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WHERE I AM, THERE (SH)IT WILL BE:

QUEER PRESENCE IN POST MODERN HORROR FILMS

by

MELANIE MCDOUGALD

Under the Direction of Margaret Mills Harper

ABSTRACT

This paper will consider the function of queer space and presence in the post modern horror film genre. Beginning with George Romero's 1968 film Night of the Living Dead and continuing through to contemporary examples of the genre, the paper posits the function of the queer monster or monstrous as integral to and representative of the genre as a whole. The paper analyzes both the current theory and scholarship of the genre and through Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and queer theory offers a theory of how these theories can add to existing theory and scholarship.

INDEX WORDS: Post modern horror film, Queer theory, Psychoanalytic theory, Lacan, Slasher films, Zombie films, Neo-slasher films

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

"Ask any horror fans, and they will tell you that American horror film is in a slump."
Steffen Hantke "Academic Film Criticism, the rhetoric of Crisis, and the Current State of American Horror Cinema: Thoughts on Canonicity and Academic Anxiety"

Noel Carroll's "Why Horror?", originally published in 1990, poses a question: if horror is about what terrifies or repulses us, "how can we explain its very existence, for why would anyone want to be horrified, or even art-horrified?" (33); (perhaps especially) given the current state and output of American horror, this is a trenchant question. Stephen Hantke's article focuses explicitly upon the scholarly and critical anxiety that the genre itself, and recent additions to that genre, produce. Part of that anxiety circulates around whether or not "classic" post modern horror is capable of sustaining critical interrogation and attention; the general abandonment of subversive explorations of political and/or cultural normativity in more recent (post 1990) horror films warrants more anxiety about the genre as an academic/critical subject. While the earlier films (roughly 1968 to 1990) certainly tested the audience's tolerance for varying degrees of gore, they also produced a horror landscape filled with the abject/ed objects of capitalist, (hetero)normative, enlightenment and humanist idealism. The later films seem often to focus upon gore explicitly or even exclusively as the site of horror. Is the abjected body, the body in pieces as disarticulated and corrupted matter, the thing around which horror composes itself? Barbara Creed notes that typical viewer responses to these films are often expressions of (excremental) voiding ("it scared the shit out of me" or "it made me feel sick"), and that these responses are part and parcel of the viewers' pleasure and expectations.(3). In the face of the

latest batch of gore-nographic "neo-slashers", remakes, reboots and revisionings of post modern horror, Carrol's question remains an important one: what is it that horror films do? How does post-modern horror (re)articulate some cultural need for an experience with the abject? And while Creed is certainly correct in noting that horror film viewers want to be made to feel shitless or nauseous, what brings about both the desire for and experience of abject horror? In concert with the physical experience of the post modern horror film is an experience with a particular kind of post modern terror, one which manipulates both its audiences' desire for voiding, for being voided, and presents as agent for that voiding, the post-modern monster. Like its predecessors, the post modern monster is protean; however, unlike the monsters of classic horror, the post modern monster and the films that produce it won't die off. The repetitive logic of the films and the monsters that subtend the genre (the casts of victims change with each film while the monster always returns—no monster no franchise) certainly indicate a seemingly infinite capacity for reproduction of a particular film experience, and yet much of the repetitive logic places an emphasis on repetition and not logic. The means by which the monstrous is enabled to re-terrorize become increasingly fantastic or simplistic over time. The acts of terrorization are mindlessly generic. Perhaps then it is not, as some critical theories contend, the (il)logic present in the genre as a whole, or the particular logic of post modern (re)gendering of the (Final Girl) hero/survivor or the destructive glee largely male, adolescent audiences enjoy while watching the world of parental authority deconstruct, that warrant the genre's continued presence in cultural and academic interest. Perhaps instead it is the specific traumatic presence of the post modern monster as a queer space that reveals the real which creates and sustains our desire.

One of the most notable differences in classic as opposed to post modern horror is that between the post-modern monster and the classic horror film monster. Classic horror presented a

monster that represented an encounter with the "other"—ideologically derived and produced anxieties about the culturally/sexually ill- or non-conformed threat to heteronormative, enlightenment, sanctioned order. Typically, the monster was understandable; it had a constitutive quality, an identity as "other," that through humanistic and/or scientific interrogation could be vanquished or at least contained. Robin Wood has noted that the function of the monster in classic horror was to enable an encounter with that other, and often to secure a humanistic recuperation of the monster as well as a return to (capitalist, family centered, paternalistic, and heterosexual) normalcy ("The American Nightmare; Horror in the 70s"). The monster as some expression of repressed identity or disavowed potential (the Frankenstein monster for example with its pathetic challenge to humanistic ideals) produced a chance for understanding and pity, but only after the threat was destroyed. The destruction of the monstrous, after ascertaining its nature and desires, led to a more informed, more humanized, human subject. The threat that the monster represented was often created through some hubris or carelessness on the part of humanity. The monster of classic horror offered the human subject a space for redress and redemption. While the post modern monster may be made manifest through human lack or culpability, the possibility for exoneration or understanding is foreclosed. The monster's queerness resides in its constitutive negation of meaning and knowledge.

The knowledge gathered about the post modern monster's presence is always inadequate or superfluous. Michael Myer's past crime may be part of an historical record, but the reason for that crime and the murderous desires that inhere in him as monster are outside of human understanding or capacity to deflect further murderousness. As such, the unknown-ness that constitutes the monster represents an un-chartable and uncharted territory—a dark continent of desire and drive. The post modern monster queers the classic horror film monstrous; rather than

representing a space of humanistic dialectic (human error, monstrous result and human enlightenment/progress through mastery of the monstrous) the post modern monstrous reveals the tenuous nature of the subject, its frailty and corruptibility, and it disallows any recuperation of the subject back into a space of productive futurity. In No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, Lee Edelman identifies the function of queer as that which "comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance...to every social structure or form" (4). The non-closure of the genre's narratives, the survival of the monstrous and the monster, produces both the inadequacy of the symbolic law to contain the monster and the continued presence of the monster as affront to and contestation of that law. Not only do the human subjects not profit from their encounter with the monster, the threat to the law and human survival remains present. Certainly, it is this outlaw positionality that marks both the classic horror film monster and the post modern horror film monster. However, the classic horror film monster produces through its monstrousness the triumph of the law; the post modern monster eludes and confounds the law. It is in its position as outside-the-law and its capacity to remain there that the post modern monster represents a space the symbolic attempts to keep at bay, if not disavow: the real.

The real is a fundamental, psychoanalytic category, one of three orders "according to which all psychoanalytic phenomena may be described, the other two being the symbolic order and and (sic) the imaginary order" (Evans, 159). Lacan used the image of a borromean knot to illustrate the linkage and interdependence of the three orders. While each link in the knot is distinguishable as separate from the other two, cutting any one of the links destroys all the links. In this way, the real can be understood as in relation to the symbolic and the imaginary to the degree that it is caught up in the same structure. However, in "The Real of Sexual Difference," Slavoj Zizek points out that "the Real is neither presocial nor a social effect. Rather, the point is

that the Social itself is *constituted* by the exclusion of some traumatic Real" (73). It is not accessible to the subject through the symbolic or imaginary. It can be glimpsed or experienced through the limits or failings of the symbolic or imaginary. The symbolic and imaginary are constructed to some degree as a reaction to the real; through the cut of language and the demand to make meaning, the nascent subject enters into the social by rejecting the real. Thus the real subtends the other two orders, even as it is, according to Lacan, "the domain of that which subsists outside of symbolization" (Ecrits 388). The real is the space in which there has been no cut, no castration, and as such it poses its own trauma and threat to the subject. Lacan states,

> For the real does not wait [*attend*], especially not for the subject, since it expects [a*ttend*] nothing from speech. But it is there, identical to his existence, a noise in which one can hear anything and everything, ready to submerge with its roar what the "reality principle" constructs there that goes by the name of the "outside world." (389)

Further, he describes the real as "always and in every case in its place; it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe, there being nothing that can exile it from it" (25).

