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## Psychoanalysis and film spectatorship

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#### Abstract

This paper interrogates selected cinematic and stylistic techniques with a view to establishing why film audience would enjoy watching a film featuring violence and instances of intense human suffering, which elicit pain, when they avoid painful situations in real life. The study is based on the hypothesis that though the fractured, chaotic, and violent aspects of crime would appear to be diametrically opposed to the entertainment functions of films, stylistic presentation of violence would cause the audience to enjoy watching films with criminal activities which they would otherwise shun in reality. The research is guided by the theory of Semiotics and Psychoanalysis and employs a qualitative research design. The findings of this research explain how the devices and techniques function to make the audience feel pleasure in response to tragedies of crime and objects of distress. The study draws a conclusion that cinematic techniques and stylistic devices transform the unpleasant emotional responses the audience may have into pleasurable ones through psychologically engaging the audiences' mental schema.

**Keywords:** adrenalin, curiosity, dopamine, pleasure, violence

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#### Public Interest Statement

Research has shown that crime is one of the most prevalent themes in contemporary cinema. Throughout film history, filmmakers have continually turned to crime narratives as a spectacle to entertain and to inform the audience. Film audiences and scholars have debated over why people would watch a painful for a considerable period. This paper posits that film spectatorship is integrated with human psychology and cognitive mechanism innately wired in the natural human making.



## Introduction

Painful art continues to be one of the most highly charged issues in the contemporary society. Bullen (2009) in her paper 'Review of The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart' writes that "According to Google Scholar, since the year 2000 over 17,000 books and articles have been written about horror and over 100,000 searches returned for books and articles on horror and genre." She adds that "many of these works relate to horror films, video games, or television, or analyze an aspect of the genre, such as gender and violence." According to Thomas Leitch, "crime film is the most enduringly popular of all Hollywood genres, the only kind of film that has never once been out of fashion since the dawn of the sound era seventy years ago" (Leitch, 28).

Contrary to the assumption that people derive pleasure from incidents that elicit positive emotions only, studies have shown that people more often derive pleasure from experiences which elicit painful emotions generally and especially from films. Charlotte L. Doyle in her commentary on, a study by N.F. Barrett, and Schulkin, J (2017) acknowledges that there is evidence that audiences enjoy grief, sadness, and other negative emotions from all art forms. She writes that 'The evocation of sadness in an individual that is also enjoyed has been a topic on ongoing research debate'. Aaron Smuts too argues that audiences enjoy sadness from art, He writes:

Many of the most popular genres of narrative art are designed to elicit negative emotions: emotions that are experienced as painful or involving some degree of pain, which we generally avoid in our daily lives. Melodramas make us cry. Tragedies bring forth pity and fear. Conspiratorial thrillers arouse feelings of hopelessness and dread, and devotional religious art can make the believer weep in sorrow. Not only do audiences know what these artworks are supposed to do, they seek them out in pursuit of prima facie painful reactions (Smuts, 59).

A study by Sarah E. Hall, Emery Schubert and Sarah J. Wilson concluded that participants were drawn more to sad music compared to music which elicited positive emotions such as joy. Natalja Deng and Daan Evers (2016) too acknowledge that people enjoy negative emotions. They write that ... 'Although People tend to keep away from the causes of negative emotions, such as violence and loss, these same people sometimes seek out and even enjoy the negative emotions themselves, such as sorrow or sadness' (p.340).

Why people watch painful art has been a discussion in the academic arena for a considerable period. This dates back to 335 BC when Aristotle wrote poetics, in which he talked about Tragedy arousing pity and fear in the audience and leading to catharsis. Theorists have come up with various arguments to this question with the most common argument being that these art works accord the audience pleasure. Borrowing from these theorists, this paper argues that through cinematic techniques, film producers are able to translate crime films into entertaining stories by converting the negative emotions to pleasure or by compensating for them. The paper makes the argument that stylistic

devices and cinematic techniques can play on human psychology and cognitive mechanism to achieve their objectives. According to Bowlby (1988) human beings are born with an innate psychological system; what he calls the attachment behavioural system. It is the fact that the mechanisms are innately wired in the natural human making that makes it possible for the techniques to succeed.

## Discussion

Creative writers and film producers use stylistic and cinematic codes and conventions which transform violence and criminal activities into captivating stories by transforming the unpleasant emotions the audience may have into pleasurable ones. Painful emotions in art is aestheticized by techniques such as invite hypothesis, suspense, characterization, cast, juxtaposition, cinematography, plot, music and sound tracks among other techniques making a considerable section of the audience to perceive the violence differently.

