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A cultural analysis of the contemporary horror film as genre

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A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM AS GENRE

by

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Abstract

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The postmodern horror genre escapes the taboos which constrain other representational practices. As a taboo-violating practice, the genre is a site of contradictions, and thus exposes the gendered social relations which have to be repressed in other sorts of films. It is only through violation that the conditions of representational practice become evident, and this is precisely what horror does. It presents the female body in the moment of violation, thus exposing the taken-for-granted, gendered representational practices of classical Hollywood cinema.

The genre is a form of popular culture which indulges in an examination of the culturally repressed. Specifically, this genre, more explicitly than most, breaks down gender as a binary term in the process of spectator identification. Spectatorial pleasure derives, not from the fixity but, from the oscillation between masculine and feminine positionings. Cross-gender identification -- female (audience) identification with the male (gaze) and

male (audience) identification with the female (gaze) -- is central to the pleasure of the genre. Thus, the genre provides an opportunity to subvert fundamental operations of cultural repression. It is this very quality -- the breakdown of repression -- which forms the basis for the popularity of the genre.

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CHAPTER ONE

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE HORROR FILM

1931-1960 / 1960-1990

"May you live in interesting times."
Old Chinese Curse[1]

In recent decades, the horror film has been one of the most popular (and lucrative) genres in the U.S., both in terms of box office receipts, video rentals, and secondary markets such as fan magazines, toys, and costumes. The larger work which follows is an attempt to explain the character and significance of the contemporary genre's appeal to audiences. Other attempts to account for the popularity of (literary or filmic) horror -- for instance books by H.P. Lovecraft, Siegfried Kracauer, Carlos Clarens, Ivan Butler, David Pirie, William Everson, and Stephen King -- have conventionally constructed historical narratives to map out the terrain of the genre. Given other possible venues, such as Noel Carroll's philosophical approach, why has the historical approach been privileged so often? Two explanations come to mind.

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[1] Quoted in Stephen King, Danse Macabre (New York: Berkeley Books, 1981) 293.

First, the socio-historical approach lends itself to an examination of how changes within the genre correspond to changes in society at large. It presupposes that films reflect social attitudes and changes, and so operate as microlevel indicators of macrolevel phenomena. Thus, it attempts to chart how social relations constitute films. Second, the historical approach has been employed to construct a canon of "classics" which have withstood "the test of time" and so achieved "art" status. Since the concept of art conventionally presupposes an artist, artistic merit is often framed in terms of an auteur who produces a great work despite generic constraints. Most of the "classics" are drawn from the pre-sixties period, although some later films, such as Night of the Living Dead (1968), have been inducted into the canonical ranks.

I take issue with some of the points outlined above. First of all, I am not concerned with the horror film's status as "art" but rather with its status as cultural object. The latter suggests that the significance of the horror film lies not in its transcendental claims to aesthetic worth, but in what it reveals about our way of life. However, neither I do subscribe to the reflectionist theory of history which asserts that the meaning of a film is determined by social reality in a one-to-one correspondence. On the contrary, although films are constituted by social reality, they are also constitutive

of social reality, and the relationship between these two terms is not a direct but a mediated one. It is this dialectical relationship which must be explored to understand the significance of the horror film.

But there is a larger problem that the conventional historical enterprise poses, and that is the problem of periodicity or continuity. In analyzing the horror film, it is more fruitful to employ Foucault's concept of the epistemic break than to pursue a more traditional history constituted by sets of continuities.[2] Thus, in the course of this chapter, I will explore the abrupt epistemic break which occurs between the "pre-sixties" and the "post-sixties" genre, rather than trace its continuities between 1931 and 1990. When I use these terms in lieu of the terms "modern" and "postmodern" it is to locate the break in an identifiable historical juncture which is already associated with the breakdown of traditional forms -- the sixties. The post-sixties break is, in effect, the postmodern break. Frederic Jameson regards the sixties as "the key transitional period" in the move towards postmodernism in the U.S.[3]

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[2] Michel Foucault, The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

[3] Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture. ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983) 113.

To illustrate the distinctions between the pre- and post-sixties genre, and because the pre-sixties genre is -- significantly -- more amenable to conventional periodization, I will begin with a fairly traditional account of the genre. To do so, I will employ sociologist Andrew Tudor's three categories (which I explain below) to group the major features and permutations of the genre from 1931 to 1960. These categories, though useful in analyzing the early films of the post-sixties genre, increasingly break down as we approach 1990. By the time we reach Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (produced 1985, released 1990), the categories fail to work at all. I continue to apply Tudor's prism simply to illustrate the profundity of the epistemic shift which occurs in the genre.

Before I begin, let me add that I have limited my analysis (almost exclusively) to English-language films distributed in the U.S.

The Origin of Horror Films in Early Silent Cinema

The pre-sixties genre is deeply rooted in nineteenth century literary conventions. Early horror films, like early cinema in general, drew upon an extensive literary and theatrical tradition for subject matter. This strategy was adopted by the film industry for several reasons: to attract popular stage actors to filmmaking, to elevate the

quality of films, and thus, to attract a larger audience.[4] Many of the plays selected by the film industry were themselves based upon novels. The upshot is that horror films, from the outset, were based on Gothic literature and theatrical adaptations of that literature. Among the earliest fictions to emerge from this new medium were the elementary figures of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Frankenstein, and the werewolf. The following shorts are the earliest examples I have found of U.S. films featuring these horrific figures:

1908 Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde Selig Polyscope 15 min

1910 Frankenstein Edison 16 min

1913 The Werewolf Bison 18 min

These three films fall roughly into what is called the "transitional period" of early cinema, i.e. the period between "primitive" cinema (1894-1908) -- based on a narrative model drawn largely from vaudeville -- and "classical" cinema (1917-1960) -- based on a narrative model drawn from the novel, theater, and utilizing specifically-cinematic devices.[5]

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[4] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985) 164.

[5] Bordwell 1985, 157.

CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD HORROR: UNIVERSAL FILMS 1931-1936

Despite the inclusion of horror films in the productions of early silent cinema, it was not until the advent of sound technology and the stock market crash of 1929, which ushered in the Great Depression, that the first wave of horror hit Hollywood. Although the horror films of this period are colloquially referred to as "The Classics," there were many second and third rate films produced during this period, as is true in any period. The ones listed below are among the most acclaimed, however, I will be using the term to denote a period rather than a tribute.

Although various studios were involved in production, Universal Pictures dominated the genre. They inaugurated the horror cycle with the release of Dracula and Frankenstein in 1931. The latter films, as well as others like White Zombie, were based on contemporary plays.[6] In the case of Dracula, the connection between stage and screen is even closer; Lugosi was recruited to play the lead after appearing in the stage version.[7] During this wave, the traditional popular Gothic figures -- Dracula, Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde -- emerged in the forefront, though figures like the werewolf, zombie, mummy, and gorilla were also featured. The cycle also generated

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[6] V. Vale and Andrea Juno, eds., Incredibly Strange Films issue of Re/Search (no. 10, 1986) 197.

[7] Phil Hardy, ed., The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) 48.

its own pantheon of stars, including Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, and Fay Wray.

title	dir.	yr	produced	studio	actor/cinematographer
Dracula	Tod Browning	1931	Universal		Karl Freund, cine.
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde	Rouben Mamoulian	1931	Paramount		
Frankenstein	James Whale	1931	Universal		Boris Karloff
Freaks	Tod Browning	1932	MGM		
The Mummy	Karl Freund	1932	Universal		Boris Karloff
White Zombie	Victor Halperin	1932	Amusement Securities/UA		Lugosi
King Kong	Merian Cooper & Ernest Schoedsack	1933	RKO		Fay Wray
The Bride of Frankenstein	James Whale	1935	Universal		Karloff
The Werewolf of London	Stuart Walker	1935	Universal		
The Wolf Man	George Waggner	1941	Lon Chaney Jr.		

The horror films of the classical period distance their monsters by locating them in an exotic time -- Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in the Victorian era -- or place -- King Kong on the uncharted Skull Island, The Mummy in Egypt, White Zombie in Haiti, or closer to home, the carnivalesque circus in Freaks.[8] They are also characterized by German Expressionism, which employs such mise-en-scene elements as lighting and setting, to link visual complexity to psychical complexity. For instance, chiaroscuro lighting, which relies heavily on twilight effect, is used to create

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[8] Robin Wood, Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986) 85.

an enigmatic atmosphere; violent contrasts between light and shadow represent the complexity of the tortured soul.[9] Expressionistic devices accentuate the estranging effect of European village settings in films such as Frankenstein and The Werewolf of London.

The films of this period are the embodiment of the closed narrative sequence -- a cinematic convention in which an order is established, disrupted, and restored. More specifically, the opening of the film establishes both the stable situation and the monster who disrupts it. This is followed by the monster's rampage and people's ineffectual attempts at dealing with it. Finally, the film closes with the defeat of the monster and the restoration of order.[10]

Within the closed narrative pattern that prevails in this period, Tudor describes three narrative structures: knowledge, invasion, and metamorphosis. The most characteristic structure is the closed knowledge narrative in which knowledge, notably that exercised by scientists, produces an external threat to the social order. The knowledge which precipitates the crisis is usually of a

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[9] Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947) 69, 71.

[10] Andrew Tudor, Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 81, 19. All subsequent references to Tudor will be to this work unless otherwise stated.

scientific or medical nature, as in the medical researches which lead to the laboratory creation of life from dead bodies in Frankenstein and The Bride of Frankenstein. But knowledge can also take a supernatural form, as in the ancient incantation (inadvertently activated by an archeologist) which resuscitates the 3700-year old Mummy. Regardless of the nature of the knowledge, when the monster is unleashed on the world, a rampage ensues. The disruptive agent is resisted through the application of coercion and (once again) knowledge. In the closed knowledge narrative, non-military authorities are invariably effective in overcoming the monster. The breach between life and death is reestablished, and the social order restored. Tudor estimates that closed knowledge narratives figure in 33-50% of the horror films of this period.[11]

A secondary narrative line is the closed invasion narrative, in which an unknown force invades the known realm; it crosses over unbidden. The unknown force can be a supernatural threat, as in the living dead Dracula who preys upon the coexistent human world, or it can be a natural but prehistoric threat, as in King Kong. Once again, the rampage is resisted through the successful application of coercion and expertise (arcane knowledge in the case of vampires). Tudor estimates that invasion

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[11] Tudor 84.

narratives figure in 20-25% of the horror films of this period.[12]

A tertiary narrative line is the closed metamorphosis narrative, which can be precipitated by either a knowledge or invasion narrative. In the first case, knowledge produces a monster which threatens the social order, but the metamorphosis narrative differs from the knowledge narrative in significant ways. It is the principal character who metamorphoses into a monster, and so, the threat is an internal one. As a result of these differences, the rampage which ensues is accompanied by the inner turmoil of the protagonist. Thus, the metamorphosis narrative provides for a greater degree of subjective focus than the preceding forms. The knowledge which precipitates the crisis can be of a scientific or medical nature, as in The Werewolf of London and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, where the protagonists' thirst for knowledge is the catalyst that leads to the metamorphosis. Or, the knowledge which precipitates the metamorphosis can be of a supernatural form, as in the esoteric knowledge which transforms the protagonist into a White Zombie. In the second case, metamorphosis is precipitated by invasion, as in the unbidden attack by an already-existing werewolf in The Wolf Man. Again, in all variants, the ensuing disorder is resisted through the application of knowledge and coercion,

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[12] Tudor 91-93.

the monster is overcome, the abnormal is destroyed, and normality is reestablished.[13]

THE WAR PERIOD: VAL LEWTON RKO 1942-1946

Although Universal launched a second horror cycle in 1942 with the release of The Wolf Man, horror cinema was in decline from 1936-1951. The decline was characterized by the predominance of low budget films that were shorter, simpler and more naturalistic than expressionistic, compared to the films of the early thirties.[14] It was also marked by an increase in the production of parodies which pitted established comedic figures, like Abbott and Costello, against a team of classical monsters who lost their affective power in the process. The only exception to this state of affairs was a series of psychological horror films produced by Val Lewton under the auspices of RKO between 1942 and 1946.

Lewton's work prefigures American film noir, characterized as it is by the use of German Expressionist chiaroscuro lighting, the preponderance of source lighting (scenes seem to be lit by light sources which originate within the story space) and the treatment of aggressive

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[13] Tudor 96-98.

[14] S.S. Prawer, Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980) 42.

female sexuality as fatal to men.[15] A good example is The Cat People (1942), in which the protagonist is plagued by a Balkan legacy that compels her to transform into a murderous panther when sexually aroused. The film treats the woman's repressed sexuality as evil, and its release as cataclysmic. Like film noir, Lewton's work is rooted in the profound social and economic upheavals of the 1940s which transfigured post-war America.[16] The fantastic narrative functions as a displacement for anxieties about disruptions in the sexual order precipitated by women's, and therefore men's, changing social positions.

THE TRANSITIONAL WAVE: SCIENCE FICTION HORROR 1951-1958

As in the forties, when film noir usurped horror's position as the genre of fear, and what emerged was a series of noirish psychological horror films, so in the early fifties, science fiction replaced horror as the genre of fear, and what emerged was an amalgam of science fiction and horror elements, sometimes referred to as the "creature feature." But, before discussing the hybrid, I want to

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[15] Although generically and chronologically further from the post-sixties genre, than 1950s science fiction horror, film noir with its unstable, disruptive, nihilistic universe is the truer antecedent of the post-sixties genre.

[16] The socio-economic upheavals of the 1940s were legion. For instance, due to the shortage of male workers, the wartime labor force was desegregated by gender. Women were actively recruited to assume jobs in previously male-dominated occupations, only to be forcibly ejected at war's end.

address the contested question of what constitutes the difference between the two genres. Although the boundary between science fiction and horror is ambiguous and disputed, some distinguishing generalizations can be made:

1. Horror focuses on the irrational or supernatural; science fiction focuses on the rational or logically plausible.
2. Horror focuses on the emotion of fear; science fiction focuses on intellectualized understanding.
3. Horror foregrounds physicality, specifically sexuality and violence; science fiction foregrounds intellectuality and its physical extension -- technology.
4. Horror moves from the disruption to the (attempted) restoration of the normative order; science fiction moves from the disruption of the normative order to the establishment of a new order.

Having made these generalizations, we can now ask: how does the creature feature combine elements of both genres to create a hybrid? The creature feature focuses on the logically plausible as an object of fear (and loathing), and foregrounds both violence and technology. Like horror, it moves from the disruption to the (attempted) restoration of the normative order. So, for instance, The Thing is a creature from outer space whose spaceship crashes to Earth -- a logically plausible, technologically based premise. A vampiric, human-shaped plant, it is also the object of fear

and loathing to the humans it preys upon; the scientist's attempts to reason with it are shown to be not only futile but misguided. The creature is violent, and soldiers defeat it with violence. Its destruction marks the restoration of the normative order.

The creature feature can be distinguished from the horror films of the classical period through various shifts. Although the monster often originates from an exotic time (prehistory) or place (outer space), science fiction horror locates its monster in a contemporary U.S. city, sometimes a small town, thus drawing the danger closer to home.[17] The classic monsters recede into the background during this period of transition between the pre- and post-sixties horror film. (They do not reemerge as a force until the late fifties under the aegis of Hammer Studios.) To understand the dominance of science fiction horror, consider that during the 1957-58 season, over 40 such films were released in New York City.[18] The traditional analysis of these post-war films is that they deal with two dominant themes: the Cold War, and the Bomb.

The Cold War became the emotional and sociopolitical focal point for a variety of sexual and colonial fears in

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[17] Patrick Lucanio, Them or Us: Archetypal Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987) 135.

[18] Carlos Clarens, An Illustrated History of the Horror Film (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967) 119.

post-war America: the strategic lobbying for global domination involved in the "race" to colonize space and launch satellite weapons, the proliferation of the (nuclear) arms race in the wake of a world war, the threat of Communist invasion and infiltration, the campaign to reinstate and fortify traditional (read: patriarchal) family roles in the wake of a wartime disruption of the gendered division of labor, and the overarching fear of a "breach in security" -- be it the security of the home, the nation, or the multinational corporation. The latter phrase became the rallying cry for a number of related causes. The traditional home was designated the haven from the danger of atomic threat. An extension of this was the bomb shelter boom, inaugurated as the privatized commodity solution to atomic war. The policy of containment extended to female sexuality, which was demarcated as dangerous if not domesticated through marriage.[19] And finally, the McCarthy hearings institutionalized paranoia and persecution in the campaign to purge the country of Communist infiltrators, a.k.a. the Left, and thus keep the invasion at bay.

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[19] The confluence of sexual politics and the Cold War mentality is embodied in the "bikini," named after the atomic bomb drop site, a term chosen to signify the "explosive potential" of the exposed female body or "bombshell." See Elaine Tyler May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women and the Bomb," Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War, Lary May, ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989) 165.

The films of this period, like the films of the classical period, are characterized by narrative closure; victory over the monster is almost inevitable. But unlike the classical period, the naturalistic style predominates, and the monster poses a threat to a more globalized unit -- for instance the world -- which rallies to defeat the monster. In science fiction horror, the (military or scientific) expert is the primary focus of identification, and plays a central role in resisting the monstrous rampage through the use of knowledge and coercion. The most characteristic narrative structure is the closed invasion narrative, in which an unknown force invades the known realm, crossing over unbidden. The invasion narrative figures in over 50% of the horror films of the fifties. The invading agent is not supernatural, but alien, and the primary opposition is between human and alien.[20] Below is a list of some representative films of the period, including several instances of the alien invasion film.

title	director	year produced	studio or producer
The Thing (from Another World)	Christian Nyby Howard Hawks/p	1951	
The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms	Eugene Lourie	1953	Mutual Pictures
Invaders from Mars	William Cameron Menzies	1953	National Pictures
War of the Worlds	Byron Haskins	1953	Paramount

[20] Tudor 89, 93-4.

Them! Gordon Douglas 1954 Warner Bros.

Godzilla (King of the Monsters) Inoshiro Honda 1956 Toho Japan

Invasion of the Body Snatchers Don Siegel 1956 Walter Wanger P.

The Werewolf Fred Sears 1956 Clover Productions

Blood of Dracula Herbert Strock 1957 Herman Cohen/p

I Was a Teenage Frankenstein Herbert Strock 1957 Cohen/p

I Was a Teenage Werewolf Gene Fowler, Jr. 1957 Cohen/p

Not of this Earth Roger Corman 1957 Los Altos Prod.

Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman Nathan Hertz 1958 Woolner Bros.

The Blob Irvin Yeaworth, Jr. 1958 Tonylyn Productions

The Fly Kurt Neumann 1958 Twentieth Century-Fox

Teenagers from Outer Space Tom Graeff 1959 Topor Corp.

The alien invasion film, as its name suggests, coalesces the fear of invasion and the fear of alien otherness. The fear of invasion from outer space is the dominant theme of a variety of films including The Thing, Invaders from Mars, War of the Worlds, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Not of this Earth, and The Blob. The aliens want to take over the world, and in some films (Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Invaders from Mars, Not of this Earth) they attempt to do so through the use of simulacra, thus raising the specter of the enemy within.[21] If the aliens look like our neighbors, relatives, and friends, how are we to

[21] Tudor 94.

tell them apart? The home-as-haven disintegrates before our eyes.

The threat of invasion emanates not only from outer space, but also from our own planet. In the latter case, the invasion narrative is often precipitated by a secondary knowledge narrative. In one variety, familiar creatures are transformed, through exposure to radiation, into gigantic nuclear mutations who wreak havoc on society -- for instance, ants in Them! and a woman in Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman. The Incredible Shrinking Man reverses this plot device. In the latter, the protagonist progressively shrinks after being exposed to a radioactive cloud. As he becomes miniscule, he battles proportionately gigantic creatures like a housecat and spider.

Another permutation is the reanimation of prehistoric creatures (by nuclear explosions in remote parts of the world) who attack remote village areas and then proceed to wreak havoc on highly populated areas. Examples of the latter include The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms and Godzilla. I include Godzilla, even though it is a Japanese production, because of its popularity in the States, and because it is a particularly intriguing cinematic instance of how the nuclear capability established during World War II went on to structure social life in the aftermath of the war. Godzilla, which features the eponymous creature razing Tokyo, can be seen as a reworking of the ravages of

nuclear warfare which Japan experienced in the Allied bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.[22]

Surprisingly, despite the central role of science, the knowledge narrative plays only a supporting role in fifties science fiction horror. In most of the films utilizing a knowledge narrative, (nuclear) science (often associated with the military) inadvertently produces an external threat to the social order. In contrast to the knowledge narratives of the thirties, the menace is unleashed unwittingly. (Such is the case in Them!, Godzilla, and The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms.) And like the closed knowledge narratives of the thirties, (military and scientific) experts succeed in destroying the abnormal and restoring the social order.[23] Thus, unlike the knowledge narratives of the thirties, those of the fifties take up a highly ambiguous stance towards science.[24] On the one hand, scientific experimentation creates monsters. On the other, scientific experts and scientific knowledge play a pivotal

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[22] Interestingly, in subsequent films, Godzilla becomes a heroic figure, helping humankind defeat monsters hell-bent on destruction. This transvaluation of Godzilla suggests various interpretations. It might indicate the improvement in relations between the U.S. and Japan, or it might be a symbolic domestication of the forces of science, or a symbolic domestication of disaster through miniaturization. For a discussion of the latter point, see Michael Stern, "Making Culture into Nature," Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema, ed. Annette Kuhn, chapter 5 (London: Verso, 1990) 66-7.

[23] Tudor 88.

[24] Tudor 89.

role in overcoming the monster.[25] Not only is scientific experimentation often performed on behalf of the military, but the latter's destructive might is usually called upon to intervene on society's behalf. True to its Cold War milieu, the monster's rampage calls for a "total mobilization" in which the military plays a decisive role, as we see in Them! and War of the Worlds.[26]

The metamorphosis narrative, which plays a peripheral part during this time, largely retains the features of the classical period. It differs from the latter chiefly in that the metamorphosis is precipitated by scientific experimentation (radiation in The Werewolf, hypnosis in I Was a Teenage Werewolf) rather than by supernatural forces.[27]

The teenager as monster or hero is symptomatic of an important cultural shift during this transitional period: the emerging centrality of adolescence. The adolescent emerges as a viable category in the wake of the post-war

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[25] Ironically, a number of the films produced during the fifties' culture of the bomb utilize primitive elements in low tech, rather than high tech, form to destroy the monster. The Thing is destroyed by heat (from electrical wiring); The Blob is frozen into dormancy (by fire extinguishers); and in War of the Worlds, Martians are overcome by the cold virus. (Clarens 125) Similarly, the creature in Alien (1979) is repelled by a flame thrower, and forcibly ejected from the shuttlecraft by a harpoon.

[26] David Pirie, A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972 (New York: Equinox Books, 1974) 31.

[27] Tudor 99.

suburban exodus, the emergence of the affluent leisure society, and the coming of age of the baby boom generation. During the fifties, adolescents became a sizable portion of the movie audience, particularly for horror films, and came to figure as important narrative characters.[28] Teenagers figure centrally in such films as Blood of Dracula, I Was a Teenage Werewolf (which also features a pop music soundtrack), I Was a Teenage Frankenstein, The Blob, and Teenagers from Outer Space. Such characters were designed to appeal to the growing teenage audience for films.

If the creature feature of the early and mid-fifties constitutes a transitional form that draws heavily on the conventions of the classical period, then the (largely English) Gothic horror film of the late fifties and sixties constitutes a transitional form that prefigures the epistemic shift characteristic of the "post-sixties" genre.

GOTHIC HORROR: 1957-1972

1957 was a watershed year for the horror film. The release of Hammer Studio's The Curse of Frankenstein (1957), and subsequently Dracula (1958), to worldwide success inaugurated a renaissance and a reorientation for

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[28] According to Clarens, a poll conducted in the fifties averred that 70% of the film audience was between the ages of 12 and 25. (140) See also Prawer (247) who cites the same figures but describes them as specific to the horror film audience.

the genre. Before considering this development in greater detail, however, let us turn to the prevailing conditions in the U.S. which provided for the reception of these English imports.

The post-war boom held many changes for the film industry, some of them inauspicious. Between 1947 and 1953, audience attendance declined dramatically, due largely to the changing consumption patterns accompanying a rising birth rate: the migration of families to suburbs, the purchase of homes and automobiles, and competition with the burgeoning television industry. In response, the film industry attempted to offset its drop in revenues by releasing old films to television, so that Universal horror classics aired on "Shock Theater." It also competed with television by relaxing censorship restrictions on films released theatrically, thus providing the audience with the novelty of what could not be shown on television.

The relaxation of censorship restrictions was made possible by a series of legal and industrial changes. First, the Divorcement Decrees of 1948, which dissolved the monopoly of the film industry, undermined the central control that had made strict film censorship possible in the thirties and forties.[29] The ensuing breakup of the

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[29] The Divorcement Decrees, which were issued by the Supreme Court through the enforcement of anti-trust laws against monopolization, mandated the separation of production and distribution from exhibition, thus dismantling a vertically integrated film industry. See

studio system led to a decline in the number of studio productions. The gap left in the wake of this move created a market for independently produced films, and increased receptivity to foreign films. Furthermore, when the Supreme Court ruled, in 1952, that film as a means of expression was entitled to constitutional protection under freedom of speech, it paved the way for the importation of foreign films showing nudity.[30] Lastly, exhibitors no longer had to fear the, by now waning, power of pressure groups like the Catholic Legion of Decency in the late fifties.[31] As a result of these circumstances, the U.S. market was receptive to the influx of British films, like the Hammer productions listed below, which radically reoriented the horror genre.

title	director	year produced	actor or producer
The Curse of Frankenstein	Terence Fisher	1957	Cushing & Lee
Dracula	Terence Fisher	1958	Anthony Hinds/p Cushing & Lee
The Mummy	Terence Fisher	1959	Cushing & Lee

Thomas Doherty, Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 21.

[30] For a discussion of this case, Burstyn v. Wilson, see Douglas Ayer, Roy Bates, and Peter Herman, "Self-Censorship in the Movie Industry: A Historical Perspective on Law and Social Change," The American Movie Industry: The Business of Motion Pictures, ch. 12, ed. Gorham Kindem (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1982) 227-8.

[31] Doherty 185.

The Stranglers of Bombay Terence Fisher 1959 Hinds/p

The Curse of the Werewolf Terence Fisher 1960 Hinds/p

Dracula, Prince of Darkness Terence Fisher 1965 Lee

Frankenstein Created Woman Terence Fisher 1966 Cushing

Lust for a Vampire Jimmy Sangster 1970

The Vampire Lovers Roy Ward Baker 1970 Ingrid Pitt, Cushing

Twins of Evil John Hough 1971 Peter Cushing

Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde Roy Ward Baker 1972

The release of Hammer Studio's Curse of Frankenstein and Dracula launched a radical new direction for the horror genre.[32] In this sense, it echoes the Universal release in 1931, of Dracula and Frankenstein, which inaugurated the first wave of horror in the U.S. The connection between these two occurrences is not merely a conceptual one; both of the Hammer films were sponsored by U.S. film companies. The Curse of Frankenstein was distributed by Warner Bros. and Dracula was distributed by Universal. The premiere entries in this wave of Gothic horror were produced in the wake of the science fiction horror boom of the fifties,

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[32] According to Hardy, the Italian film I Vampiri rightfully inaugurated the transition to Gothic horror in 1956. Despite this, the Italian tradition tends to be relegated by critics to the status of imitator. (See Tudor p.47 for an example of this practice.) Unlike its British successors, I Vampiri was a commercial failure. As a result, its director Riccardo Freda and other Italian filmmakers adopted Anglicized pseudonyms in subsequent films. (105-6)

which included such British contenders as The Quartermass Xperiment (1954) and X the Unknown (1956).[33]

After the immensely successful release of Dracula, Hammer acquired the remake rights to all the old Universal horror films.[34] This led to the subsequent production of such films as The Mummy and The Curse of the Werewolf. Hammer opportunely employed the names of mythical figures in their titles to evoke iconic images familiar to audiences from the older tradition. In the process, they created their own star system, which included such notables as Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, and Barbara Steele. Yet, despite the financial, historical, and iconic ties with the U.S. film industry, the source of this wave of British horror is more properly the indigenous Gothic literary tradition of Shelley and Stoker than that of Hollywood.[35]

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[33] Pirie 131.

[34] Pirie 43.

[35] Pirie 9-10. Strangely enough, the coupling of Frankenstein and Dracula can be traced back to Lord Byron's gathering in the summer of 1816, which yielded both Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Polidori's The Vampyre (modeled after Lord Byron), which Pirie credits as "the first prose account of vampirism in English" and as "primary source material for Bram Stoker." (68) From there we can trace the coupling to the beginning of both Universal and Hammer's horror cycles, in 1931 and 1957-58 respectively. Furthermore, Universal produced coupled sequels to Dracula and Frankenstein: The Bride of Frankenstein in 1935 and Dracula's Daughter in 1936. Then, in 1938, Universal successfully re-released Dracula and Frankenstein on a double bill.

The Hammer cycle of horror is quite unlike the early Hollywood cycle.[36] Hammer films rejected the classical period's chiaroscuro tradition, and opted instead for Eastmancolor and Technicolor to depict lush period settings, and copious amounts of blood. Furthermore, Hammer films present a more ambiguous portrait of evil than their predecessors. For instance, in The Curse of Frankenstein, the Baron goes to the guillotine unrepentant, and the film ends without the requisite restoration of the family unit.[37] More significantly, Hammer films evince an unprecedented level of gore and explicit sexuality. In the aforementioned film, Dr. Frankenstein unabashedly fondles viscera and severed limbs. Likewise, the sexual subtext, which lurks beneath the surface of the classical films, here erupts in bloody Technicolor. In Dracula, Prince of Darkness, set in Victorian England, one of the many repressed matronly women in the Hammer universe falls prey to Dracula's bite only to become a seductive figure prowling the night with ravenous appetites and heaving bosom. No longer is the vampire's "bloodlust" simply a metaphor; the implicit sexuality of the myth is made overt.

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[36] In contrast, contemporary Mexican horror cinema assimilated the expressionistic and iconic traditions of the classical period, including Transylvania, (Aztec) mummies, and werewolves. Their singular innovation was to pit monsters against masked champion wrestlers, like Santo, who have replaced bullfighters as popular heroic figures. (Clarens 159)

[37] Tudor 142.

During the rise of the feminist movement, Hammer produced a series of films featuring lesbian vampires. The Hammer trilogy -- The Vampire Lovers, Lust for a Vampire, and Twins of Evil -- is based on Sheridan LeFanu's "Carmilla." Indeed, the vampire's name is (the anagrammatized) Mircalla. These films draw out the sexual implications of vampirism, and the threat unbridled female sexuality -- particularly lesbian sexuality -- poses to a patriarchal order. Despite the subversive narrative line, the films defuse the threat to the heterosexual order by positioning the lesbian as the fetishized object of the (male) look, thus reinstating her within patriarchal terms.[38] Moreover, in the end, the social order is restored with the destruction of the vampire, and the reparation of the heterosexual couple.

Some films also explore the blurring of sexual/gender identity (in more literal terms than those of Psycho). Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde presents a gendered twist to the familiar tale by metamorphosing the male Dr. Jekyll into the femme fatale Hyde. Both Jekyll and Hyde are involved in heterosexual encounters with the unsuspecting brother-sister couple who live downstairs. The metamorphosis here (like the one in Dracula, Prince of Darkness) is deeply connected to the unleashing of sexual desire. Another

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[38] However, I hasten to add, this does not rule out an eroticized lesbian reading.

narrative of gender bending is Frankenstein Created Woman, in which the Baron transplants the soul of a dead man (Hans) into the reanimated body of his female lover (Christina). After s/he seduces and kills the men responsible for their deaths, Christina speaks to Hans' decapitated head in his voice, while his head replies in her voice. The confusion of identity is complete.

Hammer films earned the British critics' scorn for their sensuality and graphic depiction of violence. Although The Curse of Frankenstein displays viscera, The Stranglers of Bombay operates in a more sadistic vein. It features a beautiful woman, Kali's handmaiden, "whose only function is to be seen relishing every one of the multiple cruelties which the film contains. She presides over the severing of limbs, the cutting out of tongues, and, by implication at least, several castrations..." One critic was sufficiently offended by Hammer films' sensuality and bloodletting, to label them "For Sadists Only," a play on the stigmatizing "For Adults Only."[39] The condemnation of critics notwithstanding, the films were popular, at least in part because they offered more explicit sex and violence than could be shown on television.

During the sixties, Hammer faced competition from rival British studios like Amicus Productions, which featured anthology films based on stories from EC horror comics.