In terms of the post modern horror film, the monster figures or produces the trauma of the real as that which returns to itself: the repetitive formula of the genre assures specifically one return—that of the monster. While the monster may be down by the film's ending, he is certainly not out. As noted earlier, the means by which the monster is resurrected often confound logic or probability, but this does not undermine the audience's willingness to enjoy that return. It is an accepted trope that Freddy, Michael, Jason, et al will not die. In this way, the monster's ability to elude or escape death operates to expose the failure of the symbolic to control or intervene with the monster. Thus, the monster exposes a gap in the symbolic order. In The Real Gaze; Film Theory After Lacan, Todd McGowan explains:

> The Lacanian real is the indication of the incompleteness of the symbolic order. It is the point at which signification breaks down, a gap in the social structure. By stressing the importance of the real, Lacan doesn't proclaim an ability to escape language and identify what is actual; instead, he affirms the limitations of language—languages inability to say it all or speak the whole truth. To affirm the real is to affirm that the work of ideology never comes off without a hitch. Every ideology includes a point with its structure that it can't account for or represent. This is the point, the real, at which ideology opens up to the outside. (3)

The post modern horror film and its monster often function to displace or trouble ideological structure. The genre does not recoup or re-instantiate normative values or constructs but rather deconstructs the claims of normative presumptions. The subject is not afforded an oppositional other through which a more better self might be realized; instead, the post modern horror film functions to undo the subject by undoing, queering, the structure of classic horror. Indeed, a traumatic encounter with the real has the potential to reveal to the subject the constructed nature and false appearance of seamlessness the symbolic attempts to maintain. By recognizing the specious claims that the symbolic makes through ideology, the subject may realize the limited and limiting demands of the symbolic. It is this potential encounter that the subject both desires and strenuously seeks to avoid.

In No Future, Edelman argues for an embracing of queer as it operates similarly to the real: as the excessive, problematic presence of that which resists recuperation or appropriation by the symbolic and also as the site of the terror/pleasure of the limits of both the symbolic and the subject. While we can never constitute ourselves in the real, and outside of the symbolic, queer potential offers the possibility for "dismantling" the "dominant logic of narrative, *within*

Symbolic reality." Further, jouissance—pleasure that terrifies and/or terror that is pleasurable—is an undoing of the subject, of the ego, and as such is both desired and resisted. Jouissance represents the limit of pleasure, the boundary which eradicates the difference between enjoyment and disintegration of the self that can enjoy. Edelman calls it "a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning and law" (25). Post modern horror, in its negation of both classic horror and the symbolic order, offers a kind of jouissance both to its viewers and through its monster. The experience of the terror/pleasure of the film itself in general and the monster in specific as embodiment of a queer, monstrous jouissance, is not one of repetition as much as it offers an encounter with the real.

Freud's account of the fort-da game offers an example of both this game of "hide and seek" with jouissance and the real and how language works to distance the subject from the lived experience of the real and jouissance. The child (Hans) plays with a reel and string by throwing it away from himself and then retrieving it via the string, accompanying the actions with attempts to vocalize what he is doing (saying :"fort" and "da"—"there" and "here"). Hans plays this game in the absence of his mother and Freud theorizes that the game is both a development of the reality principle with its demands to delay gratification and of language as the structure that will come to symbolize the capacity to tolerate absence. In The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis Lacan suggests that the fort-da game can be understood as "tuche—which is for us an encounter with the real" (52).

Unlike the repetition compulsion which works as a marker, a symptom, of trauma, tuche is the representation of trauma. Lacan theorizes that the cotton reel does not stand in for Hans' mother, but rather for Hans. As he describes it, "the game of the cotton-reel is the subject's answer to

what the mother's absence has created at the frontier of his domain—the edge of his cradle—namely a *ditch*, around which one can only play at jumping" (62). The mother's departure is for Hans representative of representation (*vorstellungsreprasentanz*); the purpose of the thread and reel is to enact, tempt if you will, the real into which the reel might disappear. The reel has the capacity, like the mother (and like Hans), to be here or there. The thread acts as the means by which Hans may practice being the here of the there or the there of the here. The mother's disappearance is an "ever-open gap", a gap which the subject, Hans in this case, must negotiate (by means of the thread and reel) in order to achieve induction into the symbolic. The subject "detaches itself in this trial, self-mutilation on the basis of which the order of significance will be put in perspective" (62); however, the specific marker of tuche is "as if by chance." It gains meaning for the subject through this seeming chance encounter, through the idea that it could be otherwise but is not, was not, this time. Tuche is a function of the "real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter" (55). In Lacan's estimation, Hans' repetition of the fort-da game does not rehearse the anxiety of the mother's departure and the imaginary production of her return, nor does it demonstrate a desire for mastery or control over the object of desire (which readings are incidentally coincidental with some theories of the function of horror; the viewer/subject's ability to withstand the terror produces a sense of mastery or control). Rather, according to Lacan, it represents the encounter with the real, and the possibility that the real encounter may be otherwise. Just as in the probabilities of the coin toss, each toss representing its own chance of heads or tails rather than a dependence on past results as a gathering and narrowing of possible outcomes, the casting of the reel each time represents a new discrete possibility .Hans' game enacts that trauma: just because the reel was retrieved before does not guarantee that it is infinitely retrievable.

If post modern horror reiterates a sameness, that sameness is much like Hans' thread and reel; the fascination and trauma of the genre lies in its capacity to generate an encounter with the real, an encounter that might be, could be, otherwise. The tropes, clichés, and conventions that formed over the first decade and a half of its production represent the material means by which something "other than" is approached and encountered. That "other than" is itself a representation of the real, and further, a queer response to the closure, homeostasis and recuperative sensibilities of classic horror films. Post modern horror depends most fully upon the presence of the monster or monstrous, not the narrative through which the monster is conjured; the narrative is the thread that connects the viewer to the reel/real: the monstrous. Hence, its tendency to re-deploy the same plots and characters/victims again and again works to anchor the monster in filmic space. As in Hans fort-da game, post modern horror offers the viewer an experience of the subject's potential to be the there of the here, to risk the loss of coherent, cohesive identity and experience the dissolution of the self as it is caught up in the symbolic.

Queerness, according to Edelman, can "never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one" (17); it operates to intervene with our sense of ourselves as fully integrated, symbolically constructed subjects. Queerness is "never a matter of being or becoming but, rather, of *embodying* the remainder of the Real internal to the symbolic" (25). The capacity for this disturbance issues from queer's outside-ness, its abjectness. The monster of the post modern horror film works from that space—queer abjectness. The monster represents that which is already abjected; however, for the viewer and the monster's victims, the act of abjectifying represents a very important narrative focus and (de)self-constituting process. It is only through

the encounter with the queer monster that abject/ing space can be recognized and negotiated as that which marks the limit to and position of the subject as subject.

