

CARNAGE AND CARNALITY: GENDER AND CORPOREALITY IN THE MODERN
HORROR FILM

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INTRODUCTION

The horror genre has been more responsive to feminist rhetoric than any other film genre. There are many possible reasons for this. Horror is by definition a genre that focuses on the injustices of the world, and feminist rhetoric—often characterized by a sense of anger, righteous indignation, and grim tone—makes good fodder for writers of horror. Furthermore, as a genre designed solely to upset viewers, it must undermine commonly accepted notions of reality, including social norms related to gender and sexuality.

The horror genre has offered diverse portrayals of gender transgressors. Violent women, for example, have been depicted alternately as victims of feminism or femininity, as demon-possessed, or as heroic figures who use violence as a tool to overcome patriarchal oppression. In recent years, the role of violent women in film has gained the interest of many groups, including film theorists, sexual assault activists, self-defenders, and others who “find it productive to identify with, enjoy, and share images of women who could express their rage, defend their bodies, and usurp some of manhood’s most vital turf.”¹ Likewise, the horror genre has offered criticisms of traditional masculinity and provided positive alternatives for male behavior, which have been of interest to participants in the emergent men’s studies movement, who have recognized that “[dominant] masculinity is a cultural construct; that is, it is not ‘natural,’ ‘normal,’ or ‘universal.’”² These men wish to explore a more realistic way of relating to others, without the constraints of always being “tough, masterful, self-possessed, knowing, [and] always in control”—mythical and unattainable standards that jeopardize men’s emotional well-being.³

¹ Martha McCaughey and Neal King, eds. *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 5.

² Anthony Easthope, quoted in John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Harlow, England: Prentice Hall, 2001), 139.

³ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 139.

It is perhaps surprising that such progressive elements should emerge from what has often been dismissed as a “low” genre that has very few socially redeeming qualities.⁴ Many feminist scholars and critics have focused on the genre’s propensity to terrorize its female characters and to present the violence against them in a highly sexualized light. However, it appears that, along with traditional gender roles, the horror genre has gradually purged itself of objectifying portrayals of women’s bodies. For example, the infamous “tits and scream” shot, in which a nude or semi-nude woman is brutally slashed to death, has virtually disappeared from horror films made after the mid-1980s. Nonetheless, the subversive and progressive aspects of the genre were largely ignored until the publication of Carol J. Clover’s groundbreaking book, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), which has been significantly responsible for rehabilitating the genre’s reputation, and has even inspired some horror directors and writers to include her concepts into their films.

Clover argues that the horror films of the 1970s and 1980s tend to liberate members of one gender at the expense of the other. Furthermore, she convincingly argues that the viewers of horror films, the majority of whom are male, are willing to identify across gender lines to empathize with the female (or feminized male) victim-hero. Clover supports her argument by examining the genre’s subversion of the “male gaze,” as slasher films in particular feature the (usually) male killer’s point-of-view shots early in the narrative, only to replace it by the equally murderous gaze of the surviving female.

⁴ For more discussion of the progressive elements of “low” film, see Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), and Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro Reboll, Julian Stringer, and Andy Willis, eds. *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2003).

While these arguments are quite accurate for the movies of that era, more recent horror subgenres, such as the torture film, have deliberately moved away from the formulas outlined by Clover. Although Clover frequently argues that horror, along with other “low-mythic” genres such as the folk tale, translates cultural ideas about gender into bodily manifestations, she devotes comparably little analysis to issues of corporeality and bodily experiences, which is the primary focus of my examination of the genre. When discussing films of the 1970s and 1980s, I will draw directly from Clover’s arguments to include a more detailed examination of corporeality; in examining more recent films in which Clover’s theories are no longer directly applicable, I will show how the genre is continuing to re-envision or erase gender binaries by redefining which bodies are penetrable, ownable, or consumable. I will not only discuss the genre’s depictions of sexuality and violent assaults (particularly its fusion of the two), but also how the genre acknowledges the ways in which cultural constructions of gender and race are inscribed on our bodies, and how it seeks to disrupt these categories. Another area of interest is how the genre conditions viewers’ bodily responses by exploiting fears of sexual penetration and violent death, which horror portrays as having considerable overlap. However, horror does not merely produce a fear response or sadomasochistic enjoyment of suffering, which has been a common criticism on the part of the genre’s antagonists. Certainly, it also can produce feelings of empathy by stressing common experiences—bodily and otherwise—that individuals share regardless of their gender, race, age, or class.

An examination of corporeality is essential to understanding issues of gender, violence and sexuality, as these things are experienced by and lived out in our bodies. Unlike the regrettably tangible nature of physical assault, gender is a “fuzzy” area that is infinitely more difficult to pin down. Although gender is a social construct, and not inherently natural, Martha

McCaughey, an analyst of self-defense culture and popular films, has correctly observed that gender roles are encoded in our muscle memory,⁵ and that “gender ideology affects the way we interpret and experience our physical bodies.”⁶ This is problematic in that embodied gender roles perpetuate inequality between men and women. The masculine body is too often constructed as strong and inviolable. It is no wonder that many men (especially white, heterosexual men) cannot picture themselves as victims of violent crime.⁷ In contrast, to have a feminine body is to have a body that is “servile, soft, and vulnerable,” a body conditioned to deliberately withhold its own strength, and that exemplifies “a cultivated inability to defend moral and physical boundaries.”⁸ In this sense, women have been trained to participate in their own oppression.

Many facets of popular culture, especially mainstream and “high” forms of entertainment, have certainly perpetuated the myths of the passive female body and the invulnerable male body. McCaughey discusses at length the ways in which media images reinforce traditional gender roles, perpetuate rape culture, and influence how we view our bodies. It stands to reason that subversive representations may encourage us to view our bodies differently, and especially women’s bodies as having inherent strength.