## Suspense

Suspense as a style attempts to create pleasure in the audience by using the naturally occurring pleasure chemical dopamine which is released when the brain is expecting a reward (cf. Thiong'o & Barasa, 2019). When human beings actively pursue new information through curiosity, their brains are flooded with the pleasure-inducing chemical dopamine. In film viewing, acquiring knowledge and gaining an understanding of the film is the reward for curiosity. Film producers employ techniques which create curiosity and which in turn stimulates the production of dopamine in the brain.

According to Loewenstein (1994) curiosity is “a cognitive induced deprivation that arises from the perception of a gap in knowledge and understanding.” In his information gap theory, he argues that curiosity functions like other drive states, such as hunger, which motivates eating. Building on this theory, Loewenstein suggests that a small amount of information serves as a priming dose, which greatly increases curiosity. Loewenstein's idea is supported by a study by Jeong Kang and colleagues which found out that “decision-makers were least curious when they had no clue about the answer and if they were extremely confident; they were most curious when they had some idea about the answer, but lacked confidence. In these circumstances, compulsion to know the answer was so great that they were even willing to pay for the information even though their curiosity could have been slated for free after the session”. In line with Loewenstein's theory, film producers create suspense by giving viewers a little clue to whet their curiosity. This stimulates the production of dopamine which floods the brain with pleasure in anticipation of the reward of knowing what will happen next in the scene. Films are constructed to ‘invite’ the audience to view them by introducing techniques, or, codes which cue the audiences' curiosity throughout the films. One way through which these films attempts to invite the audience is by use of codes that solicit hypotheses by viewers about what will happen next or what prompted a given action. One of the codes that prompt hypothesis formation is point of view editing.

Human beings exhibit an adaptive behavior of directing their own attention

to the target of the other human's attention upon an encounter. According to George Butterworth, this tendency of looking at what other people are looking at as a natural means of information gathering takes hold in infancy and is generally a natural innate human perceptual behavior. He observed the relation of children to their mothers' in rooms full of objects and wrote that "invariably, children follow the trajectory of their mother's glance to its target object" (Butterworth 20). It is almost natural that when a person looks towards a given object, the others looking at him/her will follow his glance to that object. This perceptual practice is readily represented in films. The films use point of view editing to invite the audience to follow the characters' gazes in search of causes of their actions. Point-of-view editing succeeds in making the audience glued to the screen by the camera movement between the character's gaze and the target being deleted hence inviting the audience's curiosity to want to find out what the character is looking at. Psychologically, this produces a feeling of lack and creates a desire to fulfil the lack as the audience wishes to find out what the character is looking at. Sigmund Freud explains that "desire is a natural human response stemming from the Oedipus complex". According to Jacques Lacan, the ego is called into existence and the process of judgment begins when the baby recognizes himself as an individual and therefore separate from others. (Lacan, 1977). "As soon as the ego is in operation desire for objects is brought about, and the mother becomes the first object of desire". (Lacan, 1977b, p. 277) The baby does not fulfil the wish to own its object of desire due to competition with the father for the mother's love. This 'predicament' of dissatisfaction, according to Lacan, causes the need for constant 'wish fulfilment' (desire) from the mirror stage onwards throughout the baby's life and into adulthood. This psychological deprivation and constant desire for fulfilment creates a center stage for curiosity making human beings to always want to find out more about every situation in an attempt to fulfil this psychological lack. Curiosity as an invite technique in film arouses in the audience the original desire for wish fulfilment of the psyche. Point of view editing as an invite hypothesis may succeed because curiosity is innately wired in the human behavior.

Films tend to present the audience with a little information, such as a person looking off screen, as an invite technique. When the audience is presented with a character looking off the screen, they will want to find out what the character is looking at. Nairobi Half Life, for example, uses invite hypothesis to cue the audience's curiosity. In the first scene of Nairobi Half Life, the camera focuses and lingers on Mwas, the main character, as he acts the 'five step scene' from one of the films he is selling. Mwas suddenly stops acting and intently gazes downward towards the road. The audience is presented with Mwas gazing off the screen but the object of his gaze is not given. In a natural perceptual behavior, the audience will tend to follow Mwas' gaze to find out what has caught his attention. This keeps the audience watching as well as triggers the curiosity which will cue the audiences' expectations and a desire for fulfilment throughout the film. Once the audience discovers the object of Mwas' gaze a road show truck advertising "The Vultures", the audience remains fixed to the screen to want to find out the outcome.