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[39] Pirie 58, 40.

However, Hammer's most serious rivals were the US-based Roger Corman and American International Pictures.[40] AIP was responsible for distributing such teenage-oriented vehicles as I Was a Teenage Werewolf and I Was a Teenage Frankenstein in the fifties. In the sixties, AIP launched the American Gothic cycle with the release of Roger Corman's Edgar Allan Poe adaptations, featuring horror icon Vincent Price. These included the incestuous (Fall of) The House of Usher (1960), The Pit and the Pendulum (1961), and The Masque of the Red Death (1964, co-produced in Great Britain). Besides Poe, Gothic themes were drawn from such U.S. authors as H.P. Lovecraft (The Dunwich Horror, 1969); Shelley Jackson (The Haunting, 1963); and Henry James (The Innocents, 1961).

Like the classical horror films, the (British, American, and Italian) Gothics often locate their horror in remote (Victorian) times and places (European castles), but another strand of the emerging genre insistently locates its horror in the everyday, secular world. The latter prefigures the contemporary genre with its epistemic shift from a secure world view in which human agency prevails to

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[40] Prawer 249. The ascendant popularity of horror in the U.S. was a multi-media phenomenon. Aside from EC comics, the distribution of Hammer films, the indigenous productions of Corman and others, and television screenings of classical horror films, 1957 also saw the launching of Forest Ackerman's Famous Monsters of Filmland, the forerunner of the fanzine. See Mike Wathen, "A History of Monster Magazines, Part 1," Ungawa! (no. 2: 5-8) 5-6.

a paranoid one in which the boundaries that demarcate good and evil become hopelessly blurred.

PARANOID HORROR: THE FAMILY, PSYCHOSIS, AND GORE 1960-1972

Critics of the horror film generally discuss the post-sixties genre in terms of the watershed years and their respective ground-breaking films -- for instance, Psycho (1960), Halloween (1978). Within the terms of this discussion, they generally regard the 1973 box-office success of The Exorcist as a turning point for the genre. I have appropriated the conventional division of this period (1960-1972 and 1973-1990) to facilitate my discussion of the thirty-year span. The following are among the key early works of the post-sixties genre:

title	director	yr	produced	studio	actor/producer
Peeping Tom	Michael Powell	1960	Michael Powell	Theatre, GB	
Psycho	Alfred Hitchcock	1960	Paramount		Anthony Perkins
Blood Feast	Herschell G. Lewis	1963	Friedman/Lewis	Prod.	
Repulsion	Roman Polanski	1965	Compton/Tekli	GB	
Targets	Peter Bogdanovich	1968	Saticoy		Boris Karloff
Night of the Living Dead	George Romero	1968	Image Ten		
Rosemary's Baby	Roman Polanski	1968	Paramount/ William Castle		

The post-sixties genre shares the explicit sexuality and graphic violence of the transitional Gothics, but locates it in a contemporary, quotidian setting. It was

inaugurated by Peeping Tom and Psycho in 1960.[41] In both, the narrative revolves around a murderous young man with a psychosexual disorder which originates in the family. Peeping Tom and Psycho establish this narrative line, and serve as the precursors of seventies and eighties psycho films. The shower sequence in Psycho is exemplary in that it introduces tropes which later came to dominate the genre: the knife slasher, the woman in peril, the contemporary middle American setting, the explicit punishment of illicit (female) sexuality by death, the foregrounding of voyeurism, and the centrality of the family in the genesis of psychosis.[42]

Peeping Tom and Psycho are metamorphosis narratives; the principal character appears to be a normal young man, but is in fact a psychopath who transforms into a compulsive killer.[43] The narrative revolves around the psychotic whose repressed sexual desires precipitate

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[41] Both iconoclastic films were the recipients of critical scorn that surpassed even that heaped upon The Curse of Frankenstein. (Tudor 192) However, unlike the others, Psycho went on to garnish four Academy Award nominations.

[42] The traditional gender terms are reversed in Repulsion, where the psychotic killer is a sexually repressed woman whose psychosexual problems are rooted in the family -- a point established by the repeated references to the family portrait. She slashes one man to death, and bludgeons another. However, the woman is still the object of voyeurism, and imperiled by sexual assaults (one real, the others imagined -- perhaps remembered).

[43] Tudor 99.

murderous violence. The primary opposition, between the abnormal and the normal, is played out not only between the killer and his victims, but within the psyche of the killer himself.

These two films represent a profound transition in the nature of horror. Prior to 1960, insanity was usually manifested in mad scientists, what Tudor calls "visionary obsessives" as exemplified by Dr. Frankenstein, in the closed knowledge narrative.[44] During the sixties, this type of madman is supplanted by the psychotic, a figure who becomes increasingly important in the seventies and eighties. That the psychotic is a figure of the post-sixties genre is evident in the fact that "over 90% of films involving psychotics appear after 1960."[45] In the post-sixties genre, the psychotic emerges from and disrupts everyday life. Insanity is "a constant potential in the everyday order of things." The shift from mad scientist to psychotic is a shift from reason and science to unreason and the unconscious, a shift which parallels the genre's movement from the security of human agency and narrative closure -- which marks the classical period, to the paranoia fostered by inexplicable destructive forces -- characteristic of the postmodern genre.[46]

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[44] Tudor 184.

[45] Tudor 20.

[46] Tudor 193, 185-6.

The paranoid world view is fleshed out in subsequent films like Targets, Night of the Living Dead, and Rosemary's Baby (all 1968). Targets is a self-reflexive film about a clean-cut suburban young man (Thompson) who one day inexplicably decides to kill his wife and mother, then snipe at freeway motorists from a tower. The film is based on mass murderer Charles Whitman's 1966 murder spree in Texas.[47] A parallel plot features Boris Karloff as an aging horror film star who retires because people are no longer afraid of his films. Why should they be, when the headlines are more horrific than his fictions. The two narrative lines intersect when Thompson snipes at an audience from behind the screen of a drive-in theater featuring Boris Karloff (in a clip from the Corman/AIP 1963 necrophiliac Gothic, The Terror). The juxtaposition of these two figures dramatizes how the psychotic has supplanted the classical monster in the post-sixties genre. Because the latter presents violence as an "inexplicable, but constant constituent of everyday life," Thompson's psychotic break with normality is never explicated.[48]

The shift from a secure to a paranoid world view in the post-sixties genre is related to a shift in the pattern of

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[47] James Mulay, ed., The Horror Film: A Guide to More Than 700 Films on Videocassette, CineBooks Home Library Series, 4 (Evanston, Ill.: Cinebooks, 1989) 228.

[48] Tudor 196.

violence in the nation at large. In the 1950s, there was a "recognizable surge" in the incidence of "multicide" -- multiple homicides by an assailant.[49] Consequently, the mid-fifties' concern with juvenile delinquency was succeeded by an interest in serial and mass murder in the late fifties. The fascination with multicide was, at least in part, sparked by the revelation in 1957 of serial murderer Ed Gein's cannibalistic and necrophiliac activities in rural Wisconsin.[50] Gein's ghoulish activities inspired several horror films over the next two decades: Psycho (1960), Three on a Meathook (1972), Deranged (1974), and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974).

Psycho, based on Robert Bloch's novel of the same name, establishes the motifs that recur in subsequent psycho films. Like most real-life serial killers, Norman Bates is a (white) man who, for the most part, kills (white) women.[51] Norman's behavior is explained, though the

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[49] Ronald Holmes and James De Burger, Serial Murder, Studies in Crime, Law and Justice 2 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1988) 16, 21.

[50] The fascination with serial and mass murder was also fueled by the 1965 publication of Truman Capote's novel, In Cold Blood, based on a real-life murder spree.

[51] Though, according to Jamieson, about 75% of homicide victims are male, almost all serial murder victims are (white) women -- killed by (white) men. (Holmes 21) This establishes the pattern most often found in psycho/slasher films. I do not mean to suggest that the films, in their quest for verisimilitude, seek to replicate the gendered violence of real-life horror. Rather, what I suggest, and will argue later, is that the gendered dynamics which inform real-life violence are also

explanation is immediately undermined, in pop Freudian terms. Contemporary explanations for criminal behavior were rooted in popular Freudianism, which dictated that the blame be attributed to the family, with particular attention to mother-blaming. It is an indication of Peeping Tom's more subversive nature, vis-a-vis Psycho, that in the former the culpability of the father, rather than the mother, is the focus. Nevertheless, Psycho is more often emulated.

The box-office success of Hammer and Psycho, together with the new latitude which the relaxation of censorship provided the industry, paved the way for Blood Feast, the first "gore" film. In a daring exercise of taboo-breaking, Blood Feast featured -- not nudity and soft-core sex but -- an explicit depiction of violence and viscera known as "gore." The latter refers to the depiction of dismemberment, evisceration, and myriad other forms of mutilation, with copious amounts of blood. Blood Feast violates taboos by escalating the explicitness of violence, and in the process sets more audacious standards for the genre.

The post-sixties genre is characterized by changes other than the establishment of gore. Significantly, the

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inextricable components of filmmaking as a practice. See also, Katherine Jamieson and Timothy Flanagan, eds., Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics -- 1986, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1987) 264.

metamorphosis narrative assumes a collective form and eschews narrative closure.[52] The collective metamorphosis narrative revolves around the opposition between normal and abnormal but, because the post-sixties form is deeply marked by the paranoid world view, the terms become blurred and increasingly difficult to differentiate. Similarly, the distinction between invasion and metamorphosis narrative becomes increasingly blurred.

In the seminal Night of the Living Dead (inspired in part by Hammer's 1966 Plague of the Zombies) a small group of people is beseiged by an unrelenting and ever-growing group of zombies.[53] There is no coherent explanation for this catastrophic turn of events; it simply is. The external threat which the zombies constitute for the group of normals would qualify this film as an invasion narrative, but the zombies pose a double threat. Not only do they brutally kill and cannibalize the living, the newly-dead corpses then proceed to metamorphose into zombies and join in the onslaught. Thus, the dead brother kills the sister with whom he once bickered, and the dead daughter kills and consumes her mother. The rampage is epidemic in scope, and its character is virtually unstoppable.

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[52] Tudor 101-2.

[53] Pirie 125.

The collective metamorphosis narrative leaves the fate of humankind in the balance. At the conclusion of the film, the small group is dead and the onslaught continues. Even the forces of law and order, our agents of expertise and coercion, take on the function of marauders, killing indiscriminately, virtually indistinguishable from the zombies. Any promise of successful human intervention seems futile.[54] At the close of the film, the family is destroyed, the heterosexual couple is consumed, the hero is dead, and humanity's prospects for survival are bleak.[55]

The shift from the secure, closed narratives of the pre-sixties genre to the paranoid, open-ended narratives of the post-sixties genre occurred in the context of violent social upheaval and the delegitimation of traditional forms. The civil rights movement, the black power movement, the women's movement, the gay liberation movement, the anti-war movement, and the Vietnam War set the frame within which people were bombarded with daily televised images of bloodshed, violence, and challenges to authority both at home and abroad.[56] It is hardly

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[54] Tudor 102-3.

[55] The film's nihilism earned it the charge of being "an unrelieved orgy of sadism" by Variety. Quoted in John McCarty, The Modern Horror Film: 50 Contemporary Classics (New York: Citadel Press, 1990) 103.

[56] Tom Savini, a pre-eminent special effects artist, claims that his tour of duty as a combat photographer in Vietnam is responsible for the realism of his effects. See John McCarty, Splatter Movies: Breaking the Last Taboo of

surprising that the universe of horror became more violent, malevolent, turbulent and its threat more collective.

The post-sixties genre is characterized by the prevalence of not only (individual and collective) metamorphosis narratives, but also invasion narratives, as the body -- and its boundaries -- becomes the focus of anxiety. Invasion narratives, like Rosemary's Baby, typically deal with supernatural forces. In the latter, a satanic coven conspires to impregnate (Rose)Mary with Satan's spawn -- which they do in a rape sequence -- to bring the Anti-Christ forth into the world. As she begins to uncover the fantastic conspiracy, she turns for help to those around her, only to face betrayal, isolation, and self-doubt. The apparently normal people to whom she turns for help are either themselves involved in the conspiracy or unwittingly collude by disbelieving her and doubting her sanity. Since the film operates in highly subjective terms, it succeeds in eroding, not only Rosemary's, but our own sense of security. As in Night of the Living Dead, all attempts to intervene fail, and the forces of evil triumph. This nihilistic ending, iconoclastic in 1968, became a prevalent feature of the genre in subsequent films.

What characterizes the films of the post-sixties genre may well be called postmodernism. As Modleski notes, the

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the Screen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984) 135-6.

horror film shares certain features of postmodernism.[57] It is nihilistic -- revelling in a spirit of negativity; oppositional -- taking an adversarial stance against bourgeois society (e.g. the nuclear family, repressive sexual mores); and apocalyptic -- celebrating a lust for destruction. The universe of the post-sixties genre is a decentered and uncertain one in which good and evil, normality and abnormality, reality and illusion, self and other, become virtually indistinguishable. This, together with the refusal of narrative closure, produces an unstable, paranoid universe in which categories collapse and nightmares come true. The iconography of the body, especially -- though not exclusively -- the female body, figures as the site of this collapse. Let us continue our examination of this anxiety-ridden terrain.

PARANOID HORROR: THE FAMILY, PSYCHOSIS AND GORE 1973-1990

title	director	yr produced	studio	actor/country
The Exorcist	David Friedkin	1973	Hoya Productions/Warner Bros.	
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre	Tobe Hooper	1974	Vortex/Henkel/Hooper	
The Omen	Richard Donner	1976	Fox	
They Came from Within	David Cronenberg	1976	Trans-American CAN	

[57] Tania Modleski, "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory," Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture, ch. 9 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986).

The Hills Have Eyes Wes Craven 1977 Blood Relations Co.

Halloween John Carpenter 1978 Falcon Internat'l
Jamie Lee Curtis

Invasion of the Body Snatchers Philip Kaufman 1979
United Artists

Alien Ridley Scott 1979 20th Century-Fox

The Brood David Cronenberg 1979 New World Pictures CAN

The Fog John Carpenter 1979 Debra Hill Prod./Avco
Embassy Curtis

Dressed to Kill Brian DePalma 1980
Cinema77/Filmways/Warwick

Friday the 13th Sean Cunningham 1980 Georgetown Prod.

The Howling Joe Dante 1980 Avco Embassy/Internat'l Film
Investors/Wescom Productions CAN

An American Werewolf in London John Landis 1981
Lycanthrope Films GB

The Entity Sidney Furie 1982 Pelleport Investors/
American Cinema

Poltergeist Tobe Hooper 1982 Speilberg/p
MGM/Sim Entertainment

The Thing John Carpenter 1982 Kurt Russell

A Nightmare on Elm Street Wes Craven 1985 New Line Cinema

The Fly David Cronenberg 1986 Brooksfilm/Fox

The Stepfather Joseph Ruben 1987 ITC/New Century-Vista

American Gothic John Hough 1988 Manor Ground/Vidmark

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer John McNaughton
1990 (release) (produced 1985)

The enormous box-office success of The Exorcist (along with that of Rosemary's Baby before it) set the stage for the proliferation of the apocalyptic, graphically violent films which dot the post-sixties landscape. The Exorcist,

an invasion narrative about the demonic possession of an adolescent girl, "thrust its audience into a vertigo of realism" as her body was subjected to a graphically violent metamorphosis.[58] Although good triumphs over evil, the priestly experts die in the Manichean struggle. The supernatural invasion narratives which followed in its wake revolve around the persecution of various subjects: the individual, the family, the community, and the world. In The Entity, a woman is raped by a malevolent ghost. In Poltergeist, a family struggles against the malevolent forces which conspire to steal the youngest (girl) child. In The Fog, the ghosts of a shipwrecked crew seek revenge on the descendants of those responsible for their deaths. In The Omen, the child Antichrist is strategically placed in a politically prominent family, thus setting the stage for the Apocalypse.[59]

These films illustrate the prevalence of metamorphosis and invasion narratives in the post-sixties genre. This constitutes a shift from the prevalence of knowledge -- and to a lesser extent invasion -- narratives in the pre-sixties genre. Although invasion narratives are prevalent throughout the history of the genre, the metamorphosis narrative does not prevail until the

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[58] Quoted from Philip Brophy, "Horrality -- The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films," Screen. 27 (Jan./Feb. 1986): 6; Tudor 100.

[59] Tudor 176-77.

post-sixties period, at which time the popularity of the knowledge narrative commensurately wanes.[60] This shift is illustrated in the 1958 and 1986 versions of The Fly. The fifties version is a closed knowledge narrative about a scientific overreacher who inadvertently becomes part-fly. The eighties version is an open-ended metamorphosis narrative (precipitated by a knowledge narrative) which unrelentingly explores the disease-like transformations that the principal character's body undergoes.

Another important departure for the post-sixties genre is its incessant location of horror in the everyday, secular world. As I mentioned earlier, the monster of the post-sixties genre is more likely to emerge from everyday life. So too, those who battle the monster are more likely to be ordinary people (and potential victims) rather than (scientific or military) experts. In an interesting passage, Tudor attributes the centrality of women in the post-sixties genre to the decreasing role of (traditionally male) experts and the commensurately growing importance of (traditionally female) victims in the genre. The efficacious expert wanes as the open-ended narrative

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[60] Tudor 83. Even science-related films, which one might expect to be knowledge narratives, are often more properly classified as metamorphosis or invasion narratives. So, for instance, although the aphrodisiac parasites in They Came from Within are the result of scientific experimentation, this plot element is relatively unimportant. The narrative centers on how those infected metamorphose into indiscriminate, taboo-breaking, violent sex maniacs.

prevails. In the post-sixties genre, the outcome is always in question. Even when experts are called in, they are less likely to be effective than in the pre-sixties genre.[61] An example of this is The Entity, in which a woman is tormented by a phantom rapist. When psychiatry proves to be of no avail, she turns to parapsychology, which -- though more appropriate -- is equally unable to extricate her. In the end, the inefficacy of science leaves the horror of her predicament unabated. Regardless of who battles the monster, the monster is more likely to win in the post-sixties genre.

The films of the seventies and eighties chart the growing shift of the post-sixties genre away from security and towards paranoia. In line with this trend, the narratives are more likely to be open-ended, ending apocalyptically with the defeat of the protagonists, as in Night of the Living Dead, or with incipient signs of a new unleashing.[62] An example of the latter is The Brood, in which Samantha Eggar gives birth to her rage in the somatized form of the murderous "brood." By the end of the film, her ex-husband belatedly manages to rescue their

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[61] Tudor 119.

[62] Although Alien ostensibly provides narrative closure when the creature is catapulted into the void of space, the film ends with all but one of the original eggs intact on the planet surface. Thus, even within the parameters of the closed narrative, the potential for a continuation of the threat is implicit.

daughter, only to find that she too is exhibiting signs of somatizing her own traumatized feelings.

Perhaps the shift from a secure to a paranoid world view is best illustrated in the remakes of two 1950s films. The fifties versions of Invasion of the Body Snatchers and The Thing are characterized by the efficacy of military experts and narrative closure.[63] In contrast, the remakes (1979 and 1982 respectively) are open-ended invasion narratives in which the monster clearly triumphs in the former, and in which the outcome is unclear in the latter. In the fifties versions, the conflict is between human and alien, and the distinctions are clearly drawn. The body snatchers may look human but they lack that most distinctive of human traits: emotion. The "thing" -- a vampiric carrot -- is unmistakably marked as "other." Not so in the remakes, where the body snatchers are indistinguishable from the larger alienated population, and the "thing" metamorphoses into a perfect replica of its victims. In the paranoid world of the remakes, the monster can effectively "pass" as human, breeding suspicion among the ranks.[64]

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[63] Interestingly, the 1958 version of Invasion of the Body Snatchers originally concluded with the success of the invaders, and the failure of the hero to intervene effectively, but before distribution, the film was re-edited to resolve the story in the hero's favor. See Tudor 44.

[64] Tudor 104.

The psychotic, who sometimes "passes" as normal, is the paradigmatic figure of the post-sixties genre, particularly after 1978. Before discussing the ascendance of the psychotic, though, let me say a few words about another variant of the genre. During the heyday of the disconcertingly human psychotic, a strand of the genre cloaked its murderous beast in the mythical form of the werewolf. Unlike the psychotic, the werewolf is a monster that can be compartmentalized into a good/human side and an evil/beastly side.[65] The werewolf metamorphosis narrative of the eighties, like the vampire invasion narrative of the seventies, takes on overtly sexual proportions. The Howling opens with the protagonist, a television anchorwoman, meeting a serial killer in a pornographic den. The killer traps her in a screening room and proceeds to metamorphose to the strobe effect of the hard-core film. Later, when the protagonist's husband is bitten by a seductive female werewolf, it arouses his sexual desire for her. All this transpires in the context of a community of werewolves who frame their discourse about werewolfery in terms of desire, repression and sublimation. Similarly, in An American Werewolf in London, a pornographic theater provides the setting for a discussion of the compulsive way in which the beast within erupts.

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[65] Tudor 117.

In the seventies and eighties, another beast-within -- the psychotic -- came to occupy a position of unprecedented importance in the horror film. Although the individual psychotic is the primary figure, there are also instances of the psychotic family, which bring the familial grounding of psychosis to the fore. Examples of the latter include The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Hills Have Eyes, and American Gothic. All three revolve around a family that murders unsuspecting strangers who wander into the remote region in which they live, and in the first two instances the family is also cannibalistic.[66]

This trend reached its peak in the early eighties, when, according to Tudor, 50% of horror films were about psychotics.[67] The psycho-slasher sub-genre was inaugurated by Halloween, a film in which a masked, psychotic killer (Michael) stalks and graphically kills three sexually active teenage girls, in a middle-class midwest suburb. Although a teenage boy is also killed, he is quickly dispatched, whereas the girls, including the lone survivor, are pursued and terrorized. There is no attempt to explain Michael's psychotic outbreak of violence, though a few things are clear: his violence originates in the family, involves sexual repression, and is misogynist in character. He is labeled the "boogey man" by the

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[66] Tudor 70-71.

[67] Tudor 186.

protagonist, and even his psychiatrist regards him as evil incarnate.

Halloween was followed by Friday the 13th, in which the elements are repeated, with two modifications. First, the teenagers are situated in an isolated summer camp, an extension of the suburban retreat. Second, the psychotic is revealed to be a woman avenging the death of her son, Jason -- who becomes the killer in subsequent Friday the 13th films. Both films went on to generate numerous imitators and increasingly gory "sequels," although as various critics have noted, they are more accurately termed remakes.[68] As of this writing, Halloween is up to Part Five: The Revenge of Michael Myers, and Friday the 13th is up to Part Eight: Jason Takes Manhattan. As much as sequelization is motivated by the industrial imperative to maximize profits, it cannot be reduced to that; the genre's internal imperatives come into play. The open-ended narrative and the inefficacy of human action promotes the return of the monster.

Despite considerable similarities, the psychotics of Halloween and Friday the 13th are qualitatively different

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[68] The remake-as-sequel phenomenon is often discussed in terms of horror films, but can also apply to other films such as the endless Rambo series. Can Ninja Turtles II be far behind?

from the psychotics of Psycho and Peeping Tom.[69] The latter are metamorphosis narratives, whereas the former are invasion narratives.[70] In the metamorphosis narrative, the psychotic is the central character, and the narrative focuses on his transformation from ostensible normality to underlying monstrosity. In contrast, the invasion narrative fails to develop the character of the psychotic, often relegating him to the status of a mindless, malevolent, supernatural force, and the narrative centers on his terrorizing rampage.[71] During the course of the film, the narrative center shifts from the rampaging male psychotic to the lone female survivor.[72]

The pervasive malevolence of the slasher sub-genre permeates A Nightmare on Elm Street and Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer. The first is an invasion narrative that wreaks havoc on the supposed safety of the suburban

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[69] Indeed, the similarities with Psycho are acknowledged in Halloween. For instance, the protagonist is played by Jamie Lee Curtis, Janet Leigh's daughter, and Michael's psychiatrist is named after Marion Crane's lover, Sam Loomis.

[70] Tudor 100.

[71] Tudor 198.

[72] There are two prominent exceptions to this pattern in the eighties. The first is Dressed to Kill, about a homophobic (pre-operative) male-to-female transsexual who kills women that arouse him/her. The psychotic character is more fully developed than in the typical slasher film. The other, which I will read later as a feminist response to the slasher sub-genre, is The Stepfather, in which the character of the psychotic is developed.

environment. Freddie Krueger is a knife-taloned child molester and murderer who seeks revenge on the teenage children of the vigilante parents who burned him to death. He enters their dreams, that refuge of the unconscious, and whatever damage he wreaks there is inscribed on their bodies, or what is left of their bodies. Since everyone must sleep, there is no refuge from this hunter. Although this is an invasion narrative, the character of Freddie, unlike that of Michael or Jason, is imbued with characteristics that one would expect to find in a (psychotic-centered) metamorphosis narrative: a sense of humor and a talent for repartee. He is, if you will, more fleshed out than the monsters of the other invasion narratives.

The second film might be called a metamorphosis narrative, since it details the sanguinary activities of a psychotic serial killer who appears to be normal, even pleasant. He is clearly the narrative center. Yet there is virtually no transformation at stake; there is barely a boundary between the killer and the innocuous-seeming man. Although unambiguously human, Henry is unwavering in his obsession and profoundly immune to appeals for mercy. Henry strikes without warning and picks his victims seemingly at random, thus rendering everyone a potential victim. Based on the life of serial killer Henry Lee Lucas, the film's striking sense of malevolence is rooted

in the "real life" quality of the film and the normality Henry projects. At the dark heart of this film lies the central force driving the postmodern genre. To quote Tudor:

> [N]ormality itself is experienced as untrustworthy and fragile. The threat from the psyche is now entirely unpredictable, unintelligible and altogether ferocious: a material expression of declining faith in the security of everyday circumstances and objects.[73]

As the genre draws further into the present, the narrative categories and binary differences (like normal/abnormal) become increasingly indistinct and interchangeable. And this is precisely what interests me. The preceding pages have drawn a fairly conventional picture, not unlike the approach taken by the many authors who have tried their hand at explicating the genre. In the work which follows, however, I will take a different, more theoretical approach to analyze the post-sixties genre. In large part, my focus is motivated by the genre's attention to gender, and the enigmatic, chaotic nature of things. In the chapter which follows, I will outline a method of analysis that allows me to raise questions about how the genre operates and what it means as a cultural phenomenon.

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[73] Tudor 207.

CHAPTER TWO

CULTURAL ANALYSIS AS A METHOD FOR STUDYING POPULAR CULTURE: AN INTRODUCTION

The work which follows is a cultural analysis of the contemporary horror film, aimed at showing certain ideological and ideology-constituting features of exemplary films, and their counter-hegemonic aspects. Before embarking on this analysis, however, I will discuss what a cultural analysis is, and what methodological issues such a study raises. A cultural analysis presupposes that a culture constitutes itself through representational practices embedded in ideology. By ideology, I do not mean a "distortion" of "the truth as God would know it" but, to use Althusser's definition, a system of representations which promotes "the 'imaginary' relationship of individuals to their 'real' conditions of existence."[1] Ideology is the way in which people gain knowledge of the world, and constitute meaning, including self-meaning. A cultural analysis also presupposes that the meaning of a representational object does not inhere in the object, but

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[1] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus," Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) 79.

is grounded in the cultural context of its production and use. That is to say, film meaning is not "already given" in the film, but is produced in the process of reception.

My chosen cultural object is the horror film, not as individual text but as genre. A genre operates as a set of rules, and is in this sense comparable to the concept of "role" in the literature on formal organizations. Individual films operate, and can only be understood critically, as instances of the genre.

It is not possible to think sociologically about the horror genre, or film in general, without treating it dynamically, as both constituted by and constitutive of social relations. Sociological research that attempts to come to terms with meaning must attend to the dynamic properties of objects. There is a body of work within the field of representational theory which is particularly well-suited for this task. It is a composite approach of feminist, psychoanalytic, and semiotic theories geared towards the analysis of representational forms. Because different writers employ different combinations of elements, I will describe the combination of elements which I draw from this larger body of work. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to it as "the representational theory I privilege." What follows is an account of the principles from which, and against which, this theory operates.

The principle epistemological model against which representational theory operates is reflection theory. Reflection theory presupposes a dualistic, hierarchical model between reality and representation, sometimes articulated as the split between social structure and culture by sociologists, or as base and superstructure by Marxists. Representation is subordinate to reality, reflecting rather than determining social attitudes and social action. Reflection theory posits a direct, unmediated, and transparent relationship between representation and reality. Meaning is already there, mirrored in the images which distort or reflect social reality. To decipher the meaning of the filmic representation, one must analyze the content, especially the plot and character developments, of the films surveyed. This empiricist mode claims to yield insight into the society which produced the films.

Related to the reflectionist approach is the social psychological tradition of "effects" studies, which presupposes that a direct, unmediated, transparent, and quantifiable relation exists between representation and reality. Effects studies attempt to document how exposure to representational forms, like film, causes quantifiable changes in social behavior and attitudes, in a controlled environment. In their efforts to record causal relations,

these studies routinely abstract social behavior from the cultural context which gives it meaning.

Empiricism comes under attack by critical theory, a materialist approach which provides an epistemological model that is more compatible with the representational theory I privilege. According to critical theory, representation is not only constituted by, but also constitutive of, social relations.[2] In other words, the relation between the real and the representational is not unidirectional but dialectical, "interactive and potentially contradictory."[3] The problem for the theorist becomes one of determining not how meaning is reflected, a static concept, but how meaning is produced in representational practices, where meaning is conceived as a process (of signification). Thus, meaning is not static and intrinsic, but changing and constructed. Furthermore, meaning is neither as transparent, nor as innocent as reflection theory claims; it is hidden and embedded in ideology. According to Althusser, ideology is a function

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[2] In the materialist paradigm (which includes critical theory), social attitudes, institutional forces, social change, and indeed, all social practices are fundamentally relations between people, not between things or between people and things, and therefore fall under the rubric of social relations.

[3] Annette Kuhn, ed., Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema (New York: Verso, 1990) 53.

of representation, thus, meaning is "always caught up in relations of power."[4]

The method of critical theory is ideology critique. Since ideology critique is a materialist practice, it treats ideological operations as ultimately -- though indirectly and in mediated fashion -- linked to underlying class relations. This grounding is evident in Althusser's treatment of ideology as an autonomous or semi-autonomous, rather than subordinate, force which takes material form. Because ideology is embedded in materials and practices, it cannot be dislodged through argument. It can, however, be rendered visible through deconstruction.

Since ideological operations, and therefore meaning, are not immediately observable, they must be unearthed by deconstructing the "text" to reveal its underlying form (which for critical theory means class relations). Although the term is drawn from literary criticism, text refers more broadly to "...the structure and organization of any one cultural product or set of representations..."[5] Deconstruction, contrary to the empiricist modes outlined above, entails paying attention to what is <u>not</u> in the text,

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[4] Kuhn 1990, 54.

[5] Annette Kuhn, <u>Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema</u> (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) 8.

its "constituent lacks" and "structuring absences."[6] It is an analytic method which looks for the silences and contradictions in the text which rupture its apparent coherence, the symptomatic points at which the ideological operations of the text emerge. In some instances, the contradiction may be introduced at the level of the reading, so that the oppositional or against-the-grain reading becomes the other side of the contradiction.

Deconstruction is grounded in linguistics by semiotician Roland Barthes, who grounds signification or meaning production in language.[7] Language refers to a system constituted by a set of rules, which belongs to the collectivity, and precedes any individual exercise of "speech." Like Durkheim's social fact, language is a social construction, external and coercive, which predates the subject, and is both subject to and resistant to change.[8] Similarly, the term speech operates beyond linguistic parameters to include not only instances of oral and written discourse but also visual discourse. Speech is constrained by the rules of language and the culturally packed meanings which constitute any utterance, independent

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[6] Cahiers du Cinema, "John Ford's Young Mr. Lincoln," Movies and Methods, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976) [originally published in 1972] 496.

[7] Roland Barthes, Mythologies (London: Paladin, 1973).

[8] Emile Durkheim, The Rules of Sociological Method (New York: The Free Press, 1938) chapter 1.

of the individual speaker's intention or will. To quote Bakhtin, language is "overpopulated...with the intentions of others."[9]

In other words, every representational instance is mediated by, and therefore must be read in terms of, the larger cultural field. Meaning does not inhere in the object, rather, it is constituted in the field of social relations. To deny this cultural field is to engage in what Barthes calls mythology -- speech which negates social relations by making them appear to be natural (given), unchanging (ahistorical) and innocent (unmotivated by class interests). The realist text fosters the illusion that we are perceiving reality without its intervention, "as it really is." It denies the structuring character of language. As such, the realist text is the perfect object for reflection theory, which treats texts as objects that reflect, rather than structure, reality. In contrast, the task of deconstruction is to show how meaning is produced, and how signification or meaning production always implies a larger cultural field and therefore cannot be separated from relations of power.

