be said to produce a platform for sympathetic or antipathetic responses, because being aligned with a character opens up the possibility for such engagement (Smith, 1995, pp. 83, 105, 142-143, 146, 151, 174-175, 187-188).

Smith's *allegiance* component deals with our sympathetic or antipathetic engagement with characters, and he argues that our sympathetic engagement depends on our moral evaluation of characters, and the moral orientation of the film. According to Smith (1995), if we have "reliable access to the character's state of mind, and understand the context of the character's actions" (p. 84), we can evaluate the character based on this information and based on our own morality. In other words, the spectator's allegiance depends on the information gathered in the alignment step, and how we morally evaluate that information. Smith also argues that "spectators construct moral structures, in which characters are organized and ranked in a system of preference" (p. 84). Meaning, we also evaluate characters by comparing them to other characters within the diegesis, and it follows that we ally ourselves with the characters that occupy the top spots in our moral structures. In addition to the spectator's own moral evaluation and moral structure, allegiance also entails the film's own moral orientation: how the film suggests or guides our sympathetic engagement by foregrounding certain cues/signals. For example, character actions and iconography can and usually do guide us towards sympathetic or antipathetic responses. If a character shows kindness or malice towards others, that factors into our moral evaluation. Generally speaking, we can also associate and evaluate the appearance of characters, their physical traits (facial/body features, including dresses and props) and psychological traits (beliefs and ideas) with positive or negative qualities. Smith points out that our positive or negative evaluations of actions, hinges upon the assumption that actions have somewhat stable moral *valences* (intrinsic goodness or badness). This can be understood in terms of our evaluations of actions in the real world, or within the *co-text* of the film (the values and beliefs internal to the diegesis; the context within the film). In real life, we might find an action to be immoral, but in a movie, the same action could be contrasted with a plethora of other gruesome actions. At some level then, we would prefer action or trait (x) over action or trait (y). Smith is also careful to point out that if the film's co-text is in dire conflict with our evaluations of actions in the real world, it becomes harder to engage sympathetically (Smith, 1995, pp. 84-85, 188-195).

2.3.3 Modifying the Approach: Embodied Empathy and Closeness

Overall, Smith's approach does a great job of explaining how movies can elicit our sympathetic engagement with characters, but he pays little attention to how movies can elicit empathy, even though he allows for affective mimicry and facial feedback mechanisms to operate as subroutines within his approach (as discussed in earlier). I will argue that Margrethe Bruun Vaage's embodied empathy concept can enhance Smith's approach, and embodied empathy fits right into the recognition component (recognizing affective states) and the alignment component (getting subjective access by latching onto a character's affective state, and understanding/feeling this state). Vaage ties embodied empathy primarily to mainstream narrative films: movies that regularly employ *point-of-view structures* (point/glance, point/object, point/reaction), Greg Smith's *emotion markers* (highly foregrounded cues aimed at eliciting bursts of emotions; I go into detail about this in the following *mood theory* segment), Noël Carroll's *emotional prefocusing* (foregrounding appropriate criteria to elicit emotions; I go into detail about this in the following *cue approach* segment), and Carl Plantinga's *scene of empathy* or what Vaage calls *attraction scenes* (scenes that can elicit embodied empathy by focusing spectator attention on emotional facial expressions in close-ups and reaction-shots; for a discussion

on the scene of empathy, see Plantinga, 1999, pp. 239-240, 249-254). For Vaage, the foregrounding of emotional facial expressions in close-ups and reaction-shots is not only aimed at making us understand the emotional state of the character through embodied empathy, but to actually elicit the feelings of the character in the spectator, and thereby promote a feeling of *what it is like* to be the character. According to Vaage, scenes that promote this type of engagement are attraction scenes, because feeling embodied empathy can be an attraction in itself. In other words, feeling what the character is feeling can be an engaging experience, especially when we consider the more or less extreme situations that characters often find themselves in. Partly experiencing what it feels like to be in those situations is a big part of what makes some movies emotionally engaging (Vaage, 2010, pp. 160-161, 168-172). I will add Vaage's embodied empathy concept to Smith's alignment component, as one of the ways in which we gain subjective access to characters. Embodied empathy can provide information that may be of importance for our sympathetic engagement, but at the same time, it can also provide the emotional thrill of partly feeling what the character is feeling. Thus, even though alignment does not directly lead to sympathy, alignments are not just a matter of information, they can be emotionally significant. For example, a close alignment that provides a high degree of subjective access through close-ups and reaction-shots of emotional facial expressions, can potentially produce a high degree of embodied empathy.

On that note, an alignment can also be affectively significant in another way. An alignment can promote feelings of closeness. Jens Eder argues that we can feel close to characters in five distinct ways, and I will highlight three of them here: *perceived spatiotemporal relations*, *cognitive relations*, and *emotional responses*. Eder notes that Smith's sympathy structure correspond to these three aspects of closeness. For example, when Eder (2006) writes about spatiotemporal relations, or what I call *spatiotemporal closeness*, he argues that a close spatiotemporal attachment "can suggest that viewer and character perceive the same situation and share a mutual *semantic-perceptual space* with certain constraints and capabilities to see, hear, judge, feel, and act" (p. 72). Meanwhile, close framings (close-ups) can suggest closeness in physical space. Secondly, in terms of cognitive relations and affective responses, or what I call *cognitive closeness* and *affective closeness*, Eder argues that we can feel close to characters by understanding them (understanding a character's traits, properties, and *mental perspectives*), and by experiencing similar mental perspectives. More specifically, Eder reconceptualizes Berys Gaut's aspectual identification concepts (perceptual, epistemic, affective, etc.) into forms of mental perspectives. Our mental perspectives need not be identical to characters, but they can be more or less similar, and depending on our understanding of characters and these similarities, we can feel cognitive and/or affective closeness to characters. This includes feelings of closeness through similar perceptions, knowledge, beliefs, emotions, and mood (Eder, 2006, pp. 70-74). With this in mind, I will argue that a close alignment may elicit a high degree of feelings of closeness. For example, a close alignment may consist of an exclusive spatiotemporal attachment to a single character (spatiotemporal closeness), where our perspective and knowledge is restricted to that of the character (perceptual and epistemic closeness), and we are given a high degree of subjective access to the character (epistemic closeness and affective closeness through embodied empathy). Secondly, I think that these feelings of closeness are engaging for a lot of spectators, and because of this, they are important attractions in themselves. I will add Eder's closeness concept to Smith's approach. This gives the approach the ability to analyze how a film is structured to elicit sympathy, empathy, and feelings of closeness.

2.4 Mood Theory

In this theory section, I explore the value of analyzing how movies are structured to elicit *mood*. Unlike full-fledged emotions, moods are generally understood as *low-level emotional states* and *preparatory states* that encourage us to search for appropriate *cues* in the environment, cues that are congruent with our mood. Moods generally differ from emotions in a few important respects: they tend to last longer, be less intense, and they seem to have no clear cause or reason. This makes sense, because not every cue in our real world, or in the cinema, is so clear-cut that we are able to easily appraise them and respond to them with emotions. Some cues are diffuse, and they may elicit moods in us.

I think it's important to analyze how movies are structured to elicit mood, because there are a wealth of *stylistic* cues and *diffuse cues* in movies that do not necessarily elicit full-fledged emotions, and yet, these cues are affectively significant, and they certainly contribute to a film's overall emotional and affective appeal. In what follows, I will discuss Greg Smith's *mood-cue approach*, and I will use Smith's approach to analyze how *Mother!* is structured to elicit and establish mood in the following chapter. However, I will also modify the mood-cue approach by adding three additional perspectives on what mood is and how it can be elicited.

2.4.1 Greg Smith's Mood-Cue Approach

My understanding of mood is largely based on Greg Smith's *mood-cue approach*. Smith (2003) argues that a mood is "a preparatory state in which one is seeking an opportunity to express a particular emotion or emotion set" (p. 38), and that moods "act as the emotion system's equivalent of attention, focusing us on certain stimuli and not others" (p. 38). For Smith, moods are diffuse, last longer than emotions, focuses our attention, and makes it more likely that we will experience emotions. Likewise, emotions that are congruent with our mood also encourages the mood to continue. In other words, mood increases the chance that we will experience certain emotions (by focusing our attention on congruent stimuli), and brief bursts of congruent emotions keep the mood alive. If no congruent emotional stimuli can be found, the mood will eventually dissipate or change character. Secondly, Smith proposes an associative network model of the emotion system, wherein several inputs (external cues and internal responses) can be automatically associated with emotions. More specifically, Smith (2003) points out that "a node in the network labeled 'fear' might be associated with a childhood memory of falling from a height, a trembling voice, running, increased heart rate, increased right frontal hemispheric activity in the brain, and widened eyes" (p. 29). A key takeaway from this is that if we experience several and/or intense fear associations, we are more likely to experience fear as a full-fledged emotion, while experiencing a few fear associations can produce a low-level experience of fear: a fearful mood (Smith, 2003, pp. 29, 32, 38-39).

Smith (2003) goes on to argue that "the primary emotive effect of film is to create mood" (p. 42), and that film structures "seek to increase the film's chances of evoking emotion by first creating a predisposition toward experiencing emotion: a mood" (p. 42). Smith points out that to elicit and establish a mood in the audience, movies use *perceptual cues* that can provide emotional information, and he calls these cues *emotive cues*. For Smith, movies utilize a variety of stylistic emotive cues that function as mood elicitors (stylistic elements in the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound). Movies provide a combination of redundant emotive cues to increase the likelihood of establishing a consistent mood for a variety of spectators, because spectators need only latch onto the associations produced by some of these cues, not all of them. This is important, because

according to Smith, spectators come equipped with somewhat different emotion systems: the form of the emotion system may vary (e.g., damage to certain input channels), and the contents of our emotion systems may vary greatly (e.g., we accumulate different associations throughout our lives). Thus, coordinated emotive cues can elicit a few mild emotional associations, and this is enough to establish a mood in spectators. These emotive cues need not be foregrounded or coordinated in any particular way, and they can be quite diffuse and hard to appraise. After the intended mood has been established, Smith argues that the mood is sustained by *emotion markers*: highly foregrounded and coordinated bursts of intense emotive cues that serve to elicit several strong emotional associations and clear-cut appraisals, and this can elicit a burst of emotions in spectators. Smith notes that emotion markers only need to elicit congruent (fitting) emotions to sustain the mood, given that we also associate emotions with congruent emotions (Smith, 2003, pp. 30, 32-34, 42-44, 47; see also, Smith, 1999, pp. 115-118).

The important thing to recognize here is that a mood can be elicited by cues that we automatically associate with certain emotions. This means that the filmmaker can utilize a variety of stylistic and diffuse cues in the mise-en-scène (settings, costumes, lighting, colour, movement, facial expressions, etc.), cinematography (camera movement, framing, perspective, focus, etc.), editing (rhythmic editing, spatial editing, etc.), and sound (diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, subjective sounds, off-screen sounds, etc.) to establish a mood in the audience. For example, in the opening credits of *Alien* (Scott, 1979), we can hear eerie non-diegetic music being played, while the camera slowly pans from left to right across the vastness and darkness of space. We can see stars in the distance as the camera pans past a dark planet, a planet that is only visible because of the light rays emitting from the sun behind it. We can hear chittering string instruments, a strange heartbeat sound, and an ominous flute sound, while the film's title slowly takes form on the screen. Now, there are several visual and aural elements here (redundant emotive cues) that are not foregrounded through variable framing in any particular way. The camera is simply floating through space, and my attention is not directed towards any specific object. The *diffuse* nature of these stylistic cues makes it unlikely that I will feel fear and anxiety as full-fledged emotions, because there is no object here that clearly screams danger, and I'm not certain how I should appraise these cues. However, as I watch these opening credits, I begin to feel a low-level sense of tension, anxiety, fear, and curiosity. I automatically associate the darkness of space and the dark planet with fear, the vastness of space with loneliness, and the music with mystery, eeriness and discomfort. Altogether, I begin to feel an anxious and fearful mood. To me, it seems likely that many spectators will latch onto similar associations in *Alien*'s opening credits, and that the opening is intended to elicit such an effect through its redundant stylistic and diffuse cues. With this in mind, I will argue that the upside of utilizing this approach is that it can be used to interpret how stylistic and diffuse elements contribute to our emotional engagement with movies. On the other hand, because of this focus on stylistic and diffuse cues, the approach may encourage a lack of clarity, because automatic emotional associations vary from person to person. In other words, arguing for or against the emotional significance of specific cues is a matter of interpretation and probability. In any case, it seems to me that Smith's theory stands on solid ground, but it can certainly be modified to include some additional perspective on what mood is and how it can be elicited.

2.4.2 Modifying the Mood-Cue Approach: Additional Perspectives

Unlike Greg Smith's argument about mood focusing our attention on congruent stimuli, Noël Carroll argues that mood does not directly focus our attention, but rather does it

indirectly, by coating our perceptions and cognitions with affect. For Carroll, if we are in, for example, a happy or sad mood, our perceptions and cognitions are biased by our affective state, which indirectly increases the likelihood of having congruent emotions. As Carroll (2003) puts it, "moods pervade perception" (p. 528). Unlike Smith, Carroll draws attention to the way in which mood affects cognition, by predisposing us to certain cognitive states – influencing what we remember, how we appraise and categorize phenomena, and so on. In fact, Carroll (2003) argues that the function of mood is to "bias cognitive processes (including, though not exclusively, the cognitive emotions) in ways presumably dependent upon the component feeling tones of the mood" (p. 532). In other words, moods are composed of feeling tones that transform or influence our perceptions and thoughts. On this view, a mood not only increases the likelihood of eliciting congruent emotions, but our affectively charged frame of mind coats more or less everything with affect. Secondly, Carroll argues that filmmakers can elicit moods *by eliciting emotions*. The idea here is that strong emotions can *spillover* into moods as they dissipate in strength, because the feeling tones of an emotional episode can persist for a good while after the cause of the emotion has vanished. In Carroll's example, anger can spillover into an irritable mood that biases subsequent cognitions, or fear can spillover into an anxious mood that biases subsequent cognitions. This is quite similar to Smith's argument that emotions fuel and sustain the prevailing mood, except that in Carroll's account, emotions can evoke moods whether or not a mood has been established already. If we accept this line of reasoning, then filmmakers can establish moods not only through emotive cues, but also through emotional spillover and emotion markers (Carroll, 2003, pp. 528-530, 532, 539-541).

Carl Plantinga's mood theory integrates Greg Smith's perspective and Noël Carroll's perspective, but also expands upon them. First of all, Plantinga (2012) distinguishes between *human moods* and *art moods* by pointing out that art mood is "the affective character or tone of the film. A film's art mood is an amalgam of affective 'charges' or elicitors that together characterize the overall experience of the work" (p. 461). Human moods, on the other hand, are actual affective states that humans experience, while art moods are "potential elicitors of human moods" (p. 461). This distinction is drawn to point out that art moods do not necessarily elicit human moods, and that art moods can evolve, change, or be juxtaposed throughout the course of a narrative. As such, art moods can suggest or express an affective character through fitting stylistic elements that may prompt congruent or conflicting associations. In other words, "Whether or not the film actually elicits a mood in a spectator, it may still have the character of that mood" (p. 470). Furthermore, Plantinga argues that movies can elicit human moods in three distinct ways. First, moods can be elicited by *eliciting emotions*, because emotions themselves have an affective character, and they leave behind emotional residue and can spillover into moods (this is what Carroll argues for). Secondly, the filmmaker can elicit moods by utilizing *stylistic elements* that are perceived to have *affectively charged qualities*, because we tend to associate moods with certain qualities. For example, we tend to associate brightness and liveliness with a positively valenced mood, and we tend to associate darkness and isolation with a negatively valenced mood, etc. Thus, discrete parts of the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound are routinely mobilized to express such qualities, and often by combining several elements to create affective congruency (similar to Smith's argument). Lastly, Plantinga argues that moods can be elicited by the *cognitions* encouraged by the film. If we begin to *assume* or *expect* that the protagonist is in danger, this may lead to an anxious mood. While on the other hand, being in any type of mood can bias our cognitions and judgements about characters and narrative

events (similar to Carroll's argument). Plantinga (2012) goes on to point out that mood is "always related to narrative point of view and character" (p. 472), and Plantinga (2014) argues that "mood is a fundamental means by which the narration communicates attitude, perspective, or point of view" (p. 145). The idea here is that the art mood can, for example, suggest the affective state of a specific character within the diegesis (a *focalized mood*), and in this way, a focalized mood can communicate the affective frame of mind of a character. Secondly, the narration can suggest a general affective point of view on the diegesis (a *world-based mood*), or there can be a clash between moods (*mood incongruence*). On this view, mood can be understood as a way of experiencing or seeing the fictional world, and the art mood can invite us to experience the fiction from an affectively charged perspective (Plantinga, 2012, pp. 461, 464-468, 470, 472; Plantinga, 2014, pp. 142-143, 145-147).