In another scene, in Nairobi Half Life, after Mwas is robbed of his luggage, he tries

to overcome his affliction gradually by pacing along the streets. Suddenly, his face, shown in a point-glance shot, is gripped by shock. He gets rooted to the spot and stares. The shock gradually fades and is taken over by a smile. The recognition on the viewer's part comes with the expectation that whatever is eliciting that emotion could be exciting or reassuring, arousing the audiences' curiosity to want to know the object of Mwas' emotion. The camera then cuts to a point-object shot of the street with several boys stealing side mirrors, head lights and indicators from parked cars. With the knowledge of the emotion on Mwas' face, the audience can surmise this as the object of Mwas' attention. Point of view editing thus functions to create suspense; hence a desire, drawing the audience to want to find out more. The audience finds it hard to resist following the character's gaze, since it is readily picked up and applied, virtually by reflex. Point of view editing thus succeeds because it is keyed in this intimate human perceptual makeup. It invites the audience by structurally delivering the glance to the target, while functionally supplying information about the agent whose gaze concerns the audience.

### Cast

Cast as cinematic techniques make use of the scopic drive. Film makers cast good looking, eloquent, caring, daring, courageous and smart celebrities as cues. These traits act as 'master signifiers' and primary markers of jouissance 'inviting' the viewers to watch the film as a way of reconnecting to the lost object. According to Sigmund Freud (1905) the pleasure in looking, is a "partial-instinct innate to the childhood process of forming personality". Freud explains that "the child initially understands the mother's breast as being part of itself and experiences its withdrawal as a rupture at the level of its own being. This marks the subject's division and that is clearly motivated by the loss of the primary object and the attempt to recover it again in the field of the Other. The mother's breast becomes the lost object which always remains present within the circuit of the drive and sustains its interminable search for satisfaction" (Freud 1905) Jacques Lacan echoes Freud's sentiments and refers to this lost object which is the cause of desire to 'look' 'objet petit a. (Lacan 1964) According to Lacan a baby's whole life is that of drive satisfaction or jouissance; all that babies do is breastfeed (oral drive), stare at their primary caregiver's face or gaze (scopic drive), listen to the primary caregiver's voice (invocatory drive) and defecate (anal drive). However, there comes a point in a child's development when the child is finally separated from the mother (primary caregiver) which puts limitations on the child's drive satisfaction. This loss of the mother's body (which the child initially understands as being part of itself) leaves the child with a feeling that there is a part of it that it has been separated from and that the child must find in order to be whole again. The mother's body thus becomes the lost object that it forever haunts all the days of its life. It is this unconscious search for the lost object that causes the desire to 'look' in order to get satisfaction in the form of the virtual jouissance.

This 'lost object' which is essentially a lack, a void or an empty spot throughout the course of one's life, gets linked to certain idealized and libidinally-invested traits. The mother is the most beautiful thing a child first encounters; good looking, loving, caring and

with the most beautiful voice. As such the child grows up to associate libidinally invested traits with the traits of the mother. These traits (das Ding) get laid down in the mind as the most basic coordinates of jouissance and form fundamental “pleasurable associations” with jouissance or drive satisfaction. They become the primary markers of jouissance and master signifiers marking points in one’s environment that are reserves of jouissance. The lost object comes to be associated with the mothers’ traits, qualities, and other features and determinations which satisfy ones lack hence returning one to the satisfaction one once had with the mother. Each one (via fantasy) comes to unconsciously associate certain empirical features with that missing “part” of the self. These include what one idealizes such as nice buildings, what one desires such as love and care, what one would like to be such as good looking, sexy, eloquent, beautiful voice, smart, brave and daring among others. Good looks thus become a master signifier for jouissance. This explains why people are attracted to good looking people and why film makers cast good looking celebrities and beautiful sceneries.

The cast in Nairobi Half Life, for example, consists of celebrities who are admired by many Kenyans. Nini Wacera, for example, is a renowned Kenyan actress and director who has been praised by many in the social media as being beautiful. Nini has acted in many films and television series. She has acted as Kui in Dangerous Affair (2002), Julia Oyange in Kona, Suzzane in Wingu La Moto (2003-2006), and Ese De Souza in Desperate Housewives Africa. Other notable roles include those in Silent Monologues, The White Maasai, Epilogue, Life in D minor among others. Nancy Wanjiku Karanja popularly known as ‘Shiks Kapyenga’, who plays Amina in Nairobi Half Life, is another celebrity who is considered to be beautiful and has dominated the Kenyan social media for a long time. The Hot 96 Radio presenter has acted in many films among them Nairobi Half Life and Shuga. She is one of Churchill Show (a popular Kenyan comedy) comedian and has also acted in ‘Beba Beba’. Most people love her husky voice Jacky Vike has acted in Simiyu Samurai, NTV’s Wash and Set and in citizen TV series Papa Shirandura as Awinja. She is a professional dancer and a yoga trainer.