When applied to film, this semiotic method entails looking not only at the narrative level (content analysis),

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[9] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981) 294, as quoted in Teresa De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984) 1.

but also at the level of film language to analyze signifying practices. It means paying attention to how cinematically-specific signifying practices such as lighting, framing, sound, and editing constitute culturally established codes which operate within the film or genre to construct meaning, and thus, to structure ideological operations. Viewers are usually unaware of the operation of these codes. This analysis locates ideology in signifying practices "which as organizing principles produce their own ideological effects in the material they organize."[10] To ignore the signifying practices of a film, is to efface a whole field of cultural meaning and ideological operations.

Two elements make the representational theory I am outlining psychoanalytic, and not merely semiotic. The first is the centrality of sexuality in the theory. I will have more to say about this later. The second is the assumption that the process of signification, as embedded in ideology, operates unconsciously. The deconstructive method, which Freud calls the "work of interpretation," is employed by psychoanalytic theorists to excavate repressed,

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[10] Christine Gledhill, "Developments in Feminist Film Criticism," Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams, eds. (Frederick, Md.: American Film Institute, 1984) 19.

i.e. not merely hidden but unconscious, meanings.[11] This entails interrogating the text to locate "what is there but represented as absent."[12] Before complicating this model, let me outline some of the principles which guide psychoanalytic inquiry.

Psychoanalysis begins from the iconoclastic assumption that repressed or unconscious desires and fears are integral components of all human activities including feelings, thoughts, and actions.[13] This means that even activity we would ordinarily regard as meaningless is motivated, to some extent, by unconscious wishes, and is thus, in the psychoanalytical endeavor, meaningful. Therefore, all activity is grist for the psychoanalytic mill. Furthermore, all activity results from the interplay of a multitude of both concurrent and contradictory forces, some of which are repressed. Therefore, activity is never the result of unicausality. It is always overdetermined, i.e. the result of a multiplicity of forces tending in the same direction, even though conflicting forces may also be

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[11] Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966) 210.

[12] Vivian Sobchack, "The Virginity of Astronauts: Sex and the Science Fiction Film," pp. 103-115 in Kuhn 1990, 103. [originally published 1985]

[13] Although Freud did not always include social relations, in the larger materialist sense, I include social relations, as well as representational practices in my discussion of repression.

at work. To discover repressed material, it is efficacious to analyze gaps and distortions, the symptoms of repression, in the text.[14]

The psychoanalytic theory I will employ has undergone serious revisions, since the work of Freud, in order to capture the sociological aspect of meaning production. The radical implication of Freudian psychoanalysis, brought out more clearly in Lacan's work, is the sociological principle that the human subject is constructed, not given, in the course of social interaction. Lacan's radical departure is to locate the Freudian Oedipal narrative within the linguistic, and therefore social, field. In the Lacanian framework, language is defined as a collective process, a social production, and the site of subject formation. Lacan argues that the unconscious is structured like a language and the human subject is constituted in the process of language acquisition (and, after language has been acquired, through every speech act -- again, used metaphorically to denote signification). Therefore, identity is not regarded as something fixed or stable but as something that is continually subject to accomplishment, and interrogation, through engagement with (film) language. Neither is identity unitary, rather it is "the term of a shifting series of ideological positions."[15] The

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[14] Freud 1966, 31, 82, 91, 171.

[15] De Lauretis 1984, 14.

unconscious is the site of the contradictions, splits, and tensions which belie the ideological image of the unitary (Cartesian) subject. The work of interpretation is to disclose the unconscious ideological operations which structure the relation between subject and film text at the moment of reception.

The deconstructive method, or the work of interpretation, is used to theorize the relationship between the film text and the spectator. The spectator is an analytical, rather than an empirical category, the filmic equivalent of the imputed reader in literature. This approach presupposes first, that the meaning of a film is not already given, but is produced in the relationship between the spectator and the film. Second, it presupposes that films "...address...spectators in particular ways...and therefore that a text is not open to all possible readings, but may privilege some meanings over others..."[16] (Although keep in mind that one can read against-the-grain of privileged meanings.) This method analyzes how ideology operates unconsciously through signifying practices which interpellate, or hail, the spectator into determinate subject positions.[17] In other words, in the process of consuming a film, "...spectators

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[16] Kuhn 1990, 145.

[17] A subject position is a position occupied by a subject in relation to something else. See Althusser.

are caught up in, formed by, and at the same time construct, meanings..." (including self-meaning) through (both conscious and) unconscious processes.[18] By looking at film language, we can deconstruct the unconscious operations of ideology, and thus render them more amenable to understanding and political intervention.

The conjunction of film text and spectator occurs at the point of consumption, a process of meaning production and subject formation. Consumption is contingent on spectatorial pleasure. Pleasure is used metaphorically, and does not necessarily refer to conscious pleasure or joy. Recall that Freud (1966) regards dreams, even distressing ones, as wish-fulfillments of repressed desires. The source of pleasure can be seen as the agitation created by the rupture, the moment of resistance in/to the text (the site of analytical entry into the text).[19]

The pleasure of the spectator is unconsciously structured through processes of identification, where identification refers not to empathy but to operations which inscribe the spectator into the text and thus into

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[18] Kuhn 1982, 44.

[19] Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975).

ideology.[20] These operations structure not only the pleasure but the (ideologically situated) subjectivity of the spectator. In theorizing pleasure, I am concerned not with the endpoint of satiation but, with the pleasure of the process of consumption, of engagement with narrative desire.[21] Narrative desire in film refers to the desire to look, a sexual drive, closely linked with the desire to know. According to Metz, film viewing evokes two forms of scopophilia, or sexual pleasure in looking: voyeurism (where the object of the look is another) and exhibitionism (where the object of the look is the one looking at the subject). Furthermore, film viewing evokes two forms of identification: narcissistic (where one identifies with the body of another) or voyeuristic (where one identifies with the look of the camera).[22]

Thus far, the theoretical work I have outlined has excluded any consideration of gender, an omission which becomes glaringly apparent once sexuality is introduced as a central concept. Feminist theory has interrogated this omission, and its intervention has seriously revised film

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[20] Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," Movies and Methods Vol. II, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976) 531-542. [originally published 1970]

[21] De Lauretis 1984.

[22] Christian Metz, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977) 61-2, 96.

criticism to enable us to raise questions about a gendered spectator -- one who is situated within the political poles of male and female -- and therefore a more sociological subject.[23]

Film has engaged feminist interest precisely because it foregrounds relations of looking, specifically looking at the female body as the site of sexuality. As such, its ideological dynamics are characteristic of all sites of the production of subjectivity. Feminism focuses on representations of women and the ideological character of these representations, specifically, how these representations constitute "woman" as a social category, and how they constitute the hierarchical sex/gender system.[24] As Williams notes, feminism's long-standing attention to representational practices presupposes that

> ...an understanding of how power and pleasure function in discourses in which women's bodies are the object of knowledge could be crucial to any efforts to alter the

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[23] From the outset of the Second Wave, feminism has stressed the political relevance of representational practices. Early landmark works such as The Second Sex (Simone De Beauvoir, 1953); The Feminine Mystique (Betty Friedan, 1963); and Sexual Politics (Kate Millett, 1969) attest to the feminist treatment of representations of women as pivotal ideological operations. Furthermore, the intervention of feminist theory in film criticism predates the ascendance of psychoanalytic theory in film studies. See for instance, Molly Haskell, From Reverence to Rape: the Treatment of Women in the Movies (London: New English Library, 1975).

[24] Kuhn 1982, 4.

> dominance of male power and pleasure in the culture at large...[25]

Thus, the act of criticism participates in cultural politics, and constitutes a feminist intervention to redress the occlusion of women as subjects, social agents, and producers of culture.

The primary focus of the feminist revision of film theory has been Lacanian psychoanalysis, which has been extremely influential in film studies. The principle feminist objection has been to Lacan's treatment of the subordination of women as inevitable, a position which naturalizes male dominance. In representational terms, Lacan positions women as (sexual) objects (of exchange) and as the grounds of representation, while men are positioned as (sexual) subjects and as producers of culture.[26] Lacan draws on the hierarchical binary system of Levi-Strauss, for whom the differential valuation of men and women is naturalized as the a priori foundation for culture. Feminism rejects this patriarchal premise, and seeks to constitute a subject position for women.

To review, the psychoanalytic theory I privilege has been seriously reworked, first by Lacan, who inscribes the Freudian corpus within a sociolinguistic field, then by

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[25] Linda Williams, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible" (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989) x.

[26] De Lauretis 1984.

feminist theory, which addresses the occluded question of feminine subjectivity. These reworkings yield a psychoanalysis which allows us to see, not an individual body but, a body politic whose symptoms are culturally overdetermined. The contribution of each subsequent revision is to make the sociological aspect of meaning production increasingly more accessible by grounding it in the social.

Feminism has, in effect, developed the current field of film criticism and has constituted an important discourse on issues of representation, gender, sexuality, pleasure, and violence. The intervention of feminist theory, with its stress on the importance of cultural politics, has legitimated the inclusion of film in political and cultural discourse. In the following pages, I hope to address the confluence of gender, sexuality, pleasure, and violence in the horror film. By addressing this confluence, I hope to advance the literature and to expand the terms of the debate which constrain discussion of these issues.

Through an examination of the genre, I hope to disclose the broader gender dynamics operating in film. It is not by whim or happenstance that I have selected the horror film for this purpose. The analysis of gender cannot be separated from the study of representational practices. As Suleiman writes,

> The cultural significance of the female body is not only (not even first and foremost) that of a

> flesh-and-blood entity, but that of a symbolic construct. Everything we know about the body...exists for us in some form of discourse; and discourse...is never unmediated, never free of interpretation, never innocent.[27]

The horror film is a representational practice especially germane to the study of gender, given the intensity with which it foregrounds the body, particularly the female body, with its flesh-and-blood specificity. If one is going to study gender at the level of the representation of the body, one must study the genre which has escaped the taboos that constrain other representational practices. As a taboo-violating practice, the horror genre becomes a site of contradictions, and thus a privileged site for research.

As a site of contradictions, horror exposes what has to be repressed in other sites, and thus momentarily neutralizes the repression. Specifically, the horror film exposes what is repressed in other sorts of films. It does so, because it is only through violation that the conditions of representational practice become evident, and this is precisely what horror does. It presents the body in the moment of violation, thus exposing the taken-for-granted representational practices of Hollywood cinema.

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[27] Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986) 2; emphasis in original.

Horror indulges in an examination of the culturally repressed. Like dreams, horror processes material that is simultaneously attractive and repellent, displayed and obfuscated, desired and repressed. The horror film is the cultural nightmare, the functional equivalent of the analysand's dream. It serves the same function within the representational field -- a symptomatic product ripe for cultural analysis.

It is evident to many that the genre is about rage, terror, mutilation, and death. But less obvious that it is profoundly about gender dynamics. In the work which follows, I will argue that gender is so central to the operations of classical Hollywood cinema that rage, terror, mutilation, and death must be understood in the context of gender dynamics.

Gender is commonly understood to operate within the terms of femininity and masculinity, terms which though they vary cross-culturally and historically are generally regarded as hierarchical. When treated as binary terms, i.e. as opposite and mutually exclusive terms, the cost is the devaluation of the feminine. Feminism demands that femininity and masculinity be understood dynamically, as constructed terms in dialectical relationship with each other. When I employ the terms masculine and feminine, I do not mean <u>intrinsic</u> or natural characteristics of men and women, but rather <u>socially constructed</u> dominant and

subordinate positionings, respectively. These positions are expressed in film theory as the (male) gaze and the (female) spectacle.[28] Although feminine and masculine positions largely correspond to women and men, I am not assuming that they need to. More importantly, in the course of this work I will argue, as others have before me, that the gender-bifurcated model which determines that men are masculine/dominant and women are feminine/subordinate breaks down in the process of spectator identification.[29]

The horror genre operates on the oscillation between masculine and feminine positionings. By opening up gender dynamics for analysis, the horror film provides an opportunity to subvert fundamental operations of cultural repression. The breakdown of repression operates on the level of both consumption and criticism. I believe this breakdown of repression to be the basis of the popularity of the genre, a popularity which bespeaks the genre's sociological significance.

In "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," Clover applies the method outlined above to analyze the

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[28] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Movies and Methods: Volume II, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985). [originally published 1975]

[29] De Lauretis 1984; Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," Quarterly Review of Film Studies, Fall (1984): 267-282; Carol Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," Representations 20 (Fall 1987): 187-228.

slasher film. Although I will not discuss it in detail until Chapter Six, I raise it here as an exemplary piece that comes closest to what I propose to do. It differs from my work largely in its exclusive focus on the male spectator. Unlike Clover, I will attempt to theorize both the female and the male spectator, and thus to construct a frame of reference that includes the female subject.

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies, in which I locate my work, asserts the political and analytical centrality of culture. At this historical moment, it is an area of exploding interest, at least in part because it treats master discourses with scrutiny, rather than with doctrinaire acceptance. It is inevitably interdisciplinary, violating academic boundaries, drawing together different fields in a cooperative venture to study culture from variegated perspectives. This confluence of interest generates debate and raises various theoretical questions for cultural analysts:

1. What is the sociocultural conjunction of forces that constitutes the nexus for the popularity of a cultural object? How do we account for the popularity of "popular" culture? Although I am not doing a history, my analysis is informed by historically motivated shifts in the genre. From this vantage point, I will attempt to address the

question, "How...do changes in the textual conventions of the genre relate to broader sociocultural contexts?"[30]

2. What is the nature of the pleasure(s) upon which consumption, as a process of meaning production and subject formation, depends?

3. What can a cultural object tell us about the larger field of social life? What is the dialectical relationship between the textual and the extra-textual?

I will endeavor to address these questions, through theoretical development and textual analysis of horror films, without losing sight of these extra-textual, sociological, questions. Although it is true that any particular semiological analysis of a film cannot be extrapolated to all readers, it does generate an array of possible readings, some or all of which are actualized by empirical subjects, regardless of whether or not they are conscious of these processes. In this way, it helps us develop a critical purchase on multiplicity and difference.

Selection of Written Materials

The works I have read in the course of my research correspond to the particular issues I am raising about the genre. It is a diverse corpus consisting of theoretical pieces, commentaries, and illustrative materials. Some of the pieces are "popular" works addressed to a non-scholarly

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[30] Kuhn 1990, 9.

audience, which endeavor in their own fashion to comment on the genre. My inclusion of these works is due both to the overall dearth of serious critical appraisal of the genre, and to the recognition that discourse about marginalized genres is itself often of a marginalized character as well. I am at odds with some of the pieces, but see them as providing the occasion for argument. In emphasizing the site of consumption, my study unavoidably shortchanges the production aspect of film. Nonetheless, I expect to yield an analysis which will further the literature.

Selection of Films

The selection of films for my analysis bears some discussion. I have exhaustively perused the film/video archives to familiarize myself with the historical and stylistic sweep of the genre. For this I have relied on the accessibility of films in theatrical release, on television, and on video. I have also relied on articles and books to learn about films I have not been able to view. Although I have used many sources to familiarize myself with the scope of the genre, the most consistently important one has been The Encyclopedia of Horror, which catalogues 1,300 horror films from 1896 to 1985.[21]

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[21] Phil Hardy, ed., The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

My analysis will not entail a survey, but an in-depth, theoretical analysis of the contemporary American horror genre. Although I have limited myself to English-language films, I have included films produced by Great Britain and Canada which have been distributed in the U.S. The four films listed below will be discussed in detail. In making my selections, I have relied on film literature and educated intuition to choose films that draw out the salient features of the postmodern genre, including some self-reflexive works which predate the latest wave, but nonetheless have much to disclose about the genre's latest manifestation. Furthermore, I have privileged films which have been subject to critical discussion, since they provide the opportunity for re-analysis. Thus, my selection is responsive to the development of representational analysis. The films selected are regularly discussed as horror films. Although each film varies in the clarity with which it is confrontational, each film deals explicitly with gender; each presents bodily violations.

I will analyze the following films in depth:
[title -- director, year of production, country of origin]
1. Peeping Tom -- Michael Powell (1960) England
This is a self-reflexive film whose eponymous character is a man who murders women and documents his murders cinematically. It offers a provocative and critical

analysis of scopophilia. I will use this film to flesh out the details of the representational theory I have introduced above.

2. The Wizard of Gore -- Herschell Gordon Lewis (1968) U.S.

This is a "gore" film, featuring a magician, which plays with the relationship between illusion/representation and reality. I will use this film to discuss "realism" and "special effects" in horror, as well as to raise questions about the relationship between pornography and horror.

3. Halloween -- John Carpenter (1978) U.S.

This film, which inaugurates the slasher cycle, marks a turning point in the history of the genre. I will use it to discuss the specificity of the slasher sub-genre, and then contrast it with The Stepfather to explore the progressive and regressive elements of the genre.

4. The Stepfather -- Joseph Reuben (1986) Canada

I will constitute this as a(n) (ostensibly oxymoronic) feminist horror film and contrast it with Halloween to explore the progressive and regressive elements of the genre. In both its narrative development and formal devices, this film raises issues of violence, sexuality, and the family in ways which validate feminist discourse.

One other methodological note is in order before I proceed, and that is the problem of definition implicit in genre analysis. Andrew Tudor summarizes the "empiricist dilemma" as follows:

> [W]e are caught in a circle which first requires that the films are isolated, for which purpose a criterion [for defining a genre] is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films.

Of the two solutions Tudor outlines, I opt for the second, that is, "to lean on a common cultural consensus as to what constitutes a [horror film]...and then go on to analyze it in detail."[32] In Chapter Three, I proceed to formulate a working definition of the genre based on generalizations drawn from the study of numerous films which cultural consensus defines as horror films.

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[32] Andrew Tudor, "Genre," Film Genre Reader, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986) 5. [originally published 1973]

CHAPTER THREE

A WORKING DEFINITION OF THE POSTMODERN HORROR GENRE

"I was disgusted, but I was fascinated, too...I didn't want to watch, but I couldn't help it."

The Amazing Transplant[1]

"Horror" is a contested term, even if we limit it to a film genre. The boundaries of the genre are slippery; there is ample overlap with other genres, particularly science fiction and the thriller. Furthermore, horror conventions have become widely assimilated into mainstream films.[2] Therefore, how can we define the horror film as genre? At the risk of saying too much or saying too little, I will attempt to formulate what I see as the defining features of the postmodern horror film in its relation to contemporary audiences. Bear in mind that this is a provisional definition, one subject to the ongoing historical changes of the genre.

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[1] Quoted in V. Vale and Andrea Juno, Incredibly Strange Films (No. 10, 1986) 208.

[2] For instance Blue Steel, a cop film, utilizes such slasher film conventions as the stealthy psychotic killer who refuses to die, and the heroine (played by horror star Jamie Lee Curtis) who, after a protracted struggle, overcomes him.

De Lauretis tells us that the word genre is French for "gender" and that it refers to classification, but without the sexual denotation found in English. Genre is devoid of sexual connotations; it is a sexless word.[3] Not so the horror film as genre. The genre deals first and foremost with the body, a signifier of gender. As feminist theory has amply demonstrated, everything we know about the body is socially mediated and sexually coded. To this I would add that the horror genre is sexually coded, and accordingly, sexuality is an essential element of my analysis. The trajectory of this study will lead to the heart of such key feminist problematics as sexual difference, sexual identity, and sexual violence.

To define the horror genre traditionally, as a set of films, its themes and formal devices, would be to locate meaning at the level of the filmic, a necessary but insufficient move. Metz distinguishes the filmic (the discursive strategies of the film text) from the cinematic (the film's relations to other areas such as advertising and the star system).[4] To understand genre, then, we must consider the relationship between the audience (historically-specific spectators with multi-variant

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[3] Teresa De Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987) 4.

[4] Christian Metz, Language and Cinema, trans. Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok (The Hague: Mouton, 1974).

positionings), the film text (its signifying practices), and the cinematic (the cultural-historical context of the interaction between audience and text). To do so is to locate meaning in the relationship between the film text, the audience, and the industry. I use text here to refer not to the individual text but to the genre; this is how the industry markets and the audience experiences a film. For both audience and industry, an individual film becomes an instance of a genre.

Writing on genre as a critical category, Neale defines a genre as a system of "orientations, expectations and conventions [of narrative process] that circulate between industry, text and subject."[5] Before discussing how the horror genre operates to create and satisfy viewer expectations, I want to say a few words about how the horror film, as an instance of film, generates certain expectations, then situate the genre within the broad institutional frame known as classical Hollywood cinema.

Unlike other cultural commodities such as records and books, films are not generally bought for consumption at home.[6] The film consumer buys not the (reproduced)

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[5] Stephen Neale, Genre (British Film Institute, 1980) 19.

[6] I am excluding from discussion the privileged practice of film acquisition for private collections. More to the point, I am limiting my discussion of film to theatrical consumption. Therefore, I will not directly address television exhibition of films, nor video consumption (whether through rental, purchase, or in a

celluloid object but the ability to view a screening. Unlike the theatrical actor who delivers a live performance, a film actor does not occupy the same space as the film audience. A theater audience views a representation of a fiction, whereas a film audience views a represention of a representation of a fiction. As Metz points out, this absence lies at the heart of cinema. Film is mutually exclusive with the profilmic event -- the world of objects -- which precedes it and remains lost. Cinema, like all language, is structured by this lack.[7]

Horror films are produced within the broad institutional frame known as classical Hollywood cinema: a system of film production, distribution and exhibition for an international mass market; and its constituent films. Like other forms of mass production, it is characterized by standardized practices which provide a degree of efficiency and predictability to secure investments. Films produced within this system are subject to the continuity system, a set of rules of practice that specify how to construct a "good" film.

Within the terms of classical Hollywood cinema, a good film is defined as one that creates a coherent

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bar/club setting).

[7] Christian Metz, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977) 63. I will elaborate on the importance of this structuring absence in my discussion of woman as lack (see Chapter 4).

cause-and-effect narrative. The narrative is the basis, the privileged element of the film, to which other elements, like space and time, are subordinated. For instance, the plot will compress, expand, or reorder the chronology of story events to enhance the clarity of narrative logic. The narrative has to flow smoothly through the use of self-effacing techniques that disguise their own operations. The various continuity rules serve two overall aims.

(1) They provide a clearly-defined, unified space within which the causal narrative unfolds. (2) They shift audience attention to those elements of the scene most salient to the plot. For instance, they organize audience attention by binding our knowledge to shifts in the characters' glances.[8]

The horror genre, as an instance of the Hollywood film, is subject to the rules of the continuity system.[9] The process of standardization facilitates the regulation of commodity production. Furthermore, the horror film is subject to rules of generic convention, which I will elaborate shortly. Genres establish the parameters within

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[8] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985) 194-5, 198, 202.

[9] Throughout this work when I say film I mean in the tradition of classical Hollywood cinema, unless otherwise stated.

which a film is: produced -- Does it adhere to generic conventions? -- marketed -- Do the advertisements utilize the iconography of the horror film? -- and consumed -- Does the audience attend a screening with the expectation of experiencing recreational terror? Genres create and satisfy viewer expectations, although individual films do so with varying degrees of success. "Any one genre is, simultaneously, a coherent and systematic body of film texts, and a coherent and systematic set of expectations."[10] Within this structure of similarity and repetition, each film must be different from every other film if the genre is to continue to attract a market.

Genre functions through the play of repetition and difference, oppositional yet coterminous terms. Thus, it is like the psychoanalytic concept of desire.[11] Desire is inscribed by the initial experience of pleasure. Subsequently, the desiring subject attempts to repeat the experience but cannot since each subsequent experience is different, albeit structured by that initial experience that set desire into motion. Genre, like desire, is characterized by "difference <u>in</u> repetition." Thus, in

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[10] Neale 1980, 54-5.

[11] In the psychoanalytic narrative, the initial experience of desire is the desire of the infant for its mother. Subsequent relations of desire seek to repeat the intensity of this primary relationship, but the attempt is futile. Nonetheless subsequent relations are structured by that initial experience that set desire into motion.

mapping the parameters of the genre, it is important to consider "the 'rules' governing both the successive appearances of those signifiers [that mark a genre through repetition] and the transformations [or differences] to which they are subject."[12] Let us turn to a discussion of these rules or principles of operation.

RULES

Despite the enormous variety of subject matter, there are rules to which a work conforms if it is to be intelligible as horror. The competent audience, through repeated exposure, acquires knowledge that conditions expectations about the genre. The genre, in turn, arouses, disappoints, and redirects these expectations. Within this shifting process, I locate five rules of practice which interconnect to constitute the genre. (Note that I employ "rules" as a heuristic device, rather than as an exhaustive list of qualifying criteria.) Each rule operates in the context of the other rules; none is constitutive (of the genre) in and of itself. But together, they form an interlocking web that constitutes the genre. These rules operate on the principles of disruption, transgression, uncertainty, and undecidability.[13]

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[12] Neale 1980, 50.

[13] I do not adopt Todorov's categories of the marvelous, the uncanny, and the fantastic, because my working definition of the genre does not fit his criteria. Unlike Todorov, I neither require nor exclude the supernatural in my definition of the genre, nor do I

Rule 1: Horror constitutes a violent disruption of the everyday world.

Classical Hollywood cinema opens with a normative order which the narrative disrupts, and closes with the restoration of the normative order. Aside from the fact that horror films do not necessarily restore order, what distinguishes them from this pattern is the profoundly violent nature of the disruption. According to Waller, "...the entire genre is an unsystematic, unresolved exploration of violence in virtually all its forms and guises."[14] The disruption takes the form of physical violence: non-sexual invasion of body cavities or of body surfaces to create cavities, the release of bodily fluids through stabbing and slashing, the separation of body parts from each other.[15] The mutilated body can be the once-animate as in the case of the human body, or it can be the once-inanimate as in the case of a house. In The Haunting, the mutilated space is the body of the house. The door yields to a supernatural force by bending inward

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privilege the hesitation between supernatural and psychological accounts. See Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970).

[14] Gregory Waller, ed. American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987) 7.

[15] Violence is also used to (attempt to) destroy the monster, the agent of disruption, and thus to reestablish order. See below, Rule 2, for further discussion.

to a rhythm and sound that simulate heavy breathing. The door is ruptured by the fast-paced editing of the sequence. The door's plasticity, exaggerated by the use of a wide angle lens, defies the laws of physics.

Horror is produced by the violation of, what are tellingly called, natural laws; by the disruption of our presuppositions about the integrity and predictable character of objects, places, animals and people. Violence disrupts the world of everyday life; it explodes our assumptions about normality. The impermeability of death is violated when corpses come to life. A human order based on communication collapses when a creature whose raison d'etre is to kill stalks human prey. The line between fantasy and reality disappears when a figure in a dream has the power to kill the dreamer.

The horror film puts into question our assumptions about reality and unreality. Like Garfinkel's disruption experiments, it treats "an important state of affairs as something that it 'obviously,' 'naturally,' and 'really,' is not."[16] It disorients the viewer's taken-for-granted reality. Horror violates our assumption that we live in a predictable, routinized world by demonstrating that we live

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[16] Harold Garfinkel, "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities," Studies in Ethnomethodology (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967) 50. Garfinkel's disruption experiments put into question the correspondence between appearance and reality. As a consequence, they produce bewilderment, anxiety, and self-doubt.

in a minefield, by demanding a reason to trust in the taken-for-granted realm of "ordered normality." At any time, even when we least expect it -- even when the sun is shining, even in the safety of our own beds -- violence can burst upon us, ravaging the life we take for granted. As Tudor writes,

> In the horror movie -- its universe and our involvement founded on both the fascination and the fear of violence -- there is finally a Hobbesian state of nature: "continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man [sic], solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[17]

Let us turn to an instance of this. In Night of the Living Dead, a mundane trip to the cemetery to lay flowers on the grave of a dead, but still guilt-exacting parent, takes a horrific turn when corpses rise from their graves to consume the flesh of the living. The living dead lack compassion, existing only to cannibalize. They lack language, setting upon their work with mindless determination. They lack familial loyalty, turning on blood relatives without a glimmer of mercy. They kill unthinkingly. They lack the vulnerability that would mark them as human, and yet these very traits are mirrored in the living characters. One character ruthlessly sacrifices the lives of others for his own survival. Another remains in a semi-catatonic state for most of the film, impervious

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[17] Andrew Tudor, Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 129.

to attempts at communication. An unhappily married couple bickers contemptuously throughout the crisis. The romantic teenage couple is consumed before our eyes. The sole survivor of the night's onslaught is in the end not recognized as human. He is killed by the sheriff's posse, his body dragged out on a meathook to be burned in a bonfire.[18] The world of reason is annihilated. The effect is that of pulling the rug out from under the feet of the viewer. Thus, horror confronts us with the necessity for an epistemology of uncertainty: we only know that we do not know.

Rule 2: Horror transgresses and violates boundaries.

Although violence is a salient feature of the genre, it must be situated in the context of monstrosity. As Neale says,

> what defines the specificity of [the horror] genre is not the violence as such, but its conjunction with images and definitions of the monstrous. What defines its specificity with respect to the instances of order and disorder is their articulation across terms provided by categories and definitions of "the human" and "the natural."[19]

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[18] It is remarkable that in this 1968 film no character remarks upon the hero's blackness. This silence is the structuring absence that resounds in the concluding sequence of the film. The grainy black-and-white still-action sequence in which white men dump dead bodies onto a bonfire, here a literalized version of the bone-fire, suggests both the violence of white supremacists like the Ku Klux Klan, and television's routinization of the bloodshed in Vietnam.

[19] Neale 1980, 21.

Horror violates the taken-for-granted, "natural" order. It blurs boundaries and mixes categories that are usually regarded as discrete to create what Douglas calls "[im]purity and danger." In the horror genre, the anomaly manifests itself as the monster: a force that is unnatural, deviant, possibly malformed or compounded from two or more forms.[20] The monster violates boundaries. It violently ruptures bodies -- its own and that of others -- destroying integrity of self through dismemberment, the release of body fluids, and the invasion or creation of orifices. As Douglas points out, margins are dangerous, and orifices as points of entry are signifiers of the vulnerability of the body, the fragility of its boundaries.[21]

The monster's body is marked by the disruption of categories; it embodies contradiction. The monster disrupts the social order by dissolving the basis of its signifying system -- its network of differences: me/not me, life/death, human/non-human. The monster signifies what Kristeva calls the "abject," that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules" -- "the place where

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[20] Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "monster".

[21] Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1966) 121.

meaning collapses."[22] Danger is born of this confusion because it is "neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable."[23] This is why the destruction of the monster is imperative; it is only when the monster is dead and subject to decay that it ceases to threaten the social order. Disintegration promises to reduce the monster to an undifferentiated mass, one that no longer embodies difference and contradiction, for "where there is no differentiation, there is no defilement."[24] For example, the pallor of the vampire, the weirdly oxymoronic "living dead," signifies death, yet the sated vampire's veins surge with the blood of its victim. We see this contradiction resolved in Near Dark, when the vampires who are killed by the sunlight turn into ash, a signifier of death that eradicates the "living" half of the "living dead" and thus restores order.

Horror indiscreetly mixes categories to create monsters. According to Carroll, this can result in either fusion or fission figures. "A fusion figure is a composite

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[22] Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982) 4, 2. Although I find Kristeva's concept of the abject interesting and useful, I do not subscribe to her inscription of the abject in the maternal body. See Chapter 5 for further discussion.

[23] Douglas 96. Not surprisingly, horror appeals to adolescents, members of a liminal group (neither child nor adult), intensely anxious over bodily integrity.

[24] Douglas 160.

that unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in unambiguously one, spatio-temporally discrete entity." Examples include composite figures of life and death (zombies), self and other (the possessed in The Exorcist), internal and external (the woman whose birth sac hangs from her abdomen in The Brood), organic and inorganic (the man with an abdominal slit which is penetrated by videotapes in Videodrome). In contrast, a fission figure is one in which "the contradictory elements are...distributed over different, though metaphysically related identities."[25] Examples include the temporally sequential combination of human and non-human (werewolves), alien and familiar (Invasion of the Body Snatchers), male and female (Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde).