Lastly, Philosopher Robert Sinnerbrink (2012) argues that what is missing from Smith's mood-cue approach is "the phenomenological basis for our response to relevant 'mood-cues' as meaningful phenomena in the first place: how do we apprehend such cues as affectively charged or emotionally evocative when they are context-dependent, variable and, for the most part, insignificant?" (p. 153). Sinnerbrink here points out that not all mood-cues are inherently affectively charged, and that, indeed, many mood-cues partly become affectively charged within a specific aesthetic or narrative context. This leads Sinnerbrink (2012) to argue that a "film-world must be aesthetically disclosed or rendered meaningful *through the evocation of appropriate moods* in order for such cues to show up as affectively charged with meaning in the first place" (p. 154). Sinnerbrink claims that expressive affective qualities are a part of the composition of a fictional world, and that moods contribute to revealing what is emotionally significant in that world. Thus, moods are not only important because of their function as an orienting state that increases the likelihood of eliciting prototypical emotions - they are important because they affectively attune us to the fictional world. For Sinnerbrink, mood is a form of *background attunement*, in the sense that mood is the affective background/backdrop of the more foregrounded cues/emotion markers that elicit full-fledged emotions. In other words, the mood of a film invites us to witness the story unfold from an affectively charged view-point, and this clearly has some bearing on how we respond to foregrounded cues throughout any given film. On this view, it's important to pay more attention to how the film's stylistic elements attune us to the fictional world, and how these elements form an affective backdrop that influences our appraisals of foregrounded cues (Sinnerbrink, 2012, pp. 152-155).

2.5 The Cue Approach: Searching For Emotionally Significant Cues

In this final theory section, I tie together the aforementioned theoretical perspectives and approaches into an analytical framework that I call the *cue approach*.

In the following segment, I will begin by discussing what *cues* are, and I will point out that each of the aforementioned theoretical perspectives examine how *cues* are used to elicit specific responses. I will also point out that there are different types of cues, and that I think it's important for my approach to be able to examine a variety of cues.

Lastly, I briefly discuss what my cue approach is, and what I aim to achieve with it. In general, the cue approach is meant to be a nuanced mixed-perspective approach that examines a film's emotional appeal from three theoretical perspectives. In this way, it's designed to be able to highlight different and important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film.

2.5.1 What are Cues?

Throughout this chapter I have examined how cognitive film theorists approach the topic of how movies are structured to elicit emotions and affects in spectators. I have focused on narrative engagement theory, character engagement theory, and mood theory, and although these theoretical perspectives examine different phenomena, they have something in common. They are all searching for specific *cues* that can elicit specific emotional or affective responses. These *cues* are central to my approach, and because of this, I think it's important to properly define this concept. According to psychologist Keith Oatley (2013), "A cue is a visual pattern on the screen or a sound pattern in a soundtrack" (p. 269), and he argues that "Specific patterns act as cues to trigger specific appraisals and, by means of them, specific schemas of emotion" (p. 272). In other words, Oatley argues that cues are signals that can trigger cognitive appraisals, which in turn can trigger emotions. However, we have also seen that Greg Smith argues that stylistic emotive cues can trigger automatic associations, which in turn can trigger moods and emotions. Additionally, in Vaage's account of embodied empathy, close-ups of emotional facial expressions (foregrounded cues) can trigger automatic and hardwired mechanisms, which in turn can trigger embodied empathy. The point here is, there seems to be different sorts of cues, and clearly, not every cue elicits the same response. So, what are cues? In my view, cues are signals that - depending on their perceived or automatic significance - can trigger a variety of responses in us. Another way of putting it is that cues are events, stimuli, and pieces of information that tend to be important to us in some way.

With this in mind, I will argue that the aforementioned theories are concerned with finding cues that can elicit specific responses. For example, in my understanding, when Noël Carroll writes about erotetic narration, he is looking for cues that can elicit and sustain viewer interest in the narrative. As I have discussed previously, he points out that certain scenes are structured to raise questions and expectations, and to my mind, such scenes are *curiosity cues*. Furthermore, scenes that are structured to make it seem as if something bad is going to happen are *suspense cues*. For the purposes of this thesis, I will call this Carroll's *erotetic narration approach*: an approach that examines cues that can elicit story-directed emotions. Similarly, I will argue that Murray Smith's *sympathy structure approach* examines cues in movies that can trigger moral appraisals, and elicit character-directed emotions. Here, I will argue that scenes that foreground morally desirable or undesirable character traits and actions are *sympathy cues* and *antipathy cues*. I have also modified his approach to include the embodied empathy and closeness concepts. I will argue that foregrounded emotional facial and bodily expressions are

empathy cues. Similarly, specific forms of alignment that brings us close to a character perceptually, epistemically, and affectively, can be understood as *closeness cues*. Lastly, Smith's mood-cue approach looks for stylistic and diffuse emotive cues and emotion markers that can elicit mood and sustain mood through bursts of emotions.

Now, there are some important cue factors to discuss here. First, even though it seems likely that cues are intended to elicit emotional and affective responses, a spectator may not find a specific cue to be significant, may resist the intended effect, or may not notice it at all. Thus, there is no one-to-one ratio or clear cause-effect relationship between cues and emotions. Cues are better thought of as invitations to feel, and to analyze cues and their intended effects is a matter of interpretation and probability. Secondly, there is a difference between cues in real life and cues in movies. In real life, we are bombarded by unfiltered sensory data, but we only perceive some of that data to be emotionally significant. In movies, on the other hand, Noël Carroll (1999) argues that "filmmakers have selected out the details of the scene or sequence that they think are emotively significant and thrust them, so to speak, in our faces" (p. 29). More specifically, Carroll argues that movies are *emotively prefocused* because they are *criterially prefocused*. The idea here is that movie scenes and sequences are structured in such a way that the criteria necessary for eliciting an emotion is *foregrounded* (pushed to the front of our attention) by formal techniques (variable framing). This makes it easier for us to recognize and appraise an object as having emotionally significant criteria (Carroll, 1999, pp. 28-30; see also Plantinga, 2009, pp. 79-80; Carroll & Seeley, 2013, pp. 61-62, 68). Thus, many cues are foregrounded by filmmakers, and this is an important part of why we often pick up on their significance and respond to them.

This notion of foregrounding fits well with the narrative engagement and character engagement theories I have examined, and also Greg Smith's emotion marker concept. Salient cues are usually thrust to the forefront by way of variable framing to, for example, elicit curiosity, suspense, sympathy, and empathy. Most of these cues can be called *foregrounded cues* and *clear cues*: cues that are easy to appraise because they possess a clear emotionally significant criteria, and we are guided to pay attention to them. However, not all cues can be said to be foregrounded or clear in this way, and although variable framing highlights and focuses our attention on such cues, this does not mean that *diffuse cues* or *backgrounded cues* ceases to exist. These cues often form the backdrop to our more prototypical emotional responses to foregrounded cues (this is roughly what Robert Sinnerbrink argues for, as I discussed in the mood theory segment). *Diffuse cues* are harder to appraise, and this is because they often don't possess a clear emotionally significant criteria. Because of this, we are often unsure of how we should appraise them, and many of them can leave us with feelings of uncertainty. Diffuse cues can be foregrounded (focused on, yet hard to appraise) or backgrounded (not focused on). *Backgrounded cues* are almost always diffuse, because they exist in the background of something we are guided to pay attention to. Yet, we can still associate these diffuse cues and backgrounded cues with emotions, and I think that their diffuse nature is an important part of why we tend to associate them with emotions, rather than cognitively appraise them as emotionally significant. Of course, although Greg Smith focuses on stylistic emotive cues in his approach, this notion of diffuse cues and backgrounded cues is heavily implied in his writings. Smith (1999) writes, "When we are afraid, usually we are afraid *of something* and we want to take action accordingly. The real world, however, is also full of hidden and partial information" (p. 110). Indeed, diffuse cues and backgrounded cues can be understood as hidden and partial information that is hard to appraise. Moreover,

stylistic cues like lighting, sounds, strange pieces of dialogue, camera framings, and so on, tend to be diffuse in this way, because they are either too large, too scattered, or too indeterminable to be appraised as clear objects with clear emotionally significant criteria. Secondly, these stylistic cues tend to be outside of our immediate awareness (backgrounded), because we are guided to pay attention to foregrounded narrative cues. The important point here is that, given the task of this thesis, I think it's important for my approach to be able to examine a variety of cues that can trigger different responses.

2.5.2 What is the Cue Approach?

With the above cue discussion in mind, my cue approach is meant to be a nuanced mixed-perspective approach, one that is capable of examining the emotional significance of a variety of cues. The cue approach utilizes the three theoretical perspectives (narrative engagement theory, character engagement theory, and mood) that I have discussed throughout this chapter for this purpose. This includes the various terms and concepts I have examined within narrative engagement theory (erotetic narration, variable framing, restricted narration, curiosity, and suspense), character engagement theory (alignment, allegiance, sympathy, embodied empathy, and feelings of closeness), and mood theory (stylistic and diffuse emotive cues, emotion markers, emotional spillover, focalized mood, and attunement). Although the name of my approach is similar to Greg Smith's mood-cue approach, my approach does not focus solely on stylistic emotive cues and emotion markers. Instead, the cue approach is designed to examine several types of cues: *curiosity cues*, *suspense cues*, *embodied empathy cues*, *sympathy cues*, *closeness cues*, *stylistic and diffuse emotive cues*, and *emotion markers*. However, my approach is not meant to be a new and groundbreaking invention, it simply integrates and combines the insights of different cognitive film theorists, in an effort to highlight important aspects of *Mother!*'s emotional appeal. Thus, the cue approach can be understood as a nuanced mixed-perspective approach that examines how a film is structured to elicit story-directed emotions (curiosity and suspense), character-directed emotions (sympathy, embodied empathy, closeness), and mood.

However, this does raise one question. Why have I chosen to focus on these three elements, and not something else? There are a few reasons for this. First, I think that narratives, characters, and moods are central elements to the general movie experience, and I think that for a lot of spectators, the perceived quality of a film often depends on how engaging these elements are. If we're not interested in the story, if we don't care about the characters, and if we don't feel the affective qualities of the storyworld, it becomes increasingly hard to be engaged by the film at all. So, although there are other important aspects one could look at, these elements tend to be crucial factors for most spectators. Furthermore, the importance of these elements is also somewhat reflected by the wealth of film theory that has been written about narrative engagement, character engagement, and to a lesser extent, mood. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I have also chosen these perspectives because they seem to fit well with my personal experience of *Mother!*. It's fair to say that my emotional experience of *Mother!* has, to some degree, biased me to explore literature about emotional engagement that is congruent with my own experience, and surely, this has had an effect on the choices I have made for the cue approach. Lastly, I think that these perspectives provide my cue approach with a degree of nuance. Each of these perspectives provide detailed descriptions of specific phenomena, like how movies are structured to elicit story-directed emotions, how movies are structured to elicit character-directed emotions, and how stylistic and diffuse elements in a film can elicit a mood in the audience. By applying these insights in

my analysis of *Mother!*, I should be able to uncover important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film.

With this in mind, I have decided to utilize the cue approach in the following manner. I will use the different theoretical perspectives – narrative engagement theory, character engagement theory, and mood theory – to search for a variety of emotionally significant cues in *Mother!*. I will dedicate each part of my analysis to specific emotional and affective responses, and this should result in detailed descriptions about how the film is structured to be emotionally engaging. I will start by examining how the film is structured to elicit story-directed emotions. Within this section, I largely follow Noël Carroll's erotetic narration approach (with my conceptualizations of curiosity and suspense). Here, I pay particular attention to curiosity cues: scenes that are aimed at raising questions in the mind of the spectator. Secondly, I pay close attention to suspense cues: scenes that are structured to make it seem like something bad is going to happen. Afterwards, I will examine how scenes are structured to elicit character-directed emotions. Within this section, I largely follow Murray Smith's sympathy structure approach (with my modifications), and I will examine how the film aligns us with the protagonist, and how we are invited to feel embodied empathy and feelings of closeness through this alignment. Secondly, I will explore how the film is structured to elicit sympathy by foregrounding morally desirable and undesirable character traits and actions (sympathy cues). Lastly, I will examine how *Mother!* is structured to elicit and sustain a mood in the spectator. Within this section, I largely follow Greg Smith's mood-cue approach (with my modifications), and I pay close attention to stylistic cues, diffuse cues, and backgrounded cues that can elicit mood, and emotion markers that can sustain the mood.

3 Chapter 3: Analysis

For the sake of clarity, I will reiterate the purpose of this chapter, and provide an overview of the content within this chapter.

In this chapter, I'm going to utilize my cue approach to analyze *Mother!*. I will examine a variety of cues, and I will argue that specific cues are intended to elicit specific responses: story-directed emotions, character-directed emotions, and mood. I will dedicate one segment to curiosity, one segment to suspense, one segment to alignment, closeness, and embodied empathy, one segment to sympathy, and the last segment to mood, in an effort to provide a detailed and in-depth analysis of how the film is structured to elicit several emotional and affective responses.

I start by examining how the film is structured to elicit curiosity, and I pay particular attention to how scenes are structured to raise questions in the mind of the spectator. Afterwards, I analyze how scenes are structured to make it seem as if something bad is going to happen, in an effort to elicit suspense. Following this, I explore how the film is structured to elicit feelings of closeness and embodied empathy through the film's exclusive alignment. Then, I pay close attention to how the film is structured to elicit sympathy for Mother by foregrounding a set of morally desirable and undesirable traits and actions. Lastly, I analyze how the film is structured to elicit and sustain mood, by exploring the affective qualities of various stylistic cues, diffuse cues, backgrounded cues, and emotion markers.

3.1 Mother! and the Cue Approach: Story-Directed Emotions

3.1.1 Erotetic Narration, Restricted Narration, and Curiosity

One important part of what makes *Mother!* emotionally engaging is that the movie is filled with curiosity cues that are aimed at eliciting a high degree of curiosity. A plethora of scenes and sequences are structured to raise a flurry of questions, and in this segment, I will focus on three prominent lines of questions that are raised early on in the film: questions that can elicit CFI curiosity (reminder: curiosity as a feeling of interest). Secondly, *Mother!* utilizes a highly restrictive form of narration for the majority of the film, where we learn about the unfolding events almost exclusively from the perspective of Mother. Subjective narration restricts the flow of story information to what Mother sees and hears through variable framing, by focusing our attention on what mother attends to and how she reacts (indexing, scaling, bracketing). To accomplish this, the film employs four types of shots and one shot/edit structure that tie us to Mother's perspective and reactions for the majority of the film's duration: over-the-shoulder views, point-of-view shots, close-ups, reaction-shots, and point-of-view structures (point/glance, point/object, point/reaction). Because of this, scenes and sequences are structured in a way that forces us to uncover information with Mother. Therefore, this restrictive form of narration withholds story information by locking us to Mother's perspective, which also amplifies our curiosity. Lastly, I will argue that it is likely that our CFI curiosity gradually changes into CFD curiosity (reminder: curiosity as a feeling of deprivation) over time, when we begin to feel that we are being deprived of important information.

The first line of questions are found at the very beginning of *Mother!*. In the film's opening sequence (00:40-01:53), we see a close-up of an unknown woman who is set ablaze and is surrounded by fire. She looks straight into the camera with a sad facial expression, and the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of her teary eyes. These images are accompanied by sounds of roaring fire, crackling wood, and a faint sound of human screams/wailing. This scene is followed by a scene where a crystal is placed on a mount surrounded by darkness. The camera cuts to a close-up of the unknown man who placed it there, and he begins to smile. We cut back to the crystal, and the camera slowly tracks backwards while light gradually spreads outwards from the crystal to the surrounding darkness. Then, our view dissolves into several shots of the burned interior of a house that seems to be rejuvenating. This is accomplished through several overlapping techniques that suggest that the house is returning to life, or that we are watching a time lapse that is taking us backwards or forwards in time, which suggests that the great fire has either happened before or will happen in the future. The interior gradually shifts from a dark soot color to white walls and brown wood; burned objects and ashes gradually disappear and reveal neat and clean walls, windows, doors, and other objects; the visual elements are accompanied by sounds that suggest natural growth (wood sounds and effects, wind rustling through trees, etc.). This opening sequence invites the viewer to infer that there has either been a great fire, that people have died, and that the crystal has a mysterious power, or that all of this could happen in the future; inferences made by connecting the images and sounds together. I will come back to the significance of these stylistic cues later (see *mood* segment).

The important thing to notice here is that these scenes are curiosity cues that are intended to raise several questions in the minds of the audience. What did we just see? What led to the great fire? Who is this woman, and why is she sad? What is going on with the crystal? Does it have rejuvenating powers? Who is the man holding the crystal? Altogether, what is going on here? These questions are intended to drive and sustain viewer inquisitiveness

throughout the film, and they are not fully answered until the end of the movie. The opening sequence ends with the rejuvenation of a bedroom and the protagonist Mother, who wakes up and starts looking for her husband. Perhaps the opening sequence was a dream, or a premonition about future events? The camera follows her closely around the house while she is looking for her husband, Him (Javier Bardem), who we recognize as the man with the crystal in the opening sequence. Through establishing scenes and dialogue (03:55-07:45), we come to understand that Mother and Him are living a secluded and peaceful life in a forest mansion, and we learn that Mother is busy restoring and fixing the house, while Him is a poet/writer that is struggling with writer's block. Mother seems to be oblivious to what we have seen in the opening sequence, and she seems to be happy with her tranquil existence.