The characters are imbued with attractive traits which ‘invite’ the audience to like them. They are brought out as attractive, resilient and hardworking. Mwas goes through horrendous and spine-chilling experiences, but remains strong and focused on achieving his dream of becoming an actor. He faces numerous problems ranging from, internal conflict, instability, poverty, uncertainty, and social upheavals, some of which are a consequence of unequal distribution of social amenities which denied the rural folks opportunities. He rises above these difficulties and comes out strong. His poor back ground and lack of social amenities in the rural area does not stop him achieving his dream. He does not return to fate and instead begins his life searching journey with just an idea and rises above difficulties and obstacles. His strong character and resilience is seen in how he makes a decision to travel to Nairobi to chance his success and how he struggles to retain his dream in the face of complexities and misfortunes. Amina faces more challenges being a woman. Though a sex worker in a brothel, she hopes to one day quit the brothel for a life of dignity. She tells Mwas that her aim is to get capital (from her work in the brothel)

to start up her own salon and a beauty shop. Amidst difficulties and unstable upbringing, Amina hopes for a better life.

Casting is central to the construction of films. The cast conditions the reception of the film, since the audience's perception of a character depends to a large extent, on their view of the actor or actress who plays the part. Casting thus is not only a powerful tool in the definition of character, but also an effective means of trying to entice the audience to watch the film. That films cast celebrities has a wider psychological bearing. According to Freud's theories on narcissism, 'objects' are part of the individual who has chosen them as 'their' object. Thus, the desire of object is viewed as an attempt at self-satisfaction. Freud argues that "a person may love an object depending on the narcissistic type" He gives 4 narcissistic types as: "a) What he is himself, b) What he once was, c) what he would like to be, and d) Someone who was once part of himself" (Jacoby 1990:79). According to psychology, in film viewing process, identification with the characters comes about from b, and c. The film viewer may be attracted to a character in a film because they admire the character and would like to be like them. The trait of the character thus acts as a 'master signifier' of jouissance. Film viewers may love to view celebrities because they love their looks, or fame and would like to be like them. The cast in Nairobi Half Life consists of some young people who have made it in the entertainment world and are admired and envied by many. The viewing process thus becomes desirable since it provides the audience with an opportunity to look and in looking, the audience is presented with an opportunity to experience narcissistic love. This returns the audience to the infant love of the mother and therefore satisfying the ego by finding the 'lost object'. Identification with characters in film is thus an associative practice. Audiences unconsciously draw connections to a form of narcissistic love of themselves and in doing so experience a satisfaction compared to the first experience of oneness with the mother. They thus experience a part of themselves in the objects they watch.

### **Cinematography**

Cinematography as a cinematic technique attempts to arrest the audience by making use of the startle response. Aestheticization of suffering in crime films is achieved through visual and sound patterns. Films featuring violence present violence as a form of expressive art in which the violence is so gruesomely harsh and fearsome. These effects are achieved by manipulation of camera or lens or by editing techniques such as use of sound effects, slow motion, telephoto lens, zoom lens, quick-cutting and montage, close-up, sharp and abrupt lighting among others, conditioning the audiences' response to the violence. The combination of graphic representation of robbery with an aesthetic representation of violence produces fear and anxiety in the audience resulting into a startle response.

Startle response is an innate human tendency to 'jump' at loud noises and to recoil at fast movements. The startle response is an unconscious defensive response. This tendency, psychologists say, is hard wired, innate, involuntary and impenetrable to belief. Cinematography as a cinematic technique functions to make the audience feel pleasure by making use of the startle reflex. It does this by engaging certain audio-visual patterns and

sound effects in crime films. The presence of gunshots, screams, sharp lighting, running, fast movement and shaking camera among other cinematic techniques elicit an abrupt and intense stimulation which create fear in the audience. It is the fear created by these techniques that make the audience to feel pleasure. According to a study led by Vanderbilt University's David H. Zald, in addition to adrenaline, fear releases the pleasure hormone. Dopamine conditions responses to certain stimuli, and signals the production of fight-or-flight response when the brain senses one is in danger and pleasure hormones when the brain senses one is safe. Thus the fear created by cinematography within the context of a film elicit pleasure in the audience. According to Dr. John Mayer, a practicing clinical psychologist, "When something scary enters our awareness, whether real or made up, fear induces the fight-or-flight response. At that point, the brain determines if there is a real threat or not and acts appropriately". Dr. Mayer continues that "If the brain senses you are not threatened, you will still experience fear, but instead of releasing hormones that make you stronger and faster for defense mode, your body releases hormones that essentially make you feel good under the right circumstances". This is aided by the frontal lobe of the brain, which is the thinking part of the brain. The body can quickly shift how it experiences high arousal state, going from one of fear to one of enjoyment or excitement, depending on the feedback that the "thinking" brain gives to the "emotional" brain. Thus the fear created by cinematography within the context of a film elicit pleasure in the audience.