The latter film transgresses boundaries of sexual identity and thus exposes some of the overlap between horror and sexuality: the putting into question of the self-other distinction, the release of body fluids, and the penetration of body cavities. Dr. Jekyll butchers women to extract the ovaries necessary for his feminizing metamorphosis, thus becoming Jack the Ripper. Adding a new wrinkle to the history of male violence, Dr. Jekyll kills women to secure, not his masculinity but, his femininity.

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[25] Noel Carroll, The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart (New York: Routledge, 1990) 43, 46.

As the experiment progresses, his feminine alter ego becomes the dominant figure. She continues to commit murders despite his objections. The film rewrites Jack the Ripper lore, transforming this mythic figure of male misogyny into a female figure. To mix sexual categories even further, the film introduces a romance. Dr. Jekyll courts the woman who lives downstairs; Sister Hyde is courted by the woman's brother. What appears to be two "normal" heterosexual couples is in actuality an incestuous triangle constituted by a bisexual being and a brother-sister pair.

Another, perhaps more vivid, example of how the genre transgresses the boundaries of sexuality is provided in Crimes of the Future (1970), in which post-pubertal females are afflicted with a disease which causes them to ooze a substance from their orifices, and those around them are compelled to lick the substance off. The members of a pedophile organization believe their activity holds the only hope for the perpetuation of the species.[26]

The blurring of categories creates chaos; these violations challenge our definition of the natural. Nothing is what it seems, thus, the genre operates on the principle of undecidability. This principle is extended from the narrative level to the cinematographic level by

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[26] Kim Newman, Nightmare Movies: A Critical Guide to Contemporary Horror Films (New York: Harmony Books, 1988) 117.

violating the conventional codes that distinguish between subjective and objective representation. The conventions of classical Hollywood cinema differentiate subjective sequences (dreams, hallucinations, day dreams) from objective sequences through the use of lighting effects, slow motion, colored filters, musical motifs, etc. The horror film repeatedly rejects these conventions to blur the boundary between subjective and objective representation. Take for example, Dressed to Kill, where the violation of boundaries is accomplished at the cinematographic level by the film's failure to code fantasy from reality. The film closes with a nightmare sequence which employs bluish lighting, tracking shots, slow motion, eerie music and intense violence. But these techniques are also used in preceding reality scquences. We only learn of the subjective nature of the experience when the film cuts to the sleeper waking. But even then, the break with the nightmare is belied by the overlapping soundtrack: the eerie music and protagonist's screams bleed into the reality sequence.

Rule 3: In horror, the restoration of the normative order is an ambiguous issue.

Classical Hollywood cinema is characterized by narrative closure: the causal logic of narrative events is presented, elements extraneous to the development of narrative logic are eliminated, and all lines of action are

clearly resolved.[27] By the end of the film, the normative order is restored. It is this pattern which characterizes the pre-sixties genre. In contrast, the contemporary genre is characterized by the repudiation of narrative closure.

Narrative resolution in the horror film, defined broadly as the conclusion of the film rather than as a system of closure, is marked by violence: the course of the monster's violence and the violence that is leveled at the monster in the attempt to annihilate it. Narrative resolution can take various forms:

1. The monster is destroyed and the normative order is restored.

Unlike the postmodern genre, the pre-sixties genre is characterized by narrative closure. In the latter, the monster is an irrational other that precipitates violence and transgresses the Law. It is evil because it threatens the social order; the suppression of the unleashed menace is a priority. The violence of the Law restores repression and the social order is reestablished. This is the ending that best conforms to the rules of classical Hollywood cinema. It endorses the maintenance of the status quo and regards departures from it as chaotic and evil. In the 1958 version of The Thing, the alien creature -- a vampiric human-shaped plant -- threatens to transform the human race

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[27] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979) 236.

into livestock until it is destroyed by the military. Thus, through military might, the world is kept safe for (anti-communist) democracy and the clarion call for vigilance is rung.

Unlike the pre-sixties genre, however, the postmodern genre repudiates narrative closure. Nevertheless, it is instructive to look at an exception to this rule -- a 1988 film characterized by narrative closure. The Lady in White is a look-back at the pre-sixties genre, which is nonetheless marked as a post-sixties film. It is a ghost story, set in 1962, about a young boy's two-fold search: for the identity of the psychotic who has been killing children for over a decade, and for the ghost of the mother of the killer's first victim. As befits the contemporary genre, the killer is revealed to be a close, likeable family friend, someone the boy trusts. But unlike the contemporary genre, the film eschews gore, and ties up all the loose ends: the boy is saved, the ghosts of mother and child are reunited, and the killer dies in an act of expiat.

2. The monster triumphs and the normative order is defeated; a new normative order rises in its stead.

The monster is an irrational other that precipitates violence and transgresses the Law. Neither is the monster unambiguously evil nor the social order unambiguously good. The monster as (to use Wood's phrase) the "return of

the repressed" overturns a highly problematic social order; the value of the new order is unclear.[28] This ending throws into question the immutability and desirability of the status quo. In They Came From Within, a worm-like parasite that unleashes people's sexual inhibitions runs amok in an emotionally sterile, middle-income housing complex. The result is a violent breakdown of sexual taboos: promiscuity, homosexuality, intergenerational sex, and incest. The warping excessiveness of the released desires is predetermined by the surplus repression to which they were subjected by bourgeois society. In the end, the inhabitants of the complex drive off, presumably eschewing the constraints of labor force participation, to venereally infect the population at large.

3. The contest between the monster and the normative order is undecided.

The monster is an irrational other who precipitates violence and transgresses the Law. Although in the end the monster appears to be vanquished, the film concludes with signs of a new unleashing; the apparent triumph over the monster is only temporary. Evil prevails as the monster continues to disrupt the normative order. In Dressed to Kill, the psychopath (who murders women that threaten his transsexual designs) is ostensibly thwarted. The

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[28] Robin Wood, "Return of the Repressed," Film Comment 14, no. 4 (July-Aug. 1978): 25-32.

complacency with which the film threatens to close is disrupted, however, by the final violent sequence in which the protagonist dreams her own death. She internalizes the monster, who endures in her psyche. The repressed returns, predictably, in a nightmare.

The lack of closure in this, and the prior, form of narrative resolution prevails. In postmodern horror, danger and disruption are endemic. What makes it tolerable for the monster to persist is the containment of the menace within the spatial and temporal frame of the film. (See below, Rule 5, for further discussion.)

4. The monster, who may or may not be defeated, is revealed to be a symptom of the preceding, corrupt normative order.

The monster is an irrational other who precipitates violence in the name of the Law. Society itself is implicated in the evil. The monster originates within the heteromonogamous nuclear family, the source of psychological trauma and the primary agent of enculturation. In Peeping Tom, the eponymous character, Mark, stabs women with the tripod of his camera while he films them in the act of dying. Late in the film, we learn that as a boy he was the object of his scientist father's voyeuristic experiments in terror. As an adult heir to the paternal legacy, he occupies his father's sadistic position behind the camera and situates women in the victimized

position he occupied as a child. His pathology was born of the violence committed by his father in the name of science, a form of violence that left no physical scars but that no doubt "marked" him. This form of narrative resolution discloses the violence implicit in the normative order and assails its validity.

Rule 4: Horror puts into question the validity of rationality.

Horror exposes the limits of rationality and compels us to confront the irrational. The realm of rationality represents the ordered, intelligible universe which can be controlled and predicted. In contrast, the irrational represents the disordered, ineffable, chaotic and unpredictable universe which constitutes the underside of life. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre throws into question two of the basic underpinnings of our society: causal logic and temporal order. Causal logic collapses in the film; there is no explanation for the murders, cannibalism, dismemberment, and violence which ensues. Furthermore, as Sharrett notes, temporal order collapses in the final sequence of the film:

> It is night when the [grisly parody of the Mad Tea] party [at which Sally is tormented] begins, dawn when Sally crashes through a window and escapes, and late afternoon as she is pursued down the road by Leatherface and his brother.[29]

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[29] Christopher Sharrett, "The Idea of Apocalypse in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen, NJ:

Horror asserts that not everything can or should be dealt with in rational terms. The monster is irrational, impervious to the request to sit down and reason together.[30] The monster's violence takes its own inexorable course. Characters who insist upon rational explanations in the face of evidence that does not lend itself to rationality are destined to become victims of the monster. In A Nightmare on Elm Street, the heroine realizes that when she or any of her friends dream about Freddy Krueger, they can be killed by him in their dreams. Ultimately, she survives because she believes in this irrational premise that collapses dream and reality. Her boyfriend, in contrast, lulls himself into a false sense of security. After all, he is home in bed, his parents are downstairs, and he is surrounded by his electronic paraphernalia. His complacency lets him fall asleep. The rational skeptic, usually male, dies for his epistemological recalcitrance. The ones who survive necessarily suspend their rational presuppositions.

Although the monster is not susceptible to reason or propitiation, it is susceptible to violence. Characters who survive must come to terms not only with the irrationality of the situation but also with their own ability to be as single-mindedly destructive as the

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Scarecrow Press, 1984) 269, 258.

[30] This wonderful metaphor issues from Michael Brown.

monster. In A Nightmare on Elm Street, the heroine learns that during her childhood, Freddy Krueger -- child abuser and murderer -- was burned to death by a vigilante party of outraged parents, including her own. Freddy is avenging himself by slaughtering the children of those parents. She learns that Freddy is the legacy of parental violence, and that she is capable of wielding violence to defend herself.

The narrative is propelled by violence, both the monster's violence and the protagonist's violence. As Tudor puts it, "violence is constitutive of rather than gratuitous to the genre."[31] To be efficaciously violent, the protagonist must objectify the monster, i.e. treat it the way it treats her by using instrumental rationality.[32] Instrumental rationality aims to manipulate and control the object of its gaze, so that "perception...become[s] almost an act of aggressive violence in which the perceiver, like Procrustes with his hapless victims, cuts off those aspects of the object which he cannot use for his

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[31] Tudor 1989, 110.

[32] Weber defines instrumental rationality as action "determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as 'conditions' or 'means' for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends." See Max Weber, Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968) 24.

[purpose]."[33] Paradoxically, although the characters who survive eschew critical tenets of rationality (for example, that the knife-wielding opponent cannot be dead), they utilize instrumental rationality to facilitate their exercise of violence.

Given the genre's privileging of violence and objectification, it is interesting to note that cops and psychiatrists (descendants of the soldiers and scientists of science-fiction horror) are largely absent from or ineffectual in the postmodern genre. They may be structuring absences, as in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, which opens with a news report of the police uncovering a graveyard desecration. Or they may be ineffectual figures. In Halloween, Michael Myers escapes from an insane asylum to return to his hometown to reenact the murder of his sister. The psychiatrist teams up with the local police force to track him down. To emphasize the futility of the Law, we are shown Michael driving directly past the psychiatrist and the police officer without any hint of apprehension on Michael's part, nor any recognition on the part of the Law. The latter is nowhere to be found when the rampage begins. It is the heroine who resorts to

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[33] Ernest Schactel, Metamorphosis (New York: Basic Books, 1959) 171, quoted in Evelyn Fox Keller, Reflections on Gender and Science (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1984) 120. In Greek mythology, the giant Procrustes forced travelers to fit one of two beds either by stretching their bodies or by severing their legs.

violence with great improvisation. She utilizes household devices -- a knitting needle, a kitchen knife, and a hanger -- to attack Michael. Each time, he appears to die, only to rise again. The psychiatrist arrives in time to empty his revolver into Michael's body, causing him to topple off the balcony. Shortly thereafter, the body disappears. As the children in the film well understand, "you can't kill the bogeyman." Neither can you explain him.

Horror throws into question the efficacy of science to understand and control the world, by asserting the need to understand the irrational on its own terms, and by positing limits on understanding. Given horror's critique of science it is not surprising that the characters who survive tend to be those who are culturally associated with the irrational -- women. And given that science constitutes itself as a masculine enterprise, it is not surprising that the doomed rational skeptic tends to be male. What is surprising is that within horror, logos is defeated. According to Hartsock, rationality -- defined as masculine and associated with mastery -- requires the domestication of irrationality -- defined as feminine and associated with the bodily and disorder.[24] In horror, these logocentric terms are overturned.

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[24] Nancy Hartsock. Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism (New York: Longman, 1983).

Rule 5: Horror produces a bounded experience of fear.

Horror is an exercise in recreational terror, a simulation of danger not unlike a roller coaster ride, an exquisite exercise in coping with the terrors of everyday life.[35] Above, in Rule 1, I argue that the horror film violates everyday life. This is true on the narrative level, but on the level of unconscious operations, it is more legitimate to say that horror exposes the terror implicit in everyday life: the pain of loss, the enigma of death, the unpredictability of events, the inadequacy of intentions. It seems odd to talk about everyday life in terms of terror precisely because terror is a routinely repressed aspect of everyday life. The repression of terror is incessant and ubiquitous. As Lefebvre tells us, repression operates "at all levels, at all times and in every sphere of experience." Ironically, repression is effective precisely because everyday life "would seem to

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[35] The physical and emotional thrills experienced by a horror audience may be akin to the biochemical reactions stimulated by the intense physical excitement of a roller coaster ride. This relation is suggested by the etymology of "horror." According to Carroll (1990), "the word 'horror' derives from the Latin 'horrere' -- to stand on end (as hair standing on end) or to bristle -- and the old French 'orror' -- to bristle or to shudder." (24) For a discussion of the effects of roller coaster rides see Daniel Goleman, "Why Do People Crave the Experience?" New York Times (2 Aug. 1988, late ed.: C1, C13). This article was brought to my attention by Jacqueline Madden.

elude social repression...[to be] spontaneous and 'natural'" and therefore exempt from repression.[36]

Horror denaturalizes the repressed by transmuting the "natural" elements of everyday life into the unnatural form of the monster. In Night of the Living Dead, the mindless malevolence of a society is transmuted into the rampage of a group of zombies. This transmutation renders the terror of everyday life at least emotionally accessible. By monstrifying quotidian terrors, horror unearths the repressed. This process is similar to the dream work which Freud (1966) describes. Much as dreams displace and condense repressed thoughts and feelings, horror films introduce monstrous elements to disguise quotidian terrors. Much as dreams are unconscious attempts to express conflicts and resolve tensions, so horror films allow the audience to express and thus, to some extent, master feelings which are too threatening to articulate consciously. The horror film is the equivalent of the cultural nightmare, processing material that is simultaneously attractive and repellent, displayed and obfuscated, desired and repressed.[37] Just as Freud regards dreams, even distressing ones, as wish-fulfillments of

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[36] Henri Lefebvre, Everyday Life in the Modern World (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984) 145.

[37] There is also a historical link; key horror stories have been inspired by nightmares: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Bram Stoker's Dracula, and Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

repressed desires, so I will regard the horror film as an amalgam of desire and inhibition.

Just as a dream must process repressed material so that the dreamer does not wake up, so recreational terror must produce a bounded experience which will not generate so much distress that the audience member walks out.[38] In order to produce recreational terror, the re-creation of terror must be only partial. As Taussig defines it, terror is the threat to the body and the concomitant sense that harm could happen to you.[39] In terror, there is no insulation and no recreation because the re-creation of danger is complete. Whereas in recreational terror, the ritual violation and death of the body is experienced as partial. The experience of terror is bounded by the tension between proximity and distance, reality and illusion.[40] In recreational terror, we fear the threat of

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[38] Audience member refers to the seasoned horror film viewer rather than to a film audience member at random.

[39] Mick Taussig, "Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin's Theory of History as a State of Siege," Social Text (1989): 3-20. In this article, Taussig likens the reign of terror in Columbia to a "Hobbesian world, nasty, brutish, and short, in which...'you can't trust anyone'..." -- a world in which paranoia prevails and "dream and reality commingle." (13-15).

[40] If the tension between proximity and distance slackens, the film degenerates into terrorism or, conversely, parody.

physical danger, but the danger fails to materialize.[41] Having successfully undergone the ordeal, we experience a sense of relief and mastery, proportionate to the intensity of the ordeal.

As much as the horror film is an exercise in terror, it is simultaneously an exercise in mastery, in which controlled loss substitutes for loss of control. It allows us to give free rein to culturally repressed feelings such as terror, rage, and anxiety. It constructs situations where these responses are sanctioned. This bounded experience of terror is achieved through various means: the spatially and temporally finite nature of film; the film's semi-public setting; the acquisition of insider knowledge; and the use of comedy.

1. the spatially and temporally finite nature of film

Film promises a contained experience. What makes it tolerable for the monster to persist is the containment of the menace within the spatial and temporal frame of the film. The screen constitutes the frame on which a film is projected. It marks off a bounded reality, one which need not conform strictly to lived experience. The borders of the screen establish parameters that free the viewer to engage in fantasy. Metz likens the film to a daydream, a

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[41] Targets narrativizes the violation of this parameter when the psychotic killer snipes at the audience of The Terror, thus converting the fantasized threat of physical danger into reality.

diegetic excursion into the unreal, albeit film entails the materialized projection of visual and sound images -- a degree of realism that distinguishes it from the daydream. Both daydream and film are experienced in a waking, contemplative state, in which the person engaged is aware that the experience is imaginary.[42]

A film is not only an imaginary experience, it is also a limited one. Film viewers learn from experience that the average running time of a film is about 90 minutes. Consequently, even when narrative closure is denied, there is the minimal resolution of an ending. In Dressed to Kill, the tidying up of loose ends occurs nearly an hour into the film. Its temporal location marks it as a false ending. The actual ending comes abruptly on the heels of a profoundly threatening scene from which the audience is not given time to recover during the course of the film. In contrast, the false ending in Alien comes at a point marked as an appropriate place for an ending: over 90 minutes have elapsed, the space ship -- and presumably its alien passenger -- is destroyed, and the heroine is hurtling through space preparing for the voyage home. The heroine is behaving as though she were alone, stripped down to her underwear, vulnerable. The shot of the alien inside the shuttle craft comes as a shock to the audience, as it does to the heroine. The film concludes shortly thereafter,

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[42] Metz 1977, 132-35.

with the expulsion (and probable destruction) of the monster.

2. the film's semi-public setting

A movie theater is a semi-public setting, both communal and solitary. It is accessible to the public, for a price, and designed to seat a group in a common space. But, it is also a solitary setting: a darkened arena, where the film projector throws a pool of light at the screen which becomes the collective visual focal point. It is a setting in which people tacitly agree to ignore each other during the course of the film.[43] As Metz remarks, "...in a certain sense one is always alone at the cinema..."[44] Yet the juxtaposition of public and private dimensions generates a space for legitimate social interaction among audience members.[45]

Watching a horror film is, like riding a roller coaster, a collective experience. Horror expressly plays on the physical and emotional response of the audience. It elicits screams, nervous gasps, and laughter. When an involuntary scream escapes our lips, it is reassuring to

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[43] For instance, it is a violation of etiquette for people to talk noisily for extended periods of time, or to remain in the theater with crying children.

[44] Metz 1977, 134.

[45] Albeit, the degree of legitimate public response varies by audience. For instance, the experience of watching Aliens in the Times Square vicinity, with a boisterous audience, was very different from seeing it in East Hampton, where the audience was more reserved.

hear it echoed in the screams of others -- followed by embarrassed titters. Horror elicits audience rebukes and warnings addressed to narrative characters ("Don't go in there"), or about narrative characters ("Heeeeere's Jason").

Such remarks serve several functions. (i) At the simplest level, they evoke tension-breaking laughter. (ii) They constitute attempts to master the situation by taking an authoritative stance; the speaker indicates that s/he would never be so foolish. (iii) As Tudor points out, the competent audience member knows that the warning is futile but nevertheless issues it to express her/his own ambivalence about the dangers of risk-taking.[46] This entails a splitting of the ambivalence, whereby the narrative character performs the dangerous activity, while the audience member remains secure, yet vicariously enjoys the danger. (iv) The collective response serves as a reminder that "you are not alone" and "it's only a movie," and thus serves to reanchor the viewer near the shores of reality. (v) These remarks serve as forms of interaction with other members of the audience, who monitor each other's responses. Thus, the collective response facilitates the construction of the audience -- a heterogeneous group with simultaneous but diverse responses

[46] Tudor 1989, 112.

who share the parameters of the genre, but within those parameters, variety operates freely.

3. the acquisition of insider knowledge

The audience shares not only the experience of the moment, but also a past; it is an audience with a history of viewing. Repeated exposure to horror constitutes a process of socialization which seasons the audience. Innovations within instances of the genre, before they attain the status of standard fare, insure that the seasoning process is never complete. Even the most weathered audience is vulnerable to the possibility of innovation, to a shocking combination of elements that violates expectations based on preceding instances of the genre. A seasoned audience is only so relative to one that is naive by comparison. The seasoned audience is familiar with narrative motifs and character types, with camera work and musical codes that warn of impending violence. When the adolescent rational skeptic wanders off into the woods of Crystal Lake (the preferred setting for Friday the 13th films), and the music takes on an ominous quality, can violence be far behind? Narrative pleasure derives from the intelligibility of the genre, the deployment of generic conventions to approach the irrational, to discern the logic to the madness.

Insider knowledge is especially high in serial films such as Halloween, Friday the 13th, and A Nightmare on Elm

Street. The serial audience shares the pleasure of privileged information about Michael, Jason, and Freddy, the respective killers of these films. As members of a competent audience, we can bask in the knowledge that we would not act as foolishly as the diegetic characters; we would know what to do. Insider knowledge provides a measure of mastery. If we understand it, if we have some idea of what to expect, it becomes less menacing and we can brave it. In Aliens, when the search party nears the nest, the audience that has seen Alien knows they are perilously close, but the soldiers are unaware of the danger. Even Ripley, the narrative link between the two films, does not know; she was not a member of the search team in the original film. This is the privileged position of the sequel audience.

4. the use of comedy

Comedy serves a double, paradoxical, function in horror films. First, it produces the proverbial comic relief, the cessation of terror, thus providing the requisite distance to stave off terrorism at strategic points. Humor frequently involves intertextual references. In a direct allusion to insider knowledge about slasher films, a character in Friday the 13th Part VI says, "I've seen enough horror films to know this means trouble." (paraphrase) Playing on older audience knowledge about horror films, characters in The Howling, a film about

New Age werewolves, watch the 1941 version of The Wolf Man.[47] The play with intertextuality presupposes not only an audience with a history of film viewing but also an audience with a history of literary horror consumption. In Day of the Dead, a domesticated zombie reads Pet Sematary, a Stephen King novel about zombies. Is this a wry comment on the mental acuity of the horror fan, the self-reflexivity of the genre, or both?

Second, comedy produces incongruous, contradictory, illogical effects that create proximity to the terror at hand. Since both comedy and horror depend on "the radical cheating of expectations" one can be used to produce the other.[48] The horror genre must keep comedy and terror in tension if it is to successfully tread the thin line that separates it from parody and terrorism. If comedy produces an excess of distance, the result is parody. If terror produces an excess of proximity, the result is terrorism. A delicate balance is struck in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre where the decaying, yet marginally animate, corpse of Granpa not only incorporates horrific and humorous effects but actually utilizes one to exacerbate the other. The

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[47] The Howling is replete with intertextual references. In hommage to the history of the genre, characters are named after directors of other werewolf films: Dr. George Waggner (The Wolf Man), and Terry Fisher (The Curse of the Werewolf). It includes among the cast, Kevin McCarthy (Invasion of the Body Snatchers), Forrest Ackerman (Famous Monsters of Filmland), and Roger Corman.

[48] Bordwell 1979, 31.

humor is born of the absurdity of storing the mummified corpses of Granpa, Granma, and the family dog in an upstairs chamber. The "boys" have trouble bringing the patriarchal mummy downstairs. They revive him by letting him suck the blood from the heroine's lacerated finger. The ancient patriarch is simultaneously a totemic figure (who represents the romanticized past when manual slaughter prevailed in the butcher industry) and an infantile dependent. The horror is born of the torment of the young woman subjected to imprisonment and abuse. She is caught in a bedlam where the madmen are free and the others are destroyed or driven to insanity. In bewilderment, we cringe at the gallows humor and laugh at the terror.

The horror film is as much an exercise in mastery, as it is an exercise in terror. We are not, after all, overcome by the monster. If the image becomes too much to bear, we can avert our eyes and cover our ears. It is a test of our mettle to survive the ordeal, and yet the ordeal itself is not without its pleasures. Horror affords us the opportunity to express our fear of living in a minefield or, perhaps more accurately, it affords us the opportunity to dance through the minefield. It is a psychoanalytic paradox that repression, rather than shelter us from the repressed, puts us at its mercy, whereas being in touch with our feelings confers some measure of control over our lives. The horror film allows for the expression,

and thus the mastery, of repressed feelings. It is to this process, and to the nature of the pleasures afforded by horror, that I will now turn.

CHAPTER FOUR

FILM PLEASURE AND PROCESSES OF IDENTIFICATION: A LOOK AT FEMINIST PSYCHOANALYTIC FILM THEORY

The pleasure of the film viewer is a hotly contested topic in film theory. I will couch my analysis of the pleasures of the horror genre in the terrain of feminist and psychoanalytic film theory. I employ psychoanalytic theory to address a key problematic for feminist inquiry -- sexuality. I am not using psychoanalytic theory reductively, nor because, as Tudor fears psychoanalytic theorists are wont to do, I am inclined to believe that "...no normal person could actually enjoy this stuff." And although I do believe that "...horror movies must be tapping deep-seated desires, [and] gratifying... needs," I believe these desires are shared by cultural members, regardless of their viewing habits.[1] Ultimately, it is the larger issue of gender dynamics and representational politics which concern me. But, to get to these issues as they relate to the horror genre, it is necessary to address

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[1] Andrew Tudor, Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 106.

the body of work which most rigorously addresses representational issues in film.

The feminist psychoanalytic literature presupposes that the pleasure of the spectator is unconsciously structured through processes of identification, and that film viewing is a process in which the spectator constructs meaning, including self-meaning. Much of this literature speaks to the work of Jacques Lacan, and it is for this reason that I will periodically outline parts of his theoretical apparatus.

Central to this literature is Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, in which the (male) child begins to develop a unified sense of "I" through identification (merging) with the mirror image of his body.[2] This process entails both a recognition of his image, and a misrecognition of his image. That is to say, it is not his body that he is perceiving, but a unified, idealized representation of his body. When Baudry applies this model to film, he notes the occurrence of a double misrecognition. The viewer does not identify with a representation of his own body but rather, either identifies narcissistically with (the representation of) a narrative character's body, or he identifies voyeuristically with the disembodied look of the cinematic

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[2] I will use the male pronoun here to signify the unreflexive use of the male-as-norm in theory.

apparatus.[3] According to Baudry, film viewing, like the mirror stage, entails an ideological operation, namely the (mis)recognition of oneself as the locus of meaning.[4]

Dayan explains how this works through the shot-reverse-shot formation, a series of shots that insert the spectator into the film through the process of identification. The first shot (the camera pans a landscape) establishes a visual field which signifies "the absent-one who is looking at what we see." According to psychoanalytic theory, absence sets desire into motion, in this case the desire to know who is looking. The second, or reverse, shot satisfies this desire by establishing a narrative character from whose perspective the first shot is assumed to have been taken, the fictional owner of the gaze, with whom the spectator's vision is aligned. The spectator is thus positioned in relation to the image, sutured or sewn into the film by means of identification with the narrative character.[5]

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[3] The cinematic apparatus refers here to "...the various machines and techniques involved in the making and screening of films..." See Teresa De Lauretis and Stephen Heath, The Cinematic Apparatus (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980) ix.

[4] Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," Movies and Methods: Volume II, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985) [originally published in 1970]

[5] Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema," Movies and Methods, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976) 448-9. [originally published in 1974]

The horror film operates with two important variations on this convention:

(1) In what I will call the solitary reverse shot, the reverse or reaction shot is shown prior to or without the shot that sets the grounds for that reaction. It is conventional for horror films to foreground a terror-stricken face paralyzed by the monster's offscreen gaze. Central to this face are the eyes agape with horror and the mouth stretched into a scream. These openings express "a sudden supreme taxing of our perceptions, as if only by being opened to their fullest could the eyes [and mouth], somehow, process this...threatening appearance," an appearance that is withheld from the audience, thus setting the desire to know into motion.[6] This scene may be repeated various times before the monster who evokes the horror is seen by the audience. As Telotte points out, the unsettling quality of this convention is due to its subversion of rationality. The solitary reverse shot reverses the cause-and-effect sequence which rational discourse leads us to expect. We see the effect (the incredulous stare of the victim) without seeing the cause (the monster).

(2) The unclaimed point of view shot is a long shot (a distanced framing in which figures are seen against a

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[6] J.P. Telotte, "Faith and Idolatry in the Horror Film," Literature Film Quarterly (8 no. 3, 1980) 146-7.

dominant background) held long enough and framed so as to create the impression that someone is watching, but without a reverse shot to suture in the spectator. It belongs by implication to the monster. We see a variant of it in Halloween: The camera tracks Jamie Lee Curtis walking down the street. In the left hand corner of the frame we see a man's arm; at a distance we see Curtis. The camera cuts to Curtis who looks disturbed. When she apprehensively turns to see if someone is following her, the camera cuts to a shot of an empty street. What the audience sees is a prolonged point of view (POV) shot that inscribes the viewer in the monster's gaze, followed by a shot of no-one-there where the monster should be.

The unclaimed POV shot is unfettered by the limits of a human body. Its vague, menacing presence is structured by an excessive absence. In classic voyeuristic fashion, the one who exercises the gaze can see but cannot be seen. The voyeur occupies the gap. The unclaimed POV shot is also structured by an excessive presence. It is transcendent, not located in a fixed space. The monster's movements through space defy linear logic. He (sic) is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Jean Mitry's words articulate the experience of the transcendental subject. "In the cinema I am simultaneously in this action and outside of it, in this space and out of this space. Having

the power of ubiquity, I am everywhere and nowhere."[7] In Halloween, Curtis senses that she is being pursued, but when she looks, there is no one there. Her friends think she is being paranoid, but the audience knows better. Paranoia is validated through the system of looks, defined as a valid epistemological position, a way of knowing what cannot be seen.

Conventionally, the transcendental gaze is attributed to a male narrative character. By attributing the transcendental gaze to the monster, the monster is positioned as masculine. The counterpart of this convention is to position a female narrative character as the object of the gaze, as spectacle. The prevalence of female victims in horror films presupposes this convention. The (masculine) transcendental gaze controls the (feminine) object of its gaze.[8] In horror films, female victims predominate, if not in sheer numbers, then in the detail with which the camera lingers on the mutilation of the female body.

The solitary reverse shot and the unclaimed POV shot operate in tandem. The two strategies withhold or obscure the image of the monster while simultaneously foregrounding

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[7] Quoted in Baudry 1985, 541.

[8] Although these masculine and feminine positions largely correspond to male and female characters, I am not assuming that they have to. By masculine and feminine I do not mean intrinsic characteristics of male and female, but rather dominant and subordinate positionings, respectively.

the image of the woman as spectacle. By foregrounding the spectacle of the woman paralyzed by the monster's offscreen gaze, the film positions the spectator within the monster's field of vision, within the voyeuristic murderous gaze.

There are a series of displacements operating in this camera work, culminating in the construction of the murderous gaze. In the first place, the (murderous) gaze, properly belongs to the cinematic apparatus (the level of enunciation or production).[9] This cinematic gaze is displaced onto the narrative character of the monster (the level of fiction). Both the solitary reverse shot and the unclaimed POV shot align the spectator with the monster's field of vision, and therefore within the murderous gaze. Secondly, the voyeuristic experience of the audience is displaced onto the narrative character of the monster. According to Metz, voyeurism is one of the primary mechanisms of pleasure in film viewing. Metz likens film viewing to the primal scene -- a transgressive, sexual, and secretive experience.[10] The audience sits in a darkened, semi-public space, looking at "the aperture of the screen

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[9] As Kaja Silverman defines it, "the level of enunciation is...that of production -- of camera movement, editing, composition, sound-recording, sound-mix, script, etc." See The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983) 46.

[10] According to Constance Penley, the primal scene refers to "the fantasy of overhearing or observing parental intercourse, of being on the scene, so to speak, of one's own conception." See "Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia," Camera Obscura (no. 15, 1986) 202.

with its inevitable keyhole effect," able to scrutinize the represented bodies of people and things without being observed, without being subject to a reciprocal glance or punishment for looking. The audience engages in "unauthorized scopophilia" or what Kuhn refers to as "lawless seeing" -- able to watch a fantasy without having to take responsibility for what unfolds.[11]

Voyeurism is a form of scopophilia, or sexual pleasure in looking. According to Mulvey, "...voyeurism...has associations with sadism"; it allows for the control, disparagement and punishment of the (sexual) object.[12] Unlike Metz, Mulvey does not treat these subject positions as ungendered, nor does she assume that female and male spectators are identically interpellated into narrative. She theorizes that there are masculine and feminine positionings in the reception process. The masculine viewer is positioned as the subject of the gaze, i.e. to identify voyeuristically with the cinematic apparatus or narcissistically with the male protagonist. In contrast, the feminine viewer is positioned as the object of the

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[11] Christian Metz, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977) 61-63; Annette Kuhn, Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) 58.