I viewed over 2,000 horror films for my examination of representations of gender and corporeality in the genre. In this analysis, I am focusing primarily on independent horror films

⁵ Martha McCaughey *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Self-Defense* (New York and London: New York UP, 1997), 89-90.

⁶ McCaughey, *Real Knockouts*, 8

⁷ This became obvious during my work with various organizations that provided services (including self-defense classes) to women and victims of violent crime. Upon reading our promotional materials that cited the incidence of male rape, many men and a few women could not see how it was *anatomically* possible, apparently oblivious to the mechanics of oral or anal penetration. Many white male students I spoke with were assured that they would never be victimized. In contrast, men who were gay and/or racial minorities stated that they faced regular harassment and frequently felt that they were in physical danger.

⁸ McCaughey, *Real Knockouts*, 33

because “B”/independent films are the “cinema of the disenfranchised,”⁹ and horror is likewise “a marginal genre that appeals to marginal people . . . who may not have quite the same investment in the status quo.”¹⁰ As a result, independent horror films have always been more likely to tackle taboo subjects. In contrast, mainstream Hollywood, always concerned about profit, consistently picks “safe” topics in an attempt to appeal to the broadest audience possible.¹¹ Hollywood, backwards as ever, has been especially slow to embrace feminism, lagging 10-20 years behind independent horror.¹² In this analysis, I am avoiding the discussion of mainstream horror films (those with A-list directors and actors), because they tend to perpetuate misogynist stereotypes.

My first chapter, “The Absent Body,” shows the classical or Code-era horror film’s disavowal of bodily experience, its adherence to the “two-sex” model, and its promotion of heterosexuality and traditional gender roles. After the classical era ended, horror films of the 1970s and 1980s “liberated” one gender at the expense of the other. In chapter two, “Inviolable Bodies,” I examine the tendency of slasher and rape revenge films to inscribe masculine qualities on women’s bodies, while portraying men as defective or deviant in mind and body. Chapter three, “Grotesque and Abject Bodies,” illustrates the inverse trend of supernatural films of the same era to debunk myths of male invulnerability against a foil of grotesque female “openness.” Rather than retread ground covered by Clover, I focus on historical and cultural ideas about demon-possession and the construction of the female body as an inherently “grotesque” body. Clover’s analysis of the genre ended with the late 1980s. Since then, new subgenres modified or reversed the trends she discussed. Chapter four, “Incomplete Bodies,” will discuss the propensity

⁹ Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Second Century of Cinema: The Past and Future of the Moving Image*, (Albany: SUNY UP, 2000), 75

¹⁰ Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992), 231.

¹¹ Dixon, *The Second Century of Cinema*, 75-79.

¹² For example, Carol Clover argues that *Thelma and Louise* is merely a very watered-down and compromised version of *I Spit on Your Grave*, as it punishes its heroines by sending them off a cliff (*Men, Women, And Chainsaws*, 233-235).

of post 1990s horror films to portray the two-sex model and its adherents as pathological, yet encourages viewers to identify with female psychopaths. The last section, “Consumable Bodies,” examines the emerging genres of horror-porn and the torture film, and their ongoing dialogue with each other. I argue that horror-porn often fails to incorporate the feminist elements of standard horror films in that it idealizes the two-sex body and fetishizes racist stereotypes. Fabricated snuff films do the same, but on a more explicitly hateful level, and the genre’s preclusion of victim-identification and embrace of fetishized sexual cruelty aligns it more closely with pornography than horror. In contrast, the torture film collapses the two-sex binary and racial divisions by emphasizing the universality of extreme bodily suffering. Many horror films of this type overtly criticize the inherently exploitative nature of pornography, prostitution, and other forms of commodifying the body.

PART I.
THE ABSENT BODY:
DISAVOWAL OF THE FLESH IN THE CLASSICAL HORROR FILM

To truly appreciate the modern horror film's extraordinary representations of gender, sexuality, and corporeality, one must understand earlier horror films. In what film scholar Isabel Pinedo identifies as the classical period, the monster is defeated, social order is restored, and rationality invariably triumphs over the irrational.¹³ In short, the classical horror film (like other genres of the era) functions to uphold societal norms and, paradoxically, to reassure and comfort the viewer. While movies of the classical *type* were made since the inception of film, this narrative structure was not enforced until the induction of the Hays Code in 1934. Code regulations not only censored scenes deemed too violent or sexually suggestive, it actively enforced a variety of sexist and racist stereotypes.¹⁴ Filmmakers who did not agree with these values were hard-pressed to express their beliefs effectively. Given the daring (and sometimes feminist) themes of the films of the early 1930s, American cinema would have been very different if the Code had not enforced its narrow values upon the industry for thirty years.

The removal of explicit sex and violence didn't ruin all genres, but it certainly hurt the horror film, which deals almost exclusively with these issues. As Pinedo notes, the modern horror film *shows*; the classical film *tells*,¹⁵ but the problem is that it doesn't tell it very well. For example, not only would a Code-era film not show a rape, the word "rape" would not be spoken because the reality is too unspeakable. As Joe Bob Briggs, the (in)famous drive-in movie critic

¹³ Elizabeth Christina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, (Albany: SUNY UP, 1997), 30.

¹⁴ The Hays Code can be read in its entirety at "The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930", at <<http://www.artsreformation.com/a001/hays-code.html>>.

¹⁵ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 18.

and “aficionado of trash” observes, the Code toned down issues of sexuality and violent physical assaults to the point where viewers were hard-pressed to tell what is happening. As a mainstream non-horror example, he cites the film adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* as being “so heavily edited that first-time viewers can hardly pick up any references to homosexuality, nymphomania, Blanche’s attraction to young boys, or the climactic rape scene, since, under the Production Code, it’s unclear just what Stanley Kowalski does to her.”¹⁶ “B” films were more likely to address taboo topics, but faced the same restrictions. As a result, any subversive elements were undermined by a tacked-on happy ending that upheld the Code’s value system.

