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THE LIMITS OF DISSATISFACTION:  
POSTMODERNISM, THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM AND THE  
"PROBLEM" OF THE FEMININE

by

Lianne McLarty

M.A., Carleton University, 1984

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department

of

Communication

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

October 1993

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ISBN 0-315-91282-0

**Canada**

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DEGREE: Ph.D. (Communication)

TITLE OF THESIS: THE LIMITS OF DISSATISFACTION: POSTMODERNISM,  
THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM AND THE  
"PROBLEM" OF THE FEMININE

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I explore the links between postmodernism and contemporary horror films in the interests of assessing the oppositional political potential of postmodern horror. I isolate two strains of postmodernism: the nihilistic -- which is marked by extreme cultural pessimism; and the celebratory -- which articulates the possibilities of a culture characterized by multiplicity and self-awareness. These postmodernisms are more useful than traditional approaches to the horror genre for analyzing the particular characteristics of contemporary horror; they help explain the pessimistic and paranoid themes of the genre, and, its tendency toward playful self-reference.

Indeed, the postmodern features of the contemporary horror film bear some resemblance to strategies said to be characteristic of the progressive genre film more generally. Yet, neither of these postmodernisms offer an adequate account for the genre's oppositional potential. Confronting this limitation leads to a reassessment of the implicit politics of postmodernism, both as a perspective from which to view contemporary popular culture in general, and recent horror films more specifically. Building on the premises that popular culture is a site of struggle over meanings, and that processes of containment and resistance are the central features of that struggle, an alternative perspective is developed for analyzing the oppositional potential of postmodern horror. Given the tendency of much recent horror to displace its postmodern anxieties onto a monstrous feminine, I argue that opposition in contemporary horror depends on much more than paranoia or play. It depends on the coupling, and the uncoupling, of the monstrous and the feminine.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the members of my supervisory committee: Paul Budra (for his insights into horror) ; Martin Laba (for his support and encouragement from the beginning); and, especially, my senior supervisor, Rick Gruneau, (for his careful reading, thoughtful suggestions and invaluable support).

I also want to thank Lynne Hissey and Bob Begin for "sharing the horrors."

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## INTRODUCTION

What kind of sense can one make of images of shopping malls overrun by zombies, normal bodies mutating beyond belief, and common televisions tampering with our consciousness? In much contemporary horror, the fear that is inevitably invoked is generated by, and experienced within, the everyday: families, media, and other scientific technologies, and, indeed, the human body itself. It is arguable that both *PSYCHO* and *THE EXORCIST* deserve to be designated as "landmarks" in the history of the horror film for ushering in these changes.<sup>1</sup> These films have contributed not only to specific subgenres, but, also to the sense in contemporary horror that horror happens at home, and often to our very bodies. Contemporary horror constructs an immediate and intimate threat, and, often imagines a total disintegration of what was once a meaningful world. Oddly, at the same time that many contemporary horror films warn of unrelenting horror through gory displays, they also demonstrate a sense of humour, which is "mostly perverse and/or tasteless" (Brophy, 1986: 12). These films self-reflexively engage with the clichés and conventions of the horror genre.

Some writers have invoked postmodernism (as both critical theory and cultural practice) to explain this tendency of contemporary horror to direct its energies towards both paranoia and play (Boss, 1986; Brophy, 1986; Modleski, 1986b; Creed, 1987; Tudor, 1989; Carroll, 1990). Contemporary horror films are variously seen as popular cultural embodiments of a nihilistic form of postmodern theory and as an expression of postmodern cultural practices

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<sup>1</sup>Opinions vary slightly as to when contemporary horror began; *PSYCHO* and the *EXORCIST* are alternately cited as marking a shift in both the character and the feel of the genre. See: Boss (1986); Carroll (1990); Tudor (1989); Wood (1979).

which trouble the very practice of representation itself. What is of interest is that these postmodernisms -- and the horror films that embody their traits -- suggest strategies characteristic of a politically progressive genre. Indeed, it has been argued that, like postmodernism itself, the "postmodern horror film" takes an adversarial stance towards the social world, and, toward the ability of images to represent it (Boss, 1986; Brophy, 1986; Tudor, 1989; Carroll, 1990).

In this thesis I explore the links between postmodernism (as critical theory and cultural practice) and the nature of contemporary horror films. I assess the implicit politics of postmodernism, as a perspective from which to view contemporary popular culture, and, as a manifestation of popular culture itself. With the coordinates of both "nihilistic" and "celebratory" postmodernism established, I will evaluate the oppositional potential of postmodernism in general, and of contemporary horror, in particular.

The first chapter focuses on postmodern theories whose sense of opposition has a pessimistic or nihilistic character. I explore both Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson's discussions of the postmodern as a particular historical moment which carries with it its own perverse cultural dominant which has negative effects on the very subjectivities of the people who experience it. This position will be adopted, not as a workable framework within which to consider horror and opposition, but as a "theory-story" which helps to locate and explain some of the pessimistic contours of postmodern horror. The nihilistic strain within postmodernism helps describe the ways in which contemporary horror reminds us of the dark side of life at the millennium. However, it does not factor in the category of "opposition" in an adequate manner.

In the next chapter, I explore an alternative account of postmodernism

which takes as its basic premise the idea that the contemporary cultural scene is marked, not as the nihilists or cultural pessimists suggest, by domination through cultural orchestration, but rather, by the simultaneous presence of multiple and contradictory discourses. Indeed, it is sometimes argued that the textual features of postmodern culture generally challenge the very possibility of representation itself. (Hutcheon, 1987; Wilson, 1990). Yet, this multiplicity of cultural forms, and their textual practice which calls the ability to represent anything into question, is sometimes viewed as an indication that opposition is not so much impossible as irrelevant (Collins, 1989).

Borrowing from, yet moving beyond, these postmodernisms, my argument is that popular image-based cultural products are neither "evil demons" nor innocent games that we play, but rather "sites of struggle" -- an unequal struggle, but a struggle nonetheless. From this perspective, opposition as a cultural category emerges as an operative and meaningful term. This chapter concludes with a consideration of the textual and thematic features that the postmodern horror film shares with what some film theorists refer to as "the progressive genre."

The next chapter moves on to consider traditional attempts to account for the meaning and social function of horror as a genre. I argue that, against these theories which tend to universalize horror, the postmodern account stands out as an attempt to locate the genre socially and historically. The question here is not so much if the contemporary horror film exhibits postmodern thematic concerns and textual strategies, but rather, if these features make this phase of the genre oppositional, and allow it to take a critical stance toward dominant social institutions and their effects on us.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Since much contemporary horror is self-consciously postmodern in both thematic concerns and textual features, the two terms (postmodern and contemporary) will be used interchangeably to refer to the genre's current

This chapter concludes with a consideration of what it is about contemporary horror that is postmodern and what kind of sense its paranoia and play make.

The final chapter explores how the idea of "woman" is constructed and represented in several subgenres of the postmodern horror film. Postmodern horror often generates meaning through making particularly horrific sense of the feminine. The sense that these films make of the feminine, what "woman" is made to mean, is central in a discussion of the postmodern horror film and opposition. Given the tendency of much recent horror to displace its postmodern anxieties about the contemporary social world onto some variant of a feminine Other -- who is often both victim and monster -- I conclude by arguing that opposition in contemporary horror is more than a matter of postmodern paranoia or play. It is a matter of accessing both whose paranoia lies at the core of the genre, and, why the game is played.

## CHAPTER ONE

### READING POSTMODERN THEORY AS A HORROR STORY

In recent years, postmodernism has achieved widespread recognition as a set of ideas and practices with which analyses of contemporary popular culture must contend. This is apparent not only because postmodernism has spread through academic journals and has filtered into more popular descriptions of contemporary society, but also because it privileges culture in its descriptions of the social world (Featherstone, 1988). Some argue that both social context and experience have been penetrated by the cultural to the point that "everything in our social life...can be said to have become cultural" (Jameson, 1984b: 87). At issue in much postmodern theory is both the "image" (representational images generated by photographically and video-based technologies), and, a consequent fascination with the surface of things. The condition ushered in by image technology amounts to a virtual social apocalypse for some proponents of this argument. Contemporary image culture is characterized not only as a monstrous creation of late capitalism but also as a demonic force which invades the social world and severs our relationship to it. From the nihilistic perspective, the task, even the relevance, of searching for meaning and oppositional practices in postmodern popular culture is, at worst, outmoded, and, at best, misdirected. Postmodern culture is "sign control" at its most pervasive and invasive (Kellner 1989a).

I want to argue that postmodern theory can be read as a kind of "science fiction-horror story." The terms of reference offered by Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, in particular, provide a theoretical narrative of contemporary culture, and our experience of it, which helps to identify some of the pessimistic themes of contemporary horror. While the imaginings of

Baudrillard and Jameson are echoed in the nihilistic themes and images of bodily invasion and transformation characteristic of much postmodern horror, neither theorist provides the tools for ascertaining the degree to which these cultural representations challenge the social practices and ways of seeing on which our social order is based. At first sight, nihilistic postmodernism offers an useful perspective on contemporary horror, but is unable to engage in an adequate analysis of it. That is, it is unable to account for the diversity of meanings generated by contemporary horror, and the sense that these cultural products make of the social world. For this reason, nihilistic postmodernism is only one of the ways of situating contemporary horror. But it is a crucial place to start

#### Baudrillard's Scene: Explication to Extinction

Jean Baudrillard's description of contemporary society is premised on the assumption that postmodernism marks a different "social totality," a new condition. The shift is from a modern society based on the "primacy of industrial production" (described by Marxist political economy) to a postmodern one in which computers, media images, cybernetic models, information and communication networks (in general the system of signs, the reproduction of the code) "replace production as the centre of social life" (Kellner, 1987: 131). According to Baudrillard, Marxist analyses of political economy are unable to account for this shift because they are plagued by a "romanticism of productivity." Production is the central metaphor within which both culture and experience are framed; production is "universalized" (Baudrillard, 1975: 17).

In The Mirror of Production, Baudrillard claims that the Marxist

emphasis on labour "imposes an arbitrary, rationalist intentionality on all human activity," and, in attempting to decipher how the system of political economy functions, ends up reproducing it as a model (Baudrillard, 1975: 66). In arguing that there is a revolutionary break between the industrial capitalism described by Marx and contemporary capitalism, Baudrillard declares the end of the era of production and the triumph of reproduction of the code as the organizing principle of social reality. Capitalism sustains itself not so much through the production of objects but through a "process of social abstraction" whereby a "sign-value" is conferred onto the commodity. The real logic of capitalism is in the investment of things with value. In this sense, "it is the placing of a sign on a thing and the logic of this signification which is the true essence of capital" (Baudrillard, 1975: 5). "[R]adical semiurgy -- that is, the production and proliferation of signs" -- constitutes a "new mode of social control:" "sign control" (Kellner, 1989a: 48).

Since contemporary capitalism is sustained by the circulation of signs, the consumption of the sign is, for Baudrillard, productive: for the system to reproduce itself it needs the continuous reproduction and consumption of the code. While Marx emphasized the commodity's dual nature (having both an unproblematic use-value and an exchange-value which confers on the commodity its "mysterious character"), Baudrillard's emphasis is on sign value. What is consumed is not a thing so much as an element in a code, the consumption of which reproduces the system of reproduction. Reproduction and consumption of the code is endless and pervasive. For Baudrillard the object of analysis, the context, is precisely the system of signs generated by advertising, film and television images, information and communication technologies. In shifting the emphasis from the realm of production, which necessitates an analysis of political economy, material relations and lived

experience, to the realm of reproduction, which privileges culture as a signifying system, Baudrillard ultimately characterizes this new social situation as the system of signs and their circulation. Here, context is culture; it is the empire of the sign in which social relations, saturated with signs, are ultimately extinguished.

The idea that postmodernity is characterized by the triumph of signifying culture which is both detached from, and a substitute for, the social world, finds its explication in Baudrillard's distinction among the "orders of simulacra." In charting what he sees as the gradually changing relationship between the real and its reproduction, Baudrillard attempts to indicate a fundamental alteration in cultural production and consumption which marks the victory of culture and the death of the social (Baudrillard, 1983a).

The first order of simulacra, the counterfeit, is "the paradigmatic mode of representation" from the Renaissance to the beginning of the industrial revolution (Kellner, 1989a: 78). This period marks a break with the "fixed feudal-medieval hierarchy of signs and social position by introducing an artificial and democratized world of signs that valorized artifice," the sign as "counterfeit" (Kellner, 1988: 243). Stucco, capable of being molded to re-create any facade, is one of Baudrillard's examples here. This marks the end of the obliged sign which was Divinely sanctioned, strictly hierarchized and obligatory. In the era of the counterfeit, signs are arbitrary, democratized, having been liberated from the fixed value of the medieval era. No longer obliged to represent the Divine, for example, art sought to "imitate nature, to ground its signs in nature" (Kellner, 1989a: 78). "To justify the bourgeoisie's production of the real, the system claims Nature as the determinant Referent..." (Chen, 1987: 74). That is, the strategy of the counterfeit is to duplicate nature (the original), to claim to faithfully represent the referent.



For Baudrillard this stage of simulation is dominated by a "natural law of value" (Baudrillard, 1983a).

With the industrial revolution and increased mechanization a second order of simulacra began to appear; here, emphasis is placed on the infinite producibility and reproducibility of cultural objects. Mechanization carries with it the ability to turn out exact replicas, to mass produce the "series." The emphasis is on production, on mechanical reproduction and hence, for Baudrillard, an "industrial law of value" dominates this stage. Nature loses its status as referent ("the nostalgia for a "natural" order -- first order value -- is abandoned") and becomes, with technological progress and an adversarial view of nature, the object of domination (Chen, 1987: 75). In this second order, it is no longer a matter of imitating nature, but rather of reshaping it in the interests of industry. Here "technology itself and mechanical reproduction come to constitute a new reality" (Kellner, 1988: 244).

The third order of simulacra ("simulation proper") which emerged after the Second World War, and, is attributed to the rise of a full-fledged technological consumer society, ushers in the "structural law of value" in which the model takes precedence over things, reproduction of codes surpasses the second order's serial production of objects (Kellner, 1988: 244). This contemporary order of simulacra is the order of models, codes, cybernetics: "serial production yields to generation by means of models...Digitality is its metaphysical principle...and DNA is its prophet. It is in effect in the genetic code that the 'genesis of simulacra' today finds its most accomplished form" (Baudrillard, 1983: 103-104). Baudrillard's genetic (biological) analogy posits that, like DNA, the "codes and models of social organization and control...structure the environment and human life" (Kellner, 1988: 244). Simulation proper is "sign control." What happens in

this progression from one order of simulacra to another is the "increasing autonomization of the signifier not only in the realm of language but in all aspects of social exchange" (Baudrillard, 1975: 7). That is, in simulation proper, signs are not only detached from the social world but they replace it as well.

The simulacrum is not only the effect of a progression from one stage of simulation to another, but also the result of the change in the means by which those signs (images) are generated. Particular technologies produce particular kinds of signs and our relationship to those signs changes with changes in the technology at the root of their production. Baudrillard's simulacrum is premised on the pervasiveness of signs in contemporary society and especially on the characteristics of modern media images generated by film and video technologies. "It is precisely when it appears most truthful, most faithful and most in conformity to reality that the image is most diabolical" (Baudrillard, 1987: 13). Since the "intervention" of photography and film, images appear more real -- they "seduce" us into believing in their veracity, their ability to refer to a reality. Yet, for Baudrillard it is precisely the "reference principle" of media images which must be doubted (Baudrillard, 1987).

[T]here is something...which is peculiar to our modern media images: if they fascinate us so much it is not because they are sites of the production of meaning and representation -- this would not be new -- on the contrary because they are sites of the disappearance of meaning and representation, sites in which we are caught quite apart from any judgement of reality, thus sites of a fatal strategy of denegation of the real and of the reality principle (Baudrillard, 1987: 27).

Images in contemporary society are capable of neither representation

nor meaning. They are, in a word, "simulations," copies for which there are no originals. This point can be clarified by turning to Baudrillard's distinction between modern media images and their pre-photographic ancestors.

Reference to a prior and independent reality is the domain of representation. In visual art, theatre, and sculpture there is always an awareness of the difference between the representation and the referent. The map, for example, invokes, refers to, real physical terrain but is never mistaken for it.

Representation is an obvious mediation on the real; it is generated by the real, and confirms the existence of the real. With simulation, the difference between reality and representation disappears.

It is this obliteration of the difference between the real and the image ("Is it live or is it Memorex?") which is the genius of simulation. This effacement obviously increases with computer technology and virtual reality but Baudrillard attributes it to all modern media images. They help to constitute the new social totality: the simulacrum. It is not only a matter of producing and reproducing better images but also of cancelling the referent, the real, altogether. "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself...thus the age of simulation begins with the liquidation of all referentials" (Baudrillard, 1987: 4). For Baudrillard, then, the increasing inability to detect the difference between the sign and the referent leads to the disappearance of the real altogether. Signs obliterate and replace the real. This, too, is sign control.

In Baudrillard's universe the simulacrum replaces and comes to constitute reality. As simulacra, "images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction" (Baudrillard, 1987: 13). That is, representation's causal order moves from the

real, and implies a mediation on the real. In simulation this is reversed. Since images are neither derived from, nor refer to, a reality, they precede the real and constitute a new kind of reality, a "hyperreality" (Baudrillard, 1983c). Hyperreality defines a cultural landscape in which simulations, having both "murdered" and replaced the real can only exchange in, and refer to, themselves. There can be no representation. "The hyperreal transcends representation...only because it is entirely in simulation" (Baudrillard, 1983c: 147). Since simulations constitute an "uninterrupted circuit without reference," "an endless cycle," the impossibility of representation in hyperreality is coupled with the disappearance, or "implosion" of meaning (Baudrillard, 1987: 28). Meaning depends on a referencing outward and on a distinction between true and false, real and imaginary, which Baudrillard declares has collapsed.

Strictly speaking, this is what implosion signifies: the absorption of one pole into another, the short-circuit between poles of every differential system of meaning, the effacement of terms and of distinct oppositions, and thus that of the medium and the real. Hence the impossibility of any mediation, of any dialectical intervention between the two or from one to the other, circularity of all media effects (Baudrillard, 1983b: 102-103).

In hyperreality simulations are all there is and so all they can do is to refer to each other. This is the "endless enwrapping of images (literally without end, without destination) which leaves the images no other destiny but images" (Baudrillard, 1987: 28). It is this that causes the implosion of meaning. Implosion implies a referencing inward to the point of creating a vacuum of sorts. The image "does no more than resemble itself" (Baudrillard, 1987: 28). Having shifted the object of analysis from production to reproduction, and by extension to image culture, Baudrillard effectively

extinguishes any social context for the consideration of those signs. "[P]olitical economy is no longer the foundation, the social determinant, or even a structural 'reality'...." (Kellner, 1987: 129). In hyperreality, cultural analysis, the search for meaning, becomes the search for the absence of meaning and evidence of the triumph of simulation.

### Postmodern Culture: Baudrillard's Demons

Baudrillard's discussions of postmodern culture are not so much analytical as descriptive; analysis and interpretation are factored out as soon as meaning is declared dead. "The social void is scattered with interstitial objects and crystalline clusters which spin around and coalesce in a cerebral chiaroscuro...' What is this, if not a formal description? It might equally well be speaking of a field, a face, or a cow" (Morris, 1984: 95).

For Meaghan Morris, Baudrillard's technique is one of "adjectival escalation" in which each description of the new social totality outdoes the former in superlative intensity, creating much the same "vertigo-effect" that he argues is characteristic of postmodern culture itself (Morris, 1984: 93).<sup>3</sup> Yet, in hyperreality, where simulations catch us in an endless cycle and where the referent is only a sign among signs, all Baudrillard, by his own logic, is left with is the category of description for which the adjective is the fundamental tool.

For this reason, it is not surprising that much of Baudrillard's cultural theory can be read as a fiction: "Such a theory -- fatal, objectal -- would be a

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<sup>3</sup> Baudrillard's "adjectival escalation" is also a feature of many contemporary horror films which are, in part, a showcase for advances in special effects technologies; much of their currency lies in their ability to out-gross their competitors.

theorie-recit: not simply a fiction, and not only in the Victorian sense of fiction as that which is not 'true', but a theory-narrative, a theory-story" (Morris, 1984: 93). It is, however, a particular kind of theory-story. The story Baudrillard tells is self-admittedly "science fiction" narrating as it does the triumph of media technology over both the social and the people who used to inhabit it (Baudrillard, 1988: 17). In his descriptions of the consequences of this hyperreal postmodern scene on the "masses" Baudrillard's cultural theory is also horrific. A demonic self-generating techno-simulacrum and a subject whose very body is invaded and transformed by it are the leading actors in Baudrillard's theory-story (Baudrillard, 1983b: 4). Like contemporary horror, these nihilistic postmodern imaginings locate the commonplace as the source of the threat and our very bodies as its targets.

One of the central characters in this science fiction of the destruction of the real, and hence the cornerstone of hyperreality, is, for Baudrillard, the mass media. Although Baudrillard's simulacrum is the result of modern technical media images generally, television more specifically is cited as being "the ultimate and perfect object for this new era" (Baudrillard, 1983a: 127).<sup>4</sup> Television is privileged in this analysis because it is "the machine of simulation;" it becomes "a sort of genetic code which controls the mutation of the real into the hyper-real" (Chen, 1987: 79; Baudrillard, 1983c: 55). Television, in short, is a central agent in the proliferation of simulacra and, therefore, in the maintenance of hyperreality. In fact, with the extinction of the social world as an object of discussion, the Baudrillardian critic declares that "TV is the world" (Chen, 1987: 71).

What is said to occur here is an implosion, a collapse of boundaries

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<sup>4</sup> This terror of television is frequently a feature of contemporary horror; *POLTERGEIST*, *TERROR VISION*, *VIDEODROME* and *VIDEODEAD* privilege the television as a site of horror.

between, the televisual and the social: "the landscape all around unfolds as a television screen" (Baudrillard, 1988: 13). Simulation implies this collapse of the real and the sign, but what is at issue here is what seems like a final breakdown of the boundaries between the public and the private, between exteriority and interiority. The inside/outside model collapses as both the private and public spaces disappear into the television screen (Baudrillard, 1988: 16-19). Baudrillard finds evidence for the dissolving of TV into life and of life into TV in television's tendency to blur the boundaries between the public and the private.

The most intimate operation of your life becomes the potential grazing ground of the media (non-stop television on the Louds family in the USA, endless "slice of life" and "psy" shows on French TV). The entire universe also unfolds unnecessarily on your home screen. This is a microscopic pornography, pornographic because it is forced, exaggerated, just like the close-up of sexual acts in a porno film. All this destroys the stage, once preserved through a minimal distance and which was based on a secret ritual known only to its actors (Baudrillard, 1988: 20-21).

Television performs the dual function of rendering public intimate details of people's lives (Reagan's surgeries; any Talkshow), and, penetrating the private space of the living room with scenes from what was formerly the public realm (pre-recorded -- and obviously mediated -- but nonetheless actual police arrests and 911 emergency responses). The private and public have become televisual and indistinguishable. As a testament to Baudrillard's observational abilities, one could, in fact, cite the current fascination with reality TV programming (Talkshows, fugitive alert exposes, videotaped police and rescue scenarios, new magazines) which draw their material from, at least what we believe to be, the real world. For Baudrillard, this is another effect, or strategy, of the media; having become the world,

television produces the real in an attempt to convince us that its function is merely one of mediation. By giving us reality programming, by appearing to provide access to the real world, television functions to conceal the fact that what it is doing is replacing that world. These implosions – of TV and the real into hyperreality and of the public and the private into the televisual -- indicate for Baudrillard a further collapse of any distinction between the TV and the viewer.

There is no longer any transcendence or depth, but only immanent surface of operations unfolding, the smooth and functional surface of communication. In the image of television, the most beautiful prototypical object of this new era, the surrounding universe and our very bodies are becoming monitoring screens (Baudrillard, 1988: 12).

In this context, there is "no longer any transcendental space between subject and object, seeing and seen, cause and effect" (Chen, 1987: 79). What this immanence implies is "a fantastic telescoping, a collapsing of the two traditional poles into one another" (Baudrillard, 1983c: 57). Baudrillard asserts that the television image is more than a screen; it is "a miniaturized terminal located in your head and *you* are the screen and the TV looks at you, goes through you like a magnetic tape -- a tape, not an image" (Baudrillard, 1987: 24). Morris observes that "glued to the screen" takes on horrific connotations in Baudrillard's hyperreality as the "goo" that is television absorbs and transforms the viewer into a terminal: "everyone is his own terminal...the group plugged into video is also nothing more than its own terminal" (Baudrillard cited in Morris, 1984: 97).

This intimate interpenetration of the television object and the viewing subject is coupled with television's role as the "panopticon apparatus of



surveillance:" "TV watches you" (Baudrillard, 1983c: 52). Here television is an active agent in domination (Baudrillard, 1988: 13). Television exercises its function of social control by simultaneously preventing and simulating response.

The mass media are anti-mediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non-communication -- this is what characterizes them.... We must understand communication as something other than the simple transmission-reception of a message...the totality of the existing architecture of the media founds itself on this latter definition: they are what always prevent response...(except in the various forms of response *simulation*, themselves integrated in the transmission process.... This is the real abstraction of the media. And the system of social control and power rooted in it (Baudrillard, 1981: 169-170).

Media controls by constructing an audience which is isolated, "privatized," trapped in a "universe of simulacra where it is impossible to distinguish between the spectacle and the real" (Kellner, 1987: 133). This control hinges not only on the prevention of, one assumes, genuine, authentic response, but also in the forms of responses which are *simulated* by the media, substituted for the real thing. It is to the referendum and the poll (more and more the domain of television with the proliferation of 1-800 numbers) that Baudrillard turns for evidence of the simulation and structuring of responses. That television questions us is proof for Baudrillard that it serves not only a regulatory function but that it also seduces us, on the one hand, into believing we can respond and, on the other, into participating in our own self-regulation.<sup>5</sup> In a "society of coded simulations" and the

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, this scenario corresponds to the paranoid plot of *VIDEODROME*. The female character literally seduces the male protagonist using the television as a vehicle. As a consequence of this seduction, he is programmed to kill. Unable, and, under the power of videodrome technology, unwilling, to control his own responses he, in a sense,

triumph of cybernetic models "television producers modulate TV codes to produce programming. The codes send signals and continually test individuals, inscribing them into the simulated order" (Kellner, 1986: 245).

This testing is not only the function of actual polls in which viewers can call in and have their yes or no response registered, but also of all media: "every ad, fashion, commodity, television program, political candidate and poll presents a test to which one is to respond" (Kellner, 1988: 245). Such testing reduces our responses to a binary yes/no formula which can only be instantaneous and non-contemplative. Choice and response are predetermined and precoded here and are structured by a binary system which rules out alternatives precisely by offering structured choices between "programmed differences" (Kellner, 1989a: 80-81). In this way, media generally – and, especially television, as the central agent of simulation – function as a "deterrent against demands for radical social change" (Kellner, 1989a: 81).

Television is a simulation/deterrence machine par excellence yet it is not the only actor in this story of hyperreality. Baudrillard expands his analysis to include all "contemporary, technical images," those "evil demons" which "murder the real," dispose of its body, and take its place (Baudrillard, 1987). This "collusion between images and life, between the screen and daily life" is the result of a "brute fascination" for, and a "mad pursuit" of, images (Baudrillard, 1987: 26-28). Yet, a "paradox regarding the image" exists: images' "proliferation...is potentially infinite, whereas the extension of meaning is always limited precisely by its end, by its finality...." (Baudrillard, 1987: 27). In other words, images are "multiplying themselves according to an irresistible epidemic process which no one today can control," but, they do not mean

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participates in his own destruction.

anything; in hyperreality images have "no other destiny than images" and therefore can possess no "transcendent meaning" (Baudrillard, 1987: 27-28). Reality, having long since been devoured, ceases to be the referent as images do no more than resemble each other. Baudrillard cites "set-piece" films (CHINATOWN, THE DAY OF THE CONDOR, BARRY LYNDON, 1900, ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN, THE LAST PICTURE SHOW) as examples not only of cinema's dialogue with itself ("cinema itself becomes more cinema than cinema") but also of "perfectly nostalgic...hyperrealist" recreations; cinema not only recreates itself, it proliferates "myths of origins and signs of reality," "a second-hand truth" (Baudrillard, 1983c: 12). Nostalgia marks a "panic stricken production of the real and the referential" (Baudrillard, 1983c: 18). In other words, by drawing on both particular historical periods and specific styles and genres, these cinematic images attempt to guarantee us of both a past and a reality. They are, however, mere copies of copies, referring not to some real past but to an already constituted past -- the past of image culture. There is, however, a certain logic in this since "even outside the cinemas the whole country (the USA) is cinematographic" (Baudrillard, 1987: 26).

While the proliferation of myths of origins and signs of reality are characteristic of hyperrealist recreations and TV and films based on the real, even those images which are obviously fake conspire to assure us that reality exists and to conceal their murderous mission. "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real but of the order of the hyperreal and simulation" (Baudrillard, 1983c: 25). Disneyland is a "deterrence machine" and functions to "conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America which is disneyland" (Baudrillard, 1983c: 25). For Baudrillard, then, image culture generated by photographic, filmic or

video means in its various guises as TV, film or advertising both saturates and constitutes the social world. Yet, it's a bit like being stranded in the ocean, only in this case there are signs everywhere but none of them carry any meaning.

### Stop Making Sense: Postmodern Experience

To a certain extent, this separate discussion of context, culture and experience is contrary to the very idea of implosion and imposes, what Baudrillard would no doubt consider, a false distinction (inasmuch as anything is false). According to Baudrillard, the "masses and the media are one single process" (Baudrillard, 1983b: 44). This fusion of media images and their viewers has rather horrific consequences for the subject within postmodernity. The poststructuralist contention that the existence of some original, unique, autonomous subjectivity is illusory, and, that the subject is constituted within and through social and cultural constructs (discourses such as media images), is seized by the Baudrillardian critic as "not [only] a poststructuralist theoretical construct; it has its own specificity in late capitalism in which the segmented flow of TV programming interpenetrates human subjectivity" (Chen, 1987: 80).

Such an invasive and pervasive interpenetration renders the "social machine...an autonomous, self-regulating system without 'subjects'" (Chen, 1987: 83). This death of the subject is both the horror of postmodern experience and the place where Baudrillard begins to construct his version of the subject's reincarnation. In a landscape saturated with meaningless signs and simulacra technologies which invade our bodies transforming them into "terminals of multiple networks," subjectivity and experience become at once

impossible, and, ironically, the subject of much theorizing (Baudrillard, 1988: 16).

The postmodern experience of "vertigo" generated by "an immanent promiscuity and the perpetual interconnection of all information and communication networks" produces a "state particular to fascination and giddiness" (Baudrillard, 1988: 27/25). In other words, the "over-proximity of all things," the "absolute proximity" of communication and information networks, (which for Baudrillard is the definition of the obscene: that which is "all-too-visible" -- hypervisible) has transformed pleasure and produced a particular state of being (Baudrillard, 1988: 27; Morris, 1984: 97). "Pleasure is no longer that of the scenic or aesthetic manifestation...but that of pure fascination..." (Baudrillard, 1988: 25).

This fascination with the surface, with spectacle, with the obscene which is our cultural scene, is explained, by Baudrillard, through "metaphors drawn from pathology," as the "state of terror which is characteristic of the schizophrenic...." (Baudrillard, 1988: 26-27). This terror is in response to "a foul promiscuity of all things which beleaguer and penetrate the 'schizo', meeting with no resistance,...not even the aura of his own body protects him" (Baudrillard, 1988: 27). Such a "mutation" of our subjectivities implies that we are "living in the greatest confusion" (Baudrillard, 1988: 27). Given the overexposure to, and absolute proximity of, everything, the schizo "can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself..." (Baudrillard, 1983a: 133).

Baudrillard secures his reader's sense of the horrific experience of schizophrenia through his language: it is a response to a communication network which is "foul," "unclean," "obscene," "excessive" and which precipitates "mutation" and "transformation" "penetrating" as it does our

defenseless bodies (Baudrillard, 1988). Oddly enough, however, Baudrillard contends that his description of the schizo's state of terror does "not necessarily imply a negative judgement...We can hardly assess the consequences of such a transformation" (Baudrillard, 1988: 25). Baudrillard's equivocation on the issue of interpreting this particular form of postmodern experience also informs his discussion of the "masses." In his use of the term "masses" he invokes the image of an entity which defies explication.

To want to specify the term "mass" is a mistake -- it is to provide meaning for that which has none.... The mass is without attribute, predicate, quality, reference. This is its definition, or its radical lack of definition. It has no sociological reality...the mass is what remains when the social has been completely removed (Baudrillard, 1983b: 5-7).

It is the masses' lack of distinction, their lack of "quality" that, logically, is their quality. In In The Shadow of the Silent Majorities Baudrillard attributes to the masses qualities (or, rather non-qualities) which he elsewhere declares are the characteristics of images: their simultaneous meaninglessness and their destruction of the real, social world. That the masses cannot be analyzed for meanings is evident in descriptions of them: "spongy referent;" "opaque but equally translucent;" "statistical crystal ball;" "opaque nebula" (Baudrillard, 1983b: 1-4). Although the masses are without meaning, their desires and activities are nonetheless described: "they want spectacle...they idolise the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolise any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence" (Baudrillard, 1983b: 10). The masses, meaningless themselves, and fascinated with the surface rather than with the meaning of things, also represent an "implosion of the social in the mass" (Kellner, 1988: 245). More specifically, the masses function like "a black hole which engulfs the social" (Baudrillard, 1983b: 4).