[12] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Movies and Methods: Volume II (1985) 311. [originally published in 1975] Metz also claims that voyeurism is sadistic. (1977, 62)

gaze, i.e. to identify narcissistically with the fetishized body that is constantly being looked at, not only by the spectator but by the characters in the film.[13]

As Mulvey sees it, the only subject position available to spectators is through narcissistic identification with (idealized) male characters or voyeuristic identification with the cinematic apparatus. Since the presumed spectator is male, this leaves the question of a subject position for women open. The masculine and feminine positionings which Mulvey outlines suggest that relations of looking must be situated within relations of power, for they are invariably structured through the mediation of patriarchy (male dominance). Moreover, both positions are overdetermined by the Oedipal logic of narrative, a dynamic I will elaborate shortly.

But first, I will address several significant elisions in Mulvey's analysis, elisions which when recovered may lead us in fertile directions. First, as Rodowick points out, she fails to discuss the male star as an erotic object of the look.[14] This can be attributed to her presupposition of heterosexual terms (in which case the male spectator can only constitute the female as the erotic object of the look) and her failure, within these terms, to

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[13] Mulvey 1985, 309.

[14] D.N. Rodowick, "The Difficulty of Difference," Wide Angle (5 no. 1, 1982) 8.

theorize the female spectator as subject (in which case only the female spectator can constitute the male as the erotic object of the look).[15] Second, and this is a related point, she aligns male with active and female with passive in a deterministic way; the male is the active agent of the look and the female is the passive object of the look, within a heterosexual matrix. This dichotomization overlooks the fluidity of Freud's (and Lacan's) discussion of sexual desire. As Bergstrom notes, Freud maintains that

> sexual desire is characteristically unstable, both in [choice of love] object [male/female] and in [sexual] aim [active/passive]. Most fundamentally, because Freud argues for a predisposition to bisexuality, the field of choice of both sexual object and sexual aim is defined as a continuum where the end points (male/female and active/passive) are ideal, or theoretical.[16]

When extrapolated to film viewing, this conceptualization of desire suggests that pleasure is derived from the <u>oscillation</u> between masculine and feminine identifications (gaze and spectacle), active and passive aims (voyeurism and narcissism), male and female object

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[15] This characterization overlooks the popularity of male stars who capitalize on their bodies as eroticized objects of the look, and it begs the question: Is the look of heterosexual males at the highly eroticized bodies of Stallone and Swarzenegger <u>only</u> narcissistic?

[16] Janet Bergstrom, "Sexuality at a Loss: The Films of F.W. Murnau," <u>The Female Body in Western Culture</u>, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986) 258-9.

choices (bisexuality). It is towards this oscillation that I will now turn.

De Lauretis tells us that voyeurism (identification with the look) and narcissism (identification with the image) operate together. Indeed, narrative demands that the voyeuristic position and the narcissistic position be occupied -- i.e. identified with -- simultaneously. According to De Lauretis,

> Neither can be abandoned for the other, even for a moment; no image can be identified or identified with, apart from the look that inscribes it as image, and vice versa....[Therefore] the masculine, active, identification with the gaze (the looks of the camera and of the male characters) and the passive, feminine identification with the image (body, landscape)....must be identified with at once...

She characterizes this "two-fold process of identification" as intrinsic to narrativity.[17]

De Lauretis's position differs markedly from Mulvey's. Mulvey is still embedded within the gendered subject-object split when she claims that cinematic visual pleasure structures a subject position for man, but at the expense of woman; the only subject position dominant cinema proffers women is a masculinizing one, i.e. through identification with male characters and the masculine

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[17] Teresa De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984) 142-4.

gaze.[18] In contrast, De Lauretis questions the determinacy of these gender-bifurcated positions, and thus opens up a space for theorizing a subject position for woman within dominant cinema.

For these and other reasons I will make clear later, I will adhere to De Lauretis's formulation. In other words, I am not proposing that the putative male spectator identifies voyeuristically with the gaze and that his counterpart, the putative female spectator, identifies narcissistically with the object of the gaze. This gender-bifurcated model is overly simplistic in its mutually exclusive determination of (masculine/sadistic/voyeuristic and feminine/masochistic/narcissistic) subject assignments.[19] On the contrary, what I am proposing is that both male and female spectators identify voyeuristically and narcissistically -- simultaneously -- in the narrative process.

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[18] Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by Duel in the Sun (King Vidor, 1946)," Framework (no. 15/16/17, 1981) 15. My use of the terms "man" and "men" is analogous to De Lauretis's use of the terms "woman" and "women." The first denotes a representational construct, while the second denotes a historical subject. (1984, 5)

[19] This gender-bifurcated model also condones, if not endorses, the prescription of some psychoanalytic theorists that women, vis-a-vis men, are inherently masochistic. This is a highly problematical position for various reasons, not the least of which is that it yields a reactionary political application: masochism is equated with victimization and the oppression of women is naturalized.

If we locate this dynamic in terms of the horror film, we are inscribed in the point of view of both the sadist/monster and the masochist/victim. They are two sides of the proverbial coin, two aspects of violent activity. The pleasure to be derived from these sadistic and masochistic positionings is based on the availability of shifting identifications. The oscillating dynamic of these identifications is more accurately conveyed in the term "sadomasochism," a term which presupposes interdependence and movement between sadism and masochism. The interchangeability of subject positions affords us the pleasure of fantasy; it allows us to fantasize our murderous and masochistic impulses, to feel raw fear and rage with impunity, to experience submission and mastery.

Now to address the topic of the Oedipal logic of narrative, let us return to the spectacle of the terror-stricken woman paralyzed by the monster's offscreen gaze. As Williams points out, because the monster's body is withheld from sight, the woman's mutilated body becomes the only visible horror.[20] The excess of her terror-stricken face and mutilated body stands in for the absence of the monster's body. What is going on here? How does the woman's monstrosity arise? Is this not yet

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[20] Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (Frederick, MD: American Film Institute, 1984) 96.

another version of the psychoanalytic narrative in which horror springs from the sight of the woman's body? The Freudian Oedipal narrative tells us that to speak of the woman's body as mutilated is to be redundant. Freud speaks of the boy's reaction to the castrated condition of woman as one of "horror for the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her."[21] What is seen to evoke horror and contempt in this scene? Nothing less than the woman's body. It is to this "less" that we must now turn.

Before delving into how the woman's body operates specifically in horror, we must first explore the larger question of how the woman's body operates in classical Hollywood cinema.[22] Within the latter tradition, the construction of sexual difference and, concomitantly, sexual identity takes place on the terrain of the woman's body. Mulvey's seminal article addresses how this process is accomplished through relations of looking. As Mulvey tells us, women are traditionally "looked at and displayed...their appearance coded for strong visual and

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[21] Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works 19, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953) 252.

[22] I base my use of this term on the analysis presented in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985) 370. Although this book treats filmmaking between 1917 and 1960, the Hollywood mode of production and classical style they detail remain dominant.

erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness."[23] This "hyperspecularization of the female subject" contrasts sharply with the "despecularization of the male subject," a relation Silverman, following Flugel, treats historically.[24] Silverman utilizes Flugel's argument, in The Psychology of Clothes, that starting with the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century, class distinctions in masculine clothing (whereby aristocratic men signify their leisure through narcissistic display) started to recede while gender distinctions (whereby bourgeois women, as male objects of conspicuous consumption, signify their leisure through narcissistic display) started to intensify, a phenomenon he terms "The Great Masculine Renunciation." Consequently, masculine narcissistic and exhibitionistic desires were redirected into such activities as scopophilia and "male identification with woman-as-spectacle."[25]

As Silverman argues, this relation is born out in classical Hollywood cinema, where male sexuality/

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[23] Mulvey 1985, 309.

[24] Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988) 24.

[25] Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986) 141. See also J.C. Flugel, The Psychology of Clothes (London: Hogarth Press, 1930).

subjectivity is constructed through the negation of the body and the consequent ability to dominate. Cinematically, he is accorded mastering speech, hearing and sight.[26] Recall that the (masculine) transcendental gaze, which I discussed above in relation to the unclaimed POV shot, is above all a disembodied look that signifies power through the negation of the (specificity/limitations of the) body. Conversely, female sexuality/subjectivity is defined through the scrutinization of the body and consequent objectification. Cinematically, she is relentlessly positioned as passive through both sound and visual regimes; she is unable to look, speak, or hear authoritatively.[27] She is the object of the gaze, held captive in the grip of the panopticon.

Foucault's description of how the panopticon, or scopic regime of the prison, operates resonates with the voyeurism implicit in both the transcendental gaze and the film viewing experience.

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[26] Silverman 1988; 25, 48-51.

[27] Silverman 1988, 63-71. Ironically, the male infant first experiences a female as the overseer of his body. The mother's gaze supervises the body's activities, but the female gaze is suppressed in relation to the adult male body. The suppression of the female gaze may be a compensatory defense against the scrutiny of the maternal gaze, and film a representational instance of the institutionalization of unconscious male defenses. Blue Velvet seems to suggest the same. Frank, the sadist who controls Dorothy, calls her "Mommy" and wants to be called "Baby" as he fucks and abuses her. She is pointedly forbidden to look upon his body. Masochism is implicit in the female's restricted ability to see, hear, or speak.

> [B]y the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible...[28]

The female's, like the prisoner's, incessant visibility is necessary to control her. Thus, it becomes imperative not only to survey women, but to implant visibility in the feminine psyche, to make surveillance omnipresent. As Berger says, "a woman must continually watch herself," a sentence which contains a hint of the punitive consequences in store for women who do not "watch" themselves.[29] Inversely, the male's, like the guard's, physical occultation is necessary to his exercise of domination.

> In order to be exercised, this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere...[30]

Scopophilia ensures that the specular relations which constitute this field of perception -- the gaze and the spectacle -- are erotic operations. Voyeurism requires a body which is fetishized, or overinvested with erotic

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[28] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 200.

[29] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (New York: Penguin Books, 1972) 46.

[30] Foucault 214.

value; the gaze positions woman as the erotic object. According to Neale, "the erotic component in the look... tends constantly to be displaced away from the male and on to the female -- on to that which is already ideologically defined and accepted as an unproblematic sexual object."[31]

But woman's status as "unproblematic sexual object" is not without its problems. According to Mulvey, woman as spectacle evokes not only pleasure but castration anxiety in the male spectator.[32] The threatening aspect of looking at (representations of) women stems from the Oedipus complex, a process I will recount in brief. The infant experiences castration anxiety when he (sic) perceives, by looking at his mother's body, that she lacks a penis. Within the context of the patriarchal family, where the father's interventions discredit the child's pre-Oedipal perceptions of the mother as omnipotent, the mother's apparent lack (of the phallus or the power represented by the penis) constitutes a threat to the infant because the infant associates her "lack" with his own fantasies of castration and powerlessness. Through the Oedipal process,

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[31] Stephen Neale, Genre (British Film Institute, 1980) 57.

[32] Mulvey 1985, 311. Recall that the argument which Mulvey puts forth in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," assumes either that the spectator is male or that cinematic operations constitute the spectator as masculine. Her argument makes this presupposition, at least in part, because it is grounded in Freudian Oedipal theory which presupposes a male subject.

the mother's body comes to signify the threat of castration and powerlessness. This signification becomes generalized to (representations of) all women's bodies.

Woman's signification of lack can trigger castration anxiety in the male spectator, transmuting pleasure into displeasure. Mulvey suggests two cinematic solutions to this danger. One is to fetishize the female body, to disavow her castration by substituting a part of her body -- hands, face, shoes -- for the absent phallus.[33] The fetish substitutes for the phallic deficiency, the hole. Her castration is disavowed; she is whole. The second is to demonstrate that the woman's castration is due to her (sexual) transgressions. In this voyeuristic operation, the woman is investigated, found wanting, and her guilt established as the grounds of her punishment; her castration is reenacted.

As the marked category, the female body stands in for castration. This positioning functions to anatomically naturalize castration and to project castration exclusively onto woman. Silverman argues that this positioning is the object of a significant displacement which occurs at the levels of male subject formation, Freudian theory, and

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[33] Freud suggests that the fetish corresponds to a part of the mother's body associated with the experience of "seeing" her castrated condition. Thus, it is a symptom that simultaneously points to and away from his (sic) knowledge of her castration. Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," The Standard Edition 21, 1961.

classical Hollywood cinema. I will trace her argument, starting with her stunning appropriation of Lacan.

Lacan posits that there are symbolic castrations which precede the recognition of anatomical difference. Unlike Freud, he locates the genesis of castration in the pre-Oedipal period. In the mirror stage, the child begins to develop a sense of self, a sense of boundaries. This process involves separating from and thereby losing objects which the child had experienced as a part of itself: the mother's breast, the mother's voice, feces, a loved blanket. The child experiences these losses as an amputation, a castration. The subject who emerges from this process is already structured by lack. Or, as Silverman puts it:

> [T]he various pre-Oedipal castrations....produce a subject who is structured by lack long before the "discovery" of sexual difference, a subject whose very coherence and certitude are predicated on division and alienation.[34]

These terrible losses become the site of a repression as the child enters the Oedipal period. Here, female and male subjects diverge. The male subject is, after all, privileged vis-a-vis the female subject in patriarchal culture. Repression is succeeded by strategies of projection and denial which shore up the self-esteem of the male subject at the expense of the female. Before the Oedipal male subject engages in disavowal of the female's

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[34] Silverman 1988, 16.

anatomically castrated condition, he engages in projection, i.e. he projects his experience of pre-Oedipal castration onto the female body. "In short, what he disavows is his own insufficiency, and the mechanism of that disavowal is projection."[35]

Through the mediation of patriarchal culture, "[the female subject] is obliged to absorb the male subject's lack as well as her own." Male subjectivity is thus structured through a complex series of projection and denial. "The boundaries of male subjectivity must be constantly redrawn through the externalizing displacement onto the female subject of what Kristeva would call the 'abject'" or what I earlier called the monstrous.[36] What is unacceptable in the male must be displaced onto the degraded female, so that the horror of his own loss can be transmuted into "horror for the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her."

Silverman extends her argument from male subject formation to Freud's theorization of this process. She provocatively argues that this process of displacement is reenacted by Freud on the theoretical level in the Oedipus complex, a theory which focuses on (male) disavowal (of female castration) but occludes projection (of male

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[35] Silverman 1988, 18.

[36] Silverman 1988; 31, 81. See Chapter Three of this work.

castration onto the female body). In a sense, the Oedipal trauma of castration serves as something of a screen memory which both occludes and symptomatizes the earlier pre-Oedipal castrations.[37] In light of this, Silverman utilizes Freud's discussion of the "uncanny" to support her own thesis:

> [H]e defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." According to the terms of Freud's own argument, if the spectacle of female castration strikes the male viewer as "uncanny," he himself must already have experienced castration....Thus, what seems to confront him from without in the guise of the "mutilated" female body, actually threatens him from within, in the form of his own history.[38]

Now that the context for it has been established, I will summarize the strategy of fetishization elaborated above. The function of the fetish is to conceal castration through a double maneuver: by defining castration as the exclusive (anatomical) property of the woman (projection of male lack onto woman) and then covering over her castrated condition (denial of female lack). Thus the male subject, shall we say, erects a double line of defense against the acknowledgement of his own castrated condition.

The terms outlined above prevail within psychoanalytic film theory, but they are not the only terms involved in

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[37] The double operation of projection and denial can also be read into the double meaning of screen: the site of visibility and knowledge, the object of concealment.

[38] Silverman 1988, 17; quoting from Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," The Standard Edition (17) 220.

the debate over the pleasure(s) of the film viewer. Studlar, for one, takes issue with many of these points, particularly Metz and Mulvey's contention that there is a connection between sadism and visual pleasure. In opposition to this model, Studlar posits a connection between masochism and visual pleasure. Studlar redraws many of the scenarios in the Metz-Mulvey model in accordance with the masochistic aesthetic. For instance, Metz treats the primal scene as an analogy for the (always sadistic) voyeurism of film viewing. Studlar accepts the primal scene as an analogy for film viewing, but regards both as masochistic experiences wherein the subject fantasizes discovery and punishment.[39] The "sadism" model of Metz and Mulvey is grounded in Oedipal dynamics (the centrality of castration anxiety), voyeurism, and the pleasure of mastery; whereas the "masochism" model of Studlar is grounded in pre-Oedipal dynamics (fear of abandonment by the mother), fetishism, and the pleasure of submission.[40] I want to explore Studlar's article, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," to get a purchase on the importance of masochism in spectatorship -- a structuring absence of Mulvey's work -- and on the dialectic of pleasure and guilt.

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[39] Metz 1977, 59-63.

[40] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," Quarterly Review of Film Studies (Fall 1984) 269.

Studlar begins her exploration of this taboo subject by challenging the heterosexual assumption, implicit in Mulvey's theory, that separates identification from object choice. If Freud and Lacan's insistence on bisexuality is to be taken seriously, then we must consider the operations of opposite-sex identification and same-sex object choice. Studlar argues that it is incumbent upon those who theorize pleasure to consider the implications of the spectator's "ability to simultaneously desire and also identify with the opposite sex..." She points out that

> When opposite sex identification has been considered, it has most often been regarded as a <u>problem</u> for the female spectator rather than as a potential <u>pleasure</u> available to both sexes....Neglected are the possibilities of male identification with the female... or his identification with a "feminized" masculine character.[41]

Or, to extend Studlar's argument, consider the implications of the spectator's ability to simultaneously identify with and also desire the same sex. Neglected are the possibilities of male desire for the male, and female desire for the female.

The processes of which Mulvey and Studlar speak are not necessarily conscious ones. Indeed, Studlar claims, following Baudry (1976), that the film spectator regresses to an earlier perceptual mode, one structured by fluid boundaries reminiscent of the pre-Oedipal period. This regression frees the spectator to enjoy multiple

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[41] Studlar 270, 277-78. My emphasis.

identifications and desires normally repressed, including "primary identification [i.e. merging] with the mother" and the pleasure of shifting gender identifications. It is this which the masochistic aesthetic offers the spectator. Moreover, it constructs a subject position for woman, a place from which she can look, through identification with a dominant female character, and from which she can be controlled by the dominant female. According to Studlar,

> The female in the masochistic aesthetic...asserts...her power...[S]he is the object of the look [as in the sadistic aesthetic] but [unlike in the latter, she is] also the holder of a 'controlling' gaze that turns the male into an object of "to-be-looked-at-ness."[42]

Having launched this well-founded critique of Mulvey's model, Studlar reformulates the concept of fetishism which both theories share. Unlike Mulvey, she locates the genesis of fetishism in pre-Oedipal dynamics: the fetish substitutes for the loss of the mother's body during her absence. The fetish of masochism constructs a "fort/da game of desire" which reenacts the scene of separation (from the mother) that sets desire into motion.[43] Studlar concludes from this discussion that one need not call upon castration anxiety to account for fetishism, and accuses

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[42] Studlar 267, 277, 273. My emphasis.

[43] Studlar 275-6, 272. Freud discusses fort/da, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, as a game a child plays to negotiate the anxiety of being separated from his mother. The game entails alternately concealing and revealing a spool, a metaphor for the loss and recovery of the love object -- mother. Thus the boy, not unlike the horror film viewer, plays out his fears in order to master them.

Mulvey of "reducing spectatorial pleasure to the workings of the castration complex..."[44] Be that as it may, if we read Mulvey's and Studlar's works in the light of Silverman's reformulation of castration theory, then we need not reject either. For Silverman locates castration (Mulvey's focal point) in the pre-Oedipal subject (Studlar's focal point). Among the pre-Oedipal castrations Silverman lists is the loss of the mother('s breast). Both Silverman and Studlar regard the latter as a fundamental structuring experience which precedes the recognition of sexual difference (upon which Mulvey's work is premised). Silverman's reading allows us to see that these (pre-Oedipal and Oedipal, masochistic and sadistic) processes are not mutually exclusive but coterminous.

WHEN THE WOMAN LACKS

Let us now turn to the question of how the woman's body operates in the horror genre. The first of my detailed analyses is not a genre film but an experimental narrative called Peeping Tom. Although it does not operate in the mode of classical Hollywood cinema, it nevertheless examines the representational practices of classical Hollywood cinema and, in particular, the horror genre. Peeping Tom serves as an exemplary text, an extreme film which compresses many of the elements which subsequently

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[44] Studlar 274.

came to characterize the horror genre. It is an extreme example of one of the central dynamics of classical Hollywood cinema, namely the oscillating and interchangeable nature of subject positions.[45] Moreover, the film's panoptic regime and its foregrounding of fetishization provide a fruitful opportunity to examine the relationship between processes of identification and (how they are mapped on) the woman's body.

Peeping Tom was released in 1960, the same year that saw the release of Psycho. Upon their release, both films met with vitriolic execration by critics, and both have been redeemed by academic critics in the intervening decades.[46] The reaction to Peeping Tom is typically an extreme one. Of the nine critics who listed their choice of top ten horror films, in Hardy's Encyclopedia of Horror Movies, six included Peeping Tom.[47] In contrast, Peeping Tom's 1960 release provoked nearly unanimous condemnation from reviewers. Nina Hibbin of the Daily Worker expressed dismay: "I was shocked to the core to find a director of his standing befouling the screen with such perverted

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[45] My reading of Peeping Tom is indebted to Silverman's (1988, 32-41) and Williams' (1984, 90-93) readings.

[46] Peeping Tom however, unlike Psycho, is not in wide circulation. The video is out of print, and extant copies are difficult to locate.

[47] Phil Hardy, ed. Encyclopedia of Horror Movies (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) 397-8.

nonsense...[I]t is wholly evil." Derek Hill's comments in the Tribune were scatological: "The only really satisfactory way to dispose of Peeping Tom would be to shovel it up and flush it swiftly down the nearest sewer."[48] In addition to the critical hostility, the backlash to the film included the director, Michael Powell's ostracism from the industry. What moral boundaries did the film violate to elicit such scorn and disgust? Let us take a look.

Peeping Tom opens with a visual trope: an extreme close-up of Mark Lewis' closed eye in the throes of rapid eye movement. The eye flies open, evincing terror. Later, we learn that this "opening" shot of the adult Mark is fraught with echoes of Mark's childhood, when he was the object of his father's scientific experiments on "the effects of fear on the nervous system." The man is "marked" by the father's systematic effacement of the boy's subjectivity, by the incessant location of the boy in the position of spectacle. How Mark learns to deal with this castrating placement is the subject of the film.

The film cuts to a man (Mark) approaching a woman on the street, a woman of the street, a movie camera concealed in his coat. As he approaches her, he turns on the camera. The film aligns us with Mark's point of view by showing

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[48] Cited in Ian Christie, "The Scandal of Peeping Tom," Powell, Pressburger, and Others, ed. Ian Christie (London: British Film Institute, 1978) 54-5.

the events unfold through the view finder. His gaze on the world is mediated through the cinematic apparatus which traps the woman's body in its cross hairs. As the woman undresses on the bed, the camera moves away from her. Mark's arm obstructs the view; we hear a snap. When the camera re-positions her in center frame, he closes in on her. She screams, eyes and mouth gaping into the camera, in a solitary reverse shot.

The film cuts to Mark watching the (black and white) film of the murder we just witnessed. The film Mark sees is framed by the edges of the diegetic screen, and accompanied by nondiegetic silent-movie piano music.[49] When she undresses, the film cuts to a long shot to show Mark rising to his feet. The diegetic film ends with the woman's mouth frozen in a silent scream. He collapses in his chair, flaccid, spent. Three things clearly mark this as a primal scene. First, the transgressive nature of Mark's activities; second, the borders of the diegetic screen which foreground the keyhole effect of film viewing; and third, Mark's evident sexual excitation and orgasmic release.

What transpires in this scene, becomes clearer in the second murder. But not until the end of the film is the whole procedure revealed. What is obscured in the opening

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[49] Diegetic refers to something which originates in the story space, whereas nondiegetic refers to something which originates outside the story space.

sequence, and revealed in the second murder, is that there is a knife (a "spike") at the tip of one of the tripod's legs.[50] He kills by plunging the spike into the woman's neck, pinning her to his gaze, as it were.

Mark's cinema cannot exist without the woman's body at the center of the frame, pinned, fetishized, and sadistically punished. This film is not the product of a "sick mind," as one contemporary reviewer claimed, but a self-reflexive example of how the woman's body operates in classical Hollywood cinema. Within this tradition, identity is mapped on the terrain of the woman's body. Female sexuality/subjectivity is defined through the scrutinization of her body and her consequent objectification. Cinematically, she is relentlessly positioned as passive through both sound and visual regimes. She is unable to look (Mark controls the apparatus and she is transfixed by it, unable to defend herself), or to speak authoritatively. This unnamed woman speaks to name her price, an assertion that is not inscribed in Mark's silent cinema. Her face is distorted

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[50] The phallic symbolism of Mark's attack is overdetermined. He loads his camera and shoots; his hand holds the leg of the tripod erect to penetrate her body. The three legs of the tripod suggest a reference to man's third leg: not the walking stick of Oedipus' answer to the riddle of the sphinx, but the dirty joke's penis, or are they the same?

in a silent, impotent, scream.[51] She is the object of the gaze, held captive in the grip of the panopticon.

In contrast, Mark's sexuality/subjectivity is defined through the negation of his body and his consequent ability to dominate. Cinematically, he is accorded mastering speech, hearing and sight. Mark is the source of enunciation, the creator of a "documentary" -- what he calls the cinematic traces of his murders. We learn that the house, which he owns and rents out, is wired for sound. He is an auditory, as well as a visual, voyeur, an eavesdropper who engages in lawless hearing (to modify Kuhn's phrase). In his cinema, Mark occupies the disembodied look which signifies power. Or so it appears. But there is more to Mark's placement here than meets the eye.

In a subsequent scene, he is befriended by Helen, the young woman who lives downstairs. She asks to see his films. He leads her into his darkroom/screening room, the room which was formerly his father's workshop. What he shows her is a cinematic record of his father's systematic

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[51] The scream has historically been the province of women. Hardy notes that as early 1926 (The Terror, "[t]he second all-talking feature ever made"), horror films drew forth endless screams from the female lead. (40) The female scream is so central to the genre that Ambrogio attributes the relative lack of silent horror films to its absence. See Anthony Ambrogio, "Fay Wray: Horror Films' First Sex Symbol," Eros in the Mind's Eye: Sexuality and the Fantastic in Art and Film, ed. Donald Palumbo (New York: Greenport Press, 1986) 128.

terrorization of him as a young boy. Helen comments on the repetitious nature of the film. Among the sundry scenes of routine cruelty is one where his father drops a lizard on the sleeping boy to terrify him. The victimized boy cries impotently.

Mark's father aims to manipulate and control the object of his study -- Mark. He sees Mark in terms of his usefulness, as an experimental "subject" shorn of his subjectivity. Those elements of the boy that do not further the scientist's ends are ignored. In this early cinema (marked by the piano music that signifies both the early years of the film industry and Mark's "documentary"), Mark is the object of the sadistic, voyeuristic gaze.[52] He is the one inscribed in the regime of the panopticon.

Among the records of this ceaseless surveillance is a scene of Mark spying on a necking couple, the camera panning from Mark to the couple. This scene suggests the primal scene, and the genesis of Mark's inscription as a "Peeping Tom." This is the first direct statement of the connection between Mark's childhood trauma and his adult voyeurism. Helen chidingly calls Mark's childhood voyeurism "naughty," but when she realizes that the scene is being staged by his father, she censures his father's behavior. She turns an analytic eye on all the scenes of

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[52] It should also be noted that Mark is following in his father's footsteps; like science, a documentary makes truth claims and investigates a question.

Mark's cinema, even the distressing ones. When Mark gives her the option to turn off the projector, she declines; she is unafraid to look. Hitherto, Mark has been watching her watch the film, registering her distress. When he turns the camera on her, she refuses to be filmed; she rebuffs his efforts to insert her into the panoptic regime.[53] Instead, she reasserts her desire to understand: "I like to understand what I'm shown!..."[54]

This stance inescapably locates Helen in a place that is different from the place occupied by the women he kills. The first is a prostitute, the second a dancer/movie stand-in, the third a pornographic model. All are women who earn a living off the exhibition of their bodies, as spectacles of the male gaze.[55] This interpellation of woman's "place" allows for the sadistic operation of voyeurism; it allows for the control, disparagement and punishment of the object. This is, of

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[53] This is one scene among many which locates the audience in a self-reflexively voyeuristic position, as we watch Mark, watch Helen, watch the film of Mark-watched-by-his-father.

[54] Indeed, Helen's inquiring mind has led her to write a (children's) book on the cinematic apparatus, about a magic camera which photographs people as they looked in childhood. In a sense, Mark's "documentary" does the same; it tries to capture on the faces of women the abject terror Mark experienced as a child.

[55] Helen occupies the alternative position for woman within patriarchal culture, the maternal. She occupies the room that once belonged to Mark's mother. She asks Mark to go to bed, but not <u>with</u> her. Her statement is maternal rather than sexual.

course, the place where Mark's father positioned him as a child.

The connection between Mark's childhood trauma and adult voyeurism is drawn beyond question in the home-movie scene where his father gives the early adolescent Mark a movie camera before embarking on a honeymoon with his bride (a mere six weeks after the death of Mark's mother). The scene is filmed by the bride who, lacking authoritative vision, does not adjust the focus. Indeed, the sequence remains blurry until his father steps out from center frame to adjust it. His father, tellingly played by the director (Michael Powell), steps in front of the camera to present him with the gift, the signifier of the paternal legacy. The connection between past and present is indelibly drawn as the film cuts from the home-movie to the screening room, where that very camera sits. Upon receiving the camera, Mark immediately turns it on the world, shield and weapon combined.

Why does Michael Powell inscribe himself in the role of the director of the old film-within-a-film (as opposed to the new film-within-a-film in which Mark's body never appears)?[56] The link the film establishes between Mark,

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[56] Powell's inscription (not as individual but as function) in the film is overdetermined. The young Mark is played by Powell's son, and the exterior shots of Mark's house are the outside of Powell's home. William Johnson, "Peeping Tom: A Second Look," Film Quarterly (33, no. 3) 8.

his father, and Powell the director is palpable.[57] Just as Mark's father played the sadist to Mark's victim, so Mark plays the sadist to the women he kills. Both film their victims. Both are obsessed with "scoptophilia, the morbid urge to gaze." And, as the diegetic psychiatrist points out, Mark has his father's eyes, the corporeal expression of his father's controlling gaze. He has inherited the paternal legacy. This account of Mark's psychosis lends itself to a reading of Mark's violence as the outcome of his past victimization by his father. By inscribing himself in this paternal legacy, Powell self-reflexively points to how the larger field of representational practices, namely classical Hollywood cinema, in the temporal present, is responsible for exercising the controlling gaze at the expense of women. By drawing attention to the fact that the location of woman as castrated being is a displacement for the castrated condition of man, a displacement basic to the construction of Mark's position as subject, Powell violates a basic tenet of patriarchal culture. Rather than efface the gendered representational practices of classical Hollywood cinema, and our spectatorial complicity in them, Peeping Tom foregrounds and launches a compelling critique against

[57] In yet another ironic moment, Mark murders the second woman on the studio set, where he works as a focus-puller. The psychiatrist, called in by the police, suspects the studio director of being the murderer.

them. (I believe this accounts, at least in part, for the relative absence of this film from the video marketplace.)

What is the nature of our complicity as spectators in the gendered representational practices of classical Hollywood cinema? Mark's various placements provide a clue to this query. Mark's subject position, like the audience's, is a complicated locus of ideological determinations. When Mark views his "documentary" of murder, which he does compulsively, he occupies various subject positions:

(1) Most obviously, he identifies with his father as the sadistic voyeur, exploiting his paternal legacy to terrorize and destroy his own victim, so that the horror of his own loss can be transmuted into "horror for the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her."

(2) He identifies with the enraged little boy whom his father betrayed, and directs his rage onto the woman he kills so that, in effect, she becomes an effigy of his father. In one fell swoop, he murders the father and phallically penetrates the mother.