¹⁶ Joe Bob Briggs, *Profoundly Erotic: Sexy Movies that Changed History*, (New York: Universe, 2005), 103.

Chapter 1

The Two-Sex Body and its Discontents:

The Gothic Monsters of the Silver Screen

Nowhere is the adherence of the classical horror film to traditional values more pronounced than in its treatment of gender roles. Men are macho and heroic whereas women are passive, existing only to be victimized by the monster/killer, or to swoon and fall dramatically into the hero's arms. While violent women do exist in these films, one may be sure that the price they pay is a heavy one, as women's aggression is monstrous in itself, a crime against nature, and indicative of insanity. In contrast, male violence, whether heroic or sadistic, is portrayed as a normal facet of masculinity. This sort of thinking exemplifies the "two-sex" model, which emerged in the eighteenth century and posits men and women as completely and *essentially* opposites, and constructs gender roles as proceeding directly from biology.¹⁷ However, many earlier cultures, philosophers, and scientists ascribed to the "one-sex" model, which viewed men and women as having the same reproductive systems, but in different arrangements. While the male was considered the more perfect version, there was also a great deal of fluidity between the sexes (hence the existence of legends about lactating and menstruating men, and of individuals who could change sex spontaneously), and therefore it was thought that men could become women and vice versa.¹⁸

While horror films of the classical era promote the two-sex model, there is often slippage into one-sex thought, especially in vampire films. Just as vampires have bodies that are neither living nor dead in the traditional sense, their bodies also have the appearance of being male or

¹⁷ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 13.

¹⁸ Thomas Lacquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992). Also discussed in Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 13-16 and in Cyndy Hendershot, *The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 9-10.

female, but are technically neither—they reproduce without sexual intercourse. This, along with the concept of the vampire as an “unnatural” being, creates a potential for a non-phallic sexuality that transcends the binaries of gay and straight, male and female. However, to meet Code requirements, such deviance from the “natural order” of the two-sex model and its preference for heterosexuality had to be punished.

For example, in *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), possibly the first lesbian vampire film, the somewhat masculine, statuesque, sexually aggressive female protagonist seeks liberation from her “unnatural” body and “wicked” desires through destroying the body of her vampiric “father” Dracula. This is presented as a heroic, autonomous act. Although this should have transformed her back into an ordinary human, she soon realizes with horror that the old lusts remain, and subsequently seeks help from a male psychoanalyst to “cure” her “condition” (which we can assume refers both to her vampirism and her sexuality). In doing so, she largely surrenders her autonomy to a male authority figure who cannot save her, and in fact kills her by the end of the film. This is a common fate of coded lesbians, heterosexual women who are sexually “insatiable,” and other women who reject their “natural” femininity, although some are redeemed through marriage or embracing motherhood. Men who are coded gay or who effeminate are similarly punished if they don’t conform to accepted values of ideal masculinity.

Other monsters were more overtly gendered. One never sees a female werewolf in the classical era (even *She-Wolf of London* [1944] relied on a deranged human woman impersonating a female werewolf). The sentiment that only men should be “animals” is expressed in the cult film *Spider Baby* (1962), in which a female horror fan says she loves the Wolf Man because “that’s how a man should be—a wild beast.” The statement is absurd, but the popular culture of the time found a certain sex appeal in such images. Perhaps it was easier to envision women as

sexual seductresses than as bestial, hairy, and brutishly strong. A woman capable of manually ripping a man or woman to pieces transgresses the two-sex ideal far more than does a female vampire. By the 1950s, gothic monsters, with their predatory sexuality and animalistic bloodlust, faded from popularity, and were replaced by parasites, radioactive monstrosities, and sexless invaders from space, but the same messages about gender and sexuality remained intact.

Chapter 2

Madwomen, Gender Transgressors, and Victims of Feminism at the End of the Classical Era

In supernatural films of the classical era, science and psychoanalysis are ill-equipped to treat the demonic afflictions of their unfortunate protagonists. However, in secular horror films, particularly those made in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Freudian psychoanalyst was elevated to a nearly god-like status—a trend present in other genres as well, as Freud’s theories had gained new popularity and credibility.¹⁹ One explanation for this resurgence is that it provided a “scientific” rationale for women to resume traditional roles as wives and mothers in the wake of World War II. Furthermore, psychoanalysis allowed science to bypass the ever-troublesome body altogether—a fitting mode of treatment, as films of the classical era often distance themselves from bodily experience. However, Freudian symbolism simultaneously gave filmmakers more freedom to imply deviant sexual desires without violating Hays Code standards. If supernatural films treated one-sex bodies and the abandonment of traditional gender roles as sinful or demonic, secular films view such deviance as a cause or symptom of psychopathology in their all-too-human monsters.

For my primary examples I will examine in detail two films by William Castle—*Homicidal* (1961) and *Strait-Jacket* (1964)—and Wes Craven’s *The Last House on the Left* (1972), although these films were made in the final decade of the classical era. *Homicidal*, the film of which Castle was the most proud,²⁰ was released in 1961. On the most simplistic level, the plot involves a woman who was raised as a boy because her father desperately wanted a son.

¹⁹ Lisa Appignasesi, *Mad, Bad, and Sad*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), 301-305.

²⁰ William Castle, interview, “The House that Castle Built: William Castle,” With Rick Atkins. *Let’s Scare ‘Em! Grand Interviews and a Filmography of Horrific Proportions, 1930-1961*, (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1997), 68-75.

S/he must continue the charade into adulthood in order to collect a rather substantial inheritance. However, adopting the male role has literally driven her insane, and her gender transgression is punished by death. The character's duality is not revealed until the last five minutes of the film, and Castle adds to the gimmick by concealing the "real" gender of the lead actor. Castle had initially auditioned young, often gay, men to play *Homicidal*'s transvestite Emily/Warren character, but later decided that this approach was wrong.²¹ Castle eventually chose Joan Marshall for the role, and had her appearance radically altered for her portrayal of Warren. This transformation was accomplished through, among other things, the use of colored contact lenses, dental and hand prostheses, and a man's haircut, dyed black.²² Lastly, Marshall was billed under the androgynous name Jean Arless, thereby ensuring complete audience confusion in the matter.

