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Horror and the Carnivalesque

The Body-monstrous

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The body — that which is prey to the exigencies of desire; the opponent of reason; host to invisible signs of decay; physical barometer of approaching death; seat of earthly pleasures; signifier of feminine evil; site of repression; writing surface; postmodern text.

Notions of the body occupy a central place in current theoretical debates. As Jean Starobinski points out, writings about the body have "almost become the official religion."[1] It is not that the body has been forgotten over the preceding centuries — rather, it has functioned as the debased "other" within a series of binary oppositions that have been central to Western thought: mind/body; spirit/flesh; culture/nature; immortality/mortality. Significantly, in philosophical and religious discourses, the body is linked to the feminine — woman is emotional and more "of the body," whereas man is usually positioned on the side of logic and rationality.

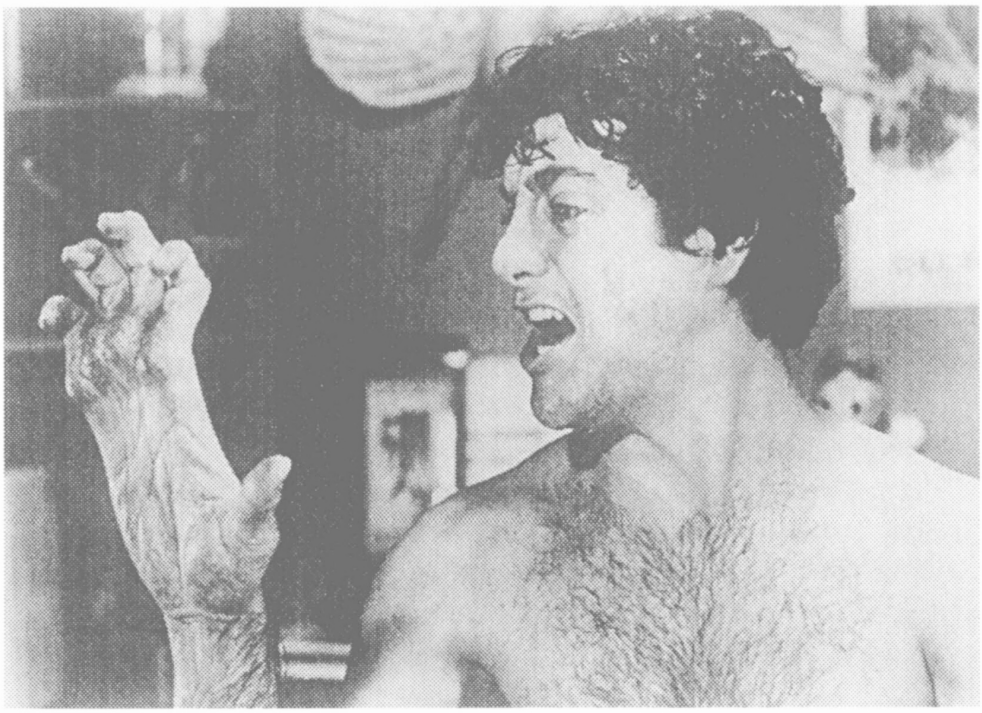
In recent theoretical works, however, the body is no longer viewed as a negative term in a series of paired oppositions.[2] Nor is it reduced to a material or biological object known primarily through physical sensations and feelings. One of the most influential modern theorists of the body, Michel Foucault, argues that the body is analogous to a writing surface on which "messages" are inscribed. He is not alone in holding this view. Foucault sees the body as a social text marked by a society's regulatory systems (forms of discipline and punishment) as well as by

self-regulation. Most important, he also sees the body as a site of resistance.[3] Michel Feher talks about the importance of outlining a picture of the contemporary body in order to acquire what Foucault has called "a thickened perception of the present" or "of the body we construct for ourselves."[4]

In its symbolism the horror film constitutes a particularly interesting popular discourse on the body. Yet very little has been written on the body's overall symbolic significance in horror and how that relates to other cultural discourses about the body. First, there have been various analyses[5] that look at body symbolism in those texts in which the boundary between human and animal is collapsed. Second, feminist critics[6] have examined the representation of women's bodies in those texts in which woman is positioned as victim. More recently, theorists[7] have turned their attention to the changing representation of the body in the postmodern horror film.

Two of the most interesting of these analyses examine the way in which representations of the body in contemporary horror are primarily concerned with the materiality of the body and the visual display of its destruction. According to Phillip Brophy, the "contemporary Horror film tends to play not so much on the broad fear of Death, but more precisely on the fear of one's own body, of how one controls and relates to it. . . . It is this mode of *showing* as opposed to *telling* that is strongly connected to the destruction of the Body" (fig. 7).[8] The modern horror film is able to depict in graphic detail the various metamorphoses that the body undergoes when attacked. "Veins ripple up the arms, eyes turn white and pop out, hair stands on end, blood trickles from all facial cavities, heads swell and contract."[9] Brophy argues that the contemporary horror film is "more interested in the body's exhibition of surface form than its disclosure of spiritual depths. . . . If there is any mysticism left in the genre, it is in the idea that our own insides constitute a fifth dimension; an unknowable world, an incomprehensible darkness."[10]

Pete Boss also argues that the modern horror film is obsessed with the destruction of the human body. The major preoccupation of the special effects artist is "the lifelike creation of human tissue in torment, of the body in profuse disarray." He sees this development as an indicator of the modern horror film's "reduction of identity to its corporeal horizons. A concern with the self as body." Boss also argues that there is evidence of a new dispassionate tone with which the destruction of the body is narrated. Whereas the representation of bodily destruction



7. Metamorphosis. *An American Werewolf in London* (1981). The Kobul Collection, London.

was once presented in relation to moral questions, destruction in the modern horror film is, "by contrast, often casual to the point of randomness; devoid of metaphysical import . . . mechanically routine." He describes this as a "peculiarly post-modern sense of dread"[11] that has partly been brought about by an increasing sense of individual helplessness in relation to the growing powers of medical technology and institutionalised bureaucracy, particularly in the areas of medicine and problems related to death and dying.

What is the body-monstrous? How many "faces" does horror wear? What does the representation of the body-monstrous tell us about our immediate fears and fantasies? What are the social and cultural functions of the cinema of horror? Here, I propose to draw on the work of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, whose fascinating book *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*[12] brings the ideas of Bakhtin together with a Freudian perspective to understand the "other" of bourgeois identity. The ideas they explore—particularly Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body—are of particular relevance.

The Carnivalesque

Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's important study *Rabelais and His World,* recent work on the carnivalesque sees European carnival not simply as a ritual festival but as a means of popular perception of society and culture.

For Bakhtin, carnival—through its politics of inversion—is essentially a populist critique of high culture. In its most obvious meaning, carnival was a time of fairs, processions, feasts, dancing, costumes, mummery, masks, human freaks, trained animals, practical jokes, and trickery. Carnival was a time of laughter, of what Bakhtin describes as "festive laughter . . . the laughter of all the people"[13] that is universal, directed at the world. In the festive practices of carnival, the social hierarchies of daily life are turned upside down. Nothing is spared—normal proprieties, beliefs, etiquettes, and relations of power are deliberately profaned by those who are normally silent, by those whose voices are usually suppressed. A well-known reversal practised during carnival was known as "woman on top." In this enactment the man lies on the bottom and a woman sits astride him; her position and pose indicate she is in power not only sexually but in all areas of their relationship. Woman on top also provided a popular subject for woodcut artists. Bakhtin defines carnival in this way:

> As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalised and completed.[14]

Bakhtin argues that after the Renaissance carnival itself was given a new face; it was cleaned up and incorporated into middle class, commercial events. Stallybrass and White trace the various repressive measures that, from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries, were introduced in order to suppress carnival and its various practices. In 1871, as a result of pressure from the London City Missions Society, the Fairs Act was passed, and in the following decade over 700 fairs, wakes, and mops were abolished. Stallybrass and White argue that carnival stood for everything despised by the newly emerging middle classes, who attempted to give definition to their newfound identity by slowly withdrawing from all existing forms of popular culture. In order

to establish themselves as clean, upright, civilised, and sanitised, the bourgeois gradually began to separate themselves out from the ordinary folk—the common, low, disgusting mass of people.