Like the signs they idolize, the masses implode with the social and consequently obliterate it: this is the "hypothesis of the death of the social" (Baudrillard, 1983b: 4). "The mass(es) is that space of ever greater density into which everything societal is imploded and ground up in an uninterrupted process of simulation" (Baudrillard cited in Kellner, 1989a: 115). Transformed by a demonic sign culture, the subject, (a dead sign, a "schizo," an undifferentiated part of the "mass") takes on the characteristics of its murderer, and, like a vampire, continues to perpetrate the horrendous acts of its master. These implosions between the real and the image, the image and the subject and finally, in full and dizzying circle, between the mass and the real, have left us with an underexposed total picture, or, in Kellner's words, "the absence of a scene" (Kellner, 1988: 247). A void is what is left once context becomes culture, the transmission of which transforms its audience which in turn absorbs the social.

While this critique of subjectivity in postmodernity may initially read as a scathing condemnation, Baudrillard's refusal to "judge" extends to the activities of the masses. In fact, the masses' refusal of meaning, their "increased ambivalence, disaffection and indifference" -- their silence -- is an indication that they "might always have been stronger than any media," capable of refusing to be tested and polled (Kellner, 1989a: 87). Silence and withdrawal, the refusal to participate ("it never participates"), are the masses' "most effective weapon[s]...[with which to] resist being positioned as the object and/or subject of the simulacrum..." (Chen, 1987: 84-85).

This silence is defined as not only the masses' refusal to participate, to "play the game," "to vote, produce, decide," but also as a kind of silence they themselves impose on the media (Baudrillard, 1983b: 108). That is, inasmuch as media images are meaningless, and it is their function to deny this by

generating signs of the real ("the maximization of the word and the maximal production of meaning"), the masses' rejection of this meaning is also a rejection of what the "system" attempts to impose (Baudrillard, 1983b: 108). The masses, presumably along with Baudrillard, recognize the meaninglessness of media images and respond to the system and its reproductions with an "infantilism, hyperconformism, a total dependence, passivity, idiocy" (Baudrillard, 1983b: 107). Yet, this passivity, this "inertia"

is the equivalent to sending back to the system its own logic by doubling it, to reflecting, like a mirror, meaning without absorbing it.... This strategy (if one can still speak of strategy) prevails today, because it was ushered in by...[the] system. (Baudrillard, 1983b: 108)

In Baudrillard's universe the only hope for the subject is to both refuse to be one at all, and, to "stop making sense" of postmodernity.

### Jameson's Postmodernism: Cultural Logic

Whereas Baudrillard's postmodern scene is one marked by the extinction of the categories of production and material relations, Jameson's analysis of postmodernity is informed by Marxist theory and firmly roots postmodern culture and experience in the context of late, multinational capitalism. Jameson argues that the contemporary period, "if anything, [is] a purier stage of capitalism than any of the moments that preceded it," and, further, that

every position on postmodernism in culture -- whether apologia or stigmatization -- is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today (Jameson, 1984a: 55).



Baudrillard's stance is to declare that the material relations of capitalism have been evacuated by the logic and progression of the simulacrum. Jameson's account inverts this since, for him, postmodernism is the "cultural logic of late capitalism;" it is read as the "logic" of a particular context and not as its substitute. Far from replacing the real then, postmodern culture is "an internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and horror" (Jameson, 1984b: 57).

Although real social relations have not imploded into the cultural they have undergone a transformation. Postmodernism does mark a different historical period, a break with both earlier forms of capitalism and cultural expression. It is, however, not so much an epochal shift as a "restructuration of late capitalism as a system" (Featherstone, 1988: 199; Jameson, 1984a: 63). Jameson uses Ernest Mandel's distinction among stages in the development of capitalism to demonstrate that postmodernism implies a fundamental historical break and consequently radically new cultural expressions and experiences. Mandel outlines three stages of capitalism, each generated by a particular type of machine production: the "market" stage of capitalism (since 1848) was dominated by steam-driven motors; the "monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism" (since "the 90s of the 19th century") was dominated by electric and combustion motors; contemporary "multinational capitalism" (since "the 40s of the 20th century") finds as its emblematic technology "electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses" (Jameson, 1984b: 78).

In adopting Mandel's notion that the progression from market to multinational capitalism marks "a dialectical expansion over the previous

stage," Jameson argues that far from being postindustrial, postmodern society is "the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas" (Jameson, 1984b: 78).

Postmodernism is set within the context of a decentred global network generated by the expansion of multinational capitalism throughout all areas of life. In postmodernity, "commodification and capitalist exchange relations have penetrated the spheres of information, knowledge, computerization, and consciousness and experience itself to an unparalleled extent" (Keilner, 1988: 258).

Although this postmodern scene is a "network of power and control" which is "difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp" it is characterized in "high tech paranoia" entertainment and is best represented by the computer (Jameson, 1984b: 79-88). Like Baudrillard, Jameson describes the postmodern scene as one structured around technologies of reproduction, such as the computer, but also film, video and audio technologies. And, although he refrains from making the leap into hyperreality, Jameson does describe a context similar to Baudrillard's. The primacy of technologies of reproduction and our "addiction to the photographic image," our fascination with surfaces, has led to a "hyperspace" where buildings like the Bonaventura hotel do not "wish to be a part of the city, but rather its equivalent and its replacement or substitute" and where "our collective future...has...itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" (Jameson, 1984b: 81/66). This postmodern hyperspace is constituted by the "transformation of the 'real' into so many pseudo-events" (Jameson, 1984b: 87). What these characteristics indicate is an "explosion" of the cultural,

a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life -- from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself -- can be said to have become 'cultural'.... (Jameson, 1984b: 87).

This explosion of culture implies not only that cultural phenomena such as advertising, the media and films play an increasingly central, and unprecedented, role in the organization and reproduction of multinational capitalism but, also, that cultural production "has become integrated into commodity production generally" (Jameson, 1984b: 56). The representation of "some immense communicational and computer network" is a "figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism" (Jameson, 1984b: 79). Jameson's postmodern scene, then, is marked by a cultural dominant which is not a replacement for, but rather an agent of multinational capitalism. It serves as its logic. It is to the logic of this postmodern culture that this discussion now turns.

### Postmodern Culture as "Logic"

For Jameson, postmodernism is the "cultural logic of late capitalism" and, in the contemporary period, the "cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1984b). In describing postmodern culture as dominant, Jameson avoids Baudrillard's vision of a "closed and terrifying [cultural] machine" and provides "a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features" (Jameson, 1984b: 56-57). Nevertheless, the period of multinational capitalism generates a "dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm" (Jameson, 1984b: 57). While not all contemporary culture is postmodern, postmodernism is the "new systemic cultural norm" of late

capitalism (Jameson, 1984b: 57).

Jameson argues that each stage of capitalism, has a corresponding cultural dominant. Realism, with its appeal to Nature for its referent and for legitimation, dominated the early stages of capitalism. Modern art (Jameson refers here to the historical avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s: futurism's celebration of machinery; the "streamlined shapes" of Le Corbusier's buildings) corresponds to the second stage of capitalism and exhibits the "excitement" of machinery (Jameson, 1984b: 78). Jameson mentions "revolutionary or communist artists of the 1930s [who] also sought to reappropriate this excitement of machine energy for a Promethean reconstruction of human society as a whole..." (Jameson, 1984b: 78-79). Postmodernism is the cultural dominant in the current stage of multinational capitalism with its computer networks and technologies of reproduction. Jameson argues that machines of reproduction have had a profound effects on aesthetic representation. Technologies of reproduction, entertainment media and the computer screen itself have generated a postmodernism in which "aesthetic production...has become integrated into commodity production generally...." (Jameson, 1984b: 56).

It is this close link between aesthetic and commodity production which characterizes postmodernism and sets it apart from its predecessor, modernism. Aesthetic modernism (Abstract Expressionism, the International Style of Le Corbusier) was based on an antagonism toward the system of commodity production and therefore insisted on a rigid separation between high art and commodity or mass culture. By detaching itself from low culture and commodity relations, by maintaining its autonomy, modernist art sought a critical distance believed necessary for subversive aesthetic expression. Alienation from consumer society is a precondition for authentic expression

and negation. This principle of autonomy extends to the artist as well; the modern artist renounces the conditions and experiences of capitalism and becomes increasingly withdrawn. His or her art, then, is the expression of a purely individual consciousness. It is within this understanding of the artistic subject that "creativity" and "genius" are operative and key terms.

This autonomy and distance from material relations is also figured in the modernist artwork's adherence to the principle of formal purity or specialization. To escape the everyday, modernist art turns toward its own rationality, its own materials. This is largely an attack on representation and realism which puts its faith in the signified, the referent, and in the ability of art to represent some content, some referent. Since realism and representation are associated with both affirmation and commodity culture by the modernist the only choice for critical art is to emphasize not the content but the form. In other words, late modernism emphasizes the signifier, the particular properties of the medium. By remaining faithful to its own materials such art resists what is felt to be the illusory and contaminated realm of representation, and, simultaneously reflects on its own materiality.

In such a scheme, a painting is about itself – the flatness of the canvas, the texture and colour of the paint, the grooves of the brushstrokes (Abstract Expressionism) – a film explores its properties of light and movement (flicker film). Modernism, then, is characterized by autonomy which implies the separation of high art from the sphere of mass culture and everyday life, the increasing subjectivization of the artist and the self-referentiality, the purity, of the modernist artwork. In this respect modernism understands itself as adversarial.

Only by fortifying its boundaries, by maintaining its purity and autonomy, and by avoiding any contamination with mass

culture can the work of art maintain its adversary stance: adversary to the bourgeois culture of everyday life as well as adversary to mass culture and entertainment which are seen as the primary forms of bourgeois cultural articulation" (Huysen, 1986: 54).

It is this modernism, eventually canonized within academic institutions and "squeezed to death in the tweedy arms of English professors," to which postmodernism responds (Latimer, 1984: 118). According to Jameson, the postmodern is a reaction to the domestication of a once subversive modernism. What was once "felt to be scandalous or shocking by our grandparents are, for the generation which arrives at the gate in the 1960s, felt to be the establishment and the enemy" (Jameson, 1983: 112). Inasmuch as it has been institutionalized its project of autonomy is an illusory one. It is precisely the modernist notion of autonomy, and its separation between high and low art, which is attacked by postmodernism. Jameson stresses this key feature of postmodern culture: "the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" (Jameson, 1983: 112). Postmodern art is infused by a "populist rhetoric" (Jameson, 1984b: 54).

Architectural design (postmodernism's "privileged aesthetic language") provides Jameson with his most compelling example of this postmodern collapse of the boundaries between aesthetic production and commodity production (Jameson, 1984b: 79). While the modernist building privileges aesthetic autonomy over context and attempts to achieve the status of a "virtual sculpture" imposed on the landscape, the postmodern building speaks the language of the "commercial sign-system of the surrounding city," and inserts itself into the "heterogeneous fabric of the commercial strip and the motel and fast-food landscape of the post-superhighway American city" (Jameson, 1984b: 81; 1984b: 63-4). This aesthetic of "learning from Las Vegas"

and speaking the vernacular of the popular has led to "cultural mutations" which

no longer scandalize anyone and are not only received with the greatest complacency but have themselves become institutionalized and are at one with the official culture of Western society (Jameson, 1984b: 56).

Postmodernism's fascination with "this whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Readers' Digest Culture" has meant a transformation, a mutation, in cultural expression (Jameson, 1983: 112). This embrace of commercial culture and the proliferation of technologies of reproduction have generated both the constitutive features of postmodern culture, and, particular kinds of experiences for those of us who inhabit this culture. Jameson describes postmodern culture in terms of "a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation...in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity" which finds textual form in the modes of pastiche and nostalgia and implies a new, schizophrenic, relationship to temporality both publicly and privately; a "new type of emotional ground tone...'intensities' -- which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime" (Jameson, 1984b: 58).

Postmodernism's engagement with the commodity form and the role of photography and the image in contemporary art has led, according to Jameson, to a culture which is characterized by "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness" (Jameson, 1984b: 60). It draws its content from commodity products, from advertising images, which ultimately render this culture flat. Postmodernism's collapse of the boundaries between high and low art and its incorporation of mass culture indicates that there is no longer either the desire or the possibility of critical distance, of being outside the system of

commodity exchange. It is, in a word, superficial. This characteristic of postmodern culture owes its existence to a more general repudiation of depth models (characteristic of modernism) in contemporary postmodern theory.

Jameson outlines four depth models: "the dialectical one of essence and appearance" accompanied by Marxist "concepts of ideology or false consciousness;" "the Freudian model of latent and manifest, or of repression;" "the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity;" "and finally, latest in time, the great semiotic opposition between signifier and signified" (Jameson, 1984b: 62). What each of these models presupposes is a distinction between inside and outside and, importantly, the existence of an inside and the possibility of its outward expression. For example, the semiotic opposition between signified and signifier implies a distinction between the two terms which allows for the creation of meaning, for expression. Expression depends on some conception of the inside and outside; it depends on a depth model.

What is denied by postmodern theory and culture is precisely this opposition between inside and outside and, for Jameson, the possibility of it generating any meaning at all. While Van Gogh's modernist "Peasant Shoes" "is taken as a clue or symptom for some vaster reality which replaces it as its ultimate truth," Andy Warhol's postmodern "Diamond Dust Shoes" is a "random collection of dead objects" which "no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's footgear: indeed, I am tempted to say that it does not really speak to us at all" (Jameson, 1984b: 59-60). The postmodern artwork is not an outward expression of inner feeling (as was characteristic of modernism). It is, rather, "gratuitous frivolity" and "decorative overlay" from which all "affect" has waned (Jameson, 1984b: 61). This postmodern depthlessness is neither restricted to visual art nor a metaphor. "It can be



experienced physically and literally by anyone who...suddenly confronts the great free-standing wall of the Crocker Bank Center... -- a surface which seems to be unsupported by any volume...." (Jameson, 1984b: 62). This "monolith's" "great sheet of windows" is the very image of flatness (Jameson, 1984b: 62). Reflecting only the surrounding landscape they eradicate any sense of depth. Depth is replaced by the play of surfaces.

Postmodernism's flatness is generated not only by the addiction to image culture generally but also by the "random cannibalization" of other media, styles and periods (Jameson, 1984b: 65). One thinks of postmodern cultural products as George Romero's zombies in his trilogy NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, DAWN OF THE DEAD, and DAY OF THE DEAD: lifeless -- depthless -- (the lights may be on but there's nobody home; they are, after all, dead) and without thought or purpose, except to self-generate, these zombies indiscriminately feed off their own kind. Jameson calls this cultural self-consumption "pastiche," and distinguishes it from parody. Although both pastiche and parody involve imitation (the adoption of some other style or technique) parody depends on the existence of a norm (an established and dominant style for example), and on the possibility of achieving a critical distance from that norm and executing a unique use (or parody) of its conventions. Modern art, with its distance from the norm, managed parody's critical edge and was, in fact, serviced by the existence of established stylistic norms inasmuch as it needed these norms as a foil against which its critical meanings could be generated.

However, modern art did not have to contend with the postmodern "field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm" (Jameson, 1984b: 65). When the norm is replaced by a "stupendous proliferation of social codes," and "reduced to a neutral and reified media speech" parody, no longer

possible, is "eclipsed" by pastiche (Jameson, 1984b: 65). Nothing remains but stylistic "diversity and heterogeneity" and a cultural practice which is "amputated of the satiric impulse" (Jameson, 1984b: 65). Pastiche is the "neutral practice" of mimicry; a "statue with blind eyeballs," it stares blankly at the world (Jameson, 1984b: 65). This cultural cannibalization implies not only a blank stare without meaning or depth but also the disappearance of the new and the recycling of the old.

Pastiche, as the "imitation of dead styles," indicates a particularly postmodern experience of the old and of history (Jameson, 1984b: 65). With the disappearance of the unique, of stylistic innovation, culture, in the age of postmodernism, is sentenced to "imprisonment in the past" (Jameson, 1983: 116). History becomes "historicism" in postmodernism; nostalgia is a key vehicle in this transformation. Pastiche, generally, indicates historicism, "the play of random stylistic allusions," but nostalgia, as a particular practice of pastiche, is exclusively concerned with styles of, and allusions to, the past (Jameson, 1984b: 66).

Jameson cites the contemporary nostalgia film as an example of historicism replacing history. Films such as *STAR WARS* and *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK* invoke "one of the most important cultural experiences of the generations that grew up from the '30s to the '50s," that is, the "Buck Roger's type" adventure serial (Jameson, 1983: 116). Regardless of their setting (the future in "a galaxy far far away" or the past during the Second World War) these films re-invent "the feel and shape of characteristic...objects of an older period;" they "reawaken a sense of the past associated with those objects" and satisfy a "repressed" desire to re-live it (Jameson, 1983: 116). Yet, since those objects of an older period are dead forms, adventure serial nostalgia films can only be metonymical; they can only substitute themselves

for what is now extinct.

The nostalgia mode extends beyond the appropriation of particular forms to the more general "aesthetic colonization" of "generational periods" (Jameson, 1984b: 67). Jameson cites the "recuperation of the American and the Italian 1930s, in Polanski's CHINATOWN and Bertolucci's IL CONFORMISTA respectively," but one could also cite the recent spate of 1960s period recreation films such as 1969, FAR OUT MAN, MISSISSIPPI BURNING and THE DOORS (Jameson, 1984b: 67). While these are more obvious examples of nostalgia in that they take place in the past they colonize, this mode is also found in the "allusive and elusive plagiarism of older plots," in the re-emergence of historical genres such as film noir in films like THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (Jameson, 1983: 117). Although not set in the past, BODY HEAT also alludes to the conventions of these films; it effaces the contemporary setting and cues a time and style gone by. Allusion to the past and the resurgence of earlier forms can also be found in the Science Fiction genre with 1950s throw-back films such as INVASION FROM MARS and THEY LIVE. Both are set in the present but it is a present unmistakably marked by signs of the times: the obvious cheesy effects used to depict the space ships in THEY LIVE and the rural setting of INVASION FROM MARS (not to mention the school nurse right out of the Eisenhower era). As well, these films adopt the Them and Us scenarios which so dominated the 1950s.

Each of these nostalgic pastiches is an indication for Jameson that we are "unable today to focus on our present" (although the immediacy of reality TV seems to suggest otherwise) (Jameson, 1983: 117). They indicate that the present itself is distant (endowed with "the spell and distance of a glossy mirage"), that we can neither deal with the present historically (our "lived

possibility of experiencing history in some active way" has disappeared) nor deal with history historically (Jameson, 1984b: 68). Historicism replaces history; history, itself, becomes so many styles and plots, present only through "the art language of the simulacrum" (Jameson, 1984b: 68). Such nostalgia films replace the real past with cultural images; they do not represent the historical past so much as recycle "our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach" (Jameson, 1983: 118). These features of postmodern culture are "alarming and pathological symptom[s] of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history" (Jameson, 1983: 117). In postmodernity history is reduced to sign culture and our experiences of time become that of the schizophrenic.

### Postmodern Experience: Fragmentation Eclipses Alienation

For Jameson, the postmodern subject is not only a consequence of culture it also shares some of its features. Douglas Kellner argues that:

Jameson suggests that there are correspondences between postmodern texts and subjects in contemporary capitalist societies. In both, there are lacks of unity, coherence, and depth, and they are both dispersed, schizoid, and characterized by a network of relations which are shifting, unstable, fragmentary, and decentered (Kellner, 1989b: 26).

It is in opposition to a "once-existing centred subject, in the period of classical capitalism and the nuclear family," that Jameson describes the decentered subject of "the world of organizational bureaucracy" (Jameson, 1984b: 63).

What this death of the subject hypothesis implies is the "end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual," the end, in other words, of the idea of the autonomous and unified self (Jameson, 1984b: 63). This

particular conception of the subject is consistent with the understanding of, for example, the modern artist as "a monad-like container:" a unique individual, capable of autonomy, self-expression and stylistic innovation (Jameson, 1984b: 63). This is understood as a "radical isolation" and "revolt" (Jameson, 1984b: 63). Given the possibility of autonomy and the existence of some core self this subject was also characterized by experiences of anxiety and alienation from the contaminated material world. According to Jameson, there was, in short, a self beyond the grip of the imperatives of the socio-economic world and one which was distanced from it. The death of this subject is evident within the characterization of the postmodern artist, not as an auteur expressing an inner self, but merely as an arranger of pre-existing cultural artifacts. There are no new styles because there is no longer a centred subject from which new styles can emerge. So colonized is this subject that he/she can only re-produce the cultural signs which have mounted an "occupation" of the unconscious. No longer capable of an alienated stance, which depends on a self, the postmodern subject fragments and is transformed into a pastiche of so many incoherent pieces.

This death of the subject hypothesis extends to "social theorists, the psychoanalysts, even the linguists, not to speak of those of us who work in the area of culture and cultural and formal change" (Jameson, 1983: 114-115). The poststructuralist position, for example, argues that the bourgeois individual subject "is...a myth," that "it never really existed in the first place," that "there have never been autonomous subjects of that type" (Jameson, 1983: 115). Rather, our subjectivities are constructed by the systems we generate and live within.

In the Lacanian model, for instance, our selves are constituted by and developed within language. The self, then, "is a self which has entered us, not

a self which we are" (Latimer, 1984: 119). The poststructuralist subject is constructed across a range of discourses, and is thus decentred and fragmented. Jameson rejects this radical poststructuralist position, preferring instead the claim that an actual historical subject and not just a theoretical concept has been eradicated. Yet, he describes a similar subject and uses Lacan's analysis of our acquisition and use of language as the basis for describing (not diagnosing) postmodern experience as schizophrenic (Jameson, 1984b: 71).

In his description of the postmodern subject as schizophrenic Jameson suggests that this fragmentation has led to an inability to think historically. It has led to an inability of the subject to "organize its past and future into coherent experience" (Jameson, 1984b: 71). Such is the experience of the schizophrenic. According to Lacan, schizophrenia is a language disorder which arises from the infant's failure to "accede fully into the realm of speech and language" (Jameson, 1983: 118). The meaning effect, derived from the inter-relationship of signifiers, the "signifying chain," has broken down for the schizophrenic; a meaningful relationship among signifiers is replaced by a "rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (Jameson, 1984b: 72).

Since the schizophrenic has failed to enter language in the "normal" way, his/her experience of temporality is also affected. For Lacan, language has a temporal dimension -- a past, a present and a future -- and confers on us a sense of a "concrete or lived experience of time" (Jameson, 1983: 119). For this reason, the schizophrenic is "condemned to live in a perpetual present in which the various moments of his or her past have little connection" (Jameson, 1983: 119). Since this schizoid postmodern subject experiences the world as a series of "isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence," it is also unable to maintain

an identity, "the persistence of the 'I' and the 'me' over time" (Jameson, 1983: 119). From this perspective, the schizophrenic subject is as much a pastiche as the culture it inhabits: it, too, stares with "blank eyeballs" at the collection of disconnected cultural signs, dehistoricized by their cannibalization, and is condemned to a perpetual present of undifferentiated signifiers. The experience of this perpetual present is more intense than normal: for the schizophrenic, who has no sense of past or future, the presence, in its isolation in time, becomes more vivid. The intensity of the present is experienced negatively as a "loss of reality" and more positively in "terms of euphoria," as "high...intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity" (Jameson, 1984b: 73).

These "intensities of highs and lows" differ from feelings of anxiety and alienation which express "an underlying nightmare state of the world" (Kellner, 1989b: 45). Rather, they "don't imply anything about the world, you can feel them on whatever occasion. They are no longer cognitive" (Kellner, 1989b: 45). A culture without depth, then, produces a similar subject, who, losing "the depth of psychological affect" ("a particular kind of phenomenological or emotional reaction to the world"), experiences intensities and the "exhilaration of the gleaming surface" (Kellner, 1989b: 44-45).

It is this experience of hallucinatory exhilaration in the over-presence of postmodern culture that Jameson defines as the "hysterical sublime" (Jameson, 1984b: 77). The postmodern sublime is a yoking of Burke and Kant's notion of the sublime (that experience of awe and terror at the immensities of Nature and the representations of "such enormous forces" respectively) and Susan Sontag's isolation of camp as a means of expression.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jameson does not provide a context for this reference to Sontag.

Unlike the modern sublime, however, this experience is not a reaction to Nature, since we now experience a "radical eclipse of Nature itself," but rather a response to the condition of the postmodern cultural landscape (Jameson, 1984b: 77). The hysterical sublime is the experience of "individual subjects fixed in some vast network of international business, blinking, clicking, whirring incessantly to transmit, like transistorized Jedi knights, the power of the Force" (Latimer, 1984: 123). The postmodernist sublime describes not a cognitive experience of revelation, nor does it resemble the conscious sublime in which "it is the self that touches the limit" (Kellner, 1989b: 45). Rather it is experienced in the body (our now postmodern body) which inhabits the hyperspace of postmodern culture. "[H]ere it is the body, that is touching its limits, 'volatized' in this experience of images to the point of being outside itself, losing itself" (Kellner, 1989b: 45).

This sublime is not subjective. It is not the experience of a self awestruck and comprehending the "limits of the individual subject and the human ego. On the contrary, it is a kind of non-humanist experience of limits beyond which you get dissolved" (Kellner, 1989b: 45). The postmodern sublime involves not only the dissolution of our bodies into the postmodern techno-imagescape, it is also experienced as intense and momentary, fragmented and incoherent. It is not the sublime which transcends the material but one which is infused by it. The postmodern hysterical sublime is the moment at which "this extraordinarily demoralizing and depressing original new global space...has moved the closest to the surface of consciousness" (Jameson, 1984b: 88).

It is this recuperation of the sublime (this transformation of transcendence into hysteria) and the dissolution of our postmodern bodies into the object world (in hyperspace "we no longer have subjects and objects")



that has led Jameson to argue that critical distance (the modernist notion of the semi-autonomy of the subject and culture) is no longer possible (Kellner, 1989b: 47). In the totalizing condition of postmodernism neither subjects, "submerged in [postmodernism's] henceforth filled and suffused volumes," nor cultural practices, which are "secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part," can escape the clutches of this "new global space" (Jameson, 1984b: 87).

Although Jameson's image of postmodernity, its culture and experiences, is in many ways reminiscent of Baudrillard's, there are several distinct differences, not the least of which is Jameson's insistence that, as an historical moment, postmodernism does not constitute a void out of which we will never return, at least not alive. Yet, while he maintains the possibility of theorizing both an alternative subject (the "collective subject") and critical culture outside the grip of postmodern practices (some so-called third world literature) Jameson finds little hope in the practices of contemporary postmodern popular culture and the ways in which we experience it (Jameson, 1984b: 92). For both Jameson and Baudrillard, then, the meaningless popular culture mediascape (of which the horror film is an undeniably a prominent component), and, our schizoid and rather blank experience of it, characterize the contemporary moment as postmodern. Although this perspective will prove useful in accounting for some of the thematic and stylistic characteristics of contemporary horror, it simultaneously short-circuits an analysis of the meanings generated by such cultural representations.

### The Limits of Dissatisfaction

The description of the postmodern context as a horror show, which generates meaningless simulacra and mutant, schizoid subjects, in the words of Douglas Kellner, makes "good science fiction but poor social theory" (Kellner, 1988: 248). To adopt the despair and resignation that Jameson feels towards postmodern popular culture, and that Baudrillard feels towards everything, is to acquiesce to a powerless position in relation to supposedly hyper-powerful popular images. The "complete inability to propose an intelligible strategy of cultural/political resistance to the social conditions they describe" limit these theories of the popular to nihilistic lament (Britton, 1988: 17). This paranoid and pessimistic mapping of the postmodern landscape is, in part, generated by nostalgia. In Jameson's case it is a nostalgia for a pre-commodified social order, for a time before multi-national capitalism exerted its total control over cultural production, and precipitated the postmodern collapse of the boundary between high and low art. For Baudrillard, the lament is for an even more historically remote past, a pre-technological one unpossessed by the "evil demon of images." The utter horror Baudrillard displays towards the monstrous simulation machine is evidence for Kellner that he is nostalgic for a time when direct conversation was the predominant mode of communication, and the culture was an oral one uncontaminated by media technologies (Kellner, 1989: 67). As Kellner points out, Baudrillard "valorizes immediate communication over mediated communication, forgetting that all communication is mediated (through language, signs, and so on)" (Kellner, 1989: 75). Baudrillard is nostalgic for a referential certitude which never existed. He longs for a context which generates its truth unproblematically and directly, and which assigns its signs indisputable meaning. It seems he would have us regress to a feudal hierarchy of value in which, at least, signs were fixed and spoke the truth

about one's social position.

The correct observation that the real and therefore Truth are not assured through our representations of the world, that, reference is not guaranteed, leads Baudrillard to the presumptuous conclusion that the real has become a victim of that which mediates it. In making the leap from the recognition that social reality is, perhaps increasingly, mediated to us through our cultural representations, to the conclusion that it has disappeared completely and, seemingly, irrevocably (lest we smash our TV sets and stick a grilled cheese sandwich in our VCR) Baudrillard has eclipsed any possibility of saying anything meaningful at all. Coupled with an intense "technophobia" Baudrillard's nostalgia prevents him from responding to the postmodern context with nothing more than an hysterical warning about the end of the social and the simultaneous demise of the real. This is postmodern paralysis.

For Jameson, postmodern culture does not replace the social so much as constitute its superstructural expression and as such demands contextualization. Power is not simply a sign for Jameson, although it certainly takes discursive form. The problem with Jameson's critique of postmodernism is not its de-contextualization of image culture but its relentless over-contextualization. Because of postmodernism's engagement with the codes and conventions of the culture of consumer capitalism it is always, and already, suspect. Postmodernism is real for Jameson (a "new social formation") and its culture does speak a truth, the truth of multinational capitalism. Multinational capitalism is the postmodern context, and that context contaminates; it infects all culture produced within it.

Jameson and Baudrillard's mutual disdain for contemporary postmodern popular culture demonstrates an elitism which renders their

discussions exercises in condemnation. Against the popular, Jameson validates the expressive capabilities of an art not yet incapacitated by consumption. Expression, denied by the collapse of the boundary between high and low art, is the ultimate victim of both Pop Art practice and media culture whose voracious appetite destroys all depth and therefore meaning. While Jameson refrains from denying that meaning itself is impossible, it is clear that popular postmodern culture generates none of it. Baudrillard's total simulacrum is pictured, more subtly, in Jameson's contention that popular images are characterized by, and appreciated for, their superficial, spectacular appeal. They delight us only in their glossy surfaces. This not only reduces the popular to a unitary form and function, rendering it, at least theoretically, standardized, it over-rides and pre-empts interpretation. It is as if such popular representations are not worth the effort.

This elitism, characteristic of the preference for the high art/low art split is also, ironically enough, a component of Baudrillard's analysis. Unlike Jameson though, Baudrillard's discussion hinges on questions of authenticity. For example, Baudrillard's description of *THE LAST PICTURE SHOW* as a "hyperrealist restitution" of an "original" production implies that the former is an imitation of the latter and as such leaves us indifferent since it lacks the authenticity of the original. This implies that the Hollywood films of the 1950s are more real in some way, that they are more accurate reflections of the social world, that they, as original productions, merely copied by current films, have a more direct relationship to the real. This mystification of the good old days of movie-making is apparent in Baudrillard's contention that: "A whole generation of films is appearing which will be to those we have known what the android is to man: marvellous, flawless artifacts, dazzling simulacra which lack only an imaginary and that particular

hallucination which makes cinema what it is" (Baudrillard, 1984: 29).

As "man" is to the android, the cinema of the past is to the contemporary simulation: the real thing on which the replica is based and on which it depends. Such a comparison generates a mystified vision of earlier films which, in their originality, are supposedly more like the real thing than their current replacements -- obviously despite the fact that they too exchange in the image. The separation of an authentic from an inauthentic culture implied by this comparison is also evident in Baudrillard's distinction between the films of Visconti and those of Kubrick:

With Visconti, there is meaning, history, a sensual rhetoric, dead moments, a passionate game, not only in historical content but in the direction. None of that with Kubrick, who controls his film like a chessboard, and makes history an operational scenario...we are entering into an era of films which no longer have meaning properly speaking, large synthetic machines with variable geometry (Baudrillard, 1987: 30).

This unapologetic preference for the European art film over the "synthetic machine" is ultimately a validation of the unique over the apparently already-said. This seems as nostalgic for a unique modernist artwork which expresses something of its maker as Jameson's lament for the personal expression of the great auteurs and the innovative potential of the art film. This nostalgia for a pre-technological and a pre-commodified cultural realm is more than a naive lament for a time of authentic communication, referential certitude and expression. It is a contemporary version of the cultural apocalypse described by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *THE DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT*. The fear they directed toward the increasing commodification of all areas of life, and toward the "culture industry" which threatened authentic expression and negation is

echoed in both Baudrillard's description of a hyper-reality ("the final victory of berserk mass culture") and the disappearance of any expression or meaning whatsoever, and, in Jameson's intensification and expansion of multinational capitalism and its orchestrated cultural logic (Collins, 1987: 11).

While Baudrillard's implosion, at least in part, prevents the high art/low art split characteristic of both Jameson's and Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of popular culture, it does not immunize him against the elitism that position entails. Although there is no longer authentic art and the possibility of negation against which to compare debased and recuperative low culture, Baudrillard's elitism is evident in his at once hysterical and dismissive attitude toward popular culture. He is hysterical in his over-valuation of image technology and dismissive in his reduction of cultural representations to meaningless simulacra. The simulacrum and the standardized culture industry are not that much different. Both are paranoid versions of a monolithic culture which, in the first instance, resolves and denies contradiction or opposition, and, in the second, eliminates meaningful communication altogether. The terms of reference may have changed (or rather disappeared) but the condemnation of the popular in both Jameson and Baudrillard is a familiar theme.

In its intimations of apocalypse this nihilistic postmodernism leaves nothing for the student of popular culture to do but lament the passing of pre-technological pre-capitalist culture, and, expose the cultural horrors such a passing has spawned. Although Jameson envisions a more advanced stage of capitalism and a more industrialized culture than that discussed in *THE DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT*, he remains faithful to the political project of its critique. Baudrillard, on the other hand, is something akin to Adorno and Horkheimer on acid.