In the role of Warren/Emily, Arless proves to be quite adept in performing both rigidly stereotypical masculine and feminine behaviors. Warren—complete with standard macho body language—is presented as a rational and levelheaded man, the antithesis of the over-emotional woman commonly portrayed in films of the era. Warren's rage at being imprisoned in his hyper-masculine role is expressed in numerous scenes, long before the revelation that he was actually a female at birth. He bitterly recalls how much his father wanted to "toughen me up, keep girls out of my life, make me more of a man," and how his doctor "gave me a quarter for being a *good little boy* . . . I didn't like him." The opening scene of Warren as a child is also quite telling. Upon entering the playroom, Warren rejects the multitude of masculinist icons—boxing gloves, sports paraphernalia, and the like—in favor of his half-sister's doll, which bears a slight resemblance to his later incarnation as Emily.

²¹ William Castle, *Step Right Up! I'm Gonna Scare the Pants Off America*, (New York: Pharos Books, 1976), 153.

²² Castle, *Step Right Up!*, 153-154.

Warren's female alter ego Emily serves not only the utilitarian purpose of carrying out the necessary murders of characters aware of the charade, but also as an outlet for the embodied feminine behaviors that were previously forbidden. However, despite her hyper-feminine appearance and mannerisms, Emily is arguably as much of a failure in the feminine role as Warren is as a man. Given that her violent behavior makes her a gender transgressor, she is often forced to submerge her aggressive tendencies under the trappings of feminine sweetness and passivity. Although *Homicidal* ultimately portrays deviation from gender norms as "unnatural," as a rebellion against one's biological status as male or female, its unique quality is that it simultaneously illustrates the artificial and confining nature of gender constructs.

In 1964, Castle released *Strait-Jacket*, which features Joan Crawford in the leading role as Lucy, a woman who spends twenty years in an asylum after the beheading and dismemberment of her unfaithful husband and his girlfriend. That she should be considered insane for these murders is somewhat strange, and belies a certain degree of sexism—after all, spouse murder is a common element in Castle's films. The actions of murderous husbands are dismissed as being merely criminal, and as occasionally justified. As Frederick Loren asks in Castle's 1959 film *House on Haunted Hill*, "What husband hasn't wanted to kill his wife?" The idea of a woman murdering her husband, however, is seen as deviant and literally unthinkable.

In the scenes following her release from the asylum, Castle illustrates the dichotomous nature of Lucy's personality primarily through her appearance. Unlike *Homicidal*, *Strait-Jacket* explores the concept of duality within the confines of one gender, and makes the distinction between "good" and "bad" femininity. "Good" Lucy is timid, matronly, sexually pure, and is most often garbed in dark-colored, frumpy dresses. The other Lucy is much more glamorous and youthful in her appearance. Her personality is also quite different, given her sexually charged behavior with

her daughter's boyfriend. As one might expect, autonomous female sexuality is seen as threatening and aberrant, and is just one more symptom of the "illness" that Lucy must overcome in order to become well. To further complicate matters, a new series of axe-murders occur shortly after her release from the asylum. These are eventually revealed to have been committed by Lucy's daughter, driven insane by the lack of a mother figure during her formative years. *Strait-Jacket's* conclusion indicates that Lucy's *real* crime was not the brutal murder of her philandering husband, but the abandonment of her "proper" role as mother.

While films like *Strait-Jacket* promoted solidly traditional values, films such as Wes Craven's rape-revenge epic *The Last House on the Left* (1972) were made at the end of the classical era and therefore occupied an ideological limbo. Like other horror films of the Vietnam era, *Last House* revels in graphic and prolonged displays of violence, exhibits blatant contempt for authority figures, and rejects the artificial "happy ending" common in classical horror films. However, its treatment of gender and sexuality could not be more stereotypical, and reflects a great deal of anxiety about the growing influence of the women's liberation movement, and radical feminism in particular.

The first half of the film depicts the abduction, rape, and murder of two teenage girls, Mari and Phyllis, by a group of escaped criminals. Sadie, a lesbian who spouts quasi-radical-feminist rhetoric, is perhaps the film's most disturbing character, as she gleefully assists in the victimization of the two teens. In *Last House*, feminism preys upon young women both literally and figuratively. Similarly problematic is the stereotypical nature of the abduction/rape scenario itself, which gives the impression that the victims are being punished for walking (unescorted and unsupervised) in a bad part of town late at night, for going to a sleazy rock concert, and—horror of horrors—for going braless in public. The second half of the film deals with the revenge

exacted upon the killers by Mari's parents. Her mother performs fellatio on one of the rapists and bites his penis off, prior to stabbing Sadie and drowning her in the family swimming pool. These killings suggest that female violence, no matter how extreme or sexualized, is more acceptable if it is the result of maternal instinct.

Although classical horror films invariably restore social order, and all of the hierarchical binaries that go with it, the genre's affinity for taboo subject matter and its propensity toward victim-identification laid the foundation for further subversion of traditional views of the body. By the mid 1970s, progressive views about women's bodies and sexuality surfaced in the lowest of exploitation cinema and set the tone for the decades to come.