Despite these repressive measures, carnivalesque practices gradually reemerged. Stallybrass and White trace the reappearance of the "other" of bourgeois identity into new sites. These included the slum, the fairground, and prostitution as well as certain symbolic representations of the body. They also suggest that many aspects of carnival did not simply disappear but were displaced into middle class discourses such as art and psychoanalysis. "It is striking how the thematics of carnival pleasure—eating, inversion, mess, dirt, sex and stylised body movements—find their neurasthenic, unstable and mimicked counterparts in the discourse of hysteria."[15]

In their struggle to construct their own cultural Imaginary, the newly emerging middle classes inadvertently created a new form of the grotesque. Stallybrass and White explore the way in which the concept of the grotesque took on two related but separate meanings: (1) the grotesque as the "other" of the middle class imaginary and (2) the grotesque as a kind of hybrid form in which the boundary between self and other is blurred. This view of the grotesque has much in common with Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject[16]—a theory on which I will draw in my discussion of the body in the horror film.

The Carnivalesque and the Cinema

The concept of the carnivalesque as a practice of symbolic inversion and transgression provides us with a framework for the study of a range of cultural practices and political and social discourses. Following on from the proposition that aspects of carnival were displaced into middle class discourses, it is possible to argue that the horror cinema constitutes an arena into which aspects of carnival practices have been displaced. Certainly we can trace the horror discourse itself through other cultural and social practices, from the gothic novel, to the shilling shockers, through Grand Guignol theatre, to dada and surrealism. (Some critics of course argue that the origins of horror are as old as the human race itself.) Certainly there are striking similarities between the practices of carnival and the cinema of horror, particularly in relation to the following forms and concepts: (1) transgression; (2)

the world turned upside down; (3) grotesque humour; (4) the monstrous body; (5) spectatorship and the classical body.

My intention in this comparison is not to claim an identity between carnival and horror cinema but to draw out some similarities and differences to arrive at a better understanding of the cultural and symbolic function of the cinema, particularly in relation to representations of the body and to the question of transgression.

TRANSGRESSION

Like carnival, the horror film mocks and derides all established values and proprieties: the clean and proper body, the desire for immortality, the law and the institutions of church and family, the sanctity of life. It is this aspect of the horror film that offers immense pleasure to the spectator—particularly the youthful audience. Recent publications, such as those of Robin Wood,[17] clearly indicate that the horror film presents a critique of the symbolic order—particularly the institutions of the couple, family, church, law, medicine, and corporate capitalism. The postmodern argument[18] about the collapse in the West of the master narratives of imperialism and progress also points to a massive failure within the domain of the symbolic. Like the practices of carnival, the cinema of horror is hostile to all that is sanctioned by the official culture, specifically to the norms and values of patriarchal culture. Wood argues that the modern horror film in particular celebrates the destruction of the nuclear family and the heterosexual couple. He pays little attention, however, to the representation of the body.

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Woman on Top

Like carnival, the horror film also presents its version of "woman on top." Although woman is the central victim of the slasher subgenre, there are many other instances when woman takes on the role of the monster. The various forms of the monstrous-feminine represent woman in a variety of powerful roles.[19] Woman as the monstrous-feminine is represented as witch (*Carrie* and *Suspiria*); vampire (*The Hunger, Vampire Lovers*); monstrous womb (*Lifeforce, The Brood, Aliens*); creature (*Cat People, The Leech Woman, The Wasp Woman*); homicidal killer (*Fatal Attraction, Sisters*). There is also a subgenre that I have called the woman's revenge film in which woman takes revenge—either be-

cause she has been raped or because her sister or best friend has been raped (*Violated, Savage Streets, I Spit on Your Grave, Angel of Vengeance*). In virtually all of these films, the most savage form of revenge is castration. The male victims of these women are dispatched in scenes of bloody gore.

Man-as-Mother: Couvade and Horror

The theme of birth, linked to monstrosity, is also played out in relation to man and suggests a fundamental change in gender role—a world completely turned upside down. The theme of couvade—or the male mother—has always been central to the horror film. In earlier decades, we witnessed the mad scientist in his laboratory hatching a plot to create life from his test tubes or to give birth to himself as the other (*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Wolfman, Frankenstein*). In the modern horror film the couvade theme has been given new emphasis. In *Altered States* the scientist takes himself back to his beginnings and gives birth to himself as an apeman. In *Xtro* man emerges fully formed—that is, as an adult—from the womb of woman; he births himself, cuts his own umbilical chord, and walks away. In *Alien* we have that now infamous scene where the male astronaut is raped by an alien creature and gives birth through his stomach. In films such as *Starman* the alien-man clones himself in the image of an earth man. In *The Thing* the alien creature compulsively clones itself in the image of an entire male group stationed at the South Pole. Werewolf films show man rebirthing himself as a creature. The male scientist of *The Fly* develops a mode of transportation known as a teleporter, which consists of two womb-like chambers. The teleporter is designed to revolutionise travel by deconstructing living organisms in one place and then reconstructing them in another. A fly is caught in the teleporter just when the scientist is attempting to deconstruct himself; he is reborn as a monstrous fly. The metamorphosis takes place gradually and provides most of the film's shocking scenes as well as black humour.

In all of these films, the male who gives birth or rebirths himself is asked to take up the position of woman. Clearly, a male desire to give birth, to take up a feminine position in relation to reproduction, suggests a form of hysteria in the Freudian sense of behaviour resulting from an inability to come to terms with one's ordained gender role. The monstrous changes wrought on the body of the male in these films (he transforms into an animal, his stomach is torn open, etc.) could, at one level, be interpreted as a form of conversion hysteria brought about by man's terror at actually having to take up a feminine place as "mother."

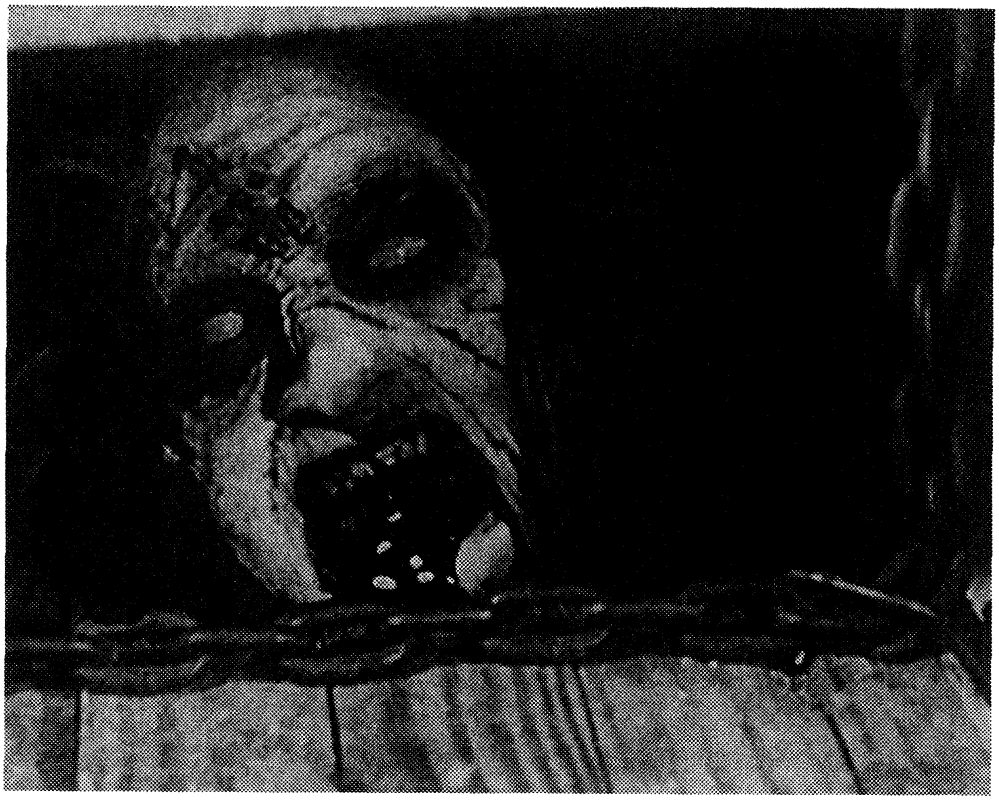
Male hysteria in this context also represents a repudiation of the symbolic order and man's destiny as it is set out within the symbolic. The couvade theme has also been explored recently in various comedies such as *Three Men and a Baby* and *Three Fugitives;* hysteria in these texts is displaced onto narrative movement, which is generated by mounting confusion, mistaken identity, loss of bodily control, female impersonation, and scenes of male pregnancy. At the centre of this confusion is the male body—distorted, out of control.

