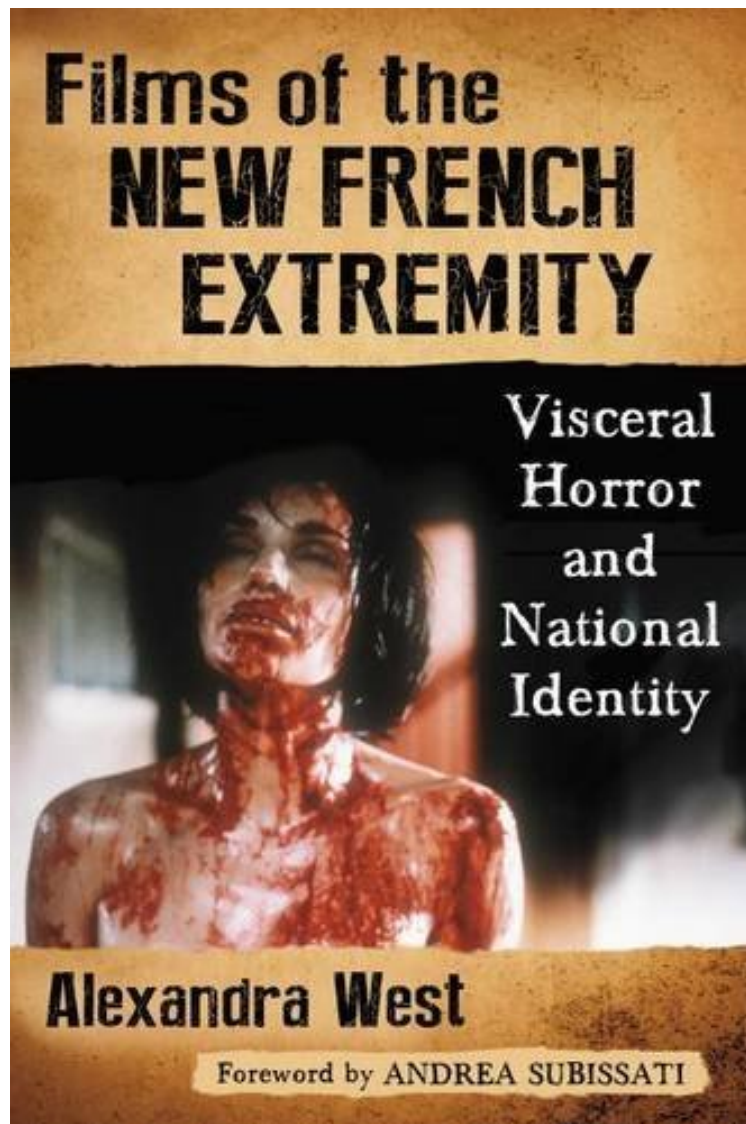


(Download free ebook) Films of the New French Extremity: Visceral Horror and National Identity

Films of the New French Extremity: Visceral Horror and National Identity

Alexandra West

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Alexandra West : Films of the New French Extremity: Visceral Horror and National Identity before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Films of the New French Extremity: Visceral Horror and National Identity:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Insight and context for a notorious and magnetic horror subgenreBy titania86The New French Extremity film movement has been popular for years because of its tendency to push the