PART II

INVIOABLE BODIES:

THE TRANSFORMATION FROM BODY-THINGS TO BODY-SELVES

While rape-revenge films portray women as capable of avenging themselves, albeit typically by tricking their rapists into making themselves physically vulnerable, slasher films go a step further by portraying women as competently defending themselves *during* an attack. Although the genre created an exaggerated form of the objectifying male gaze in the form of “stalker-cam” point-of-view shots, which show the killer’s propensity to view women only as “tits and ass,” and serve the dual function of showing women in distress and masking the killer’s identity, eventually these shots are increasingly replaced by the Final Girl’s point-of-view (a trend that is of great interest to Clover). In McCaughey’s terms, this illustrates the transition of women as body-things “that house their intellects” or body-objects “to be gazed at or sexually taken,” to “body-selves” with inherent strength and integrity.²³ Slasher films validate women’s experiences in other ways. Female fear or hyper-vigilance is presented as an enlightened state of mind rather than as a form of hysteria. As Judith Halberstam, one of the few feminist apologists of horror, accurately observes, “Films that feature sadistic murderers stalking unsuspecting female victims simply confirm a certain justified paranoia, which means that women aren’t crazy to be paranoid about rape and murder but rather they are crazy not to be.”²⁴

²³ McCaughey, *Real Knockouts*, 11-12

²⁴ Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995), 65.

Chapter 3

A Case for Retributive Action: The Female Victim-Hero and the Modern Rape-Revenge Film

It is ironic that the rape-revenge film, formerly one of the most sexist narratives²⁵ and stubborn adherents of the two-sex construction of the body, eventually became the first subgenre to endorse radical feminist ideas. In the old-style or Code-era rape-revenge film, the revenge is typically carried out by the victim's enraged father, husband, or lover—usually in an attempt to soothe his bruised ego rather than out of any genuine concern for the rape victim, who is unceremoniously tossed aside like so much damaged goods, the forgotten detritus of a male territorial dispute. In many older films, the rape scenes themselves were eroticized, adding an additional voyeuristic element that catered to male viewers.²⁶

This type of thinking is the descendant of archaic notions about rape. For example, early church fathers such as St. Jerome believed that a woman's virginity was her most valuable asset and her ticket to heaven, and counseled raped women to commit suicide rather than live with their "shame."²⁷ This was not peculiar to Christian thought, as the "virtuous pagan" Lucretia was considered a role model for women because she opted to kill herself rather than disgrace her family. Her example later served as the model for the dismal fates of rape victims in Renaissance tragedies such as *Titus Andronicus* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

²⁵ The rape-revenge film often transcends genres. Its essential narrative components can also be found in film noir, westerns, action films, maternal melodrama, and (oddly enough) romance, but its manifestations within the horror genre have been the most progressive from a feminist standpoint.

²⁶ Films of the silent era were especially troubling—consider how *The Birth of a Nation* turned patriarchal rape-revenge into racist propaganda, and how *The Sheik* portrayed a captive white woman as falling in love with her rapist after he rescues her from another, more brutal rapist. Women are given the fabulous option of choosing the lesser of two evils.

²⁷ I would like to thank Dr. Carole Levin of the University of Nebraska for discussing Jerome's ideas in her course *Saints, Witches, and Madwomen*. See also David Gilmore's *Misogyny: The Male Malady* for more on this.

Clearly, the crime of rape still carries a great deal of cultural baggage, and female chastity is still valued more than the woman's life in some societies. Laura Kipnis poses the question, "Is any other human body cavity quite so laden with symbolic value, not to mention actual monetary worth, particularly for exclusive access? . . . in what other system of exchange can you trade exclusive access to an orifice for a suburban split-level and a lifetime of monetary support?"²⁸ The flip side of the vaginal overvaluation described by Kipnis is that denying or withdrawing access to this orifice can get you subjected to all sorts of sanctions, and this is especially bad if the abuser is in a position of power greater than your own. And if exclusive access to the vagina is the cultural basis of a woman's value, it stands to reason that a woman who is raped or who has consensual sex with more than one partner is worth less than a virginal or monogamous woman. Very few old-style rape revenge films depict the avenging male as valuing the victim in the same way that he did before she was raped.

In contrast, American horror films of the mid-1970's were the direct result of the social upheaval of the previous decade. The influence of the Vietnam War, Civil Rights movement, and the emergence of second-wave feminism ensured that horror films would completely overturn the values of the classical era,²⁹ and the fall of the Hays Code in the mid 1960s allowed greater displays of on-screen sadism. Even the character types of victim and hero, so clearly delineated in the past, were often collapsed into one (usually female) character.³⁰ Thus the male rescuer/avenger quickly became obsolete, while the female victim-hero was given the agency and the means to become her own rescuer.³¹

²⁸ In *The Female Thing: Dirt, Sex, Envy, Vulnerability*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 123.

²⁹ Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, 231.

³⁰ Clover, *Men Women, and Chainsaws*, 4.

³¹ Given that both the murders and the subsequent revenge are not divided along gender lines, *The Last House on the Left* was an intermediary step between the male-identified rape-revenge films of the past and new-style rape revenge films. See Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 137-138 for more on this.

The rape-revenge film was an ideal genre for this collapse, and was the first genre to overtly adopt second-wave feminist rhetoric about the harm of rape, to make the survivor's physical and emotional trauma the center of the story, and to legitimize women's rage. These films are so radical and misandrist that, had these films been directed by women, they would have been dismissed as "man-hating." The genre is the direct outgrowth of radical feminist endorsement of physical resistance as a tool for ending women's oppression.³²

Exploitation films were quick to embrace images of fighting women, especially when their violence corrected some form of social injustice. The most (in)famous new-style rape-revenge film is *I Spit on Your Grave* (originally released in 1978 as *Day of the Woman*). The film's plot is quite simple—Jennifer Hills, a writer of women's fiction, rents a cabin in the country for the summer and is gang-raped by four local rednecks. After recovering from her injuries, Jennifer proceeds to kill the rapists in a variety of gruesome ways, using their own tools and twisted ideologies against them. At the end of the film, she leaves the site of the killings behind without feeling remorse or facing punishment for her murders. There is no question of who we are supposed to identify with—Jennifer is the embodiment of the '70s feminist vision of the ideal woman (independent, intelligent, successful, and sexually liberated), whereas the rapists are instantly established as utterly repulsive and ignorant. *I Spit on Your Grave* has generated a great