Julia Kristeva describes the violence of rejecting/abjecting in Powers of Horror; An Essay on Abjection. In her account of an encounter with the loathsome (the skin of the milk offered her by her parents) her child-self works through the rejection of the gift, recognizing that to produce the subject that child-self must produce a space of possible rejection by rendering the gift abject. In developing the capacity for rejection, the subject is forced to admit the possibility of rejection, abjection. She writes:

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and is death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of a signified death—of a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such waste drops so that I might live, until from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. (3-4)

If the struggle to establish and sustain the "I" is a series of rejections, expulsions and defenses, those rejections and expulsions have to happen in order for the subject to claim its space as subject. The rejection of the skin of milk, the thing prized and offered lovingly by the parent, represents the border of the confrontation between life and death, the abject and the incorporated, the queer and the normative. But what is rejected/abjected and what is coveted as an object of desire is not normatively ordered, either in the first instance or in later expressions of desire.

In Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality Freud writes that:

> Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown us that in them the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together—a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct. We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thoughts between instinct and object. It seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attractions. (14)

In other words, sexual desire is not produced by an object, nor is it attendant to normative constructs of what that object could/should be (a gendered/sexed object/subject). Specifically, Freud identifies fecal matter as the first object of desire. The causes for this are several.

The child sees the fecal matter as a gift, a material substance that issues from the child and has value. "[B]y producing them," Freud observes, "he can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them, his disobedience" (52). Additionally, the feces exit the body in the same region from which babies do. Freud states that "one of the sexual theories of children" holds that babies are created through eating and delivered through the bowels. The feces are thus like the child in its relation to its parents as the parents' issue, and exclusive to the

child as its particular, own issue. Further, given the digestive process and its effects on the body, specifically the anal tissue and its conjunction with the genital area, the child experiences pain/pleasure sensations that circulate around an area already invested by the caregiver with libidinal energy and attention. Thus, the fecal matter is the product of an erotic experience. However, the child must learn to reject the fecal matter as an object of desire and replace it with socially sanctioned objects if it is to takes its place in social space. This rejection/displacement of the turd represents a sublimation of the thing for a person.

This displacement and sublimation helps in understanding the nature both of the queer monster and its place in desire. If the monster occupies, designates, a queer disruption that is outside of the demands and constructs of the symbolic—as I noted in terms of the post modern monster's function in horror—then it can also be viewed as abject; its statues as abject object aligns it with the turd. (As Kristeva notes in the earlier quote). The monster's (sh)itness recalls for the viewer/subject that rejected object of desire. The monster figures as border to becoming (sh)itness and embodied abjection. The attraction that the monster holds for the viewer circulates around desire and rejection/abjection, and supports the filmic reality that re-presents the queer monster as narrative focus and structure in order to manipulate that desire.

Tim Dean observes in Beyond Sexuality, that what we desired and lost is shit is a queer idea indeed. Further, Dean remarks, "By pointing to one extreme outcome of the discontinuity between sexual instinct and sexual object, Freud reminds us that originally the object of desire is not another person, much less a member of the opposite sex, but something rather more abject" (265) and the recognition of this first object might be a specifically queer operation in that it resists the "affect-laden social norms regulating sexuality." If the post modern monster occupies

abject space, the space of defilement, dung and death, it also marks the space of that first object and recalls for us the rejection of the abject entrance to the social demands of us.

. The post modern monster figures both the queer and the abject; it also serves to produce queer/real spatiality, through its exposure of the gaps within the symbolic and the symbolically constructed subject and to produce the abject, through the corpses it leaves in its wake. It is the line between the subject and the terror/pleasure of the dissolution of self (the space of jouissance), between life and death, between the "I" and (sh)itness, what life resists "hardly and with difficulty." Post modern horror works across that line: the line between incorporated subject-ness and disarticulated matter, the confrontation between what must be avoided and what must also be acknowledged if the experience of subject-ness is to be had at all. As Freud asserts, the first object of desire and loss is the turd; post modern horror films (re)produce desire for that lost object as well as the horror of that object, in the figuration of the post modern monster. Perhaps what the monster most fully represents is desire itself, the presence of an absence. The manner in which that desire is presented to us varies, but the monster is monstrous desire in all its abject, queer, (sh)itness,

CHAPTER 2.THE SLASHER FILM

The slasher film produces a queer monstrous that intervenes with and exposes the fallacious and fragile nature of the symbolic law. While the post modern monster of the slasher film may share some history or characteristics with its predecessor, the classic horror film monster, these similarities are intentionally subverted or queered. For instance, in many cases both monsters are instantiated in some historical past transgression that comes back to threaten the human being and human culture. However, an understanding or knowledge of that monstrous history does nothing to defeat or contend with the post modern monster. Often the monsters of the post modern horror film are masked and/or deformed. This deformity or masking in the case of the classic horror monster traditionally worked to both identify the human lack in the monster and produce a humanistic recuperation of the monster, at least through an understanding of its motivations. The post modern monster never yields a human face, or human space, to the victims of the slasher film. Indeed, the unmasking of the monster engenders only more horror, and no abatement in the slaughter. The monster is indifferent to its difference. Like the real, it knows nothing of lack.

Several specific tropes of the slasher film circulate around sexuality and spatiality, specifically as they pertain to the queer monster. The Final Girl, a term coined by Carol Glover, became over the first decade of the genre a standard character. While classic horror may maintain the victim/heroine intact through the film's ending, she is saved not by her own endeavors but through the interventions of a masculine hero. The Final Girl not only saves herself, she is usually the only person to be aware of the monstrous threat and to survive it. So like her classic horror predecessor, she is aligned through an instinctual awareness with the monster; however,

unlike the traditional damsel in distress, she cannot access the post modern monster through a mutual experience of lack. Gender, as it pertains to Final Girl and her function in post modern horror, has become an important focus. Gender, as it pertains to the monster, operates to mask the absence and (sh)itness of the monster. The monster's selfsameness with its (home)space, its lack and its connection to sexual aberration, might and has been construed as a feminized and/or homosexualized monstrous; however, the capacity of the monster to elude symbolic castration (and death), its queering of "home" and "family," and its embodiment rather than forbearance of lack suggest an absence of gender and sexuality. It is not a traumatized other, or deficient human subject and it does not symbolize (*mean*) gender or sexuality. Indeed, issuing from the real and figuring queer, sexuality and gender would be impossible constructs, registered as they are through the symbolic and imaginary orders. The post modern monster is, rather, the abject, the turd.