This nostalgia for an authentic and unique culture is coupled by an equally nostalgic lament for the stable unified subject demanded by modernism and dispersed by the postmodern. Although to varying degrees and with different consequences, both Baudrillard and Jameson credit the postmodern cultural landscape with the demise of the centered and coherent subject and with the emergence of a mutant schizophrenic one. This subject, not properly a subject at all, is rendered defenseless against the invasive cultural technologies which transformed it in the first place (Baudrillard), or, lives in a state of confusion unable to make any sense of a superficial image culture (Jameson).

Baudrillard's descriptions of the audiences of popular culture as "them," "they," "the masses," "a black hole which engulfs the social," and "a spongy [and, one assumes, vampiristic] referent" are not only elitist and exasperated over-generalizations about the people who attend, and attend to, postmodern spectacles, they offer no practical strategies, or even categories, for the analysis of those audiences. Consequently, any critique of Baudrillard's discussion of the masses must attack it for how it describes them. To do otherwise, to take Baudrillard seriously, whether figuratively or literally, is not only to indulge in metaphysical word play but to legitimate a meaningless postmodernism which represents itself as meaningful.

In Baudrillard's universe the masses have a dual function or character; they are simultaneously victim and villain. As victim of the simulation machine, the masses are invaded, penetrated and, in a sense, made pregnant and transformed, by their exposure to postmodern image culture. Individual subjectivity, the unique self, is replaced by a series of networks which, significantly invade the brain, once the site of the self. These images of the invaded, transformed, silent and inert selfless, non-subject, which is really

only an indistinguishable component of an amorphous mass, not only recapitulates, hysterically, the passive, one-dimensional, standardized audience of traditional Marxist and conservative criticism alike, but, more importantly, it does so through metaphors which figure this victimization in terms of the feminine. As Barbara Creed points out, the horrors of postmodern experience are, at least for Baudrillard, best described by metaphors of feminization (Creed, 1987). The real experience of horror in postmodernity is becoming woman. It is also worth noting that this image of the subject -- which is not properly a subject at all -- is also a familiar characterization of woman. Assigned passivity and inertia as primary qualities woman, like the masses, responds with silence. Yet this silent victimized mass has another side, and that side is dangerous.

Baudrillard contends that the masses pose a threat to the social and in so doing subscribes to a familiar fear of the rabble which, supposedly, comprises the audiences of low culture. Baudrillard attributes certain monstrous qualities to the masses. They, too, engulf the social, assume the role of vessel and, ultimately constitute a void. This not only replays familiar plots from 1950s alien invasion films, it also invokes more contemporary images of a zombified mass bent on total destruction. For Baudrillard, it is a matter of both the invasion of the subject and the, perhaps consequent, threat of the subject. In Baudrillard's world, the masses appear to be as much a threat as the culture they relentlessly and meaninglessly consume. The mass is a monster and, in Baudrillard's universe, its monstrosity is feminine. As we shall see in later chapters, this monstrosity of the feminine is not only a key feature of contemporary horror films, but also the hinge upon which the door to opposition swings.

If Baudrillard's goo and fluid imagery does not secure this reading of



the feminine and feminized mass, his adherence to the black hole theory of the audience certainly does. The masses are invaded by all the networks of influence and respond by soaking it up. That is, the media penetrates and the masses get their revenge by doing what they do best, engulfing, encasing, absorbing, and generally smothering any life out of what they encounter. That this is simultaneously a form of resistance for the masses indicates that Baudrillard also extends the metaphor of the feminine to the strategies of resistance he imagines for them. The masses resist either through their silence (they deny the meanings the system attempts to maximize and refuse to be subjects at all), or, through hyper-conformity and hyper-consumption. This option either relegates people to passive and marginalized silence or sends them right to the mall. This characterization has also been made of woman: silenced; essentially the same ("all women are alike"); and, denied a coherent self (an object rather than a subject). Feminized, Baudrillard's subject engages in the trivial -- it is a subject "born to shop." Baudrillard's description of the masses as simultaneously victim and monster and, significantly, feminine in both roles, makes poor (and misogynist) social theory but provides a useful set of ideas against which to situate the themes of postmodern horror.

While Baudrillard's discussion of postmodern subjectivity hinges on excessively gendered language, Jameson's errs in under-emphasizing the category of gender. What the postmodern schizophrenic subject lacks is the stability and coherence of the modernist subject. For Jameson, this subject actually existed "in the period of classical capitalism and the nuclear family" (Jameson, 1984b: 63). Yet, he detours from the fact that this subject was resolutely male, white and bourgeois. As Hal Foster points out, the death of the subject scenario is fraught with nostalgia for a particular kind of subject:

"For what is this subject that, threatened by loss, is so bemoaned? Bourgeois perhaps, patriarchal certainly -- it is the phallogentric order of subjectivity" (Foster, 1984: 78). Although Jameson far from suggests a return to the bourgeois, patriarchal family and the conception of the subject it entails, he nevertheless laments the disappearance of the subject of modern art: the self which, although alienated, is coherent, possessing both purpose and depth.

Jameson reads the fragmentation of such a subject, not as a multiplication of possible subjectivities, de-centered around race, class, gender and so forth, but as a death of sorts. Certainly, the postmodern artist is so much dead wood in his or her superficial re-arrangement of the cultural scene. Similarly, the postmodern subject is as incoherent and shallow as the culture which produces it. The fragmentation of subjectivity can only mean chaos. Jameson, however, is not as bleak and misogynistic as Baudrillard. For him, the possible alternative to postmodern subjectivity lies in a collective subjectivity which is understood as neither the bourgeois ego nor the schizophrenic subject, but a non-schizophrenic, decentered subject. Such a subject, however, is generated outside of multinational capitalism. In the same way that cognitive mapping is within the scope, not of popular culture, but of culture removed from postmodernism, collective subjectivity seems unlikely in the cultural context Jameson describes.

In the end, this strain of postmodern theory is unable to analyze adequately the very phenomenon with which it is obsessed: contemporary image culture. Undoubtedly much of the problem lies in the particular paranoid and nostalgic stance of nihilistic postmodernism, a stance which is predicated on a fear of the image. For Baudrillard this fear is categorical and is directed at representations in general; for Jameson it is a fear of popular mainstream representations, and not representation itself. Regardless of their

differences, both subscribe to the simulation model to explain postmodern image culture. As such, that culture is both homogenous and removed from a context in which meanings are circulated; it is beyond analysis.

Yet, while neither Baudrillard nor Jameson find much that is oppositional in postmodern culture, their paranoia about the contemporary world has made its way into much contemporary horror. However, before exploring how contemporary horror manifests this postmodern nihilism in an ostensibly oppositional manner, I want to examine alternative postmodern theories that offer a less nihilistic and pessimistic view of the postmodern than that provided by either Baudrillard or Jameson. It is to a consideration of postmodern theories that attempt to account for the diversity of meanings generated by contemporary culture that I now want to turn.

CHAPTER TWO  
TOWARDS A LESS HORRIFIC POSTMODERNISM:  
THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE POPULAR

Beyond the nihilistic and pessimistic strain of postmodernism described in the last chapter, another strain of postmodernism describes the contemporary cultural landscape as a tension-filled semiotic environment, in which meanings, far from disappearing, proliferate. This approach is a useful corrective to the extreme cultural pessimism and nihilism of other postmodern theories inasmuch as it embraces the heterogeneity of the contemporary cultural landscape. It re-maps the postmodern to account for the multiplicity of cultural forms and the diversity of expressions therein.

Some suggest that postmodern culture (more often high than low) occupies a critical stance in relation to the social world because it challenges the very ability to represent that world, indeed, because it troubles representation itself (Hutcheon, 1987; Wilson, 1990). Yet, in other accounts of postmodern popular culture, the category of opposition is rendered obsolete (Grossberg 1987; Collins, 1989). It seems that, in an effort to distance themselves from the pessimistic stance, some theorists argue that there is neither sign control nor a dominant culture to oppose. Thus, cultural expressions cannot adequately be accounted for in terms of either a reactionary or an oppositional relationship to the social context. In the extreme version of this position, a certain equivalence follows from this multiplicity.

In this chapter I adopt the description of the contemporary cultural landscape as tension-filled, however, I argue that this very observation, far from relegating opposition to has-been status, demands its return. The

obvious existence of contradictory cultural expressions necessitates, not merely a postmodern listing of diversity, but a critical examination of these contradictions and the different ways cultural products make sense of the social world. Popular culture has never been as monolithic as pessimistic accounts suggest, but, the turn in critical theory towards a recognition of diversity, requires that we sort out the differences among these cultural forms.

The thematic concerns and stylistic features of the contemporary horror film have been made sense of not only by invoking the nihilistic ruminations of Baudrillard and Jameson, but, also, the strategies said to be characteristic of postmodern culture. The important point to make here is that, thematically and stylistically, postmodern horror embodies features said to be characteristic of the progressive genre. For this reason, it is necessary to consider both postmodern cultural practice and so-called progressive strategies of opposition in order to complete the context within which contemporary horror might be situated.

### Postmodern Possibilities

The more optimistic interpretation of the postmodern scene offers, at least in part, an alternative to the paralysis generated by nihilistic visions. From this perspective, the observation that the social world is deeply coded by cultural discourses leads not to a description of a self-generating simulacrum which destroys the real, but, to a conception of a context defined by the simultaneous presence of various and varied styles and cultural artifacts. The contemporary environment is neither unitary nor monolithic, but rather heterogeneous and decentered. An obvious debt is owed here to Francois

Lyotard's description of the "collapse of the grand narratives" and the profound questioning of explanations of the world which purport universality and make claims to Truth (Lyotard, 1984).

This philosophy of the postmodern condition interrogates the notion of consensus. Consequently, "[w]hatever narratives or systems that once allowed us to think we could unproblematically define public agreement have now been questioned by the acknowledgment of differences – in theory and in artistic practice" (Hutcheon, 1987: 14). Such a conception necessitates a stance which declares that any knowledge of the social can only be regional or local. For Lyotard, there can be no Truth, only truths. Following from this, some theorists argue that since one can no longer contend that the public sphere is centered and unified one must abandon the theory of a homogeneous cultural landscape and substitute instead the notion of the postmodern context as a "plural and fragmented" "semiotic glut" (Hutcheon, 1987: 10; Collins, 1989).

James Collins describes a situation in which "cultural production is no longer a carefully co-ordinated 'system', but an arena of simultaneous options that have destabilized the traditional distinction between High Art and mere 'mass culture'" (Collins, 1989: 2). The modernist version of a monolithic cultural landscape (to which, undoubtedly, nihilistic postmodernism owes a debt) is replaced by the notion of "heterglossia." Here postmodernism is seen as a "tension-filled environment," a heteroglot in which "culture does not have one center or no center, but multiple, simultaneous centers" (Collins, 1989: 27). Lyotard, too, foregrounds this diversity in his characterization of the postmodern day-in-a-life: "One listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong" (quoted in Gitlin, 1989: 52).

Similarly, for Iain Chambers, the postmodern landscape as one marked by eclecticism.

Different tastes, diverse artifacts, distinct forms and practices, coexist in the intertextual spaces of networks that permit both the recognition of connection and difference. Knowledge is no longer monumental and monolithic but differentiated and nomadic.... Different histories become available, their languages drawn into a contemporary eclecticism -- producing unexpected encounters in the record grooves, on the dance floor, in fashion, in front of the television, in the city, and in everyday life (Chambers, 1986: 193).

This postmodern context, decentered by multiple discourses and truths, has generated a kind of cultural practice which is as decentered and "uncommon" as the context in which it is produced and consumed (Collins, 1989). Postmodernism's central tendency is intertextuality, and its central function is the troubling of representation. Some argue that, in engaging and exploring multiple textualities, postmodern practices make their audiences sensitive to the discursive character of social reality, to the multiple and diverse ways in which that reality is constructed, and, to the role of postmodern text in that construction (Collins, 1987/1989; Grossberg, 1987; Hutcheon, 1987; Wilson, 1990). In so doing, postmodern texts undermine representation. Thus, Tony Wilson argues that postmodern practice suspends the "veridical effect, [that is] an apparent looking on at how things are" (Wilson, 1990: 392). While modernism constituted a "detached" "scrutiny of the means of representation, postmodernism raises the question of the very possibility of representation itself;" "the postmodern image...merely displays another" and "makes no 'pretense to showing me, offering me sight of, the Real occurring elsewhere'" (Wilson, 1990: 396-401).

What distinguishes this from Baudrillard and Jameson's simulacrum, is the "radical edge of postmodernism's questioning of reference" (Wilson,

1990: 400). Where Baudrillard's images pretend to be the real in their replacement of it, these images, conversely, avoid any pretense of reference at all. They question their own truthfulness. Lawrence Grossberg refers to this strategy of troubling representation as "pose-modernism:" "the media's performance of particular poses," which, as such, "relate problematically to the real" (Grossberg, 1987: 39).

The questioning of representation implied by this kind of textuality has led some to suggest that it is a culture which defies interpretation. Referring to both the multiple "billboards" which comprise postmodern culture, and, its particular kind of intertextual self-reflexivity, Grossberg declares that "[i]t doesn't really matter whether it is another billboard for McDonalds , an anonymous bank, Pepsi or a political organization. It is not a sign to be interpreted, but rather, a piece of the puzzle to be assembled...any individual billboard is in-different" (Grossberg, 1987: 32). It seems that postmodern culture, in questioning representation through intertextual reference, has troubled itself out of any meaningful content at all.

This perspective on postmodernism troubles the relationship between the real and the image, signaling the lack of correspondence between representation and referent, by foregrounding its own textuality. It does so, not through investigating the materials of the medium as in modernism, but, through engaging with representational forms and working with them (Wilson, 1990: 11). The postmodern text "provoke[s] change from within," it "inscribes and then subverts its mimetic engagement with the world" (Hutcheon, 1987: 14-24). This notion of provoking change from within is evident, not only in postmodernism's exploitation of commodity culture (supposedly in order to expose its own commodification), but also in its preference for the visual, particularly the representational. Postmodernism



engages with the popular, with the representational, in order to subvert representation itself. In other words, postmodern texts question representation by demonstrating that they themselves are generated through so many other representations. This intertextuality signals the illusory character of the postmodern text.

Linda Hutcheon explores the critical character of this postmodern practice. She contests Jameson's claim that postmodern reference to the already-said is an evacuation of history, and argues, instead, that such practice signals the presence of the past and is "always a critical reworking, never a nostalgic 'return'; it is a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society, a recalling of a critically shared vocabulary of...forms" (Hutcheon, 1987: 11). Unlike Jameson's nostalgia film, Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction" (such as *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN* and *RAGTIME*) re-thinks history "as a human construct" and self-reflexively exposes "the myth- or illusion-making tendencies of historiography" (Hutcheon, 1987: 21). This not only points to the fact that the past is always and only available to us in textual form, but also to the very indeterminacy of the postmodern text (or any text for that matter). Such indeterminacy, the refusal of a single meaning or take on the world, and, of referentiality itself, is what paves the way for "the recognition of the value of differences and even contradictions..." and affords postmodern practice its critical edge (Hutcheon, 1987: 26).

Hutcheon, however, locates this postmodernism well beyond the sphere of what she regards as a uniform mass culture. Echoing Baudrillard, she defines the popular as a "kind of vast global informational village that McLuhan could only have dreamed of" (Hutcheon, 1987: 18). She describes a critical postmodern practice which "uses and abuses" the "invasive culture

industry to challenge its own commodification processes from within" while simultaneously remaining outside its homogenizing embrace (Hutcheon, 1987: 18). Although this practice owes its existence to the consumer culture of late capitalism it is in opposition to that culture that postmodern art practice maintains its critical edge. The popular remains a "homogenizing impulse" (Hutcheon, 1987: 18). In fact, "one of the totalizing forces" which "postmodernism exists to challenge -- challenge but not deny" -- is the "increasing tendency towards uniformity in mass culture" (Hutcheon, 1987: 12-13). In separating postmodern art practice from the grip of commodity culture, Hutcheon challenges Jameson's assertion that it is subsumed by the logic of late capitalism, and attributes to it an oppositional potential. Yet, she responds to the popular with similar generalizations and disdain. The critical potential of (high) postmodern intertextuality is lost in the homogenizing melting pot which is (low) postmodernism.

In contrast to Hutcheon, Collins is very postmodern in his refusal to distinguish between high and low forms of cultural expression; for him postmodernism means the blurring of that hierarchy and the coming into focus of multiple centers. Here, the popular arena provides the site for such centers. He argues, in fact, that popular culture and postmodernism are so interconnected that "developing a coherent theory of the latter depends on our understanding the complexity and historical development of the former" (Collins, 1987: xiii). Postmodernism is "most productively understood...as a transitional reaction against...the culmination of the ongoing proliferation of popular narrative that began nearly two centuries ago" (Collins, 1989: xiii).

This proliferation of popular narratives has generated a particular kind of popular culture which produces and reflects the same cultural perspective as postmodern theory. Postmodern intertextuality is a response to "the

complexities of contemporary cultural arenas...," "far more congested and conflicted than anything envisioned by Bakhtin" (Collins, 1989: 27).

Postmodern texts reproduce the heterogeneity of the postmodern context. They do so, "not only to decenter High Art or problematize modes of representation, but also to demonstrate the highly discursive nature of contemporary culture" (Collins, 1989: 64). Through intertextual reference, postmodern texts, as "virtual microcosms of the overall field of competing discourses," are not only attempting to deal with the glut of styles and representations within which they circulate and are exchanged, but also to point out "that the 'real' is always discursive...." (Collins, 1989: 60).

Postmodern texts refer to other texts, with which they compete, in order to demonstrate the ways in which discourses help to constitute "individual identity and culture" and, consequently, to challenge the very enterprise of representation itself; postmodern popular forms, like postmodern theory itself, are "discourse-sensitive" (Collins, 1989: xiii).

The overcrowded semiotic space within which popular representations circulate is a particular kind of heteroglot. It is one in which "'the official hierarchy' is difficult to identify" and no one kind of cultural representation is privileged over another (Collins, 1989: 25). Collins characterizes this postmodern landscape not as "one Grand Hotel (his metaphor for the culture industry account of the popular) that has fixed ontological status transcending its representations, but rather as a series of hotels, the style changing according to the way it is imagined by the discourses that represent it" (Collins, 1989: 26). Any attempt to construct a totalizing version of the postmodern (whether as simulacrum or cultural dominant) is frustrated by this recognition that the postmodern context is tension-filled, and, that a cultural hierarchy is difficult to identify.

The absence of such a hierarchy has necessitated a competition among discourses. Postmodern popular forms not only trouble representation, indicating a sensitivity to discourse, but, in recognizing the "conflicted pluralism" that so many discourses constitute, they also struggle to promote themselves over alternative discourses (Collins, 1989: 27). Collins identifies this cultural self-promotion as the "discursive ideologies" of popular forms (Collins, 1989: 6). For him, it is more fruitful to investigate, not how cultural representations embody a "non-aesthetic, pre-existent ideology," but, rather, how "they promote themselves as forms of discourse, generating their own set of distinctive values, sustaining their own stylistic uniqueness, constructing very particular subjects" (Collins, 1989: 6). In the absence of cultural orchestration, postmodernist texts are better understood as processes of "self-legitimation" than as "vehiculations of a 'dominant ideology'" (Collins, 1989: 27). In the glutted semiotic environment a central hierarchy or master system is impossible. Instead of supporting a dominant ideology, popular texts function to "clear a space" for themselves "within a field of competing discourses and fragmented audiences" (Collins, 1989: 27).

From this perspective, popular texts are less in the business of legitimating dominant ideology and more concerned with valorizing themselves and, others like them, against competitors: "When a unitary culture gives way to fragmentary cultures in which discourses have no fixed audience or body of pre-existent subjects, competing discourses must differentiate themselves according to style and function" (Collins, 1989: 89). Here, "differentiation and competition become the core of popular cultures" (Collins, 1989: 111). Popular genres legitimate their own creation and consumption by differentiating themselves from "rival" genres and by advertising themselves as "the sole 'language of truth'" (Collins, 1989: 88).

For example, "Gothic discourse becomes a kind of all-devouring monster that subsumes all other forms of writing to a form of one master discourse" (Collins, 1989: 88). It is each discourse's insistence that it is the most valid ("the multiplicity of ennobled discourses") that produces a "radically decentered culture" (Collins, 1989: 73).

In such a field of competing discourses, where so many centers are insisted upon simultaneously, there can only be alternatives. The conflict-filled plurality of the contemporary scene indicates for Collins that the category of oppositional cultural practice should be rethought since any discussion of opposition necessarily implies a dominant against which it is reacting. With the disappearance of a dominant in this postmodern heteroglot, the idea of opposition becomes outmoded, and any political position is only one alternative among many. There is an equivalence among codes in a "field of tension which can no longer be grasped in categories such as progress vs. reaction, left vs. right..." (Collins, 1989: 136).

In summary, Hutcheon argues that intertextuality and the undermining of representation are oppositional strategies which distinguish postmodern art practice from mass culture. Yet, even this critical edge attributed to (high) postmodernism lacks a sense of the oppositional. Because these texts are indifferent, the differences and contradictions which abound can never really be pinned down. They trouble representation to the point that their only critical message is that they do not represent anything. From this perspective, we can only look at how a text creates meanings, we can never venture to suggest what those meanings are.

Conversely, Collins, contends that these are strategies of popular culture as well. Yet, he suggests that the existence of these strategies troubles the very idea of opposition since self-promoting texts are alternatives to other

texts, and not affirmations or negations of some pre-existent ideology. Similarly, according to Grossberg, these texts are indifferent, their actual content irrelevant. In each case, however, postmodern texts are to be understood, not as re-presentations of something beyond themselves, but in relation to other texts as a subversion of representation, as a self-promotion of their own discursive strategies or as just another piece of the postmodern puzzle.

This characterization of the postmodern as a tension-filled environment which is insufficiently accounted for by proponents of mass culture (whether modern or postmodern) constitutes a necessary step in distancing popular culture criticism from the regressive condemnation of postmodern nihilism. On first glance, theories of postmodern practice appear to lend themselves to discussions of popular forms and opposition inasmuch as they acknowledge the diversity among cultural products (refusing the monolithic simulacrum) as well as the absence of a uniform, and uniformly, reactionary culture. A landscape in which there are conflicting and contradictory cultures seems an ideal place to look for representations that are oppositional. Yet, the possibility of both representation and opposition in popular culture are as good as evacuated here too.

It is not my purpose to dispute the rather obvious fact that the contemporary cultural scene is tension-filled and marked by diversity. What needs to be questioned, however, are the conclusions and the consequences for analysis often drawn from this description of the postmodern context and its culture. That is, that diversity means equivalence, equivalence leads to alternatives, and, alternatives render discussions of progressive and reactionary representations of the world obsolete. This is similar to suggesting that no one kind of cultural representation is privileged over any other in the

postmodern scene.

By contrast I argue that one need not resort to nihilistic postmodernism or to conspiracy theory to recognize that certain representations in contemporary western cultures are privileged over others. The simultaneous invisibility and particular kinds of visibility of gays and lesbians, African Americans and women, for example, in mainstream media makes this point clear. From the postmodern perspective, as soon as discourses are declared alternative any consideration of them in terms of occupying either a progressive or a reactionary relationship to their historical moment and social context is rendered irrelevant. Analyses of how postmodern culture maps the world is superseded by a consideration of how they map each other.

These theories of postmodern possibilities open up the potential for the recognition of a critical popular culture by dismantling the monolith. Yet, they, ironically, short-circuit any attempt to identify that potential by declaring such an activity either unpostmodern (Collins) or well beyond the reach of a still (and increasingly) contaminated mass culture (Hutcheon). Discussion of oppositional culture is relegated to an antiquated modernism which insists on the separation of cultural spheres of production into high and low, and, on the relatively fixed function of both as progressive or reactionary respectively. In other words, the collapse of high and low culture, presumably into an equalizing postmodern melting pot, has necessitated, for some, the abandonment of the function each was said to perform; that is, since there is no longer a high culture and a low culture per se, the terms that used to describe each, progressive and reactionary, are said to evaporate. It seems that even for some postmodernists, such an exclusive separation still exists. This is particularly evident in Hutcheon's evaluation of high

postmodernism against low mass culture and in her fixing of oppositional and homogenizing functions to each respectively. In challenging such pronouncements against popular culture, Collins is unable to conceive of the category of opposition at all. Once there is no longer a dominant culture against which to be oppositional, opposition, as well as affirmation, are rendered irrelevant.

My position is that the couplings, high/progressive and low/reactionary, are not as immutable as modernism argues, nor so intertwined that the demise of the first term necessarily means the irrelevance of the second. The recognition that the boundaries between high art and popular culture have blurred, and, that a notion of a homogeneous mass culture is seriously outmoded, does not mean that the categories of progressive and reactionary have become indistinguishable or equally and simultaneously present. The existence of contradictory and conflicting discourses and a context which is tension-filled necessitates, rather than obliterates, such categories. It is postmodern culture's "uncommon" character and its centrality in the mapping of everyday life that demands a consideration of both its oppressive and oppositional moments.

Such distinctions matter in a discussion of a culture which has never been adequately accounted for by paranoid generalizations and which, as postmodernism teaches us, has been elevated to a position of prominence in both theory and practice. If postmodernism demonstrates a respect for differences, then the difference between a misogynist and a feminist representation is more than a simple matter of alternative discourses, or a different kind of hotel. Rather, it is a matter of the difference between how difference is mapped: how cultural representations respond to, and project their images onto, the social world; how they define femaleness for their



audiences.

The categories of oppositional and reactionary may be more useful when they are not fixed to particular kinds of practices and formal concerns which automatically make representation the enemy. Late modernism did this by refusing to represent anything at all; postmodernism does this by invoking the representational only to make a mockery of it. That is, whether characterized as a death (Baudrillard) or a kind of liberation from an orchestrated system of meaning (Collins), the postmodern questioning of representation is still a declaration of the futility of representation. In a context glutted by so many intertexts, this postmodernism differs from the simulacrum; it declares its own artifice and questions the impossibility of representation. In other words, since representation is suspect and context is replaced by intertext, postmodern texts can only be understood in relation to one another.

It would seem that postmodernism's intertextual strategies and its undermining of representation have led to a form of inter-textualism which makes it difficult to talk about representations as re-representations: they are "not signs to be interpreted;" the particular ways they map the world are not to be analyzed. They are indifferent. In other words, what gets represented seems less important than the undermining of representation itself. This postmodernism is restricted by a kind of formalism, in as much as it gives primacy to intertextual references over what is represented of the social world. It fails to see popular representations as mediations, that is as re-representations of something beyond themselves. It fails, in other words, to situate the popular within a social context and to explore the ways it makes that context meaningful.

To borrow from Jameson, representations are maps of our

contemporary scene. As maps they neither replace the territory to which they refer nor do they simply instruct the traveler to refer to another map. They have to be read in the context of a particular territory. Maps, unlike simulations and pastiches, require a view of themselves which extends beyond their own boundaries. They also share conventions or codes which indicate the ways in which the landscape can be negotiated, and, although various routes are possible, they are not unlimited. What landscape a map depicts and how that landscape is depicted is key to the map's function and meaning.

In privileging one landscape over another, maps unavoidably restrict other landscapes. Maps demand interpretation. As maps, representations mediate and provide ways of understanding the social world in which they are produced and consumed. They are neither meaningless simulacra nor playful games but vehicles through which social reality becomes intelligible. Representations present their landscapes through certain codes and conventions and privilege certain territories over others. As maps, representations demand interpretations of how they frame the world. What is required, therefore, is an analysis of postmodern culture that recognizes tensions among popular forms but which considers those tensions contextually rather than intertextually. Representations need to be read against a social world rather than against each other as expressions of their own impossibility. Criticism needs to identify the social importance and political character of popular culture representations. It is to such an approach that this discussion now turns.

### Popular Culture and Opposition

Although Antonio Gramsci is most frequently cited in discussions of working class cultures and youth subcultures, his concept of hegemony is useful in contextualizing postmodern culture and avoiding both totalitarian visions and simple uncommonness. Gramsci replaces the notions of political coercion and ideological indoctrination with the concept of hegemony. Hegemony exists, for example, when an alliance of class fractions exerts control, not by totalitarian means, but by the winning of the consent of the subordinate classes. This is done, not through the destruction of working class culture, but through its articulation to the values and interests of a hegemonic historical bloc. In other words, the dominant culture finds a place for and accommodates elements of opposing classes and values. All competing definitions of reality are therefore framed within ideology of the dominant classes. Their definition of reality comes to constitute the primary lived reality. Yet, because hegemony depends on this articulation, dominant culture/ideology is never purely dominant; it is, rather, a combination of various cultural and ideological elements, which are historically specific and mutable. There is no ideology in a pure form; it is always "compromised" (Bennett, 1986: xv).

This notion of "compromised" ideology is able to account for the absence of a stable dominant center within postmodern culture without dismantling the idea of domination altogether and disconnecting culture from the social world. It also avoids the pitfalls of postmodern paranoia by insisting that culture is a key terrain upon which hegemony is negotiated. Common sense, folklore and popular culture are as important as the "perceived 'hard centers' of political and economic power" (Mercer, 1986: 52). Popular culture is seen as a "force field" of relations shaped by contradictory pressures and tendencies. It is characterized as a field "structured by the

attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony and by the forms of opposition to this endeavour" (Bennett, 1986: xv). From this perspective, the question is not simply one of tension between discourses but of struggle over them. The popular is a "site of struggle" -- an arena in which "dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values are 'mixed' in different permutations" (Bennett, 1986: xvi).

The strength of this approach lies in its resistance to a static and totalizing dominant ideology thesis and in its commitment to the idea of a continuing struggle over meanings. Because hegemony must be won and sustained there is no permanent hegemony; there can be no total incorporation. Hegemony can also be lost. Ideology is not totalizing and monolithic; a hegemonic historical bloc must constantly work to secure consent. Within this framework, resistance is not only possible, but can occur within the popular cultural realm itself. Indeed, as Bennett points out, this reorientation towards the popular presents a radical perspective on popular culture which does not categorically condemn it. It further provides a relatively "optimistic" stance without falling into an uncritical celebration. Cultural texts are not seen as dominant ideological machines which carry a unified ideology and determine responses but as "moveable" sites on which a struggle over meaning occurs. Gramsci's concept of hegemony and the notion that culture is a force field of relations shaped by contradictory tendencies have generated a variety of work on both the resistant practices of audiences and the oppositional potential of popular forms.

Perhaps Gramsci has been most influential in the studies of working class and youth subcultures for which the "Birmingham School" of contemporary cultural studies is best known. In some discussions of subcultures, resistance is seen to reside in the activities of people -- in the

ways in which they critically respond to their conditions by refusing and dismantling dominant meanings. Dick Hebdige, for example, takes the punk style as an example of resistance within and through commodity culture (Hebdige, 1979). Similarly, John Clarke argues that subcultural styles involve the "transformation and rearrangement of what is given (and 'borrowed') into a pattern which carries a new meaning" (Clarke, 1976: 178). It is out of commodity culture that certain "opposed classes" generate oppositional meanings which speak "the experience and consciousness of a suppressed social group" (Clarke, 1976: 178). From this perspective, resistance is in consumption, in the use to which style is put. Here, audiences are theorized, not as passive consumers, but as agents actively engaging in making sense of their experiences in contemporary capitalist societies. The point is that, through appropriating and re-signifying the signs and objects of commodity culture, certain "spectacular youth subcultures" challenge common sense meanings and inject their own, sometimes oppositional, meanings.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that resistance is located in audiences' engagement with the products of popular culture has also found its way into discussions of mainstream media. Writing of commercial television, John Fiske argues that cultural texts are less the "containers or conveyors" and more the "provokers of meaning and pleasure" (Fiske, 1988: 58). It is the audience which creates meaning. The audience of popular culture is re-thought as a "multiple concept, a huge variety of social groups," whose role is not that of passive consumer but of active "producer of meaning and pleasure" (Fiske, 1988: 58). According to Fiske, audiences' "freedom" as "producers in the cultural economy is considerable" (Fiske, 1988: 59).

Bakhtin's suggestion that oral culture is "necessarily oppositional" in a

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Brake (1980); Hall, et al., eds. (1976); McRobbie, ed. (1988).

literate society (because "it bears the traces of the political position of its subordinate subcultures") provides the theoretical support for Fiske's argument (Fiske, 1988: 60). For Fiske, the very fact that people talk about TV and incorporate it into their lives ("in a way that the Hollywood moguls can neither foresee nor control") suggests an active participation: "In its interface with mass culture, oral culture necessarily brings its activeness to that process by which the consumer or the product becomes a producer of meanings" (Fiske, 1988: 61). It is more in the diversity of possible readings of popular cultural products, than in the diversity of the texts themselves, that Fiske locates a "stance of resistance" (Fiske, 1988: 63).

This re-conceptualization of the audience of popular culture as heterogeneous, active, and capable of resistant readings has also surfaced in some feminist discussions of female spectatorship. Much of this work marks an effort to move beyond Laura Mulvey's path-breaking analysis of the conditions of spectatorship in mainstream film. In her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey argues that the visual pleasures that narrative cinema offers are predicated on a notion of active male and passive female. Hollywood cinema functions through its organization of a gaze which is fashioned for the male spectator and directed toward the objectified woman. The logic of this division filters into the audience as well. According to Mulvey, the ideal spectator of mainstream cinema -- indeed, the one for whom it is constructed -- is male. Woman exists in mainstream film as an object and an object alone; she is denied the gaze, denied a pleasurable place in the audience. According to Mulvey, two options emerge for the female spectator: she can either identify with the male position and assume an active position in relation to the narrative (that is, assume a vicarious position of power through rejecting her gendered status as woman), or, she

can identify with the sexualized, objectified and ultimately male-defined female image on the screen and assume a masochistic position (Mulvey, 1975).

