

the new French Extremity



*“Nous ne pouvons pas abandonner comme ça à nos enfants. Je sais de quoi je parle.
J'adore le mien.”*

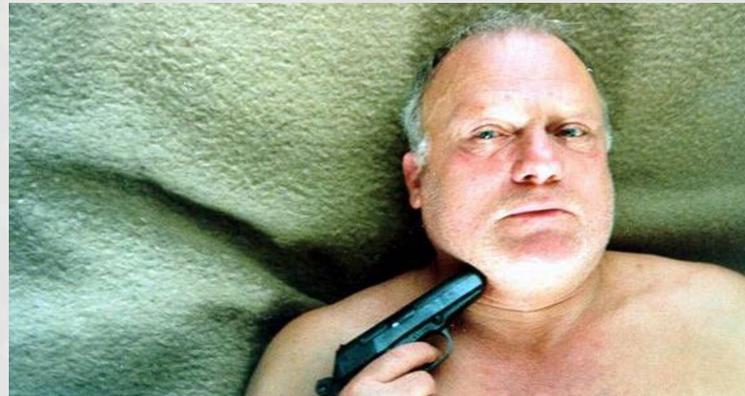
~ Eva, Frontière(s) (2007)

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- The **New French Extremity** is a recent tendency of willfully transgressive filmmakers who are making “aggressive and abrasive forms of cinema that seek a more confrontational experience...a cinema of brutal intimacy” (Palmer, 22, 31).



Cannibal sex in *Trouble Every Day* (2001)



The butcher in *Seul contre tous* (1998)

- Extremism breaks cultural taboos by reveling in images of sexual depravity and extreme violence, carried out by psychotic characters.
- Filmmakers consciously seek to defy moral and ethical boundaries of French consciousness by “portraying contemporary society as isolating, unpredictably horrific and threatening” (ibid, 22).

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- Extremist films are highly experimental, employing discontinuous editing techniques, extreme close-ups, hand-held cameras, ambiguous noise, and loud, abrasive soundtracks.
- Odd juxtapositions, abstract visual designs, and provocative imagery combine to create unsettling aesthetic encounters.



Long takes, jarring hand-held cinematography, and piercing audio in *Irréversible* (2002)

- Narratives are underdeveloped or disjointed, and eruptions of violence and sex penetrate through the films' ordinary scenarios.
- Spectators identify with characters whose relationships ultimately “disintegrate and fail, often violently” (Palmer, 22).

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DeWinter's emotional decline in *Humanité* (1999)



Unexpected brutality in *À ma sœur!* (2001)

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- French Extreme films inspire debate about “whether it is appropriate for widely circulated films to incorporate such extreme forms of aesthetic, sexual, and social provocation; or, conversely, whether even high film art should be limited to more sanctioned forms of physical desire and social interaction” (Palmer, 26).



Claustrophobic violence in *À l'intérieur* (2007)



Self-mutilation in *Dans ma peau* (2002)

- Ultimately, the films of the New French Extremity aim to shock the spectator into an awareness of ones boundaries. They challenge the terms of “proper” spectatorship, and force discussion about the lines that separate high and low culture, taste and taboo, and that which culture deems “too extreme” to engage with.

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- When asked why he set out to disturb his audience in *Twentynine Palms*, Bruno Dumont responded: “Because people are way too set in their ways; they are asleep. They have to be woken up. You can never definitely say you are human. You have to regularly be confronted by something to remind you that you still have a lot to do as a human being” (Quandt, 8).



David's rape and Katia's murder in *Twentynine Palms* (2003)

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Martyrs



Written & Directed by
Pascal Laugier

Canal+
(2008) 94 mins.

Tim Palmer. Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body. Journal of Film & Video. September 2006, Vol. 58, Issue 3.

James Quandt. "Flesh & Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema". Artforum. February, 2004.