One sequence of shots typical to the genre represents specifically the monster's position outside of the symbolic. At some point in the film, the monster is seemingly killed. The monster's "lifeless" form lies heaped on the ground, presumably dead. There are a series of cut away shots of the relieved, exhausted, survivor followed by a shot of the space that the monster should occupy. The space is empty and the sequence ends with reaction shots of the (re)horrified survivor. This shot sequence works on several levels. First, it reenacts the trauma of the threat of castration. The thing (the penis/monster) which should be there is not. And while castration functions for the subject as an induction into the symbolic, as the price of meaning, the monster's absence indicates its escape from castration and its connection to the space of no castration, no meaning: the real. The second function of the empty space shot establishes the monster as outside of the symbolic law due to that escape from symbolically signified death. The monster's

corporeality does not operate from a recognizable reality as a human body. The symbolic law and the lethal instruments of its phallic (de)meaning making, the guns, chainsaws, knives and machetes brought to bear in order to bear the monstrous across the deadline between symbolically structured "reality" and abject real-ness are impotent against the queer monster. Its escape is both indicative of its always/already (sh)itness and an affront to the symbolic law which seeks to control what is voided and what is retained. The monster's incontinence, its ability to run out, away, off from the death the symbolic can produce, results in the uncanny, the out (of)house that is the monster's queer realm. The submission to castration and the trauma of the shitty process demanded of the subject in order to have meaning, the rejection and abjuring of the first object (the turd), is revisited through the monstrous otherwise-ness. The monster is the stain of the real on the seat of the pants of the symbolic, an embarrassing marker of lack of control that marks the return of the monster to the site of its birth through voiding. The real is, according to Lacan, that thing which returns to itself; the monster as queer presence of absence (desire) acts in a similar fashion. It returns to the space of abjection not because the symbolic has the power to consign it there, but because that is *its* space and *it* is always/already that space.

Space and the queer monstrous are intricately and inextricably bound up in one another. Camp Crystal Lake operates not only as the initial site of Jason's watery death/birth as monstrous (sh)it, but as the (un)homely camp in which the hockey-masked Jason has the home-field advantage. Haddonfield is not only the place in which Michael stabbed to death his illicitly post-coital sister, but is the familial ground which he penetrates in order to finish the job. Angela returns to the site of her first trauma/confusion (the lake/camp where her gay father and sister?brother? were killed) in Sleep Away Camp 1 and later performs as transsexual camp counselor at a nearby location in Sleep Away Camp 2 then finally as a camper in teenaged drag

in Sleep Away Camp 3. The decrepit family home of the cannibals in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is not only the family live/work space it is evidence of their particular craft: a shithouse, it is a compost heap of decomposing remains of the family's victims. The irradiated desert, a military nuclear wasted site, of the southwest both births and then (mis)carries the mutant cannibal tribe of The Hills Have Eyes. These spaces produce the monstrous, and the monster operates as an extension of that queered space in a metonymy of spatiality and monstrousness, the real and the queer. While it is a common trope in horror films, if not a given, that the particular horrific designation of the space indicates the presence of the monster (a haunted house is a haunted house because of the ghost that haunts it), the queer monster itself reveals and sustains the specific horror that circulates through Crystal Lake, Haddonfield and the other locations. The face of horror and the place of horror are caught up in each other, working to produce an eternal return of the monstrous/same.

The ability to (re)occupy both presence and place of trauma is an integral component of the queer monster/monstrous. The resurrection of the monster is demonstrative of its deathly virility and promiscuous (de)productive capacity. Not only is the monstrous resurgence of orgasmic killing multi-filmic, but the monster comes back for more within the individual narratives. As I discussed earlier, the sequence depicting the empty space that should contain the body of the monster references castration and reenacts the trauma of castration. Another common sequence in the slasher film suggests a connection between the queer monster and (multi)orgasmic capacity. In this sequence, rather than the excessively empty space of attempted symbolic murder, the seemingly dead monster re-erects in the frame's background. The dead monster should stay down; being dead and death already, the monster keeps coming. Further, the monster's multiple erections engender more death (les petit morts); the monster does not

procreate but rather aborts the futurity of its victims. This parody of human sexuality and the queering of the idealism surrounding its expression and (re)productive capacity indicate an outside-ness of sexuality and gender for the queer monster.

Though the monster may be gendered masculine in terms of its human past and may retain the gendered markers that stick to it (the masculine names, the clothing, the types of masks worn, etc.), these markers are nominal rather than pronominal. Conflations of the gendering accessories with a gendering of the queer monstrous misses the absence of performative genderedness the queer monster represents. If the monster was capable of (trans)gender performance, the monster would necessarily be caught in the symbolic register. Transgender performance and drag performance take as their frame of reference the gender expectations of the symbolic order. Drag and transgender do not attempt to deny the symbolic structure of gender, but rather seek to disrupt it or expose it as a symbolic structure. And while the queer monster is a disruption to and exposure of that structure, it is not from within it as subject but from without it as representative of the real, that the monster disrupts. In Beyond Sexuality, Tim Dean states that drag and transgender performance have as much to do with political or social negotiations as with sexual expression. The political and the social are both symbolic constructions and hence of no concern for the queer monster. Even though the presence of the monster exposes ideological functions/fictions, the monster as real representation operates from a space outside of language and political or social valuation.

Interestingly, Angela, as I mentioned, is a transsexual. Dean describes the transsexual as most closely engaged with the real, due to the transsexual's attempt to deny the symbolic through the imaginary realm (the imaginary ordering of the inner experience/vision of the body does not match the symbolic ordering of that body). By seeking a space outside of the castrating effects of

language (the symbolic) the transsexual is attempting to access the space that knows no castration: the real (38). But importantly, Angela is as un-killable as Jason and Michael. In the final scene of Sleep Away Camp 3, Angela is hauled off in an ambulance after having suffered multiple gunshots, a shooting that seems to indicate her death. However, from beneath the sheet that covers her "corpse", Angela cheerfully, maniacally, informs the medics that she is doing just fine. What this suggests is that while Angela may indeed be a transsexual, it is inconsequential. The position of transsexual covers her monstrousness, her absence. It functions as a mask, like those the other monsters wear. Her human performance as the creepy, too cheery camp counselor is a kind of drag. She is much more like a death camp matron than a summer camp counselor, especially when she euphemistically declares that the murdered campers have been "sent home." She is not anymore contained by the symbolic law than the other post modern monsters. As with the monsters' masks, these chimeras of gender or sexuality reveal instead a constitutive non-presence. The queer monster is outside of desire; being nothing it lacks nothing.

The lack that the monster figures is not one of human lack, but rather the monster is lack, absence, itself. For instance, in Halloween, two of Michael's victims are a high-school couple who are taking advantage of another victim's babysitting job to engage in sexual activity. Michael murders the boyfriend in the kitchen and then appears in the doorway of the bedroom wearing a sheet and the glasses of the boy he has just stabbed to death. The girlfriend responds to the "ghost" as if he is her boyfriend. Michael of course responds by killing her too. What is significant about this sequence is what it suggests about Michael's presence/absence. His disguise as the lover/ghost is not so much an expression of a desire to take the place of the boyfriend in the sheet(s), or a fear of that demand being made. (Additionally, he has already successfully murdered several people with no need to disguise himself from them; he simply

overwhelms them.) Michael's disguise is representative of representation, like the reel of Hans fort-da game. The sheet acts as the thread that connects the girlfriend to what the boyfriend now is: a ghost. Michael's ghostly apparition represents the death and absence of that boy and communicates to the girlfriend from the beyond, from the real. What the girlfriend assumes to be underneath the sheet (the boyfriend) is not there. And not only is the boyfriend not there, Michael himself is not there. Beneath the sheet is a mask and behind the mask is only queer space—death, the abject and the undoing of the subject.