GROTESQUE HUMOUR

Like the grotesque body of carnival, the monstrous body of contemporary horror has become a source of obscene humour. Think for instance of Reagan's body in *The Exorcist*—it urinates on the carpet (before guests), belches green bile, utters filthy jokes, mocks all forms of propriety—its head even rotates in full circle on its neck. Or think of the laughing hag in *The Shining* or the dance of the skeleton in *The Evil Dead.* Here the headless body of the murdered woman rises from the grave and begins to dance grotesquely in the moonlight; realising her head is off, she retrieves it and puts it back on her neck before continuing her dance, in which she deliberately mocks the gestures associated with romance and courtship rituals (fig. 8). One of the most humorous moments in horror occurs in *The Thing* when the thing—a small tentacle—attaches itself to a human head in order to clone itself into a living image of the dead man. In what is one of the most amazing technical feats of modern horror, the head turns upside down while eight spidery feet tear through the skull and use the head as a body. As the head "walks" to the door one of the crew remarks: "You've got to be fucking kidding!" But unfortunately it isn't, and the thing proceeds with its murderous attacks. Humour is generated from the way in which, like a magician, the thing is able to make the human body do absolutely anything—change shape, defy gravity, parody life itself. The self-reflexive nature of the horror film, particularly of the postmodern horror film, combined with its deliberate use of parody and excess indicate the importance of grotesque humour to the success of the genre.

THE GROTESQUE BODY

The main concept around which Bakhtin formulates his discussion of Rabelais as a carnivalesque text is that of "grotesque



8. The abject witch. *The Evil Dead* (1983). The Kobul Collection, London.

realism" with specific emphasis on the "grotesque body." According to Stallybrass and White:

> Grotesque realism images the human body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete. The opening and orifices of this carnival body are emphasised, not its closure and finish. It is an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide and its lower regions (belly, legs, feet, buttocks and genitals) given priority over its upper regions (head, 'spirit,' reason). . . .
>
> To complete the image of grotesque realism one must add that it is always in process, it is always becoming, it is a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing all limits, obscenely decentred and off-balance, a figural and symbolic resource for parodic exaggeration and inversion. All of these grotesque qualities have a positive force in Bakhtin.[20]

In his discussion of the carnivalesque, Bakhtin refers to the grotesque body in relation to woman's body, specifically to the Kerch terra-cotta figurines of three pregnant, ageing hags:

This is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed.[21]

The grotesque body lacks boundaries; it is not "completed," "calm," or "stable." Instead the flesh is decaying and deformed, presumably falling from the bodies, connecting them to the earth. What is most disturbing is that the decaying flesh of the pregnant hags intermingles with the unformed flesh of the living foetus. Here the abject is created in the collapsing of boundaries between the living and the decaying or putrefying flesh. The pregnant female body is also an important figure in the modern pantheon of female grotesques.

Bakhtin's notion of the "grotesque body" is particularly relevant to the horror film; indeed if one word can be used to describe all manifestations of the body found in this genre it is "grotesque." The grotesque body of horror is—like Bakhtin's grotesque—always in a process of change and alteration. However, the emphasis is different. Whereas the grotesque body of carnival privileges the lower regions of the body over the upper, the monstrous body of horror draws on the bodily categories of inside and outside in order to shock and horrify. Julia Kristeva draws particular attention to the collapse of boundaries between inside and outside as a major cause of abjection.[22]

Twelve "Faces" of the Body-monstrous

The concept of a border is central to the construction of the body-monstrous of horror. Although the specific nature of the border may change from film to film, the function of the border remains constant—to bring about a conflict between the whole and the proper body (the symbolic body, the body politic) and that which threatens its integrity, the abject body, the body-monstrous. The abject is produced when a body crosses the boundary between the human and nonhuman or takes up a borderline position in relation to a definition of what it means to be human. The categories I have drawn up define the body as monstrous in relation to the border between the abject and symbolic bodies. By using the *symbolic* body as the norm, the taxonomy can allow for different cultural definitions of the monstrous. In the past, the monster has provided the focus of a number of taxonomies. The general assumption has been that the monster is almost always male, the victim

female. By focussing on the body, we can see more clearly how the feminine body is constructed as monstrous in the horror genre.

The monstrous body of horror falls into one of at least twelve categories with at least eighteen subdivisions. There is much overlap between these categories, but for the purposes of this study I will discuss them individually.

THE METAMORPHOSING, TRANSFORMING BODY. The image of the transforming body is central to the horror genre; its main symbolic function is to challenge definitions of what it means to be human. The proper body of the symbolic does not metamorphose; it is recognisable, fixed, trustworthy. It is made "in God's image" — a sacred vessel, a divine temple. In some discourses, particularly that of Christianity, the male body is seen as the norm, the female body as an inferior version. Bodies which change shape physically, particularly if they adopt animal or insect forms, conjure up notions of degeneration, devolution, deformity, loss of control, magic, satanism, and witchcraft. The possibility of bodily metamorphosis attacks the foundations of the symbolic order which signifies law, rationality, logic, truth. By signifying these qualities, the human body is seen to represent or reflect the ideals of the body politic. It too should be upright and consistent, conforming to the laws of biology and physics. Human beings who deviate physically from the norm (dwarfs, bearded women, hermaphrodites, Siamese twins) have always been socially stigmatised; they are the "freaks" of the circus and sideshow.

Images of the changing body are found within various subgenres of the horror film, particularly those dealing with the werewolf, vampire, creature, or animal. Change always leads to the emergence of a different life form; its difference is the sign of its monstrousness. Emphasis is on the process of change as well as the outcome. What will it become? How much will it change? What will be produced? Films dealing with the metamorphosing body take many forms.

The Animal/Insect/Reptile Body. Many films in this category belong to the werewolf subgenre — *The Wolf Man, The Curse of the Werewolf, I Was a Teenage Werewolf, An American Werewolf in London.* In other metamorphosis films, man changes into a monkey (*Altered States*) and a fly (*The Fly*); and woman into a wolf (*The Howling*), a leopard (*The Cat People, Cat Girl*), a snake (*The Reptile, The Snake Woman, Cult of the Cobra*), an orang-utan (*Captive Wild Woman*), a wasp (*The Wasp Woman*), or a

fish monster (*The She Creature*). In earlier horror films the association between human and other is not represented in terms of a visible metamorphosis but rather is suggested through the convention of the doppelgänger, the double or the alter ego, as in *King Kong* and *Tarantula.* In the latter woman and spider are linked through various filmic codes. With the renaissance in special effects technology, scenes of metamorphosis (*The Fly, An American Werewolf in London*) now take place before our very eyes.

Gender appears to play a part in determining the nature of the metamorphosis. In the werewolf film, it is man who usually becomes the beast, although there are a small number of werewolf films that represent female metamorphosis, such as the Mexican horror film *La Loba* and *The Howling.* Woman, however, is more likely to transform into a cat, reptile, or a spider—a phobic object with which woman continues to be linked in modern myth and superstition. In the majority of films involving metamorphosis, the body is neither fully (once and for all) animal or human. Transformation films point to an anxiety about what it means to be human. When the human transforms into a wolf, the body appears literally to be turned inside out. Teeth, nails, and hair sprout without warning and at such speed that it is clear the process cannot be stopped. It is as if these bestial characteristics were lying hidden beneath the skin's surface waiting for the opportunity to burst forth in order to attest to man's nonhuman self. The inside of the body becomes the outside. In a few texts, such as *The Fly,* the metamorphosis is irreversible. The remake of *The Fly* also contains a landmark scene of horror in which a monkey is literally turned inside out during the scientist's preliminary experiments with teleportation of the body.

The Vampiric Body. The films in this category belong to the ever-popular vampire genre—*Nosferatu, Dracula, Dracula Has Risen from the Grave, The Lost Boys.* Here the body is erect, pointed, phallic. Several critics have stressed the phallic nature of Dracula's body and stance—his stiff posture; his pointed face, ears, nails, and fangs; his penetrating look; the blood rushing to his eyes as if his whole body were having an erection. On the other hand, Dracula is also coded as feminine. He is always dressed beautifully in silk and satin, his face is white, his lips red, and he appears on the night of the full moon, associated in myth and legend with witches and menstruation. He also loses blood periodically and seeks to replace it. He appears to be a curious mixture of hermaphrodite, transvestite, and androgyne. The female vampire is also represented in sexually ambiguous terms. She is aggressive, phallic, and often

a lesbian. In many films about lesbian vampires, the queen vampire is dedicated to the seduction and recruitment of uninitiated women, often young virgins, as in *Vampire Lovers, Daughters of Darkness, Vampyros Lesbos,* and *The Hunger.* The vampiric body is sexually ambiguous, male and female vampires taking on the gender characteristics of the opposite sex. In general, however, only the female vampire is homosexual.