(3) He identifies with the woman, as fetishized object, and masochistically reenacts his childhood terror through her death.[58a] As Silverman says, "Far from maintaining the

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[58a] The fact that Mark recognizes himself in women, even outside of a violent scenario, is established in the scene where Mark gives Helen a brooch. As Helen experiments with different placements of the brooch on her body, Mark mimics her movements on his own body.

requisite distance from the image of woman-as-lack, Mark recognizes himself in that image, and tips over into it."[59] (4) He identifies with himself as a man engaged in a web of relations as filmmaker, murderer, audience member, and victim.

Mark simultaneously invokes the subject positions of narcissist (identifying with the representation of a human body which is fetishized, or overinvested with erotic value) and voyeur (controlling and punishing the object of his gaze).[60] For both Mark and the film spectator, voyeurism and narcissism, sadism and masochism operate together, interchangeably and simultaneously.

Like the horror genre, Peeping Tom operates as a naked instance of the inscription of the audience into the interchangeable sadomasochistic positionings implied in classical Hollywood cinema. I will even go so far as to suggest that one of the reasons why the genre is denied respectability, and why this film met with such invective upon its release, is that it luridly lays bare the interchangeability of these subject positions and the extent to which the delectation for sex and violence is implicated in scopophilia or pleasurable looking. (Given the rhetorical uses to which the phrase "sex and violence"

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[59] Silverman 1988, 35.

[60] These terms are derived from, though not identical to, the ones Mulvey employs in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

has been put, I am compelled to ask the reader not to read this as an execration of the genre, but rather to suspend judgment on this matter until my discussion is completed.)[61] Or, as Christie puts it:

> Since Peeping Tom offers a variety of "pleasures" which cannot be enjoyed without acknowledging their origin in sadistic/masochistic drives -- in other words, the "normal" scopophilia of film consumption is inscribed and identified as the cause of the trouble -- there is an automatic tendency to censor it. The [vitriolic] reviews can be read, on one level, as a series of repressions, or attempts to censor the effectivity of the film, by assigning it to a category "beneath contempt."[62]

In other words, this film, with its films-within-a-film structure, is about the (guilty) pleasures of classical Hollywood cinema and its subgrouping, the horror genre.

Let us return to a discussion of what is obfuscated in the women's murders. Towards the end of the film, Helen enters Mark's apartment and, drawn by her insatiable curiosity, turns on the projector to witness the second murder. As terrified as she is, she refuses to turn away from the image. When Mark comes home, she confronts him with what she has seen. She interrogates him; he confesses. He explains that the most frightening thing in the world is fear. Then he holds up a convex mirror. Screeching music sounds as we see Helen's face distorted in

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[61] I am well aware of the pornography debates that have raged in the feminist community, and though I am traversing similar terrain, I will not directly engage that debate here.

[62] Christie 58.

the mirror. Mark narrates: "When they felt the spike touching their throat and knew I was going to kill them, I made them watch their own deaths. I made them see their own terror as the spike went in, and if death has a face, they saw that too." But Helen rejects the position which Mark offers; she will not be inscribed as one of his faces of death.[63] She averts her eyes and thus refuses to be transfixed by this distortion of herself. As Williams notes:

> Helen's...look both sees and understands the structure of seeing that would entrap her; her look is not paralyzed by the recognition of the horror she represents, and she therefore refuses the oppressive lie of the narcissistic mirror that the cinematic apparatus holds up to her.[64]

So we return to the spectacle of the terror-stricken woman paralyzed, not by the killer's offscreen gaze, but by the distorted reflection of herself.[65] As Williams points

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[63] Faces of Death (1981) is a pseudodocumentary video (series) which purports to compile unstaged scenes of real-life death and violence.

[64] Williams 1984, 92.

[65] Peeping Tom's use of the mirror resonates with DeSalvo's historical account of Virginia Woolf, whose earliest memory of sexual abuse was at the hands of her half brother, Gerald Duckworth, when she was six or seven. The abuse took place in a hallway with a mirror. DeSalvo

> strongly suspect[s] that what intensified the horror of the [abusive] experience was the fact that Virginia was able to see herself in the mirror: she was watching herself being assaulted. [DeSalvo concludes.] No wonder she developed a dread of looking at herself in that mirror, in any mirror.

This biographical incident sheds light on Woolf's reference, in A Room of One's Own, to woman as the mirror

out, this is the lens that patriarchy holds up for her to see, the site of a lie about who bears responsibility for her death. The mirror confuses the identity of the source of the horror so that the woman's mutilated body becomes the only visible horror. The excess of her terror-stricken face and mutilated body stands in for the absence of the monster's body.

But Mark's body does not remain in this absented condition. Unable to escape imprisonment in his father's panoptic regime, Mark's final act is to locate himself in front of the camera, to complete his father's project. With this in view, he has elaborately staged his own death, rigging a barrage of cameras to go off as he runs onto the awaiting spike. In a scene which belies the conventional alignment of masochism with passivity, Mark completes his (father's) "documentary." The soundtrack consists of tapes of himself as a child crying and screaming (the eclipsed soundtrack of Mark's early cinema). Though he has rehearsed this event, he races to his death brimming with ambivalence. "Helen, Helen, I'm afraid...and...I'm glad I'm afraid." His "documentary" reaches fruition with this

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that magnifies the man. Let us turn this insight back on to Mark's subjectivity. By projecting his fears onto women, by seeing his fears writ large on the close-ups of their faces, and by acting out his rage on their bodies, Mark is using the distorted reflection of woman to shore up his masculinity, to magnify the man. See Louise DeSalvo, Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989) 105.

ultimate record, his pain and fear no longer displaced onto women. He films his own death, impaling himself on the spike, enthralled by his own terror-stricken image in the mirror. To quote Silverman, in this act

> Mark acknowledges the splits and losses that have structured his subjectivity, and directs against himself the whole battery of weapons he has until then reserved for his female victims -- camera, mirror, sharpened tripod knife....[H]e levels the psychic barrier separating himself from the female subject, and embraces his own castration.[66]

This conclusion acknowledges that male subjectivity is structured at the expense of woman.

I started my discussion of Peeping Tom by discussing the torrent of abuse the film received in 1960, and suggesting that the film's radical critique of representational practices, particularly our own complicity as spectators, poses a threat to conventional constructions of cinematic pleasure. My location of this defensiveness in the past might suggest that it is anachronistic, but I do not think so. Let us take as an example, Twitchell's reading of Peeping Tom in, the aptly named, Dreadful Pleasures (1985).

He begins his discussion of the film by acknowledging his anxiety. "[T]his is the kind of film one feels very uneasy about liking and even less easy about discussing." He then proceeds to rewrite several scenes in the film. Among the distortions, one set stands out. Twitchell

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[66] Silverman 1988, 37.

rewrites the ending. Recall that Helen unwittingly discovers Mark's documentary and Mark discovers Helen watching the film, at which point Helen confronts Mark and forces him to confess. Twitchell rewrites this scene as one in which Helen discovers Mark watching the film. According to Twitchell, "[Helen] catches Mark in an act of self-arousal, staring at his films of women being literally invaded, and he is startled and confused, not at being caught, but at her look of panic."[67] Twitchell is correct to say that Mark is caught, not because Helen catches him watching the film, but because Helen confronts him with what she has seen.

It does not end here. Twitchell rewrites the last pivotal event, Mark's suicide, as a murder-suicide. Twitchell takes the scene in which Mark approaches Helen armed with spike and mirror, the point at which she refuses to be inscribed in the panoptic regime, and rewrites it as one in which Mark carries this threat to fruition. "We see the tripod leg point first toward her, then skewer her, then point back at Mark, at us...The police break down the door, too late. She is dead and he is dead, stuck on the spike of his tripod. We are exhausted."[68] Such rewriting must indeed be exhausting. These distortions speak to the

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[67] James Twitchell, Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985) 292, 295.

[68] Twitchell 1985, 295.

interchangeability of subject positions (Twitchell reverses or conflates their positions) and the threatening nature of Peeping Tom's critique.

To conclude, Peeping Tom's self-reflexive discourse on subjectivity, and classical Hollywood cinema in general, cannot exist without drawing on the woman's body. More to the point, they cannot exist without mapping male subjectivity on the woman's body. The scandal of Peeping Tom is that it dares to expose the gendered nature of representational practices, or as Christie says, it dares to "acknowledge the illicit pleasure principle of cinema."[69]

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[69] Christie 59.

CHAPTER FIVE

FETISHISM IN HORROR

"He praises horror films because they show that behind cozy bourgeois society there's something violent and disgusting and terrible which is more real!"[1]

As we saw in the previous chapter, the horror film foregrounds the problematic of castration, and the strategy of fetishization, variously defined. According to Freud, fetishization functions to endow the woman with the absent penis, thus disavowing her castration. He attributes this process to the boy's desire to ward off fears that he too will be castrated (by the father). According to Silverman, fetishization functions to disavow (not his imminent but) his already-existent symbolic castration. She attributes this process to the boy's desire to project his own lack onto the woman by defining castration as the exclusive, anatomical, property of the woman. It is only after he anatomizes and projects castration onto her, that he proceeds to disavow her castration through fetishization.

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[1] Iris Murdoch, The Book and the Brotherhood (New York: Viking) 224. This quote was brought to my attention by Mickie Grover.

In both theories, fetishism entails what Freud calls a "divided attitude." The boy simultaneously retains and abandons the belief that the woman has a penis.[2] Dadoun generalizes and renames this process the "fetish function." The fetish function requires the simultaneous conservation and abandonment of belief, a divided attitude. This function is expressed in the general formula, "I know very well -- but all the same."[3] The first part of the formula, "I know very well," is the reality principle; the second part of the formula, "but all the same," is the disavowal of reality, a process which Freud (1961) claims requires energy to sustain. This principle is also articulated in the more familiar expression, "the suspension of disbelief." Let us turn our attention now to how the suspension of disbelief operates in film.

Classical Hollywood cinema conventionally disavows the absence of the real (variously used to mean the world of objects or the site of production) through the "impression of reality" or verisimilitude. As Neale notes, verisimilitude involves not a relation to the "real" so

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[2] Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud 21, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961) 157, 154.

[3] Roger Dadoun, "Fetishism in the Horror Film," Enclitic 1, no. 2 (1979) 40, 42. Dadoun adopts O. Mannoni's formula from Clefs Pour L'imaginaire ou L'autre Scene (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

much as a relation to "systems of credibility...modes of fetishistic belief." So, as Newman points out, "Decades of newsreels, newspapers, TV documentaries and still photographs have conspired to give the impression that, though real life is in colour, black and white is more realistic."[4] Thus, the history of black-and-white film lends Night of the Living Dead its documentary texture and enhances its construction of realism.

As a representational practice, film is characterized by the loss of the real and this loss underlies the need for fetishistic belief. As Studlar describes it, "the cinematic apparatus cannot provide intimacy or fusion with real objects. The spectator must disavow an absence...The object/screen/images cannot be physically possessed or controlled by the spectator."[5] Although the loss of the real characterizes classical Hollywood cinema, within this, horror is marked as one of the less realistic or more fantastic genres. Dadoun credits the resistance mounted against horror to the genre's intense mobilization of the fetish function.

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[4] Stephen Neale, Genre (British Film Institute, 1980) 36-7; Kim Newman, Nightmare Movies: A Critical Guide to Contemporary Horror Films (New York: Harmony Books, 1988) 6.

[5] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," Quarterly Review of Film Studies (Fall 1984): 277.

> The horror film...effects a considerable reduction of reality, of the "I know very well"...in order to permit a more intense representation of fantasms (of castration, disintegration, etc.), that is to say, a more acute, more gripping experience of the "but all the same"; it also arouses, much more than all other genres, resistances...[6]

As a resistance-generating, fantastic genre, horror foregrounds the loss of the real. To compensate for this loss the genre uses gimmickry to introduce the real into the imaginary scene, at the point of consumption. The genre's use of gimmickry dates back to at least the thirties, when ambulances were parked outside theaters showing Frankenstein (1931), as if to "prove" the publicity warnings that this film was not for the weak-hearted. Gimmicks have included giveaways, like barf bags for I Dismember Mama (1974), or vampire dentures for Dracula Has Risen from the Grave (1968).[7] The heyday of these innovations occurred in the late fifties in response to the decline of movie attendance. Offering a "more gripping experience of the 'but all the same'" than its competitor (television), gimmickry was used to entice people to theaters. The history of the genre abounds with instances of this strategy.

Ray Dennis Steckler (director of The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Crazy Mixed Up

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[6] Dadoun 43.

[7] Bill George, "Cine-Gimmicks," Horror Fan (Summer 1989) 38.

Zombies, 1964), who also acted in the film, would tour with the film and jump out at the audience during its most frightening moments. This produced, what Freud called, "an uncanny effect...by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality..."[8] Gimmicks such as these, which play on the temerity of the audience, foster a sense of community which sustains the boundedness of the experience and thus tempers the threat.

William Castle issued admonitions about the risk implicit in seeing his films. For Macabre (1958), Castle purchased $1000 in life insurance, from Lloyds of London, for any audience member who suffered "DEATH BY FRIGHT during the performance of this terrifying picture." For The Tingler (1959), Castle invented "Percepto" -- an apparatus that could be installed under theater seats to give viewers mild shocks during the screening. It was billed as an unprecedented experience of audience identification with narrative characters: "Actual shock-sensations and physical reactions experienced by the actors will be felt by you -- in all their terrifying impact!" When Vincent Price exhorted the diegetic audience (and by implication, the nondiegetic audience) to "Scream,

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[8] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," Collected Papers 4, ed. Ernest Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1953) 398.

SCREAM for your very lives!" it was the projectionist's job to shock members of the nondiegetic audience.[9] The claim to realism implicit in this and other gimmickry, and the admonitions which accompanied it, drew people to the theaters.

Like Dadoun, Neale attributes the critical marginalization of the genre to its ability to generate fear and wonder by mobilizing the fetish function. According to Neale,

> The horror film...seem[s] to involve special demands on the spectator's faculties of belief and on the cinema's capacities for sustaining it. The degree of "success" with which this is done is measured by the degree to which particular modes of affect -- horror, anxiety, fear, wonder -- are supposed to be experienced by the spectator. This in itself is indicative of the degree to which these genres are concerned with fetishism and fetishistic modes of belief. Horror, anxiety and fear are all linked to the problematic of castration...[10]

Paradoxically, the horror film simultaneously "arouses" the desire to not know -- disavowal, and the desire to know -- epistemophilia. This conjunction is the site where fetishistic modes of belief operate. As Neale puts it, "the desire to know and disavowal, together, articulate a desire to know something else, a substitute for what in

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[9] George 39, 37, 42. The premise of The Tingler is that fear produces a creature which can be neutralized only by screaming. When a mute woman dies of fear, a scientist surgically removes "the tingler," which then escapes to a movie theater to feed on fear.

[10] Neale 1980, 38-9.

fact is at stake."[11] In other words, the horror film sets into play the contradictory terms of the fetish function, "I know very well, but all the same."

The tension between disavowal and epistemophilia operates in the solitary reverse and the unclaimed point of view shots. In the solitary reverse shot, we see the victim's terrified reaction, but the monster's body is (largely) withheld from sight, leaving the viewer wondering what the monster looks like and what it is doing to the victim. In one instance of the unclaimed point of view shot, the camera is placed behind a window, doorway, or other framing device to create the (keyhole) effect of surveillance by an unseen, or partially seen, other. Giles describes the effect of this camera work. "The viewer senses a terrible presence in the articulation of imagery, but the images themselves display only an absence of the terrible object, or the possibility that it may become visible." Thus, disavowal and epistemophilia commingle in the conjunction of the desire to know with "delayed, blocked or partial vision," to produce what Giles calls "the pleasure...[of] not seeing."[12]

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[11] Neale 1980, 42-3.

[12] Dennis Giles, "Conditions of Pleasure in Horror Cinema," Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984) 42, 41.

A well-known instance of the pleasure of not seeing is found in the chiaroscuro tradition, which functions to intensify the tension between disavowal/concealment and epistemophilia/knowledge. According to Neale, "[d]arkness not only signifies concealment, [it also] invok[es] an unknown and unseen presence within it...thereby simultaneously invoking the desire to know and the desire to see..."[13] Similarly, Telotte and Carroll suggest that the pleasure of seeing and the pleasure of not seeing operate together in horror. Telotte employs Bonitzer's division of filmic space into the fields of "specular space" -- that which is seen on the screen, and "blind space" -- "everything that moves (or wriggles) outside or under the surface of things..." According to Telotte, "the most effective threats in the genre are...dark patches and vague presences which invite projection and suggest an interweaving of specular and blind space..."[14]

An interesting innovation on the pleasure of not seeing is found in Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer, which brings into play the pleasure of "not hearing". The opening sequence is a montage of scenes which reveal the

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[13] Neale 1980, 42-3.

[14] Pascal Bonitzer, "Partial Vision Film and the Labyrinth," trans. Fabrice Ziolkowski, Wide Angle 4, no. 4 (1980) 58. Quoted in J.P. Telotte, "The Doubles of Fantasy and the Space of Desire," Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema, ed. Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990) 152. My emphasis.

spectacle of ruined bodies. This graphic visual track is overlaid with a muted acoustic flashback of the violence which transpired. The muted soundtrack reveals, yet withholds, vital information. Thus, a partial or blocked aural image is juxtaposed with a graphic visual image to play up the dialectic between the pleasure of seeing (more fully), and the pleasure of not (fully) hearing.

Carroll relates the pleasure of not seeing, the prominence of blind space, to the fantastic -- the moment of suspension between psychological and supernatural explanation. So, through the prominence of blind space, horror generates uncertainty about the ontological (supernatural, psychological) status of what one is seeing, and thus, I would add, exposes the limits of rationality. As Carroll notes, the genre problematizes knowledge.

> Cinema -- by means of editing, camera angulation, camera positioning, lighting, pacing (both inside and between shots), object placement, set design, and so on, can problematize...[the clarity, directness, and duration of the image] for the spectator, thereby forcing the viewer to the position of saying...that we thought or believed...rather than that we knew...[15]

This uncertainty generates suspense and fosters the desire to know. The "pleasure of not seeing" is not only produced by the activities of the film; it is also produced by the activities of the audience. As Giles notes, audience members often obscure their own line of

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[15] Noel Carroll, The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart (New York: Routledge, 1990) 154-5.

vision by looking through their hands or by intermittently turning away from the screen. Giles accounts for the pleasure of not seeing by invoking the concept of fetishism, which he distinguishes from Freud's definition by setting aside the question of sexual difference and dealing with a more generalized sense of horror. According to Giles, fetishism is

> an arrested or blocked vision which has recoiled from, or fears to approach[,] any image of horror...The fetishistic act is the means by which the subject protects himself/herself against a horrible spectacle, and gains pleasure from a vision which stops short of this spectacle. It is essentially a defensive vision, but one which is enjoyed by the spectator precisely because it lurks on the threshold, because it refuses to fully see.[16]

Let us, for the moment, accept the claim that the pleasure of horror lies in not (fully) seeing, in the pleasure of recoil; later we will have the opportunity to examine the other side of the dialectic: the pleasure of seeing (more fully). What is at issue here is seeing, or not seeing, the monster and its concomitant violence. Let us look more closely at this conspicuous figure of absence. The monster functions as a figure of desire: epistemophiliac desire to know the monster, and scopophiliac desire to see it. Here then is the dual nature of the creature; the monster is not only a voyeur, the monster also functions as a spectacle. DeLauretis claims that the etymology of the word "monster" connotes a

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[16] Giles 47.

relation to the gaze; monsters are "beings awesome to behold" with the "power to capture vision, to lure the gaze."[17] Like the woman, who signifies sexual difference, the monster simultaneously stands as a figure of absence -- lack/castration, and a figure of presence -- the fetishized object.

The monster's otherness signifies sexual difference and arouses desire. According to Fiedler, "Freaks are perceived to one degree or another as erotic... [A]bnormality arouses...a temptation to go beyond looking to knowing in the full carnal sense the ultimate other."[18] The monster, like the woman, incites the desire to know. More to the point, in the male gaze of classical Hollywood cinema, "there is not that much difference between an object of desire and an object of horror."[19]

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[17] Teresa De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984) 109.

[18] Leslie Fiedler, Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) 137.

[19] Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, ed. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (Frederick, Md.: American Film Institute, 1984) 88. The slippage between woman and monster, desire and horror, is provocatively condensed in the logo for Alien. At the heart of "Alien" is a radiant slitted "i" visually suggestive of a vaginal opening. It suggests, moreover, Freud's (1953) discussion of the "unheimlich," the putative uncanniness of the female genital organs, the once familiar "heim"/home whose familiarity is concealed by its status as unfamiliar or alien.

The body of the monster, like the site of repression, is a locus of contradictions. (As Dadoun points out, the affirmation of contradictory propositions is always at work in repression.)[20] The monster is encoded as both object of desire and object of horror. Take, for instance, Leroux's tantalizing description of the disfigurement of the Phantom of the Opera. "His nose is so little worth talking about that you can't see it side-face; and the absence of that nose is a horrible thing to look at."[21] The monster is sexually coded, as masculine through the transcendental gaze, and as feminine through its function as fetishized object. It simultaneously embodies difference, through its status as freak or "ultimate other," and it erodes difference by disrupting categories. The monster signifies and wreaks havoc on sexual difference.

It is the monster's function as fetishized object which necessitates the appearance of the monster's body, the satisfaction of the desire to know. Particularly intense moments of the monster's appearance are its initial appearance, through birth or transformation -- the moment of its visual discovery, and its destruction, moments invariably marked by violence. Herein lies the importance

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[20] Dadoun 42.

[21] Quoted in S.S. Prawer, Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980) 96.

of the off-screen "star" of the genre, the special effects artist. As Neale tells us:

> Interconnected with this function of the monster [as fetishized object] is the enormous stress laid not only on the moment[s] of its appearance, but also on the nature of its appearance. All the resources of the costume and make-up department are mobilised precisely to give the monster an appearance that will not only frighten and terrify, but will also give it credence, an instance of the operation of the "splitting of belief" fundamental to the structure of fetishism.[22]

The realism of special effects violence, together with audience knowledge that the violence is simulated, operate in tandem to accomplish the fetish function or suspension of disbelief. "I know very well, but all the same." As Boss notes, the special effects "process is one of producing not the total illusion of people in torment [but of producing an imperfect illusion] -- for it is only through awareness of their artifice that we can appreciate them as effects..."[23] Neale concurs that awareness of artifice is not a flaw, but a function of genre. Moreover, he argues that within classical Hollywood cinema, genre functions to display and contain (rather than efface) the production process.[24]

Special effects realism engenders questions about the production process which fanzines have emerged to address.

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[22] Neale 1980, 44-5.

[23] Pete Boss, "Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine," Screen 27 (Jan/Feb 1986): 24. The Boss, Brophy and Creed articles all appeared in a special issue of Screen on Body Horror.

[24] Neale 1980, 31.

Fanzines, like "Fangoria" and (in a direct interpellation to the audience) "Horror Fan," are devoted to a discussion of "how they do it." They express "a fetishistic desire to 'know all about'" horror films.[25] These publications yield a discourse, addressed to the lay audience, that reveals the hidden, behind-the-scenes work, and thus foregrounds the artifice involved in production. Telotte claims that fanzines function to reassure the audience that the monsters "have no originals, no correspondence in our world" other than the constructions of the special effects team.[26] They provide a repudiation of the plausibility implicit in special effects realism. (The need for this repudiation is exacerbated by claims the genre makes, on occasion, that films are "based" on real-life events. For instance The Exorcist, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Entity, The Amityville Horror, and Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer make such claims.)

To this, I would add another, related, function. The instruction which fanzines provide about special effects technology allows the audience to distantiate from depictions of violence by looking for the trick, the cut from the actor to the prosthetic device. This strategy of

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[25] Neale 1980, 38.

[26] Telotte 152. In a similar vein, Stephen King attributes the commercial failure of Tod Browning's Freaks (it was banned in the United Kingdom for thirty years) to his use of "real freaks" in the film. See Danse Macabre (New York: Berkley Books, 1981) 45-6.

looking for flaws or ruptures in realism can be seen as a deconstructive operation which allows the audience to enjoy the "pleasure of looking" without taking the effect so seriously that it becomes too threatening. It is the counterpart to not looking or looking away discussed earlier. (Paradoxically, "not looking" or averting ones eyes to avoid special effects realism allows the imagination to fill in the gaps, and thus may enhance the realistic quality of the effects.) The coterminous strategies of "looking" and "not looking" embody the philosophy toward violence articulated in Bloodsucking Freaks (a.k.a. The Incredible Torture Show, 1978): "If you're bored by it, pretend it's real, but if you're excited by it, pretend it's fake."[27]

Fanzine discourse demystifies the production process by foregrounding special effects, yet simultaneously mystifies it by naturalizing all the other "effects" in filmmaking. As Stern notes, the outcome of this discourse is that "all of the other effects which make up the film are transformed from cultural artefacts into natural objects."[28]

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[27] Quoted in Newman 202.

[28] Michael Stern, "Making Culture into Nature," Alien Zone, 69. Stern illustrates how this process operates in his discussion of 2001: A Space Odyssey. Although nominated for Best Special Visual Effects, it was not nominated for make-up and costume awards, because members of the Academy did not realize that the simians were played by actors. Thus, their performances were naturalized, and the production process effaced.

Furthermore, implicit in fanzine discourse lies the tendency to flaunt the prowess of special effects technology, to offer the fascinating spectacle of copies without originals. As Neale points out, "[t]his flaunting both caters to -- and counters -- the spectator's awareness..."[29] Thus, the discourse of special effects enhances the fetish function, "I know very well (it's not real), but all the same (it looks real)." Consequently, special effects discourse stimulates interest in seeing the effects, in the act of seeing.

The special effects fanzine, like the horror genre itself, is grounded in the wish to see monsters, mutilated bodies, and mutilation, "'as they really are.'" Both fanzine and genre are grounded in, what Dervin calls, the desire "to penetrate 'fictional facades' and glimpse forbidden areas of privacy."[30] Like pornography, the horror film dares not only to violate taboos, but to expose the secrets of the flesh, to spill the contents of the body. Like pornography, the horror film exposes "everything" -- but its obsession is with the mutilation and destruction of the body. The genre's fascination with the spectacle of the ruined body necessitates its

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[29] Stephen Neale, "'You've Got to be Fucking Kidding!' Knowledge, Belief and Judgement in Science Fiction," Alien Zone, 166.

[30] Daniel Dervin, "Primal Conditions and Conventions: The Genre of Science Fiction," Alien Zone 97.

privileging of "the act of showing." According to Brophy, "this mode of showing as opposed to telling...is strongly connected to the destruction of the Body."[31] The dismembered body, the body in bits and pieces, occupies center stage in the genre. Let us turn to the examination of a "gore" film to explore this subject further.

"When people complain of sadism in horror...they mean simply that the film is showing too much..."[32]

Unlike Peeping Tom, a film which tells and implies but shows very little of the destruction wrought upon the human body, The Wizard of Gore, true to its name, relishes the act of showing. The film opens with a literal show, the stage show of Montag the magician.[33] After staging a few

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[31] Philip Brophy, "Horrality: The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films," Screen 27 (Jan/Feb 1986): 8.

[32] David Pirie, A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972 (New York: Equinox Books, 1974) 42.

[33] Montag, who is hailed as a "master of illusion," (and whose very name evokes "montage" -- a technique of film editing), hearkens back to those early illusionists, like George Melies, who turned to filmmaking to further their illusions. [David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction (New York: Knopf, 1979) 76.] The Wizard of Gore utilizes the conventions of the trick film, which as Fischer points out, as early as 1896 entailed a male magician demonstrating his power over a female. Fischer claims that these conventions betray a fear of female "carnality." See Lucy Fischer, "The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic and the Movies," Film Quarterly (Fall 1979):

garden variety tricks, Montag launches into a taunting address to the audience on the subject of recreational terror.

> Torture and terror have always fascinated mankind. Perhaps whatever made your predecessors see the sadism of the Inquisition and the gore of a gladiator's arena is the same thing that makes you stare at bloody highway accidents and thrill to the terror of death in the bullring. Today, television and films give you the luxury of observing grisly dismemberments and deaths without anyone actually being harmed. But, ladies and gentlemen, have you ever seen the sight of human butchery in person! Well tonight, on this stage, you will have the privilege of seeing such a sight.[34]

This teasing preamble is ostensibly delivered to the diegetic audience, but Montag's direct look at the camera interpellates the nondiegetic audience, establishing the first of various links between the two fields of spectatorship. In his speech, Montag sets the stage for the themes that are to be developed in the film. First, he implicates the audience in the impending show of violence, inscribing the audience in a voyeuristic position. Second, he invokes the real in relation to the illusory and proffers the real. Third, he promises to show us "everything," to satiate our scopophilia. After delivering his speech, Montag proceeds to guillotine himself to establish the fakeness of the upcoming performance.

The "meat" of the show is standard magician fare, with a twist: he (chain)saws a woman in half. Ironically,

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30-40.

[34] My transcription.

though he promises that "nothing will be concealed," he conceals a number of critical points:

(1) The "volunteer" (always female) is first procured by a male audience member and then mesmerized into compliance.

(2) Although the trick he purports to perform is that of appearing to saw a woman in half, when she is in fact unharmed, the "real" trick is that he is sawing a woman in half, and she only appears to be unharmed. The guillotine, signifier of fakeness, looms in the background when he performs the illusion of an illusion.

(3) While it appears to the diegetic audience that he is dispassionately waving his hands over her body, he is in fact lasciviously fondling her entrails, a sight available only to the nondiegetic audience.

(4) The trick seemingly ends when she walks off stage, but it "really" only ends when her (already dead) body collapses in a bloody heap after leaving the performance.

This is the first in a series of repetitive performances in which the female body becomes the broken body, sundered by a battery of phallic instruments: chainsaw, metal spike, punch press, and sword. Each time, the nondiegetic audience is privileged to see what is "really" happening. The scene crosscuts between the harmless trick accessible to the diegetic audience, the destruction of the woman's body accessible to the nondiegetic audience, and the diegetic audience watching

the performance. The diegetic audience's impassive (or pleased) reaction is disconcertingly juxtaposed to shots of blood and viscera. The editing presents the action twice, in jump cuts which alternate between the varying perspectives of the two audiences. Musical codes mark the transition from one perspective to the other, and thus facilitate the process of "looking" at the innocuous shots, while "not looking" at the violent ones. Although this strategy might appear to augment audience safety, what it does is decidedly disturbing; it aligns the nondiegetic audience with a diegetic audience which complacently watches the torture and murder of women.

Just as The Wizard of Gore foregrounds the position of the audience, so it foregrounds the artifice of its special effects (and indeed all its effects) through the production of unnaturalness. Although the film bears the stamp of documentary realism (out-of-focus shots, inaudible dialogue, Montag's speech to the audience via a direct look at the camera), it more convincingly strains realism through mechanical acting, continuity violations, seedy settings, unmotivated action, and narrative inconsistencies. In particular, the dialogue makes excessive claims about the damage done to the women's bodies. Women are said to be mashed to a pulp, punch-pressed "from head to foot," decapitated, cut in half. But the narrative claims exceed the trauma we see

inflicted on the bodies, either through the privileged vision of the nondiegetic audience, or in the aftermath when the broken body is revealed to all. Thus, narrative excess compensates for inadequacy of vision, the very thing which the film purports to overcome by showing us "everything."

The "You've got to be fucking kidding!" wallop that Brophy attributes to "the mind-boggling state [of]... special-effects make-up" (in John Carpenter's The Thing), operates in The Wizard of Gore as a response to the poor quality of the special effects, and the idea behind the effects, which is still powerful enough to have a disturbing effect on the audience.[35] For instance, when Montag hammers a railroad spike into the skull of the second victim, it is clear he is violating a mannequin. But the audience still squirms in fear and disgust when he bores his finger in the hole to draw out brain tissue, and gouge out her eyes.[36]

The primacy of the ruined-body-as-spectacle is central to The Wizard of Gore. Boss, following Brophy, claims that the appeal of "body horror" lies in the fact that it allows the audience to rehearse the loss of control over the body through gory special effects. Everything else is

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[35] Brophy 11.

[36] Since this film is not in theatrical release, even at revival houses, this observation is based on a screening for students at SUNY Purchase.

subordinated to "the demands of presenting the viewer with the uncompromised or privileged detail of human carnage."[37] The Wizard of Gore locates the ravaged spectacle at center stage. Each performance lingers over the organs and blood which spill from the despoiled body. The film displays the horror genre's obsession with the (female) body in bits and pieces, what Creed calls the mutilated body of the woman "transformed into the 'gaping wound'" -- an image which suggests the centrality of castration anxiety in the genre.[38] (Bear in mind that my use of castration theory is predicated on Silverman's inflections on it.)