One of these early scenes open up a second line of questions concerning Mother and her special connection with the house (04:45-06:22). Mother is shown mixing a paint base, applying one stroke to the wall, then placing her hand on the wall. We then see a point-of-view structure: an extreme close-up of Mother's eyes, followed by a strange vision from Mother's point-of-view. Inside the wall, we see a mysterious beating heart: the heart of the house. The image is accompanied by a stable and calm heartbeat sound and a light jingle sound. We cut back to a reaction-shot of Mother opening her eyes and gasping. She then mixes in a warm yellow color into the paint base, applies one stroke of paint to the wall, then exhales calmly with a satisfied facial expression in a close-up. She seems to have communicated with the house on what colour to use, and she is happy with the result. This scene is another curiosity cue that raises several questions. What is the connection between Mother and the house? Is the house alive in some supernatural way? Or, is Mother suffering from a mental disorder? These questions are reinforced by several scenes (later in the narrative) that cue us to question the strange nature of the house and/or the reliability of Mother's perceptions. For example, in a later scene, Mother hears a strange noise in the basement, and she switches on the basement light to investigate (12:40-13:15). We are then shown a point-of-view structure: Mother's concerned facial expression in close-up, and a cut to Mother's point-of-view of the wall while the camera tracks closer, accompanied by distant frog sounds. Suddenly, a loud impact sound is heard from inside the wall, and we see debris fall of it. We are then shown a reaction-shot of Mother, who is startled and gasps (12:54-13:10). The scene is clearly structured to elicit curiosity (and other emotions that I will come back to later; see *mood* segment). What's inside the wall, and why is it there? Are there frogs in the walls?

Later scenes show similarly structured point-of-view structures: Mother seeing and reacting to a strange organic creature clogging the toilet (32:35-33:00), Mother seeing and reacting to the lightbulb exploding (48:00-48:10), Mother seeing and reacting to blood forming a door pattern on the basement wall, which she then opens to reveal a hidden room (48:15-49:30). All of these scenes are cues that are aimed at eliciting curiosity (and other emotions), but two additional things need to be said here. First, the aforementioned scenes occur when Mother is alone; she doesn't share her strange experiences with others, and no one else can confirm their reality status. Secondly, after the unannounced visitors arrive, Mother is also repeatedly shown to suffer from some kind of panic attack: she experiences shortness of breath, visual abnormalities, and intense and eerie ringing sounds (09:20-10:08, 17:20-18:30, 37:20-37:52, 1:01:30-1:02:20). In three of these scenes, she is shown drinking a yellow remedy to fix her symptoms. Together, these cues leave the question of the reliability of her perceptions open to interpretation. There seems to be something wrong with Mother, but to what extent we do not know. Furthermore, if

we can't rely on her perceptions, how can we rely on anything we are seeing and hearing, given that the subjective narration binds us so tightly to her perceptions?

The third line of questions concerns the unannounced visitors and her husband, Him. Mother's tranquil existence is interrupted by the arrival of Man, a doctor that is looking for a place to stay the night. Shortly after Man's arrival, Him invites Man to stay the night without consulting Mother, and despite the tell-tale signs of Mother's discomfort. In this scene (08:35-12:05), it is made clear to us through dialogue and Mother's facial expressions, that Mother is wary of outsiders, and that she doesn't want Man to stay. Him's behaviour is somewhat strange and uncomfortable in this scene. While the camera is following Mother to the kitchen, we can hear Him tell Man that "My wife loves having company", to which Mother reacts with a confused facial expression (09:00-09:05). Shortly after, Him says "We always talk about how this place is too big for the two of us", and a reaction-shot of Mother reveals another confused facial expression (11:08-11:32). Mother's reactions are in conflict with what Him is saying, so what he is saying is clearly not true. Man sees Mother's reactions and picks up on her distress signal, which is why he gets up to leave, before Him invites Man to stay anyway. Things get even more strange in a later scene that same night, when Mother wakes up and goes looking for Him (16:25-16:35). She enters the guest room, and we see a point-of-view structure: Mother glances to one side, before we see Mother's point-of-view of an ashtray with several cigarettes, then a reaction-shot of Mother letting out a sigh of disappointment. Mother has previously told Man that they don't smoke cigarettes in the house (12:02-12:18), but he does so anyway, which suggests that he doesn't respect her rules. Suddenly, an off-screen vomit sound catches Mother's attention, and Mother opens the bathroom door to find Him taking care of Man who is puking (16:48-17:04). Here we see another point-of-view structure: an over-the-shoulder view of Him and Man hunched over the toilet; cut to a reaction shot of Mother with a concerned facial expression, she asks "Is everything all right?", with a worried tone; cut to Mother's point-of-view of Him telling Mother that Man just drank too much; cut to a close-up of Mother glancing downwards; cut to Mother's point-of-view of a large open wound on the right side of Man's body, a wound that is quickly hidden by Him; cut to a reaction shot of Mother's worried expression, she starts asking "What is…"; cut to Mother's point-of-view of Him telling her to give Man some privacy. Together, these scenes raise a series of questions. Why does Him ignore Mother's distress signals, and why doesn't he consult Mother before inviting a stranger to stay? Why does Man not respect her rules? Why does Him cover up the wound on Man's body as if he's hiding it from Mother? What is wrong with Man?

Something seems to be going on that Mother is not privy to, and neither are we because of the restricted narration. This becomes even more apparent the day after, when from Mother's point-of-view, we see a sustained close-up of a strange picture of Him in Man's luggage, and we see a reaction-shot of Mother's confused and anxious facial expression (33:05-33:30). Why does Man have a picture of Him in his luggage? Man has been acting as if he just stumbled upon their home by accident, but now we understand that he has been lying. The scene is a clearly foregrounded curiosity cue, and it invites us to ask a series of questions about Man and Him, but it also primes spectators to question the intentions of the other visitors that arrive throughout the film. Why has Man been lying about his reasons for coming to them? What does he truly want? Is he a crazy fan of Him's books? More importantly, is he dangerous? Does he pose a threat to Mother, Him, and their home? If so, what will Mother do about it? How will Him, given his strange behaviour, react to it? Will he safeguard Mother's interests, or does the strange picture suggest that

there is something wrong with Him, something that Mother doesn't know about? What's going to happen? The scene invites questions about possible danger, and possible danger is a prominent question throughout the film, as more and more unannounced visitors arrive, and increasingly strange and unacceptable things start to happen.

Lastly, While the initial questions posed by early scenes can elicit global CFI curiosity in spectators, it is likely that the valence and intensity of our curiosity gradually changes to CFD curiosity over time (a feeling of deprivation, accompanied by unpleasant feelings of anxiety/tension). This seems probable, because as the story progresses, more and more cues pull our emotions and mood in the direction of uncertainty, suspense, fear, anxiety, and pity for Mother. More specifically, and as I will explore in the following segments, as we begin to feel the eerie and anxious focalized mood, we are biased to view things in a fearful, anxious, and suspicious light (see *mood* segment), which has an effect on our response to curiosity cues. As we are provided with a lot of information about Mother's internal state, and as we are cued to feel close to Mother (see *alignment* segment), we understand that she is experiencing a great deal of confusion, anxiety, and tension. We begin to understand that Mother feels like she is lacking important information, and this increases her anxiety and tension. As we begin to feel sympathetic fear and pity for Mother, and feel suspense in response to the possibility of a sinister outcome, we understand that Mother's well-being is threatened, and that her future is not looking bright (see *sympathy* and *suspense* segments). When these elements occur in tandem, we start to notice that we are also being deprived of crucial information, and that we, like Mother, have little control over the situation because of it. We are concerned about Mother's well-being, and it feels like something important is being hidden from us, something that she should know.

For example, the morning after Him hides the wound on Man's body, why does Man act like he doesn't understand Mother's question, when she asks him if he's feeling better (19:55-20:12)? Why does Woman say that Mother and Him are "so different", when from our perspective, Woman has just arrived, she has barely spoken to them, and they have never met each other before (22:25-22:35)? Why does Him invite Man and Woman to stay as long as they want, without Mother's consent (23:25-24:18)? Why does Woman say, "Wow. You really love him. God help you" to Mother, as if she knows something about Him that Mother doesn't know (28:45-28:58)? Why won't the strangers leave when Mother tells them to leave (36:18-36:32, 39:42-40:12)? Why does he board up the study after the strangers destroy his precious crystal, instead of just kicking them out (39:10-39:36)? Why is there a secret room hidden behind a wall in the basement (48:25-49:30)? Why does Him decide to host a funeral for the strangers (54:10-54:40)? Why do the strangers start painting the house during the funeral scene (1:02:52-1:03:32)? The list of questions continue to grow throughout the film, and sufficient answers to them are few and far between.

The important point here is that this is all becoming very confusing and very suspicious, and increasingly so when coupled with our growing closeness to Mother, our growing sympathetic care for her well-being, and our growing suspense (I go into detail about these elements in the following segments). Because of these elements, we can start to feel a strong urge to understand what's going on, to regain some epistemic control over the unfolding situation. It feels like something important is being hidden from Mother, some knowledge that would have enabled her to better plan an escape from the cruel fate that awaits her. In other words, these questions become more than just light-hearted and fun opportunities to learn something new, they become questions of grave importance.

3.1.2 Erotetic Narration and Suspense: Something Terrible is Going to Happen

In addition to cuing a high degree of curiosity, *Mother!* is a distinctly suspenseful film. The restrictive narration fosters viewer uncertainty by keeping us in the dark about a lot of questions, while slowly increasing the possibility and probability of something bad happening in the future. First, I will argue that suspense cues in the first half of *Mother!* invite suspense by foreshadowing (hinting, indicating, suggesting) the possibility of an undesirable outcome. More specifically, various factors alert us to the possibility and probability of something bad happening to Mother, as the guests become more and more unreasonable and vile. Meanwhile, Mother's husband is shown to want the strangers to stay despite Mother's distress signals and wishes. This is coupled with several sympathy cues (I go into detail about this in the *sympathy* section) that are aimed at making us feel sympathy for Mother, so that we hope for a good outcome, but fear a bad outcome. Secondly, suspense cues in the second half of *Mother!* invite strong suspense by incrementally increasing the probability of a terrible outcome. More specifically, the suspense is kicked into high gear when a horde of strangers arrive to celebrate Him's new book, and Mother gives birth to their baby amidst a series of chaotic and unbelievable events. Overall, the film invites us to feel a creeping sense of growing suspense that builds up to a highly uncomfortable experience over time.

Shortly after Woman arrives, there is a scene in which Mother and Woman talk about relationship issues. Towards the end of this scene (28:42-29:00), we see Mother's point-of-view of Woman being drawn to Him's sun-filled study on the second floor. Woman gasps and asks Mother: "Is that where he works?" The camera cuts to a close-up of Mother who replies: "That's private." We cut back to Mother's point-of-view, and we see Woman eagerly walking up the stairs while saying: "Oh, can't you just give me a peek?" We then cut to a close-up tracking shot of Mother who stops Woman while saying: "He doesn't like anyone being in there without him!" We then cut from a close-up of Mother's serious facial expression to a reaction shot of Woman (shot/reverse-shot), who has a somewhat pensive and pitying facial expression, and she says: "Wow. You really do love him. God help you." Interestingly, she says it with a rather sad tone, as if she is displaying pity for Mother. Now, one wonders, why does she say this? What is the purpose of this scene? Besides being a curiosity cue, it's also a suspense cue, because it hints at something sinister. Woman seems to know something about Him that Mother doesn't know, and she seems to express pity for Mother. This scene should also be understood with the narrative context and other suspense cues in mind. As I have touched on previously, early scenes alert us to the fact that Him invites a stranger to stay regardless of Mother's distress signals, that Mother had a frightening experience with the wall in the basement, and that Man doesn't respect Mother's boundaries. In this scene, Woman doesn't respect Mother's boundaries either, she just has to have a peek inside the study even though Mother says it's private. The point here is, Mother has recently been through several strange and anxiety-inducing experiences, and now a stranger she barely knows tells her "God help you." Furthermore, spectators are barely given any time to reflect on this ominous message, as we suddenly hear laughter off-screen, and the camera cuts to Mother's point-of-view of Him and Man telling Mother and Woman that they are going hiking. This is followed by Mother helping Woman with her laundry, and nothing more is said about this ominous message. It's just left hanging in the air, as if nothing really happened. I will argue that the scene is a foregrounded suspense cue that clearly hints at the possibility of something bad happening in the future, and that it's intended to elicit suspense. The hint is that Mother should be careful about loving Him, because for some unknown reason (cue curiosity), she's going to need God's help if she does (cue suspense).

Another clearly foregrounded suspense cue reveals itself when Mother finds the picture of her husband in Man's luggage. As I have discussed previously, this scene raises the question of the possible danger of the visitors, and therefore increases the perceived probability of something bad happening in the future. After all, we now understand that Mother has strangers in her home that in all likelihood are crazy fans of Him, and that Man has lied about their supposed chance meeting. What could possibly go right? This expectation is made even more palpable, as the camera cuts from Mother's point-of-view of the strange picture to a reaction-shot of her worried facial expression. It's easy for us to understand that this is anxiety-inducing for her, and that we, like Mother, should be worried about what might happen in the future, if we care about her well-being. Furthermore, with the film's opening sequence, Woman's ominous message, and Him's previous strange behaviour in mind, viewers can also become suspicious of who Him really is. Him is shown to be overly pleased by the arrival of the unannounced visitors, and he has a somewhat strange non-sceptical attitude. For example, we know that Him, through previous dialogue, has invited Man and Woman to stay as long as they want (two complete strangers), without Mother's consent (23:30-24:22). When Mother confronts him about it, he says that he didn't think it was a big deal. This cue fits perfectly with the previous suspense cues that alert us to Him's disregard of Mother's distress signals and wishes. These cues are also reinforced by later scenes where Him wants the visitors to stay regardless of their increasingly vile behaviour, and their disregard of Mother's boundaries.

Him has a propensity to be apologetic on behalf of the guests, and there seems to be nothing that is going to convince him that the guests should leave. For example, in the scene where Mother tells Him that Man is a crazy fan, we see from Mother's perspective (over-the-shoulder view and shallow focus) that Him defuses the entire situation by telling Mother that Man is dying, and that Man just wanted to meet Him before his death (34:39-35:20). After Woman accidently breaks Him's precious crystal in the study, we see from Mother's perspective (over-the-shoulder view and shallow focus) that Him starts boarding up the study entrance in a fit of anger, but he doesn't want to throw the guests out, because apparently, they have nowhere else to go (39:10-39:36). After the family conflict scene that leads to the death of Man and Woman's son, we see from Mother's perspective (over-the-shoulder view and shallow focus) that Him tells Mother that he has invited the family back, including their friends this time, because strangely enough, they have nowhere else to go (54:20-54:35). Then, Him decides to host a funeral party for them. Now, the idea of inviting strangers into your home and hosting a funeral for them is, of course, completely strange and unbelievable, and it invites suspense. In this scene, several guests quickly begin to act in strange ways that are not appropriate to the situation, and towards the end of this scene, some guests are blatantly rude and vile towards Mother (1:04:00-1:05:30). We see one stranger aggressively flirt with Mother, and he won't let go of her arm. While Mother is deflecting his advances, she repeatedly asks two other strangers to get down from the sink they are sitting on, because it has not been braced yet. When Mother tells the aggressive flirter to let go of her, he responds with "why?" At the end of the scene, the aggressive flirter calls her an "arrogant cunt" when she declines his advances, before we see the other strangers mock Mother by mischievously bouncing up and down on the sink while laughing, in an over-the-shoulder view followed by a point-of-view structure from Mother's perspective. Mother repeatedly begs them to stop, but they won't listen, and shortly after, the sink and adjacent wall/roof breaks, and water starts flooding into the kitchen through leaky pipes. At this point, Mother has clearly had enough, and she angrily shouts: "Get out! Get out, all of you!" When the guests start to leave, we see from Mother's point-of-view that Him is begging the guests

to stay, even though Mother has just told Him that they won't listen to her (1:05:14-1:05:30). Lastly, we see from Mother's point-of-view that Woman is looking at Mother with a spiteful facial expression, while we hear Him off-screen say: "But where will you go?" This scene is another foregrounded suspense cue, and this cue is more intense than the preceding cues. The scene makes it clear that Him enjoys the company of the guests so much that he wants them to stay regardless of Mother's discomfort, and that while the guests respect and adore Him, they clearly don't respect Mother. Not only do they not respect her, but some of them also ridicule her, and their behaviour gradually becomes more and more rude and vile, which increases the perceived probability of an undesired outcome happening.