Against the assertions that there is no place for the female spectator in the audience of mainstream film, and, that any pleasure experienced therein is suspect -- "incorrect" -- some feminists have begun to re-think women's relationship to mainstream film in particular, and the popular in general. The impetus of such work is, as Jane Gaines observes, "the reclamation of narrative gratifications for ourselves" (Gaines, 1987: 366). Along similar lines, Lynne Joyrich suggests that, through a process of "reading against the grain," "we can open up the space for both pleasure and resistance, activating melodrama's contradictions in our struggle for new meanings" (Joyrich, 1988: 149). In their reading of *GENTLEMAN PREFER BLONDES*, for example, Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca demonstrate how a film that seems fully entrenched in male-centered ways of seeing can be appropriated for an exploration of female pleasure. They note that the female leads, Jane Russell and Marilyn Monroe, not only "effectively resist male objectification by controlling access to their own space and by freely intruding on men's spaces," they also appropriate the look by "frequently [gazing] lovingly at each other" (Arbuthnot/Seneca, 1982: 20/19). The pleasures appropriated by the female spectator involve "both identification and a kind of female voyeurism" (Gaines, 1987: 366). These readings foreground the presence of female spectators and articulate their activities of making culture make sense. This kind of work has opened up a space for feminist discussions of popular culture that recognize the complex, and often contradictory, ways in which women negotiate and make sense of it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For discussions of the ways in which popular narrative forms such as the

These audience studies have contributed a great deal to the re-conceptualization of popular culture as a struggle over meanings, and, to the recognition of the audience as a central site of resistance. Yet, this attention to audience activities has, in some writings, led to a rather weak formulation of resistance, and, to a naive, wholesale acceptance of popular culture. As Tania Modleski points out, "the insight that audiences are not completely manipulated, but may appropriate mass cultural artifacts for their own purposes, has been carried so far that it would seem mass culture is no longer a problem for some 'Marxist' critics" (Modleski, 1986a: xi). Indeed, for Lawrence Grossberg, television is "indifferent."

Modleski further notes that the strategies of resistance identified by these critics (Modleski cites Grossberg) are "anticipated and even prescribed by the culture industry" (Modleski, 1986a: xii). In her book, Open the Box, Jane Root takes this position to its (instructive) extreme. In an attempt to counter the television-viewer-as-zombie image, she paints an unconvincing picture of the active audience. She argues that, since people often put things on their television sets, "it is clear that TV sets have other uses besides the obvious ones" (Root, 1986: 40). Further, the remote control allows television viewers to "exorcise an enormous degree of choice" (Root, 1986: 31). Resistance is reduced to choice. This is "simply to endorse the pluralism of consumer society, whereby if you do not care for a certain product or brand of product you are 'free' to reject it and choose another" (Modleski, 1986a: xii).

While studies which locate resistance in the practices of people have contributed both to a contextualization of popular culture and to a re-thinking of its potential, they are limited if they lose site of the cultural

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television soap opera and the romance novel provide pleasure for, and make sense to, their female audiences see: Modleski (1982); Radway (1984).



products within and against which the people are reacting. When the emphasis is placed on the oppositional practices of people, the actual products themselves are given a limited role. In some studies, popular forms are considered the dominant (which ultimately serves a recuperative function) against which the suppressed groups react (Clarke). In the postmodern variant, they are indeterminate and offer a range of choice to the consumer as bricoleur. Dick Hebdige, for example, argues that pastiche and collage "become means through which ordinary consumers can not only appropriate new technologies, new media skills but can learn a new principle of assemblage, can open up new meanings and affects" (Hebdige, 1988: 211). It is not so much these forms that matter, but, the variety of uses to which they can be put.

Raymond Williams recommends that an analysis of the forms themselves be put at "the top of the list" in the study of mass culture; the popular culture critic should try "to understand precisely the production of certain conventions and modes of communication right inside the form" (Williams, 1986: 14). Although he warns against limiting this kind of investigation to a discussion of the isolated single work, the emphasis is directed toward the ways in which cultural products organize meanings for their audiences.

This focus on the ways in which cultural products communicate, coupled with a recognition that the popular is a site of struggle, indicates that a consideration of what communicative role these forms play in that contest over meanings is necessary. The recognition that popular forms are marked by tensions and contradictions, that they provide the audience with "new principles of assemblage" is not enough. It is precisely because these forms provide audiences with ways of thinking about the world, because they are sites of contestation, that we also need to consider the role they play in the

hegemonic struggle over meanings.

Stuart Hall suggests that the study of popular culture should start with a recognition of "the double-stake...the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it" (Hall, 1981: 228). From this perspective, "the domain of cultural forms and activities" is seen as a "constantly changing field" (Hall, 1981: 235). Popular forms are no more "fixed" than audiences. Laura Kipnis argues that, while "popular culture certainly plays a role in securing capitalist legitimation," it functions not as "an instrument of domination" but rather as "an access to domination, for hegemony is not given but always in process" (Kipnis, 1986: 31-32).

As an access to, rather than a guarantee of, domination, popular culture is a site where social conflicts are played out, where meanings are negotiated. As a "field of possibility" the tensions among popular culture products are not "cozily embraced under the umbrella of a happy liberal pluralism," but are read as indications that popular culture is a site that "antagonistic social forces attempt to appropriate and utilize in opposing ways" (Kipnis, 1986: 35/29). It is precisely in this movability of the popular that opposition can be located.

This tradition of criticism recognizes that, as a site of struggle, popular culture embodies both oppositional and recuperative moments; all popular forms are not created equal. This is "not an argument for recognizing a limitless pluralism or heterogeneity;" "voices do not hang together randomly" (Mercer, 1986: 62). There is a hierarchy -- a "reproducible structure which persists in defining how things hang or loop together" (Mercer, 1986: 62). Sorting out how cultural products "hang together," how they map the social world, is a matter of identifying their role in the struggle over meanings; it involves a consideration of the "double-stake" of containment

and resistance. As such, it opens up a place for the discussion of popular forms and opposition.

In film studies, for example, Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni's 1969 essay, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," provided an early basis for a consideration of oppositional cinematic practices. Comolli and Narboni consider film a "material product of the system" (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 24). "Because every film is part of the economic system it is also part of the ideological system, for 'cinema' and 'art' are branches of ideology" (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 24). Indeed, it is precisely the task of criticism to indicate the ways in which films differ in their relation to ideology. The concern, here, is with what "constitutes" dominant cinema, and, with what "de-constitutes" it (Klinger, 1984: 30).

Comolli and Narboni categorize film practices according to how they either support or challenge expressions of dominant ideology. Their articulation of the differences between reactionary and progressive films is premised on the contention that these differences are located in the formal operations of the film text. The category, classic realist text, has been invoked to identify those films which are said to be "imbued through and through with dominant ideology," those films which constitute the discourse which backs-up the prevailing definition of reality (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 25). The classic realist text's formal features, such as coherent and logical narrative development, character identification and voyeuristic fascination, continuity editing and an overall "realist intelligibility," "help instill ideology by creating an illusion that what happens on the screen is a neutral recording of objective events" (Kellner, 1988: 1).

For example, by denying their own signifying practices, mainstream Hollywood films confer on themselves a sense of naturalness, a sense that

they are unmediated and transparent reflections of the world. They deny their own function as maps (as opposed to reflections) of the social world; they conceal their own artificiality by erasing signs of their production. Narrative closure is also cited as a device which contributes to the classic realist text's inherently ideological function. The traditional Hollywood film's resolution of tensions and conflicts is said to deny the contradictions generated by the narrative, and, to posit a world in which conflicts are resolvable within existing structures. Closure confers on the story a sense that the ending given is the only ending possible, and that such resolutions are imminently available. According to Comolli and Narboni, what these formal strategies amount to is a "bourgeois realism," which demonstrates a "blind faith in 'life'," "'humanism'," and "'common sense'" (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 26). These films are said to reassure their audiences in their failure to demonstrate the "difference between the ideology they meet everyday and the ideology on the screen" (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 26). They work to confirm and endorse the existing, and dominant, definition of reality.

While some films may appear to be oppositional because of their content (an overtly political subject), they are only capable of a critique if they, through their formal strategies, break down traditional ways of depicting reality. This has led to a valorization of "radical signifying practices" as a means of resistance against representational and narrative forms that are said to be imbued, by their very nature, with dominant ideology. In its extreme, this view precludes popular representations from embodying oppositional moments and privileges a radical signifying practice. Laura Mulvey, for example, argues that a feminist aesthetic must be reactive to the pleasures of narrative and representation and seek out formal strategies which deny such pleasures. Similarly, in defense of a "radically materialist avant-garde"

practice, Peter Gidal argues against representation: "the depiction of male and female sexuality (whatever that is) is the ideological mode of reproducing dominant relations, no matter what the 'actual' narrative ostensibly is" (Gidal, 1984: 28). The premise is that ideology is in the character of representational and narrative systems, in the form itself, and not in the particularities of images and stories. Thus, an oppositional practice is one which subverts that form. From this perspective, popular narratives are wholly imbued with dominant ideology, completely under its sway.

There is, however, a significant body of criticism which seeks to identify those popular films which are oppositional. The text is the focus in this criticism; it is a "site upon which the significant relations of representation and ideology are distilled..." (Klinger, 1984: 32). In this regard, Barbara Klinger points out that one of "the bedrock propositions regulating the critical establishment of progressive textual practice" is that "the progressive work must exhibit textual characteristics which are strategically reactive to commonplace 'classicisim'" (Klinger, 1984: 33). In much of this work, it is argued that opposition is located in a practice which signals its own artificiality through cinema-reflexive, non-representational strategies and a non-linear or non-narrative structure. Comolli and Narboni argue that some Hollywood films "dismantle the system from within," and, that they do so through formal strategies; it is the form which "lets us see the dominant ideology" (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 27).

The films of Ford, Dreyer and Rossellini, for instance, only appear to "belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway;" they actually possess an "internal criticism...which cracks the film apart at the seams" (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 27). These films "throw up obstacles in the way of the ideology, causing it to swerve and get off course," through

specifically formal means (Comolli and Narboni, 1976: 27). The "cinematic framework" works to present ideology as ideology (it "shows it up and denounces it") and does so through self-reflexive strategies which rupture or crack the apparent formal coherence (Comolli/Narboni, 1976: 27).

In her review of studies of the progressive genre which have built on Comolli and Narboni, Klinger identifies several oppositional strategies which operate at both the thematic and stylistic levels. The progressive genre, for instance, does not depict the "typical celebratory or complacent view of the American way of life" (Klinger, 1984: 35). Nihilistic themes abound. In constructing an atmosphere which is "bleak, cynical, apocalyptic, and/or highly ironic" these films "disturb or disable an unproblematic transmission of affirmative ideology" (Klinger, 1984: 35).

Genres such as film noir, family melodrama and the horror film of the 1970s are said to offer a critique of the social world by depicting its demise. Their oppositional potential resides in their refusal to endorse the effectiveness of dominant social institutions. For example, Robin Wood argues that the horror film of the 1970s imparts the "sense of civilization condemning itself" (Wood, 1979: 22). The "negativity" in which it exchanges is not recuperated into the dominant ideology. Rather, it constitutes "the recognition of that ideology's disintegration, its untenability" (quoted in Klinger, 1984: 35). More specifically, this pessimistic world view is articulated through thematic structures which critique "the role and nature of social institutions" (Klinger, 1984: 35). Klinger suggests that the Law and the Family are two institutions which frequently come under attack in the progressive genre.

These films also work against classic narrative construction and development. For example, the progressive genre film works towards an

"exposure" rather than a "suppression" of contradictions, and, functions to "create ambiguity which prevents easy identification and segmentation of systems of good and evil" (Klinger, 1984: 37). It confuses oppositions which are traditionally set up between the identification of "that which upholds the existing order" as good, and, "that which threatens the social order" as bad (Klinger, 1984: 37). The conflation of good and evil achieved through "structural correspondences" mapped between the hero and the villain problematize a clear cut and affirmative depiction of dominant social institutions (Klinger, 1984: 37). For example, Wood's analysis of the oppositional potential of the 1970s horror film (discussed in the next chapter), hinges on the idea that it is normal society, often the family itself, which produces the monster. Traditional associations between the family as a site of stability and a purveyor of values worth holding onto are upset in the monstrous families of some horror films. As well, the progressive film refuses closure. The resolution and ultimate containment of tensions arising from the narrative is denied. The conventional happy ending is subverted by the progressive genre's refusal to resolve the conflicts within the story and force the narrative to a final state of equilibrium. Excesses remain which "disturb the harmonizing tendencies of closure" (Klinger, 1984: 39). Tania Modleski, for instance, cites a narrative which is constantly being interrupted and which, therefore, refuses to progress to a satisfying closure as an indication that the soap opera is "not altogether at odds with a possible feminist aesthetics" (Modleski, 1987: 271).

The progressive genre is further characterized by a particular "stylistic self-consciousness and formal excess" which is foregrounded "so forcefully as to contend with the dominance of the narrative line" (Klinger, 1984: 39). These films foreground their visual style in such a way that they call

attention to themselves as constructs. They are image conscious. In "exploitation and B films, [for example] the visual register calls attention to itself through its sheer bargain-basement look" (Klinger, 1984: 39). Film noir and melodrama are equally characterized by this "stylistic self-consciousness" and "formal excess" (Klinger, 1984: 39). The former exploits its visual presence through its use of expressionistic lighting and angles and the latter through its "baroque foregrounding of the formal aspects of mise-en-scene and camera" (Klinger, 1984: 39). Since self-reflexivity is said to disrupt illusory strategies of realism it is a further characteristic of the progressive genre.

What is of interest here is that this account of the progressive genre (a pessimistic world view; negative portrayals of dominant social institutions such as the Law and the Family; a confusion or conflation of traditional categories of good and evil; refusal of satisfying closure; and an excessive visual style that announces itself as such) aptly describes the contemporary horror film which has been invaded by both the paranoia of nihilistic postmodern theory, and, by the intertextual and non-mimetic strategies of postmodern culture. Contemporary horror is a site where the postmodern and the progressive intersect -- or so it seems.

In the next section of this thesis, I explore traditional (primarily psychoanalytic and ahistorical) explanations of the genre, and argue that they are limited for a discussion of the contradictory, and potentially oppositional, character of popular forms inasmuch as they attribute to the genre a timeless nature and a universal psychological appeal. I argue that the parameters of the postmodern and the strategies of the progressive genre provide a more useful way to describe the contemporary horror film. Yet, they do not account for its oppositional potential. I conclude this chapter by arguing that pessimism and self-reflexivity (and their postmodern variants, paranoia and



play) are limited as subversive strategies. A consideration of horror from a feminist perspective helps to map both the limitations to, and the avenues of, opposition in postmodern horror.

CHAPTER THREE  
HORROR FILMS IN POPULAR CULTURE:  
FROM PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES TO POSTMODERN  
READINGS

In order to situate contemporary horror as a postmodern cultural practice, it is useful to contrast perspectives that draw from more traditional approaches. Traditional approaches to the horror genre tend to abstract it from its social context and ascribe to it a universal appeal and function. These explanations of horror tend to focus on the sexual themes and nightmarish visions that have long been considered the central features of the genre. These features have engendered widely accepted, and diversely developed, psychoanalytic approaches which have become, in a sense, canonized. For example, in his book Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror, James Twitchell asserts that "the interpretation of horror will finally be psychological" (Twitchell, 1985: 20). According to Noel Carroll, as well, "the horror genre is explicitly acknowledged as a vehicle for expressing psychoanalytically significant themes" (Carroll, 1981: 17).

Some writers who take this perspective privilege the psycho-sexual function of horror for its primarily adolescent audience. At the risk of considerable oversimplification, I will refer to this as the "Rites of Passage" perspective. Other writers develop, what I shall call, the "Nightmare and Catharsis" perspective by highlighting the analogy between the nightmare and horror stories and positing a cathartic effect of the horrific for broad audiences. Related to the nightmare analogy and the experience of catharsis is the argument that the terror often embedded in horror stories fulfills uniquely human needs for transcendence; I call this the "Terror and

Transcendence" approach. These approaches attempt to account for both horror stories and horror audiences by invoking a universal human unconscious out of which the stories emerge and to which they appeal.

Robin Wood's "Return of the Repressed" explanation of horror, and, recent attempts to account for the contemporary films within the parameters of postmodernism are somewhat more useful for a consideration of oppositional horror and the contemporary (postmodern) film respectively. Although Wood relies on psychoanalytic theory, he provides an analysis of, and foregrounds, the ideological relationship between horror stories and the social world. His analysis of horror, indebted as it is to Freudian theory, yields a reading of the genre which inextricably links it to themes of repression. Yet, these themes are related, not to a primitive unconscious, but, rather, to the maintenance of and/or resistance to a particular set of social relations: those of patriarchal capitalism. Wood's Return of the Repressed analysis situates horror historically (and politically) and, further, attempts to account for oppositional moments within the genre.

Yet, some proponents of postmodernism maintain that Wood's analysis is unable to explain some of the particular features of contemporary horror. According to Pete Boss, for example, since the distinction between the monster and normality collapses in contemporary horror, the very category of Otherness, on which Wood's analysis (and the traditional genre) hinges, is outmoded, troubled in postmodern horror. He argues that Wood's analysis is tied too closely to the monster as Other to account for the ways in which recent horror posits the monster as us. While aspects of Wood's analysis of oppositional horror and postmodern observations can be appropriated for a discussion of contemporary horror, neither sufficiently accounts for the Other of postmodern horror. Some feminist discussions of the genre which tackle

this problem of the Other in postmodern horror suggest Otherness (monstrousness) is often dependent on a horrific feminine. For this reason, I conclude by arguing that oppositional practices in horror are tied less to paranoia and play -- as postmodern perspectives suggest -- and more to the ways in which the genre makes sense of gender.

### Rites of Passage

What gives the Rites of Passage perspective its particular momentum is its focus on the horror audience. James Twitchell contends that "[o]f all the various forms, horror art has the most defined and most predictable audience:" "an adolescent audience is the largest for horror art,...and so it is here...that any study of horror should begin" (Twitchell, 1985: 69). He argues, further, that the interest in, and effectiveness of, horror wanes as its audience matures and its lessons are "assimilated." In fact, those "older men (never women" who attend horror films are "so out of place that, although blacks and whites can sit together, young and old can't" (Twitchell, 1985: 69). In other words, not only are adolescents the main audience of horror, but the proper one as well.<sup>9</sup> Adults have outgrown horror. If not, the argument runs, they are "male rogues" only interested in the demise of the victimized female protagonist. This particular affinity between horror stories and the period of adolescence is also central to Walter Evans' consideration of the genre. Although more inclined than Twitchell to consider the presence of adults in the horror movie audience, Evans, too, stresses that horror primarily speaks "to the psyches of troubled adolescents, whatever their age" (Evans, 1984: 54).

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<sup>9</sup> This seems to suggest that horror is so tied to a particular generation that it transcends issues of race. In horror, it seems, we are all the same.

It is the adolescent, then, who, generation after generation, keeps the horror story alive and profitable, and for whom it is "uniquely tailored."

Both Twitchell and Evans focus on adolescence as a period characterized by sexual trauma and psychological maturation and argue that there is a convergence between the psycho-sexual experience of adolescence and horror stories. For Evans, what is central to both the monster movie and its audience is "the theme of horrible and mysterious psychological and physical change" (Evans, 1984: 54). The appearance of secondary sexual characteristics in the adolescent finds horrific expression in the monstrous transformation of such figures as werewolves and zombies. Since the monsters in these films "suffer the change as unwilling victims" they are in large part sympathetic, the adolescent's sole-mate. Evans relates formulaic features of the genre to the adolescent's experience of horror at aspects of adolescent sexuality such as masturbation and menstruation. The myth that masturbation results in psychological disorder is a component of horror inasmuch as "the monster's transformation is generally associated with madness" (Evans, 1984: 56). The vampire, too, is read "in terms of a mysterious physical and psychological development which startles many adolescents -- nocturnal emissions" (Evans, 1984: 56). Further, the vampire's "bloodletting of women" is "certainly related to the menstrual cycle which suddenly and mysteriously commands the body of every adolescent girl" (Evans, 1984: 56).

Yet horror stories do not only express themes of adolescent sexuality in monstrous terms, they also end happily which usually means the death of the monster and the marriage of the protagonists:

Only marriage can free Henry Frankenstein from his perverted compulsion for private experimentation on the human

body;...only upon the death of adolescence, the mysterious madness which has possessed them, can they enter into a mature state where sexuality is tamed and sanctified in marriage (Evans, 1984: 57).

Both horror imagery and narrative progression and resolution are said to hold a mirror up to the sexually confused adolescent, and in so doing prepare him or her for adult sexuality. Indeed, for Evans, the "power and appeal" of horror are

finally much more fundamental than class or political consciousness, more basic than abstractions of revolt against societal restrictions, yet more specifically concerned with certain fundamental and identifiable features of human experience than such terms as "darkness and "evil" seem to suggest. Their power...is finally and essentially related to that dark fountainhead which physically moves those masses in the American film and TV audiences who desperately struggle with the most universal, and in many ways the most horrible of personal trials: the sexual traumas of adolescence (Evans, 1984: 54).

Inasmuch as horror stories "mirror" the personal and widely shared anxieties of adolescence they are "imitations" of his/her life, "reflections" of and guidance through the sexual transformation from adolescence to maturity (Evans, 1984). Evans' choice of words is revealing and the message is clear: regardless of the social context of production and consumption, horror responds to a universal experience and is itself ahistorical and transcultural. That Evans abstracts horror out of its specific social context is evident in his assertion that horror is best understood as "rites of initiation" into adulthood and sexual maturity. Not only do monster movies "mirror the sexual traumas of adolescence," they "respond to a deep cultural need largely ignored in Western society, the need for rituals of initiation" (Evans, 1975:

125). He argues that

the adolescent who squirms and perspires his way through a good monster movie participates in an imaginative experience in many ways incredibly close to the complicated and detailed initiatory practices of premodern peoples around the world. Indeed, the complex initiatory pattern echoed in these films lends tremendous power and significance to their otherwise largely incomprehensible grab bag of formulaic motifs (Evans, 1975: 125).

Since the conventions of horror stories are related by Evans to the initiation practices of premodern peoples, they tend to satisfy a "universal, and in America largely neglected, need for rituals of initiation generally and for puberty rites specifically" (Evans, 1984: 138). So compelling is the universal need for such rituals that he even intimates that the adolescent audience willed it into existence:

it would have been amazing if adolescents exercising even their meager powers of influence had not somehow generated, somehow compelled their culture to produce even some eviscerated form of a vitally necessary tool for psychological adjustment to self, the social body, and to life itself (Evans, 1975: 183).

The formulaic elements of horror for which Evans finds parallels in the initiation rites of premodern peoples include: "the focus on distant time, religion, monsters, transformations, bloodletting, terror, the death-rebirth cycle...the revelation of esoteric lore" and the figures of the "often innocent and untested hero and the learned older man who assists him" (Evans, 1975: 125). Images of transformation and metamorphosis so central to vampire, werewolf and zombie stories are characteristic of "primitive rites" in which "novices frequently take the form of the beast-gods which kill them" (Evans,

1975: 130). As well, the horror story's obsession with blood, especially the vampire's bloody seduction, is tied to the observation that "[i]n tribal rites initiates also undergo ritual, and bloody circumcision and subincision; the latter allows males to mimic the monthly feminine bloodletting menstruation, so closely related to the werewolf's bloody, monthly attacks on women" (Evans, 1975: 136). Because of these, similarities between horror stories and initiation rites, and, because the horror audience is primarily adolescent, Evans concludes that the "crucial function" of horror is "the vital process of initiation which modern American adolescents require and demand no less than their brothers and sisters of premodern societies" (Evans, 1975: 137).

This sexual initiation explanation and the tendency to resort to a universal function of horror, recurs in James Twitchell's account of the genre. Twitchell focuses on those horror stories which "endure," on those that are retold to, and used by, adolescent audiences generation after generation (Twitchell, 1985). Horror stories which rapidly fade from memory are those which are "tied too closely with current fixations" (Twitchell, 1985: 53). The ones which endure are "invariably those most unselfconsciously developed and left unexplained" (Twitchell, 1985: 53). Vampires, no-name creatures, transformation monsters come "pre-coded out of folklore" and endure precisely because they reach deeply into the unconscious (Twitchell, 1985: 82). Horror not only appeals at the level of the unconscious, but, because of its association with adolescence, it is also connected to biological processes. Twitchell draws a connection between "cultural mythologies and biological maturation:"

The motifs inherent in the mythography of fairy tales are indomitable because these motifs are linked, not only to culture



but to biology -- something in the physiological changes of the audience demands explanation or at least consolations (Twitchell, 1985: 82).

As rites of passage horror stories instruct. They establish not social patterns of escape but of entry. "Night visitors prepare us for daylight" (Twitchell, 1985: 7). "[T]he stuff of sexual initiation inheres in all the major horror myths and informs the audience of important knowledge" (Twitchell, 1985: 89). According to Twitchell, the specific content of that "social information" is reproductive sexuality. In the interests of instruction, horror myths detail the "'do's' and 'don'ts' of breeding." They "prepare the teenager for the anxieties of reproduction" by "parenting" him or her through adolescence (Twitchell, 1985: 89). They do so in a manner which is frightening; horror results because these scenes of sexual change/activity are both confusing for the adolescent and forbidden by culture. Creatures from the id find monstrous expression in the horror genre. Yet, for Twitchell, horror results for a much more specific reason:

specifically what is it that we must learn enough about so that we will not do it? What is the sexual act that must be feared (and is especially feared in cultures where initiation horror myths are the most vibrant), lest real horror results? I think it is incest...the fear of incest underlies all horror myths in our culture that are repeatedly told for more than one generation (Twitchell, 1985: 93).

Since the incest taboo is cultural and not genetic, it must be socially learned. Because of horror's preoccupation with the psycho-sexual processes of adolescence, and, because the "shivers are a most effective teacher," it is one of our culture's most effective tools for instructing its young audiences about the horrors of incest and directing them into socially acceptable sexuality

(Twitchell, 1985: 96).

According to Twitchell, the 18th century gothic novel provides not only the basis for modern horror but also the literary roots for its preoccupation with the family and incestuous violation. Certain "image clusters" and "plot developments" characteristic of gothic literature "still form the matrix of modern horror mythology:" the presence of ghosts which cannot be explained within the parameters of reason; the relentlessly conventional nature of the form in its reluctance to take "chances...with the delineation of scene or character;" its focus on the not too distant past; the centrality of the family (literal or figurative); and finally, a technical problem, "that still remains in horror art," which makes it "[s]tructurally unaesthetic, anti-artistic, preserving only the unities of the subconscious"<sup>10</sup> (Twitchell, 1985: 41). Of these examples, the fact that gothic fiction concentrates on familial relationships is its most direct tie to themes of incest:

the early gothic usually tells the story of a single and specific family romance run amok: "father" has become monstrous to 'daughter'. It seems to make little difference if the father role is shunted to uncle, priest, duke, landlord, devil, as long as his relationship with the young female is one of paternal dominance.... This often barely-disguised incestuous interaction form the core of horror art which continues unabated to this day (Twitchell, 1985: 42).

While the gothic may have set the literary precedent for modern horror (which Twitchell claims finds its real growth in films), the roots of each run much deeper: they are generated by the cultural taboo against incest. Since incest is "cultural, not genetic...it does not protect the phenotype, it protects the society" (Twitchell, 1985: 94). Contrary to the belief that incest

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<sup>10</sup> What Twitchell means by a "technical problem" is unclear since it is in the nature of genres to make reference to, and to borrow from, other products within the genre.

"(along with cannibalism) inspires universal horror," Twitchell maintains that "the act we really fear seems to be talking about it and thinking about it, and so from the seventeenth century onward we have remained rather mum. We may not even dream much about it" (Twitchell, 1985: 94). Incest taboos exist to "enforce domestic stability," and not to "protect the purity of the gene pool" (Twitchell, 1985: 97). Further, those societies that are "sensitive to, and hence usually repressed about, incest" construct "initiation ceremonies for adolescents [to] teach them to be wary, if not horrified, of incest" (Twitchell: 1985: 97). Like Evans, Twitchell finds the function of horror in the initiation rites of pre-modern people: "the incest-avoidance mechanisms, rites of passage, monster confrontations, and initiation myths are connected to our own cultural past and so may well be in the present" (Twitchell, 1985: 99). While Evans locates this function of horror in some deep-seated psychological adolescent need, Twitchell stresses that it serves more of a social than natural or biological need. Incest is tabooed because "social intolerance is much lower than our biological thresholds" (Twitchell, 1985: 97).

While both Twitchell and Evans see horror as a modern rite of passage, their reasons for, and the implications of, this differ slightly. Evans appears content with a universal explanation for horror which contends that the genre fills a fundamental need for rituals of initiation. Since it serves this basic function, any consideration of the particular historical context of production and consumption is rendered irrelevant; any consideration of horror's relation to this context is, by implication, seen as missing the true purpose and meaning of the genre. Further, such a valorization of horror loses sight of the limited options for dealing with, learning about, and expressing, sexuality that horror stories, when fulfilling their proper function,

offer; marriage or death is restricted indeed. That is, it ignores these films' reactionary relationship to their specific social context.

Evans' ambivalence regarding this prevents him from considering the often misogynist and highly conservative nature of these representations. In fact, the male monster as aggressor and the female victim scenario, so central to the horror discussed by Evans, is seen merely as an expression of universal adolescent sexuality. Here, the old dichotomy of active male and passive female is both confirmed and naturalized. That is to say, Evans ties horrific representations too closely to a generalized understanding of adolescent sexuality; if they are willed by the adolescent audience they must be an accurate expression of its experience. This ends up justifying these images with a "boys will be boys attitude." It reduces the content and appeal of horror to uniquely human cravings and legitimates misogynist images in the name of psychic processes.

Although Twitchell connects horror stories to unconscious, and even biological, processes, he emphasizes their social, instructional function. Horror comes not from a natural but rather a social need. The avoidance of incest allows for social stability and horror is the vehicle through which that message is expressed. From this perspective, horror, as a form of social control, is seen as "ultra-conservative" since it invariably serves the status quo by instructing in the proper expression of sexuality and warning of the monstrous consequences if deviation occurs. That many of these representations are conservative is not to be contested. However, if, as Twitchell contends, the "core" of horror art is "incestuous attraction" and its function is to instruct in the rights and wrongs of reproductive sexuality, then they can occupy nothing but a reactionary position in relation to the social context. Lest Twitchell argue for incestuous relations (which he does not since

that would be tantamount to condoning a form of child abuse) he has to ultimately applaud horror for filling this social need.<sup>11</sup> Here women are victimized in the name of civilization.

For both Twitchell and Evans, the relationship between horror and the society which produces and consumes it is characterized as deep-seated, profoundly unconscious and largely ahistorical. Little attention is given to the changes which occur in horrific representations which mark off stages or cycles within the genre, or, to the particular context in which they occur. Further, in assigning to horror a psycho-sexual/instructive function which is deemed either psychologically or socially necessary, both Twitchell and Evans bracket off any critique of, or challenge to, the ways in which horror represents gender. Males and females have their assigned and proper roles within the genre whether it serves a psychic or social function.

### Nightmare and Catharsis

For the proponents of the nightmare analogy, the preoccupation with sexuality in most psychoanalytic readings of the horror genre is too limited. While few would deny that sexual themes abound, horror is seen to have a "broader reference than simply sexuality" (Carroll, 1981: 18). What motivates the genre, then, is not primarily the working through of sexual trauma,

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<sup>11</sup> I do not wish to contest Twitchell's assertion that incest is a cultural rather than a natural taboo. However, in the interests of making this argument, he makes a problematic and, to me, shocking claim regarding incest victims: "the victims of this 'crime against nature' are not automatically candidates for neurosis.... What this trauma does for the victim, however, and there is plenty of it, is not so much the victim's revulsion, but the social stigma and ensuing guilt and confusion...we have to address the fact that...if the victim [almost all females in his studies], is allowed to simply speak her mind, she may well see nothing wrong with the acts her father has described as a natural part of his affection" (Twitchell, 1985: 95-96). That this is a crime of power does not enter Twitchell's analysis. The logical extension is that if the vast majority of people in society did not frown on incestuous relations, victims of this abuse would be alright.

although that may be involved, but rather the evocation of something more general: fear. For Morris Dickstein, the "main point of a horror film is to frighten us, or rather to play on our fears" (Dickstein, 1984: 65). These fears are largely understood as archaic and deeply embedded in the human unconscious. In this respect, the nightmare analogy shares some common ground with the initiation rites hypothesis. "Elemental fears" (such as "fear of the dark, fear of being alone, fear of enclosure" and "fear of the supernatural") find expression in both horror stories and "anthropological accounts of primitive tribes" (Dickstein, 1984: 70). Dickstein's connection between horror and deep-seated universal human fears is figured in his positioning of horror.

The secularization of religion and the increasing secularization of society have given more and more mythical resonance to popular culture, which provides us with binding and common experiences and satisfies some primitive needs (Dickstein, 1984: 70).

As "modern counterparts to ancient myths," horror stories "excavate archaic fears and taboos and explore deeply buried wishes" (Dickstein, 1984: 78). Since horror's main role is to deal with, play on, our elemental and archaic fears, the unconscious realm of the nightmare logically helps to understand both the representations and experiences of fear in horror.

Bruce Kawin argues that, "in the Freudian sense, [horror films] are anxiety dreams or nightmares..." (Kawin, 1984: 9). In the first instance, the experiences of watching a film and having a dream are so closely correlated as to appear indistinguishable. Both involve a simultaneously passive and active "dreamer/audience" who watches "a visual process that often tells a story and often masks/presents some type of thought" (Kawin, 1984: 3). Both

the dreamer and the movie audience "is physically cushioned in a darkened room, most of his movements restricted to slight shifts of position in a bed or chair, and, "[i]n both cases the eyes move and the mind exercises creative attention" (Kawin, 1984: 3-4). That film is a visual medium further connects it to dreams since

the stories and symbols in dreams are subject to condensation, displacement, and secondary revision, but also to translation into pictorial and concrete representability, according to Freud (Kawin, 1984: 4).