The monsters' mask marks the monster as the presence of an absence rather than a covering over of identity. Traditionally, masks are worn to disguise or occlude a personality or identity, to obtain an absence of presence. The mask becomes the privileged persona, a visual appropriation of some recognizable but distinctly other entity. Masks confer secrecy, access to prohibited activities or behaviors or erasure of the "real" self so that some other "assumed" personality is visible. Children at Halloween, participants in masked parties, actors in various theatre traditions or bank robbers mask their true identity in order to hide the everyday face and engage in behavior or activity outside of what is allowed to that everyday face. Michael's mask, Jason's hockey mask and Leather-Face's death masks incite horror and terror, but not due to a hidden human self that has taken on the obscuring face of some other in order to more easily perpetrate their crimes. Rather, the masks reveal an absence, a lack of an identity. The masks are the only appearance of a presence the queer monster has. It is the masks' likeness or reference to human beings that make them so horrific. The thing beneath the mask is even further removed from an identity than the mask that represents an identity. In several instances over the course of the franchises, the queer monster's mask is removed, usually by a female character. Beneath the mask, the monster is hideously disfigured, an object of lack and

malformation. In classic horror films, this would be the moment of recognition and pity between the victim and victimizer. As Linda Williams notes in "When the Woman Looks," the woman who unmasks the monster in classic horror is often moved by the "distorted reflection of her own image" and from her perspective "the monster is not so much lacking as he is powerful in a different way" than the human male (65). Williams suggests that because the woman is designated herself as constitutive lack, the monster's lack produces an affinity between the two. Indeed, in classic horror, what the monster desires is the human female, specifically as an erotic object (King Kong and Fay Ray, Mina and Count Dracula, etc). There is no possibility of the lack of the female subject connecting to a similar, symbolically informed lack in the monster of post modern horror. We never witness the monster's own sense of shaming lack, much less an erotic attraction for any of the characters, male or female. Further, the monster's murderousness continues unabated. The unmasking holds no symbolic power over it. The monster's appropriation of the mask is a moment of queer, disavowal of the recuperative ideology inhering in the classic horror film monster.

Mary Ann Doane in "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator" writes about the particular manner in which feminine masquerade works to produce a lack "in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image" (66). The feminine masquerade makes overt through its performativity the performative nature of gender. The fact that it is a woman performing as a woman undoes any naturalness that might obtain to the woman performing the masquerade. It is this undoing that is subversive and traumatizing. In a similar kind of move, the queer monster's masking of itself with a recognizable, and horrific, aspect of subject-ness, reveals the non-presence behind the mask. The mask is the monster's masquerade as human and it acts to double the impenetrability of the queer monstrous. The mask as mask is not human,

and the particular mask worn does not produce any possibility for connection to a human being. It in fact further distances the monster beneath the mask from any human-ness. Like Doane's conception of the feminine masquerade as an undoing of the naturalness of feminine performance, the monster's mask undoes the notion of naturalness in its human performance. Its intentional appropriation of the mask positions the monster as excessive and outside the law, much like the femme fatale with her excessive, lawless performance of femininity.

However, the queer monster does share some qualities with one very human subject: the final girl. As Carol Clover describes her in Men, Women and Chainsaws; Gender in the Modern Horror Film,:

> The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl. She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see stagger, fall, rise and scream again. She is abject terror personified [...] She is inevitably female. (35)

She is also "intelligent, watchful, levelheaded." She is alert to the monster's presence, the something amiss its presence produces even before the killing begins. She is often sexually reluctant or ambivalent, while her peers are sexually active and permissive. In addition, her sexual immaturity suggests not only a reluctance to move from childhood to adult sexual maturity, but some kind of sexual aberrance. The linkage to childhood aligns the final girl with the monster through this emphasis on childhood, (whose monstrous turn often is imbedded in childhood). For example, Laurie Strode is more comfortable carving jack-o-lanterns with her young baby-sitting charge than she is pursuing the attentions of boys her own age. The final girl is often seen by her friends or peers to be freakish or "retarded' somehow, echoing the "expert"

or authority opinion of the monster as deficient. She often has a gender neutral name and is interested in gender neutral or masculine activities (a tomboy, a brainiac, a creative type). She is more dependent upon childhood affiliations or relationships than her peers. In Friday the13th VI, the final girl is a daddy's girl for instance, while in Friday the 13th III, she is a fatherless and exploited telepath with telekinetic abilities (paranormal capacities that conflict with the symbolic order and also align her with the queer monstrous). She is also the only one who's "perspective approaches our own privileged understanding of the situation" (44). Further, Glover observes that the final girl will, by the film's climax, takeover the privileged position the monster has held up to this point, "a shift underwritten by story line as well as camera position." The use of the shaky cam, the I camera of the monster's POV, gives way to camera work that positions us in the same space as the final girl, "in the closet with her, watching with her eyes the knife blade pierce the door; in the room with her as the killer breaks through the window and grabs at her; in the car with her as the killer stabs through the convertible top, and so on" (45). In this way the characteristics of the final girl work to suggest her complementarity to the monster, while the camera and storyline eventually position her as the narrative focus, the privileged space of the monster. And eventually, she becomes the means by which the monster is, if not destroyed, at least defeated for the purposes of the film's ending. But the final girl will be final girl only once. If she shows up in the sequel, she is often the first to die, making way for the next final girl. Only the queer monster and the space that it designates are assured of a return—both to the film series and to itself. However, the figure of the final girl is the position through which the negotiation of the subject with the real (through her contest with the monster) registers through the gap that fantasy and post modern horror exposes.

In The Real Gaze, Todd McGowan examines the function of fantasy in cinema and positions its intention to support the production of a "normal" subject as identical to the work of psychoanalysis. He explains:

> Understood in this way, normal subjects are not those who fit comfortably into their society but the ones who are able to avoid blending together the experience of desire and fantasy. Keeping these experiences distinct does not, as we might expect, ensure a healthy ability to distinguish reality from illusion, but it does allow the subject to have a direct experience of the traumatic real. The normal subject, for Freud, is the subject who embraces traumatic enjoyment instead of sacrificing it in the name of a demand made by social law. (166-7)

The final girl represents the subject attempting to negotiate desire and fantasy. While her peers (and the first victims) are caught up in the fantasy of the sexual relationship and the ideological constructions of desire, she is reluctant to embrace the symbolic structuring of sexuality and desire. It is exactly that reluctance that assures her status as final girl.

Ultimately, it is the return of the monster, the reiterative lack of closure, that work to produce the film genre itself as a space that reveals the real and produces queer space as evidence of the real. The films are not about the victims or the final girl. Readings that suggest a feminist presence due to the sex/gender of the survivors of these films may indeed suggest something about female viewership of these films. They might also suggest the presence of misogynistic and traditional conceptions of the nature of victim-hood. Frequently, the female victims are pursued longer and killed more viciously than the male characters. It may be more comfortable for male viewers to watch a female character scream and cry in terror. However, what is ultimately the purpose of the film is to insure the return of the monstrous queer, not the return of

the final girl. The queer monster represents an engagement with queer space, the abject, and the real. That presence of absence can only be negotiated through and by the queer monster.