It seems likely that we will respond with suspense to these scenes, because morally speaking, it's pretty clear that Mother doesn't deserve to be treated like this. First of all, the guests are in her home, so she naturally expects them to follow her rules and boundaries. This is perfectly reasonable, who wouldn't expect that? However, the guests repeatedly cross those boundaries in this scene, and become increasingly vile in their behaviour. Secondly, as we have learned throughout the first half of the film, Mother enjoys living a peaceful and tranquil life, she cares about her husband, she enjoys restoring and fixing her home, and although she is shown to be wary of strangers, she routinely shows kindness towards them by helping them and cleaning up after them. We have also seen that she is somewhat frail and/or unstable (her panic attacks), which is another cue that invites us to feel concern for her. Thus, several cues guide us to feel sympathy for Mother more than any other character, a pro-attitude towards her wishes and goals (I go into detail about this in the *sympathy* section). Suffice it to say here, that viewers understand that in the scene where the strangers are breaking the sink, they are not only mocking Mother, but they are also breaking something that Mother cares about deeply: the home that she has devoted so much time to restoring. We begin to see that Mother is not only treated badly, but no one is doing anything to stop it. This includes her husband, who is so busy enjoying himself that he doesn't see or care that Mother is being mistreated, and even when Mother tells Him that they won't listen to her, he still wants them to stay. Thus, on the one hand, several suspense cues alert us to the possibility and probability of something undesirable happening to Mother and the things she cares about (the possible danger of the guests), while on the other hand, several suspense cues alert us to her husband's strange behaviour, which practically enables and facilitates the behaviour of the guests. When taken together with our concern for Mother's well-being, these two sets of suspense cues in the first half of the film invite us to feel a creeping sense of suspense directed at a possible and probable undesirable outcome in the narrative. We don't want Mother to suffer, because she clearly doesn't deserve it, but the odds seem to be stacked against her.

The suspense is kicked into high-gear in the second half of the film, when a horde of crazy fans arrive after Him has finished his new book, and Mother is about to give birth to their baby. The chaotic scenes and sequences occur against the backdrop of a peaceful and tranquil sequence that clearly represents Mother's natural and preferred habitat. There are no visitors in the house, Mother is pregnant and she is fixing the house in peace and quiet, and her husband is writing his new book. We never see Mother happier and more content than in this peaceful pregnancy sequence (1:08:26-1:19:00). For example, we see her smile as she realizes she has become pregnant, as she sees how happy it makes Him, and as she sees Him get his creative fire back (1:08:55-1:10:46). We see her happy and content facial expression when Him tells her he loves her (1:10:56-1:11:04); we see her

throw away her yellow remedy, as if she won't be needing it anymore (1:11:04-1:11:22). After a time lapse dissolve, we see a very pregnant and content Mother organize the room of her soon-to-be-born baby (1:11:22-1:11:42), and we see her content facial expression as she strokes her pregnant belly in the shower (1:16:50-1:17:05). The important point here is that the sequence suggests that for Mother, everything is as it's supposed to be, and that this is how she wants to live her life: in a peaceful, tranquil, and safe environment with her family. However, this was never meant to last, as the primary purpose of this peaceful sequence is to reinforce our concern for Mother, and additionally, to amplify our emotional experience of subsequent scenes by creating a clear contrast between the idyllic life Mother desires, and the chaos that soon arrives. Additionally, the stakes have now been raised, because now there is a baby to think about, and we certainly don't want anything to happen to Mother's innocent baby.

Suddenly, Mother hears a strange sound in the kitchen, and as she turns on the light to investigate, we see an over-the-shoulder view of a stranger waving at Mother from the outside. They're back. The camera cuts to a reaction-shot of Mother's startle response and horrified facial expression, before she quickly goes looking for her husband. The scene is a foregrounded suspense cue (and jump scare), which after the peaceful sequence, once again alerts us to the possibility and probability of an undesired outcome. It is likely that spectators will start to feel suspense again, this time with the added bonus of having to think about the baby when they build their expectations and hypotheses. What follows is a long sequence of chaotic and unbelievable events, where we come to realize that Him is a complete narcissist that simply can't get enough of being loved by these crazy fans, and that he values their company and praise higher than Mother's safety, even though Mother is in her final stage of pregnancy. From Mother's perspective (over-the-shoulder view and shallow focus), we see Him's face brimming with excitement as he tells Mother that the strangers have come to see him (1:19:52-1:20:08). Shortly after, we see Mother make a clear emotional plea to Him, as she tells him that she is about to have their baby, and that she wants to be alone with Him (1:21:30-1:22:12). Not long after, Him invites the strangers in and acts as if everything is completely normal, while his publisher, the Herald (Kirsten Wiig), implies that Mother was simply the inspiration for Him's new book (1:24:39-1:25:30). Not long after, Mother's home is filled with strangers, and in a point-of-view structure, the camera oscillates between Mother's perspective of emotional strangers surrounding and praising Him, while Him is marking their foreheads with ink, and reaction shots of Mother's disbelief and sad facial expression (1:26:40-1:26:58). The strangers now speak in different languages also, as both Swedish and Italian can be heard in this scene. The scene suggests that people from all over the world have arrived, and that Mother's hopes of a peaceful and tranquil life with Him are all but obsolete. We also witness Mother's fears manifest themselves in other ways, as the unacceptable behaviour, madness, and danger of the strangers rapidly increase. This is facilitated by her husband telling the strangers that it's everyone's house (1:23:40-1:23:55), and that they should share (1:24:55-1:24:25, 1:26:28-1:26:38). Because of this, the strangers start looting the house, while Mother is powerless to stop them (1:25:40-1:26:40). When she confronts Him about the strangers ruining everything, Him nonchalantly replies that it's just things, and that she shouldn't worry about it (1:27:00-1:27:10). These are all suspense cues that alert us to Mother's incremental loss of authority and control over the situation unfolding within the confines of her home.

Because of all of this, Mother packs her bag and decides to leave, which establishes a new goal and gives viewers some semblance of renewed hope. However, we see from Mother's

point-of-view that the front entrance is now blocked by hordes of people, and that there is now a rave in her home (1:29:00-1:29:30). In the following sequence (1:29:30-1:39:00), the suspense is kicked into overdrive, as there are so many confusing, unbelievable, intense, nerve-wracking, fear/anxiety-inducing visual and aural cues going on both on-screen and off-screen that it's really hard to make sense of it all, other than the fact that it's extremely unpleasant. It begins with Mother looking for another exit, while we hear chatter and people fighting off-screen, coupled with the intense bass rhythm emanating from the rave. We can see Mother's baby crib being taken away, and we can see rampant vandalism. Some people are painting the walls, while other people are tearing them down. Suddenly, the police arrive, Mother and Him are pepper sprayed, we see a naked man crying in a bathtub, we hear gunshots and people panicking, we see Mother being knocked to the floor, and we see a cage full of women that are begging for help. At this point, it is total chaos in Mother's home: we see a Molotov cocktail explosion during a riot fight, we see people being executed, and then, the army arrives, while we hear on-screen/off-screen sounds of explosions, heavy gunfire, and screams. Shortly after, we see Mother crawling through a pile of ash-covered corpses - while she is having contractions - as she desperately tries to get to the exit leading outside. However, she is stopped by Him, who instead takes her through a fallout shelter full of refugees inside their home, before he helps her up into his study, where she gives birth to their baby. When the baby lets out its first cry, the mad crowd outside falls silent, while we watch Mother hold her new-born baby close to her chest.

Now, there are many stylistic elements that contribute to the discomfort, tension, anxiety, and fear that this sequence seeks to generate in viewers, but this sparse description should already tell us enough about how it has been structured to elicit strong suspense. More or less the entire sequence is filmed in a point-of-view structure from Mother's perspective, which focuses our attention on each of the visual suspense cues in the mise-en-scène I have mentioned above, and Mother's emotional reactions to them. Each visual cue is clearly charged with a negative valence, and this understanding is reinforced by Mother's increasingly disturbed, desperate, anxious, and fearful reactions. This is a situation that screams danger for Mother and her baby, and the scene is structured to be relentlessly chaotic, intense, and nerve-wracking. We are routinely reminded that Mother is about to give birth through her contractions, while we see/hear that danger looms around every corner, because combined with the anxiety-inducing elements we see in the mise-en-scène, the soundscape is filled with constant off-screen sounds of chatter, chants, screams, explosions, and gunfire. On the whole, this sequence stands in stark contrast to the peaceful sequence that precedes it, and it's easy to understand that this is the absolute worst place for Mother and her child to be in. In other words, there is a wealth of suspense cues (and sympathy and fear cues) in this scene, and when combined, they are meant to elicit excruciating suspense.

However, the climax of suspense in *Mother!* occurs right after her baby has been born. In this scene (1:40:00-1:47:10), we see Mother vigilantly protect her baby by denying her husband a chance to hold it, out of fear for the baby's safety. She once again begs Him to make the strangers leave, but he doesn't want them to. He wants to show them his baby. We then see Him sit down and wait patiently next to Mother, and after some time has passed, a close-up of Mother shows that she is slowly drifting away into sleep. Given the situation, this is a clearly foregrounded suspense cue. Of course, when Mother wakes up, she wakes up to the sound of the strangers applauding, while Him is carrying their child towards them. We then see a point-of-view structure from Mother's perspective, where

we see the baby being lifted through the mad crowd, while in reaction-shots, we see Mother's horrified facial expressions, and desperate attempt to recover her son. This scene is the climax of suspense precisely because, if we have learned anything while watching *Mother!*, it's that the strangers cannot be trusted with anything. Throughout the film, we have seen them lie, steal, destroy, fight, enslave, and kill. In general, we have seen them slowly but surely destroy the things that Mother cares about: her peaceful, tranquil, and protected life with the man she loves, and the home she has single-handedly built. There is only one thing Mother cares about more than what has been taken away from her, and it's her baby, but now, Him has simply given the child to the mad crowd. It's hard to not feel extreme suspense at this point in the narrative. We are invited to feel a high degree of hope, a hope that no harm comes to this innocent child. We are invited to feel a high degree of fear and anxiety for Mother and her child, because we know that the strangers are untrustworthy, dangerous, and that in all likelihood, they will mess this up. We are invited to feel a high degree of uncertainty, tension, and frustration, because we don't know for certain what's going to happen, we hope for the best, but we expect the worst, and we can't do anything to save the child, which is intensely frustrating. We can only wait and see, with our burning question: what's going to happen to this child? It seems likely that something terrible is going to happen.

3.2 *Mother!* and the Cue Approach: Character-Directed Emotions

3.2.1 The Exclusive Alignment, Closeness, and Embodied Empathy

In *Mother!*, we are exclusively aligned with Mother for the majority of the film. We are spatiotemporally attached to her wherever she goes, and we are given a high degree of subjective access to her through combinations of close-ups, reaction-shots, point-of-view structures, shallow focus, emotional facial expressions, and her vocal tone. Although I have previously discussed the film's restricted narration (which can be understood as a form of alignment), I here focus on how that alignment lays the foundation for our character engagement with Mother. In this section, I examine a specific sequence in-depth, and argue that the alignment forces us to see and hear the unfolding events from a position that is experientially close to Mother, while also foregrounding and prioritizing Mother's emotional reactions. This is especially interesting, because Mother is not even a part of the action that drives the sequence forward, yet it is her continuous experience of the event that we are asked to pay attention to. I will argue that the exclusive alignment cues us to feel aspects of what it is like to be in her situation, and that it cues us to feel close to Mother in several respects: spatiotemporally, perceptually, epistemically, and affectively. On the one hand, the alignment chains us to a spatiotemporal vantage point that is continuously close to Mother's vantage point, and to her perspective on the events. On the other hand, while we can understand Mother's emotional state in relation to the narrative context, I will argue that the myriad of close-ups and reaction-shots of Mother's emotional facial expressions are embodied empathy cues that invite us to latch onto her affective state automatically, which can lead to a direct understanding and/or a shared feeling of her emotional/affective state. Thus, the exclusive alignment invites the spectator to experience feelings of closeness and embodied empathy with Mother, while also establishing a solid platform for our sympathetic responses (provides salient information that we can morally evaluate).

From the moment Mother wakes up in her bed, and until Him rips out her heart towards the end of the film, we are spatiotemporally attached to Mother and her perspective on the unfolding events (1:50-1:54:50). Practically every scene in the film is shot in a way that foregrounds what Mother is paying attention to and how she reacts to what she sees/hears. This is accomplished through a combination of formal elements. As I have discussed earlier, over-the-shoulder views, close-ups, reaction-shots, point-of-view, point-of-view structures, and hard cuts between these shots are frequently used to focus our attention on specific objects in the mise-en-scène, and how Mother reacts to them (variable framing and restricted narration). In addition to this, the filmmaker also employs frontal and rear tracking shots that follow Mother closely when she is moving somewhere (01:54-03:25, 10:20-10:36, 21:38-22:22), diegetic off-screen sounds and sights are often used to draw the attention of Mother and the audience (09:00-09:05, 12:40-12:55, 16:35-16:48), and shallow focus is routinely used to blur out parts of the scene and focus our attention on objects that are in focus (41:06-41:40, 1:32:22-1:32:40). Thus, almost everything we see and hear, we see and hear while being close to Mother, and this pretty much means that we are chained to her spatiotemporal vantage point throughout the film. To learn about the unfolding events in the story, is to learn about them with Mother. In other words, we are exclusively aligned with her. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence for this in the film, but a good way to illustrate this is to take an in-depth look at how the first sequence with several characters in it is filmed.

In this family conflict sequence (40:10-44:56), I will pay very close attention to how information is presented to us, in an effort to reveal just how exclusive the alignment in

Mother! is. Afterwards, I will discuss the emotional significance of this alignment. At the start of this scene, and while we are watching Mother, we hear a sudden off-screen sound of a door being opened and someone saying "Hello?" Mother quickly turns her head towards the origin of the sound, and we cut to Mother's point-of-view, while she is walking towards the sound (simulated by a tracking shot). We then see an unknown man, before the camera cuts to a close-up of Mother who glances upwards; we cut to Mother's point-of-view of the study (she is looking for her husband); we cut back to a close-up of Mother, who looks in the direction of the unknown man, with a confused facial expression. Then, we cut to an over-the-shoulder view of the unknown man, and he asks: "Hey, who are you?" The camera cuts back to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother who has a confused facial expression, and she responds: "Who are you? What are you doing here?" Through further dialogue, we come to understand that this man - Younger Brother (Brian Gleeson) - is the son of Man and Woman, and that he has come to alert them about his brother who is, "out of control", because he found Man's will (context: Man is dying). Suddenly, the brother - Oldest Son (Domhnall Gleeson) - arrives and demands to speak with Man. We can see from Mother's point-of-view that Oldest Son is angry and frustrated about the will, and that Woman and Younger Brother are trying to calm him down. Shortly after, Man enters the conversation, and the conflict escalates. At this point, Mother is sandwiched, so to speak, between strangers who are arguing in her house. The scene is filmed in such a way that Mother looks like she is cornered by the guests. Shallow focus and close-up draws our attention to Mother's confused and anxious facial expressions, as she looks off-screen at Man and Woman arguing, while we see the brothers in the background, arguing out of focus. Throughout the entire scene, we watch the conflict in a point-of-view structure from Mother's perspective, and the camera movement, framing, and editing continually oscillates between what Mother is looking at, and her confused and anxious reactions.

A few minutes later, after Mother has informed Him about the situation, the argument about the will turns into a bloody fight that is viewed entirely from Mother's perspective. The fight starts with an over-the-shoulder view of Oldest Son grabbing Younger Brother and shouting "Shut up!" We cut to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother who is surprised and gasps; we cut back to the same over-the-shoulder view where we see Younger Brother pushing Oldest Son into the wall, and Oldest Son punching Man in the stomach. We cut back to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother who is startled and gasps; we cut back to the over-the-shoulder view where we see Oldest Son pushing Younger Brother to the right side of Mother; we cut back to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother who screams and moves away from the brothers; cut to a new over-the-shoulder view of Oldest Son pushing Younger Brother into a wall while the camera pans to follow the action; cut to another reaction-shot close-up of Mother with an anxious and fearful facial expression, she gasps and covers her mouth with her hands. Then, we cut to Mother's point-of-view of the brothers wrestling; cut to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother shouting: "Stop!"; cut to Mother's point-of-view of Younger Brother falling on the floor; cut to a close-up of Mother while we hear Woman shouting off-screen: "Boys! Stop it!", then Mother shouts: "Stop! Please!"; cut to an over-the-shoulder view of the brothers wrestling on the floor; cut back to a close-up of Mother who turns her head as she hears Him ask Man off-screen: "Can you breathe?" Then, the camera pans to the right and reveals an over-the-shoulder view of Woman and Him taking care of Man on the floor; cut to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother's concerned facial expression, before she turns her attention back to the brothers, and the camera pans to the left and reveals an over-the-shoulder view of Younger Brother spitting in Oldest Son's face. Then, we cut back to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother's anxious facial expression; cut back to an over-the-shoulder view of Oldest Son retaliating

by tossing a chair that hits the wall and breaks; cut to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother's frightened facial expression, and she screams loudly and physically recoils, then covers her mouth with her hands. Now, the brothers start running through a hallway, and we cut to a rear tracking shot of Mother following the brothers through the hallway, while she frantically shouts: "Wait! Stop!". This is followed by a cut to a frontal tracking shot of Mother, and a cut to Mother's point-of-view of Oldest Son grabbing an object and chasing his brother; cut to a frontal tracking shot of Mother, who has a very frightened facial expression, and she shouts: "No! Stop! No!" Then, we cut to Mother's point-of-view of Oldest Son forcefully striking his brother, then we see blood splattering from Younger Brother's head as he falls to the ground; cut to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother's frightened facial expression as she screams; cut back to Mother's point-of-view of Oldest Son striking his brother again; cut back to a reaction-shot close-up of Mother yelling: "No!" Mother then proceeds to try to stop Oldest Son, but he knocks her down to the ground. Mother frantically breaths and scurries backwards, before we cut to Mother's point-of-view, and we see Younger Brother lying unconscious on the bloodied floor. Afterwards, we see Mother's eyes widen in fear as she realizes that Oldest Son is looking at her. The camera then cuts between eyeline matches of Mother's perspective of Oldest Son moving towards her, and reaction-shot close-ups of Mother's frightened facial expression, while she begins to cry and shake her head. Oldest Son tells her it's not his fault, then in a close-up of Mother, he firmly grabs her chin and asks if she understands. Then, we see Mother's frightened and sad facial expression, as she nods her head while tears roll down her chin.