THE SUPERNATURAL BODY

The Possessed Body. In films about possession, the body—usually female—is capable of a range of amazing feats; it changes shape, performs amazing tricks, or assumes supernatural powers (*The Evil Dead, Evil Dead 2*). Often the supernatural powers of this body, when female, are linked to menstruation, the arousal of the girl's sexual desires, or the onset of puberty. For instance, Reagan in *The Exorcist* is possessed by the Devil when she reaches puberty. In *Rosemary's Baby,* sexual possession is taken to its logical consequence and Rosemary becomes pregnant with the Devil's child. The possessed body defies all known laws governing bodily powers; it is horrifying precisely because possession desecrates the body (its own or the bodies of others) in its presentation as grotesque, engorged, disgusting, or abject. The permutations are arbitrary and seemingly endless.

The Psychokinetic Body. Like the possessed body, the psychic body is also capable of amazing feats, but these are related to acts of paranormal power such as telekinesis (*Carrie*) and the ability to kill from a distance (*The Omen*) or to transmit visions to receptive bystanders (*The Sender*). Whereas the possessed body is usually taken over and rendered powerless to resist, the psychokinetic body is powerful and potentially dangerous. These films usually explore a wish-fulfilment fantasy in that the character with paranormal powers has been hurt, humiliated, or pushed beyond endurance, whereupon she or he takes revenge. Some films about characters with psychic powers (*Carrie, Firestarter*) also emphasise the body of the adolescent about to discover sexuality. Carrie, for instance, develops her powers of telekinesis at the same time as she begins to menstruate. Other films in this category include *Ruby, The Fury, Jennifer, Scanners, The Medusa Touch, Psychic Killer, The Shout.*

The Demonic and Ghostly Body. Surprisingly, films about pagan practices have drawn very little on H. P. Lovecraft's mythology of Elder Gods in which these divinities have been held somewhere in a state of limbo

waiting to return to take over Earth. The closest approximation of this scenario is found in *Ghostbusters,* in which a horde of Sumerian demons, agents of Gozer, try to take over New York. *Gremlins* and *Gremlins 2* also explore the possibility of demons trying to take control of or destroy the world. The "bodies" of ghosts and demons have much in common with the protagonists of films about possession. The bodies can assume any shape, defy the laws of gravity, and resist most lethal weapons.

The Pagan Body. Films about covens and devil worship usually draw on pagan depictions of the body, particularly in scenes of fertility worship where coven members dance naked or seminaked in order to harmonise with nature. If the Devil is present, she/he usually sprouts horns at some point (*The Wicker Man, Children of the Corn, Blood Orgy of the She-Devils*).

THE BESTIAL BODY. In one sense films about transformation into a creature/insect/reptile also belong to this category. However, the monsters of this category do not usually change from a human into a nonhuman life form. Their form is fixed; they are either creatures who resemble humans or humans who resemble creatures. The creatures of this category are horrifying because their bodies symbolise dark desires, desires which specifically threaten the symbolic order.

The creature represents the darker side of sexual desire in its animalistic, sadistic, and incestuous forms. For instance, the Claude Rains version of *The Phantom of the Opera* generates horror through the suggestion of an incestuous father-daughter relationship. The Phantom's scarred face points symbolically to such perverted desires. *King Kong* and *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (both films have sympathetic monsters) explore the animalistic nature of sexual desire. Sometimes, the creature represents the doppelgänger or alter ego of another character. In these films there are usually two main characters: the scientist/doctor and his creation or creature, the monster—*Frankenstein, The Phantom of Rue Morgue.* Again, the creature is often more sympathetic than its master. It is almost always male.

THE BODY OF NATURE. In these films, the natural world turns against the human. Nature's "revolt" often symbolises the appearance of something "unnatural" or rotten in the human world. Nature terrifies because she is no longer controllable and hence threatens the very fabric

of civilisation. Films include: *Jaws, The Swarm, The Savage Bees, The Giant Spider Invasion, The Blob, The Birds.*

THE GENERATIVE BODY

The Female Body. In many of these films, woman's body becomes capable of amazing feats and her womb assumes new powers—it is able to conceive alien life forms and is capable of assuming enormous proportions and of coming to full-term pregnancy in a matter of hours. Woman is monstrous because she is able to copulate with and give birth to the other; for instance, in *Rosemary's Baby* she gives birth to the Devil's child. Woman's most monstrous feature is her womb. In order to accommodate the womb's changing shape, her outer skin stretches to new limits, changes texture and colour, while also pointing to its potential for further transformation. This process is represented vividly in *Xtro.* In *The Brood,* her birth sac is attached to the outside of her body so we can see in clear detail what normally remains hidden. Her mutant offspring are born of her rage. The schizoid heroine of *Possession* gives birth to a tentacled pseudo-human (it is born of her fury) which finally metamorphoses into a double of her husband. Her womb not only contains this creature but also all manner of abject wastes such as gore and pus. In *The Manitou* the foetus of an evil witch doctor, about to reincarnate himself, grows from a tumour/womb on the heroine's neck. In *The Fly,* the heroine dreams that she gives birth to a giant maggot. Although at the mercy of alien birth processes, the generative female body is not usually depicted as if it were hostile to these forces. Instead, the female body is acquiescent and receptive. Woman and her monstrous-womb stand less on the side of humanity and more on the side of the inhuman and the alien. It is woman's alliance with nature that constitutes her monstrousness in these films. In *Dead Ringers,* the womb with its triple cervix is literally represented as a monstrous thing.

In films dealing with the generative body, the house is often used as a symbol of the womb and woman's reproductive powers, as in *The Amityville Horror, Amityville 2: The Possession, House, The Shining.* Usually, the house is constructed as a place of horror. Its walls and hallways bleed, its cellar fills with blood. Freud's theory of the uncanny provides us with a working hypothesis by which we can understand how the house functions symbolically as that original, first house—the womb. The house becomes monstrous because of the uncanny likeness it bears to the womb in the eyes of the protagonist. Sometimes female characters who inhabit the house are also represented in an uncanny form, as

are the dead female twins of *The Shining,* who appear as twin ghosts to haunt the young boy, Danny.

The Male Body. The classical horror film played on the theme of couvade in those films in which the mad scientist tried to create new life forms in his laboratory, as in *Metropolis* and *Frankenstein.* This theme has been explored in a variety of ways in the horror film. We see man give life to another creature (*Frankenstein*), create life in the form of a robot (*Metropolis*), create mutant life forms in experiments with humans and animals (*Island of Lost Souls*), or discover a vaginal opening in his stomach (*Videodrome*). In *Alien,* man is raped orally and later gives birth through his stomach. In *The Beast Within,* he is raped by a swamp creature and eighteen years later gives birth to a mutated flesh-eating insect which erupts out of his body. In these films the male body, which does not possess a womb, is not distorted in the same way as woman's body. However, the hysteria generated by man's attempt to take up a feminine position, by giving birth or creating life, is played out across the male body in a variety of horrific ways. In some films the male body takes up a feminine position. In others, it is impregnated and torn apart (*Alien*), or else the newly created life form itself is represented as monstrous (*Frankenstein, The Fly*).

Although primarily metamorphosis films, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Altered States* also play on the theme of couvade. The laboratories of these scientists, with their winding tubes and womb-like structures, suggest the female reproductive system. There is also a suggestion of couvade in the wereman transformations in that the wolf appears to emerge from the inside of the man. However, wereman films belong primarily to the metamorphosis category.

THE INFANT BODY. In these films, the monster takes the form of a foetus or infant which is misshapen or deformed in some way. It is the mutant, partially formed nature of the body which is exploited to create scenarios of horror. The monstrous infant films also present a critique of the nuclear family, with the infant itself symbolic of a canker eating at the heart of the family. Films include *It's Alive, It Lives Again, Alien, The Kindred, Eraserhead, Basket Case, Gremlins.*

THE MORTAL BODY. The bleeding body is usually the victim's body and as such it does not constitute a monster in conventional terms. As I have argued, however, the bleeding body, particularly the female, is repre-

sented as a sight of monstrosity. This characteristic has become a feature of the contemporary splatter film. Prior to the mid-1960s, when the splatter film first appeared, the dying or dead body was depicted with little emphasis on scenes of blood and gore. With the advent of the splatter film, whose roots can be traced back to Grand Guignol theatre, the representation of the body in contemporary horror changed. The body and its parts have become the locus for various forms of physical transgression. The body is cut, slashed, dismembered, infested, skinned, and cannibalised. The destruction of the body is emphasized with close-up shots of gore, blood, body parts, torsos, limbs, eyeballs, offal. Everything and every part of the body has become horrifying. Special effects technology can create realistic images of human tissue in a variety of states of disintegration and destruction.