Action films tend to place the scenes of violence very much in the spotlight. The violent scenes are filmed in cinematic techniques that differ significantly from the rest of the scenes in which the murder scenes are embedded. The diegetic sound is lowered and special film sound track is added for the effect of both estrangement and fear. The scene is filmed out of a hand-held camera which gives the images a wavering quality, making it shaky and frightening. In most 'action-packed' movies, the scenes of violence are filmed amidst screams, flashing lights, gun shots, and confusion among others, manipulated to accentuate fear in the audience. The standard realist modes of editing and cinematography are violated in order to spectacularize the violent scenes. The camera work is normally abrupt and shaky, imitating the gestures of violence with actions tend to moving very fast arresting the viewers (what is commonly called "action-packed"). The robberies are edited to a fairly high pace compared to the other less violent scenes. The robbery scenes are set outside dialogue. There is no clear spatial orientation. All that the viewers see and hear are shaky images, gun shots, sound tracks, metals banging, hooting, darkness, running footsteps and screams which creates a scary scene hence creating a startle reflex and captivating the audience attention. Since quick cutting and montage is a change in the rate of progression, it makes the change pronounced and more noticeable. The more noticeable the change, generally, the more pronounced the effect; the viewer is reminded that something significant is happening, whetting the viewers' curiosity to want to watch to find out what is happening. Quick cutting is a resultant sense of suddenness. The audience may forget the pain of the violence as they get excited at the prowess with which the thugs can dislodge and take off with the head lights and side mirrors.



## Plot

Films may act as a window into the repressed desires of the film watcher. According to Freud when audiences watch a film, “they identify with the behavior and dialogue of certain characters and forge psychic bonds with the characters and unconsciously project their own fantasies, phobias, and fixations onto their alter egos. Whenever the characters say or do something that touches upon one of these fantasies, phobias, or fixations, the audience derive unconscious satisfaction or dissatisfaction accordingly”.

Film viewing is not just the relationship that occurs between the viewer and the screen, but also the relationship the viewer had before watching the film. Film viewing thus goes beyond the material and visible factors to psychoanalytic perspective and the spectators’ unconscious emotional engagement. Much of the audiences’ emotional engagement happens at an unconscious level with the emotions in the audience secondary to a prior cognitive appraisal of the meaning of a certain situation. Fischer-Litche (2008, p.153) when discussing the emotions aroused in an audience witnessing an actor being subjected to self-inflicted injuries or to physical abuse by others says, “the spectators experienced these emotions because violence against self and others had been charged and connoted with intense emotions for them prior to the performance” (153). Harper and Porter in answering the question about crying in cinema say that “memories of key scenes from films gave respondents a kind of fast track access to emotional high points in their lives” (1996 p.153).

Crossberg (1992 p 52) says “audiences are meaning - making beings who constantly struggle to make the text mean something that connects specifically ‘to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires” (1992, p. 52). Audiences exhibit a powerful cognitive and affective connection with something they encounter in a film if it generates a memory the audience can identify with. The intense identification with a narrative or plot line which generates a memory gives a strong affective reaction to what is on the screen. Film makers make use of this psychological phenomenon by crafting stories and creating characters the audiences can identify with. Films tend to employ characters and themes which the audience can relate with and foreground impulses which are similarly repressed in everyone. It is this repression which is shaken up by the situation of the film that makes the audience to reorganize themselves in the characters in the film by recognizing that they are susceptible to the same misfortune as the characters. In Nairobi Half Life, as in most films, the main character in the film is neither perfect nor fundamentally evil. They are people the audience can identify with. They move from positions of happiness to unhappiness due to mistakes they commit and partly due to circumstances beyond them. These mistakes, unconscious or error in Freudian terms and tragic flaws in Aristotelian terms, are mistakes the audience can identify with as common to humans and can be committed by anyone. The sorrows the characters go through which are as a result of their faults (which the audiences can identify with), are calculated to draw the audiences to identify with the characters since they too can commit such mistakes and land in the same state of unhappiness.