CHAPTER 3. THE ZOMBIE FILM

Unlike the particular presence and singularity of the monsters of the slasher film, zombie films represent a threat that is overwhelming in number and nature. The films present an abjected future and a closure of futurity. Zombies are a sea of undifferentiated masses of dead and an exponentially productive corruption of the living. While the films posit a possible future, the film narrative takes place in contemporary time; some unexplained or poorly understood event causes the dead to rise and through their physical assaults on the living, produce more zombies. Human beings are quickly reduced in number and the action centers on the attempts of those humans remaining to survive the onslaught of the zombies and the resulting new world (dis)order. The fight for survival results in societal and relational stresses that undermine those efforts, or reveal a humanity so compromised and unfit that any survivors left face a human reality that is unpalatable if not outright unsustainable. Zombie films and the zombies themselves are a massive eruption of queer space in that they, like queerness, which "attains its ethical value" through its "resistance to the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure" (No Future 3) represent a challenge not only to accepted notions of what constitutes "good" or "acceptable" but also to a speculative future in which such valuations lose their meaning. The zombies also figure the real through this evacuation of meaning making and in that they deflect ideological intervention and shamble about outside symbolically structured understanding. The zombie presents a future of undifferentiated, undead, non-living, sameness—it's zombies all the way down. And like the real, the zombies expose the gaps in the symbolic and the inadequacy of the law in the face of the needs and demands of the

uninfected, even as the probable outcome, a world of the undead masses, becomes more and more inescapable. In other words, the future is (zombie) shit.

George Romero's Night of the Living Dead (1968) not only altered the horror film genre, it created the template for what would become zombie films. The film was iconic and subversive in terms of the horror genre, and it also dealt overtly with social and political issues of the day. 1968 was the year the Supreme Court of the United States struck down anti-miscegenation laws; Romero's protagonists are a dark skinned black man (Ben) and a very blonde young white woman (Barbara). The casting of a black actor as the hero was singular enough for the time, but Romero's film places the only possibility for Barbara's survival fully on Ben's capacity to save her. The film's direct interrogation of sexual anxieties and raced, classed, gendered political issues established this kind of socio-political critique as a specific, integral component of many zombie films, and all of Romero's sequels. Through the zombie crisis, order and the subject are undone, or at least under extreme duress, revealing fault lines present but hidden or ignored pre-infection. As Isabel Cristina Pinedo defines it,

> The horror film violates the taken-for-granted "natural" order. It blurs boundaries and mixes categories that are usually regarded as discrete to create what Mary Douglas calls "[im]purity and danger." The anomaly manifests itself as the monster: a force that is unnatural, deviant, and possibly malformed. (93)

The zombie and the zombie film operate precisely in this way. The world of the living dead most certainly upsets the "'natural' order" of things; the confusion of the uninfected survivors produces not only a necessary renegotiation of societal boundaries but often, through the escalation of violence and the progression of the infection, blurs the distinction between the infected and the healthy, the undead and the tenuously alive, the pure and impure. That these

boundaries typically delineate "discrete" spaces recalls Kristeva's observations concerning the separation of the space of the abject from that of the living, something accomplished "hardly and with difficulty." And the zombie is marked as "unnatural, deviant, and possibly [definitely] malformed." In this way, the zombie and the zombie film represent the same space that the slasher film monsters do: the queer, abject, space of the real.

In terms of the narrative, a major difference between the slasher and the zombie film is the purpose and function of the monster(s) and victims. The slasher film almost exclusively pits one monster against many humans. Those human characters are often under-developed, if not completely undeveloped. Their purpose is to show up for the slaughter. The characters often have the thinnest gloss of individuality, with of course the exception of the final girl. Much of the camera work focuses on the monster's point of view, and the narrative develops around the monster's actions. In the zombie film, the reverse is true: the narrative and camera develop the human characters through their point of view and their (re)actions to the zombie infection. However, a common shot sequence in zombie films does focus on the zombie as a distinct presence.

At some point in the film, often during the sequence in which the immanent threat of the gathering zombies is realized, a sequence of "crowd" shots is cut in with the reaction shots of the survivors. Some of the zombies are dressed in recognizable, meaning laden, distinctive clothing (a high school band member or cheerleader, a man in business dress or uniform, a woman in workout gear) but the clothing does not confer an identity to the zombie; rather the clothing works to emphasize both the absence of identity and the collapse of age, class, race and gender, symbolic markers of the (evacuated) subject, in the face of the indiscriminate nature of the infection. The zombie has no connection to the meaning of its dress, nor to the meaning it, as

meaning making subject, once produced through that dress. It is a foreclosure of meaning, of the symbolic. The relationship between signifier and signified is severed. As such it "cuts short any manifestations of the symbolic order" and is the condition "for something from the real to offer itself to the revelation of being" (Ecrits, 18). Annika Lemaire explains:

> Foreclosure effects neither the judgment of existence nor the negation; only the symbol remains, but, because of its relation to the signified, it loses its true value as a signifier, as a symbol. It is no longer any more an image taken for reality. The imaginary has become the real. (233)

A further function of clothing is its visual ability to help the viewer focus, single out, particular zombies from the mass of zombies. This identification does not allow the viewer to invest the zombie with identity or a separate, distinct presence from the rest of the zombies. Rather, it forces the viewer to insert themselves into the space of the zombie. Somewhere, among all that rotting flesh is a zombie that was once like the viewer. Thus, the viewer is thrust into that abject landscape, reversing the Freudian equation of subject production: "Where I am, there (sh)it will be." .

The dates of the films' releases and the socio-political content are significant too in terms of what sensibilities an American audience was likely to bring into the theater with them. As I mentioned earlier, Romero establishes with his first Dead film the overt introduction of contemporary political and cultural anxieties. Dawn of the Dead, released in 1978, features a frustrated, pregnant, unmarried, career woman who must interact with homo-social, paternalistic, macho fellow survivors, the only company she has available. While she may be (and is—she is one of the two survivors at the end of the film) quite capable of defending and sustaining herself, the post-infection society re-inscribes pre-infection ideology of feminine lack on her capacity and

agency. The gay couple of Day of the Dead (1985) constitute not only the remaining space of humanity and sanity in the increasingly chaotic, militarized space of the bunker, they are also the only male survivors, an ironic twist in the 1980's Reagan years of increased military spending and expansion as well as the non-response of the administration to the AIDS crisis and public fears of a gay induced, blood born, epidemic. The political realities of the day work to both support a subversive critique of those realities through the fictional apocalypse of the Dead films and to insert the viewer into that apocalyptic space. The characters, their experiences and their realities are at least familiar to the viewer. Through this mechanism, the viewer is placed in the social and political landscape of the dead.

A recurrent plot point in these films is the retreat of the living from the structures that frame their pre-infection reality. In Night of the Living Dead, Barbara is trapped in a rural farmhouse; in Dawn of the Dead, the four survivors seek refuge in a suburban shopping mall; Day of the Dead takes place largely in a military bunker complex while Land of the Dead features a walled off, disintegrating Manhattan as the place of last resort for the survivors of the infection. These flights from familiar space to safe space also trigger a collapse of the social structures that inhered in the pre-infection landscape. In the face of this physical and psychological unmooring, the survivors attempt to overlay the template of symbolic law on their impoverished social resources as a means for attaching meaning to the new circumstances. The gaps in the symbolic become ever wider, even as the redirection of libidinal energy offers a fleeting moment of a possible utopian society.