I would argue that the contemporary horror film's obsession with the materiality of the body points to another, more complex concern — an obsession with the nature of the "self." Images of the dismembered, mutilated, disintegrating body suggest that the body is invested with fears and anxieties which are actually felt about the self. Is the self like a fortress, impregnable, inviolable? Or is it, as Lacan would argue, like the body, a construct which is capable of fragmenting, disintegrating, even disappearing?

> Here we see the ego, in its essential resistance to the elusive process of Becoming, to the variations of Desire. This illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, entails a constant danger of sliding back again into the chaos from which he started.[23]

For Lacan the autonomy of the ego is only an illusion, and the subject will draw on various symbols, particularly in dreams, to displace anxiety about the fragmented ego onto the body. He refers to "images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body. . . . The works of Bosch," he writes, "are an atlas of all the aggressive images that torment mankind."[24] The monstrous body of horror may appear to be only flesh, bones, and sinew, but I would argue that the destruction of the physical body is used as a metaphor to point to the possibility that the self is also transitory, fragile, and fragmented.

The Bleeding Body. The body that bleeds is invariably the one that has been cut open by an axe, knife, ice pick, hammer, or chainsaw. (Guns are pointedly absent in the horror film.) The bleeding body is most evi-

dent in the slasher film. The rise of the slasher film was no doubt aided by the revolution in special effects technology, which enabled an audience to see with its own eyes what the body would look like if cut open. Blood flows from wounds and orifices, linking the inside and outside of the body. Images of the bleeding body also point symbolically to the fragile nature of the self, its lack of secure boundaries, the ease with which it might lose definition, fall apart, or bleed into nothingness. Films include *Suspiria, Psycho, Dressed to Kill, Hell Night, Slumber Party Massacre, He Knows You're Alone, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, My Bloody Valentine.*

The Hysterical Body. This is almost always the body of the female victim, the woman who runs and screams as she is pursued by the monster, whether human or animal. The victim we remember most is the one who survives, the one who has usually seen the butchered bodies of her friends and who is relentlessly pursued by the killer for the long final sequence, as in *Halloween, Friday the Thirteenth, Texas Chainsaw Massacre.* Her flight often follows a predictable pattern whereby she falls or stumbles, picks herself up again, loses her only weapon, and continues on her frantic journey. Her arms and legs appear out of control. She thrashes frantically in the dark; her mouth is usually opened wide and emits piercing screams. Male victims rarely scream or allow their arms and legs to flail in the air in hysterical movements. It is the female body which is used to express (on behalf of men?) terror at its most abject level. As she loses bodily control, she also loses her powers of coherent speech and her sense of her "self" as a coherent whole. Close-up shots of her open mouth frequently fade into blackness; the black hole of her mouth appears to signify the letter "O"—zero, the void, the final obliteration.

The Dismembered Body. The dismembered body is central to several subgenres of the horror film: the ghoul film, the slasher film, and the vampire film in which the vampire is killed through decapitation. Perversely, the appeal of some of these films is that we are denied an actual glimpse of the dismembered corpse, as in the Jack the Ripper films. Severed hands feature as a monstrous image in a number of horror films (*Un Chien Andalou, Mad Love, The Beast with Five Fingers, The Exterminating Angel*). This may be partly explained because of the link in mythology between severed hands and spiders. Minerva punished Arachne by turning her into a hand, which then changed into a spider.

Images of bodily dismemberment fracture our sense of bodily unity and, by extension, of the self as a coherent whole. Images of bodily dismemberment represent a particularly strong expression of the abject. Such images also point to the contemporary horror film's desire to explore all forms of material transgression, in succumbing to the lure of abjection and the pleasures of perversity.

The Disintegrating/Exploding Body. Here the body disintegrates or explodes from within. Emphasis is frequently on the spectacular, operatic nature of these scenes of destruction. Bodily mutilation and fragmentation are taken to extremes—the entire body is constructed as a battlefield. These scenarios of bodily destruction frequently assume the proportions of a spectacle, suggesting that the total annihilation of the body and self is experienced as an explosion into nothingness. Films include *Scanners, The Hunger, Lifeforce.*

The Invaded Body. Here the body has been invaded by an alien life form, disease, parasite, insect, or creature. Horror is aroused because the presence of the creature in the body is not known. In one group of these films, the creature/alien either uses the existing body or makes an exact duplicate of it in order to hide its presence among "normal" human beings. These films play on paranoid fears about the body of other people, suggesting that as aliens they cannot be trusted (*The Thing, Invasion of the Body Snatchers*).

In other body-invasion films, the body acts as a host to some form of infestation. Again, the body is a traitor because it acts as a host to the infestation and rarely gives any warning until it is too late. Images of the infested body suggest an underlying paranoia directed at the self where self-betrayal is experienced as bodily infestation. In other films the body is invaded by disease which renders the body either treacherous (*Rabid*) or grotesque (*The Elephant Man*).

In these films the monster or alien is not only able to inhabit human bodies at will but also able to evacuate itself from these bodies when necessary. The body becomes a nest. The imperialised body also collapses boundaries between human and alien, making it impossible to distinguish one from the other. Again horror is generated because of an inability to distinguish the human from the "thing."

The Body as Living Corpse. There are many monsters who have returned from the dead: Dracula, Frankenstein, the zombie, and the mummy.

Whereas Frankenstein was created by science and Dracula is reanimated from his grave at night, zombies are revived from the dead by black magic. In the zombie film (*White Zombie, I Walked with a Zombie*) the self exists in a state of suspended animation; having been revived from the dead, it is simply "undead." The zombie films play on the fear of being buried alive. Not all zombies are cannibalistic. However, the zombies of *Night of the Living Dead* do feast on human flesh. Driven by a terrible need to feast on the flesh of the living, these zombies point symbolically to the incorporative, cannibalistic aspect of the self. In this context, the self exists in a trance; it is will-less and indistinguishable from the body itself. The cannibalistic zombie is similar to the ghoul—a spirit in Muslim stories that robs graves and devours the corpses in them.

The mummy is also one of the living dead, but unlike the zombie it does have a will. In the mummy films, Hollywood's response to the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, the semi-preserved shell of a man, buried thousands of years ago, is brought to life by incantation or the imbibing of a secret potion. He usually finds the presence of his ancient love in a modern woman whom he wants to take back to eternity with him (*The Mummy, The Mummy's Hand, The Mummy's Ghost, The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb, The Mummy's Shroud*). The mummy's body, preserved in a state of semidecay, is neither fully alive nor dead. The body, covered in earth mould and decaying bandages, is horrifying because of its liminal state. Parallels between woman, eternity, and death suggest these films are also exploring the subject's desire for reunion with the maternal body.

The Corpse. The corpse figures in all horror films. It represents the body at its most abject. It is a body evacuated by the "self"—but worse still, it is a body which has become a "waste."

THE MECHANICAL BODY. Many science fiction horror films use the body of the robot (machine that resembles a person) and the android (artificially created person) to explore definitions of the "human" (*Metropolis*). Whereas earlier films in this genre usually drew a clear distinction between the human and robotic body, contemporary films tend to collapse the two in relation to the figure of the android. The android is neither fully human nor fully machine. It is an immensely attractive figure because it is self-regenerating; it also repels because it observes no moral code and is able to kill without sentiment. In some recent films,

however, the android is depicted as being more "moral" than its human counterparts (*Bladerunner, Aliens, Robocop*). Such films present an interesting critique of the nature of the "self." In some films the robot or android is monstrous because it is perfect (*The Stepford Wives, The Terminator*).

Theorists of postmodernity such as Jean Baudrillard have pointed to a collapse in the once clearly understood boundaries between subject and object. The revolution in communications and systems of representation means that the individual can no longer clearly distinguish the real from the hyper-real, original from the copy, human from simulacra. In the horror film this failure of perception in relation to the body is linked to scenes of monstrosity.

THE SEXUALLY DEVIANT BODY. In this category the body is represented as monstrous in terms of a confusion about gender and sexual desire. The monster is either a girl raised as a boy, as in *Homicidal!* and *Private Parts,* or a boy raised as a girl, as in *A Reflection of Fear* and *Deadly Blessing.* Related to these films about gender confusion, we have the monstrous transsexual of *Dressed to Kill* and the son-mother of *Psycho.* Horror is generated by the sexually ambiguous and indeterminate nature of these figures. They are usually represented as psychotics.