³² Robin Morgan wanted martial arts training and firearms education to be mandatory for all women (*Going too Far: The Personal Chronicles of a Feminist*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 131-140). While researching and writing her landmark book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975, 403-404), Susan Brownmiller trained in karate and ju-jitsu. Feminist lawyer and anti-pornography activist Catharine MacKinnon spent several years training "two hours a night, five nights a week, [in] martial arts as a physical, spiritual, and political activity" (*Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1987, 117). By the late 1970s women were joining martial arts schools in record numbers, and several women-only dojos formed in response to the hostile, all-male environment that typified most schools of the era. See Linda Atkinson, *Women In the Martial Arts: A New Spirit Rising* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co. 1983) for more on this.

deal of controversy, largely because its graphic rape scenes sprawl uninterrupted over 25 minutes of screen time—to my knowledge, the longest scene of its type in film history.³³

Rather than being made as the result of some voyeuristic motivation, this scene was inspired by a real incident that occurred in 1974. In the director's commentary on the 2002 DVD re-release, Meir Zarchi recalls that while driving past a park in New York City, he and his friend Alex Pfau saw a woman, "18 or 19 years old, totally naked, staggering toward us like a walking corpse . . . her body stained with blood and mud, her eyes wide open, staring into space and numb with shock." The woman had been gang-raped for several hours. Zarchi and Pfau helped the woman into the car, and the three decided to report the incident to the police before going to the hospital.

Zarchi quickly realized how wrong that decision was. The officer on duty acted annoyed and indifferent toward the victim, hammered her with questions that were both insensitive and irrelevant, and completely ignored her need for medical attention. While witnessing this seemingly interminable session, Zarchi came to the sad realization that "the raping of the girl had not stopped, it had just been transferred from that park into this police station and was continuing in front of my eyes." To Zarchi's knowledge, no arrests were ever made. Hence, one may argue that the movie is an attempt to re-write reality and create a happy ending of sorts for the rape victim, a means of retribution without the manifold perils and pitfalls of police involvement.

Zarchi states that the rape scenes were essentially intended to make audience members as miserable as Jennifer Hills and her real-life counterpart, and to portray rape as an un-erotic, bloody, and painful experience. I would contend that he has done a fine job at accomplishing this

³³ For this reason, Siskel and Ebert condemned the film, and it was pulled from US theaters prematurely. It likewise became a centerpiece of the UK's "video nasties" debate in the early 1980s. See Marco Starr "J. Hills is Alive: A Defense of *I Spit on Your Grave*," in *The Video Nasties: Freedom and Censorship in the Media*, Martin Baker, ed., (London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1984), 48-55 for more on this.

goal. *I Spit on Your Grave* is shot in a quasi-documentary style; its scenes play in disturbing real-time, bereft of flashy camerawork and extradiegetic music; the unflinching eye of the camera never looks away from the violence and its aftermath, and instead assaults the viewer with its gaze, offering no easy out, no fade-to-black, and no mercy. The rather unique result is a film that facilitates the experience of its depictions of violence on a *tactile* or *somatic* level, and therefore absolutely precludes the possibility of viewer neutrality.

I Spit on Your Grave spends a significant amount of time focusing on Jennifer's physical and emotional recovery, a time spent in contemplative silence. Rape-revenge films, and horror films in general, portray rape and other brutal assaults as catalysts for personal transformation, specifically by depicting "the experience of being raped that makes a 'man' of a woman."³⁴ The idea that physical trauma is transformative is consistent with McCaughey's observation that when one is beaten or raped, much like when one is ill, "the unified body becomes an object for reflection . . . [and] the absorbed projection of one's embodied self becomes particularly difficult."³⁵ Physical trauma thus has the potential to affect a repair in the Cartesian mind-body split.

However, rape is devastating to one's identity in ways that a simple beating is not. As an assault on sensitive body parts typically reserved for sexual self-expression, rape is an assault on one's sexuality itself. Sexuality and sexual self-expression are both integral aspects of individual identity. Rus Ervin Funk, a sexual assault activist who endorses radical reformations of masculinity as essential for sexual equality, observes that "having control over this essential part of ourselves is at the base of all our beliefs of personal rights, individual autonomy, and bodily

³⁴ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 159.

³⁵ McCaughey, *Real Knockouts*, 172.

integrity. Without control of our sexual selves, none of those ideals means anything.”³⁶ There is truth to Funk’s assessment, but he fails to recognize that women’s perception of autonomy and bodily integrity is pretty shaky in the first place, due to the internalization of cultural beliefs regarding what it means to be female. Laura Kipnis observes that women have been socialized to become accustomed to the “bizarre idea” that “you could be minding your own business just walking down the street and *someone would simply decide to put his penis in you*,”³⁷ and therefore, “protecting that prized portal is virtually the bedrock of female experience, leading to timidity, impeded mobility—even basic bodily comportment is affected: you don’t see a lot of women sitting with their knees three feet apart, taking up two subway seats, do you?”³⁸

This sort of neurosis is the direct result of cultural messages that, as a woman, you are the “gatekeeper” of your sexual “purity,” yet lack sufficient strength to defend it;³⁹ that all men are potential rapists, but you should put your gut instincts aside and give even the most menacing man the benefit of the doubt (after all, it’s not nice to hurt people’s feelings); and furthermore, you should seek protection from the very group of people statistically most likely to victimize you. The horror film’s solution to these feelings of feminine vulnerability is for women to become inviolable, usually by symbolically becoming a man. Typically, the female victim-hero becomes masculine by appropriating the rapists’ phallic weapons, and then literally or figuratively emasculates the rapists.