Mwas, the main character in Nairobi Half Life is a person the audience can identify

with; a person in search of a better life as most people do. He moves from his rural home to Nairobi to fulfil his dream of becoming an actor having been promised a place in 'the Vultures' by Jose, a member of the Vultures. Mwas lands in the hands of thugs and is robbed of everything that he had; misfortune that can befall anyone. He is mistakenly arrested by the city council and thrown in the police cell where he is mishandled by the seasoned hard-core criminals he finds in there. When Mwas leaves the police cell the following morning, he gets stranded in Nairobi with no relative, no friend, no money and nowhere to start from. Being homeless, he spends the cold rainy night on top of the hotel tables, with nothing to cover himself. When Mwas later finds Jose, the man who promised to help him start up a career as an actor in Nairobi, Mwas realizes that Jose conned him and that there is no slot for him as an actor in the theatre group. By the time he comes to the realization that he has been cheated and conned, he is already in Nairobi, jobless, penniless and homeless. Mwas goes through events that evoke pity in the minds of the audiences. The recognition in the minds of the audiences that such misfortunes can befall anyone including them is what evokes pity for Mwas in them and the fear that they too can fall victim of such circumstances. The identification with Mwas in Nairobi Half Life and other main characters in similar films reside in the fact that the hero, who is neither perfect nor fundamentally evil, and who is a person like the audience, a person we see in the society every day and can therefore identify with, passes from a state of happiness to unhappiness on account of a certain misfortune that can befall anyone.

### **Characterization**

How audiences interpret violence varies according to their own position vis-à-vis the narrative characters. It will be interpreted differently if the violence is perpetrated on or by a character constructed in the narrative as close to the audience. Psychological investigation into the expression of emotion has amassed a compelling amount of data to the effect that, interacting with people closest to one intensifies emotions. Naturally people would do anything to protect the ones close to them. The actor/observer bias tells us that the more you know about a person you are watching, the more you are likely to trust them, even if they are not moral. Films tend to make use of this psychological phenomenon to entice the audience by shooting or editing in a certain way to ensure that the audience identifies with or support the main character even if they do some morally questionable things. In many occasions, audiences will tend to follow the actions of the main character. The more the audience identifies with a character, regardless of their shady morality, the more they defend them even if their actions are violent. The audience will thus keep on watching to follow and support 'their person' despite the violence and will celebrate if the person against 'their person' is killed even if it is their person perpetuating the violence. The act of violence is thus viewed positively, welcomed, anticipated and cheered when it comes. The violence will thus give the audience pleasure by giving the 'bad guy' his comeuppance with the murdered or the mutilated body turned into an object of fascination.

The close up shot is a device designed to activate the audiences' closeness to the character in such a way that they identify with the character and support him/her. Nairobi

Half Life opens with a close up shot; the diegetic narrator keeps the camera focused on Mwas and slowly zooms out to a medium shot, then wide shot of Mwas acting out a scene in one of the movies he is selling. The audience identifies Mwas as the main character or star. Throughout the first scene, the camera remains static and lingers on Mwas, simply observing his actions, and zooms rather than cuts in its transitions. Though the opening shot has other characters; they are shot in a medium long and medium shots indicating that they will feature less prominently in the film, which distances them from the audience. The close-up singles out Mwas in most of the scenes he is involved in. By having the camera focus on Mwas', it positions the audience with him and thus helps in mediating the relation between Mwas and the audience. Within the first few seconds of Nairobi Half Life, the audiences not only get to know the main character but are also drawn to him as a lively and focused character. He humorously acts out scenes in the movies he is selling, first 'the five step scene', and then 'the spartan boy'. Other than being creative, he is focused and determined. The audience is drawn to like Mwas such that when he later on becomes a robber, the audiences are likely not to question his character, instead they see him as a victim of circumstances, sympathize with him, blame others for his actions and celebrate his achievement even if it is a robbery or a violent act of killing.

Other than making the main character an adorable character, the film makers has ensured that the other characters around the main character come across as repulsive so as to accentuate the main character's goodness. Daddy M for example, is presented as a repulsive character. He is a thug who tries to persuade Mwas to join him (in robbery) so that Mwas too can live like a big buck and stop making fifty shillings from selling movies. He eventually forcefully initiates Mwas into carjacking. He forces Mwas to rob a Toyota VX for him to compensate for his stereo player which Mwas lost in the hands of robbers. Most of the other characters are also presented as repulsive: Mwas' father is a reckless drunkard who neglects his family, Ndingo tries to exploit Mwas and his gang of what they rob, Oti spends all that he makes on prostitutes and beer, and the policemen are cheats. By the time Mwas becomes a robber, the audience has taken Mwas' side enough to welcome anything that he will do to succeed. There is the pleasure of Mwas winning in the long run, regardless of what he does to win, and the pleasure of the people against Mwas being killed. Nairobi Half Life affords the audience the comfort in knowing that Mwas finally succeeds and the 'bad' guys are punished in the end; the bad guy being the one against 'our person' and not the criminal, robber or murderer.