THE BODY OF THE SLASHER. The slasher is usually male—a shadowy, terrifying figure who remains in the background, despatching victims with alarming regularity (*Halloween*). Films in which the slasher is female include *Sisters, Friday the Thirteenth, Play Misty for Me.* When the slasher is a psychotic female, she sometimes castrates her male victims. When victims are of both sexes, the film usually represents the deaths of the women in more detail and at greater length. The slasher is a figure associated with knives and other sharp instruments. Freddy Kreuger, the indestructible nightmare "hero" of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, literally is a lethal blade; he has knives for fingers. His body is a mutation of flesh and steel. He also frequently takes on a female form when he kills. The slasher is a figure who threatens castration; his/her victims are stabbed, mutilated, and dismembered. The body of the slasher is associated with the unknown, death, blood, sexual difference. The male slasher is almost always destroyed by a young woman who sometimes castrates him. These themes of the slasher film have recently been represented as a source of pathos mixed with horror in the film *Edward Scissorhands.*

The woman who castrates for revenge—usually the crime is rape—is also a slasher figure, but she is not depicted as psychotic. Her revenge is presented as justified and audiences are encouraged to sympathise with her. Sometimes she is represented as a temptress who kills during coition (*I Spit on Your Grave, Naked Vengeance*). In these films death for the male victim is eroticised, suggesting a link between sexuality and masochistic desire.

THE MATERNAL BODY. There are also a number of films that represent the female psychopath as a woman who clings possessively to others, particularly family members (*Psycho, Carrie, Fanatic, The Psychopath, Friday the Thirteenth, Deep Red, What's the Matter with Helen?, Sunset Boulevard*). It is her possessiveness which is represented as the source of horror. In some films she is an ageing female psychopath. Her appearance is usually disturbing in that it suggests either a decaying or frustrated sexual desire. Unlike films which deal with male psychopaths, her reasons for killing are almost always linked to perverted familial relations and her desire to suffocate her loved ones. (A recent exception to this is *The Stepfather,* in which the suffocating parent is male.) The male psychopath kills as a form of symbolic rape. His victims are usually teenagers who are unknown to him.

THE BODY OF THE ARCHAIC MOTHER. The bad imago of the archaic mother exists in the horror film as a background oceanic presence or what Roger Dadoun refers to as an "omnipresent totality."[25] Signs of the archaic mother are cobwebs, dust, hair, dried blood, damp cellars, earth, empty chambers, creaking noises, steep stairs, and dark empty tunnels. Everything associated with the archaic mother belongs to (a) the idea of an empty forgotten house, that first mansion or dwelling place, and (b) the image of that last resting place, the grave, Mother Earth. The archaic mother is not the same as the phallic mother, the mother of the pre-oedipal. The archaic mother pre-dates the phallic mother; she is a totalising presence known or apprehended only through the senses and through specific signs such as those listed above. Her presence constitutes the background of the horror film, particularly those films which involve a haunted house, decaying mansion, or empty grave. Films include *Dracula, Aliens, Psycho, The Psychopath, The Hunger.*

Abjection and the Body-in-Process

Like the carnivalesque body, the monstrous body of the horror film is always in a process of change. It is the body of becoming,

of process, of metamorphosis—from human to animal, from animal to human, from living to dead, dead to living, human to machine, machine to human—but always the process turns on the definition of what it means to be human. What distinguishes this body of becoming? How are the processes of change and alteration linked to the monstrous?

Representations of the monstrous body in the horror film do not in general draw on symbolic oppositions of high and low as expressed in relation to the grotesque body of carnival. Instead the horror genre mainly puts into play those oppositions that take place between the *inside* and *outside* of the body. This interplay between inside and outside implicates the entire body in the processes of destruction. Whereas carnival celebrated a temporary liberation from prevailing values and norms of behaviour, the cinema of horror celebrates the complete destruction of all values and accepted practices through the symbolic destruction of the body, the symbolic counterpart of the social body. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection provides a particularly useful basis for an analysis of these issues—particularly the relationship of inside and outside to the representation of abjection and the body.

In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva argues that the constitution of the self is intimately bound up with the constitution of a sense of stable subjectivity, coherent speech, and the clean and proper body.[26] The child gains access to the symbolic order only when it has come to understand the rules governing the constitution of the clean and proper body—the boundaries of the body and the boundaries between its body and the bodies of others. Everything that threatens the subject's identity as human is defined as abject. As I have explained in a previous article,

> the place of the abject is "the place where meaning collapses," . . . the place where "I" am not. The abject threatens life; it must be "radically excluded" . . . from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self. . . . The abject can be experienced in various ways—one of which relates to biological body functions, the other of which has been inscribed in a symbolic (religious) economy. . . . The ultimate in abjection is the corpse. The body protects itself from bodily wastes such as shit, blood, urine, and pus by ejecting these substances just as it expels food that, for whatever reason, the subject finds loathsome. The body extricates itself from them and from the place where they fall, so that it might continue to live.[27]

Kristeva draws on her notion of the abject to explain the way in which cultures establish themselves by expelling everything that threatens their existence and naming it as abject, that which must be located

on the other side of the border. In patriarchal cultures, those objects that are related to woman and her procreative and mothering functions (menstrual blood, faeces, urine), and hence to the maternal body, are defined as abject. Many cultures erect elaborate rituals of defilement and purity to safeguard the group from the contaminating presence of these "wastes."

The existence of the abject points always to the subject's precarious hold on what it means to be human. For the abject can never be fully excluded; it beckons from the boundaries, seeking to upset the already unstable nature of subjectivity, waiting to claim victory over the "human." Fear of the abject inspires the human subject to deny the corporeal, material, animalistic nature of existence. Abjection gives rise to an impossible desire—bodily transcendence. Wastes that the body expels in order to protect the self include faeces, blood, tears, urine, vomit. These emit from zones forming a surface on the body, a point of entry that links inside and outside. Hence there is a place on the body's surface at which bodily wastes leave the body; as they are expelled they link the inside to the outside of the body. In the horror film a number of these zones and bodily wastes are drawn upon to represent and exploit the relation between abjection and the inside and outside of the body—in particular the mouth, eyes, vagina, womb, skin, and blood. A closer examination of the representation of these wastes and bodily zones will tell us more about the way in which the inside and outside of the body are constructed in relation to abjection and sexual difference.

Blood

Blood taboos of course are central to all cultures—frequently taboos on woman's blood or menstrual blood. Blood is still used in this context in some horror films, with menarche being linked to witchcraft. In *The Exorcist* Reagan is possessed by the Devil at the same time as she begins to bleed. In the slasher film the prime target for the knife-wielding homicidal maniac is the young girl on the brink of womanhood. A dominant image in the slasher film is the body of the young girl cut and covered in blood. One could argue that her whole body has been transformed into a bleeding wound signifying the horror of menstruation. She is threatening precisely because she is a liminal figure, at the threshold of womanhood. She represents female power associated with bodily change—a change that may also serve to reawaken castration anxiety in the unconscious of the male protagonist. Finally, she becomes monstrous because she literally represents the bleeding wound.

In the horror film, blood is the most visible of bodily wastes, the one that seems to evoke the most terror in the protagonists and, through the mechanisms of identification, in the spectator. Blood flows from inflicted wounds and from all of the bodily orifices. Blood also flows between individuals, the blood from victims covering the living. Blood signifies another liminal state—the state between life and death. Many contemporary films depict images of blood as it gushes forth from the body in close, realistic detail.

The Skin

The representation of the skin in horror is particularly relevant to a discussion of the abject. The skin, which normally guarantees the integrity of one's clean and proper body,[28] acts as a border between the inside and outside of the body. Bodily wastes that pollute the skin are usually quickly wiped away. But in the horror film, the skin is always there to be cut, penetrated, to permit the inside to stream forth and cover the outside. The horror film abounds in images of cut and marked skin, skin erupting from within into pustules, skin infested with parasites, skin covered with blood, skin bubbling and transforming itself as the beast from within erupts, skin that expands to permit the creature inside room to grow. The representation of skin as mobile, fluid, and fragile reinforces an image of the grotesque body as constantly in a state of becoming.