Since films in general are analogous to dreams, horror films, in particular, are logically analogous to nightmares. In fact, Kawin contends that "[o]ne goes to a horror film in order to have a nightmare" and that "[t]his may be a matter of unconscious wish-fulfillment" (Kawin, 1984: 4). Like nightmares, horror "both presents and masks the desire to fulfill and be punished for certain conventionally unacceptable impulses" (Kawin, 1984: 4). According to Freud, since the dreamer rejects his or her wishes their fulfillment "takes the form of anxiety" (Kawin, 1984: 9). From this perspective the implications of a film like *THE WOLF MAN* are clear: "*THE WOLF MAN* is a transparently Oedipal nightmare, a full playing out of castration anxiety..." (Kawin, 1984: 9).

Noel Carroll privileges a psychoanalytic framework for the consideration of horror because:

the horror genre is explicitly acknowledged as a vehicle for expressing psychoanalytically significant themes such as repressed sexuality, oral sadism, necrophilia, etc.... As a matter of social tradition, psychoanalysis is more or less the lingua franca of the horror film and thus the privileged critical tool for discussing the genre (Carroll, 1981: 17).

Psychoanalysis is also "unavoidable" because "the nightmare is a culturally established framework for presenting and understanding the horror genre " (Carroll, 1981: 17). In other words, there is a "correspondence" between horror stories and nightmares which indicates the "distant genesis of horror motifs in nightmare[s]" (Carroll, 1981: 24). Here, nightmare imagery is understood in terms of conflict; nightmares are both "attractive and repellent" because they "function to enunciate both a wish and its inhibition" (Carroll, 1981: 17).

This conflict between attraction and repulsion is not only characteristic of, but essential to, horror. Like the nightmare, it is a "unique combination of repulsion and delight" (Carroll, 1981: 18). For Carroll, horror film monsters are simultaneously attractive and repulsive. It is partly through the figure of the monster, then, that the horror film functions as a nightmare. The monster serves the simultaneous functions of attracting us through peaking our curiosity and repelling us through its Otherness.

Like Carroll who ties horror stories to deep-seated, archaic conflicts, Charles Derry connects horror imagery (such as being chased yet unable to move or slowed down) to an "archetypal scene" which is "profound and subconscious" (Derry, 1987: 162). Horror stories "speak to our subconscious and -- as do our dreams -- deal with issues that are often painful for us to deal with consciously and directly" (Derry, 1987: 162). Yet, where Carroll seems to universalize horror, relating it to psychoanalytically-defined nightmare imagery, Derry suggest that such representations speak to the shared fears of a particular culture at a particular moment in time. They are public nightmares. The differences between Carroll and Derry's versions can be seen in their respective analysis of *THE EXORICIST*.



According to Carroll, the demonic possession of Regan is a cinematic way to "act out the imagery of infantile beliefs in the omnipotence of the will; each grisly scene is a celebration of infantile rage" (Carroll, 1981: 18). In the "demonic possession" subgenre which followed *THE EXORCIST*

the fascination with telekinesis...is nothing but a cinematic metaphor of the unlimited power of repressed rage. The audience is both drawn to and repelled by it -- we recognize such rage in ourselves and superstitiously fear its emergence, while simultaneously we are pleased when we see a demonstration, albeit fictive, of the power of that rage (Carroll, 1981: 18-19).

By contrast, rather than connecting such imagery to a generalized "infantile rage," Charles Derry argues that the horror of the demonic proliferated at a time when church attendance was in decline and the effects of the 1960s were being felt. "Is it any wonder that children in these films are presented as no longer innocent when the young were out on the street protesting the Vietnam War?" (Derry, 1987: 169). For Derry, *THE EXORCIST* "perfectly reflected the concerns of its audience" (Derry, 1987: 169). So closely are these representations tied to historical circumstances that spin-offs of *THE EXORCIST*, such as *GHOST STORY*, were box office failures because of the "return in America of a certain groundswell of popular religious belief" (Derry, 1987: 169). Derry suggests that while real dreams serve a personal function, horror, as nightmare, "play[s] upon the audience's anxiety, in all its guises" (Derry, 1987: 172). While there is an attempt here to relate horror to its particular social and cultural context it seems to emerge as an accurate and unmediated reflection of that context.

Whether horror stories can be understood as nightmares for individuals or societies, or both, the nightmare analogy privileges the

cathartic function of horror. Horror "may release some part of the tensions that would otherwise erupt in nightmares" (Carroll, 1981: 24). According to Dickstein, horror is a "way of neutralizing anxiety by putting an aesthetic bracket around it" (Dickstein, 1984: 69). For him, the anxiety provoked by "the fear of death" is the "ultimate attraction of all horror films" (Dickstein, 1984: 69). This not only explains the largely young audience (who seem more willing to flirt with their demise) but also the very cathartic function of horror as a way of encountering our fears, subduing them, and gaining control.

In fact, "[g]etting caught up emotionally, walking out drained and satisfied, waking up relieved to deal with more workaday problems -- this is the secret of all horror films" (Dickstein, 1984: 70). "[P]eople throughout history have told each other ghost stories as a way of both terrifying and reassuring themselves by making their fears explicit;" so too do we use horror stories to fulfill that need for catharsis (Dickstein, 1984: 70). For the individual, the experience of horror may release pent up anxiety, sexual frustration or repressed rage. Carroll suggests that perhaps "horror film fans go to the movies (in the afternoon) perchance to sleep (at night)" (Carroll, 1981: 24). Derry's version of horror as "public nightmare" sees the cathartic function as social in scope (Derry, 1984: 168). That is, as release, for (the good of) the society, of shared tensions and anxieties.

As Joseph Gixti observes, this explanation of horror presupposes "the 'human zoo' picture of civilized society" and emphasizes "innate drives which are viewed as our evolutionary heritage" (Gixti, 1989: 82). Horrific representations which provide an outlet for the safe release of the beast within are cast in a significant and socially beneficial role. The nightmare analogy posits that, like nightmares, horror stories provide a vehicle through

which the individual and the society can confront and overcome, or at least vent, repressed rage, fears and generally socially unacceptable feelings. The logical conclusion of the argument is that these feelings are better expressed and dealt with in the cinema than on the street.

However, if horror films, as public nightmares, draw from and represent the anxieties of an era, then, one might expect to find racist and misogynist representations in contemporary American horror movies. The idea that horror serves as an outlet for these anxieties over Otherness is the basis of a rather shopworn catharsis argument. This argument implies that, since horror provides safe release of pent up rage and fears, its often misogynist representations are functional for society. (There is a similarity here to catharsis theories about the function of pornography -- it is better to have porn than real violence against women in the streets. This assumes that porn functions in some way to alleviate the oppression of women while simultaneously exploiting it.) Likewise, horror, because of its often misogynist representations, is implicitly seen as actually being good for women; it provides a necessary (and presumably safe) outlet for, what are cast as natural, fears.

### Terror and Transcendence

The Terror and Transcendence argument about the function of horror is also informed by an attempt to account for the universal, ahistorical appeal of the genre. In expressing a desire for access to the spirit world it is said that horror taps into a human need for such contact -- a need that is not being met in our secularized and industrial society. From this perspective, horror is both the expression and fulfillment of a need for confirmation that a world, a

reality, beyond this one exists. For instance, Dickstein argues that, since the irrational has been "exorcised" by and in a rational society, "[h]orror films, which excavate archaic fears and taboos and explore deeply buried wishes, have undoubtedly come along to help redress the balance" (Dickstein, 1984: 78).

Will Rockett makes a similar suggestion that horror is a response to a rational world view. He argues that "[s]uch films [primarily, those which deal with demonic themes] provide the contact with the transcendent...which a rational, secular society tends to rationalize away in philosophical abstraction even in its religion" (Rockett, 1988: 20). Along the same lines, in his book The Delights of Terror: An Aesthetics of the Tale of Terror, Terry Heller positions the gothic novel as a response to the Enlightenment's denial of the irrational and its privileging of reason. "The Gothic novel becomes a means of appropriating experiences that the dominant culture has ruled out of reality" (Heller, 1987: 199). Horror is a representation of the other side of reason. It simultaneously expresses and fulfills the need for such imaginings.

Kawin contends that horror stories are "exorcistic or transcendent pagan rituals for supposedly post-pagan cultures" (Kawin, 1984: 5). By giving voice to the irrational, to the "mystical unconscious," horror allows for the expression of that which is repressed by Judaeo-Christianity (Kawin, 1984: 10). The ultimate validation of that which cannot be, of that which is outside our rational view of the world, is characteristic of horror. "In this sense the horror film asserts the survival of 'paganism'...and the inadequacy of science... -- a return to magic" (Kawin, 1984: 10). It is in horror's connection with nightmarish dreams that Kawin's version of its transcendent function can be glimpsed. Kawin argues that "dreams are often considered instances of contact with the spirits of the dead and that such dreams may serve as keys to

the future" (Kawin, 1984: 11).

Horror stories, in privileging the "Land of the Dead," are analogous to such prophetic dreams. The wish to which horror appeals is that of getting a glimpse of the other side. Horror confirms that there is another realm beyond the material world. The seer or "first victim," then, acts as "a surrogate for the audience's desire to have, through watching a horror film, a spiritual vision" (Kawin, 1984: 11). In this respect, horror films replace "transcendent pagan rituals" that allowed "primitive man" contact with the spirit world; they satisfy the "nostalgia for ritual" that takes the particular form of "the cathartic journey into the Land of the Dead (Kawin, 1984: 12).

Although Dickstein does not relate horror specifically to transcendent pagan rituals, he does argue that "[t]he decline of religion and the increasing secularization of society" has lent a "mythical resonance" to popular culture, and that horror stories in particular satisfy "some primitive needs" (Dickstein, 1984: 70). While "civilized man" has been "taught to subdue his fears and superstitions" he can never repress them completely (Dickstein, 1984: 70). Horror is the site for their release in a rational society. Since horror stories deal with fear (one of "our most primitive impulses") and are "modern counterparts to ancient myths" they respond to and fulfill something deeply human (Dickstein, 1984: 70). This is observed, for example, in Dickstein's version of the difference between science fiction and horror. Science fiction trades in themes of a conceptual nature while horror is motivated by deep psychological concerns; its domain is the unconscious, presumably shared by "civilized" and "primitive" peoples alike. With their instinct for our deepest anxieties" horror stories "seem to be able to read our minds" (Dickstein, 1984: 69). Horror has emerged, then, as modern society's way of giving "form and dimension to the unknown," and as such it replaces

the myths and rituals of "primitive man" (Dickstein, 1984: 69). For this reason, Dickstein argues that horror is most successful when it remains "simple and fundamental," when it plays on elemental fears" (Dickstein, 1984: 69-70).

HALLOWEEN and NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD...have the timeless aura of the early classics of the genre. A dark street, a deserted house, a creaking door, an escaped madman, a throng of ghouls and zombies ('pure motorized instinct') -- these seem to me far more effective than the spaceship setting of ALIEN, the anti-suburban satire of DAWN OF THE DEAD...or the excessive gore of THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (Dickstein, 1984: 69-70).

What is effective about these films is that they evoke shared, basic fears, and also, importantly, "avoid overwhelming us with gore and violence" (Dickstein, 1984: 77). For Dickstein, effective horror -- horror which helps to "redress the balance" by providing cathartic contact with the other side, by providing the experience of transcendence -- works not by showing but by concealing (Dickstein, 1984: 78).. Effective horror is not seen, but unseen; it works by suggestion.

Not seeing the ultimate horror provokes the experience of terror which is key to the sublime and consequently to the transcendental function of these stories. The distinction made here is between horror and terror and is predicated on the differences between showing it and not showing it. Will Rockett argues that terror resists opening the door; it never reveals the ultimate horror. When the monster or source of threat is completely revealed the work degenerates into "mere horror" (Rockett, 1988: 131). Showing what's behind the door also relieves the viewer/reader inasmuch as he/she "adapts" to the horror: "[s]how what is behind the door, and we'll adjust" (Rockett,

1988: 132). In other words, horror alleviates fear; terror sustains it. Horror further couples that fear with disgust, revulsion and loathing. This is the stuff of the gross-out: graphic violence, exploding heads and mutating bodies -- most contemporary horror. Gore can be nothing but reassuring. Terror, however, doesn't disgust its audience, rather it inspires a feeling of "awe" (Rockett, 1988: 31).

The point is that while horror succeeds merely in the "the presentation of loathsome and repugnant scenes," terror is a "much more complex process" (Rockett, 1988: 46). Because "terror is always of the indeterminate and incomprehensible, of the unseen but sensed or suspected, or of the imperfectly seen," it engages the audience in a manner in which horror is incapable (Rockett, 1988: 46). Terror requires both the imagination of the filmmaker/author and the audience. Since the horror is never fully explained imagining the ultimate horror is left up to the audience and this is more terrifying. Terror, then, "should be reserved as a term for works which evoke a fear of that which is truly awesome and powerful, and which demands reverence or respect, that is to say, fear of the transcendent or sublime" (Rockett, 1988: 46). Horror elicits "simple" feelings of crude loathing or repugnance while terror provokes "anticipatory dread, awe and reverence" (Rockett, 1988: 46).

According to Rockett, "interfusion with a transcendent world" beyond this one is something humans unconsciously "crave;" desire for contact with a "sublime plane of existence" is a "primary attribute of humanity" (Rockett, 1988: xiv-6). Tales of terror (and terrifying moments in some horror) have emerged to confirm "the existence of an already transcendent world" and satisfy the "greatest 'metaphysical aspiration'," "hunger for transcendence" (Rockett, 1988: 20). So,

in feeling a strong attraction toward certain films usually identified as horror, audiences are seeking transcendence, or at least confirmatory contact with the sublime or transcendent (Rockett, 1988: 6).

The films best suited to transcendence, both downward and upward, are supernatural and supranatural. In the former, the unknown "exists beyond the natural world as man understands it,...and transcends that world as long as it remains outside his understanding" (Rockett, 1988: 34). These stories often represent space as the transcendent domain. Supernatural films construct a threat which "exists outside the natural world and as such can never be understood by man" (Rockett, 1988: 34). Ghosts, werewolves and zombies figure in this group and transformation and transcendence are recurring themes:

these are the films in which one finds the most direct, clearest treatment of transformation and transcendence, and of demonic dread and deific deliverance as the redemption process. Here one may achieve a downward transcendence that is a spiritual death through possession by the demon, or through conversion into the undead vampire, werewolf, or zombie. The cost of immortality is one's soul or, in some instances, the soul of the whole of humanity.... To be delivered from such a state by a force of goodness is to be reborn, turning this transcendence from a downward path to an upward one (Rockett, 1988: 42).

One of the things that make these films particularly well suited to transcendence is their thematic concern with something inexplicable, whether from space or another dimension. (Both Techno-Terror and Psycho-Killer films fail to serve this function because they connect the horror to something generated by, and thus explicable within the understanding of, humanity.) Both Rockett and Heller invoke Edmund Burke's consideration



of the aesthetic effect of the sublime to explain the function of terror. The sublime is understood as the "effect resulting from the presentation of terrifying objects within some artistic form or from the contemplation of the awesome in a landscape" (Heller, 1987: 201). It depends on limitlessness and uncertainty; "obscurity seems in general to be necessary" (Rockett, 1988: 47). The experience of transcendence results from the sublime in as much as the suggestion of that which cannot be (the otherworldly, the inexplicable) confirms that another realm exists beyond this one and that transcendence is a possibility.

Transcendence emerges as a possibility in certain terror films which "resurrect and revitalize the figures of the iconography of the oldest mythologies," and in so doing recount, again, "the old myth of deliverance" (Rockett, 1988: 26-27). Rockett tells the myth this way:

[t]he demonic threatens, and one suffers first dread, then disaster; the divine, however, provides succor. The manifestation of the awful power of the demonic, and then its defeat by an even greater power of good, assure one of the reality of the transcendent world and grant one the joy of which James writes (Rockett, 1988: 27).

In retelling this myth of deliverance these types of films, like the myths they replace, are seen as "affirmations of the existence of demonic evil and, in turn, the old mythic gods" (Rockett, 1988: 27).

The appearance of both the demonic and the divine is connected to "that innate human pessimism that has led people to believe the worst" and "that innate human optimism that has led people to hope that despite great suffering, in the end humanity will survive the worst onslaughts of evil with aid from the deity" (Rockett, 1988: 27). This confirmation of a rather abstract

and indeterminant evil and its usual defeat by the power of good is a central feature of horror films. Even if the evil is not annihilated, because of a "loss of hope on the part of the species" or the "increasing demands by audiences for more shocking material," these tales of terror still provide transcendence: "[a]ccepting the reality of the demonically sublime leaves them [the audience members] open to the possibility of its existence as well as that of the divinely sublime, or even of their own ultimate transcendence" (Rockett, 1988: 27).

It is clear that this sense of deliverance has religious overtones and impulses as "demonic dread gives way to deific joy" (Rockett, 1988: 10). Since deific joy is achieved primarily through deliverance from fear, the demonic is not only necessary, it precedes the deity, and, in a sense, confirms the existence of it. The suggestion that terror provides downward transcendence to the demonic and affirms the existence of evil means that it also affirms the existence of goodness since there is a "kind of symbiosis between the demonic the divine: without evil to be dreaded, then overcome, goodness would remain unrecognizable" (Rockett, 1988: 10).

In making such a case for the terror film, Rockett contends that the "compulsion for transcendence, which is common at some level to all men," is not restricted to the domain of high art (Rockett, 1988: 15). As high art may connect one with the sublime and the possibility of transcendence, so, too, do the contemporary cinematic counterpart of ancient myths. "So it has been throughout human history, and so it continues today, in the cinema as in life" (Rockett, 1988: 7). In modern society, then, "encounters with the cinematic shadow of Otherness may be as close as most will ever come to achieving even a fleeting glimpse of transcendence" (Rockett, 1988: 15).

Theories of horror as transcendence are typically linked by their insistence on the spiritual value of terror over horror, and, by their

consequent appeal to a version of the high art/low art distinction. Here, mere horror is a poor relation of more respectable terror. Graphic imagery "suggests nothing of transcendence;" it is, according to Rockett, "simply revolting" (Rockett, 1988: 39). Horror satisfies the base needs of a jaded public while terror's goals and effects are more lofty, more in line with the supposed role of high art. From this perspective, popular culture is only suitable matter for analysis to the extent that it duplicates the strategies and concerns of more respectable culture.

The problem is that this tendency to apply high art criticism to horror not only re-inscribes a problematic high/low dichotomy into cultural theory, it also fails to address the genre within the terms of its specific social context. Like other traditional approaches, the Terror and Transcendence argument abstracts the genre out of its particular historical context and gives it universal appeal and significance. Horror is said to function for us in the same way ancient myths did for so-called primitive people. This reduces the genre to an expression of a socio-cultural unconscious and the audience to a set of primitive impulses. It is also, significantly, unable to account for the contemporary stage of the genre which is certainly more predisposed towards traditional definitions of horror -- showing it -- than not. The Terror and Transcendence argument not only ascribes to the tale of terror the timeless and universal function of satisfying a human need for transcendence worthy of high art, it implies that the contemporary horror film, by definition, is the servant of baser (more pedestrian) needs, and, it would seem, unworthy of consideration.

### The Return of the Repressed

Each of the explanations recounted so far tends to naturalize horror in appealing to certain universal, psychologically-rooted human characteristics. Whether they satisfy the need for sexual initiation or catharsis, or transcend to terror and offer contact with the sublime, horror stories are seen as emerging from and appealing to primitive impulses. In contrast to these ahistorical explanations, Robin Wood's account of the horror film develops an argument about horror and repression against the background of a broader analysis of patriarchal and capitalist society. He stresses the importance of horror beyond the realm of universal human craving and in so doing considers possible relationships between horrific representations and the specific society that produces them.

Because Wood generally accepts many assumptions and arguments in Marx and Freud, he takes as more or less a given the existence of a dominant patriarchal capitalist order and the general (though not total) effectiveness of the institutions and cultural practices which sustain its ideology. Psychological processes are seen as the channel through which that "ideology is transmitted and perpetuated" and repression is a central tool in that process (Wood, 1979: 7). Wood makes use of Marcuse's distinction between basic and surplus repression in which the former is "universal, necessary and inescapable" and the latter is "specific to a particular culture" (Wood, 1979: 7-8). Basic repression makes possible our development into human beings "beyond the screaming and convulsions" of "an uncoordinated animal" while surplus repression "is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within that culture" (Wood, 1979: 8). Within contemporary western culture, surplus repression "makes us (if it works) into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists" (Wood, 1979: 8). Towards this end, our culture represses sexual energy in

general and bisexual, female and children's sexuality in particular.

Inseparable from this concept of repression is the figure of the Other, "that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with" (Wood, 1979: 9). In psychoanalytic terms the Other is understood as "what is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outwards in order to be hated and disowned" (Wood, 1979: 9). It is the figure of the Other, then, that embodies what the culture strives to discredit, disown, and annihilate. In the interests of maintaining capitalist relations and male privilege, contemporary western culture defines as Other all that which threatens its inevitability and validity. For example, "woman" is constructed as Other:

onto women men project their own innate, repressed femininity in order to disown it as inferior (to be called 'unmanly' -- i.e., like a woman -- is the supreme insult (Wood, 1979: 10).

Once what is repressed within the self finds expression in the figure of the Other, it is either rejected (preferably annihilated) or rendered safe through assimilating it by "converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself" (Wood, 1979: 9).

According to Wood, this concept of repressed/Other finds its clearest expression within the horror genre:

[one] might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses: its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, the 'happy ending' (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression (Wood, 1979: 10).

Horror is a vehicle for the expression and usually the containment of that

which threatens dominant ideology. As such, it is inextricably tied to historical and social conditions. They function, in part, to endorse and perpetuate those conditions. Yet, since horror, in order to restore repression, first needs to represent the repressed, possibilities for resisting the restoration of repression emerge. The ways in which horror stories represent Otherness and whether they enact repression are, for Wood, the criteria against which the progressive horror film can be distinguished from the reactionary.

Since the figure of the monster dramatizes the dual concept of the repressed/the other, how the monster is defined is central in this distinction between those films which affirm and those which subvert the dominant ideology outlined by Wood. The "simple and obvious basic formula for the horror film" is the threatening of normality by the monster: the "essential subject of the horror film" is the "relationship between normality and the monster" (Wood, 1979: 14). In most horror films, normality is "boringly constant" usually defined in terms of the "heterosexual monogamous couple" and/or the family and those institutions such as church and state "that support them and defend them" (Wood, 1979: 14). What is defined as monstrous changes from era to era "as society's basic fears clothe themselves in fashionable or immediately accessible garments" (Wood, 1979: 14).

In the reactionary wing of the horror genre normality is validated and strengthened through its encounter with, and its triumph over, a monster which in its extreme Otherness poses a deadly threat. The designation of the monster as "simply evil" is, for Wood, one of the characteristics of the reactionary horror film.

To identify what is repressed with 'evil incarnate' (a meta-physical, rather than a social definition) is automatically to suggest that there is nothing to be done but strive to keep it repressed (Wood, 1979: 14).

The logical response to an understanding the monster as pure evil, is the adoption of repression as the only way to keep it at bay. For example, in many of these films the devil, understood as simply evil, is finally repressed by the presence and actions of Christianity. Inasmuch as traditional authority in the figure of Christianity is "given weight or presented as a positive force" by these films, they are reactionary (Wood, 1979: 23). The threat to normality by a non-human monster is also reactionary inasmuch as what is Other is completely outside of our understanding and therefore our sympathy. Finally, horror that privileges sexuality only to create a scenario of revulsion around it, also qualifies as reactionary. Here, "the sense of horror is motivated by sexual disgust" (Wood, 1979: 23).

If reactionary horror ultimately affirms both the dominant ideology and the necessity of surplus repression, then progressive examples within the genre. They "seek to invert it...whether explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously" (Wood, 1979: 23). They "question," "modify" and "challenge" the basic assumptions of the reactionary film. Progressive horror demonstrates a much more ambivalent attitude towards both normality and the monster, often to the point of confusing the two terms. In contrast to the designation of the monster/Other as pure evil, the progressive horror film maintains, or at least encourages, some identification with the monster:

in many...the Monster is clearly the emotional centre, and much more human than the cardboard representatives of normality. The Frankenstein monster suffers, weeps, responds to music, longs to relate to people; Henry and Elizabeth merely declaim histrionically (Wood, 1979: 15).

It is precisely in this identification that sympathy is invoked and the monster

is spared the classification of complete Otherness. This ambivalence towards the monster suggests the possibility of reowning that which has been (surplus) repressed rather than the necessity of annihilating it completely.

If progressive horror depends, in part, on a monster which is not completely Other, it also, conversely, holds up the institutions of normality as monstrous, or, at the very least, as the cause of the monstrous. In expressing the monstrous character of normality's institutions, these films demonstrate the genre's oppositional potential. According to Wood, progressive horror expresses "despair and negativity" and suggests an apocalyptic end of the world scenario (Wood, 1979: 23). That is, an end of patriarchal capitalism. By representing traditional signifiers of normality as monstrous, these films demonstrate "the recognition of that ideology's disintegration, its untenability, as all it has repressed explodes and blows it apart" (Wood, 1979: 23).

What Wood offers that other psychoanalytic theories of horror do not is a consideration of the specific context of horror production and consumption. Framed within the ideology of patriarchal capitalism, his work links contemporary horror to the broader perspective of the progressive genre in film. For Wood, horror works less to reflect and fulfill universal needs (however they are defined), than as a vehicle for the transmission and perpetuation of a particular world view which claims universality. At the same time, horror embodies the potential to disrupt the apparent inevitability of patriarchal capitalism by challenging the definition of what is monstrous. Although inextricably linked to the social and economic order in which it is produced, horror's relationship to that order is not reducible to one of unproblematic affirmation. It emerges in this analysis as (although Wood doesn't use the phrase) a potential site of struggle over defining the



monstrous. Interestingly, the progressive strategies described by Wood (the construction of a monster recognizable as us, and, the expression of paranoia towards the everyday reality and dominant social institutions) are also features that some writers have attributed to the postmodern horror film.

### Contemporary Horror as Postmodern Horror

A strong case can be made for the suggestion that contemporary horror is suitably described by both the textual strategies and the thematic concerns of postmodernism. Contemporary horror films often deny the cohesion of illusory representations and the comfort of closed and secure narratives. Horror is said to echo postmodern cultural practice in its plethora of re-makes, self-conscious strategies and visual excess and gory detail; an increasing tendency towards intertextual quotation and playful self-reference characterize the contemporary genre. These films also replace the secure narratives of an earlier phase of horror films with paranoid and nihilistic visions of proximate, and often irrevocable, destruction. Recent attempts to account for contemporary horror films, insist that this horror is best understood in the context of an anxious postmodernism which often adopts a bleak and nihilistic view of contemporary experience and culture.

It is a particular textual look and an apocalyptic world view, then, that ultimately characterize postmodern horror. Such textual and thematic features of the contemporary horror film suggest that it is also adequately described by the self-reflexive strategies and pessimistic themes said to be characteristic of the progressive genre generally, and, Wood's oppositional horror film more specifically. Since both postmodernism and the progressive genre position themselves in an adversarial relationship to the contemporary

social world, and, since much contemporary horror embodies their critical features, it is reasonable to suggest that contemporary horror, far from constituting a categorical endorsement of the social order, is frequently a nihilistic critique of our social world and representation itself.

### Horror as Postmodern Text

Some theorists argue that contemporary horror films are distinguished by their particularly reflexive and self-conscious character. Echoing theories of postmodernism, Noel Carroll suggests that horror, at present, is "highly intertextual" (Carroll, 1990: 211). Philip Brophy argues that contemporary horror is "a genre about genre," "a genre which mimics itself mercilessly" (Brophy, 1986: 5). This formal self-consciousness is, for Brophy, the result of horror's "violent awareness of itself as a saturated genre" (Brophy, 1986: 5). For example, postmodern horror, as pastiche, pays homage to a tradition of horror in the form of re-makes (such as *THE THING*, *THE FLY*, and *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*) and quotation ("*IT* reanimates a gallery of classic monsters" and *THE APPLLEGATES* depends on Big Bug films for its comic impetus) (Carroll, 1990: 211). As well, Romero's *CREEPSHOW* draws on the E.C. comics of the early 1950s for its textual organization (Brophy, 1986: 11).

Horror's postmodernism is also a matter of its self-conscious strategies which play with the awareness that "it's a movie." This is accomplished through narrative elements which foreground horror conventions and clichés, the act of telling a ghost story in *GHOST STORY* and in *THE FOG*, for example. Brophy points out that *GHOST STORY* names itself by drawing attention to what it is. (More recently, *MATINEE* plays with the same

awareness.) Self-consciousness is also a feature of *VIDEODROME*, *VIDEODEAD* and the European film, *DEMONS*; they specifically foreground image technology (TV in the first two and cinema in the third). This media self-consciousness is picked up more recently in *MISERY* and *THE DARKHALF* (both based on novels by Stephen King) which foreground the act of writing, specifically popular fiction, as a central narrative concern.

Further, much of contemporary horror's self-consciousness is found in its elaborate and excessive realism. Advances in special effects technologies have made it possible to render extreme graphic detail and unrelenting gore in the most realistic fashion, and, consequently, have led to an increased emphasis on visual effects. Contemporary horror not only shows us, but invites us to marvel at how it shows us. According to Brophy, this excessively realistic presentation of special effects has the effect of calling attention to the effects themselves. In *THE THING*, for example, the excessiveness of the effects (culminating in a severed human head growing the legs of an insect) leads one character to exclaim: "You've got to be fucking kidding!" Brophy points out that this both registers as a response to the monstrosity of the thing and to the "mind-boggling" special effects (Brophy, 1986: 11). He argues that this film is "violently self-conscious," and, that it is such precisely because it "perversely plays with these extensions of cinematic realism presenting them as a dumbfounding magical spectacle" (Brophy, 1986: 11).

Similarly, in Cronenberg's *THE FLY*, the creature, Brundlefly, demonstrates how turning into a fly has made it necessary that he vomit on his food (to aid in the digestion process). Having done so, he looks up at the camera (the demonstration is being recorded by the journalist and love-interest, Ronnie) and declares, embarrassed, "Oh, that's disgusting, isn't it?" Again, our grossed-out response is comically anticipated and self-reflexively

commented on by a character within the film. The presence of the camera in this scene further codes this display of special effects, as display, through invoking the ability to record them in the first place. As well, *THE EVIL DEAD* has aptly been described by Brophy as a "gore movie beyond belief," and, indeed, derives much of its appeal and humour from not only outdoing other horror excesses, but by outdoing itself as well; here, too, just when you think nothing else could explode or mutate on the human body, something does (Brophy, 1988: 12). Ironically, contemporary horror addresses its own artifice by calling attention to that which makes it most realistic: its special effects. It is the ability of horror to faithfully represent its gory detail which has contributed to its isolation of spectacle as spectacle.

Like analyses of postmodern culture generally, this analysis of horror suggests that a saturation of the genre has led to a practice which is first and foremost about itself. This explication of horror as postmodern play, with its emphasis on the tendency toward intertextual quotation and a signaling of the visual as spectacle, suggests that contemporary horror has particular things in common with the progressive genre. Both postmodern and progressive strategies emphasize self-conscious textual features and both consider the ways in which representation is disrupted, or at least tampered with.

For example, Tania Modleski suggests that particular aspects of the postmodern horror film work against the narrative pleasure offered by the Classic Realist Text. Such horror undermines "processes of identification," "narrative continuity," and "mechanisms of closure" characteristic of narrative pleasure, and, cited as the targets of the progressive genre (Modleski, 1986b: 160). Modleski points out that these textual features of the postmodern horror film are also features said to be characteristic of

adversarial culture. She argues that contemporary horror films "often delight in thwarting the audiences' expectations of closure" (Modleski, 1986b: 160). (She cites *CARRIE*, *THE EVIL DEAD*, *HALLOWEEN*, *FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH* but the list includes many titles.)<sup>12</sup> While this open-endedness is obviously connected to the economic viability of sequels, it is also said to refuse both the resolution of conflicts generated within the narrative, and, the sense that contradictions are easily smoothed over.

In addition, narrative continuity and processes of identification are disrupted in postmodern horror; these films "drastically minimize the plot and character development that is thought to be essential to the construction of the novelistic" (Modleski, 1986b: 161). Films like *RABID*, *FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH* and *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* (Modleski's examples) reduce the plot to a collection of "disparate scenes," thereby subverting the linear (and logical) cause and effect construction demanded by the classical form (Modleski, 1986b: 161). Further, not only is the audiences' "narcissistic identification" troubled by a certain cardboard construction and formulaic function of the characters, it is transformed into a kind of "anti-narcissistic identification;" the audience comes to delight in the relentless destruction of their representatives on the screen (Modleski, 1986: 161b).<sup>13</sup> Although Modleski has reservations about the effectiveness of these strategies (a reservation which will be discussed below) she suggests that, in refusing closure, logical narrative development and audience identification,

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, *VIDEODROME*, *THE BROOD*, *SHIVERS*, *RABID*, *The Dead Trilogy*, *THE CRAZIES* (in fact, most Cronenberg and Romero films), *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*, *ALIEN*, (most films for which sequels seem to be profitable).

<sup>13</sup> Modleski refers, as well, to Wood's observation about the audience of *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* whom he identifies as "half-stoned youth" who "cheered and applauded everyone of Leatherface's outrages against their representatives on the screen" (Wood, 1979: 22).

these films engage in a disruption of classical realism and bare some resemblance to the progressive genre.