With all of this in mind, one wonders, why is the scene filmed in this way? The entire scene is like a continuous point-of-view structure that highlights Mother's perspective and reactions. Something catches her attention (on-screen and off-screen sights/sounds coupled with close-ups of Mother turning her head; point/glance), then what she sees is revealed to us and focused on (over-the-shoulder views, point-of-view, and shallow focus; point/object), and then her reactions are revealed to us and focused on (close-ups, reaction-shots, shallow focus, emotional facial and bodily expressions, and speech; point/reaction). This cycle continues throughout the entire sequence. Furthermore, if Mother moves somewhere, we follow her closely in frontal and rear tracking shots, and hard cuts between shots are more or less entirely motivated by Mother's attentiveness, reactions, and movement. Now, the scene shows us a family conflict between strangers in Mother's home, a conflict that escalates to the point of a person dying. Yet, we are shown no shot/reverse-shots between the characters involved in the action that drives the sequence forward, and there are no cross-cuts to the perspectives of the different characters. Even though Mother has little to nothing to do with the action unfolding in the sequence, the scene is filmed in a way that places great emphasis on Mother's perspective and reactions. Furthermore, although we partly gain subjective access to the other characters when we attend to them with Mother, it is Mother's emotional face that we return to time and time again. Thus, the exclusive alignment prioritizes her perspective on the unfolding events in a highly foregrounded way, by focusing our attention on what she attends to, and what those things mean to her. We gain more subjective access to her than any other character, and we are continuously attached to her in time and space, which provides each scene with a kind of seamless perceptual and aural continuity from a specific vantage point within the diegesis.

I will argue that the exclusive alignment invites us to experience a high degree of feelings of closeness, because the story information is presented to us in a way that is close to how it is experienced by Mother in several respects: similar spatiotemporal vantage point,

similar perceptions, similar knowledge, similar affects. First, the close spatiotemporal attachment (closeness cue) invites us to feel spatiotemporal closeness to Mother. The tight cinematography and editing (close-ups of Mother, over-the-shoulder views, point-of-view) forces us to view the storyworld from a similar spatiotemporal vantage point, and the attachment suggests that there is a physical closeness between the spectator and Mother. Secondly, the exclusive alignment and the point-of-view structures within it (closeness cue), invite us to feel perceptual closeness to Mother. We continually watch and hear the world from a similar perspective, and we are chained to her spatiotemporal vantage point. Thirdly, because the exclusive alignment chains us to Mother, there are no cross-cuts to other characters or events that could provide us with a surplus of information, so our knowledge and understanding of the surrounding events are constantly in sync with Mother's knowledge and understanding (closeness cue). This invites us to feel epistemic closeness to Mother. I will come back to how the film elicits affective closeness, but the important point here is that the exclusive alignment cues us to experience the events from a similar spatiotemporal vantage point, with perceptions, knowledge, and affects that are similar to Mother's mental perspectives. In this way, the alignment invites us to feel a close experiential bond with Mother.

These feelings of closeness are reinforced by the myriad of close-ups and reaction-shots of Mother's emotional facial expressions, shots that provide us with a great deal of information about her internal state: Mother is a transparent character. However, the filmmaker does not continually cut back to Mother's emotional reactions simply to provide us with information about her internal state. In my view, we clearly understand Mother's confusion, anxiety, surprise, fear, and sadness in relation to the narrative context, and we would understand this even if the amount of close-ups and reaction-shots had been cut in half or more (there are approximately fifty close-ups and reaction-shots of Mother's emotional reactions in this four minute sequence), so the great emphasis on Mother's affective state exceeds its informative function. I will argue that we are being continuously invited to latch onto her affective state through embodied empathy. The close-ups, reaction-shots, and shallow focus foregrounds and focuses our attention on Mother's emotional facial expressions (attraction scenes; embodied empathy cues), and through automatic and hardwired mechanisms (mirror neurons, affective mimicry, facial feedback), we can pre-reflectively understand Mother's affective state and/or reflectively feel aspects of her affective state. On the one hand, this provides another layer of valuable information that we can cross-check with our cognitive interpretations of the narrative situation and Mother's interior state. On the other hand, we are invited to feel aspects of what it is like to be in her situation, and this is an important part of what makes *Mother!* emotionally engaging. When the conflict between the strangers begins, the focus on Mother's emotional expressions invite us to feel aspects of her uncertainty and anxiety. When Oldest Son approaches Mother after having beaten his brother unconscious, the focus on Mother's emotional expressions invite us to feel aspects of her fear and sadness. Mother's affective state is even more palpable at the end of the scene (44:30-44:42), when she begs Him to stay with her, while Him is helping the strangers rush their son to the hospital, which leaves Mother all alone after this terrible ordeal.

In a close-up frontal tracking shot of Mother's desperate and frightened expression, she says: "No! No, please stay with me.", before the camera cuts to Mother's point-of-view, and Man answers: "Please, we need him.", then Him answers: "Lock the doors. I'll be back as soon as I can." The camera cuts back to the close-up frontal tracking shot of Mother who responds in a desperate and frightened tone: "Please don't leave me! Please don't

leave me!" We then hear the sounds of Him, Man, and Woman slowly dissipate off-screen, while the camera dwells on Mother's frightened and sad facial expression in a sustained close-up (embodied empathy cue), as she breaths frantically while tears roll down from her eyes. This is a clear attraction scene, a foregrounded empathy cue and sympathy cue that invites the viewer to feel aspects of Mother's fear and sadness, and to feel sympathetic pity for her. In doing so, the viewer partly feels what it is like to be in Mother's situation, and these feelings are added to our total assimilation of the narrative situation. This is one of the emotional attractions of *Mother!*, to partly feel her confusion, surprise, anxiety, fear, and sadness. Furthermore, these embodied empathy cues invite us to feel affectively close to Mother, to feel similar emotions and affects. Therefore, I will argue that the exclusive alignment cues us and invites us to feel embodied empathy with Mother, and to feel close to Mother in several respects: spatiotemporally, perceptually, epistemically, and affectively. Now, it's important to remember that this exclusive alignment extends throughout the majority of the film, and although I have focused on closeness cues and embodied empathy cues in this segment, the alignment provides a solid foundation of salient information, information that we can morally evaluate and respond to with sympathy and antipathy.

3.2.2 Allegiance and Sympathy: Concern, Fear, Pity, and Anger for Mother.

The exclusive alignment alerts us to several factors that increases the likelihood of our sympathetic engagement with Mother, and in this segment, I go into detail about how the film is structured to elicit our sympathetic engagement with Mother. I will first examine some general narrative movements that provide us with information about Mother's character traits and concerns. Mother is shown to have a peaceful, caring, innocent, and wary nature, she is shown to value peace and safety, and we learn that she loves Him, and that she wants to have children. With this information, we come to understand that Mother's goal is to live a peaceful, tranquil, protected, and healthy life with the man she loves, and to create a peaceful and safe environment for her family. With this in mind, I examine two sets of sympathy cues that are aimed at eliciting sympathy for Mother. On the one hand, Mother is shown to have a set of morally desirable traits: she is a kind and caring person, even towards the strangers, despite her wariness of outsiders. Mother is also shown to be somewhat frail and innocent/pure. These cues are aimed at eliciting an allegiance between the spectator and Mother, a pro-attitude and concern for Mother's well-being, including her goals and wishes. On the other hand, Mother is shown to be treated badly by Him and the strangers, and increasingly so. Together, they form the oppositional force to Mother's well-being, and before the film's end, they end up destroying everything she cares about. This generates a lot of concern, fear, pity, and anger for Mother, and these sympathetic emotions are amplified by several attraction scenes that foreground Mother's emotional facial expressions: cues that are aimed at eliciting both embodied empathy and sympathy.

In the first half of *Mother!*, several foregrounded cues establish Mother's character traits and concerns. We are informed of Mother's deep connection to the house, how much she cares for it, and we can see that Mother is happy and content with her tranquil existence. For example, in the scene where Mother is painting the wall (04:46-06:22), the camera dwells on her in a close-up, while she smiles and lets out a pleased sigh, after she has communicated with the heart of the house on what colour to use. Mother is happy and content in this peaceful and tranquil scene, which is accompanied by diegetic off-screen sounds of gentle bird songs and the calming rustle of the wind (suggestive of peace and harmony). She seems to have a harmonious connection with the house, and she seems to

care about it deeply. Furthermore, Mother's content expression in this scene stands in stark contrast to the myriad of reaction-shots and close-ups that focus our attention on her confusion, anxiety, and fear in later scenes that are filled with uncertainty, conflict, and chaos. Because of this scene (and the peaceful pregnancy sequence: 1:08:26-1:19:00), we understand that Mother enjoys her calm and tranquil life, and that she is a peaceful person that cares about her home.

We also learn that Mother has rebuilt the entire house by herself (this is what Him tells Man: 15:15-15:35), and later, we come to understand that this caring for the house is actually Mother's way of showing her dedication and love for Him. For example, in a conversation between Mother and Woman (26:00-28:42), Woman tells Mother that she can't believe that Mother has rebuilt the entire house, to which Mother responds: "Well, we spend all our time here. I want to make it paradise. And I love the work." Shortly after, Mother tells Woman that she has rebuilt the entire house because it's Him's home (implying that she's done it out of love for Him), to which Woman replies: "Oh… You really love him." Through further dialogue between the two, we also come to understand that Mother wants to have kids, but that there seems to be some relationship issues between Mother and Him that hinders this desire. This is also why Mother looks surprised and confused at Him in an earlier scene (22:58-23:08), when Him tells the visitors that they want to have kids. This narrative thread is continued in the laundry scene (29:48-31:00), when Mother doesn't want to talk about her sex life with Woman. Woman then implies that perhaps Him doesn't love Mother, and as Woman leaves the basement, the camera dwells on a close-up of Mother's pensive and concerned facial expression (she seems to be worried about the implication). These cues foreground Mother's love, dedication, and care for Him, her worries about their relationship, and her wishes for the future.

These cues are combined with various cues that foreground Mother's caring, pure/innocent, and wary nature. For example, Mother is shown to be worried when Him is gone, and she repeatedly goes looking for him (01:45-04:00, 16:00-16:51). She also tries to protect his interests by stopping Woman from entering his study (28:42-28:56, 33:35-34:04), by informing Him of the possible danger of the guests (34:38-35:20), and by asking the visitors to leave after they have angered Him (36:18-36.30). We also come to understand that the pure and innocent Mother is not a fan of the "impure" elements that the guests bring into her home: alcohol, smoking, and excessive sexuality. For example, we see Mother's displeased expression when she sees Man's liquor bottle, and Him tells Man that Mother rarely drinks (10:26-10:50). We see Mother tell Man that he's not allowed to smoke in the house, and when he does it anyway, she hides his lighter (12:04-12:14, 17:04-17:20). We also see Mother toss away Woman's sexy lingerie, which suggests that she doesn't like her excessive sexuality (31:06-31:22). Mother's wariness of strangers is also routinely on display, as several reaction-shot close-ups of her confused and anxious expressions alert us to her distress when Him invites them to stay (11:10-11:14, 11:18-11:36, 23:30-23:41), combined with her dialogues with Him about the possible danger of strangers (11:50-12:02, 23:56-24:22, 34:38-35:20).

Together, these cues provide us with a lot of information about Mother's character. She is shown to be peaceful, caring, pure/innocent, and wary of strangers. They also tell us that Mother values the peaceful order, safety, and boundaries she has established in her home. Mother's goal in this film is simple, but twofold. She wants to live a peaceful, protected, and healthy life with the man she loves, and she wants to create a peaceful and safe environment for her family. Therefore, she will protect her home and her loved ones from any perceived outside threat. I think it's likely that most spectators will pick up on these

traits and concerns, and Mother's character can be understood as reasonable, innocent, and sweet, albeit somewhat naïve and boring. In any case, it is likely that many viewers will be sympathetic to her character, as her traits and goals resonate with many cross-cultural norms and values, and her idyllic ideals are certainly not inflicting any harm on anyone. Therefore, it is hard for us to evaluate Mother's character traits and behaviour as anything but morally good, especially given that we are witnessing the story unfold within the confines of her home, a setting in which she should have the authority to decide what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Suffice it to say here, that our understanding of Mother is the backdrop through which many other sympathy cues gain their amplified emotional significance.

With this in mind, the filmmaker seeks to secure our allegiance, pro-attitude, and concern for Mother through a series of sympathy cues that emphasize Mother's sympathetic and innocent/frail character. Although Mother's kindness and care towards Him is evident in her efforts to single-handedly rebuild his home, and in her efforts to protect his interests (keeping Woman out of the study), she is also repeatedly shown to be helpful and kind towards the strangers, despite her wariness of them. For example, when Man arrives, she makes tea for him (08:36-10:32), she collects linen for his bed and readies his bed (12:15-12:44, 13:30-13:45), and she asks if he's feeling better the morning after he "drank too much" (19:20-20:00). Later, Mother makes breakfast for the guests (21:38-21:56), and she routinely cleans up after the guests throughout the film (24:50-24:58, 32:18-32:32, 45:52-46:40). We also see Mother help Woman with her laundry (29:28-31:22), we see her beg Man and Woman's sons to stop fighting (43:00-43:25), and we see Mother offer her condolences to Woman after the death of her son (59:56-1:00:25). Even when things start to become extremely chaotic in the second half of the film, we see Mother try to help the slaves out of the cage, while she is experiencing contractions (1:31:55-1:32:20). Thus, even though she doesn't want the visitors to stay, she shows kindness towards them. Additionally, there's another pattern here. These kind character actions (sympathy cues) not only show Mother's sympathetic and caring character, but it is likely that for many viewers, they also evoke positive associations to our schemas about a particular family member. Mother is, perhaps unsurprisingly, quite the motherly character. It isn't far-fetched to say that many viewers, cross-culturally, will compare and associate Mother's protective, responsible, caring, and kind actions (and wariness of strangers) with their own memories and understandings of their own real-world mothers, and/or with how we think mothers ought to be. This gives the filmmaker an extra avenue for eliciting our pro-attitude and concern for Mother's well-being, and this understanding is reinforced by the peaceful pregnancy sequence, where we learn that Mother has become pregnant. We watch her happily and responsibly prepare her baby's bedroom (1:11:22-1:12:04), and we see her smiling and caressing her belly in the shower. Who would want anything bad to happen to this sweet and caring mother?

These sympathy cues are combined with cues that foreground Mother's frailty and youthful innocence, which amplifies our sympathy for her. Mother is much younger than Him, and this can suggest to spectators that there is an unbalanced power dynamic in their relationship, as Mother's youthful innocence implies inexperience, and the older Him could be taking advantage of her. This age gap is also foregrounded through dialogue, as Man can be heard saying that he thought Mother was Him's daughter (09:00-09:08), and Woman also makes a passing remark about their age difference (28:35-28:42). Meanwhile, Mother is shown to suffer from severe panic attacks (09:20-10:08, 17:20-18:30, 37:20-37:52), and we can't be certain of whether or not she has some kind of

mental disorder, given her recurring strange, supernatural, and frightening subjective experiences with the heart of the house (05:30-05:55, 46:50-47:15), the mysterious basement wall (12:40-13:15, 47:50-49:35), and the reappearing bloodstain on the floor (1:16:10-1:16:45, 1:20:50-1:21:15). Because of these cues, it is likely that spectators will construe Mother as somewhat innocent and frail, and as a character that struggles with problems that the other characters don't have to deal with, which puts her at a clear disadvantage. The point here is that we tend to show sympathy towards those who are less able to defend themselves (morally speaking, if someone we categorize as "weak" is in conflict with someone who is "strong", the conflict just seems unfair), and Mother's frailty and youthful innocence makes her somewhat vulnerable. Simultaneously, Mother's panic attacks and strange experiences are frightening, and they cause her a lot of discomfort (revealed by close-ups of her confused, anxious, and fearful expressions), which she clearly doesn't deserve. So, these scenes are also sympathy cues that can elicit pity and fear for Mother. With all of these cues in mind, it's hard to evaluate Mother as anything but a kind-hearted, innocent, and frail person that routinely displays a decent moral character. Mother is a Manichean character, and she's clearly the good guy. It seems unfair that she has to deal with these issues, and this becomes even more apparent when we compare her to the other characters in the film.