The Mouth

The horror film's obsession with the body, where identity is defined in corporeal terms, represents a self no longer defined in relation to language. Language can no longer be trusted as a defining characteristic of subjectivity. Language has betrayed the self; the self has taken refuge in the body, has become one with the body. It is the scream—particularly the scream of woman—that epitomises the failure of the symbolic order. In the slasher subgenre of the horror film, the most dominant iconographical image is that of woman's terrified face and her open mouth, lips rimmed with blood, from which her terrified scream rises to pierce the night air. (An image that immediately comes to mind in this context is Munch's painting *The Scream.*) The mouth, particularly the open mouth, represents another aspect of the abject. The mouth represents an inside and outside plane of the body; its lips are on the outside, the other side of the lips leads into the body's inner recesses. Blood that flows from the mouth links the inside to the out-

side. The body's boundaries are violated by the open bleeding mouth. Parallels with woman's other mouth and lips, which also bleed and also link the inside with the outside, are obvious and are frequently underlined in the horror film—particularly the vampire film.

The mouth, normally the portal of speech, has become in the horror film an image that signifies the most unspeakable of terrors. First, the mouth that can only scream or groan signifies a renunciation of speech and a blurring of boundaries between animal and human. Second, the mouth that bleeds or becomes a portal through which spills the guts of the human body suggests that the loss of language leads only to death. The third (and perhaps most terrifying) function of the mouth in the horror film is that of traitor—the body's traitor. For the mouth of woman (and sometimes man) is used more and more as a displaced vagina—the opening through which woman is raped and inseminated by alien creatures.

The Womb

Bakhtin's discussion of the Kerch figurines of three pregnant hags that suggest pregnant death is an example of a very strongly expressed form of the grotesque. Images such as this are central to many horror films. In *The Shining* the character played by Jack Nicholson walks toward a beautiful young woman who steps from her bath; the scene suggests Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. He embraces her lustfully and then watches in horror as she suddenly transforms into a hideous laughing hag whose flesh is already in an advanced state of decay.

The theme of woman as pregnant grotesque is central to many horror films (sci-fi horror) where woman is depicted as monstrous because she is capable of breeding and giving birth in abnormal ways. For instance, in *The Brood* she has a large birth sac attached to her side and is able to conceive parthenogenetically. Horrified, her husband watches as she tears the birth sac with her teeth. He is revolted by the sight of the birth process, which, because it takes place on the outside of her body, is rendered in full view. In *Inseminoid* and *Xtro* woman is impregnated by an alien, while in *Demon Seed* she is raped and impregnated by the household computer. In *Alien* and *Aliens* both women and men are orally raped and impregnated by aliens. In one sense these films could be interpreted as fantastic representations of the primal scene as defined by Freud.[29] In another sense, scenes such as these draw connections between woman's reproductive capabilities and the abject. The fact that woman's body is represented as that which is capable of receiving the

alien is a sign of the truly monstrous nature of her body and being. Possibly one reason why reproduction has become a dominant theme in horror may be found in the current anxieties surrounding developments in reproductive technology.

In all of these films, pregnancy is also linked to death. The very fact that woman has conceived abnormally—particularly where she has been raped by an alien of some kind—suggests that the act of giving birth will lead to death. In *Alien* and *Aliens* this is taken to extremes in that the victims' bodies are transformed into wombs and they die as the creature gnaws its way through the stomach. While the notion of a pregnant death is important, these images suggest the grotesque more because of the conjoining of human and alien.

It is possible that the modern horror film's obsession not only with the body and with bodily wastes such as blood, putrefying flesh, crumbling bones, vomit, tears, and so forth but also with the "limits of the body" represents a retreat from the symbolic, the domain of the father, and a return to the imaginary, the domain of the body and of the mother. Consider *Psycho,* for instance—its emphasis on the toilet bowl, blood, the bog, tears, cut flesh, and the need to halt the process of decay by embalming dead birds and the body of mother. The father of course has already been murdered and his body removed from the scene. The film's attitude to the world of the mother, her authority as the one who authorises the clean and proper body, what Kristeva calls the "semiotic chora," is highly ambivalent—there is a wallowing in the taboo as well as an attempt to shore up the authority of the mother. There is no doubt, however, that the domain of the father, the word of the law, is spurned, derided, banished.

SPECTATORSHIP AND THE CLASSICAL BODY

Stallybrass and White's argument that carnivalesque practices gradually reemerged in displaced and distorted form as objects of phobic disgust and repressed desire in various nineteenth-century cultural discourses is clearly of relevance to a discussion of the horror film. I have attempted to show that there are marked similarities between carnivalesque practices, particularly in relation to inversion, grotesque humour, and the representation of the monstrous body. What is of particular interest is the way in which these practices continue and the changes that have taken place in their representation, for instance

the change from a high/low body binarism to one characterised by an inside/outside opposition.

Stallybrass and White argue that carnival practices also mounted an attack on the classical notion of an ideal ego. "The carnivalesque inversion mounts a coordinated *double* attack upon the 'ideal-Ich,' calling the bluff on foreclosure: it denies with a laugh the ludicrous pose of autonomy adopted by the subject within the hierarchical arrangements of the symbolic at the same moment as it reopens the body boundary, the closed orifices of which normally guarantee the repressive mechanism itself."[30]

In her important discussion of carnival, Mary Russo points out that the "grotesque body is opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism."[31] At one level the subject matter of this paper is a carnivalistic inversion of Gaylyn Studlar's. The important question that arises here concerns the relationship between carnival practices and their displaced counterparts and the bourgeois spectator. Is bourgeois identity at all shaken by its encounter with the "other" or is it reconfirmed? Or both? And to what extent might female spectators view the feminised body-monstrous differently from male spectators?

Earlier Stallybrass and White stressed the importance of recognising that "the classificatory body of a culture is always double, always structured in relation to its negation, its inverse." "What is socially peripheral is often symbolically central."[32] In her article "Myth, Narrative and Historical Perspective,"[33] Laura Mulvey makes a similar point. She argues that the definition of carnival as the opposite of official culture does not guarantee that carnival therefore challenges the system or poses a radical threat to its continuation. The horror film is also a discursive practice that inverts and attacks the official world order and its values. The horror film addresses a classic body—the body of the audience. The horror film is also licensed, a legitimate practice. To what extent, then, does the horror film seek to unsettle and alienate the viewer?

Drawing in part on the Lacanian theory of the subject, film theory of the last decade has presented a radical critique of existing notions of the screen-spectator relationship. Central to this view of the screen-spectator relationship is the idea that the spectator does not sit in the cinema in isolation from the events unfolding on the screen. The spectator is then constructed, through the ideological workings of the filmic process, in a comforting but illusory sense that she/he is a coherent, rational subject. This view argues that the classic Hollywood realist text,

through the very nature of the viewing process and the deployment of conventional narrative structures, works to construct the spectator in a position where she/he (mistakenly) thinks herself/himself to be a unified, rational subject.[34] This process is particularly reinforced by the conventional happy ending of the classic realist text in which all loose ends are usually neatly tied up and the values of the status quo confirmed—the couple, family, society, and the law. Recent critical articles[35] have, however, argued that this theory of the screen-spectatorship relationship and the classic text is too reductive. A close study of many popular texts will reveal that there are moments of contradiction, gaps and dislocations, that allow for subversive readings.

How does the horror film construct its viewer? What values are brought to bear in the interrelationship of screen and spectator? Robin Wood's view, discussed earlier, holds that the subject matter of the horror film, particularly its attack on the status quo, does have a subversive potential. But what of the viewing process itself? In general, it seems that the above theory of spectatorship is not relevant to the processes involved in the viewing of horror. It seems clear that the horror film, with its emphasis on the death, temporality, bodily destruction, and ambiguous nature of the monster, cannot construct in the viewer a comforting or lasting sense of unity and coherence in relation to the ideal ego and the symbolic body.