Released from the strait jacket of capitalist, heterosexual, patriarchal ideology, the survivors reorganize along the lines of what is necessary, and what is the individual good. Barry Keith Grant remarks that post infection survival requires "a philosophical detachment and existential

determination"; because the survivors are "cut off from established codes of ethics, forced to survive on an existential precipice", initial negotiations of space and acceptable behavior focus on practicality, ability, available means and self expression. The only space of civility and comfort in Day of the Dead is the tarted up trailer of the gay couple; that these two are tolerated in this space of masculine, armed, aggression says something about at least the initial laissez faire attitudes of the survivors. The inhabitants of the mall in Dawn of the Dead plunder the goods still available, but only insofar as particular items give them pleasure. That the pleasure the objects afford are ideologically loaded (Francine visits the makeup and perfume counters while the boys gather guns and smoke cigars), indicates the survivors' inability to free themselves from ideology. Poignantly, the fact that they are still subjects in the symbolic, that they are not among the undead, informs the living that they are capable of and limits that livability.

These restructurings of the social are always fleeting, fluid, and failures. The sheer number of the zombies overwhelms the space the survivors manage to obtain and the socializing, civilizing structures humans need to maintain life disintegrate in the undead face of the encroaching real. Alexander Doty draws attention to the particular queer intervention of horror as it "exploit[s] the spectacle of heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry" (15). As both abject and abjecting the zombie presence deconstructs normative value and meaning. The real and the queer space the zombies (re)produce places an unrelenting pressure upon the livings' attempt to maintain a space that is cohesive, impenetrable and/or disease-free. The zombie film most overtly indicates the (sh)itness of the future- where the subject is, the zombie will be.

CHAPTER 4. THE NEO-SLASHER FILM AND THE REMAKES

Steffen Hantke writes of Wes Craven's 1996 neo-slasher Scream that "it was, depending on who you asked, either the best or the worst thing to happen to horror film" (191). Scream marks the beginning of the self-referential horror films of the 1990s, a trend in horror that continues today, with mixed results and reception. Mark Jancovich, in his introduction to Horror; The *Film* Reader, remarks that the film "presents itself as a clever, knowing, and ironic reworking of the slasher movie, which is presented as moronic and unselfconscious" (8). The film most obviously referenced by Scream is Carpenter's Halloween—a film that in its time was, according to Jancovich, credited by critics as being "a startlingly clever, knowing and self-conscious play with the genre." This brings up two seemingly contradictory evaluations—was Carpenter's film "clever, knowing and self-conscious" or "moronic and unselfconscious"? Or is Scream, its sequels and similar films of the '90s, more correctly merely an ill advised abandoning of the more "politically attuned horror film of the previous generation" resulting in a film that is "self-indulgent postmodern play"? Or, perhaps the question is: do time and film historiography necessarily change what we appreciate, expect and demand of the horror genre? What is certainly true of these films is that they rely upon post modern predecessors in order to play with expectations of what the genre does, and how those expectations might be re-deployed, re-envisioned or merely retread.

Scream (1996), Scream 2 (1997) and Scream 3 (2000) all play to some degree with a self-awareness not only of the horror genre, but the world of films and celebrity in general, flirting with the fourth wall in sometimes clever and funny ways. Courtney Cox's character, Gail Weathers, explains that nude photos of her circulating on the internet are "my head but Jennifer

Anniston's body," a joke that references not only Cox's real life publicized friendship with Anniston but also works to establish Cox's character as someone who circulates in the world of celebrity. The casting of well known and even A list actors in the films works to increase the sense of irony the films create. In the first film, Drew Barrymore is "doing" the blonde, nubile babysitter that slashers love to slice and dice. Her character will be "done" in the next two films, through a film within a film conceit, that form part of the plot of the two sequels—first by Heather Graham and then by Jenny McCarthy. Scream 2 begins with a sequence starring Jada Pinckett as a self-aware, reluctant audience member critiquing the absence of major black characters (there were none in the original) who is then stabbed to death by the new killer(s) in the first few minutes of the film. Pinckett's brief appearance and general critique are answered in the character of Sidney's college roommate, an African American woman who almost manages to survive the slaughter, and Gail Weather's cameraman, who breaks horror film racial barriers by being a suspect for a few minutes. Despite this conscious acknowledgement of the traditional, raced, gendered, casting of horror films, the killers themselves reflect the monster-ish expectations and traditions of the genre, but with some very important differences.

Like Jason, Michael and Leather-Face, the homicidal maniacs of the Scream trilogy are masked (and in this case, robed). The costume has become as iconic as Jason's hockey mask or Freddy's razor-tipped gloves. However, unlike the masks in the earlier films, the mask worn in the Scream trilogy does not provide a semblance of identity in order to hide the horror of the nothing-ness it conceals. Like the traditional use of masks, the mask in the film serves to hide the identity of the killer(s). It is frightening to the characters for that reason and connotes to the audience the presence of the killer, who is all too human.

The killers of the previous films, as I discussed in chapter 2, are without symbolically ordered gender or sexuality. The killers in the Scream trilogy most assuredly are sexed and gendered, and that gender/sexuality informs the murders. In all three films, the motive for the killers is revenge. Like the films of the 1970s and '80s, that desire for revenge comes out of a sexually charged, societally prohibited moment or history. Billy Loomis, Sidney's boyfriend in the first installment, seeks to avenge his mother's abandonment of the family after his father's illicit affair with Sidney's murdered mother comes to light. In Scream 2, Billy's mother seeks to avenge the murder of her revenge obsessed son at Sidney's hands. And Sidney's long lost, illegitimate half brother, product of a casting couch rape while Sidney's mother was a Hollywood wanna-be starlet, is the killer seeking revenge for his having been cast off by Sidney's mother in Scream 3. While all of these killers (and their accomplices; the first two killers had sidekicks who enabled the murder spree) may be clinically insane, they are not monstrous. They are rather, much like the villains in Scooby Doo cartoons, the guys (and gal) in the mask. Also unlike the queer space/narrative the other films construct and leave open, the Scream films bring about narrative closure and the return to normalcy. To paraphrase the words of Mrs. Loomis, it all starts, and ends, with the family.

As Robin Wood describes it, this dialectic of human error, monstrous threat, and return to re-legitimated normative structures through the vanquishing of the threat, forms the basis for (classic) horror narrative. He also identifies the family as the site of that negotiation. In this case, Scream operates as a "classic" horror film rather than a post modern horror film. While Scream and its ilk may play around with the markers of post modern horror, the recuperative narratives and the lack of a monster that is truly monstrous more closely resemble classic traditional horror. As Wood notes, the recuperative move re-instantiates the sexual and social

repression that forms the need for an othered encounter through the person of the monster or monstrous with that repression. Films like the Scream trilogy attempt a conservative recuperation of the genre as a whole, resulting in a series of who-dunnits that up the ante on gorey-ness while doing nothing to reveal the queer trauma of the abject, queer, real that the earlier films present.