Our sympathetic engagement with Mother is largely elicited by how badly she is treated by the guests, and by her husband. Mother receives a great deal of abuse during this film, and the abuse is structured to increase over time. It begins with small slights, and then the abuse becomes more and more intense later in the narrative. First, the visitors don't respect Mother's rules, privacy, and boundaries, and later, their behaviour becomes increasingly vile and destructive. As I have previously discussed, we find out that Man smokes inside the house, even though Mother has told him that smoking is not allowed (16:30-16:38). We see Woman sneaking into the study, even though Mother has explicitly told her not to go in there (33:35-34:00). When Mother asks Man and Woman to leave, they don't listen to her (36:18-36:34, 39:38-40:05). During the funeral scene, Mother finds guests making out in her bed, and they laugh at her when she tells them that it's her room (1:01:55-1:01:30). Later, the aggressive flirter won't let go of Mother's arm and calls her a "cunt", and other guests mock Mother by bouncing on the sink and destroying it, even though Mother begs them to stop (1:04:02-1:05:10). When the horde of strangers arrive after Him has written his new book, they start doing whatever they feel like, including stealing things and destroying the interior of the house, even though she begs them not to (1:23:40-1:24:25, 1:25:40-1:26:38, 1:29:30-1:31:40). Secondly, the guests routinely make a mess without cleaning up after themselves, as if it's Mother's job to clean up after them. For example, in a point-of-view structure from Mother's perspective, we can see the messy remains of Woman's lemonade project, before a reaction-shot reveals Mother's sigh of disbelief. Shortly after, we see Mother clean up Man's mess on the toilet, and turn off the faucet that has been running for who knows how long (32:18-32:32). After the death of Man and Woman's son, Mother cleans up the bloodied floor, all alone (45:52-46:42). After the funeral scene, Mother once again cleans up the mess left by the guests, all alone (1:05:55-1:06:30). These are all sympathy cues, and together, they are aimed at eliciting fear and pity for Mother, and anger towards the unscrupulous guests, on Mother's behalf.

The important point here is that these are terrible guests, and I don't think anyone would want to be visited by them. They won't listen to Mother (their host), and they are defiling her sacred space, her home. We know that Mother has spent a great deal of time rebuilding

this house, and that she has done it out of love for Him. We understand that Mother is gradually losing control over the things she cares about, and we understand that the guests are only there because they are crazy fans of Him. Meanwhile, Him doesn't lift a single finger to stop the increasingly reckless behaviour of the guests. Instead, he facilitates it, and he practically let's them do whatever they want. As I have discussed earlier, we see Him invite the strangers to stay, without consulting Mother, and despite her distress signals (11:10-12:05, 23:25-24:20). We repeatedly see that Him wants them to stay regardless of their inappropriate behaviour. They destroy his precious crystal (39:15-39:35), they destroy the sink and flood the kitchen (1:05:10-1:05:30), and they slowly begin to treat Mother like crap, but Him still wants them to stay. We can also hear Him indulge the strangers by saying things like, "Yes, of course. What's mine is yours" (1:03:30-1:03:35), as if he's giving the strangers permission to use the house as they see fit. The point here is, Him is robbing Mother of power and control over the situation, and he doesn't seem to consider her needs or feelings at all, which is kind of disgusting. Why doesn't he support and protect his wife's interests? Why doesn't he kick the strangers out? Clearly, it hurts Mother that Him cares so much about these strangers, while they are becoming increasingly vile towards her, and she feels powerless, not appreciated, and abandoned. In the scene where Mother confronts Him about feeling abandoned (1:06:30-1:07:45), Him explains the situation by practically saying that he's bored to death, and that he needs to bring new people and ideas into their home to be able to write again. This is a scene that cleverly masks the unsettling truth about Him, by providing only a small piece of the truth. We learn later that Him is a complete narcissist, and that he loves being worshipped by the strangers, which is the real reason why he wants them to stay. We understand this when we see his glowing eyes and happy expression, in response to the horde of strangers that arrive, after he writes his new book (1:19:45-1:20:25). By this point in the narrative, Mother is in a late stage of pregnancy, and it's really hard to not feel a great deal of fear and pity for her, when the camera follows Mother in a close-up, as she anxiously walks around the room she has prepared for her baby (1:20:30-1:21:20). We can clearly see her anxious and sad expressions and hear her trembling breath (embodied empathy cue and sympathy cue), and then, she sees the bloodstain of Younger Brother reappear on the floor again, suggesting that evil has returned to her home. She hopes that Him will make the strangers leave, but she fears that he will invite them in (sympathy cue: fear and pity for Mother).

Lastly, towards the end of the film, we witness what can only be described as the ultimate betrayal. Him, in his infinite desire to be loved and worshipped, takes the newborn baby from Mother while she is sleeping, and hands it to the mad crowd, which inevitably leads to the baby's gruesome death. In this closing sequence (1:46:00-1:56:21), and in a point-of-view structure from Mother's perspective, we watch on helplessly, as Mother desperately tries to get the baby back from the crowd, while the baby is being carried out of reach. It's peeing and crying. The camera cuts back and forth between the baby and Mother's desperate pleas and fearful/anxious facial expressions (embodied empathy and sympathy cue), before we suddenly see/hear the baby's neck snapping, the baby disappears out of sight, and the crowd falls silent. Mother desperately pushes her way through the crowd and enters a red-tinted altar room. She asks the Zealot (Stephen McHattie) where the baby is, and the Zealot repeats Him's eulogy for Younger Brother, which suggests that the baby is dead. In a close-up, and with the wailing crowd around her, Mother breaks down crying (embodied empathy and sympathy cue). She pushes her way past the Zealot, and from Mother's point-of-view, we see the disgusting remains of her baby's mangled corpse: blood, guts, bones and all. In a reaction-shot, we witness

Mother's horrified expression, and we hear her hysteric screams. Then, Mother turns around, and from her point-of-view, we see the bloody-handed mad crowd, eating parts of her baby, accompanied by disgusting smacking sounds (sympathy cue: anger towards the strangers, pity and fear for Mother). With unbridled, horrified, and hysteric rage, Mother picks up a piece of glass, and furiously attacks the strangers. Then, in a point-of-view structure from Mother's perspective, the mad crowd retaliates by knocking her to the floor, ripping her clothes off, and beating her senseless (sympathy cue). They violently stomp on her, and call her filthy names, until Him intervenes (far too late, as usual). While Him begs Mother to forgive them, Mother cries and touches the floor to communicate with the heart of the house, one last time. From Mother's perspective, we see the heart of the house turn pitch-black, suggesting that all she cares about is now lost (sympathy cue). Shortly after, Mother collects Man's lighter, and enters the basement with the intention to burn the entire house down, so she can finally get rid of the strangers. In a shot/reverse-shot between Mother and Him, Mother says, "You never loved me. You just loved how much I loved you. I gave you everything! You gave it all away." Mother's sadness is palpable (embodied empathy and sympathy cue), as we watch her beaten, bloodied, and bruised face in a close-up, before she tosses the lighter into the seeping oil, and the entire house explodes. Then, we see a shot that is structured exactly like the beginning of the opening sequence, with Mother surrounded by fire, and the screams of people in the distance. Afterwards, we see Him, unscathed, carrying the now charred Mother into his burned down study. He takes her heart out of her chest, Mother disintegrates, and within her heart, he finds a new crystal. He places the crystal on the mount, and in a close-up, he laughs and lets out a pleased sigh (antipathy cue), before we see a repeat of the second part of the opening sequence, with the house returning to life, and in the final shot of the film, we see a new Mother waking up in her bed.

Besides answering some questions that we desire answers to (the opening and closing sequences are parts of the brutal cycle of creation within the diegesis; Him is a God; Mother is Mother Nature), the closing sequence is clearly structured to elicit both embodied empathy with Mother (latching onto her fear, anxiety, horror, and sadness), sympathetic fear and pity for Mother, and anger towards Him and the strangers. It is hard to not feel a strong sense of hopelessness here, as her newborn baby swiftly meets a gruesome death at the hands of the mad crowd, and as we watch her heart become a new trophy on Him's mount. If this isn't disheartening enough, we also understand that Mother's heart will surely fuel Him's new nightmarish creation, which makes Mother's story an even more pitiful and hopeless affair. This has happened before, and it will happen again.

Overall, it is this combination of sympathy cues, Mother's desirable moral traits and actions, the increasingly vile behaviour of the guests, Him's neglect of Mother, and several attraction scenes that foreground Mother's confused, anxious, fearful, and sad facial expressions, that together invites spectators to feel strong sympathetic concern, fear, pity, and anger for Mother.

3.3 *Mother!* and the Cue Approach: Mood

3.3.1 Establishing an Eerie and Anxious Focalized Mood

In addition to the foregrounded and clear cues that elicit curiosity, suspense, closeness, embodied empathy, and sympathy, there are several stylistic, diffuse, and backgrounded cues in *Mother!* that coat the diegesis with an eerie and anxious art mood. This mood consists of a sense of eerie mystery, uncertainty, discomfort, anxiety and fear about possible dangers, and a loss of control. The mood is established during the introductory scenes of *Mother!*, and it can elicit an eerie and anxious mood in the spectator, through a combination of stylistic, diffuse, and backgrounded cues, and emotional spillover from emotion markers (foregrounded and coordinated cues) that attune us to the affective qualities of the story-world. These cues also sustain the mood throughout the film. Secondly, the mood is also a focalized mood that is largely congruent with Mother's affective state. Because of this, we are guided to experience the world with an affectively charged frame of mind that can bias our cognitions and appraisals of subsequent cues in the direction of Mother's appraisals, because we experience them through the same eerie and anxious backdrop.

In the opening sequence of *Mother!* (00:40-01:53), there is a combination of foregrounded cues, stylistic cues, and diffuse cues that can be associated with eeriness and anxiety. The images and sounds are not explained in any way, they are quite intense, and they also contain some disturbing elements. For example, judging by the blood, bruises, and cuts on the unknown woman's face, she has been severely beaten (association: anxiety). We also see her sorrow, which is expressed through her facial expression and the tear falling from her eye. Meanwhile, in the soundscape, the foregrounded cue is a loud roaring fire coupled with crackling wood, which is congruent with the dangerous sea of fire (association: anxiety) surrounding the woman. However, there are also backgrounded and diffuse aural cues of people screaming and wailing in the distance (association: eeriness and anxiety), and these sounds are more or less tucked under the sound of fire. Together, these cues suggest that something terrible has either happened in the past, or that it might happen in the future, but we are not exactly sure about any of it. We then transition to the mysterious crystal being placed on the mount by the sooty hands of Him, and a close-up of Him smiling in the darkness (association: eeriness). These shots are enveloped by darkness and silence, before the camera slowly tracks backwards to reveal light spreading out from the crystal to the surrounding darkness, accompanied by deep and eerie atmospheric sounds. These stylistic cues suggest that the crystal has some kind of supernatural power (association: eeriness), which is further reinforced by the shot dissolving into several shots of the burned interior of Him's house returning to life, which is suggested stylistically through the gradual recomposition of the interior: darkness, soot, and ash disappear as light streams in and reveals clean and bright objects. Simultaneously, the eerie atmospheric sounds gradually change to natural sounds of wood (creaks and groans) and wind (rustling through trees and other surfaces) that blow away the darkness, and breath life and light back into the house. These stylistic elements suggest that there is a tension between contrasting elements in the world of *Mother!*: natural growth and destructive fire, light and darkness. In other words, between positively valenced cues (growth and light), and negatively valenced cues (destruction and darkness). Overall, the sequence attunes us to many of the affective qualities of the story-world. The combined affective expression of the intro reveals a mysterious world of powerful, strange, and disturbing sounds, intense and uncomfortable imagery, the possibility of danger and of the supernatural, and conflicting forces. Spectators need not pay conscious attention to

all of these elements, but they can certainly associate several of these elements with a feeling of eeriness and anxiety. Furthermore, if viewers come to feel suspense in this opening sequence, emotional spillover can also contribute to eliciting an eerie and anxious mood.

There are also several other stylistic and diffuse cues that pull the affective tone of the world in the direction of this uncomfortable mood. This is primarily accomplished through stylistic, diffuse, and backgrounded cues, and emotional spillover from foregrounded cues during the introductory scenes in *Mother!*. For example, in the scene following the intro (01:53-04:46), while Mother is looking for Him, the scene is backgrounded by dark tones, shades, and shadows, the soundscape is filled with diffuse and eerie sounds, and the cinematography gives us an intimate and restricted view of the world. The filmmaker utilizes natural lighting and little to no artificial lighting in this daytime scene, which creates relatively dark tones, shades, and shadows within the house, as the bright light from the sun creates a clear contrast between the bright outdoors, and the darkness inside the house. Because of this contrast, and because we continually follow Mother inside the house, most of this scene is coated in darkness. People tend to associate darkness with negatively valenced emotions and moods, because it reduces our visual control of the environment, which makes it harder for us to locate possible threats and guard ourselves against them. The darkness in *Mother!* forms the background for many of the foregrounded narrative events in the film, but it isn't something most viewers will pay conscious attention to, because darkness is way too large and diffuse to be clearly appraised as dangerous, and our attention is also directed elsewhere. Nonetheless, it still exists there in the background. Thus, the darkness contributes to giving the house a somewhat uncomfortable and uneasy atmosphere during this scene. In addition to this, darkness is a background factor for the majority of the film's duration, because most of the film's narrative events unfold during night-time and with low-key lighting (which I will come back to later).

In addition to the lighting, the scene is imbued with an eerie soundscape. We can hear the creaks and groans of the house (wood sound effects), both in close proximity to Mother (from her footsteps, as she opens/closes doors), and in the distance (off-screen). These sounds imbue the house with a life of its own throughout the film, and Mother frequently reacts to the sounds of creaks and groans off-screen, as if she's looking for the origin of the sounds (02:32-02:42). These sounds are also accompanied by other diffuse and strange off-screen sounds (watery sounds, clinking sounds, rattling sounds) that Mother also reacts to (02:56-03:12). What is the purpose of these sounds? They routinely suggest the possibility of someone or something moving off-screen, out of sight. Because of this, the sounds are easily associated with mystery, uncertainty, and anxiety. What made the sound? We don't know, and neither does Mother. In fact, we spend a good deal of time looking for the origin of sounds with Mother throughout the film (12:40-13:15, 31:50-32:22). Additionally, we can also hear some eerie atmospheric sounds when we are looking for Him from Mother's point-of-view (02:07-02:16, 03:37-04:00). These eerie atmospheric sounds are diffuse in several respects. It seems likely that they are either non-diegetic eerie sound effects meant to amplify or polarize images in the direction of discomfort, or internal diegetic sounds that Mother subjectively hears. There is some merit to this second interpretation, given that we usually hear them while looking from Mother's point-of-view several times throughout the film (08:00-08:04, 16:15-16:20), and that we hear similar eerie sounds when Mother is having anxiety attacks (09:20-10:10, 17:16-18:32). Eerie atonal sounds can also be heard in the background of situations that Mother

finds strange, like a jarring stinging sound effect in the background of Man and Woman's over-the-top passionate kissing, and Him's strange enjoyment of it, in the breakfast scene (22:30-22:45). In either case, these sounds are somewhat unnatural and strange, and they infuse the images we see with an eerie quality, especially when we hear them coupled with the more peaceful and natural ambient sounds of birds and the rustle of the wind, towards the end of this scene (03:37-04:00).

In addition to the darkness and eerie sounds, the cinematography locks our perspective on the world to that of Mother, as I have argued for in-depth earlier (see *exclusive alignment* segment). We either look at Mother (tracking shots, point/glance, point/reaction), or we look at things with Mother (point/object, point-of-view, over-the-shoulder views). We are also exhaustingly close to Mother, as she is routinely framed in close-ups from the front, side, and rear, and with shallow focus, which blurs out her surroundings and reduces our visual control of the environment. Furthermore, there are no cross-cuts to other events, other characters, or other perspectives, and there are almost no long shots or establishing shots in the film. This means that we are given little to no visual control over the environment, and no extra information about what is going on in any given scene, outside of Mother's perspective and knowledge. Thus, the cinematography is exceptionally restrictive and intimate, and it contributes to our uncertainty about off-screen elements and the whereabouts of Mother's husband in this scene, by restricting our perspective and knowledge to Mother's point-of-view. Because of this, the cinematography can be associated with a feeling of claustrophobia and loss of control, as we are more or less confined to a close-up radius surrounding Mother, which makes it is easy to feel a lack and loss of control throughout the film. The close-ups and shallow focus heavily foregrounds Mother and her perspective, so there is little to no space between us and her, which reduces our general visual control. In other words, we are trapped with Mother, and this can start to feel fairly claustrophobic when we begin to wonder if there are dangers lurking in the vicinity, especially when the intimate cinematography won't reveal those dangers before they are pushed into our close-up field-of-view, right into our faces. This is practically what enables and amplifies the jump scare emotion marker towards the end of the scene.