Whereas *I Spit on Your Grave* only justifies the murder of the rapists and never vilifies men as a whole, Abel Ferrara’s *Ms. 45* (1981) supports a more radical ideology by suggesting that *all men* actively victimize and oppress women, and simply need to be shot in the head. Ferrara

³⁶ In *Stopping Rape: A Challenge for Men*, (Philadelphia and Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1993).

³⁷ Kipnis, *The Female Thing*, 125.

³⁸ Kipnis, *The Female Thing*, 123-124.

³⁹ Kipnis, *The Female Thing*, 125.

goes so far as to cast himself in a cameo role as one of the rapists, implying that he is no better than the other fine specimens of masculinity in his film. In this instance, a mute woman, appropriately named Thana, is raped by two men on the same day (an unlucky coincidence, as the assailants are unknown to each other). After years of being literally and figuratively silenced, enduring petty harassments day after day, and being stuck in a low-paying “pink-collar” job in the Manhattan garment industry, these assaults inspire Thana to take vengeance on all men. Her victims include a pimp who is caught beating a prostitute, a variety of men who demand sex in exchange for career advancement, street harassers, a group of teenage gang members, two men who boast about buying virgins in South America’s sex-slavery trade, a man who lied to his wife about his vasectomy, and a jealous spouse who strangled his wife’s cat in a fit of rage.

In the final scenes of *Ms. 45*, Thana, dressed as a nun, randomly shoots men at her office Halloween party. Since nothing so aberrant and transgressive can survive long in a patriarchal society (although the men in the film are never legally punished for their brutal treatment of women), Thana is eventually stabbed in the back—ironically by a *female* coworker who wields a butcher knife at crotch-level as if it were a substitute phallus. Realizing the betrayal, Thana breaks her silence and gasps “Sister . . . !” before dying. Masculinity is portrayed as a disease in this film, but some women are also at fault because they are simply too co-opted by the patriarchal system, and the lack of women’s community prevents the possibility of real social change.

Rape-revenge films not only accomplished the monumental feat of allowing their female victim-heroines to claim physical autonomy, they simultaneously destigmatized rape victims for the first time in film history by making rapists dirty, rather than their victims. They posit rape as a *men’s* problem without placing the burden of moral reform on women. They dismiss the notion

that women are responsible for inciting rapists, and reaffirm women's right to wear what they like, travel alone, and have sexual relationships on their own terms—all actions that have a profound impact on women's relationships with their bodies.

Chapter 4

“Sometimes a Power Drill is Just a Power Drill”: Overcoming Oppression and the Limitations of Gender in the 1980s Slasher Film

As Adam Rockoff observes, graphic rape scenes angered audiences, so by the early 1980s most films avoided the issue of sexual assault entirely, preferring instead to penetrate women's bodies with a variety of sharp weapons.⁴⁰ In slasher films such as *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982) this act is explicitly a symbolic rape, as the killer skewers several half-naked young women with his overly phallic power drill while muttering, “It takes a lot of love for a person to do this . . . You know you want it.” It is ultimately no surprise that the Final Girl (defined by Carol Clover as the slasher film's lone female survivor)⁴¹ symbolically castrates him by chopping off his drill bit (to which he reacts with horror and self-pity) before finally impaling him.⁴² Although the two subgenres developed concurrently, the slasher film effectively outlived the explicit rape-revenge film by carrying out its more distasteful work on a symbolic level.

Slasher films have a certain affinity for Freudian symbolism, although the only characters who suffer from penis envy are men. The killers in these films exhibit some form of *defect* in either their body or in their ability to perform the masculine role. They may be in a stage of arrested development (Michael Myers in *Halloween*, Leatherface in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), be trapped in the physical body of a child (the deformed killer in Dario Argento's *Phenomenon*), possess a hermaphroditic body that is neither male nor female (Angela in *Sleepaway Camp*, the Spielberg-loving killer in the Troma spoof *Terror Firma*), or have sexual

⁴⁰ In *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986*, 65.

⁴¹ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 35-41. Clover observes that the Final Girl is most often virginal, tomboyish, and tends to be more intelligent and self-reliant than her peers.

⁴² Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 37-38.

organs that are small, withered, or missing altogether (Farmer Vincent in *Motel Hell*, the yuppie killer in *Slumber Party Massacre 3*). The killer must compensate for his own lack by appropriating a phallic weapon and killing young women who remind him of his weakness and sexual inadequacy. Many film scholars and feminist critics view the sexualized slaying of women in these films as misogynist or as promoting puritanical, “sex-negative” values. While the horror genre as a whole *is* anti-sex, these critics miss the point that these murders point to something defective in the killer, not his sexually active victims. These cinematic murders reflect the everyday reality that male murderers, like rapists, “often get violent with a sense of righteousness—as though the woman had teased, dared, or defied them, as though they were simply defending their own rights to the identity and self-worth that a woman exercising self-determination took away.”⁴³ In short, the killer is operating from a fragile sense of male entitlement.

Hence, the horror genre has difficulty in distinguishing the experience of being sexually penetrated and being penetrated with a weapon. The rare erotic horror film shares this perspective. To endorse sex means that one must endorse butchery and mayhem as well. David Cronenberg’s 1996 film *Crash*, a film featuring “vehicular penetration,” depicts car accidents as an orgasmic experience. French feminist Marina De Van’s *In My Skin* and cult director Hisayasu Sato’s *Splatter: Naked Blood* depict self-mutilation as a metaphor for masturbation. However, most horror films construct penetrative sex as undermining the bodily integrity of those being penetrated. From the killer’s perspective, it is equally satisfying to brutally stab someone to death as to have sex with them.