Yet, given the problems with postmodern perspectives noted in earlier chapters, it is important to note a number of significant limitations to the oppositional potential implicit in such displays of artifice. From James Collins' perspective, the fact that contemporary horror signals its traditions through quotation, and its artifice through special effects, would suggest, not a critical stance in relation to the social world, but, merely an instance of the genre's self-promotion. Here, textual disruption does not mean a questioning of the relationship between representation and the social world and a certain critical engagement of the spectator, but, rather, it is seen as a textual game that the spectator plays with the text. In postmodern culture, this is self-reflexivity for its own sake. These textual strategies do not generate oppositional meanings because none of it means a thing.

Similarly, for Philip Brophy since contemporary horror is about "how it states itself as genre," "what is of prime importance is the textual effect, the game one plays with the text" (Brophy, 1986: 4). To the degree that horror's "statement is coded within its very mimicry," it is, simply stated, about itself (Brophy, 1986: 3). The "historical over-exposure" of the genre results in contemporary horror which "knows that you've seen it before; it knows that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know. And none of it means a thing" (Brophy, 1986: 5). Echoing Baudrillard's description of a meaningless simulacrum and Jameson's contention that contemporary postmodern culture is without depth, Brophy suggests that horror "has no time for the critical ordinances of social realism, cultural enlightenment or emotional humanism" (Brophy, 1986: 5). It, like the postmodern culture around it, is too busy with its look to provide meanings

for its audiences.

A further point that renders self-reflexivity inert as a progressive strategy is its pervasiveness, particularly its appropriation by much mainstream popular culture. Indeed, contemporary television programs and advertisements (arguably the cultural product most directly tied to the interests of capitalism and the system of commodity exchange) frequently call attention to their artifice. This appropriation of the critical strategies of progressive culture by television advertising does not necessarily mean that they, as strategies, are categorically and for all time rendered commonplace and inert. It is arguable, however, that with widespread use, these strategies lose their ability to distance the audience. Breaking the illusion is simply what we have come to expect. This indicates that, however effective as a category in some contexts, self-reflexive strategies (whether postmodern or progressive) do not, in and of themselves, constitute oppositional representational practices. To argue otherwise would be to suggest that postmodern popular culture (horror included) is progressive because it is self-aware, because it plays with the fact that "it's just a movie."

My point here is not to contest that contemporary horror, as postmodern horror, is highly self-aware, but, rather, to suggest that, in this cultural moment in which self-reflexivity is more or less the norm, postmodern horror and oppositional practice are about, and entail, much more than formal subversion and innovative textual play. Indeed, Barbara Klinger suggests that innovation is less an oppositional strategy than a feature of generic forms themselves. "Difference/innovation" are "system-descriptive" of such forms, rather than "system-subversive" (Klinger, 1984: 42). The point is that "supervising systems negotiate a normative function for even the most excessive, foregrounded, deformative textual tendencies"

(Klinger, 1984: 43).

Along similar lines, Dana Polan points out that "Hollywood not only presents unreality as reality, it also openly acknowledges its unreality" (Polan, 1987: 350). In another article he argues that contemporary popular culture (his example is a Blondie cartoon which plays with narrative closure) self-consciously disrupts the conventions of classical realism. Yet, this "tell[s] us less that such works fall outside the sway of the dominant ideology than that the terms in which we theorize the relations of mass culture to dominance need to be expanded" (Polan, 1986: 175). For Polan, the paradox of postmodern culture lies in the fact that, although this culture is highly self-reflexive, it is not so much oppositional as incoherent. Here, incoherence is part of the norm in contemporary popular culture; self-consciousness generates not oppositional meanings, but non-sense.

While I agree with Polan in his estimation of the ineffectiveness of formal strategies for oppositional culture, I wish to challenge his (postmodern) assertion that their ineffectiveness renders the cultural product itself meaningless. This culture is not, as some postmodern accounts suggest, rendered meaningless through these particular textual games. It is the textual game itself, not the cultural products that play it, that is rendered meaningless these days. In a cultural landscape in which self-reflexivity is the norm, it is not in formal subversion and textual play that we should look for oppositional meanings in contemporary postmodern culture. This is especially true if the point of postmodern self-reflexivity is to question representation and deny meaning. Indeed, these strategies of the cynic (whether nihilistic or optimistic) demand the "evacuation of sense", and, with it, the possibility of oppositional culture (Polan, 1986).

Frederic Jameson provides an alternative to this fascination with form.



In an analysis of *DOG DAY AFTERNOON*, he invokes the concept of "figurability" to access the ways in which opposition can be said to be a matter, not of formal innovation, but of representation itself. The first condition of opposition is to be figurable -- to be "visible in the first place, accessible to our imaginations" (Jameson, 1985: 719). From there it is possible to read popular culture as an instrument of possible self-consciousness. Although Jameson restricts his analysis to class, the idea of figurability can be extended to a consideration of the representations of race, gender, sexual orientation and so on. Because figurability, to be represented, is the fundamental requirement for class, and other forms of consciousness, what is manifest in popular cultural forms matters; it is a crucial site of potential opposition. As Bill Nichols explains, Jameson "tries to put his analytical finger on what is already evident -- materially apparent -- in the film; as such, it is something to which a viewer can be sensitive, even if he or she cannot name it" (Nichols, 1985: 716). In focusing on what gets represented, Jameson avoids the tendency of some critics to valorize subversive textual strategies over the particular kinds of stories we are told.

Oppositional films subvert, not through the denial, but through the making of meaning. What is important is not formal innovation, but what sense is made by the genre, what kinds of stories are told; it is not a matter of evacuating but of making sense. In the case of postmodern horror, this entails a consideration of where the threat is located, what kinds of monsters are created, and where postmodern dread is directed. Like the progressive genre, postmodern horror is pessimistic; it exchanges in particularly paranoid visions of the social world. It makes sense in terms of postmodern nihilism.

### Horror as Postmodern Nihilism

Horror movies make sense of fear. Andrew Tudor points out that, "one of the distinguishing characteristics of horror movies is that they are implicated in the distinctive subset of cultural patterns through which we construct our understanding of what is fearful to us" (Tudor, 1989: 212). They are socially meaningful as cultural sites for both the articulation and direction of fear, and, as such, depend on a construction of a threat for their motivation. He suggests that, "the 'threat' is the central feature of the horror movie narrative, the organizing principle around which all else revolves" (Tudor, 1989: 8). Horror is also distinguished by its association of the threat, the source of fear, with a monster and monstrous consequences. Horror, then, is a central cultural site for the representation of what is both threatening and monstrous, and, for the articulation of what should be feared. That contemporary films often make sense of these basic horror conventions in a primarily nihilistic fashion, is central to a discussion of their paranoid postmodern themes.

The horrific images and narratives of contemporary horror are variously understood as versions of a critical discourse, and, as cultural symptoms of an actual condition. Pete Boss suggests that postmodern horror films "are part of a more general set of discursive practices," like those of Baudrillard and Jameson, for example, which "seem to partake in the tradition of symptomatic responses to reified notions of 'technological society'" (Boss, 1986: 22). Noel Carroll also argues that contemporary horror articulates postmodern anxieties for "mass audiences, in a manner analogous to the way postmodernism articulates intimations of instability for intellectuals" (Carroll, 1990: 213). Contemporary horror is viewed as the exoteric version of more esoteric postmodern theory.

Arguing along similar lines, Andrew Tudor suggests that the paranoid tendencies in recent horror are symptomatic of a general, post-1960s, social uncertainty generated by a rapidly changing world and "escalating disorder" -- "the culmination of the 'age of delegitimization'" (Tudor, 1989: 222). He argues that the evolution of the genre has involved a "passage from secure to paranoid horror," and, that such horror makes sense in a world which is "fundamentally unreliable" (Tudor, 1989: 213-221). It makes sense in a world in which "we no longer have any reliable maps;" that is, it makes sense in a postmodern world. (Tudor, 1989: 222). Paranoid horror makes sense of the world, and what is horrific, in a manner similar to nihilistic postmodernism. It is the proximity of the threat in the commonplace and the monstrous consequences experienced by the protagonists which contributes to the postmodern character of contemporary horror.<sup>14</sup>

The contemporary horror film posits a threat which is "not simply among us, but rather part of us, caused by us" (Polan, 1984: 202). It also constructs a monster which is increasingly indistinguishable from us, and a world in which the restoration of order is beyond reach. Postmodern horrors are proximate, invasive and relentless. This horror marks a movement away from depicting a threat which comes from somewhere else (the there of Europe in the 1930s and space -- or more properly the U.S.S.R. -- in the 1950s) to depicting a threat which is located here. The remote Transylvanian castle is replaced by the suburban split-level.

In *NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*, for example, a white middle class suburb generates Freddy Kruger, a child molester who was burned to death, and who returns to haunt, and actually kill, his victims while they dream.

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<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed discussion of *VIDEODROME* as Baudrillardian discourse see Bukatman (1990) and for a similar consideration of *THE FLY* see Emberley (1987).

The EXORCIST locates affluent Georgetown as the site of demonic invasion and the horrific transformations of the body of an adolescent girl. In VIDEODROME the threat is monstrous image technology itself and in DAWN OF THE DEAD the horrors primarily unfold in a shopping mall. (Indeed, most of Cronenberg's films and all of Romero's explore the condition of the contemporary.) As Dana Polan points out, recent horror films "look at current modes of everyday life and see that life itself as a source and embodiment of the monstrous" (Polan, 1984: 202).<sup>15</sup>

Indistinguishable from this tendency to cite the everyday as the source of the horror, is the tendency to collapse the categories of normal bodies and monstrous bodies. Contemporary horror often dispenses with the binary opposition of us and them, and, subsequently resists the portrayal of the monster as a completely alien Other characteristic of such 1950s films as IT, THE THING, THEM, THE BLOB. (Polan points out that the extreme Otherness of the monster is indicated by the very titles of these films.) Pete Boss, too, argues that traditional categories of Otherness no longer apply and the more recent films blur the traditional distinction between the human and the monstrous (Boss, 1986: 18). Norman Bates in PSYCHO is, ostensibly, just like us. Regan in THE EXORCIST is both child and demon, the psycho-killers of THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE are unemployed slaughterhouse workers driven to cannibalism by the economy, and, in THE FLY, Seth is genetically fused with a fly and transformed into the monstrous

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, whole subgenres seem to take as a convention locating the horror in the commonplace. Psycho-Killer films, for example, rely on innocuous (albeit sometimes remote) places such as summer camps (SLEEPAWAY CAMP, FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH), schools (NIGHT OF THE CREEPS, PROM NIGHT), trains (TERROR TRAIN, THE SLEEPING CAR), suburbia (A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, HALLOWEEN) and, of course, showers (PSYCHO).

Brundle/Fly.<sup>16</sup> This tendency to generate the horror out of the commonplace and to give it a familiar face (the monster is not simply among us, but possibly us) is tied in postmodern horror to the focus on the body as both site and victim of the monstrous. The consequences of the postmodern threat are explicit and visited at the most intimate of levels; the body is destroyed at the knife -- or the ax or whatever -- wielding hand of a psycho-killer, transformed through demonic possession or mutated by viral or technological invasion.

This "person-as-meat" imagery, the "extreme iconography of personal vulnerability," characteristic of much contemporary horror is consistent with postmodernism's declaration of the death of the subject, and with its "excessive denial...of the category of personhood" (Carroll, 1990: 211-213). This breakdown in the distinction between the norm and the Other, and images of body invasion and transformation, have been viewed in terms of the postmodern notion of the collapse of boundaries between the subject and the object-world. Thus Boss suggests that both horror fiction and postmodern theory "contribute to the same discourse" (Boss, 1986: 23). For example, he accounts for the monstrous consequences experienced by bodies in these films by invoking Jameson's description of a condition "in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject" (Boss, 1986: 23). Like paranoid postmodern theory, then, contemporary horror depicts a world which constructs its own horrors and makes monstrous victims of its

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<sup>16</sup> This tendency to blur the norm into the monstrous, and, subsequently to circulate imagery of bodily invasion and transformation is characteristic of much Cronenberg and Romero. It is also seen in such films as *ALIEN*, *X-TRO*, *THE HIDDEN*, *THE EVIL DEAD*. In fact, it is typical of demonic possession films, as well as those films which are preoccupied with the invasive character of contemporary technological society; both take as their central focus the ostensibly normal body and its subsequent monstrous transformations by either the evil demon of demons or the "evil demon of images."

participants by wreaking havoc on, and in, their very bodies. It demonstrates a "horror at systems which reduce subjects to objects, people to things" (Boss, 1986: 22). These films see the contemporary social world as the location of, and the breeding ground for, what is monstrous; our response to it is one of relentless victimization. Baudrillard and Jameson's postmodern subject is made flesh in the defenseless body of contemporary horror. As well, like the progressive genre, these films hold up social institutions, such as the Law and the Family, to critical scrutiny. They are, in a word, pessimistic; horror happens here and the monsters are us.

Yet, like self-reflexivity, nihilism, itself, does not necessarily constitute a critical stance. The nihilistic sense that "horror can break out anywhere" is often generated in these films by hedonistic libidinal energy (THE HOWLING, SHIVERS) and frequently demands a retreat to "militarism or fascism or aggressive professionalism" (Polan, 1984: 207-208). Inasmuch as some nihilistic visions equate moral decadence with monstrosity, credit it for the collapse of stable social institutions and exploit "a thrill of violence to ends supportive of violent authority" they "can easily fuel desires for regression as well as progress" (Polan, 1984: 209-210). Similarly, some nihilistic visions of technological progress (such as LOGAN'S RUN and THX 1138) can work to "affirm such social values as freedom, individualism, and the family" against a social world seen to be dominated by "terrifying images of collectivization and modernity" (Ryan and Kellner, 1990: 245/244). From this "conservative" perspective, the horrors of technology are opposed to traditional social institutions.

Ultimately, the observation that many horror films construct their sense of what is threatening and monstrous in particularly pessimistic terms, fails to account for the particular ways this dread is expressed and fear is

directed. Recognizing that these films articulate a dissatisfaction with the world does not quite get at what it is about that world which provokes the dissatisfaction. How the contemporary horror film expresses postmodern anxiety about the world, and ourselves, how it dramatizes its nihilistic themes, is central in a discussion about opposition.

What is of interest about the pessimism in contemporary horror is, not so much that the horror has come home, but to whom, particularly to what Other, it has come. In the next chapter, I want to demonstrate that much contemporary horror relies on a monstrous construction of the feminine. That it does this at the same time that it engages in ostensibly oppositional practices indicates that we need to re-think what constitutes opposition in cultural forms generally, and in postmodern horror in particular. Since the feminine figures as monstrous Other in many of these paranoid scenarios, postmodern horror's oppositional potential is best evaluated from a feminist perspective. I conclude by suggesting that contemporary horror is oppositional when anxieties are generated by, and fused to, dominant social institutions and practices and not to a monstrous, feminine Other. Inasmuch as postmodern horror constructs the feminine as a "problem", there is a problem with it.

CHAPTER FOUR  
CONTEMPORARY HORROR AND THE QUESTION OF OPPOSITION  
OR  
THE "PROBLEM" OF THE FEMININE OTHER

Having set the theoretical stage in earlier chapters, it is appropriate now to turn to an examination of specific subgenres, and, particularly to a consideration of the ways in which they figure the feminine. The following analysis discusses contemporary horror films which are resolutely postmodern in their dramatization of the cause of the threat, in their characterization of the monster, and, in the horrific consequences they imagine for their protagonists. To varying degrees, and in different ways, these subgenres locate the cause of the threat in the commonplace everyday reality of contemporary society. Like nihilistic postmodernism, many of these films display a lack of faith in the institutions which constitute society, to the point that the institutions which used to be successful in annihilating the monster in the more secure narratives of the past are now, themselves, at best ineffective, and, at worst, responsible for the horror.

Further, these films tend to play with the distinction between us and them in the figure of a monster which is, in a sense, both. These films reserve a privileged place for images of the invasion and transformation of the body, and in so doing collapse the distinction between normal bodies and monstrous bodies; our own bodies become monstrous. That the consequence of the threat is frequently experienced at the intimate level of the body, suggests a certain similarity to conceptions of the postmodern subject which is seen to be invaded by, and changed as a result of, the contemporary social world. This is, for instance, certainly reminiscent of Baudrillard's mass



which is both the victim of invasive media images, and a monstrous black hole which destroys the social. What ultimately links these various subgenres, then, is their articulation of an proximate threat, their tendency to make monsters of ordinary folks, and, their frequent refusal to provide a satisfying closure to their horrors.

In contrast to an earlier phase within the genre (traditional monster movies and alien invasion films, for example) which alleviated the here and now from responsibility, made a clear distinction in the boundaries between the monster and normalcy, and, resolved their narrative conflicts with the annihilation of the monster, postmodern horror appears to occupy a more adversarial relationship to the social world it mediates. It appears to make sense of contemporary existence in a way that holds that existence responsible, holds it up to critique. Indeed, postmodern horror challenges the image of contemporary society as a secure and beneficial place to be. It is a world which generates its own horrors and makes monstrous victims out of its subjects.

Yet, in addition to the reservations noted earlier, some analyses of postmodern horror indicate that postmodern nihilism is limited as an oppositional strategy, primarily because it generates its paranoia around horrific constructions of woman. For example, Tania Modleski points out that the apparently adversarial attack on dominant institutions in these films is, more specifically, directed at woman; she is the figure who embodies their values.

Importantly, in many of the films the female is attacked not only because, as has often been claimed, she embodies sexual pleasure, but also because she represents a great many aspects of the specious good – just as the babysitter, for example, quite literally represents familial authority [in HALLOWEEN]

(Modleski, 1986b: 163).

Indeed, contemporary horror seems doubly dependent on images of the feminine for its postmodern paranoia; it simultaneously associates the monstrous with the feminine, and, communicates postmodern victimization through images of feminization. As Barbara Creed observes, the sense of postmodern powerlessness is evident in "the theme of 'becoming woman'," in the depiction of the male body as womb in such films as *ALIEN*, *THE THING* and *XTRO*. "From a male perspective" becoming woman is "the ultimate scenario of powerlessness, the ultimate violation of the body" (Creed, 1987: 60). This depiction of the postmodern destruction of the body as a process of feminization is coupled with a tendency to define the monstrous as feminine. Creed also points out that it is the monstrous births which generate the horror in *ALIEN* and *THE BROOD*, and the female body itself which is site and sight of disgust in *THE EXORCIST* (Creed, 1987/1986).

Significantly, this figure of the female victim/monster, characteristic of much contemporary horror, indicates that Otherness has not, as some have suggested, disappeared in postmodern horror. Pete Boss, for example, argues that the "categories of Otherness which traditionally functioned in the horror film are no longer adequate" because, in postmodern horror, "one's own body [is] rendered alien" (Boss, 1986: 24/20). This postmodern dread at the ruination of the physical subject and the conflation of subject/object in the form of a monster which is both victim and threat does not mean, however, that the horror film has dispensed with the category of the Other altogether. Barbara Creed observes, "traditional concepts of Otherness...may well emerge in a new form" (Creed, 1987: 60). Postmodern horror does not expunge the Other so much as redirect it. And the extent to which its nihilism is

dependent on a female victim/monster suggests that the Other of postmodern horror is the feminine. When the monster is also the victim it seems that issues of gender become doubly important. In such monstrous/victim-centered horror, evoking the feminine is the most economical means of demonstrating postmodern paranoia towards both the social world and its effects on us.

That such horror relies on constructions of the feminine, to both characterize the monstrous and dramatize the consequences of the threat, suggests that it is not adequately accounted for by postmodernism alone. Since postmodern horror films often give feminine form to what is fearful, to monstrous Otherness, their adversarial stance, their potential to "serve as a critique of the very ideological justifications by which contemporary society sustains itself," is dependent more on questions of gender than on self-reflexivity and paranoia (Polan, 1984: 210). Postmodernism may account for the fact that much of the horror in contemporary horror happens close to home, but, it does not account for how it is brought home, or, for the consequences on the gendered body of that homecoming. Attention to gender, however, indicates that the horrors have been brought home to mother, or at least to the woman of the house.

In the analysis which follows, I attempt to bring the limitations of postmodern horror into focus by arguing that, because many of these films exhibit progressive strategies at the same time that they imagine monstrousness as feminine, such strategies do not in themselves constitute opposition. Exploring how horror maps woman, what the feminine is to mean, is one way to navigate through these imagined landscapes and to make judgements about horror's reactionary and oppositional moments. The key to the differences between reactionary and oppositional horror is not to be

found in self-reflexive strategies and cynicism; it is to be found in the refusal to conflate the image of the monster with the category of woman.

Oppositional horror refuses to give feminine form to what is horrific about the social world, and to what is monstrous about us.

### Postmodern Horror: A Profile of Subgenres

The contemporary postmodern horror film can be usefully divided into four subgenres: "Psycho-Killer," "Evil Demon," "Techno-Terror," and "Social Horror." Psycho-Killer films, most commonly referred to as Slasher or Stalker (or, more crudely, Slice and Dice) films, are primarily represented by FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH, HALLOWEEN, A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET and their brood of sequels and rip-offs such as SLEEPAWAY CAMP, TERROR TRAIN, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME, HELL NIGHT, SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT and PROM NIGHT. These films frequently locate the source of the horror in common places (such as summer camp, high school or the suburbs), and, in social institutions (such as the family). They are distinguished by their tendency to hinge their horror on an individual, human, and highly personalized, monster. They, further, depict the relentless terrorization of a group (usually teenagers) as the consequence of this threat.

By contrast Evil Demon films rely on a supernatural realm to generate their horrors; here, the cause of the threat is otherworldly, often an abstract demon. After THE EXORCIST, these films are primarily concerned with the demonic invasion of individuals (usually women) and are exemplified by such films as WITCHBOARD, THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS, THE MANITOU, THE EVIL DEAD and THE EVIL DEAD 2: DEAD BY DAWN.

The consequence of the threat is frequently the horrific transformations of the invaded body.

Despite their exchange in a certain postmodern nihilism, films in these two subgenres ultimately deflect their anxieties away from the social world. Generally, Psycho-Killer films tend to locate the monstrous at the level of the individual; they suggest that it is an aberrant personality which should be feared. Conversely, those films that focus on demonic invasion posit irrational and unknowable forces beyond the realm of human responsibility as the source of fear. In both subgenres, the threat may be located in our social world, but that world itself is not at fault. In fact, what is often at fault is some variation of the feminine. Psycho-Killer and Evil Demon films, then, are doubly reactionary: they insist that what should be feared is either the individual or the abstract demon rather than the social world itself; and, they rely on a monstrous construction of the feminine to give form and substance to this Other.

Techno-Terror films largely avoid the tendencies of Psycho-Killer and Evil Demon films to either personalize or abstract the monster. Techno-Terror (exemplified in this analysis by the films of David Cronenberg, but which also includes such films as the Alien series, DEMON SEED, PULSE, VIDEODEAD and, more recently, ROBOCOP, TERMINATOR, TOTAL RECALL and LAWNMOWER MAN) draws its horror from the contemporary social world; it is technology itself that is responsible for the horror. In Cronenberg's films, especially, the monsters are generated by technology, and, as such, they are simultaneously victims. It is the horrific effects that technology has on bodies that is often the focus of these films. Although Techno-Terror films direct our fear towards aspects of the contemporary world (such as medical, media and image technologies, as

opposed to an individual or abstract monster), they tend to mediate this fear through the figure of the female victim-monster. Like Psycho-Killer and Evil Demon films, Techno-Terror's depiction of the contemporary social world as horrific is often dependent on a monstrous and victimized image of the feminine. Here, too, postmodern anxieties are displaced onto woman.

Like Techno-Terror, Social Horror (represented here by the films of George Romero) suggests that the threat is generated by aspects of the social world: the traditional patriarchal family IN NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD; consumerism in DAWN OF THE DEAD; the military in DAY OF THE DEAD and THE CRAZIES, for example. In these film, the paranoia displayed towards contemporary society is not displaced onto, or imagined through, the feminine. Neither is the character of the monster and the consequence of the threat dependent on some variation of the female-victim monster. Social Horror does not filter its pessimism through the feminine. Rather, fear is directed towards a specific social order. The horror is brought home, not to the resident of the house, but to the house (the very structure/institution) itself. It is there, and not in the body of woman, that the threat is found in oppositional horror.

### Psycho-Killers

The Psycho-Killer formula is a simple one and, although variations certainly occur, it can be summed in the following way: some traumatic incident occurs (as a child, Michael watches his sister making love with her boyfriend in HALLOWEEN; the drowning of Jason motivates the actions of the killer in FRIDAY THE 13TH); the resulting monster is frequently an individual (we know them by their first names: Michael, Jason and Freddy);

and the consequences of this threat (the mass destruction of a group of people, usually teenagers) is the focus of the narrative. These films play on postmodern anxieties in a variety of ways: they locate the horror in an identifiable social context (if not in the home then in a familiar location, at camp, at the prom or on a train); they rely on the "person-as-meat" construction of their protagonists; and they, as evident in both their popularity and self-generation in the form of sequels, provide an endless horror in the indestructibility of the monster.<sup>17</sup> Any place can generate the threat, anyone can become a monster, and no one can stop it. Yet, what is of interest here is that the commonplace which generates the threat, the kind of monster which results and the consequences of the monstrous are frequently dependent on woman.

PSYCHO is one of the first of the Psycho-Killer films and, undoubtedly, responsible for some of the conventions of the subgenre. In fact, Robin Wood privileges this film as a turning point in the horror genre generally by suggesting that "[s]ince PSYCHO the Hollywood cinema has implicitly recognized Horror as both American and familial" (Wood, 1979: 19). Hitchcock's film has not only generated a subgenre, but, it seems to have been instrumental in ushering in postmodern horror itself. That is, since PSYCHO it is American society itself which has become the critical focus of the horror film. For that reason, PSYCHO is a logical place to begin an analysis of postmodern horror generally, and Psycho-Killer films in particular.

Like the progressive genre film, PSYCHO disrupts clear cut distinctions between good (embodied by dominant social institutions) and evil (embodied by that which is Other). Indeed, the film consistently reinforces the confusion

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Tudor demonstrates that Psycho-Killer films have reached and maintained a level of popularity over and above films which draw from supernatural or mad science (Tudor, 1989).

of good and evil, safe and unsafe, norm and Other: the wall of a commonplace (and home-improvement oriented) hardware store is covered with knives and other potentially deadly instruments; it is in the everytown U.S.A. Fairvale, and more specifically, in a brightly lit shower, that Marion Crane meets her fate. The implication is that, not only can violence erupt anywhere, but, particularly that it can erupt on the site of common ground. Perhaps the clearest indication that *PSYCHO* subverts traditional tendencies to associate the good with the norm is its assertion that the family is ultimately responsible for generating the horror. Norman Bates is the boy-next-door. Yet, Norman Bates' psychosis, and the threat that he poses, are explained within the parameters of a particular kind of family. It is not the traditional patriarchal family which produces monsters, but an aberration of that family; Norman is a product of a so-called dysfunctional family. Significantly, the dysfunction is a function of the absence of the biological father. Indeed, it is Norman's unusually close relationship with his mother, and, her ultimate abandonment of her son in favor of her second husband, that sets him off. The horror, then, is generated by a family in which the mother constitutes the primary focus.

As Carol Clover points out, not only is it Mrs. Bates' offspring who becomes the monster, his monstrosity is defined to the extent that he is actually she (Clover, 1992). Norman's femininity is expressed not only in his effeminate (bird-like) mannerisms and walk, but also through his possession by his mother. As the psychiatrist explains at the end, Norman was never only Norman, but he was sometimes only mother, and, it was the mother half of Norman who killed. Norman's monstrosity, his Otherness, is a function of his motherhood, his femaleness. His adolescent awkwardness about all matters sexual, as well as his obsessive tie to his mother, further



situate him as a male not yet fully a man. What defines Norman as Other is precisely the ways in which he is not completely male, that is, the ways in which he is woman. He may be, in true postmodern form, the boy-next-door who becomes a monster, his complete Otherness may in fact be questioned, but the degree to which he is Other is the degree to which he is feminine. We are indeed made monstrous.

The consequence of this monstrosity is also deeply dependent on the figure of woman. It seems fair to say that it is the shower scene for which PSYCHO is best known; interestingly, its main cultural reference point is the death of a woman, Marion Crane.<sup>18</sup> The placing of the murder early in the narrative resists the security offered through character identification, which usually lasts the duration of the film, and is said to be characteristic of the progressive genre. In its abruptness, Marion's murder also underscores the apparently arbitrary nature of the attack. The murder occurs just after she has decided to come clean, as it were, and return the stolen \$40,000 dollars; she is not murdered for her obvious crime. Her murder is random, seemingly unconnected to what initially appears to be the motivation for the narrative, the money. The abrupt and arbitrary nature of the attack, and, its occurrence in a most intimate and, until PSYCHO, safe place, is a particularly nihilistic feature of the film. The suggestion here is that anyone, anywhere, anytime and for no reason can become a victim.

While PSYCHO certainly communicates that the threat is at hand, and, that we are all vulnerable to it, what is of interest here is that "anyone" is a

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<sup>18</sup> The death as focal point is replayed more recently in relation to the Psycho-Killer films inasmuch as these films partly exchange in upping the body count. That the number of deaths is a central feature of these films is suggested by the boardgame (actually called "Body Count") designed to accompany films and allow the viewers to predict and keep track of the body count.

woman. The deaths we see, those of Marion and Arbagast, are an interesting point of comparison. As is well known, Marion is stabbed to death in the shower by Norman who is dressed as his mother. The invasion into her space, the vulnerability of her naked position in the shower, and, the brutality of the attack (emphasized by the frenetic pace of the editing and the staccato music) combine to make this the most horrific, and the most memorable, moment in the film.

Yet, this attack is not motivated by the money. The money is, in Hitchcock's word, a "McGuffin," a red herring; it is what prevents the characters from discovering the real cause of Marion's disappearance. The audience, however, is never in doubt. We know what is confirmed by the psychiatrist's explanation: "These were crimes of passion not profit." Marion is killed because of her expression of sexuality and Norman's repression at the hand of his mother. In the scene which precedes (and logically motivates) the murder, Norman voyeuristically watches Marion undress and, because of his arousal by the image of her, the mother half takes over and kills. Marion's victimization is heavily coded as a function of her sexuality.

The murder of Arbagast, on the other hand, takes place in Norman's house (Arbagast's space was not invaded), he is less vulnerable (having entered the house he is on the defensive -- he is also, obviously, clothed) and his attack is not as visually seductive as Marion's (his stabbing is filmed in high angle, and, although the camera follows him falling down the staircase, it maintains a greater distance and avoids the painful extreme closeups provided of Marion). His death is much less spectacular, less a focal point of the film (it happens toward the end in the middle of a general heightened suspense), and, it is not motivated by his maleness in the way that Marion's death is motivated by her femaleness. Marion is defined in sexual terms, her

sexuality is coded as deviant (she is having an illicit affair with a married man and is twice seen in black underwear -- a sure sign of deviance in 1960) and, she is killed for it.

The debt owed to *PSYCHO* by such films as *HALLOWEEN*, *PROM NIGHT*, *TERROR TRAIN*, *SLEEPAWAY CAMP*, *HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME* and *FRIDAY THE 13TH* (to name but a few) is apparent in their location of the threat, the character of the monster and the consequences of his actions. Both *FRIDAY THE 13TH* and *SLEEPAWAY CAMP*, for example, set their horrors in the context of a summer camp; in *HALLOWEEN* and *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* violence erupts in suburban neighbourhoods, and, in *PROM NIGHT* a high school is the setting. Like the town of Fairvale in *PSYCHO*, these locations are right around the corner, and, the monsters which emerge from them are often generated within or by the family.

In *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*, for example, it is the vigilante action of the parents and their subsequent secrecy and denial which is responsible for Freddy Kruger. More particularly, the familial situation is characterized by the absence of the father and the presence of an ineffective alcoholic mother. *HALLOWEEN*'s Michael Myers is also generated within a familial context, only this time it is the sight of his sister's love-making which triggers his monstrosity. (Like Marion Crane, she is promptly killed for the visual pleasure she embodies.) In the *FRIDAY THE 13TH* series, not only does a mother-dominated family produce the monster, but, in the first film, it is the avenging mother herself who turns out to be the killer, in a sense making literal what *PSYCHO* implies: the killer is a woman.<sup>19</sup> Because

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<sup>19</sup> Notable exceptions to this are the monstrous patriarchal families of *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* and *THE HILLS HAVE EYES*. Yet, here too women are the most victimized. There is every indication that Sally's sanity

these films hold up as monstrous non-traditional and specifically woman-led families they are less a critique of the traditional family unproblematically endorsed in secure horror, and more a paranoid lament for its passing.<sup>20</sup>

Although there are other examples of films in which the killer is female (SLEEPAWAY CAMP, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME and PROM NIGHT), like Norman, the majority of psycho-killers are biologically male. Yet, as Carol Clover observes, these killers are frequently defined by gender confusion (the transvestite psychiatrist in DRESSED TO KILL, and, more recently, Buffalo Bill in SILENCE OF THE LAMBS), or, by some form of sexual/familial disturbance which arrests their development and prevents their maturation into full adulthood (in the sequels to FRIDAY THE 13TH Jason's sole motivation is to avenge his mother's death and "his excessive attachment toward [her] is manifested in his enshrining of her severed head," and, in HALLOWEEN Michael obsessively returns to his boyhood home) (Clover, 1992: 29).<sup>21</sup> The monstrousness of these psycho-killers is dependent upon their characterization as not fully male; their Otherness is a function of their confused gender identity generally. More particularly, it hinges on the ways in which the male body has been invaded, in a sense, by the feminine. For example, Norman's condition is explained as a sort of possession by his mother. These are men who are either obsessed with their mothers or, at the very least, with the feminine. This postmodern monster who looks like us seems to resemble some of us more than others.

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is in question by the end of the former and the body of the mother is brutally employed as a means of defense by her children in the latter.