### **Juxtaposition**

Putting pathos and farce side by side can make pleasure derived from art works to compensate for the pain these same works may embody. Film producers use buildings, humorous scenes, sound, lighting, camera angles and movements among others as foregrounding devices. Often, when the pleasure had from something outweighs the pain, it downplays the painful emotions one would have gotten from it. The negative emotions audiences may feel in response to a drama, for example, may be down played by the excitement experienced in anticipating for a happy ending. Relief may often play

a role as well, for example when the audiences are relieved that the main character is not going to die after all, something the audiences were probably afraid would happen throughout the film. Noël Carroll in her compensatory theory argues that pleasure derived from art works can compensate for the pain these same works may embody. Patricia Greenspan defends this view saying “it is not the release of fear that is pleasurable, at least in immediate terms, but the fact that one is soon released from it.” (Carroll 32) crime films normally accommodate a combination of sorrow and humor, moving the audience to tears and laughter with the laughter making the tears bearable. Aesthetic pleasure is enhanced when one emotion serves as a foil to the other and allows the audience some relief before or after the film plunges deep into a negative emotion. The juxtaposition of humour and sorrow is seen in several instances in the films. Before Mwas is robbed of his luggage upon arrival in Nairobi, the audience is given a humorous, almost ridiculous picture of Mwas; a shoddy villager in town, with a ridiculously big luggage, ridiculously smiling at his ‘achievement’ of getting to Nairobi. The picture sends the viewers into laughter before exposing them to the pain of Mwas losing his luggage to robbers upon arrival in Nairobi. As the bus moves to Nairobi, a song plays at the background welcoming the audience to share into Mwas’ joy and excitement of going to Nairobi; the first step to achieving his dream of being an actor. The camera zooms out to give the viewer a glimpse of Nairobi. The camera’s movement is slow and composed, imitating a graceful and beautiful entrance into Nairobi. As Mwas alights from the bus, a song plays as though to welcome Mwas into Nairobi. The whole entrance is artistic and beautiful eliciting a positive reaction in the viewers just before the film plunges into the pain of Mwas being robbed.

Almost every robbery scene is preceded by humorous scene or followed by one. When Mwas and his gang car jacks a lady at the garage, the whole scene is brought out so humorously that the audience are relieved from the harshness of the robbery by the humor. The lady’s desperate attempt at saving her car is humorous. The gang is canny and smart; a car pulls in front of the lady and blocks her way, she stops and gets out of her car to find out what the driver is up to, from behind her, the boys quickly get into her car and start off. Just when she hears her car start, the driver to the other car moves creating a barrier between her and her car. She beats the car using her fists for blocking her way and tries to push it out of her way using her hands to the amusement of the audience. As her car speeds off, she desperately tries to wave it to a stop and chases after it on foot. The whole scene is funny. The gang’s prowess is captivating. The audience is drawn to the grace of the robbers’ actions in the process downplaying the pain of the robbery. Juxtaposition of humor and sorrow thus alleviates the pain that the audience feels. This concurs with the argument advanced by the compensatory theorists to the effect that pleasure that is sufficient can offset the pain involved.

## Music

Neuroimaging studies have shown that music can activate brain areas that are typically associated with emotions. According to psychologists the enjoyment of music involves the same pleasure center in the brain as other forms of pleasure, such as food, sex, and

drugs. Studies have shown that an aesthetic stimulus, such as music, can naturally target the dopamine systems of the brain that are typically involved in highly reinforcing and pleasurable.