Together, these stylistic, diffuse, and backgrounded cues create an atmosphere that can be felt as somewhat uncomfortable, uncertain, and foreboding. These cues invite people to feel an eerie and anxious mood. It feels like something dangerous is hiding just out of sight, even though there's no solid evidence for it. Suddenly, Mother is ambushed by her husband from behind, which is a clearly foregrounded emotion marker: a jump scare that is intended to elicit a startle response, shock, surprise, and fear. The cinematography, lighting, and sound is carefully coordinated to hide Him, before he swiftly and silently infiltrates our close-up field-of-view from the darkest part of the mise-en-scène behind Mother, coupled with the frighteningly loud sound of Him clasping Mother, and Mother gasping. Although we quickly understand that the startle was for fun (as Mother's shocked facial expression quickly turns into smiles and laughter), this emotion marker is entirely congruent with the affective qualities of the scene, and probably, the affective frame of mind of spectators that have been attuned to this eerie and anxious mood. At this point, it seems likely that spectators will have caught on to these affective qualities, and the emotion marker helps to sustain the mood by momentarily shoving potential danger into our faces. Moreover, similarly structured jump scare emotion markers are routinely used to sustain the eerie and anxious mood throughout the first half of the film (12:40-13:15, 19:30-19:45, 32:35-33:05).

Furthermore, there is another important sequence that establishes and reinforces the eerie and anxious mood, and that is the film's first night-time sequence (07:05-18:40). In this sequence, we witness a fairly strange and uncomfortable chain of events from Mother's perspective, which invites us to have an affective experience that is similar to Mother's experience, which in turn tells us something about the film's mood. The eerie and anxious mood is a focalized mood that partly expresses Mother's affective point-of-view on the events, which is continually reinforced by Mother's anxious and confused reactions to what is happening. First, right after Man arrives, we follow Mother into the kitchen (09:00-09:08). Suddenly, we can hear the off-screen sound of Him whispering to Man that Mother loves having company. We then see Mother's confused reaction, which suggests that Him is not telling the truth, followed by Mother's point-of-view of Man telling Him that he thought Mother was his daughter, and Him responding with laughter. Now, this is a fairly strange conversation. Is Him whispering so that Mother won't hear what he's saying, is he serious, or is he being sarcastic? Secondly, why does he laugh in response to the daughter comment? The dialogue is quite diffuse, as it can be viewed as an innocent misidentification on Man's part, but it can also be associated with a lecherous conversation between two older men (association: eeriness and anxiety), a knowing wink, where Mother is simply viewed as a young and beautiful prize. On this view, the dialogue, and Him's laughter response, suggests an uncomfortable power dynamic in their relationship, where the older Him is taking advantage of the younger Mother. These cognitions and/or associations make their dialogue rather strange and uncomfortable, as it seems somewhat demeaning to Mother, even though it's unclear if this was Man and Him's intention.

Right after this strange and uncomfortable conversation, we see Mother go through a panic attack. In the panic attack scene (09:15-10:20), we can see that Mother is continually experiencing shortness of breath, while we can hear eerie sounds coupled with Mother's subjective and amplified sound experience of noises in her vicinity (association: eeriness and anxiety). We can hear a loud electrical buzzing sound coming from the lamp, the loud and sharp clinking of the cups Mother takes of the shelf, and an eerie tone that rapidly increases in volume and pitch. Mother then reacts and groans in discomfort, before she drops a cup on the floor that shatters and leaves behind a loud ringing sound. Shortly after, Mother touches her chest, and we hear a deep heart beat sound, coupled with an uncomfortable ringing sound, and an eerie rumble/fire sound that increases in volume, before all the sounds slowly disappear. During our experience of these uncomfortable sounds, we also see some visual abnormalities. From Mother's point-of-view, we can see darkness spreading on the floor, coupled with her blurry vision. These subjective sounds and visuals represent Mother's subjective experience of her panic attack, and it is a foregrounded and coordinated emotion marker that is meant to elicit curiosity, discomfort, anxiety, and sympathy. We can see from Mother's shortness of breath, facial expressions, and body language, that this is uncomfortable for her, and because of the way the scene is stylistically presented to us, we are also invited to feel anxiety in response to the eerie sounds and visuals, which is congruent with the overall mood. The scene can also be associated with anxiety and a loss of control, as we see the panic attack briefly take control of Mother. Simultaneously, the scene invites us to worry about Mother's well-being, and feel concern about what might happen to her in the future. Similar panic attack emotion markers are also used to sustain the mood throughout the film (17:17-18:32, 37:10-37:53, 1:01:30-1:02:18), and they all share these amplified and eerie sound characteristics, coupled with intimate and restrictive close-up framings and point-of-view structures, which places us experientially close to Mother.

In addition to this, the entire night-time sequence is backgrounded by a clear contrast between light and darkness. Naturally, the forest mansion is surrounded by darkness during night-time, but the inside of the house is now partly lit by several small sources of light: lamps that are scattered throughout the house. Many of these lamps only spread a small amount of light to their immediate surroundings, so the lighting is low-key in several parts of the house. This creates a clear contrast between light and darkness in the night-time scenes, where some parts of the house are comfortably lit, some parts have darker tones, shades, and shadows, and some areas are pitch-black. This creates a gloomy atmosphere in several of the night-time scenes, and this backgrounded and diffuse stylistic cue is clearly on display at the beginning of Mother's panic attack.

The panic attack scene leads into the scene where Him invites Man to stay despite Woman's distress signals (11:00-12:05). This scene is also quite diffuse, strange, and uncomfortable. One reason for this is that we clearly see Mother's discomfort, and that the scene occurs against the backdrop of the strange piece of dialogue and Mother's panic attack. Although Man seems fairly innocent and courteous in this scene, most of the discomfort here is generated by our perspective and uncertainty about Him's strange behaviour. On the one hand, Him seems like a nice person that is simply inviting a stranger to stay. On the other hand, he seems to be forcing the issue in a strange and uncomfortable way, by taking control of the situation away from Mother, as he invites Man to stay the night without consulting her, and by saying things like, "We always talk about how this place is too big for the two of us." What Him is saying here is clearly not true, and this is revealed by a close-up of Mother's confused and worried reaction. We also see Man pick up on Mother's distress signal, and he courteously begins to leave, but Him keeps forcing the issue (association: eeriness and anxiety). This reinforces our previous cognitions and associations about the possibility of an uncomfortable power dynamic in their relationship, as it seems like Him is pushing her to accept his desire to let the stranger stay, despite her discomfort. Now, we are experiencing the event largely from Mother's perspective, and even though we (and Man) see her discomfort, it's not quite clear if Him does, which makes the entire situation somewhat hard to appraise, as it could just be a mistake on Him's part. We have also seen Him acting in a caring and loving way towards Mother previously. He kisses her and talks to her with affection after the first jump scare (04:00-04:35), he is thankful and happy for the meal she makes for him (06:45-07:00), he protectively tells her to wait in the study when Man is knocking on the door (07:40-08:00), and he asks her if she is alright during her panic attack (09:34-09:44). Because of this, it's not like we have been cued to think that he doesn't care about her at all (that understanding comes later), so there is a sort of ambivalence and uncertainty going on here, in our understanding of Him's behaviour. On top of this, Mother does seem a bit paranoid about the possible danger of strangers in this scene, especially given Man's non-threatening presence and courteous behaviour, which makes it unclear if it's Mother or Him that's being unreasonable. Because of these elements, we are left with a sense of uncertainty, eeriness, discomfort, and a loss of control.

Shortly after, we follow Mother into the basement, where she has another strange and uncomfortable experience with the basement wall (12:40-13:15). I have previously argued that this scene is structured to elicit curiosity (see *curiosity* segment), but it is also a clearly foregrounded jump scare emotion marker that is intended to elicit a startle response, shock, surprise, and fear, which can generate emotional spillover, and sustain the prevailing mood. Simultaneously, while we are guided to pay attention to the wall and Mother's reaction through a point-of-view structure (variable framing), the scene is also

heavily backgrounded by the gloomy atmosphere, combined with an eerie soundscape. There is a constant and deep rumbling noise in the basement, and when Mother turns on the light and approaches the wall, we can hear an eerie metallic heartbeat sound, the distant and strange ribbit sounds of a frog, coupled with the intense and uncomfortable electrical buzzing sound coming from the lightbulb. Meanwhile, the intimate point-of-view structure drags us into a close-up of the wall (reducing visual control of the environment), before a loud impact sound is heard from inside the wall. We then see debris fall of the wall, and the spade on the right suddenly moves, which combined with the impact sound, creates the impression of a large forceful push that's headed straight towards us (pushing danger into our faces), before we see a reaction-shot of Mother's gasp and her fearful/anxious reaction. Lastly, the nearby oven is inexplicably turned on, and then the scene ends. Nothing more is said about this strange and uncomfortable event, and the wall isn't explored further until much later in the narrative (47:38-49:35). These elements suffuse Mother's uncomfortable basement experience with an eerie and anxious quality. The possibility of danger, darkness, eerie/uncomfortable soundscape, uncertainty, and Mother's confused and worried reaction contributes to establishing and sustaining the mood. There either seems to be some sort of supernatural thing going on with the house, and/or there are secrets hidden in the walls, and/or Mother sees things that are not real. In either case, it's hard to understand what's going on, because the strange wall experience is so diffuse: it's unclear what's inside the wall, and it's unclear if the experience is real at all. Nonetheless, the experience is frightening, strange, uncomfortable, and it's actually what Mother is experiencing, whether it's real or not. Because of these elements, I will argue that we are once again left with a feeling of eeriness and anxiety.

The important thing to notice here is that the entire chain of events is suffused with these affective qualities. The strange piece of dialogue, Mother's panic attack, Him's strange behaviour, and Mother's basement experience, are all somewhat diffuse experiences. They are infused with a feeling of eeriness and anxiety (uncertainty, strange and frightening elements, discomfort, loss of control), and they all occur within the context of point-of-view structures of Mother's perspective and reactions (point/glance, point/object, point/reaction). Indeed, it is Mother who is experiencing this strange and uncomfortable chain of events; she is enveloped by the gloomy atmosphere; she hears these strange and eerie sounds; she sees the strange and uncomfortable dialogue; she experiences a sudden panic attack for no clear reason; she sees her husband invite a stranger to stay despite her discomfort, and she is inexplicably ambushed by the basement wall. In other words, the eerie and anxious mood belongs to Mother, and it is from her affectively charged frame of mind that we are asked to experience the events that follow. Therefore, it seems quite clear that the mood is a focalized mood, given that her confused and anxious reactions are congruent with the affectively charged qualities of stylistic, diffuse, and backgrounded cues (gloomy atmosphere, eerie sounds), other diffuse foregrounded cues (strange dialogue, behaviour, and experiences; uncertainty about the meaning of things), and foregrounded emotion markers (panic attacks and jump scares). We are also given access to her subjective experiences of sounds and visuals, and we routinely see and hear things from a similar spatiotemporal vantage point. More specifically, the audiovisual data that we encounter is largely the same audiovisual data that Mother encounters, which includes more or less the same emotive cues. Alongside Mother, we have encountered an increasing number of diffuse, unclear, and uncertain cues that have been deliberately coordinated to reduce our epistemic control over the unfolding situation. Simultaneously, the restricted narration forces us into a position where we lack the necessary knowledge to make sense of the events, and this increasingly uncomfortable lack of knowledge feeds into our general

sense of a loss of control, which is another factor that pulls us into Mother's affective point-of-view.

Thus, I will argue that the art mood of *Mother!* is a focalized mood that is congruent with and communicates Mother's mood quite naturally, and just like her eerie and anxious mood biases her cognitions in the direction of inquisitiveness, suspicion, fear, and anxiety about possible dangers, it seems likely that we are affected in a similar fashion. Our eerie and anxious mood not only increases the likelihood of experiencing congruent emotions (curiosity, suspense, fear, anxiety), but it also coats the events that follow in an eerie and anxious light. With this in mind, it's probable that after these introductory scenes, our eyes and ears start to patrol Mother's environment, looking for and half-expecting suspicious behaviour, strange events, and/or possible dangers that can validate our mood. Slowly but surely, *Mother!* invites us to feel like something is wrong, like something is not quite right. *Mother!* invites us to feel an eerie and anxious focalized mood.

4 Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusion

4.1 Reflections on *Mother!* and the Cue Approach

In this thesis, my aim has been to uncover important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film, and although I think that my cue approach has been somewhat successful in this endeavor, there are other important aspects that I haven't touched on in this thesis. Of course, it's impossible to illuminate all aspects of a film's emotional appeal, given the pressures and constraints of time and space, and given the incredible variety of possible spectator responses. Nonetheless, I think that my cue approach is a fairly open construct, and it can certainly be enhanced or modified by other theoretical perspectives. In this segment, I want to take a step back, and reflect on some important aspects that I have not been able to include in my approach. Although I have paid close attention to how *Mother!* is structured to elicit specific story-directed emotions, specific character-directed emotions, and mood, I have paid very little attention to other important factors, like the importance of *genre*, and the importance of *spectator differences*.

I think it's fair to say that *Mother!* belongs to the horror (and mystery) genre, and specific genres are usually structured to elicit specific emotions. Noël Carroll argues that horror films are designed to elicit a combination of *fear* and *disgust*, and that this is usually accomplished by foregrounding specific criteria that are appropriate to these emotions: *harmfulness* for fear, and *impurity* for disgust. For Carroll, it is usually a *monster* that embodies some combination of harmful and impure attributes, and by focusing our attention on the monster's harmful behaviour, and the monster's impure behaviour and/or nature, we are apt to feel *horror*: a compound emotion of fear and disgust (Carroll, 1999, pp. 38-40; see also Carroll, 1990, pp. 27-35; Bordwell et al., 2017, pp. 339-340). One could argue that in *Mother!*, the strangers are monsters. The harmful and impure behaviour of the strangers is clearly foregrounded in the scene where we see a close-up of the mangled corpse of Mother's baby, and Mother's point-of-view of the strangers eating parts of her baby. It's not hard to evaluate their behaviour in this scene (and in other scenes) as harmful and disgusting, and one can certainly find more *horror cues* like this in the film. Secondly, narratives are usually structured with *genre conventions* in mind. For example, Carl Plantinga (2009) argues that most narratives are structured around *paradigm scenarios*. These scenarios are "types and sequences of events that are associated with certain emotions" (p. 80), and they are "scenarios that are consistently repeated until they become conventional" (p. 82). For Plantinga, paradigm scenarios typically conform to the criteria necessary for a specific emotional response. In other words, a scenario/situation that is interpreted as dangerous or is associated with danger (a criteria for fear), is apt to elicit fear in the audience. Paradigm scenarios tend to be understood cross-culturally, because they usually correspond to universal basic emotions like fear, anger, sadness, joy, and love. Lastly, paradigm scenarios can be more or less appealing to different spectators, and because of this, Plantinga argues that Hollywood utilizes *genre classifications* so that spectators can choose to experience different kinds of emotional scenarios (Plantinga, 2009, 80-84). In *Mother!*, the plot is clearly structured around a paradigm scenario that is common within the horror genre, a *home invasion scenario* that is intended to elicit fear. A person's *home* is often thought of as a sacred space, and it's usually associated with positive values like safety, protection, privacy, family, trust, and love. The home invasion scenario plays with our fears about the defilement and/or destruction of this sacred space. In *Mother!*, we witness the slow and steady erosion of Mother's privacy, boundaries, authority, and complete loss of control over her sacred space, and this scenario can certainly elicit fear in spectators.

The important point here is that the genre of a film certainly has some bearing on the emotions that it seeks to elicit, and given that many spectators not only expect, but desire to be scared, shocked, and horrified by horror films, it could have been fruitful to examine how *Mother!* utilizes horror genre conventions or *genre cues* (jump scares, low-key lighting, eerie sounds, blood/guts/gore, monsters, home invasion, etc.) to elicit negatively valenced emotions and affects. Although I have argued for the emotional significance of several of these cues in my analysis, a detailed genre perspective could have uncovered important genre cues that I haven't touched on.

Another issue with my cue approach and my analysis of *Mother!*, is that I pay very little attention to *spectator differences*. My reading of *Mother!* is entirely focused on examining the emotional significance of cues: cues that can elicit similar and congruent emotional responses in a wide range of spectators, despite our differences. My reading of *Mother!* rests on the assumption that spectators are similar in a lot of ways, that we have similar brain structures, that we are endowed with similar perceptual, cognitive, and emotional processes, and that we share a lot of the same concerns. As such, this thesis has little to say about issues of representation, politics, and ideology, and how such divisive issues can influence our emotional responses to movies. In fact, my thesis is more or less completely apolitical and genderless, and this is something that cognitive film theory has been criticized for in general. For example, film scholar Robert Stam (2000) writes, "Cognitive theory allows little room for the politics of location, or for the socially shaped investments, ideologies, narcissisms, and desires of the spectator, all of which seem to irrational and messy for the theory to deal with" (p. 241), and he argues, "In cognitive theory, a raceless, genderless, classless understander/interpreter encounters abstract schemata" (p. 241). I think this criticism is somewhat reasonable, but I don't think that every academic thesis within the humanities needs to have a political agenda. Stam is right in arguing that people are different, and that this has an effect on how we understand and respond to film, but he also glosses over the importance of our similarities. Because of a lack of space, I won't be able to go into detail about Stam's criticism of cognitive film theory here (see, e.g., Stam, 2000, pp. 241-247), or Plantinga's responses to Stam (see, e.g., Plantinga, 2002, pp. 27-31; Plantinga, 2019, pp. 193-196, 201-202), but suffice it to say here, that even though my cue approach is grounded in similarities between spectators, it can certainly be combined with a critical perspective.