The experience of viewing most horror films is extremely complex. On the one hand, the horror film invariably employs filmic codes such as lighting, music, camera angles, and tight editing to elicit maximum identification. On the other hand, no clear answer can be given to explain the nature of identification. The spectator may identify with the monster or psychopath or else with the victim—or switch identification throughout. Possibly, the spectator may not identify with any of the protagonists—although the audible response of most audiences to the horror film suggests that identification with the victim is extremely important. The spectator may be made aware of her/his voyeurism and punished for looking. Clearly, a detailed study of modes of identification and viewing in relation to the horror film would have to draw on both sadistic and masochistic theories of the gaze.[36]

What of the gendered spectator? In her article "When a Woman Looks," Linda Williams argues that there is a clear difference. She claims that there is "a surprising and at times subversive affinity" between the female heroine of the text and the monster in that, like woman, he is also "a biological freak with impossible and threatening appetites"—

particularly sexual appetites.[37] In her view the female spectator in the auditorium—unlike the male—is punished for looking at the male monster because she realises that its freakishness is not unlike her own. Williams's thesis is important, although it does not take into account the possibility that the monster might be female. What happens when the male spectator looks at the female monster, particularly the castrating female monster? Isn't he also punished? Nor does Williams consider the differences between the abject and symbolic bodies in relation to death and the natural world. (She is primarily concerned with the question of bodily appetites.) But insofar as all monsters are feminised, as a result of changes that transform the body from symbolic form into an abject thing, it would seem that the female spectator is positioned differently from the male. On the one hand, through identification with the abject and feminised body she is better placed to confront the abject nature of life and the fine line separating the human from the animal world; but, on the other hand, she alone is made to bear, through the processes of representation, mankind's debt to nature precisely because of this association of the feminine with the monstrous.

What are the underpinnings of the modern cinema of horror and its representation of the abject body? On the one hand we could argue that a central function of the horror film is to mount an attack, through scenarios of bodily destruction, on the notion of the unified rational self. One of the major changes in the modern horror film is to address the viewer directly, to construct scenarios of bodily destruction that ask the viewer to imagine that the body displayed on the screen could be her/his body. One of the most pronounced features of the contemporary horror film is the realistic creation of human bodies, limbs, organs, and tissues in states of torment and destruction.

The modern horror film now, with perverse pleasure, shows everything that was once only alluded to. The grotesque body of the horror film is the spectator's body—for the duration of the narrative. Furthermore, the horror film's attack on the symbolic order and its repressive institutions denies the autonomy and validity of the subject within that order. This attack coincides with an attack on the body, particularly the boundaries of the body, which normally work to confirm the validity of the ideal self within the symbolic.

On the other hand, it could be argued that one of the major functions of the horror film is to reconstruct in the viewer a definite sense of her/his body as clean, whole, impregnable, living, inviolate. The images of the human body in various stages of dismemberment and disarray must

work also to create in the viewer a sense of separateness from the screen. The scenarios of bodily destruction are too horrifying to sustain indefinitely the mechanisms of identification. Clearly, identification must be weakened or broken at the point at which the abject living body becomes a corpse. Finally, the experience of viewing horror, the subject's encounter with abjection, might also serve to reinforce in the viewer a sense of bodily purity, wholeness, and selfhood.

It is important to remember that carnival was a licensed, authorised practice. The horror cinema is also a licensed practice. As Juliet Mitchell points out:

> You cannot choose the imaginary, the semiotic, the carnival as an alternative to the symbolic, as an alternative to the law. It is set up by the law precisely in its own ludic space, its own area of imaginary alternative, but not as a symbolic alternative. So that politically speaking, it is only the symbolic, a new symbolism, a new law, that can challenge the dominant law.[38]

The kinds of pleasure that horror offers (the permitted breaking of taboos, a safe confrontation with the abject, black humour) also point to one aspect of the ideological work of horror—a separation of the pure body from its abject other and a reaffirmation of a comforting but illusory sense of a unified, coherent, authentic body and self. However, this is not the whole story. For if the horror film does function as a kind of safety valve for the forces of protest and rebellion, it must equally work to construct a space that gives rise to, permits the utterance of, a language of protest and revolt, not only in relation to the sociopolitical arena but also in terms of the constitution of subjectivity. The audience's encounter with abjection as it is represented in the horror text cannot be ignored or dismissed. For if abjection is the condition of the proper body and unified subjectivity, abjection as it is represented in the horror text may well function to remind the viewing subject of the fragile nature of all limits and all boundaries, particularly those of the symbolic (masculine) self. Like the practices of carnival, the cinema of horror serves to mark out those boundaries and those limits. Yet again we find, as with other patriarchal forms of representation, that it is the feminine that signifies the outer limits of those boundaries.

Notes

Many thanks to William D. Routt for his particularly helpful comments and suggestions.

1. Jean Starobinski, "The Natural and Literary History of Bodily Sensations," in Michel Feher, ed., *Zone: Fragments for a History of the Human Body* (London, 1989), 2:350–93.

2. For a detailed discussion, see Elizabeth Grosz, "Desire, the Body and Recent French Feminism," in *Flesh, Intervention* 21–22 (1988): 28–33.

3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Victoria, 1977).

4. Michel Feher, "Introduction," in Feher, ed., *Zone: Fragments for a History of the Human Body,* 1:12.

5. James Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Pleasure* (Oxford, 1985), is a good example.

6. The representation of woman in horror is discussed in the following: Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in Mary Anne Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams, eds., *Re-Vision,* American Film Institute Monograph Series, vol. 3, University Publications of America (1984); Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," in James Donald, ed., *Fantasy and the Cinema* (London, 1989), 91–133.

7. There is an interesting collection of articles on this theme in the "Body Horror" edition of *Screen* 27, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1986). For a humorous reverie on the dead, see Bill Routt, "Dead Is My Dancing Partner," *Flesh, Intervention* 21–22 (1988): 68–69.

8. Philip Brophy, "Horrality: The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films," *Screen* 27, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1986): 8.

9. Ibid., 9.

10. Philip Brophy, "The Body Horrible," *Flesh, Intervention* 21–22 (1988): 60.

11. Pete Boss, "Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine," *Screen* 27, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1986): 15; 16; 16; 15.

12. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London, 1986).

13. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 11.

14. Ibid., 10.

15. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression,* 182.

16. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York, 1982).

17. Robin Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s," *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York, 1986), 70–94.

18. Barbara Creed, "From Here to Modernity," *Postmodern Screen* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 47–67.

19. Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," *Screen* 27, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1986): 44–70.

20. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression,* 9.

21. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* 25–26.

22. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 3–4.

23. Jacques Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 24 (1953): 12.

24. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), 11.

25. Roger Dadoun, "Fetishism in the Horror Film," in James Donald, ed., *Fantasy and the Cinema* (London, 1989), 43.

26. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 113–15.

27. Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine," 46–47.

28. For a discussion of the clean and proper body see Kristeva, *Powers of Horror.*

29. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," in Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan, eds., *Formations of Fantasy* (London, 1986), 335–36.

30. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression,* 183–84.

31. Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies: Critical Studies* (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), 219.

32. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression,* 20.

33. Laura Mulvey, "Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience" in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London, 1989), 159–76.

34. See Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and the Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (London, 1983); Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and the Cinema* (London, 1982), 21–65.

35. Kuhn, "Rereading Dominant Cinema," in *Women's Pictures,* 69–128. For a sustained critique of contemporary theory in relation to the films of Alfred Hitchcock see Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* (New York, 1988).

36. For a discussion of these issues see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures,* 14–18; Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9, no. 4 (1984): 267–82.

37. Linda Williams, "When a Woman Looks," *Re-Vision,* University Publications of America (Los Angeles, 1984), 85; 87.

38. Juliet Mitchell, "Psychoanalysis, Narrative and Femininity," in *Woman, the Longest Revolution* (London, 1984), 291.

8

Barrymore, the Body, and Bliss

Issues of Male Representation and Female Spectatorship in the 1920s

GAYLYN STUDLAR

In November 1922 *Motion Picture Magazine* featured a poem, "The Movie Fan." "She may live in Pinochle, Wisconsin," the poem declared, "but she holds the whip on Hollywood."[1] The poem was accompanied by two cartoons. One depicts the aftermath of a woman taking a hammer to the bust of her favourite male film star. She stands with a hammer in one hand and a newspaper in the other. The newspaper headline reads: "FLOYD PHILMSTAR HAS WIFE AND CHILDREN."

In spite of the real and metaphoric violence attributed to female film spectators by the poem, the Hollywood film industry in the 1920s rarely bemoaned the fact that women were regarded as a formidable box office force, both in its own estimation and that of the popular press. Although box office records of the time are untrustworthy and studies of the gender differentiation of the audience nonexistent, the female portion of the American film audience was estimated by exhibitors' trade journals, fan magazines, and numerous casual observers as being between 75 and 83 percent.[2] For example, in 1925 *Exhibitors Trade Herald* warned its readers: "DON'T FORGET HER! In every exploitation campaign, it would be financial suicide to leave the women folk out of consideration. They are the ones who go to the movies the most, and they are the ones that give the youngsters the pennies needed to attend your matinees."[3] An ad recommending tie-up exploitation schemes for a 1925 comedy likewise warned exhibitors: "You must never lose track of the fact that the majority of your business comes to you because Mrs or Miss So-and-So says to the other half of the party, 'I would like to