<sup>20</sup> In some respects, ALIEN is also a Psycho-Killer film: a group is pursued by an individual monster generated by an even more monstrous mother. For a discussion of how monstrousness is attached to mothers in that film see Creed (1987).

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of this gender-confused monster in PSYCHO and THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS see Tharp (1991).

Another PSYCHO-like, and defining, feature of these films is that the body count leans heavily in the direction of women. Generally speaking, women characters suffer more frequent and more graphic deaths. They are also more frequently characterized as visual prey for the monster; a status reinforced by the tendency of these films to adopt the monster's point of view and to direct that point of view onto female characters. Women often become the objects of a lingering, predatory and monstrous gaze in these films. In *FRIDAY THE 13TH* and *HALLOWEEN* for example, the deaths of several women are preceded by voyeuristic point-of-view shots from the monster's perspective. That women are more frequently terrorized in these films is evident in what Clover calls "the final girl," the one who is most consistently terrorized but who, at least for the time being (her victory is seldom final), overpowers the monster (Clover, 1992). Laurie saves herself from Michael at the end of *HALLOWEEN* and the killer mother of *FRIDAY THE 13TH* is finally over-powered by that film's final girl. As Clover points out, the final girl is defined both by her refusal to engage in sexual activity and by her traditionally masculine attributes.

It is commonplace in these films for sexual activity to precede the monstrous attacks. *HALLOWEEN* takes this to the extreme by locating the cause of the monstrous transformation in the very sight of sexual activity. In that film, Laurie is the only one of her peers who abstains (she does not even have a boyfriend). Inasmuch as the final girl is pre- or non-sexual she is defined more by her girlhood than by her womanhood. In other words, the final girl is precisely that, a girl. Those female characters who symbolically approach adulthood through engaging in sexual activity are killed off. The one who remains is not fully a woman.

Just as the killer is not fully masculine, [the final girl] 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... (Clover, 1992: 40).

Clover observes that, "lest we miss the point, it is spelled out in her name: Stevie, Marti, Terry, Laurie, Stretch, Will, Joey, Max" (Clover, 1992: 40). What this indicates, then, is that, not only do Psycho-Killer films often rely on a monstrous construction of the feminine for both the cause and character of the monster, and, on the terrorization primarily of women, but, also that the survival of their final girls depends on them being coded as masculine, or at least, not fully woman. The women who survive owe no thanks to their femaleness.

It should also be pointed out that the victory of the final girl is rarely complete. The return of the monster or the threat of his return, often within the same film, (FRIDAY THE 13TH ends with the final girl's dream of Jason's emergence from the lake, and, in HALLOWEEN, the disappearance of Michael at the end suggests his return and omnipresence) indicates that her empowerment is only temporarily effective, and, then, only on a local level. This is an individual victory; she can save her own life, but she can never save her friends or guarantee that the monster has finally been annihilated. If her personal victory is a function of her masculine qualities then the limitations of this victory (true to postmodern nihilism, the horror does continue) come to rest on her female qualities. The horror continues precisely because traditional male authority, such as fathers and the police, are no longer effective. The anxiety about the ineffectiveness of such institutions seems tied to the figure of the final girl: the horror continues because you can't send a woman (let alone a girl) to do a man's job.

These films re-play a certain postmodern nihilism and, like the progressive genre in general, display a pessimistic lack of faith in institutions like the family. They further suggest that monstrosity is in us; despite their frequent supernatural powers, which enable their return from what looked like certain death, psycho-killers were all once human. Yet, this postmodern paranoia which locates the source of the threat close to home, and, constructs a familiar face for the monster is dependent on the feminine for its articulation. Psycho-Killer films not only displace their postmodern anxieties onto the individual monster, they displace them onto some construction of woman. They instruct us to fear the beast within, and that beast within is frequently feminine.

### Evil Demons

What immediately distinguishes Evil Demon films from the Psycho-Killer subgenre is the source of the monster. The horror of these films is generated by an abstract phenomenon: an absolute evil. Since one of the characteristics of postmodern horror is its tendency to posit that the threat comes from within the social order, Evil Demon films, in their privileging of a non-secular horror, seem to deviate from this convention. The horror comes from out there, beyond the human realm; it is independent of the social order. Evil Demon films posit an abstract threat and displace social anxieties onto a pure evil; the source of the horror is not us but "them demons."

This is a central feature of the reactionary horror film described in the preceding chapter; the monster is defined as a pure evil generated outside this social world. Inasmuch as demons are usually of ancient and distant origins,

these films relieve the here and now from responsibility. Particularly, they relieve the contemporary (Western) world from responsibility. In what is a contemporary version of the them and us scenario, other cultures are associated with the demonic. In *THE MANITOU*, for example, it is a Native North American tribe that died out long before the white man's arrival ("pure ethnic occult undiluted by European conceptions") that possesses monstrous power. *THE BELIEVERS* locates a New York barrio as the site of ritual abuse and an African demon as the motivating force. Similarly, in *THE EXORCIST 1* and *2* Iran and Africa, respectively, are the sites of the initial manifestations of the demonic. It is the supposed proximity of these other cultures to the demonic which unleashes evil's earthly presence. These films simultaneously displace social anxieties onto an abstract threat and project that demonic onto other cultures; Others lay claim to the demonic.

Yet, the Other in these films is not completely other worldly, or distinct from the here and now. In Evil Demon films the monster has a double character; he exists both as an abstract phenomenon and, through possession, as a material being. In the first instance, it is apparent that evil demons are usually male. This is especially evident in those films which figure Satan or his off-spring (*THE EXORCIST*, *THE OMEN* and *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*), but, it is also a convention of films which draw from a variety of demons (*THE MANITOU*, *THE EVIL DEAD*, *POLTERGEIST* and *THE ENTITY*). It is not, however, the maleness of the demon which constitutes his Otherness. It is, rather, his demonic, supernatural nature, the degree to which he is not human, not man. (And, in the examples cited, specifically not White, Western man.) It is not his maleness we fear, but his superhuman powers. (Maleness is coded as Other in these films only when the traits -- a deep voice, aggressive action and an unfeminine display of force -- appear in women;



such gender confusion is clearly a sign of possession.) Like psycho-killers, then, these monsters are characterized as not really (hu)man. This is picked up more obviously in the ways in which such demons materialize. In Evil Demon films, the horror is brought home, not so much to the family (although the family certainly figures in many of these films), but to a much more personal site: the physical body.

These demons lay in wait for some access to this world; the professor's recording in *THE EVIL DEAD* reveals that the "creatures lay dormant but are never truly dead." The idea that demons need a portal is picked up literally in the title *THE GATE*. In *POLTERGEIST* the television, as well as a closet, provide entry for, and to, the spirit world; in *THE EVIL DEAD* the playing back of a recorded incantation summons the demons of that film; in *THE EXORCIST* Regan supposedly opens the door to the demonic by playing with "Captain Howdy" on the ouiji board; and in *DEMONS* a horror film itself serves as the gate. These films often depend on the idea that demons can gain entry to this world; they just need to be invited. What is of interest here is that, in possession films, this portal is frequently the body. The construction of the body as a conduit for the demonic underscores the proximate and invasive character of the threat. The invasion of the body by powerful and inexplicable forces, and its transformation into something monstrous, are particularly postmodern features of these films. Inasmuch as our bodies are defenseless against "the evil demon of images" in Baudrillard's world, so too do these films suggest that the body is infinitely transformable into something monstrous. It is in the body that these films articulate both the character and the consequence of the threat.

Although the ultimate source of the monstrous is out there, in the supernatural, its horror is manifested in the commonplace, most commonly

in bodies, and its consequences are tied to horrific transformations of those bodies. Yet, this postmodern dread of body invasion and the subsequent expression of fear of one's own body is neatly displaced onto female characters. If, as Clover points out, Psycho-Killer films rely on the phenomenon of the "female victim-hero" then it seems fair to suggest that one of the motivating feature of Evil Demon films is their "female victim-monster" (Clover, 1992). That is, Evil Demon films tend to conflate the character of the monster and the consequence of his action through projecting both onto the female body. The female victim-monster suffers the consequence of the threat (women are often the victims of demonic possession), and, as the agent of the demon, she also poses a monstrous threat to those not possessed. It is through her that threat takes shape. That evil demons frequently take the form of women through possession, and, that they appear as women throughout, not only deflects the source of the horror from their maleness, but also suggests that the threat may be less abstract than it initially appears.

Inasmuch as absolute evil manifests itself in Evil Demon films through figures of women -- and women's bodies are used to both characterize the monster and depict the consequence of its power -- fear, horror and disgust are directed less out there than in here, in the body, but particularly the female body. *THE EXORCIST* is notable in this respect and, like *PSYCHO* is credited with unleashing a particular kind of horror.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, its depiction of the demonic possession of the female body has become a convention of the subgenre. The spectacular, if disgusting, ruination of Regan's body may trigger a "how-did-they-do-that?" response but it also, most certainly, leaves us with the image of woman as the site and

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<sup>22</sup> As in *PSYCHO*, the context for the horror is a woman-led family.

sight of horror.

Similarly, in *THE MANITOU* women are the exclusive conduits for the demonic: two minor female characters carry messages from the demon and the main character, Karen, is actually impregnated by (and with) him, and, ultimately gives birth to a full grown Indian Medicine Man, "the Devil himself." She also serves as the portal for the manitous of the hospital technology (everything, we are told, has a manitou). In the film's climactic scene, the machines get together and direct their positive energies through Karen, successfully sending the demon back. That she is, for the first and only time, nude in this scene suggests that the positive energy she directs is a function of her sexuality. Not only are good manitous tied to Western technology (against the primitive demons) but they are also tied to an objectified woman.

Considering that the horror centers around Karen, it is significant that her role is a relatively minor one. Although it is her possessed condition that motivates the story, the narrative's focus is Harry's search for a cure for Karen, and his evolving friendship with the good Medicine Man. In fact, Karen spends most of the film in a comatose state. She exists, on both a structural and a thematic level, as a device: structurally, she generates the story of Harry and John Singing Rock; thematically, as both victim and monster, she serves as the vehicle of both forces of good and evil. Karen is not only a conduit for the spirit world, she has also become the ground on which the two cultures meet. She is, in a sense, the battleground. After the demon has been expunged, Karen disappears from the narrative (her condition is never confirmed) and the film concludes by solidifying the bond between the two men with Harry's unfortunate line "If I can call one Indian a

friend."<sup>23</sup>

The possessed female victim/monster also appears in the more recent *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*. In this film, Satan exists as a swirling green liquid which has been preserved over millions of years by a secret order of Catholic monks. Here, too, the demonic takes the female body as its material form. Satan possesses his first female victim, Susan, by literally forcing himself down her throat. She, in turn, possesses Lisa in the same manner in a scene highly charged with lesbian connotations.<sup>24</sup> In an extreme version of the penetration/possession of Susan and Lisa, Kelly is invaded through her eyes and mouth by green fluid which has collected on the ceiling. In a monstrous reversal (she does not give birth to the fluid but rather absorbs it into her system) Kelly gives birth to herself; she is transformed into the son of the Devil. It is through her, as her, that the demon materializes. She was, in fact, pre-chosen; early in the film she discovers a bruise on her arm which develops into a mark, identified as the sign of the devil.

Women, here, seem pre-determined, pre-disposed to demonic possession, to being the portal through which demons find entry.<sup>25</sup> A distinction is made here between those who are directly possessed (that is

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<sup>23</sup> There is a degree of racist stereotyping in this film as well: as payment for his services, John asks for a donation to the Indian College Fund – a noble gesture – and for tobacco for himself -- they still come cheap; he is also the first to declare "Harry, face it, we're beaten."

<sup>24</sup> Lisa interprets Susan's advances as sexual and begins to protest uncomfortably.

<sup>25</sup> This association of women with dark, demonic forces is also apparent in *THE BELIEVERS*. In that film, the family headed by the single-male is brought into the realm of the occult through the actions of both the Hispanic maid and the independent woman (she owns the house he rents) who lives next door. It is she who becomes obsessed with, and dependent on, the voodoo rituals. By the end of the film, the audience thinks the characters have finally escaped the threat by moving to the country until the father discovers the mother's alter. In clinging to these rituals, she is responsible for the continuation of the horror.

those who come in direct contact with demonic forces, and for all intents and purposes, become that force) and those who are victims of the initial victim-turned-monster. For instance, only women come into direct contact with the fluid, with the original evil. It is they, doing the Devil's bidding, who transform the male victims into zombies. The men, as zombies, only follow the women's orders. In fact, one commits suicide in a futile effort to escape succumbing to the demonic.

By the same token, in *THE EVIL DEAD*, the female characters are the almost exclusive conduit for the demons. Indeed, the association between the feminine and the demonic extends beyond the story at hand. For example, the tape recording the group finds even informs us that, although the professor (in whose cabin they are staying) discovered the book which allows access to the demons, it was his wife who originally fell victim to them. In fact, not until the end, and in a comparatively brief scene, is a man transformed into a demon. Here, as well, abstract demons take on female form.

The first to provide access to the demons is Cheryl, the, significantly, unattached sister of Ash. The film sets her up, not only as the initial portal for the demonic, but also as pre-disposed to its presence. She, for example, hears their call to "join us," and, while drawing, is overcome by the demons which force her to sketch a primitive face. Cheryl is also the focus of the demons' predatory gaze through the cabin window. Yet, it is the scene in which the actual possession occurs that underlines the brutal way in which women are invaded in this film. Cheryl, thinking there is something in the woods, ventures out only to be attacked, constrained and raped by them, that is, "the woods themselves." Suffice it to say that the dazzling effects are rendered inconsequential in what is a lengthy scene of violent penetration followed by a relentless chase back to the cabin.

Eventually, both Linda and Shelly are possessed and the two male characters are left to defend themselves in what stands out in recent horror as extreme gore. Since these demons must be dismembered, the image of horror we are left with is, not only the sight of a monstrous female body which has become home to the demonic, but also one which has to be hacked to death, literally fragmented in order to be destroyed. Shelly, for example, ends up as quivering pieces of flesh, and, Linda is finally decapitated after Ash beats her with a two-by-four. This film demonstrates the extent to which the female characters are both victims and monsters. Here, as both victims and representatives of the demons, their bodies are further victimized by those who are not possessed.

The postmodern preoccupation with the death of the subject is certainly realized in these films in the specter of the ruination of the body. As well, since the monsters are generated from human characters with whom we are allowed to identify, they, like psycho-killers, have some of us in them. (THE EVIL DEAD makes a point of this by having one of the women transform back into Ash's girl friend -- only to deceive him, of course). These pessimistic scenarios warn of intimate invasion and construct a monster which is just like us. Yet, they often displace these anxieties about the insecurity of the subject onto the body of woman. Like Psycho-Killer films, the Evil Demon subgenre frequently relies on horrific constructions of the feminine, and on the terrorization of the female body to articulate, and direct, postmodern dread. In these films, then, the horror is brought home through its earthly manifestation as woman. Since women are often the portal to this irrational threat, the conduit which allows its entry, their bodies are demonic, Other in some way. Evil Demon films are as much about women's bodies as source of the threat as they are about an abstract threat from outside the

rational.

### Techno-Terror

The majority of David Cronenberg's films deal with the transformation of the body as a result of scientific or technological experimentation. In their location of the threat in science, and in their depiction of its monstrous consequences on the human subject, these films exploit, more than *Evil Demons* and *Psycho-Killers*, a postmodern nihilism which warns of invasive and monster-generating technologies. Rather than directing fear towards an individual monster or an abstract demon, these films locate the source of the threat in social institutions; the horrors are, indeed, generated by the social world. For example, in *SHIVERS*, scientific experimentation produces parasites which, when spread by sexual contact, transform their victims into raw libidinal energy (thus guaranteeing their own propagation). *RABID* deals with the effects of medical practices (plastic surgery and skin grafting), and, in *THE BROOD*, a form of psycho-therapy ("psychoplasms") generates the threat.

In addition, in both *VIDEODROME* and *THE FLY* technology itself (video signals and Tele-Pods) generate monstrous bodies, and, in *DEAD RINGERS* it is the mal-practice of gynecology which serves as the breeding-ground (their specific concern is with reproductive technology) for the monstrous twins. Apparently, it is towards the social world, and the scientific/technological practices which support it, that these films direct their fear. They also direct their fear towards the monstrous consequences such practices have on the people who come in contact with them. Monsters in Cronenberg's films usually result from some kind of interaction between

science/technology and the body, rather than from demonic invasion or individual psychosis. They are monsters which are both the victims of science/technology, and, an indication of the horrific legacy of those practices.

Cronenberg's contribution to postmodern dread about the contemporary social world and the ruination of the subject can be categorized as either "Viral Body" horror (SHIVERS, RABID and THE BROOD) or "Techno-Body" horror (VIDEODROME, THE FLY and DEAD RINGERS).<sup>26</sup> In the former, it is the body itself, as a result of its sexual or procreative potential, which is the threat, and, in the latter, the body mutates as a result of direct contact with technology; the distinction here is between films that depict a threat of the body, and those that depict a threat to the body. Yet, like other nihilistic contemplations of the postmodern condition, scenarios of invasive technologies and bodily mutations, in both Viral Body and Techno-Terror, depend on the figure of the female/victim monster to give meaning to their horrors.

### Viral Body Horror

What is distinctive about SHIVERS, RABID and THE BROOD is that they locate the source of the threat in science. Yet, significantly, in each of these films, the threat is generated by an individual scientist, rather than by widespread practices. That is to say, the threat may be of scientific origin, but it finds its genesis in the local tamperings of specific scientists, distinguished by their unique and visionary experiments, who inhabit a place outside the mainstream of scientific practices. Even the rural settings of Raglan and

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<sup>26</sup> Not all of Cronenberg's films fit neatly into this categorization. I have chosen to concentrate on the ones that do.



Keloid's clinics suggest their distance from dominant science.<sup>27</sup> In these films, the scientists represent a science of personal vision. This dissociates bad science from mainstream practices, and, diverts critical attention away from the norm.

It is, further, a personal vision which is dedicated to the alleviation of human misery. Dr. Raglan in *THE BROOD* is committed to helping his patients work through their psychological traumas. In *RABID* Dr. Keloid saves Rose's life, and *SHIVERS'* Dr. Hobbes attempts to find a way to get people in touch with their bodies. These scientists mean well (Handling, 1983). Science fails because of some unpredictable event over which the scientists themselves have no control, and to which they ultimately become victims. They have inadvertently unleashed the horror; they, too, suffer: Keloid is infected with rabies; Hobbes commits suicide; and Raglan, redeemed by his act of heroism (he risks his life to save a child), is killed by the brood of mutant children his science has helped to create. This not only directs fear away from widespread social practices and toward localized crazies, it also shifts the focus of dread away from the scientist -- he is well-meaning, if misdirected -- and toward the result of his mistake: the horrific body.

Science does not fail in these films because of its own workings; it fails when the body is introduced. Each experiment deals directly with the body: Raglan's therapy is based on bodily expressions of anger; Keloid's plastic surgery is about transforming the body; and Hobbes' aim is to reconnect with the body. Science initially causes the threat, but the focus of the narrative becomes the monstrous body. *SHIVERS*, *RABID* and *THE BROOD* ultimately

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<sup>27</sup> This is also picked up in *DEAD RINGERS*. The Mantle twins are noted for revolutionizing reproductive technologies. Here, too, the experimenting is done on women; one of them remarks "We don't do husbands." Women, it seems, make better patients.

project both the character and the consequence of the monstrous onto the body. The initial threat of science is transformed into a threat of the body, particularly the female body.

It is Cronenberg's tendency to project evil and revulsion onto the female body that provokes Robin Wood to reserve a privileged place in the reactionary wing of the horror genre for his films. Both *SHIVERS* and *THE BROOD* are considered to be the "precise antithesis of the genre's progressive potential;" the "ultimate dread" in these films is "of women usurping the active, aggressive role that patriarchal ideology assigns to the male" (Wood, 1979: 24). In *THE BROOD*, Raglan's psychoplastic therapy induces transformations in the bodies of his patients which range from welts, to cancerous tumors, to the monstrous children of the title. Yet, the horror is tied less to Raglan than to some aspect of the feminine. It is particularly the mothers in this film which produce the horror. For example, Nola's rage is a result of her abusive mother and her ineffectual father who failed to protect her.<sup>28</sup> The cycle of abuse is transferred from mothers to daughters. The film concludes with the suggestion, that, although the father was successful in rescuing his daughter, he was too late to protect her from the influence of her mother. By the end of the film Candy's arm bears the physical marks of rage as well. It seems that the over-present mother and the absent father constitutes the problem family. The family which produces the horror is one in which the male is, at best, ineffectual and powerless, and, at worst, rendered

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<sup>28</sup> While Cronenberg's films do not usually concern themselves with family horror, *THE BROOD* makes the family, and its preservation as male-led, a central concern. Interestingly, both mutant families in *THE BROOD* are dysfunctional inasmuch as they are female-led: the ineffectual father of Nola's childhood gives way to the totally absent/unnecessary father of the brood. Monstrous children have no father; they do, however, have too much mother.

completely irrelevant by a monstrous mother. Nowhere is this more clear than in the characterization of Nola as monster.

Not only is the cause of the horror directed away from Raglan and toward the mothers, but, the most monstrous implication of his therapy is graphically articulated through Nola's maternal body. Her rage finds outward expression in the brood of mutant children which she produces in a sac on the outside of her body. They are the "children of her rage," and as Raglan points out, "she is one of them." That the brood is Nola is also suggested by the murders they commit. Each is directed at a source of her rage: her parents; the school teacher she mistakenly suspects is having an affair with her husband; and Raglan himself. Her monstrousness is not only a result of an abusive mother, it is defined precisely in terms specific to her reproductive potential; that is, Nola is a source of disgust because of her ability to give birth single-handedly. Nola herself draws attention to this in a scene in which she gives birth to one of the mutant children. Her mouth covered with blood (she has just licked her newborn clean), she speaks her husband, Frank's, and presumably the audience's, thoughts: "I disgust you, I sicken you."<sup>29</sup> The mother, then, is doubly horrific: she both causes and is the monster.

In *RABID* and *SHIVERS*, as well, scientific experiments on women's bodies result in consequences which have much more to do with the female body as a site of disgust, than with male science as a source of horror. As in *THE BROOD*, the horror in *RABID* is dependent on the monstrous transformation of the female body. Rose develops a vaginal-like slit in her arm-pit, complete with a phallic protrusion, after plastic surgery. She is both a "vampire" (she develops a hunger for human blood), and, the original source

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<sup>29</sup> It is significant that Cronenberg intercuts this scene with Raglan's rescue of Candy; Raglan's self-sacrifice is compared with Nola's selfish procreation of the brood and, consequently, herself.

of a form of rabies which reaches epidemic proportions by the end of the film. That her monstrosity is attached to her sexuality is evident in the choice of the actress, Marilyn Chambers, who comes to the film pre-coded as a porn star.<sup>30</sup> It is precisely Rose's aggressive, literally phallic, sexuality which defines her as monstrous. As Michael O'Pray observes, "if Rose possesses the phallus then it is a bad object" (O'Pray, 1984: 50). The sexually aggressive woman is monstrous. Rose's sexuality is also associated with illness inasmuch as it through her sexual activity that she spreads the rabies and contaminates others.

This image of sexuality as contamination and illness is also evident in *SHIVERS*: the parasites are described as both aphrodisiac and venereal disease (visually, they are both phallic and excremental). Here, as well, the sexual body is the ultimate focus of horror. Stripped of inhibition by the parasites, and freed from repressive constraints, those infected live out their sexual urges, and, by the end of the film, carry their illness to the broader community. Horrific sexuality is alternately conceived in this film as incest, lesbianism and geriatric sex -- that these sexualities are constructed as equally aberrant is an obvious problem here. As Robin Wood points out, any expression of sexuality in *SHIVERS* generates revulsion and disgust (Wood, 1983).

Although the horror here is not specifically a function of the female body, the parasite's original home is in a woman, and, it is her sexual promiscuity that initially spreads the disease. Further, the film's horrific center-piece is the parasite invasion of Barbara Steele (another star who

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<sup>30</sup> This use of a porn star in the lead role has not only been recently replayed in the made-for-TV movie, *THE TOMMYKNOCKERS*, with the casting of Tracy Lords, it also indicates that there are telling connections between some horror films and porn. For a discussion of horror and porn see Williams (1991).

comes sexually pre-coded from the horror genre itself). Sexually charged by both the nature of the invasion (the parasite enters her vagina), and, her naked vulnerability (she is taking a bath), this scene is reminiscent of *PSYCHO*'s shower scene. The original scientific cause, then, is over-shadowed by this image of the body as a site of contamination and transmission.

In these films, then, horror is not so much generated by this world as by the viral body which inhabits it. It is the body, and the eruptions within, which constitute the monstrous. The monstrous body is simultaneously its own victim. Specifically, it is the female body which both characterizes the monstrous and suffers its consequences. What this means in terms of oppositional potential is that Viral Body horror is limited in its critique of the social world because of its tendency to direct fear towards the body in general, and the female body in particular. This viral body directs critical attention away from the social and places it on what is most personal.

### Techno-Body Horror

Techno-body films direct their postmodern anxieties at the world around us; they maintain that it is technology and the social world, and not some eruption in the physical body, that causes the monstrous transformations. For example, the ultimate threat in *VIDEODROME* is the multi-national corporation, "Spectacular Optical" (it makes "missile guidance systems for N.A.T.O. and inexpensive eye-glasses for the Third World"). The horror is generated by the corporation's appropriation of "Videodrome" technology for their own moralistic ends (echoing the New Right, one of their followers declares that the world is a cess pool filled with moral degenerates). In *THE FLY*, it is the computer which, when faced with the

presence of the house fly in Seth's Tele-Pod, makes the rational decision and fuses Seth with the fly. Significantly, these films also depend on the interactions of their characters with technology: Max, the protagonist of *VIDEODROME*, frequently interfaces with video technology, and Seth, the scientist in *THE FLY*, experiments with teleportation right up until his tragic death. The monstrous body is continually seen in relation to technology. That is, while viral body horror transfers the threat onto the body, these films focus more directly on technology and socio-cultural practices as the threat.

Both *VIDEODROME* and *THE FLY*, then, tie the source of the threat to corporate interests and scientific rationality, respectively, rather than to an individual psycho-killer, abstract demon or viral body. The threat, in other words, is generated by the high-tech postmodern world; it comes from within the social order, not from within us. Further, it is not the body, in and of itself, which is horrific, but the explicit invasion and transformation of the body by technology. This characteristic of Techno-Body horror is an indication of its critical potential; in these films the threat is in widespread social practices, and, has monstrous consequences for individual subjects. Yet, these films also displace their postmodern anxieties onto anxieties about the feminine.

In *VIDEODROME*, Spectacular Optical's plan to use the videodrome signal to penetrate and manipulate human consciousness is executed through the image of woman. Like Baudrillard's seductive evil demon of images, the video signal is associated with female characters from the outset; the film opens with Max's Girl Friday's video-taped wake-up call. The central female, character, Nikky Brand, is also introduced through a video monitor (on the set of the "Rena King" show) and, during the course of the film, becomes increasingly associated with videodrome itself. When Max plays her a

videodrome tape, she responds, "I was born to be on that show;" she is, by nature, image. In fact, it is through the image of Nikky Brand that Max is seduced by Spectacular Optical.

The horrific, feminine seductiveness of video technology is most poignantly expressed in a scene in which Max's television broadcasts Nikky's lips, in extreme close-up, and hyperreal, pulsating, three dimensionality. Her erotic enticement to Max to "come to me, come to Nikky," results in him literally being engulfed by the television; her lips seem to devour his head. So linked to video technology is Nikky, that her image is as effectively used by Spectacular Optical's adversary, Bianca O'Blivion, to induce Max's suicide. Although Bianca's father, Brian O'Blivion, himself is tied to the image (he exists only in video form), Nikky murders his video image and effectively supplants him as the film's video personality. That is to say, his role in the narrative as image is replaced by Nikky; after she murders him on Videodrome it is her image which seduces Max. (It is also of interest that the daughter of Brian O'Blivion inherits his Cathode Ray Mission.) The body of woman is further associated with technology during the hallucination in which Max whips a television set that alternately broadcasts the bound image of Nikky and Marsha. Technology is imagined as monstrous in as much as it is imagined as feminine.

Conversely, in *THE FLY*, technology is distinguished from the feminine and associated with a rational male world. Seth's exclusion of the body (which for Cronenberg seems inextricably linked to the feminine) is neatly captured in his wardrobe: he has multiple copies of the same clothes to avoid thinking about what to wear; that is, to avoid thinking about the body. In fact, Seth can only teleport inanimate objects until a woman (Ronnie) introduces him to the "flesh." Like Seth, the technology has to be taught to

incorporate the body. It is the introduction of the body, signified by woman, into this rational, technological universe which precipitates the horror in *THE FLY*. The monster here is generated by the computer's incorporation of the fly's body into its program.

It is the presence a foreign body (that of the fly) which precipitates the horror in this film. As Creed observes, "through the metaphor of the body, the film draws parallels between the woman and the fly -- reinforced by the nightmare in which she gives birth to a gigantic maggot" (Creed, 1987: 61). It is not technology itself which is monstrous but rather the presence of the body of the Other, particularly the female Other. (This idea is picked up in *DEAD RINGERS*: the introduction of the mutant female body -- "it's the bodies, they're all wrong" -- precedes the development of Bev's "radical surgical means" to correct its Otherness.) In *VIDEODROME* and *THE FLY*, then, what makes technology threatening is precisely the introduction of the feminine into the male world of scientific rationality; it is technology's association with the feminine which makes it monstrous.

Further, both films articulate the consequences of this monstrous technology through the initial invasion and subsequent transformation of the bodies of their protagonists. In *VIDEODROME*, not only is Max's consciousness invaded by videodrome-induced hallucinations, he, in true Baudrillardian spirit, is transformed into a "switching centre for all the networks of [Spectacular Optical] influence." As is often noted, Max develops a vaginal-like slit in his stomach through which he is programmed by the insertion of a video cassette. Modleski points out that this vision of the victimization of the protagonist by invasive technology is "made to seem loathsome and fearful through the use of feminine imagery" (Modleski, 1986b: 163). Ironically, the victim of seductive (feminine) technology is the



passive, feminized, spectator. Max's emasculated powerlessness is further suggested in the scene in which his gun produces multiple penetrating metal tentacles and fuses with his hand. With his defenses down, he is open to all means of penetration.

Similarly, in *THE FLY* the body of Seth is fused with the fly; he is not so much feminized through penetration as through incorporating the feminine into his molecular structure. What makes Seth monstrous is his flyness. As Creed suggests, this flyness is coded as feminine: when "the metamorphosis is complete...man fully signific[s] the female -- a monstrous fetishized insect" (Creed, 1987: 61). As well, Seth's gradual transformation into the Brundle-fly is signaled by his increasing appetite, particularly, for sugar. He is frequently seen consuming: in one scene, he loads his coffee with sugar; in another, he compulsively eats ice-cream from the box; in yet another, junk-food containers litter his apartment. This monstrous over-consumption of junk food/culture invokes Baudrillard's devouring, feminized mass. Seth's monstrous inability to control his consumption is a feminine disorder.

The Brundle-fly and Max's techno-body not only capture the postmodern collapse of the distinction between subject and object, and contemporary horror's collapse of the monster and the victim, they also point out the degree to which both the monster and his victimization centers around woman. It is interesting that Viral Body horror depends on the initial or exclusive female victim of technology, while these films, which are more expressly about the threat to the body, focus on men. The female body is diseased because it is a female body while the male body is horrific to the extent that it is invaded, made feminine.

The ultimate consequence of the threat in these films is not only a matter of becoming woman; it is also a matter of the death of the male.

Cronenberg's films deal with the postmodern notion of the death of the subject, and, they reveal what is implicit in much nihilistic postmodern theory. It is the death of the individual male subject that is lamented. In both *VIDEODROME* and *THE FLY*, the nihilistic ending is generated out of the tragic death of the individual male. The deaths of Max and Seth are not without their sense of tragedy: Max is compelled by Nikky's image to commit suicide, and Seth dies in a last desperate attempt to hold onto his humanity. Techno-terror films lament the final, tragic, exit of the male subject whose disintegrating power is seen as a function of the feminine.

Cronenberg's films ultimately project their postmodern anxieties onto individualized, sexualized or feminized bodies. Viral Body films do not tie their horrors to material conditions themselves, but, to aberrations of those conditions (the mad scientist, the experimental technology, the single-parent-mother-led family), and, Techno-Terror takes as its focus the horrific character of the feminized body. Because of this, these films are limited in their oppositional potential, in their ability to offer a critique of contemporary conditions. In mapping their horrors about the contemporary condition onto images of mutant women and emasculated men, onto what dominant culture rejects, they deflect their threat away from the social order and onto what that social order itself disenfranchises; they, in a sense, blame the victim rather than the social practices themselves.

### Social Horror

George Romero's films share with other postmodern horror, the sense that the threat is part of the contemporary social order, and, that it subjects normal people to its monstrous control. Yet, what is distinctive about films

like *THE CRAZIES*, *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*, *DAWN OF THE DEAD* and *DAY OF THE DEAD* (and Social Horror films, generally) is their insistence that the source of the threat is already here in the social order; what is threatening are the normal workings of society. In characterizing the monster, these films further refuse the feminine (postmodern) Other. They refuse to characterize the monster as anything other than the social order itself; bodies in Romero's films are not monstrous because they are human (feminine) bodies, but, because they are inscribed with social practices.<sup>31</sup> The horror, then, originates in dominant social practices, not in some deviation from them. The monster truly is us; not the us of the monstrous postmodern Other (the body feminine), but, the us of the social order (the body politic).