Film music is an integral part of a film experience. Films that use music involve the audience completely and expose the inner feelings and thoughts of characters and can shape the way the viewers feel about what's happening on the screen. Music complements cinematography to encourage viewers to appreciate a film. It combines with the other channels of information to help create the narrative and control the way the audiences interpret a film. Mwas' journey to Nairobi is shot against the background of music and sound tracks. As the bus moves, soft music is played on the background inviting the audience to share in Mwas' joy. The camera zooms out to the landscape and buildings creating a feeling of beauty and excitement. As Mwas alights from the bus, in Nairobi, the soft music is replaced by hard rap music which functions to change the mood. This has a wider thematic bearing to the film since gangster rap songs majorly deal with themes such as crime and gangster life among others. This symbolically marks Mwas' initiation from innocence to gangster life in Nairobi. As the rap plays, a gang descends on Mwas robbing him of everything. Immediately after Mwas is robbed, the rap music is taken over by a slow melancholic tune as Mwas tries to recover from his attack and robbery. The slow motion editing combined with the music function to convey Mwas' emotion to the audience. Without words spoken, the audience can feel Mwas' pain and loneliness. By working with other channels of information, music moves beyond the role of simply reflecting or filling the background to the role of affecting how viewers interpret meaning in a film.

Music functions to convey emotions and suggests connections to themes in the film by guiding the audience towards a set of expected responses. One of the themes of Nairobi Half Life is robbery with violence and music and sound tracks is the tool that has been used to convey this theme to the audience. Just before a robbery takes place, often, music is used to create anticipation in the minds of the audience. When Mwas arrives in Nairobi, as he alights from the bus, the soft music; a kikuyu song that has been playing is replaced by a gang star rap which goes:

The change in tune from a soft song to a rap signals the audience that something has changed and that the change from the rural to Nairobi is more than just a geographical relocation. This generates anticipation as the audiences' curiosity about what will happen to Mwas in the city of thugs as suggested in the line; 'Nairobi ni kunoma' is aroused. When Mwas goes to Ndingo, the soft background music that has been laying is replaced by a hip hop/rap. This is witnessed throughout the film. Every scene featuring robbery, carjacking, counting money from the robbery, drinking and smoking, among other scenes involving Mwas' gang and Ndingo's gang has rap or hip-hop music playing at the background. The rap music other than aiding the audience to understand the film has deeper meaning. Rap music is associated with violence and gangster life. This has a wider historical bearing since rap music developed as a form of resistance to the subjugation of working-class African-Americans in urban centers. The theme of rap music is rooted in the history of African-Americans from their beginnings in West Africa, to their enslavement throughout

the early history of the United States, to their struggles against racial prejudice and segregation after Emancipation, to the continuing battles against de facto economic segregation and reclamation of cultural identity of many African-Americans today. Rap music appears to be excessively violent because it stems from a culture that has been seeped in the fight against political, social, and economic oppression. Foreman 2004; Watkins 2004 writes that “the roots of Rap music began in the inner city streets of the ghetto. The African-American experience has been shaped by the legacies of slavery, segregation, and economic and political subjugation, and has been marked by institutions and incidents of violence, rebellion, conquest and bloodshed”. Rapper Chuck D thinks that much of the violence and nihilism in rap music is the legacy of the hate that minorities have faced in the United States. He says: "We [African-Americans] were a product of what hate produced. We were taught to hate ourselves, so a lot of [intra-racial conflict] is bred off of ignorance." Chucks observation applies not only to the marginalized African-Americans but marginalized Kenyan Youths too who find themselves in crime. Many rap songs focus on escaping the ghetto through strength or street smarts in order to achieve wealth and success. Iyamoto (2003) describes this stereotype as “being hyper-masculine; attempting to create an image of a man that has no feminine characteristics and epitomized exaggerated features of masculinity”.

In the present day societies, Kenya included, rap music still serves as a voice of resistance and points to an outcry of an already-existing problem of youths whose world views have been shaped by experiencing economic inequalities. The criminal gang in Nairobi Half Life live in poor households and neighborhoods, are unemployed, and have spent time in prison at some point in their lives. According to Cornel West, a professor of Religions and Afro-American studies at Harvard University, " Some of the popularity of the "thug life" celebrated in the "gangstar rap" sub-genre is the opportunity it may provide for economic and social power in neighborhoods where hope has been lost. For many poor, inner-city youth, the gun, which has had a central role in the lyrics of many gangstar rappers, represents a way to empower oneself and gain respect within continuing cycles of racial and economic prejudice” Foreman (2004) considers Rap music “a way of creating an abstract space for commentary on the meaning of urban space and race. Hip Hop music in Nairobi Half Life therefore seemed to offer a commentary on the city gangster life”.

## Conclusion

The paper has interrogated some of the techniques used in Nairobi Half Life to gain an insight into how they function to create pleasure. Having interrogated how the techniques function to elicit pleasure in the audience, the research draws a conclusion that cinematic techniques make use of natural innate human construction and audiences’ own psychological needs to cue audiences’ responses to films which feature crime and violence.

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