The centrality of castration anxiety, and the obsession with the (woman's) body suggest a connection between horror and pornography, a connection which critics have noted before. Indeed, much has been made of the way horror films combine explicit sex and nudity with violence, as well as the way that horror films displace sexuality onto aggression. It seems there are more similarities than dissimilarities between hard core pornography and hard core horror, or the "gore" film.[39] This link is captured in the

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[37] Boss 15.

[38] Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," Screen 27 (Jan/Feb 1986): 52.

[39] This comparison is indebted to Linda Williams' work on mainstream heterosexual pornography. See Linda Williams, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible" (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989).

term "carnography" which uses the carnality of both genres as a bridge.[40] Let us look at some of these similarities. (1) As Dyer points out, both are disreputable genres because they elicit physical responses -- fear, disgust and arousal in various combinations -- and thus privilege the degraded half of the mind-body split.[41] Thus, both Tudor and Williams (in their studies of horror and porn, respectively) have to issue disclaimers about "prurient fascination" to avoid "contamination" by the degraded genre.[42]

(2) Both violate taboos by privileging the act of showing the body, by figuring what Clover calls "the opened

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While she excludes gay male porn from her analysis, I believe many of the points she makes about straight porn also apply to gay male porn, though I do not assume that the two operate in identical fashion. Therefore, where possible I have used "feminine" and "masculine" -- as opposed to "female" and "male" -- to allow for the possibility of men or women occupying any of these positions, in either genre.

[40] Richard Gehr uses this term in a review of "splatterpunk" novels in the Village Voice, Feb. 6, 1990, pp. 57-8. Incidentally, Herschell Gordon Lewis produced soft core porn before producing the premier gore film, Blood Feast (1963).

[41] Richard Dyer, "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms," Jump Cut no. 30 (1985): 27.

[42] Andrew Tudor, Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 60; Williams, Hard Core, xi. To Williams' credit, she acknowledges her defensiveness, and points out that if she admits to pleasure, she stands to be discredited not simply for enjoying sexual materials, but because she is a woman enjoying sexual materials. As a male scholar, Carroll is freer to exclaim that he had "a hell of a good time" writing his book. (11)

body."[43] They expose what is normally concealed or encased.

(3) Both entail excessive narrative redundancy. Each film is a series of repetitions and variations on a central theme: the phallic penetration of a feminine body. In horror, redundancy is further constructed on an intertextual level through the proliferation of remakes and sequels that dominate the genre.

(4) Both foreground the penetration of the body with phallic instruments. In pornography, genital intercourse is signified through the "meat shot" (vaginal penetration by a penis in close-up), an appellation which seems overdeterminedly appropriate to the horror film's obsession with evisceration and cannibalism.[44]

(5) Both are obsessed with the body and its orifices. But whereas pornography is concerned with the sexually-coded ones like the mouth (gaping in ecstasy or pain), vagina, anus, and penis; horror is concerned with these and with the manufacture of other openings.

(6) The penetration of the body results in the loss of body fluids, culminating in the involuntary spasm of death/orgasm (le petit morte). In pornography, the involuntary spasm is captured in the "come shot" (or "money

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[43] Carol Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," Representations 20 (Fall 1987): 198.

[44] Williams, Hard Core, 72.

shot") in which a man ejaculates, the visual proof of male pleasure. In horror, the involuntary spasm is death accompanied by bleeding, the visual proof of the violation of the feminine body. If pornography is the genre of the wet dream, then horror is the genre of the wet death.

(7) Both show the body in bits and pieces. Pornography does so largely through close-ups (the meat shot, the beaver shot -- a woman's genitals in close-up), whereas gore utilizes both close-ups (of wounds, phallic weapons) and the literalization of the body in bits and pieces (dismembered limbs, exposed viscera).

(8) If the body in bits and pieces triggers castration anxiety, then these genres mobilize intense responses through their obsession with the nude or mutilated female body. Koch suggests that the castration anxiety, which the sight of female genitals triggers in the male viewer of pornography, is compensated by the sight of "lots of penises confirm[ed in] their durability and intactness..."[45] Similarly, the castration anxiety which dismemberment and injury set into play in horror is compensated by the proliferation of phallic objects -- "knives, hammers, axes, icepicks, hypodermic needles, red hot pokers, pitchforks."[46] Castration anxiety is negotiated

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[45] Gertrud Koch, "The Body's Shadow Realm," trans. Jan-Christopher Horak and Joyce Rheuban, October no. 50 (Fall 1989) 24.

[46] Clover's list of popular weapons in the genre, 198.

by converting the loss of the penis into the abundance of phallic objects. Only thus can the re-enactment of castration on the feminine body be rendered tolerable (to the male viewer).

Perhaps the critical difference between pornography and horror lies in their disparate claims to facticity. As Williams points out, the pleasure (and pain) of pornography is assumed to be real, i.e. involuntary and unfeigned.[47] The genre is obsessed with the come shot precisely because it is the visible proof of male pleasure. In contrast, the pain (and pleasure) of horror is assumed to be fake. Horror relies on the realistic, but insistently simulated, representation of violence. The proof of this lies in the discourse of special effects.

When the reality principle of pornography is conjoined with the mutilation principle of horror, a different order of film is constituted -- the snuff film, in which women are actually killed during sex.[48] According to Williams,

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[47] Linda Williams, "Power, Pleasure, and Perversion: Sadomasochistic Film Pornography," Representations 27 (Summer, 1989): 42. To make this point, Williams even departs from her stated focus on mainstream pornography to discuss "amateur sadomasochism," whose "overwhelming effect ...is that [the pain] seems 'real'...[I]t appears neither acted by the performers, nor faked in the editing..." (44)

[48] I am using "snuff" as an analytical category, to avoid the confusion created by films, such as Snuff (uncredited 1976), which make false claims about the facticity of their representations.

"Snuff, both the film and the idea, exists at the contradictory intersection of the spectacles of pleasure... in hardcore pornography...and pain...in horror films." Because the sex scenes in Snuff marked it as pornography, the violence and pain could also be read as real. Snuff, unlike horror, exceeds the limits of realism; in snuff, the violence and pain are real.[49]

Although distinct from it, the horror genre displays a fascination with snuff. In Peeping Tom, Mark's documentary is a snuff film. (Not so incidentally, Mark moonlights as a pornographic photographer.) Videodrome is about a cable channel which features people tortured to death in real time, the ultimate S&M channel. In Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer, Henry videotapes the murder of a family, and his partner obsessively replays it. Perhaps this fascination is a self-reflexive move, a diegetic incursion into recreational terror, a reflection on the pleasure of looking at the body in bits and pieces.

If recreational terror is an exercise in mastery, in which controlled loss substitutes for loss of control, and

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[49] A related, but distinct, genre is the "mondo" film. Like the early cinema's exotic travelogues, the mondo (Italian for "world") film depicts bizarre behavior from around the world, including genuine violence. The first such film was Mondo Cane (1963), released the same year as the first gore film, Blood Feast. The mondo genre peaked in the sixties, disappeared, then reemerged in the eighties with Faces of Death (1981). See V. Vale and Andrea Juno, eds. Incredibly Strange Films issue of Re/Search no. 10 (1986) 153-6.

if the filmic space creates a relation to the mirror stage (i.e. enacts processes of identification), then what does the dismemberment of the body accomplish? Or, to put it another way, if the constitution of the self in the mirror stage involves the construction of a totalized image of the body, what does it mean to look in the mirror and see the body in bits and pieces? Since the genre structures an identification with (what Brophy calls) the "torture and agony...wrought upon a body devoid of control," Creed suggests that the spectator defends against this anxiety-inducing loss of control by looking away.[50] Not looking allows the spectator to momentarily "withdraw identification from the image on the screen in order to reconstruct the boundary between self and screen and reconstitute the 'self' which is threatened with disintegration."[51] Thus, the spectator reasserts control.

Creed's account is predicated on the spectator's need to defend herself/himself from the threat of the experience, but wherein lies the <u>pleasure</u> of identifying with the abject spectacle (the place where meaning collapses)? Brophy suggests that the pleasure lies precisely in the "tension, fear, anxiety, sadism and masochism" which the abject spectacle provokes. Unlike Creed, Brophy suggests that the pleasure of mastery

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[50] Brophy 10.

[51] Creed 65.

operates with the pleasure of submission. "The effect...is not unlike a death-defying carnival ride: the subject is a willing target that both constructs the terror and is terrorised by its construction." Both sadism and masochism, mastery and submission, are at work in the construction of pleasure. More to the point, "the pleasure of the text is, in fact, getting the shit scared out of you -- and loving it..."[52] Creed elaborates on the meaning of this telling choice of words.

> [W]hen we say such-and-such a horror film "made me sick" or "scared the shit out of me" we are actually foregrounding that specific horror film as a "work of abjection" or "abjection at work" -- in both a literal and metaphoric sense. Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images, being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, having taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat).[53]

Although Creed acknowledges the pleasure implicit in violating the taboo, she subordinates this "pleasure in perversity" to the overriding desire to expel the "perverse." More specifically, she argues that the horror film provides an occasion to confront the abject or monstrous "other" which threatens to disrupt the symbolic order, so as to repress it. Thus, horror performs a cathartic, stabilizing function. According to Creed,

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[52] Brophy 5. My emphasis.

[53] Creed 48.

> the horror film brings about a confrontation with the abject (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) in order, finally, to eject the abject and re-draw the boundaries between the human and non-human. As a form of modern defilement rite, the horror film works to separate out the symbolic order from all that threatens its stability...[54]

including the feminine, constructed as "other" within patriarchal discourse. And so, despite the Lacanian framework, her argument is, in effect, a Durkheimian account of how deviance (the defilement rite) supports the status quo (the patriarchal symbolic order).

Twitchell makes a similar argument from a more Freudian perspective. For Twitchell, the horror genre is a form of socializing ritual for adolescents, one which induces the repression of violence, and directs sexuality into conservative, heteromonogamous channels. He treats the trilogy of traditional myths in horror -- Dracula, Jekyll/Hyde, and Frankenstein -- as archetypal forms that embody the sexual confusion and anxieties of adolescence.[55] For instance, Hyde represents the eruption of untrammeled sexuality, a change marked by the growth of body hair in unaccustomed places. Twitchell analyzes the three narratives to illustrate how they punish transgressive (incestuous, promiscuous), non-reproductive

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[54] Creed 49, 53.

[55] Stephen King also asserts the preeminence of these three figures, and treats their respective novels as "classics." Apparently, they are horror literature's canonical works.

(masturbatory, homosexual) sexuality. He argues that horror operates as a morality tale. By demonstrating "what will melt down the nuclear family," horror socializes adolescents to avert these pitfalls.[56]

The problem with both Twitchell and Creed's positions is that they fall into a simplistic functionalist analysis of the genre, one which expunges the nastiness of "sickening, horrific images." Moreover, Twitchell expressly endorses the patriarchal social order, and so fails to explore the appeal of "melting down the nuclear family," both within the genre and for the audience. And though Creed treats feminine monstrosity as the historical construction of patriarchal discourse, she too fails to theorize the complexity of the pleasures of the genre.

Let us interrogate the pleasures of the genre by looking at the slasher sub-genre, a hotbed of contention in the pornography debates and feminist discourse.

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[56] James Twitchell, Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985) 65-6, 104.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SLASHER SUB-GENRE

Despite the excoriation Peeping Tom (1960) received upon its original release, critical reception has since redeemed it. This is not true of the (still) disreputable slasher film. General consensus has it that the slasher sub-genre was inaugurated by Halloween (1978) and that it has since generated a slew of films. The sub-genre's inflections on sex and gender have caught the disparaging eye of commercial critics like Janet Maslin and Roger Ebert; the scrutiny of social scientists like Edward Donnerstein, Daniel Linz, and Steven Penrod; and the ambivalently appreciative attention of academic feminist critics like Vera Dika and Carol Clover.[1] Since Dika and Clover have written most extensively about the slasher film, I will compare, contrast, and critique their respective formulations. In the course of this discussion, I will develop my own formulation of the sub-genre.

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[1] Vera Dika, "The Stalker Film, 1978-81," American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film, ed. Gregory Waller (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987): 86-101; Carol Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," Representations no. 20 (Fall 1987): 187-228.

Clover divides the slasher film into two historical periods: 1960-1974 and 1974-1986, thus drawing on a broader temporal framework than Dika who limits her discussion to the height of the slasher film's popularity -- 1978-81. Clover identifies Psycho (1960) as the predecessor of the slasher narrative (to which I would add the more self-critical Peeping Tom), and takes note of the sub-genre's debt to gore films like Blood Feast (1963) which established the serial murder pattern. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974), though not a slasher film, develops a similar narrative line: A party of five teenagers is beset by psychotic killers, and only one -- a woman -- survives, after a protracted, highly violent struggle. Halloween fleshes out the narrative and stylistic elements which have come to signify the slasher film. According to Tudor's categories, the films of the 1960-1974 period constitute metamorphosis narratives; the psychotic (Mark in Peeping Tom or Norman in Psycho) is the central character, and the narrative focuses on his transformation from ostensible normality to underlying monstrosity.[2] In contrast, the films of the later period constitute invasion narratives. The invasion narrative centers on the terrorizing rampage of the psychotic (Michael in Halloween, Jason in Friday the 13th, Freddy in

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[2] Andrew Tudor, Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie (Cambridge, MS: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

A Nightmare on Elm Street), whose character is undeveloped, and often relegated to the status of a mindless, malevolent, supernatural force.

The disreputability of the genre, to which critics invariably refer, is related to its importance. Clover, like others, privileges the genre because it is disreputable. She argues that the horror genre is important because it engages repressed fears and desires through the re-enactment of conflict. Contrary to conventional aesthetic criteria, it is the slasher film's very crudity and repetitiveness which yields insights into prevalent sexual ideologies "...at least among the segment of the population that forms its erstwhile audience..."[3] As Dyer points out, since genres associated with the body fall on the degraded, and I would add repressed, side of the mind/body split, looking at these degraded objects yields valuable information about social relations. Similarly, Wood argues that the disreputability of the genre carries with it the concomitant agreement that these films are not to be taken seriously, a judgement that is conducive to the free play of repressed emotions.[4]

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[3] Clover 188. I take issue with this empirical limitation; it is unwarranted if we locate the "text" (genre) within the larger social relations within which it is produced.

[4] Richard Dyer, "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms," Jump Cut no. 30 (1985): 27-29; Robin Wood, "Return of the Repressed," Film Comment 14, no.4 (July-Aug. 1978): 25-32.

Rather than applying conventional aesthetic standards, like originality, to the slasher film, Clover and Dika treat it as myth. Clover recognizes in it,

> the hallmarks of oral story: the free exchange of themes and motifs, the archetypal characters and situations, the accumulation of sequels, remakes, imitations. This is a field in which there is in some sense no original, nor real or right text, but only variants; a world in which, therefore, the meaning of the individual example lies outside itself.[5]

The variants then, are more accurately seen as remakes than sequels. As Dika puts it, "[t]his level of replication gives the films an 'already seen' quality that is more extensively realized than in any other popular movie formula."[6] Let us look, then, at the constituents of this formulaic genre.

Both Dika and Clover argue that the stalker or slasher film is characterized by a formulaic combination of narrative, stylistic, and cinematic elements.[7] Cinematically, the films are low budget productions with a largely adolescent audience. Dika puts the age group at 12-17; Clover puts it at 12-20. Clover, like most critics, asserts that "by all accounts" the audience for the slasher film (and the horror film in general) is predominantly male, whereas Dika contends that it is largely (55%)

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[5] Clover 190.

[6] Dika 87.

[7] Dika refers to the sub-genre as "the stalker film." I prefer the term "slasher" because it conveys the element of recreational terror more effectively.

female.[8] (Although Dika's assertion about the composition of the audience is an interesting departure, she does not speculate about the implications for the female spectator.)

Drawing largely on Dika's discussion, I can summarize the slasher narrative as follows: A masked or hidden (largely offscreen), psychotic male propelled by psychosexual fury stalks and kills a sizable number of young men and women with a high level of violence. The killer's rage derives from a traumatic childhood experience, sometimes a primal scene. This past event is either recounted chronologically (as in Halloween) or in flashback (as in Friday the 13th). In the present, the killer returns to the scene of the past event (Halloween night in Haddonfield, Illinois) to reenact the violence. Although both men and women are killed, the objectification, scrutinization, and death of women is stressed. After a protracted struggle, a resourceful female ultimately subdues the killer, sometimes kills him, and survives. The action transpires in one fictional location, usually a rural or (middle-class) suburban environment.[9] Clover adds that the virtually

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[8] Clover 192; Dika 87.

[9] The rural in horror is often a summer camp, or summer home, i.e. an extension of the suburban retreat.

indestructible killer is the only repeating character in the serialized films.[10]

Stylistically, distinctive elements are employed to narrativize the stalking and slashing. Since the killer is offscreen or masked for most of the film, his presence is signified by musical codes, and a battery of distinctive shots, which I call unclaimed point-of-view shots -- shots which are held long enough and framed so that they create the impression that someone is watching, but without a reverse shot to show us who. I will outline four variants. The first is a tracking shot. Clover elaborates on this camera work.

> [T]he camera is hand-held, producing a jerky image, and the frame includes in-and-out-of-focus foreground objects (trees, bushes, window frames) behind which the killer (I-camera) is lurking -- all accompanied by the sound of heartbeat and heavy breathing.[11]

The dream at the end of Dressed to Kill (1980) contains such a sequence.

The second is a tracking shot which allow us to see some part of his/her body from the character's point of view. One of the earliest examples is the opening sequence

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[10] The killer's virtual indestructibility not only legitimates a paranoid attitude, it also motivates the overkill imperative -- the need to kill the monster over and over again; once is never enough. This imperative is narrativized in Tremors (1989) and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part III (1989), where the aid of survivalists, armed with the overkill mentality, is decisive in overcoming the monster.

[11] Clover 190.

of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1932), but the most oft-repeated example is the opening of Halloween:

A tracking shot approaches the house. The camera climbs the front steps, and moves from the door to the window, voyeuristically pursuing a teenage couple engaged in sexual play. When the couple goes upstairs, the camera enters the house through the back door into the kitchen. An arm enters the frame to open a drawer and remove a butcher knife. This is the first clear evidence we have that the perspective belongs to a diegetic character. The unknown character lurks in the shadows when the teenage boy comes downstairs and exits the house, then "he" goes upstairs where he retrieves a clown mask from the floor and puts it on.[12] Our perspective is now circumscribed by the outline of the mask. He approaches the half nude teenage girl, who is brushing her hair before the mirror, observes the rumpled sheets on the bed, and begins to stab her. He observes the motion of his swinging arm and continues to stabs her until she collapses to the floor. Then, he retraces his footsteps until he reaches the bottom of the stairs, at which point he goes out the front door and down the steps. A car pulls up, and an adult couple gets out. When the man removes the mask we see the killer for the first time: a dazed six-year-old boy holding a bloody

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[12] See below, discussion of voyeuristic masculine position.

knife. The end of the sequence is marked by the abdication of the unclaimed point-of-view shot, in favor of a reverse shot showing us the killer.

Just as this sequence establishes, within the film, that the reappearance of the unclaimed point of view shot (and its musical code) signifies the killer's presence, so Halloween establishes this set of visual (and aural) codes as conventions for the slasher film.[13]

The third is a series of voyeuristic shots, either tracking or stationary, taken from various angles and points in the diegetic space, with objects in the foreground creating a keyhole effect, but without any part of the voyeur's body being seen or heard. Although these shots are coded as subjective, sometimes it is ambiguous whether or not they represent the point of view of any of the diegetic characters. Dika describes it as

> ...a sequence of shots that signify the killer's presence but fail to confirm his exact position within the space. These shots tend to fragment the visual field by observing a potential victim from a variety of different focal lengths and angles. Some of these can be read as subjective shots because they suddenly approach the victim, are taken from behind doorways or partitions, or are merely held too long.[14]

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[13] I am not claiming that Halloween invented this subjective work, since it clearly draws on conventions used in previous films like Psycho and Jaws (1975), merely that the codes Halloween employed have been imitated to the point of standardization. For an interesting departure from these codes, see The Slumber Party Massacre (1982) and The Stepfather (1986).

[14] Dika 88.

The fourth is similar to the third, in that the (tracking or stationary) shot is framed by foreground objects (screen door, window, bushes, trees) but it differs from the latter in that some part of the voyeur's body (shoulder, arm) moves into the edge of the frame, thus revealing that although the shot is aligned with the voyeur, it is not taken directly from the voyeur's perspective.

This subjective camera work not only masks the killer's identity by withholding a reverse shot (and therefore not allowing us to see even when we look); it also functions to gull us, as when it is shown to represent the point of view of a non-threatening diegetic character. More importantly, this camera work aligns the viewer with the killer's point of view. While this locates the audience in the privileged and masterful position of voyeur, it also reveals the limitations of the killer's (and the audience's) vision; the foreground objects which construct the voyeuristic keyhole also obscure the voyeur's line of sight.

As I have argued in Chapter Four, the formal logic of this camera work constructs a voyeuristic "masculine" position. Victims in the slasher film are positioned through the male gaze as the fetishized objects of sexual investigation. The counterpart of the killer's despecularized "masculine" position is the victims' hyperspecularized "feminine" position, by which they are

constituted as objects of the controlling gaze. According to Dika, "...victims...occupy a 'feminine' position because their narrative and cinematic enfeeblement has rendered them functionally 'castrated.'" Unable to look, speak, or hear authoritatively, unable to use violence, or to drive the narrative forward, they lack knowledge of the threat, and ultimately, they lack subjectivity or narrative agency. We do not see the killer from their point of view, but we do see them from the killer's point of view, as scrutinized sexual objects who become "objects of aggression."[15] Although victims far outnumber any other characters, the audience is largely unconcerned about the fate of these undeveloped and clearly doomed characters.

Within patriarchal discourse, the restricted ability to see, hear, or speak is implicitly a masochistic position, and being the object of the look is implicitly a feminine position. So, like the woman in Mulvey's formulation, victims are investigated. The visual/aural evidence of their sexual activity is used to establish their guilt and to motivate the punishment for their transgressions -- a reenactment of castration.[16] Clover notes that "the postcoital death" is a staple of many slasher films including, Friday the 13th and Halloween. According to

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[15] Dika 90, 89.

[16] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Movies and Methods Vol. II, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985): 303-315.

Dika, the (feminized) victims' symbolic castration is literalized in the mutilation of their bodies. "[T]heir wound, as the symbolic site of their castration, is meant to be manifestly seen."[17]

Despite the even-handedness of many slasher films in which roughly equal numbers of men and women are killed, male and female death are not the same. Male death is swifter, more distanced, and more likely to occur offscreen. Female death is extended, occurs at close range, and in graphic detail. Of the two men who are killed in Halloween, one is killed offscreen (his death is incidental), and the other is dispatched quickly in the shadowy kitchen. Although he is the object of aggression, he is not shown to be the object of the gaze prior to the attack. Although his is a postcoital death, it occupies substantially less screen time and drama than his female lover's death in the bedroom.

The three women who are killed in Halloween have either just engaged in sexual intercourse or are about to do so. Their deaths, and the anticipation of their deaths, occupies substantially more screen time than that of their male counterparts (most of whom are spared). As Clover notes (and this is true not only of the slasher film, but of the postmodern genre), women are killed because they are female to a degree that it cannot be said that men are

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[17] Dika 90.

killed because they are male. This has held up since Psycho and Peeping Tom inaugurated the pattern, and it has continued through Halloween, Dressed to Kill, and Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (1989).

According to Dika, the surviving heroine, whom Clover aptly names the "Final Girl," is distinguished from the victims by being allotted more close-ups, screen time, and reverse shots from her perspective. Her character is more fully developed, and she is generally a likeable person. She is less likely to be the object of sexual scrutiny, less likely to engage in sexual activity or to be shown nude, and so less subject to the controlling gaze, than are the victims. Like the killer, she is able to see, hear, and speak authoritatively. Like the viewer, she directs an active investigative gaze at the events surrounding her, and so comes to understand the magnitude of the violence that threatens her. More specifically, she directs an active investigative gaze at the killer; we see him from her point of view.[18]

Indeed, the transition from the killer's point of view to the Final Girl's point of view is pivotal. As Clover describes this process:

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[18] The convention of the final girl has been appropriated by mainstream cinema. For instance, the female protagonists in The Silence of the Lambs (1990) and Sleeping with the Enemy (1990) rescue themselves from murderous male psychotics by killing them.

> We are linked...with the killer [through point of view work] in the early part of the film, usually before we have seen him directly and before we have come to know the Final Girl in any detail. Our closeness to him wanes as our closeness to the Final Girl waxes -- a shift underwritten by story line as well as camera position. By the end, point of view is hers...[19]

Her exercise of the active investigative gaze enables her to subject the killer to her controlling gaze, and thus to transform him into an object of aggression. It is this gaze which enables her to use violence to defend herself effectively, and to drive the narrative forward. As Clover notes, in the horror film, the Final Girl survives because she activates the female investigative gaze -- the grounds for punishment in conventional Hollywood narrative cinema.

Clover points out that the protracted struggle between the Final Girl and the killer constitutes the climax of the film and occupies the last 10-20 minutes, during which she is preyed upon, tormented and terrorized. She is "abject terror personified."[20] However, she is also courageous, resourceful, intelligent, mechanically competent, and watchful. In Halloween, Laurie bends a wire coat hanger to jab the killer in the eye, thus piercing the opening in his protective mask. In A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984), Nancy rigs up a series of booby traps using household devices and lures the killer into her trap. In The Stepfather (1986), Stephanie fashions a knife from a broken

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[19] Clover 208.

[20] Clover 201.

shard of glass. The Final Girl's weapons, like the killer's weapons, are often primitive extensions of the body -- knives, axes, pitchforks -- that allow for "closeness and tactility" in their violent encounters with the other.[21]

Not only does she fashion weapons, the Final Girl runs, screams, cries out for help, dodges blows, negotiates, and fights back with anything at her disposal.[22] In other words, the Final Girl employs the range of strategies which, according to Bart and O'Brien, are most effective in avoiding rape.[23] Despite its misogynist inclinations, horror, and the slasher film in particular, is the only Hollywood genre that consistently shows women using self-defense effectively. This pattern has prevailed as the sub-genre has evolved. Clover observes a shift from earlier films like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Halloween, where in the end women are saved by the intervention of men, to later films like The Slumber Party Massacre (1982), Friday the 13th (1980), The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part II (1986), and The Stepfather (1986), where

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[21] Clover 198.

[22] Although negotiation is generally useless, in Friday the 13th Part II (1981), the Final Girl, Alice, impersonates Jason's dead mother and commands him to put down his weapon.

[23] Pauline Bart and Patricia O'Brien, "Stopping Rape: Effective Avoidance Strategies," Signs 10, no. 1 (1984): 83-101. The most misogynist of the slasher films (e.g. Splatter University, 1984; The Entity, 1982) invariably play down this element.

women must rely on themselves to kill the killer and survive.[24]

It is this quality of self-reliance which establishes the Final Girl as a "female hero" rather than as a heroine.[25] For, according to myth criticism, the heroine occupies a passive position (she waits to be rescued), whereas the hero occupies an active position (he rescues himself).[26] Similarly, in DeLauretis' reading of Lotman, "...the hero must be male, regardless of the gender of the text-image..." because "...the mythical mechanism produces the human being as man and everything else as, not even 'woman,' but non-man..."[27] Agency is coded male in patriarchal discourse.

The structural position of the Final Girl as female hero, the slasher film's transition from the killer's point of view to the Final Girl's point of view, and the Final

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[24] This pattern is born out in the 1990 remake of Night of the Living Dead, where Barbara, who is virtually catatonic in the 1968 version, emerges in the remake as a full-fledged Final Girl.

[25] Clover 218. She also refers to the Final Girl as a "victim-hero." I reject the term, because "victim" negates the element of struggle implicit in survival.

[26] Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, The Female Hero in American and British Literature (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1981).

[27] Teresa DeLauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984) 118-119, 121 on Jurij M. Lotman, "The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology," trans. Julian Graffy, Poetics Today 1, no. 1-2 (Autumn 1979): 161-84.

Girl's narrative agency in general, generate Dika and Clover's discussion of the sexual "ambiguity" of the Final Girl. According to Dika, "...there is usually a certain ambiguity to her sexual identity."[28] Dika points out that although the Final Girl is female, she shares with the killer, the masculine ability to see authoritatively and to wield violence. Clover develops this idea further:

> The Final Girl is boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine -- not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself. Lest we miss the point, it is spelled out in her name: Stevie [The Fog], Marti [Hell Night], Terry, Laurie [Halloween], Stretch [The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part II], Will.[29]

What does the "masculinization" of the Final Girl signify? First, it signifies the genre's inscription within patriarchal discourse, where power is coded masculine, even when embodied in biological females.[30] Within the terms of patriarchal discourse, feminine

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[28] Dika 90.

[29] Clover 204.

[30] Masculine and feminine are more than human characteristics; they are basic metaphysical categories which organize the cultural field. I contend that power is coded masculine even when embodied in a biological female. I submit the following intelligible joke as evidence: "Why doesn't Margaret Thatcher wear pants? 'Cause her balls might show." The female status of the Prime Minister is neutralized through a masculinization which distorts reality to conform to patriarchal restrictions on accession to (male) power.

subjectivity or agency is an oxymoron. Clover tacitly accepts these binary terms in her characterization of the Final Girl's interests as "masculine," and her reduction of agency to masculinity. Indeed, it is not clear if Clover is being ironic when she tells us that when the Final Girl fights back with a slew of phallic symbols, she has not only "manned" herself, but also "unmanned" the killer.[31] Smartness, gravity, competence, and the ability to fight are only prerogatives of the masculine in a male-dominated society.

Second, the "masculinization" of the Final Girl signifies the genre's transgression of boundaries. As I argue in Chapter Five, the killer is coded ambiguously, as masculine through the controlling gaze, and as feminine through his function as fetishized object. Similarly, the Final Girl is coded ambiguously, as feminine through her function as fetishized object -- as "abject terror personified" -- and as masculine through the controlling gaze. The genre breaks down binary notions of gender formally (women exercise the controlling gaze, men function as fetishized objects), narratively (women use violence against men effectively, men are symbolically and literally castrated), and unconsciously -- by constructing cross-gender identification in the audience. It is to a discussion of the latter that I will now turn.

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[31] Clover 210.

It is generally assumed that same-gender identification is the prevalent mode of identification.[32] This position is grounded in the assumption of a particular reading of heterosexuality which separates identification from sexual object choice. Thus, within this heterosexual matrix, one identifies with people of the same sex/gender, and desires people of the opposite sex/gender. As Clover rightly points out, when cross-gender identification has been theorized, it has been dealt with largely as a matter of female (audience) identification with the male (gaze) (which Fetterly refers to in the literary field as "immasculation.")[33] Studlar points out that female identification with the male has been regarded largely as a problem for the female spectator, a matter of colluding with the oppressor, rather than as a potential (non-collusive or not-only-collusive) pleasure. To pursue this line of thought, we must ask: what is at stake for the female audience of the slasher film? But before we

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[32] This assumption is operative not only in film theory, but in the feminist appropriation of object-relations theory as well. The latter assumes that the mother-infant daughter attachment is prolonged because the mother identifies with the similarly gendered child. See Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978).

[33] Judith Fetterly, The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977) xx.

address this question, let us address Clover's concern with (male) spectatorship.

Clover is interested in a different but related question: male identification with the female. She suggests that this question has been neglected because people assume that "...men's interests are [so] well served by the traditional patterns of cinematic representation," that they have no need to identify with the female. But, if that is the case, "...how are we then to explain the appeal to a largely male audience of a film genre that features a female victim-hero?"[34] Since I disagree with Clover's constitution of the genre audience as male, I will reformulate her question as: what is at stake for the male audience of the slasher film?

Clover grounds cross-gender identification in the psychoanalytic claim that "...the threat function and the victim function coexist in the same unconscious..." regardless of gender.[35] In other words, vulnerability and rage are essential components of emotional life for both women and men, despite the fact that vulnerability is coded feminine and rage is coded masculine. And though viewers are more likely to acknowledge identification with the vulnerability of the victim (i.e. fear of injury, death, and the unknown), identification also operates with the

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[34] Clover 206, 207.