Urban Legend, I Know What You Did Last Summer, Turistas and Hostel all operate from this conservative, recuperative space. The films are not only a chronological move through the last decade or so of horror film history but produce an ascending scale of violence and gore. The victims of the first two films (and their sequels) die in increasingly macabre and spectacular ways, improving if you will over the death scenes of the Scream trilogy; the victims of the last two films die in torturous and explicit scenes designed to test both the limits of the genre in terms of gore and the limits of the audiences' collective stomach for such depictions.

Films like the Saw series, Hostel I and II, and Turistas make evident the inherent culturally and ideologically conservative nature of these newer films. They may push the envelope in terms of what we can bear to see be done to another human being, but they do not challenge in any meaningful way who it is that is tortured. Saw punishes privileged members of the culture for a lack of appreciation for that privilege (while this may seem subversive, and perhaps is meant to be, the message is "Enjoy!" not "Die capitalist pig"—the charge against the victims is "privilege not enjoyed is criminal"); Hostel I shows the torture and mutilation of American male college students and (problematically) one young *Asian* woman. In an apparent attempt to spread multi-cultural, unbiased, democratic ideals about victimization, Hostel II features the torture and deaths of young American women. The two films exploit the final girl concept (the lone male survivor of the first film is killed off at the start of the sequel and the lone survivor of the sequel is female) but the traumatic encounter is with a monstrous human, rather than an inhuman monster. These

films reproduce the kinds of national, cultural, and sexual prejudices that the earlier films sought to expose through their manipulations of ideology. Further, they completely abandon the post modern monster for a completely human, self-indulgent and banally sadistic, villain.

Many of the remakes and reboots of recent years operate through the same recuperative sensibility. The Fog (2005), Black Christmas (2006), Rob Zombie's reboot of Halloween (2007), My Bloody Valentine and Friday the 13th (both 2009) all act to recuperate horror back into the symbolic order of meaning either by righting a wrong (The Fog) or an overdetermination of the monster as lack through an over-emphasis on the monster's human history. The sorority sisters of the original Black Christmas (1974) were terrorized and murdered by something left unexplained and still in the attic. The sisters of the 2006 version are brutalized by an escaped maniac and his deranged sister. Zombie's Michael Myers is more akin to Jeffrey Dahmer than the original's monster; much is made of his victimization at the hands of his stepfather and his classmates. Specifically sexual slurs are heaped upon him (his stepfather calls him a fag and his classmates taunt him about his mother's job as a stripper), which work to conflate and secure ideological, sexually normative demands and pop cultural, sensationalistic readings about the cause of mental illness and sociopaths. All of this anchors Michael as a rather pitiable resident in the land of the (human) deviant, rather than an unknowable representation of what exceeds the symbolic. As in the case of the Scream films, the production of a humanized monster reiterates the human rather than the monstrous; the purpose and experience of these films only leads the viewer to an encounter with the known.

While there have been several American releases of British and European post modern horror that do function to reproduce the particular abject, queer horror of classic post modern horror, American output has been minimal. Brian Berino's 2008 film The Strangers is one of those few.

The film centers on the baseless terrorizing of an attractive young couple. The reason the monstrous trio gives for the brutality is that the couple were home. This reason, which obviously is no "reason" at all, designates the "family" of monsters (they suggest the three bears' family in their gradated range of shape; all three are masked so we can only guess at their relationship to each other) as figures from both the tradition of post modern horror and the abject, queer space of the real. The film begins with a voice-over declaring the story's basis in an actual crime and a moralistic intonation about the number of unsolved crimes committed in America every year. The connection to earlier films is obvious, but the deployment of the factoid/fictoid information redoubles the sincere insincerity of the voice-over. Whatever the purpose of the film, it surely is not a public service announcement and it will far exceed the parameters of "reality based" television crime shows, a pop-cultural phenomenon that didn't exist in the 1970s and '80s, at least to the extent it does now. The "no reason" of the couple's horrific experience and the monsters' purpose for their actions opens up the space of the queer monstrous. As they drive off from the devastation, the "family's" chilling agreement that it (the next encounter) will be better next time leaves the narrative structure and the space of the real open. The non-closure, the masked non-entities and the attack on the "innocent" victims, all function to reproduce the queer monster of the post modern horror film.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

In an analysis of scholarly and critical theory of the post modern horror film genre, Hantke says that writing about a genre that is "still a vital element in the cultural landscape" produces specific critical and scholarly problems:

> Hence, one might tell of American horror cinema as the story of the slow and steady decline of the genre; or, conversely, as the story of its ascent from modest, inauspicious beginnings to prominence; or as the story of the birth, death, and rebirth of the genre. Just as the question of beginnings, of proper origins, is a crucial one for the construction of such narratives, so is the problem of endings. (195)

He goes on to say that "explicitly or implicitly, the genre whose centrality they are working so hard to establish or reaffirm is currently in a state of crisis." It may be in a state of crisis, but that crisis may reveal more about the power of post modern horror than its waning, and attempts to fix its current position may inadvertently reproduce normative impulses for knowledge and mastery, impulses more fixed around classic horror films.

Perhaps the problem in American post modern horror films may be more properly understood as a (recent) failing of representation rather than a representative failure; the films of the last decade or so that recuperate the monstrous into a space of possible if not actual normativity reject the queer/real spatiality of the abject monstrous outright. However, the intentionality behind that rejection might be read as a continued presence of the abject. Its exclusion is both a contrivance and a notable absence, and perhaps signals the success of the classic post modern genre. In the more recent films' revisionings of the classic post modern horror film, the space that the queer/abject monster represents is not adequately or satisfactorily

filled by the substitution of the human monster. The monster, as we have seen, is the space/place that made the post modern horror film compelling and horrifying—the real out of which emanates the abject queer and to which the symbolic attempts to respond—recalls to us and for us the instantiation and sublimation of original desire. Dean, writing about Freud's theories on perversity and sublimation, states:

> According to Freud the triumph of love consists in fucking corpses and eating shit. Or, to put it another way, the triumph of love entails a kind of "mental work" that—by overriding shame, disgust, horror or pain—could be identified as specifically queer, because this work consists in struggling against the affect-laden social norms regulating sexuality. (268)

We need the queer threat/promise in order to (re)mark the border that Kristeva identifies as the demarcation between ourselves and the abject (corpse, shit) we thrust away, in order to take and hold a place in the social.

When we consider the abject space that the queer monster occupies and represents, we can begin to appreciate how and why the genre that produces that space holds such cultural and critical fascination and anxiety. While the monster of classic horror films presented a space through which the other could be experienced as an opportunity for recuperative, ideologically informed normalcy, the monster of the post modern horror film represents a non-space, a non-presence, through which we can experience both the terror/pleasure of the queer/real and the desire for the lost, abject/object of desire. The threat of that space triggers the repressed trauma of struggle and cost of the space we occupy as subjects and allows an experience, through fantasy, of the traumatic real. Further, the genre as a whole offers possible ways to think through queer abjectness, which is perhaps a redundancy. Queer cannot be an identity, as Edelman insists

and as we have seen in the queer monster. It can however, as that which "voids every notion of a general good," resist the power of ideologically expressed, symbolic law that calls us to maintain its fiction of completeness for our own good. Dean aligns fantasy with "the Lacanian real as a disintegrating force, one that ultimately resists all efforts at assimilation and domestication" (Beyond Sexuality 259); queer capacity connects us to fantasy, possible otherwise-ness, which post modern horror represents through the post modern monster.

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