boundaries of cinema even beyond the horror genre. These films are typically nihilistic with extreme violence, social commentary, and other taboo that most consider beyond the pale. Alexandra West's book starts out with a history of France with turmoil, resistance, tyranny, and blood soaking it all. It's completely the opposite of what people typically view as France: romance, the city of lights, and idyllic beauty. Their history (and present in some cases) of beheadings, fascism, concentration camps, and racism isn't widely known and not represented in their film. Charles de Gaulle famously advocated moving forward without acknowledging or coming to terms with French support of the Nazis during the occupation, causing any film to do so fail. Many of the films in this genre acknowledge this denial and cite it as the cause of reactionary attitudes and politics as well as the resulting public unrest and riots. I found this fascinating as I knew about Vichy France, but never studied the events that followed. Then, West covers a brief history of French cinema, starting from the very first horror movie ever created, *The Haunted Castle* in 1896. Later, horror in France was characterized by surrealism and the conflict surrounding self and identity, especially after World War II. The New French Extremity movement took real life fears and made them even more horrific. Interior struggles become exterior and irrevocably damage the world around the characters. They also take the buried history of France, especially the atrocities of WWII that went largely unacknowledged, and make it a focus. Many of the films have that seed of racism, fascism, and violence either festering over years and growing or exploding. Many of the films have civil unrest in the background usually as a response to a conservative government. She mentions Antonin Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty*, which uses theater as a means of confronting harsh realities for an uncomfortable catharsis instead of escaping into fantasy in idyllic films such as *Amelie* and *The Artist*. The concept describes this movement well. These directors take the formula for horror films and alter them in unsettling ways to make something unique. The first wave of French Extremity was based in art house films by the likes of Gaspar Noe, Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis, Marina de Van among others. The most notorious of these was *Irreversible*, which many don't consider horror at all. It has all of the elements of this movement in the extended rape scene, its brutal violence, and its nihilistic ending. Its homophobia and racism were frequently called out by critics, but proponents argued that they are both an intrinsic part of France and its history portrayed honestly. Breillat's *Romance* showed that family isn't the happily ever after everyone expects in the face of an unstable and insecure society and critiques society's view and expectations of women. *Palo X* has a successful man rejecting the society that valued him and has the viewers act as observers rather than judges of his morals. In *Baise Moi*, lower class women inflict violence that they have become accustomed to onto others in a *Thelma and Louise*-esque road trip. My personal favorites of this sub-genre are the cannibal films *Trouble Every Day* and *In My Skin*. They act as this movement's version of body horror. The former centers on love and desire as a disease and the other on isolation in success and the need for connection. Both have shockingly tender moments among their carnage that I respond to. Many of these films subvert expectations in the horror genre and in gender norms while pushing the boundaries of cinema and audiences. The last evolution of the genre takes conventions of American horror films and infuses them with the brutality, nihilism, and social commentary of the art house wave. The first and most iconic is Alexandre Aja's *High Tension*, which takes a slasher film and twists it. I found the twist to be homophobic in nature, but West reads it differently. Although I don't agree with her, it shows how complex these films are and how even a decade later they are still being hotly debated. *Calvaire* is a particularly odd film that almost feels like it doesn't belong and the film I liked the least of this genre. West's observations let me see another side of the film. Xavier Gens' *Frontier(s)* is my favorite of the later wave. I had seen it years ago and dismissed it as a Texas Chainsaw ripoff, but I gave it another chance and it has so much more going on than that. The historical implications make the film so much more tragic and upsetting. *Martyrs* is the most notorious entry and even West can't convince me that it isn't poorly constructed, misogynistic, exploitative, and ridiculous. I do enjoy her reading and interpretation of it even if I disagree. For instance, although the plot is linear, the way it deals with trauma isn't. It starts with the aftermath, follows with the trauma, and ends capture and torture. Its condemnation of religion and the exposure of its inhuman sides set it apart from other religious themed films that usually uphold religion's patriarchal system. *Inside* is another amazing film, but the added critique of the media and their portrayal of violence and conservatism makes the film even deeper than I thought. I have seen and reviewed many of these films throughout the years on my blog because I feel so strongly about them. Whether I find them problematic or I absolutely love them, I keep returning to them because they have a singular element that combines violence, social commentary, and true emotions. I see the echoes of this movement in more recent films like *Raw*, which isn't as extreme, bleak, or violent, but shares a lot with films like *In My Skin* and *Trouble Every Day* in breaking gender and societal norms through cannibalism and body horror. Although I didn't entirely agree with West's reading of a few of the films, she still gave wonderful insights on all of the films as well as a look into the cinematic history, social history, and hidden conflicts within France that give much needed context to these films. I will definitely be watching more of these films as I didn't know some of them even existed before reading. I hope this book will help other viewers expand their view of this genre beyond the most popular films.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. West wrote the perfect book at the perfect time. By Axel Kohagen West wrote the perfect book at the perfect time, placing her work next to names like Clover, Skal, and Wood. This book makes the entire New French Extremity movement accessible for everyone from the film scholar to the film fanatic. As a bonus, this book is well-written in a way some scholarly works neglect. You can read this book

for a fun afternoon and it'll never talk down to you during that time. VERY highly recommended. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This book is an engaging eye-opener to the world of ...By Hunter Friedrichsen This book is an engaging eye-opener to the world of French horror and the development of the New French Extremity. Anyone with an interest in horror or the history of film will be rewarded with West's well researched insights into France's culture and tempestuous struggle for identity.

The films of the New French Extremity have been reviled by critics but adored by fans and filmmakers. Known for graphically brutal depictions of sex and violence, the subgenre emerged from the French art-house scene in the late 1990s and became a cult phenomenon, eventually merging into the horror genre where it became associated with American torture porn. Decidedly French in flavor, the films seek to reveal the dark side of French society. This book provides an in-depth study of New French Extremity, focusing on such films as *Trouble Every Day* (2001), *Irreversible* (2002), *Twentynine Palms* (2003), *High Tension* (2003) and *Martyrs* (2008). The author explores the social implications of cinematic cruelty presented not as "violent films" but as "films about violence."

"West's book is so tres fantastique that I wish it were a reference guide that covered hundreds of films"--Flick Attack "quite a profound and thorough analysis of the extreme French art house and horror films of this movement"--Fangoria; "West's book is so tres fantastique that I wish it were a reference guide that covered hundreds of films"--Flick Attack. About the Author Alexandra West has written about genre films for *The Toronto Star*, *Rue Morgue Magazine* and *Offscreen Film Journal*, and regularly contributes to *Shock Till You Drop*, *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and *Diabolique*. In 2012, she co-founded the *Faculty of Horror* podcast, which explores the analytical side of horror films. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.