[35] Clover 209.

rage of the killer (i.e. untrammeled fury and violence), even when viewers are unwilling or unable to acknowledge it. This multiplicity of identifications is not a "problem" for the audience; it is at the heart of the experience, and therefore the pleasure of the genre. As Clover puts it, "the force of the experience, the horror, comes from 'knowing' both sides of the story," or, as I would put it, from the blatant interchangeability of subject positions.[26]

"But why," Clover asks, "if viewers can identify across gender lines and if the root experience of horror is sex blind, are the screen sexes not interchangeable?"[27] To answer this question, Clover poses a metanarrative: The slasher film dramatizes the male viewer's incestuous fantasy of having sex with his father, but the desired and dreaded erotic penetration is displaced onto violence.[28] What is at stake, according to Clover, in this sadomasochistic fantasy of an inappropriate (because familial) attachment to the father, is the male's transition from childhood dependence to adult autonomy, or

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[26] Clover 191.

[27] Clover 209.

[28] Although Clover does not cite it, her account implicitly suggests that she is drawing on Sigmund Freud's essay, "'A Child is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Origin of Sexual Perversions," Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works 17, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).

to put it in gendered terms, from femininity to masculinity. In other words, the slasher film is a (homosexual) male Oedipal drama. The central character's femaleness serves both to signify abject terror (screaming, crying, pleading, despairing) -- which is coded feminine -- and to distantiate the male viewer from the taboo drama being enacted in the film. In Clover's reading, the Final Girl's sexual inactivity is thus motivated by the need to shield the male viewer from the homosexual, and feminized, nature of his desires. After all,

> ...the male viewer may be willing to enter into the vicarious experience of defending himself from the possibility of symbolic penetration on the part of the killer, but real vaginal penetration on the diegetic level is evidently more femaleness than he can bear.[39]

The castration anxiety implicit in the centrality of a female figure (the Final Girl) is negotiated, in accordance with Mulvey's formulation, through the strategies of reenactment and fetishization. First, the woman (victim) is castrated (killed) for her sexual transgressions, and

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[39] Clover 212. What makes femaleness unbearable for the male? According to Chodorow, and object-relations theory, within a system of female-specific mothering, masculinity is defined as the negation of femininity. Masculine identity formation requires the male to shift his primary identification from the feminine, as represented by the concrete mother, to the masculine, as represented by the abstract father. Add to this, the cultural degradation associated with the feminine, the downward mobility implicit in male identification with the feminine -- be it a female or a feminized male -- and the result is that males learn to defend against female identification. For the Freudian answer to the question of what makes femaleness unbearable for the male, see the discussion of castration theory in Chapter Four.

second, the fetish (a proliferation of phallic objects) substitutes for the absent phallus of the woman (Final Girl). According to Clover, the Final Girl's "phallicization" accomplishes the male's transition from femininity to masculinity.[40] So, in the end we might well call her the Phallic Girl.

Clover's analysis begins to open up the discussion of cross-gender identification in the slasher film, but reduces it to male identification with a female narrative agent. As Clover admits, her analysis presupposes that males identify with masculinized females but not with feminized females (or feminized males).[41] To explore this topic further, I suggest we examine the possibility that male viewers identify as much with the Final Girl's abject terror -- with the feminized female -- as they do with her phallic agency -- with the masculinized female. I suggest that what is ultimately compelling to the male viewer, about the scenario Clover draws, is what is taboo -- i.e. the male's feminized position within the Oedipal drama

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[40] Clover 211.

[41] I believe Clover is correct in asserting that the threatening nature of male identification with the feminine problematizes male identification with feminized males (incompetent authority figures, victims, the defeated killer) because this position does not create enough distance to mitigate the threat. Similarly, female victims, though abject, are problematic points of identification because they overstate the case. However, this does not mean that identification cannot or does not operate in this direction.

vis-a-vis the father -- rather than what is normative -- i.e. phallicization. The Final Girl is the most compelling point of identification for the male viewer, not in spite but, because of her femininity.

Similarly, some have argued that male viewers of pornography identify not only with men, but with (naked) women as well. According to Williams' reading of Giles,

> ...the male viewer's scrutiny of the vulva is an occasion for (unconscious) identification with the woman herself. The viewer projects and expels qualities, feelings, and wishes that he himself possesses but refuses to recognize. Through this 'projective identification,' the male viewer does not merge with the female on the screen, as in more typical primary identification; rather, he projects his own feminine traits of passivity and sexual urges onto the body of the woman as 'other.'[42]

What then of the female spectator? If male spectatorial pleasure lies in identifying with the repressed, taboo categories of the abject, castrated, and feminine, then female spectatorial pleasure lies in identifying with the repressed, taboo categories of the enraged, violent, and masculine. Violence is a taboo position for women in patriarchal society, a taboo which is born out in the statistics. Not only are most murders committed by men, but most violence occurs in the direction male-to-male or male-to-female.

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[42] Linda Williams, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible" (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989) 82. On Dennis Giles, "Pornographic Space: The Other Place" The 1977 Film Studies Annual: Part 2 (Pleasantville, NY: Redgrave, 1977): 52-65.

In light of this, let us consider how the Final Girl becomes the compelling point of identification for female viewers. She uses self-defense effectively to protect herself.[43] She activates the female investigative gaze to drive the narrative forward. She defeats, and sometimes kills, a man -- the killer. The Final Girl, like the female in the masochistic aesthetic, asserts her power. As Studlar describes the female in the masochistic aesthetic, "she is the object of the look but also the holder of a 'controlling' gaze that turns the male into an object of 'to-be-looked-at-ness.'"[44] The slasher film constructs a subject position for woman, a place from which she can look -- through identification with a dominant female character. The female viewer is permitted to identify with a female character who has no choice but to use extreme violence against an "other." This fantasy is the flip side of the woman's rape fantasy, as feminists have theorized it; it enables women to experience taboo emotions (be they sexual arousal or rage) and vicarious actions (be

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[43] In the conventions of Hollywood narrative cinema, female violence is justified when it can be attributed to "maternal instinct." The horror film, especially the slasher, is the only Hollywood genre in which women consistently use self-defense effectively to defend themselves or eachother (The Slumber Party Massacre, The Stepfather).

[44] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," Quarterly Review of Film Studies (Fall 1984): 267-282, 273.

they fucking or killing) without the onus of guilt.[45] As in the rape fantasy, she is forced to indulge feelings and actions proscribed to her, and although she is "forced" she is in a position to stop it/leave if it does not suit her.

However, the subject position for woman which the slasher film constructs is still inscribed within patriarchal discourse, and so, there are limits to the agency accorded the woman. Clover formulates those limits as the limits of a sadomasochistic fantasy in which the female stands in for the male. Dika formulates those limits differently. At the end of Clover's metanarrative, the Final Girl is phallicized. "The moment at which the Final Girl is effectively phallicized is the moment that the plot halts and horror ceases."[46] But Dika formulates the narrative conclusion differently. She observes that when the Final Girl kills the killer, she loses narrative agency, i.e. she loses vision, the ability to use violence, and the ability to drive the narrative forward. The killer's death or escape halts the plot, but not necessarily the horror; it reinstates the Final Girl in the passive position to which female characters are conventionally relegated. In the end, she is "trapped within the confines of the frame and returned to her

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[45] This analogy was brought to my attention by Heather Levi.

[46] Clover 211.

position as object."[47] Furthermore, Dika points out that the killer's escape (or resurrection in a subsequent film) implicitly threatens the Final Girl with his violent return. This threat can lead to one of various possibilities: another successful outcome for the returning Final Girl, as in Halloween Part II (1981), in which Laurie triumphs again; or to the death of the Final Girl, as in A Nightmare on Elm Street Part III: Dream Warriors (1987), in which Nancy dies at the end. A third possibility is found in Friday the 13th Part II and Halloween Part VI, in which the Final Girl of the preceding film in the series reappears, only to be killed at the outset.

What has been elided from this discussion is the issue of viewer identification with the killer. Like the Final Girl (woman), the killer (monster) signifies both the phallic and the castrated; both are sites of taboo desires. For the female viewer, the killer signifies unbridled rage and violence, as well as the male body upon which female violence is inscribed. For the male viewer, the wounded killer signifies an abject body, both literally and symbolically castrated. The pleasure of the text lies in vicariously indulging taboo feelings and experiences through the mediation of a fiction. The slasher narrativizes the oscillation of identification between the

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[47] Dika 95.

feminine and the masculine, the spectacle and the gaze, central to the pleasurable workings of film.

But what of people who report no pleasure, only (or mostly) displeasure, in the violent spectacle of the slasher film? Are they not subject to the same play of repressed desires? People who find it necessary to not only look away but to not look back, generally acknowledge fear of the victim position.[48] They say it makes them feel too vulnerable. The film's re-creation of terror is so complete that it precludes the construction of recreational terror.

I suggest that more than the reported fear of victimization is at stake in this terror. The psychoanalytic method suggests that we look for the repression in what is left out of the account, namely, in the opposite of vulnerability and victimization -- rage and violence. I suggest that what motivates the avoidance of this violent genre is ultimately not fear of being victimized, but fear of their own aggression. This fear is exacerbated by the killer's virtual indestructibility, his unwillingness to be put to rest, his insistence on

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[48] This observation is based on informal conversations with friends and acquaintances who are fascinated that I would subject myself to such torture in the name of research.

resurfacing, his dogged insistence on a return.[49] This fear is so threatening that it is projected onto its opposite (victimization) and denied.

Although, admittedly, patriarchal discourse places severe limitations on the subject position accorded woman within the representational field, the horror genre's disruption of the normative order creates an opening for feminist discourse. In the following section, I will explore this potential by constituting The Stepfather (1986) as a feminist horror film.

THE STEPFATHER AS FEMINIST HORROR FILM

To investigate the uneasy relationship between the horror film and the feminist film, as embodied in The Stepfather, I will first address the question of what constitutes a feminist film. Then, I will consider the subversive elements of the horror genre that contribute to the film's feminism, as well as the regressive elements of the genre which the subversive text inverts.

The question of what constitutes feminist cinema has been a much-debated one. Feminist cinema, like female subjectivity, is not already-there; it is in the process of forming. As such, it may have a multiplicity of

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[49] Without negating the force of the marketplace, I suggest that the return of the repressed is the internal driving force, at least on the level of consumption, for the genre's proliferation of sequels, remakes, and serializations.

identities. The Stepfather, like feminist film theory itself, is characterized by the tension between classical Hollywood cinema and feminist cinema. Stylistically, it is located within the realist tradition of classical Hollywood cinema; it effaces its own production processes. But though it uses narrative to entertain, it also throws into question the taken-for-granted. It is a genre film which employs conventional forms in subversive ways to appeal to a large audience.[50] Kaplan argues that to use familiar forms in challenging ways allows for the development of a feminist counter cinema that is accessible to a general audience.[51]

Feminist cinema addresses ambivalence and contradiction, what Mayne calls "a simultaneous fascination with and contempt for Hollywood cinema."[52] It examines the contradictory fit between the female image and the male gaze. The Stepfather locates the gaze in a female narrative character who successfully defends her right to question male authority and to exercise power. Moreover, the film explores the consequences of her agency as a critique of patriarchal power.

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[50] Although The Stepfather received virtually no publicity, and an extremely limited theatrical run, it has since become a popular video rental.

[51] E. Ann Kaplan, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera (New York: Methuen, 1983).

[52] Judith Mayne, "Feminist Film Theory and Criticism," Signs 11, no. 1 (Autumn 1985: 81-100) 83.

DeLauretis formulates feminist cinema as one which constructs a frame of reference that includes the female subject, one which utilizes narrative and visual pleasure so as to make female subjectivity possible.[53] The Stepfather repeatedly, and in the face of diegetic contradictions, validates the woman's discourse.

Feminist cinema concerns a feminist problematic, in this case, the ideology of the nuclear family and the prerogative of male violence. In a subversive move, the film privileges mother-daughter bonding (precisely where much feminist theory locates itself) over patriarchal authority. Horror, like the political of feminist discourse, is domestic. It is sewn within the fertile soil of the family. The Stepfather exploits this convergence.

Feminist cinema challenges narrative conventions. The Stepfather both conforms to and inverts features of the horror genre. For instance, horror films foreground violence against women. The Stepfather opens in the aftermath of the murder of a woman and her three children, two of whom are girls. As the narrative unfolds, three characters die graphically; all of them are men. The film is not without its protracted struggle between male assailant and Final Girl, but the emphasis is on her survival and sustained agency.

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[53] De Lauretis 67-8.

The Stepfather exploits the genre's disruption of the heteromonogamous nuclear family to articulate a scathing critique of the nuclear family and the American Dream. It focuses a critical eye on male-to-female and adult-to-child violence -- the ultimate exercise of patriarchal prerogatives -- and validates a woman's right to defend herself. It does so through the agency of a female character, 16-year old Stephanie, by activating her investigative gaze, validating her discourse, and legitimating the primacy of female bonding. I will now interrogate how the film foregrounds narrative material to validate the woman's discourse.

The film opens with a panning crane shot (the camera leaves the ground) of a suburban street littered with autumn leaves, and moves to the carnage that concludes Jerry's life as head of the Morrison family. The opening scene is the scene of the crime. It establishes the contradiction between Jerry's underlying psychosexual fury and his exterior placid stability. It juxtaposes chaos and order in the authoritarian personality. After metamorphosizing into Jerry Blake, he walks down the stairs past a picture hung askew and a bloody handprint, to reach the dead lying amid overturned furniture and puddles of blood. In the background, the family portrait hangs over the mantlepiece, the mise-en-scene of middle class family life. He exits the house whistling "Camptown Races." This

scene renders Stephanie's intense dislike and distrust of Jerry not only plausible but imperative.

Autumn, the season of death, is when Jerry sheds blood and changes identity. After the opening sequence, the frame dissolves to another suburban street, and the subtitle, "one year later..." Because of the cyclical nature of reenactment, we get the end of the story at the beginning. This knowledge of the outcome not only informs how we read the events which unfold, it is also essential in validating Stephanie's perspective, which otherwise would seem paranoid given the prevailing "normality" of Jerry's character. Furthermore, this knowledge literalizes hyperbolic remarks such as "he's going to kill me," and cliches such as "let's bury the hatchet." This literalization of speech actively engages the audience to read the seemingly innocuous as fraught with danger.

The film further engages the audience in an active reading by inverting conventional spectatorial positions. It subverts the traditional positioning of man as voyeur or subject of the gaze, and woman as spectacle or object of the gaze. Stephanie distrusts Jerry because she sees -- she sees through him, she investigates his past, she exercises the gaze. She sees his unflagging calmness and affability, at first as phoney and disturbing, eventually as pathological.

Unlike Stephanie, her mother, Susan does not see. Susan has been seduced and blinded by Jerry's charms. Even Stephanie's psychiatrist is unconvinced that what Stephanie sees in Jerry constitutes more than a projection of Stephanie's rage at the loss of her dead father. At issue here is the question of whose vision is legitimated.

Jerry represents the hegemonic view. He sees the world through the prism of 1950s family sitcoms, those exemplars of the cult of domesticity and the ascendance of the nuclear family. The film makes reference to Mr. Ed, Father Knows Best, and Leave It to Beaver. (David Edelstein aptly titled his review in The Village Voice, "Ward Wields the Cleaver.") He models his life on those prefabricated television images of the "good life." He marries into ready-made families. He putters around the house, affectionate but asexual. He spouts sitcom platitudes. He compulsively repeats formulas. He ruthlessly cancels failures.

His vision is that of Ronald Reagan's America, where the benevolent Father rules with loving austerity, Mother keeps house, and children respect their elders. Jerry would be happy in Stepford.[54] Ironically, the story is set in the state of Washington. Like Reagan, whose portrait enters the diegetic space, Jerry is a consummate chameleon

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[54] Stepford, the location for The Stepford Wives, is a town where women and children are replaced with simulacra who cater to men's every whim.

and salesman. Employed by American Eagle Realty, Jerry unabashedly claims to be selling what he has already bought -- The American Dream.

Unlike Jerry, Stephanie does not see the nuclear family as the Family framed by conservative rhetoric. Although she misses her father, she understands that mother and daughter constitute a family. She tells her psychiatrist, Dr. Bondurant, "If he wasn't here, my Mom and I would be alright." She perceives that Jerry's vision is warped. Unlike Stephanie, Susan idealizes him and in her blindness, she wants Stephanie to see him as she does. But though Stephanie's perceptions are regarded skeptically by the diegetic characters, they are validated by the audience.

Moreover, the film validates Stephanie's discourse in its very construction. Important in this regard is the film's one use of the voice-off, a disembodied voice which "exceeds the limits of the frame, but not the limits of the diegesis."[55] The film juxtaposes the visual image of Jerry building a birdhouse with the aural image of Stephanie's voice speaking disparagingly about him. The use of the disembodied female voice, brief though it is, is subversive because it accords her a diegetic position of authority. Moreover, by presenting a voice unanchored by a body, it

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[55] Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 48.

disrupts her construction as body. It frees her from the control of the male gaze -- she's not visually accessible -- and it positions the woman as the knowing subject.[56]

Undaunted by their doubts, Stephanie turns her investigative gaze on the problem of obtaining evidence that Jerry is not what he appears to be. An opportunity arises when an article appears in the newspaper about the still unfound mass murderer of the Morrison family, Henry Morrison. Ever faithful to patriarchal prerogatives, Jerry ponders with dismay that a man could be driven to murder by his family. And why? He tells us, because they disappointed him. At which point, Jerry looks up at Stephanie and the camera cuts to her watching him. His plastic features shift from innocuousness to rage, then back to a warm smile, an image which reverberates with the name of the town in which the Morrison murders took place. Bellevue literally means beautiful view, but it also signifies the site of insanity. The attractive facade hides internal derangement.

Stephanie inadvertently witnesses Jerry's derangement when he vents his rage in the basement workshop. In a litany of abuses towards "Daddy's little boy," which culminates in an enraged assertion of the sanctity of the

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[56] Kaja Silverman, "Dis-embodying the Female Voice," Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams, American Film Institute Monograph Series 3 (Frederick, MD: Univ. Publications of America, 1984) 135.

Family, he articulates the sustained warfare that rages inside him. Disjointed voices alternate between despair, volatile endearments, rage, and calls for order. Badly frightened by this display, Stephanie escalates her scrutiny by writing to the paper for a photograph of Henry Morrison.

Dr. Bondurant, Stephanie's psychiatrist, and the voice of male rationality, puts into question Stephanie's seemingly excessive assessments of Jerry's behavior. Bondurant rationalizes the outburst that she witnesses as a form of letting off steam that helps Jerry to manage garden variety neurosis. Although Bondurant discredits Stephanie's belief that Jerry is crazy, his concern deepens when she acknowledges that Jerry frightens her. Intent on scrutinizing Jerry, Bondurant devises a plan to pose as a prospective house buyer. Posing as a "confirmed bachelor" who disparages "the family, home sweet home, and all that crap," Bondurant provokes Jerry. Calling him a "cheerleader for the traditional family," he interrogates Jerry about his strict upbringing. In the process, Bondurant slips and mentions his wife. Jerry, whose suspicions have been aroused prior to this, seizes a 2-by-4 and beats him to death.

True to the conventions of the genre, the rational skeptic, usually a man, dies. Unable to believe in Jerry's murderous violence, he is unequipped to defend himself. In

an inversion of the convention that graphically depicts female death far in excess of male death, his exercise of an active investigating gaze is punished in a protracted, graphic sequence. Bondurant screams and jerks spasmodically as Jerry hammers at his body. The beam bisects the frame in a relentless rhythm. The voice of male rationality is stilled by the madman who in his madness calls for order. Bondurant's belated ability to see is inscribed in the look of horror in his eyes.

The film reasserts the clarity of Stephanie's vision even as she doubts herself. It crosscuts between Stephanie telling her friend Karen that she was completely wrong about him to Jerry disposing of Bondurant's body. Stephanie has reached this false conclusion because Jerry has intervened to block her vision. He has intercepted Stephanie's mail from the newspaper and replaced the photo. Shorn of her suspicions, Stephanie responds to the news of Bondurant's death by crying in Jerry's arms. She is disarmed. Jerry opportunistically steps into the vacant space left by the loss of another father figure. It is then that Stephanie makes conciliatory gestures towards Jerry and helps him to erect the birdhouse, of which I will say more later.

Stephanie's loss of clarity of vision parallels her loss of sexual innocence. The scene which precedes Stephanie's receipt of the mailing with the bogus picture,

and her subsequent reconciliation with Jerry, is one in which Stephanie experiences sexual desire. She and her friend Paul engage in a mock sparring bout that stirs sexual feelings. Stephanie's desire for another male figure and her sexual agency precipitate the argument that carries Jerry to the point of no return.

Jerry is confronted with Stephanie's sexuality when she and Paul kiss goodnight. He bursts through the door and, in terms which reveal his sexual disgust, accuses Paul of rape. Trying to usurp Stephanie's discourse of desire, he claims that "she's not ready for this." He disavows her sexual agency. Paul is guilty of imposing his desire because Stephanie has no desire of her own. In anger, Stephanie retaliates by calling him crazy, demented, and hung up on sex. This verbal attack marks her ability to see again, this time in the light of sexual agency. It also marks her willingness to undermine his authority.

Stephanie's sexuality threatens Jerry because it lies beyond his control. He attempts to stifle her sexuality because he cannot allow Stephanie to grow up and become an autonomous being. Jerry's definition of family requires children who are the property of their father, therefore children cannot grow up. It is interesting to note that Stephanie is a teenager, a liminal category between childhood and adulthood, bound to upset Jerry's need for a strictly ordered world. His expectations insure that

eventually Jerry will be disappointed and the consequences of his rage will be inscribed on the bodies of his family.

The Thanksgiving dinner epitomizes Jerry's fleeting realization of ideal family life. It is picture perfect, yet full of references to impending disaster. Jerry evokes his status as patriarchal authority when he gives thanks to the Father. But Biblical fathers demand sacrifices, and often the sacrificial lamb is the offspring.[57] Jerry gushes with sentimentality about the family as he carves up the bird. This juxtaposition is disquieting, given that the association between birds and families is established explicitly in the preceding scene, when the birdhouse is erected. Jerry's fondest hope is that a family of birds will move into the birdhouse. His image of the family is like the static image of birds in the film: contained, hunted, and dead. Jerry houses families and birds, and he carves up their bodies with kitchen knives.

The film juxtaposes the scene that epitomizes Jerry's realization of ideal family life with the destruction of that ideal -- Stephanie's refusal to conform to Jerry's anti-sexual dictums. It is Stephanie's refusal to be controlled by a domineering male that leads to Jerry's decision to kill again.

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[57] In various scenes, Stephanie wears sweaters made of wool or decorated with lambs.

I want to address now the relationship between the woman and the monster. Williams notes that the horror film constitutes the monster as the distorted reflection of the woman, a relation which can be used both critically and hegemonically.[58] The Stepfather establishes an affinity between Stephanie and Jerry through mirror images, both literal and figurative ones. For instance, Stephanie is introduced through a dissolve in which her image supplants Jerry's early in the film. This blurring of images occurs again, late in the film, when Jerry's image supplants Stephanie's.

This mirroring effect structures other parts of the film as well. The opening scene juxtaposes carnality and carnage as Jerry showers off the blood of his victims. This scene corresponds to one towards the end where Stephanie showers as Jerry climbs towards the bathroom with a knife. Both figures are shown nude from a high angle shot. Both scenes occupy privileged positions in the film: opening and closing respectively.

Stephanie's shower scene serves various functions. It is a reference to Psycho that elevates the audience's anxiety level. It is also an inversion of the opening scene. Jerry showers to cleanse himself after the ritual

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[58] Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks" Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams, American Film Institute Monograph Series 3 (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984).

slaughter, whereas Stephanie showers to prepare to kill. This inversion prefigures one which is deeply radical in its significance: the protracted murder of a man by a woman/women. Jerry is stabbed in the arm, lured to the attic where he falls through the insulation to the floor below, shot twice (by Susan), and stabbed in the chest (by Stephanie).[59] For a genre grounded in the violation of expectations and disruption of the social order, it is remarkably rare that women kill men and survive relatively intact. (I omit here films where the monster is unkillable and can only be stopped temporarily as in the Halloween and Friday the 13th series.)

The Stepfather violates other rules of the genre as well. In an interesting departure, the unclaimed point-of-view shot, which establishes the dominance of the male gaze, is not used in the film. To demonstrate the significance of this departure, let me review how the unclaimed POV shot operates. It withholds or obscures the image of the monster, and simultaneously foregrounds the image of the woman as spectacle. The hyperspecularization of her body stands in for the despecularization of the monster's body. Through this scopic economy, the woman's mutilated body becomes the only

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[59] The reception which this sequence received, when I saw the film in theatrical release and when I screened it for students, was one of vociferous, passionate approval, especially from the female members of the audience.

visible horror. In a (re)vision of the psychoanalytic narrative, horror springs from the sight of the woman's body. Or, as the Freudian Oedipal narrative tells us, to speak of the woman's body as mutilated is to be redundant. The Stepfather resists this positioning of woman.

Although not abandoning the terrorization of women in its narrative development, the film does subvert the reactionary tendency of this convention in several ways. First, the film foregrounds the mutilated male body. The three people killed in the diegetic space are men. Second, the first horror of the film is evoked by the sight of a man's body: Jerry's bloodied image in the mirror. Although his body is intact, editing techniques fragment his body in a series of close-ups. In contrast, the woman is killed before the film opens, and her mutilated body is only shown in long shot; the camera does not linger. This constitutes an inversion of the convention whereby male desth is swifter, more distanced, and more likely to occur offscreen than female death.

As Peeping Tom reveals, in a genre where the monster is the distorted reflection of the woman, mirrors are significant. When Jerry lunges at Stephanie with a knife, she whips it out of her way with a towel, and locks herself in the bathroom. We see Stephanie's reflection in the full length mirror attached to the door. Jerry's battering of the door fragments the mirror and distorts her image. In

the tradition of the Final Girl, Stephanie uses a towel to fashion a shard of glass into a makeshift knife. When Jerry breaks through the door, her fragmented image explodes as his violence shatters it and supplants her image with his. Understanding that he is the source of the distortion, the pathological one, she turns the mirror against him and stabs him. She stabs him again later when, with her mother's help, she wrests the knife away from him and kills him.

The last shot of this sequence, which follows Jerry's death, shows Stephanie looking exhausted and stunned. As Dika points out, the image of the woman "trapped within the confines of the frame and returned to her position as object," is one of the last images in the "stalker" film.[60] Once the Final Girl has vanquished the killer, she loses her motivation for vision and violence, and thus loses her ability to drive the narrative forward. The Stepfather inverts this recuperation of female agency with its closing.

In the final scene, Stephanie skillfully uses a power saw to cut down the birdhouse, the totem to the patriarchal family, as her mother looks on. The phallic pole tumbles in a figurative castration. Mother and daughter embrace and walk into the house as the shattered figure of the birdhouse looms in the foreground. What Stephanie rejects

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[60] Dika 95.

is not family, but the ideology of the nuclear family which the birdhouse represents. The two women survive to reconstitute a family, one which allows for the possibility of female agency. This scene encapsulates the film's twofold (deconstructive and constructive) project -- to critique patriarchy, and to posit an alternative order grounded in female bonding.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The preceding work is a cultural analysis of the post-sixties or postmodern horror genre, in which I treat the genre as both constituted by and constitutive of gendered social relations. The postmodern horror genre escapes the taboos which constrain other representational practices. As a taboo-violating practice, the genre is a site of contradictions, and thus exposes what has to be repressed in other sorts of films. It is only through violation that the conditions of representational practice become evident, and this is precisely what horror does. It presents the body in the moment of violation, thus exposing the taken-for-granted, gendered representational practices of classical Hollywood cinema.

To situate the postmodern genre historically, I chart the epistemic break between the "pre-sixties" and the "post-sixties" genre. The epistemic break is, in effect, the postmodern break. The postmodern genre is nihilistic, oppositional, and apocalyptic. Its universe is a decentered and uncertain one in which good and evil, normality and abnormality, reality and illusion become virtually indistinguishable. This, together with the

refusal of narrative closure, the inefficacy of human action, and the presentation of violence as a constituent of everyday life, produces an unstable, paranoid universe in which categories collapse. The iconography of the body, especially (though not exclusively) the female body, figures as the site of this collapse.

The postmodern genre is characterized by five provisional rules or principles of operation, which I employ as heuristic devices. Each rule operates in the context of the other rules; none is constitutive of the genre in and of itself.

1. Horror constitutes a (physically) violent disruption of the everyday world.

2. Horror transgresses and violates boundaries. The agent of violation is the monster, who disrupts the social order by dissolving the basis of its signifying system -- its network of differences: me/not me, life/death, human/non-human.

3. Horror repudiates narrative closure, and so renders the restoration of the normative order an ambiguous issue.

4. Horror throws into question the validity of rationality and compels us to confront the irrational.

5. Horror produces a bounded experience of fear. Recreational terror is a pleasurable confrontation with the terrors implicit in everyday life. As much as the horror film is an exercise in terror, it is simultaneously an

exercise in mastery, in which controlled loss substitutes for the loss of control.

In order to delve more deeply into the question of pleasure, and the gendered nature of pleasure, I draw on a body of work within the field of representational theory to formulate a composite of feminist, psychoanalytic, and semiotic theories. Specifically, I analyze how the pleasure of the spectator is unconsciously structured through processes of identification. This includes the solitary reverse shot and the unclaimed point of view shot, conventions which operate together to withhold or obscure the image of the monster while simultaneously foregrounding the image of the woman as spectacle. This camera work functions to align the monster with the male gaze, to position the woman as the object of the gaze, and to align the spectator within the monster's field of vision. This formulation of sexual politics, which has come out of feminist film theory, aligns men with the masculine or dominant positions of voyeurism and sadism, while it aligns women with the feminine or sobordinate positions of objectification and masochism. Though a useful formulation, it is far from being the whole story.

Spectatorial pleasure derives from the <u>oscillation</u> between masculine and feminine identifications; voyeurism and narcissism operate together, interchangeably and simultaneously. This oscillation means that <u>both</u> male and

female spectators identify voyeuristically and narcissistically in the narrative process. When applied specifically to the horror film, it means that they are each aligned with both the monster and the victim, and that both sadism and masochism are at work in the construction of pleasure. Indeed, the interchangeability of subject positions is key to the pleasure of fantasy. Peeping Tom provides an extreme and vivid instance of this inscription of the audience into the interchangeable sadomasochistic positionings implied in all classical Hollywood cinema, but developed more explicitly in horror.

I further my account of the multiple nature of pleasure by discussing how the pleasure of seeing and the pleasure of not seeing operate together as pleasures produced by the activities of the film, the activities of the audience, and the activities of fanzines. The Wizard of Gore is useful in examining how the postmodern horror genre privileges the "act of showing" the spectacle of the ruined body, and in comparing the gore film to hard-core pornography, two genres which purport to expose the secrets of the flesh. Throughout the work, I show how postmodern horror foregrounds relations of looking, specifically looking at the female body as the site of sexuality.

I draw on Halloween to flesh out the narrative and stylistic elements which have come to signify the slasher film sub-genre. It is here that I introduce the third term

that ruptures the monster-victim dyad: the Final Girl or female hero who, like the killer, is able to see, hear, and speak authoritatively. Her exercise of the active investigative gaze enables her to subject the killer to her controlling gaze, to use violence to defend herself effectively, and to drive the narrative forward. The Final Girl becomes the compelling point of identification for both male and female viewers, though for different reasons. What is ultimately compelling to the viewer is what is taboo, so what compels the male viewer is the Final Girl's feminized position; male spectatorial pleasure lies in identifying with the repressed, taboo categories of the abject, castrated, and terrorized. Conversely, what compels the female viewer is the Final Girl's masculinized position; female spectatorial pleasure lies in identifying with the repressed, taboo categories of the enraged, violent, and destructive. Although these are the dominant pleasures en-gender-ed by the genre, they are co-existent rather than mutually exclusive positions for the spectator.

The issue of cross-gender identification is central to my discussion of the oscillation between feminine and masculine identification. When cross-gender identification is theorized, it is usually dealt with as a matter of female (audience) identification with the male (gaze), where it is regarded largely as a <u>problem</u> for the female spectator, a matter of colluding with the oppressor, rather

than as a potential (non-collusive or not-only-collusive) pleasure. Rarely is the issue of male (audience) identification with the female (gaze) broached. Further, I do not regard the multiplicity of identifications as a "problem" for the audience; rather I regard it as the heart of the pleasure of the genre.

The postmodern horror film is a form of popular culture which indulges in an examination of the culturally repressed. More to the point, the genre breaks down gender as a binary term in the process of spectator identification. The postmodern horror genre, more explicitly than most, operates not on the fixity of identity, but on the oscillation between masculine and feminine positionings. Thus, it provides an opportunity to subvert fundamental operations of cultural repression. It is this very quality -- the breakdown of repression -- which forms the basis for the popularity of the genre.

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