In *THE CRAZIES*, for example, the military is responsible for a chemical weapon which leaks into the water supply of a small town and drives its inhabitants crazy. It is in its socially sanctioned role as defender and representative of the nation (developing weapons) that the military is at its most threatening. What generates the horror is not some aberration of the military in the form of a mad scientist but commonplace military practice itself. The monsters, the crazies, which result from this practice do not deflect

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<sup>31</sup> Other films can be classified as Social Horror because of their tendency to locate the threat and the monster in widespread, and mainstream, social practices: in *NIGHTBREED*, it is the bigoted inability of normal society (represented by the church and the law) to accept those who are different (the nightbreed) which is more monstrous than the monsters themselves; in *THE PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS* the white slum landowners (significantly a retro-heterosexual couple (circa 1950s) who fulfill traditional -- if a bit kinky (they are into 'S/M') -- gender roles) are responsible for the horror (they are also portrayed as the real monsters in contrast to the people under the stairs who turn out to be their abused children); in *THE STEPFATHER 1* and *2*, it is the entry of the traditional father into the mother-centered families, and, the subsequent constitution of the traditional patriarchal family, which generates the horrors; and, in *THE CANDYMAN*, the monster is the result of racist paranoia which provokes the lynching of a financially successful African American after Reconstruction.

attention away from the cause of the threat (and onto the female body, for example) but are, rather, inscribed with the characteristics of the source.

In contrast to Cronenberg's films (in which technology becomes threatening when the body is introduced, and, the body, as the site of horror, is monstrous), Romero's monsters are imbued with the qualities of what causes them. The monsters in these films mirror their social roots rather than deflect them elsewhere. For example, the transformation of ordinary people into violent lunatics, into crazies who commit indiscriminate and unmotivated acts of violence, is associated with the military's transformation of men into soldiers, into killers. The craziness of the monsters is not only caused by military practice, it also becomes an expression of its logic; they are, in a sense, taught to be crazy. In fact, the soldiers themselves are increasingly characterized as monstrous: dressed in white contamination suits and gas masks (which contribute to their threatening appearance), they forcefully invade people's homes, tear children from parents and eventually quarantine the citizens in the high school gym.

What is horrific here is, secondarily, the crazies, and, first and foremost, the brutal exercise of martial law. This extends to the search and destroy mission for those who have evaded the military. Here, the military's pursuit and indiscriminate elimination of people (who may or may not be crazy) is central in coding the military itself as monstrous. (One character even comments that the soldiers are "enjoying it.") It is also the military's failure to deal effectively with the situation, (again, because of its own, normal, rules) which provides it with monstrous connotations. The scientist they send to the town is chosen, not because his skills will be exploited most effectively there, but, because the order was given to "send the first scientist contacted." As he points out, he is helpless without his lab. Following the

order, that is, following proper military procedure, prevents finding a solution.

The cause of the threat in the Dead Trilogy is never conclusively explained (although the characters' speculations range from radiation, in NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, to the wrath of God, in DAY OF THE DEAD). In leaving the actual cause of the threat ambiguous, these films suggest, not that it comes from nowhere but, on the contrary, that it comes from everywhere. It is pervasive and endemic; a structural part of our social disorder. That the social context itself generates the threat in the trilogy is suggested at the beginning of NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD. In the opening scene, the prominent American flag places the graveyard in the context of contemporary America, suggesting that contemporary America itself is a graveyard (Wood, 1979: 93). It also suggests that, as a graveyard, it is contemporary America which generates the Living Dead. These zombies are made in the U.S.A. The zombies themselves are characterized, less as individuals, and more as the general American public; they are frequently figured in groups representative of a broad range of social positions – they come from all walks of life. This suggests that the horror is widespread and systemic; it's in all of us, not just us women.

By not directly specifying a particular cause for the zombies, these films suggest that the threat is capable of manifesting itself in a variety of dominant practices and institutions. For example, Robin Wood argues that, in NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, "the zombies' attacks...have their origins in (are the physical projection of) psychic tensions that are the product of patriarchal male/female or familial relationships" (Wood, 1979: 91). Unlike other horrible families, the families in this film generate monsters because they are normal; anxieties are provoked, not by deviant, mother-centered, families,

but by traditional, male-centered, ones.<sup>32</sup> The film begins with a brother and a sister's visit to their father's grave; with their participation in a social ritual which aims to affirm the patriarchal family (even in death). Their gesture is one of respect for the patriarch. That this family is the normal patriarchal family is also suggested by the fact the their mother was too weak to make the trip.

It is this ritual of affirming the patriarchal family which initiates the horrors in *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*. Yet, their graveyard visit is dominated by quarrelsome references to their familial responsibilities. Their resentful attitudes toward family responsibility, and their simultaneous acting out of expectations (the visit to their father's grave), suggest that this normal family is only a matter of appearances; it is troubled underneath the facade. Indeed, it is troubled because of the facade. In fact, the first zombie attack occurs in the graveyard just after Barbara's brother aggressively frightens her with "They're coming to get you Barbara." It is in the context of the traditional, male-dominated, family that the zombies come to life; zombies are all in the family. Significantly, it is Barbara's brother (they actually come to get him) who attacks her later in the film.

The zombie attacks are not only generated within the context of the family, the family itself is characterized as monstrous. This normal-family-as-monster theme is also suggested by the nuclear family that takes refuge from marauding zombies in an abandoned farmhouse (itself a familiar metaphor for the traditional family). The father, a traditional patriarch, is not only domineering and racist, but dangerous: he risks the lives of his family (by insisting that they take shelter in the cellar, even though it offers no means of

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<sup>32</sup> Lest I make instant enemies of all my male friends who are also fathers, I should stress that it is a particular/patriarchal kind of fathering which is the target here.

escape) in order to maintain his disintegrating control. His need to control, to live out the role of the traditional father, is demonstrated in his abusive behaviour toward his wife -- when she challenges his authority he slaps her.

It is important to note here that this father is not characterized as threatening because of his biological maleness, because of his body, in the way that so many mothers are. He is not threatening because he has the Phallus; he is threatening because he uses it in particular ways. He is threatening to the extent that he lives out socially constructed rules of masculine behaviour. That his threat is a function of his social position, rather than his biology, is suggested by the fact that he also assumes a position of dominance in relation to another male, the African American character, Ben. He most forcefully exerts his control over those to whom he feels superior, women and other races; the monstrous father embodies qualities which link him to the broader social practices of sexism and racism. In fact, it is in response to Ben's challenge to his power that this father figure risks the lives of his family. Taken in this context, the weakness of the mother (she is capable only of bitching) is not so much tied to her femaleness as to the very organization of the patriarchal family: she is rendered powerless (made into a bitch -- the last resort of the powerless) by an all too powerful partner.

Wood suggests that the destruction of these parents at the hands of their zombie daughter represents the film's judgement on them and the norm they embody" (Wood, 1979: 93). Yet, it is the mother who is killed by the daughter (the father is killed by Ben in self-defense): her murder is not only a judgement on the "norm they embody" but, particularly, on her position within the family. Inasmuch as her husband has disempowered her, she is defenseless, even against her own child. Significantly, she is attacked in her sleep; her passivity means her death. She is not killed because she is a

woman, because of her body/sexuality, but because of the disempowered position she occupies within the family. Perhaps her murder can be read as the image of a new generation of women shedding old stereotypes.

Similarly, the father's death can be seen as a function of his sexual/racial dominance; he, too, is killed because of the social norms he embodies. His murder signifies a revolt against those social norms. The family produces the seeds of its own destruction in both the disenfranchised position of women, and, the over-enfranchised position of the white male as he is socially constructed. That is, to the extent that he lives out traditional masculine behaviour, the father is an embodiment of the monstrous. What is evident, then, is that Romero's monstrous families are not the exception, but the rule; the degree to which they follow the rule defines their monstrousness.

In *DAWN OF THE DEAD*, the zombies are most clearly associated with the practices of consumer society. Principally set in a mall, this film draws a parallel between the zombies' cannibalism and consumption; shopping takes on horrific connotations as it is imagined as the literal consuming of human flesh. As Wood suggests of *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*, cannibalism is an effective metaphor for capitalism, that is, people living (feeding) off others. His analysis is also appropriate here since direct reference is made to capitalism through the foregrounding of its central icon, the mall, and main supportive activity, consumption. These monsters, then, are linked to a fundamental practice which allows the system to self-generate. Their monstrousness is also tied to their internalization of that practice. Their inhabitation of the mall is explained as a function of "instinct." The film suggests that they gravitate to the place that once had meaning for them. They have internalized the requirements of consumer society to the point that,



acting on pure instinct, they repeat, in death, the rituals of another life. What characterizes the zombies, then, is not some deviant desire but a commonplace social practice: consuming. What makes them most normal is what makes them most horrible.

More particularly, *DAWN OF THE DEAD* points out that the monsters are us, zombie or not. To the degree that the protagonists are defined by their internalization of social practices, and, by their instinctual acting out of them, they are associated with the zombies: referring to the zombies, one character comments, "they're us." Like the zombies, the normal people in the film instinctively duplicate conventional social rules and rituals. For example, having found refuge in the mall, their first strategy is to re-activate it and go shopping. Like the zombies, they have internalized the ideology of the old order and continue to perpetuate it.<sup>33</sup> Shopping is what brings meaning to their lives (with childlike glee at new toys, Steve says to Fran, "you should see all the great stuff we got Franny").

These characters echo the social world by clinging to rituals which once gave order to their lives. For example, they reproduce hierarchical gender relations: when the men venture into the mall, they leave Fran alone and without a gun ("for her own good" she is told); without consulting her, they discuss what to do about her pregnancy. In establishing a normal domestic scene (by transforming a storeroom into an apartment), they reproduce traditional gender relations in which Fran is relegated to the role of wife and mother. (She continually protests against her function as "den-mother.") When Steve asks her to marry him (to further duplicate the old order), Fran

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<sup>33</sup> The absurdity of this instinctive, unthinking, acting out of social rules and conventions is comically portrayed in the zombies' encounter with the escalator. Lacking a certain motor control, they are simply carried along by the pre-programmed and repetitious movement of the machine.

responds by saying, "we can't do it now, it wouldn't be real." In furnishing themselves with the image of normality these characters, like the zombies, mindlessly repeat the rituals of the dominant social world.

In DAWN OF THE DEAD these now meaningless rituals (consumption and the propagation of the patriarchal family) are defended by the characters with an excessive violence which further associates them with the zombies, and, by extension, with the social order itself. In fact, the first violent acts in this film are committed in the name of the state. The film opens with a S.W.A.T. team's attack on an inner city tenement: they have been sent in to re-kill the dead (mostly African Americans) in the basement. Not only are their acts of violence indiscriminate (they also kill the living), they are linked to racism; one of them expresses delight in killing a "nigger." The social context of racism is also invoked in the scene in which a group of "red-necks," sporting guns and American Flags, have made a day of zombie hunting (they have brought their families and their picnic baskets). This not only echoes of lynchings, it also clearly links the celebration of violence with the "American Way."

This thrill-of-the-kill attitude is expressed most clearly in the characters of Steve and Roger who find enjoyment in killing the zombies. Because of their sense of power derived from their weapons, both characters become victims of the zombies (both are killed because of violent bravado). This suggests not only that normality is connected with the zombies through its equally excessive violence, but, also, that this monstrous violence is endemic. It is not only a characteristic of the zombies but also of the last remnants of a social order violently trying to sustain its now meaningless social rituals.

DAWN OF THE DEAD'S suggestion that the monstrous has social roots, and, that the zombies are, in part, victims of it, is made explicit in DAY

OF THE DEAD. In this film, the zombies have been corralled and are being used in gruesome scientific experiments. Here, the threat comes less from the zombies than from science. Although zombies roam the cities of America, the protagonists are, for the most part, protected from them in the bunker. In fact, the zombies are seen as captives and afforded a degree of sympathy: they respond with conscious fear, for example, when captured for the experiments. It is the scientist, whose research goal is to exploit the zombies as servants, who is coded as monstrous. The means he uses to accomplish this goal are undoubtedly responsible for the most visually disgusting scenes in the film. For example, his lab is filled with the bloody remains of zombies and zombie parts, he even experiments on recently deceased, and identifiable, members of the human group, and is always seen with his gloves and apron covered in blood.

What is significant here is that he represents a science whose mandate is domination and social control. Unlike the female scientist, Sarah, (who wants to find the cause in order to stop the dead from walking), his goal is to exploit them. Particularly, it is patriarchal control which is at the root of, the aptly nick-named, Frankenstein's madness. The threat he poses (his desire to control) is explained as a result of his relationship with his dominating father: he does to the zombies what his father did to him (he even names his prize zombie Bub, after his father). That is, he coerces them into being "good little girls and boys." It is precisely this patriarchal drive for control which generates monsters and precipitates horrific consequences: the scientist antagonizes the already volatile military by his apparently useless experiments (especially his use of their leader as one of his subjects); the zombie attack at the end (up until then they have been on the defensive, as it were) is a direct result of his exploitation of them.

The military also embodies aggressive, and violent, masculinity. This is particularly evident in the scene in which Sarah, fed up with the captain's machismo, resists his authority and attempts to leave a meeting. His response to this minor display of insolence is to command one of his men to shoot her. His order to have her killed (which is never executed -- although the film intimates that it would have been, had she not sat down) is issued in the sole interests of asserting his authority, of saving his patriarchal face in the face of a woman's challenge. He declares that if "anyone (and, it is implied, especially a woman) fucks with my command, they get court-martialed, they get executed." This excessive enforcement of authority is also echoed in his transformation of the civilian scientific operation into a military one. Everything is effectively subjected to his control. The monstrousness of the military is expressed in the sexual threat the soldiers pose to Sarah, the film's only female character. They make frequent reference to sharing her and she is even warned to "watch her back;" the threat of rape is explicit here. These traditional notions of masculinity and power are seen as particularly aggressive and violent. In the case of both science and the military, then, it is the expression of patriarchal, military and sexual control which generates the threat and which is, in short, monstrous.

THE CRAZIES and the Dead Trilogy locate the threat in dominant social and cultural institutions and practices. They insist that what is most threatening is what is most normal: the patriarchal family, consumer culture, and, a national defense based on a notion of the control of others through the assertion of male dominance. Romero's films also suggest that this social system, and the monsters which ensue from it, are responsible for widespread monstrous consequences. THE CRAZIES ends with the spread of the virus to another town, and, by the end of the Dead Trilogy, the social order has

completely collapsed; as one character puts it, "the power's off in the mainland and all the malls are closed." Since the social world is responsible for its own collapse, and, since the dominant social and cultural institutions and practices are, themselves, monstrous, any elimination of the horror depends on rejecting that world. Here, the social world is responsible for consequences which necessitate nothing less than the massive restructuring of all that is dominant. Only a deviation from the system promises any hope. The idea here is that hope lies outside the boundaries of conventional definitions of normality, and, that it is embodied in those characters most disenfranchised by that norm.

This is particularly evident in *The Dead Trilogy*. In *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*, for example, it is Ben who is not only the most resourceful, but who survives the night, only to be shot by a posse that (likely because he is Black) thinks he is a zombie. Indeed, part of the nihilism of this film is generated out of this senseless and tragic killing of the hero. Further, the *Dead Trilogy* is distinguished by its increasingly centralized female characters.<sup>34</sup> The catatonic Barbara (an admittedly regressive image, even when taken in the context of her domineering brother -- she is rendered speechless from the first zombie attack) is replaced by the insightful Fran who at least protests the position to which she has been relegated. In *DAY OF THE DEAD*, Fran is replaced by the practical and resourceful Sarah.

Significantly, both *DAWN OF THE DEAD* and *DAY OF THE DEAD* end with the escape of their female leads and Black male characters. In the former, Fran realizes all along that attempting to protect the mall and re-establish the dominant order is futile. She, for example, does not participate in the old

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<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of the recent *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*, scripted by Romero and directed by Tom Savini, as a feminist film see Grant (1992).

rituals of consuming and even makes ironic comments about the uselessness of some of the stuff the men retrieve from the mall. (Without a broadcast, for instance, the television is only a piece of furniture). Similarly, in giving up his gun to the zombie in order to escape with Fran, Peter relinquishes the tools of his old life and discards the violence they symbolize. As the zombies over-run the mall, the only hope for the remaining protagonists is to leave that social world behind, to discard its artifacts and the values they represent.

In *DAY OF THE DEAD*, as well, those who survive are the Others dissociated from the represented mainstream. Sarah is defined in opposition to both a science of domination and traditional female passivity, and the African American character, John, distances himself from the rest of the bunker by simulating a tropical paradise behind his trailer. In this film, it is John who realizes the futility of trying to defend what is left. What they are defending, it turns out, is a bunker full of useless records of the former society (marriage certificates, death certificates and the like). In referring to the bunker as a "tomestone" John draws an explicit connection between that order and the dead. (That he would leave "even if none of this was going on" further suggests the former order itself is equally monstrous and not worth the effort of saving.) Here, it is those most disenfranchised by the social order who escape and who hold a hope for the future in their rejection of, not only what has become of the social world, but the social world as it was.

These films direct fear toward widespread social institutions and cultural practices, they identify the norm as monstrous, and, they transcend a nihilistic vision of unrelenting victimization. Social Horror is distinguished from Techno-Terror precisely because of this profound distrust of the social world as it is. Techno-Terror directs fear towards aberrations of the social world in its focus on particular and localized technologies. Even when the

threat is widespread in Cronenberg's films, the social order is the victim rather than the cause. *SHIVERS*, for example, ends with the infected leaving the apartment complex and beginning their contamination of the rest of the community. Similarly, in *RABID*, the widespread consequences result not from systemic dysfunction but from the introduction of the rabidly sexual body into the community. It is not the social order itself which generates social collapse but, rather, the diseased and sexual body. Inasmuch as the threat is either to the body or of the body in *Techno-Terror*, paranoia about horrific technologies is displaced onto the, frequently feminine/feminized, body as a central site of disgust. Conversely, Social Horror defines the threat more broadly as a structural problem and, in so doing, escapes the tendency of much contemporary horror to displace anxieties about the social world onto the monstrous body as Other.

Further, the cause and character of the monster are distinct in *Techno-Terror* (it is the introduction of the body into scientific rationality that precipitates the horror and the individual body transformed which is monstrous). Social Horror collapses these categories and avoids the transference of anxiety about the material world onto specific, decontextualized, bodies. The system not only makes its own monsters, it makes them in its own image. The threat is not a norm made monstrous, but, a norm which is already monstrous; here, the monstrous body is the norm. Significantly, it is not the feminine body which motivates the horror, but collective bodies that are horrific to the extent that they embody some aspect of the social. The zombies are indeed what they eat: they are us. They are the body politic. Ultimately, Social Horror avoids the postmodern tendency to respond to these anxieties about the social world by displacing them onto a convenient, feminine/feminized, Other.

In identifying the norm as monstrous these films suggest, not only the need for systemic change, but also that the potential for that change resides in those most marginalized by the dominant social and cultural institutions and practices; it resides, in other words, in Others. Unlike much postmodern horror, Social Horror does not make victims of its Others. If anything, it transforms the traditional victim into the site of hope. In Romero's films, it's the girls' night out.



## CONCLUSION

In exploring the links between postmodernism and the contemporary horror film, this thesis has argued that, although theories of postmodern culture provide a seductive framework for looking at recent horror, the postmodernism of horror does not, in itself, make it oppositional. Most notably, the ways in which postmodern horror attaches fear to the feminine limits the oppositional potential of the genre. The example of postmodern horror indicates that paranoia and play are not only limited as subversive strategies, but also that opposition in popular forms depends on much more; it depends on the figurability, and the conditions of figurability, of such subject positions as gender.

The postmodern has been afforded a central position in this study since, on first glance, it seems to account for both the specificity of the contemporary phase within the horror genre, and, its antagonistic and ostensibly critical features. Indeed, postmodernism seems to serve as a corrective to traditional accounts of horror which appeal to universal fears, shared psycho-sexuality and uniquely human needs. As we have seen, these traditional approaches are unable to account for the particularities of what is considered (and constructed as) fearful in specific social and cultural contexts. They either attribute to the genre a timeless, ahistorical quality, or, subject it to the scrutiny of a master narrative (psychoanalysis) thereby reducing it to a manifestation of a universal psyche. In the first instance, there is no way to account for the particularities of time and place; horror is said to function the same for everyone, ahistorically and transculturally. In the second, interpretative possibilities are restricted to a particular set of terms; the meaning and experience of horror will always, and finally, be psychological. It

is said to appeal to what makes us human. It is not surprising, given the longevity and persistence of horror tales which are indisputably sexual and nightmarish in orientation, that these approaches have become widely accepted. They even frame popular interpretations.<sup>35</sup> Yet, the invocation, in some recent writing on the contemporary horror film, of both nihilistic and optimistic postmodernism, indicates an attempt to extract the genre from its psychological, indeed, almost biological, appeal, and, to consider it within the context of a specific set of social and cultural conditions.

Nihilistic postmodernism may indeed help to account for the kinds of fears invoked in, and provoked by, contemporary horror, but, in its imaginings of the contemporary cultural scene, it is prohibited from factoring the category of opposition into its analyses. Indeed, for Baudrillard, all sense is evacuated as representation gives way to simulation. The "logic" that Jameson sees in postmodern culture, the sense that he makes of its surfaces, hinges on its singular role as a "superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world" (Jameson, 1984b: 57). All popular representations, and the narratives that carry them, are conflated and given monolithic status in these paranoid accounts of the postmodern condition. That this culture might make sense of the world in varied, and perhaps critical, ways never enters into the equation. In Baudrillard's case, this obviously restricts an analysis of what sense these cultural representations make of the social world. For both Baudrillard and Jameson, it excludes opposition from its set of explanatory terms; where there is no depth, no meaning, there can be no opposition.

It is ironic that this variant of postmodernism, taken as a theory-story, does provide a way to make sense of the nihilistic themes in the

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, King (1981).

contemporary horror film. That nihilistic postmodern theory finds, as its more exoteric counterpart, the contemporary horror film, indicates that its condemnation of the popular as a site of domination needs to be challenged. The contention that popular image culture supports "the system" -- either by constituting it as Baudrillard suggests, or, as Jameson notes, by masking what is really going on -- is problematized by the fact that the horror film reproduces many of nihilistic postmodernism's critical postures towards contemporary society. Tania Modleski suggests that the fact that the postmodern horror film exchanges in visions similar to nihilistic postmodern theory indicates that the very terms in which this postmodernism defines popular culture need to be re-evaluated.

Indeed, as Modleski points out, what needs to be questioned is a critical position (whether in theory or in cultural representations) "which makes a virtue of `sustained terror'" (especially when that sustained terror, and the paranoia of which it is a function, is directed at the monstrous feminine) (Modleski, 1986b: 162). The more optimistic postmodern observation that popular culture is marked by diversity and flexibility challenges these paranoid accounts of cultural control. In dismantling the notion of a monolithic cultural landscape, this position puts us in a place where oppositional representations are at least imaginable.

Yet, the principle challenge that this postmodernism poses is to representation itself, to the making of sense; opposition is understood as a process of dismantling, of denying the ability to represent anything. What is considered radical about postmodern culture is that it cannot be pinned down or "grounded." It is indeterminate; no one sense (oppositional or otherwise) can be made of it. Any critical judgement about this culture amounts, then, to a simple recognition of alternatives; opposition no longer makes sense as a

critical term when the cultural landscape is said to be marked by a play of differences. The limitations of this position, for a discussion of horror and opposition, reside in the tendency to replace a consideration of what cultural products say about the social world, with a consideration of what they say about themselves, and each other.

Both versions of postmodernism provide a set of terms which help to situate the textual features and thematic concerns of a great many contemporary horror films, yet, they leave the question of opposition largely unexamined. In these, admittedly extreme, versions of postmodernism, popular image-based culture is alternately vilified, relegated to the status (almost literally) of murderous monster, or, trivialized: "if they know it's a game and we know it's a game then why not sit back and enjoy the joke; that's entertainment." Opposition, as a cultural category, is discarded; as a consequence of its own logic, postmodernism renders it unfashionable. When inextricably linked to a theoretical perspective that thinks in terms of binary oppositions (Left/Right, High Culture/Low Culture) the category of opposition is sent the way of the Edsel when those boundaries are said to breakdown. Conversely, we might "imagine" that the possibility of thinking in terms of oppositional culture is expanded, rather than diminished, in a cultural scene marked by diversity. Further, the necessity of this category for cultural analysis is made all the more apparent in a social context that, as the nihilists warn, is in need of critique.

What needs to figure in discussions of contemporary popular culture is not so much a bleak and reductive nihilism, or, a "happy consciousness" celebration, but, an attempt to navigate between the two scenarios, to imagine the popular in terms of struggle rather than domination or play. The focus on tension, contradiction and negotiation in some cultural theory has indeed

made major contributions to the study of popular culture, generally, and, more particularly, to an understanding of the ways and contexts in which meanings are made and re-made and to the place of those meanings in the struggle between forces of containment and resistance. From this perspective it is possible to read some popular practices as oppositional while keeping site of the eventual defusion of their more troubling or threatening elements.

The description of the popular as a field on which unequal negotiations over meanings occur presumes that there is something to negotiate. When the idea of struggle or contest replaces notions of domination and play, opposition is re-activated as an operative category. The image of the contemporary cultural landscape as a contested terrain indicates that something matters, that there is a point to the contest -- otherwise, why struggle? (Paranoia and play are much easier.) It indicates that there is something meaningful in all of it. It also indicates that opposition depends on the making, as well as the unmaking, of sense. It is, after all, a struggle over meanings.

However, the oppositional meanings which contemporary horror potentially embodies are not generated by the textual and thematic features that the contemporary films share with both postmodernism and the progressive genre. Opposition depends on how the horror film constructs the Other. The postmodern assertion that a breakdown in boundaries has led to an abandonment of "them and us" thinking does not make it so in our cultural representations. Otherness remains a central feature of the postmodern horror film. Otherness, as a cultural category, has not disappeared; it is alive and well and, ironically, living in a genre partly characterized by its profound questioning of categories of Otherness (Creed, 1986). While much postmodern horror does indeed question categories of

Otherness characteristic of the traditional horror film, it does not, in the end, challenge them; it dismantles distinctions between norm and Other only to displace them onto the feminine. Much reactionary postmodern horror directs fear and disgust towards the feminine by transcribing postmodern anxieties onto the female body. Postmodern anxiety is displayed through images of feminization; becoming woman is the ultimate postmodern horror. The threatening social world is made sense of by ultimately invoking the feminine as an indication of its monstrosity.

This indicates that the contemporary horror film's oppositional potential may better be understood and analyzed within the parameters of a feminist discussion. Feminist discussions of contemporary horror offer way of making sense of its postmodernism; it goes beyond paranoia and play. A consideration of how gender is constructed is one way of understanding how those forms make sense. The point is not to imply that gender is the only guide through this terrain (representations and experiences of ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation are others) but, rather, to suggest that gender as a guide is particularly well suited to navigating through postmodern horror. Discussions of gender help to ground the popular terrain and avoid the paranoid and/or playful paralysis that is often a consequence of postmodernism. Indeed, the oppositional potential of contemporary horror is constrained, rather than enhanced, by its postmodernism. Opposition in postmodern horror depends on a construction of Otherness which, true to the spirit of postmodernism, is inclusive. It depends on a monster which is indeed us -- not the feminine us, but the us of the body politic.

The postmodern horror film, which hinges its horrors on a construction of a female victim/ monster, is arguably part of a larger social and cultural backlash recently addressed by Susan Faludi in her book of the

same name. Faludi explains the phenomenon this way:

BACKLASH happens to be the title of 1947 Hollywood movie in which a man frames his wife for the murder he's committed. The backlash against women's rights works in much the same way: its rhetoric charges feminists with all the crimes it perpetrates. The backlash line blames the women's movement for the 'feminization of poverty' -- while the backlash's own instigators in Washington pushed through the budget cuts that helped impoverish millions of women, fought pay equity proposals, and undermined equal opportunity laws (Faludi, 1991: xxii).

Similarly, in contemporary horror, the crimes of the contemporary social world are displaced onto the feminine. Our world does, indeed, generate (real, and well as imagined) horrors, yet, the backlash swings into operation when these horrors are attributed to some monstrous feminine: when they are seen as the mother dominated family; the possessed body of a young woman; the virally infected body of another young woman; or the feminized body of the techno-victim. Like the backlash, these films ultimately blame the victim. That the experience of victimization is realized in some of these films as a process of feminization, further indicates that women bare the burden of monstrous representation in contemporary horror. In line with backlash thinking, then, women are associated with both provoking the threat and suffering its consequences. After all, the backlash's main cultural function is to blame women (specifically feminists) with what is wrong with a culture which still makes victims of women. According to this logic, a woman is her own worst enemy.

This monstrous feminine is not a feature exclusive to the horror films discussed here. In fact, it has emerged in a more recent version of the Psycho-Killer film, what I call the "Melo-Thriller": "melo" because, like melodrama,

these films give primacy to the family and/or the home as a location, and, they often deal with affairs of the heart; "thriller" because, like Psycho-Killer films, these films construct this home as a site that must be defended against the new variant of individual monster. Recent films, such as *FATAL ATTRACTION*, *THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE*, *SINGLE WHITE FEMALE*, *THE TEMP*, *THE HOUSE KEEPER*, *BASIC INSTINCT*, *THE GUARDIAN*, *MISERY*, and *DEATH BECOMES HER*, in varying ways and to different degrees, extend the psycho-killer formula by mixing it with the melodrama. Like postmodern horror, these films reinforce the sense that horror happens in the everyday -- melodrama is, of course, a principle cultural site for making sense of the domestic spaces. Home is where the horror is. Yet, unlike the Psycho-Killer formula, the home (and the families who frequently inhabit it) is not so much responsible for the threat as a victim of it. It is the family that is in need of protection from the threat: the maniacal Other -- the woman who does not have the home and family because of a career (*FATAL ATTRACTION*), the death of her husband (*THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE*) or just down-right weirdness (*SINGLE WHITE FEMALE*).

What is of interest here, although not surprising in the climate of a backlash, is that this new variant of the monster wears skirts, not as some psycho-killer cross-dresser, but "legitimately." As long as popular culture continues to displace dissatisfaction about the social world onto the feminine as Other -- or onto any Other for that matter; in *BASIC INSTINCT* the killer is a bi-sexual woman -- it can only make sense of that world in reactionary ways by conveniently locating the threat in, and directing fear towards, something other than the social order itself. Opposition depends on re-thinking Otherness and not just thinking of another Other.



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## APPENDIX

The following list includes films discussed in this thesis as well as a selection of those screened during its preparation:

ALIEN (1979); ALIENS (1986); ALIEN 3 (1992); AMERICAN GOTHIC (1987); THE AMITYVILLE HORROR (1980); THE AMITYVILLE HORROR 2: THE POSSESSION (1982); AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON (1981); ANGUISH (1988); THE APPLLEGATES (1990); APRIL FOOL'S DAY (1986); BASIC INSTINCT (1992); THE BELIEVERS (1987); BEYOND DREAM'S DOOR (1989); THE BLOB (1988); BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR (1989); THE BROOD (1979); THE CANDYMAN (1992); CARRIE (1976); THE CELLAR (1988); CHILD'S PLAY (1988); CHILD'S PLAY 2 (1990); CHILD'S PLAY 3 (1991); THE CRAZIES (1978); CREEPSHOW (1983); CHRISTINE (1983); DARKMAN (1990); DAWN OF THE DEAD (1979); DAY OF THE DEAD (1985); DEATH BECOMES HER (1992); DEMONS (1985); DEMON SEED (1977); DRACULA (1992); DRESSED TO KILL (1980); THE ENTITY (1982); THE EVIL DEAD (1982); THE EVIL DEAD 2: DEAD BY DAWN (1987); THE EXORCIST (1974); THE EXORCIST 2: THE HERETIC (1977); THE EXORCIST 3 (1990); FATAL ATTRACTION (1988); THE FLY (1986); THE FOG (1980); FRANKENHOOKER (1990); FRIDAY THE 13TH (1980); FRIDAY THE 13TH 2 (1981); FRIDAY THE 13TH 3 (1983); FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE FINAL CHAPTER (1984); FRIDAY THE 13TH: A NEW BEGINNING (1985); FRIDAY THE 13TH 6: JASON LIVES (1988); THE FURY (1978); GHOST STORY (1982); THE GUARDIAN (1990); HALLOWEEN (1979); HALLOWEEN 2 (1982); HALLOWEEN 3: SEASON OF THE WITCH (1983); THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE (1992); HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME (1981); HELL NIGHT (1982); HELLRAISER (1988); HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER (1990); THE HILLS HAVE EYES (1977); THE



HOUSEKEEPER (1987); THE HOWLING (1981); THE HOWLING 2 (1984); THE HOWLING 3 (1987); THE HOWLING 4 (1988); THE INCUBUS (1982); INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (1978); IT (1990); IT'S ALIVE (1975); THE KINDRED (1986); LIFEFORCE (1985); THE MANITOU (1978); MARTIN (1977); MISERY (1990); NEAR DARK (1987); NIGHTBREED (1990); A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (1985); A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 2 (1986); A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3 (1987); A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 4 (1988); A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 5 (1989); NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1968); NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1990); THE OMEN (1976); THE PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS (1991); POLTERGEIST (1982); PRINCE OF DARKNESS (1987); PROM NIGHT (1980); PSYCHO (1960); PULSE (1988); RABID (1976); RE-ANIMATOR (1985); ROSEMARY'S BABY (1969); SCANNERS (1981); THE SHINING (1980); SHIVERS (1975); THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (1991); SINGLE WHITE FEMALE (1992); SISTERS (1973); THE SLEEPING CAR (1990); THE SLUMBERPARTY MASSACRE (1983); THE STEPFATHER (1987); THE STEPFATHER 2 (1989); TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE (1990); TERMINAL CHOICE (1984); TERROR TRAIN (1980); TERRORVISION (1986); THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (1974); THE THING (1982); THE VIDEODEAD (1987); VIDEODROME (1982); WITCHBOARD (1987); XTRO (1983); XTRO 2 (1991).