For example, when we look at *Mother!* from a feminist film theory perspective, we may begin to notice some uncomfortable and stereotypical representations of women in the film. Without going into great detail about gender studies or feminist film theory (for a detailed discussion on problematic representations of women in film, see, e.g., Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, pp. 218-255; Mulvey, 2009), Mother is represented as a fairly helpless, frail, pure, and innocent character that is constantly worried, anxious, fearful, and prone to panic attacks. She is largely unable to deal with her problems, and she wants to be protected, supported, appreciated, and loved by her husband, a man that arguably treats her like a child. As I have argued in my analysis, several of these cues are meant to elicit sympathetic concern for Mother, but from a feminist perspective, Mother is awfully reminiscent of the pure, virtuous, and passive *Victorian woman* stereotype. According to film scholars Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin (2009), the Victorian woman stereotype is protected by men and her life is controlled by men. She is pure and innocent, she does housework, she waits patiently for her husband to come home, and she's regularly the victim of some misfortune (p. 218). In other words, this stereotype is steeped in patriarchal ideology, and it's definitely not an empowered and active female "role model".

Thus, many of the sympathy cues in *Mother!* may fail to hit the intended mark, and they may instead elicit irritation or anger about how Mother is represented as a somewhat helpless victim that is unable to fix her problems. Furthermore, this may lead to a reduction in suspense and curiosity, because with reduced sympathy for Mother, spectators may care less about what happens to her. Of course, this type of critical perspective would have to wrestle with our horror genre expectations and desires. If Mother had been empowered, more active, and more in control of the situation, it would have been a completely different film, and the film wouldn't have been able to elicit feelings of fear, anxiety, pity, and hopelessness in the same way. In any case, the larger point here is that there are probably several representational issues in *Mother!*, issues that can elicit emotional responses to the film that are not necessarily intended by the filmmaker. If I had utilized a detailed spectator difference perspective, I could have examined how *Mother!*'s cues are emotionally significant in diverse ways for different spectators. This perspective could have provided my cue approach with a more nuanced and critical view of the possible tensions and fissures between the intended emotional effect of cues and our emotional responses to them.

I also want to address another issue with my cue approach. Even though I have separated narrative engagement and character engagement into two theoretical perspectives in my approach, character engagement can be understood as a sub-category of narrative engagement. Of course, narratives usually revolves around the goals and actions of characters, and despite the differences between story-directed emotions and character-directed emotions, there is undoubtably a close relationship between these emotional responses. This has led to some overlap in my arguments about cues in *Mother!*. For example, the elicitation of CFD curiosity and suspense in *Mother!* depends – to some degree – on a common concern in the audience: our sympathetic concern for Mother. In retrospect, I could have united these two perspectives into one perspective, and I could have, for example, made room for one of the perspectives I have reflected on above. However, I think that my analysis of *Mother!* shows that there is more than enough to explore within each of these theoretical perspectives. For example, aspects of our feelings of closeness to Mother, and our embodied empathy with Mother, do not necessarily rely on any understanding of narrative context.

Lastly, there are undoubtably a lot of other important issues that I haven't touched on here (to name a few: story-directed surprise, artifact-directed emotions, self-directed emotions, non-moral factors that can lead to sympathy, the paradox of negative emotions, and so on), but despite all of this, I think that I have been able to uncover important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film. By utilizing the cue approach, I have been able to examine how *Mother!* can elicit curiosity, suspense, feelings of closeness, embodied empathy, sympathy, and an eerie and anxious mood.

4.2 Conclusion

In the introduction I wrote that my task in this thesis was twofold. My primary aim in this thesis has been to examine important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film, but in order to do this in a nuanced and effective way, I decided to integrate three theoretical perspectives about emotional engagement into an analytical framework that I call the cue approach.

My cue approach utilizes narrative engagement theory, character engagement theory, and mood theory to highlight different and important aspects of a film's emotional appeal. More specifically, I designed my cue approach to be able to explore the emotional significance of a variety of cues, cues that can elicit story-directed emotions (curiosity and suspense), character-directed emotions (sympathy, embodied empathy, feelings of closeness), and mood. Therefore, my cue approach relies heavily on the insights of several cognitive film theorists, and the theoretical terms and concepts I have examined within narrative engagement theory (restricted narration, erotetic narration, variable framing, curiosity, suspense), character engagement theory (alignment, allegiance, sympathy, embodied empathy, and feelings of closeness), and mood theory (stylistic and diffuse emotive cues, emotion markers, attunement, emotional spillover, and focalized mood). I have utilized my cue approach to examine a variety of emotionally significant cues in *Mother!*: curiosity cues, suspense cues, closeness cues, embodied empathy cues, sympathy cues, stylistic, diffuse, and backgrounded emotive cues, and emotion markers.

In my analysis of *Mother!*, I have argued that the film is structured to elicit a variety of emotional and affective responses. In the curiosity segment, I have argued that *Mother!* is filled with curiosity cues that are aimed at eliciting a high degree of curiosity. I point to several scenes that are structured to raise a flurry of questions, and I have focused on three prominent lines of questions that are raised early on in the film, questions that can elicit CFI curiosity. I have also argued that *Mother!* utilizes a highly restrictive form of narration that withholds story information by locking us to Mother's perspective, and that this also amplifies our curiosity. In addition to this, I have argued that it is likely that our CFI curiosity gradually changes into CFD curiosity over time, when we begin to feel deprived of important information. Furthermore, in the suspense segment, I have argued that there are several suspense cues in the first half of *Mother!* that invite us to feel suspense by foreshadowing the possibility of an undesirable outcome, and that several suspense cues in the second half of *Mother!* invite strong suspense by incrementally increasing the probability of a terrible outcome.

In the alignment segment, I have argued that the exclusive alignment (high degree of spatiotemporal attachment and subjective access to Mother) cues us to feel aspects of what it is like to be in Mother's situation, and that it cues us to feel close to Mother in several respects: spatiotemporally, perceptually, epistemically, and affectively. Secondly, I point out that we are primarily given subjective access to Mother through close-ups and reaction-shots of Mother's emotional facial expressions, and I have argued that these shots are embodied empathy cues that invite us to partly feel Mother's confusion, anxiety, fear, and sadness. Afterwards, in the sympathy segment, I have argued that we are invited to feel strong sympathetic concern, fear, pity, and anger for Mother through a combination of sympathy cues: Mother's desirable moral traits and actions, the increasingly vile behaviour of the guests, Him's neglect of Mother, and several attraction scenes that foreground Mother's confused, fearful, anxious, and sad facial expressions (embodied empathy cues and sympathy cues).

Lastly, in the mood segment, I have argued that a combination of stylistic cues, diffuse cues, backgrounded cues, and foregrounded emotion markers attune us to the affective qualities of the storyworld, and that they are intended to elicit an eerie and anxious mood in us. Secondly, I have argued that the eerie and anxious mood is a focalized mood that is congruent with Mother's affective state, and that we are cued to experience the world of *Mother!* with an affectively charged frame of mind that is similar to Mother's mood.

After my analysis, I took a step back to reflect on some important aspects that I was unable to include in my approach, like the importance of genre and spectator differences, and I have also reflected on some other issues, like the close relationship between story-directed emotions and character-directed emotions.

Overall, I have argued that *Mother!* is structured to elicit a high degree of curiosity, suspense, feelings of closeness, embodied empathy, sympathy, and an eerie and anxious focalized mood, and I have argued that these elements are important aspects of what makes *Mother!* an emotionally engaging film. In conclusion, I think that by utilizing the cue approach, I have been able to uncover important aspects of *Mother!*'s emotional and affective appeal.

Reference List

Film List

Aronofsky, D. (Director). (2017). *Mother!* [Movie]. Paramount Pictures. Protozoa Pictures.

Aronofsky, D. (Director). (2010). *Black Swan* [Movie]. Fox Searchlight Pictures. Cross Creek Pictures. Protozoa Pictures. Phoenix Pictures. Dune Entertainment.

Aronofsky, D. (Director). (2000). *Requiem for a Dream* [Movie]. Artisan Entertainment. Thousand Words. Sibling Productions. Protozoa Pictures. Industry Entertainment. Bandeira Entertainment. Requiem for a Dream. Truth and Soul Pictures.

Scott, R. (Director). (1979). *Alien* [Movie]. Brandywine Productions.

Trousdale, G., & Wise, K. (Directors). (1991). *Beauty and the Beast* [Movie]. Walt Disney Pictures. Silver Screen Partners IV. Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Literature List

Bálint, K., & Tan, E. S. H. (2019). Absorbed Character Engagement. In J. Riis, & A. Taylor (Eds.), *Screening Characters: Theories of Character in Film, Television, and Interactive Media* (pp. 209-230). New York: Routledge.

Benshoff, H. M., & Griffin, S. (2009). *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bordwell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. (2017). *Film Art: An Introduction* (11th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bordwell, D. (1985). *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Great Britain: Methuen & Co. Ltd.

Carroll, N., & Seeley, W. P. (2013). Cognitivism, Psychology, and Neuroscience: Movies as Attentional Engines. In A. P. Shimamura (Ed.), *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies* (pp. 53-75). New York: Oxford University Press.

Carroll, N. (2013). *Minerva's Night Out: Philosophy, Pop Culture, and Moving Pictures*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Carroll, N. (2003). Art and Mood: Preliminary Notes and Conjectures. *The Monist, 86*(4), 521-555. Retrieved February 4, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/27903843

Carroll, N. (1999). Film, Emotion, and Genre. In G. M. Smith, & C. R. Plantinga (Eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (pp. 21-47). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Carroll, N. (1990). *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York: Routledge.

Carroll, N. (1985). The Power of Movies. *Daedalus, 114*(4), 79-103. Retrieved November 2, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20025011

Choi, J. (2005). Leaving It Up to the Imagination: POV Shots and Imagining from the Inside. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 63*(1), 17-25. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559136

Coplan, A. (2004). Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 62*(2), 141-152. Retrieved February 16, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559198

Currie, G. (1999). Narrative Desire. In G. M. Smith, & C. R. Plantinga (Eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (pp. 183-199). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Delatorre, P., León, C., Salguero, A., Palomo-Duarte, M., & Gervás, P. (2018). Confronting a Paradox: A New Perspective of the Impact of Uncertainty in Suspense. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*(1392), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01392

Dockterman, E. (2017, September 21). *Allow Darren Aronofsky to Explain mother!*. TIME. https://time.com/4951193/darren-aronofsky-mother-director/

Eder, J. (2006). Ways of Being Close to Characters, *Film Studies*, *8*(1), 68-80. https://doi.org/10.7227/FS.8.8

Eitzen, D. (1999). The Emotional Basis of Film Comedy. In G. M. Smith, & C. R. Plantinga (Eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (pp. 84-99). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gaut, B. (2010). Empathy and Identification in Cinema. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, *34*, 136-157. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.2010.00211.x

Gaut, B. (1999). Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film. In C. Plantinga, & G. M. Smith (Eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (pp. 200-216). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Goldberg, M. (2017, August 17). *'mother!': WTF is Going on with Darren Aronofsky's WTF Movie?*. Collider. https://collider.com/mother-movie-explained/

Grodal, T. (2009). *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture, and Film*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Grodal, T., & Kramer, M. (2010). Empathy, Film, and the Brain. *Recherches sémiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry*, *30*(1-2-3), 19-35. https://doi.org/10.7202/1025921ar

Iacoboni, M. (2009). Imitation, Empathy, and Mirror Neurons. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *60*, 653-670. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163604

Kashdan, T. B., & Silvia, P. J. (2009). *Curiosity and Interest: The Benefits of Thriving on Novelty and Challenge.* In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Oxford Library of Psychology. The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 367–374). New York: Oxford University Press.

Lehne, M., & Koelsch, S. (2015). Toward a general psychological model of tension and suspense. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *6*(79), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00079

Litman, J. A. (2005). Curiosity and the pleasures of learning: Wanting and liking new information. *Cognition and Emotion, 19*(6), 793-814. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930541000101

Miller, J. (2017, September 15). *Mother!'s Ending: What Does It All Mean?*. Vanity Fair. https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/09/mother-movie-meaning-explained

MovieZine. (2017, September 14). *Darren Aronofsky Explains "mother!"* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/bOzdAHubUmI

Mulvey, L. (2009). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. In L. Braudy & M. Cohen (Eds.), *Film Theory & Criticism* (7th ed., pp. 711-722). New York: Oxford University Press.

Nannicelli, T., & Taberham, P. (2014). Introduction: Contemporary Cognitive Media Theory. In T. Nannicelli, & P. Taberham (Eds.), *Cognitive Media Theory* (pp. 1-23). New York: Routledge.

Oatley, K. (2013). How Cues on the Screen Prompt Emotions in the Mind. In A. P. Shimamura (Ed.), *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies* (pp. 269-284). New York: Oxford University Press.

Plantinga, C. (2019). Ethical Criticism and Fictional Characters as Moral Agents. In J. Riis, & A. Taylor (Eds.), *Screening Characters: Theories of Character in Film, Television, and Interactive Media* (pp. 191-208). New York: Routledge.

Plantinga, C. (2014). Mood and Ethics in Narrative Film. In T. Nannicelli, & P. Taberham (Eds.), *Cognitive Media Theory* (pp. 141-157). New York: Routledge.

Plantinga, C. (2013). The Affective Power of Movies. In A. P. Shimamura (Ed.), *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies* (pp. 94-111). New York: Oxford University Press.

Plantinga, C. (2012). Art Moods and Human Moods in Narrative Cinema. *New Literary History, 43*(3), 455-475. Retrieved November 2, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23358875

Plantinga, C. (2009). *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Plantinga, C. (2002). Cognitive Film Theory : An Insider's Appraisal. *Cinémas*, *12*(2), 15–37. https://doi.org/10.7202/024878ar

Plantinga, C. (1999). The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film. In C. Plantinga, & G. M. Smith (Eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (pp. 237-255). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Plantinga, C. & Smith, G. M. (1999). Introduction. In G. M. Smith, & C. R. Plantinga (Eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (pp. 1-17). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Seeley, W., & Carroll, N. (2014). Cognitive Theory and The Individual Film: The Case of Rear Window. In T. Nannicelli, & P. Taberham (Eds.), *Cognitive Media Theory* (pp. 235-252). New York: Routledge.

Silvia, P. J. (2019). *Curiosity and Motivation.* In R. M. Ryan (Ed.), *Oxford Library of Psychology. The Oxford Handbook of Human Motivation* (2nd ed., pp. 157–166). New York: Oxford University Press.

Sinnerbrink, R. (2012). *Stimmung*: exploring the aesthetics of mood. *Screen, 53*(2), 148-163. https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjs007

Smith, G. M. (2003). *Film Structure and the Emotion System*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, G. M. (1999). Local Emotions, Global Moods, and Film Structure. In G. M. Smith, & C. R. Plantinga (Eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (pp. 103-126). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Smith, M. (2014). "the pit of naturalism": neuroscience and the naturalized aesthetics of film. In T. Nannicelli, & P. Taberham (Eds.), *Cognitive Media Theory* (pp. 27-45). New York: Routledge.

Smith, M. (2010). *Engaging Characters*: Further Reflections. In J. Eder, F. Jannidis, & R. Schneider (Eds.), *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (pp. 232-258). Berlin: De Gruyter.

Smith, M. (1995). *Engaging characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Smuts, A. (2009, July 6). *The Paradox of Suspense*. In E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition). https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/paradox-suspense/

Smuts, A. (2008). The Desire-Frustration Theory of Suspense. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 66*(3), 281-290. Retrieved January 21, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40206345

Stam, R. (2000) *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Tan, E. S. H., & Frijda, N. H. (1999). Sentiment in Film Viewing. In G. M. Smith & C. R. Plantinga (Eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (pp. 48-64). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Tan, E. S. H. (1995). Film-induced affect as a witness emotion. *Poetics, 23*(1-2), 7-32. https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(94)00024-Z

TIFF Originals. (2017, September 20). *MOTHER! Director Q&A | TIFF 2017* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/xEkV2JOeMYQ

Vaage, M. B. (2010). Fiction Film and the Varieties of Empathic Engagement. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, *34*, 158-179. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.2010.00200.x

Vaage, M. B. (2008). *Seeing is Feeling: The Function of Empathy for the Spectator of Fiction Film* (Doctoral thesis). University of Oslo, Oslo.

Wilkinson, A. (2017, September 15). *Darren Aronofsky's Mother! is an explosive retelling of creation in fire and blood*. Vox. https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/9/10/16277234/mother-review-aronofsky-lawrence-bardem-tiff