Another modification of the rape-revenge genre is the transformation of the initially feminine victim-hero into the Final Girl, who is terrorized throughout the course of the film, but is

⁴³ McCaughey, *Real Knockouts*, 10.

constructed as impenetrable from the very beginning. Lest we miss this crucial point, it is often stated or implied early in the film that she is either a virgin or celibate—states of being that can denote independence and self-containment rather than mere sexual inexperience or abstinence. Another cue of impenetrability is the Final Girl’s masculine qualities of “smartness, gravity, and competence in mechanical and other practical matters,”⁴⁴ and what appears to be a more masculine form of dress and bodily comportment, including athletic ability and a lack of fear of getting dirty. She is not brutishly strong, but typically lacks the self-imposed impediments of feminine fashion, which Susan Brownmiller accurately describes as “creating a sex difference where one does not exist in nature” and fetishizing women’s incapacitation.⁴⁵ For example, long nails prevent one from forming a solid fist; stiletto-heeled shoes make it impossible to run, let alone walk for a significant distance, and even this is forced to take the form of tottering, mincing little steps.

The Slumber Party Massacre spoofs the elements of symbolic rape and male deviance, and also boasts the novelty of being written, directed, and produced by women (all of whom are self-proclaimed feminists, such as writer Rita Mae Brown), and deliberately used the woman-friendly aspects of the Final Girl formula as a marketing ploy.⁴⁶ Certain aspects of the film are promising—such as the theme of female solidarity⁴⁷—but any feminist objectives are undermined by its derivative slasher plot, gratuitous nudity, and the leering male gaze that dominates many scenes. As Adam Rockoff observes, “[It’s] a weird brand of feminism indeed which equates a

⁴⁴ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 40.

⁴⁵ Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1984), 126.

⁴⁶ Adam Rockoff *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978–1986*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 138.

⁴⁷ Clover, *Men Women, and Chainsaws*, 37–38.

tawdry high school locker room shower scene with any liberation other than that from clothing . . . sometimes a power drill is just a power drill.”⁴⁸

Other films, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986) managed to be far more subversive, and further developed the character of the Final Girl, who is by definition more masculine, more competent, and less sexually active than her female friends.⁴⁹ *Chainsaw 2*'s Stretch is perhaps the toughest of the Final Girls. Stretch is pitted against the all male, cannibalistic Sawyer family, and is forced to undergo a series of gruesome torments as part of her necessary gender transformation. The more notable scenes include an incident in which Leatherface presses his idling chainsaw, clearly intended to be a substitute phallus, into her crotch before coming to a spastic orgasm. This “sex scene” exemplifies the notion that such horror villains use these weapons to compensate for feelings of sexual inadequacy. An equally revolting scene in which Stretch is forced to wear the freshly-skinned face of her male co-worker—an obscene drag performance— illustrates the necessity of adopting male characteristics for survival.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 offers no heroic male characters for viewer identification. Stretch's doomed coworker L.G. is tenderhearted yet ineffectual, while the conventionally macho hero-figure “Lefty” Enright proves himself to be corrupt and mentally deranged, a revelation that likely left many viewers feeling betrayed. Enright, a former Texas Ranger, “regards Stretch's feminine presence as [a] real threat to his masculine ideal of lone avenger.”⁵⁰ Near the film's conclusion, Enright storms into the Sawyer's lair and partakes of a chainsaw duel with Leatherface, a conflict that becomes a contest of “mine is bigger than yours.” Both L.G. and Enright are perfect examples of the “comic ineptitude and failure” of would-be

⁴⁸ Rockoff, *Going to Pieces*, 139.

⁴⁹ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 35-41

⁵⁰ Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film*, (London: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1996), 205.

male rescuers in the slasher film,⁵¹ and serve to illustrate the absolute “bankruptcy of the patriarchal structure.”⁵²

Before her final triumph, Stretch stumbles upon the mummified body of the Sawyer family’s original *matriarch* (complete with chainsaw cradled in her bosom), which has been preserved as a shrine to (defunct) female power. Grasping the significance of the shrine and remembering that the patriarchal family “lives on fear,” Stretch draws on her inner strength, appropriates the phallic weapon for herself, and drives it into her surviving tormentor, creating a vagina-like opening in his abdomen.⁵³ For all its excesses, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* successfully uses such Freudian imagery to invert gender norms and create a surprisingly powerful and uncompromised ideal of female heroism.

⁵¹ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 38

⁵² Williams, *Hearths of Darkness*, 205. See also Halberstam’s *Skin Shows* for additional discussion of gender performace in this film.

⁵³ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 38.

Chapter 5

Carol J. Clover's Influence Upon the Horror Genre: A Case Study

As previously discussed, Clover's 1992 book, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, is considered a landmark work in film criticism and is largely responsible for rehabilitating the reputation of the horror genre as more than an expression of misogyny. Naturally, horror writers and directors love her for it. *S&Man* (2006), a faux documentary on faux snuff films, features extensive interviews with Clover regarding the popularity of the subgenre. Another film, the horror-comedy *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* (2006), repeatedly refers to her theories. Slam poet Daphne Gottlieb converted Clover's theory into poetry in her *Final Girl* collection. There is even a comic book series, *Hack/Slash*, featuring a virgin who survived a confrontation with a horror-movie slasher and then made it her life mission to protect other women by hunting and killing slashers.

Since the mid-1990s, Clover's theories have become so well-known that filmmakers tend to either exaggerate the genre conventions she identified or break away from them in order to keep the genre fresh. For example, the "Final Girl"—the convention of the lone female survivor who is often white and virginal, but always androgynous, intelligent, and self-reliant—has become such a genre staple that audiences often identify her in the first scene. To avoid this pitfall of predictability, many directors have modified the Final Girl by making her sexually active, or very young, or a woman of color. Others have undermined audience expectations by killing the "Final Girl" first (as in *Wolf Creek*), or have excluded her altogether.

One of the recent films to reference Clover's work is Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof*, released as the second half of the double-bill *Grindhouse*. In the March 2007 issue of *Fangoria*, Tarantino states, "I've read a lot about slasher films, and Carol J. Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* is hands-down my favorite. It's a great piece of criticism, one of the best in the past

20 years.”⁵⁴ While Tarantino deviates from genre conventions by introducing a false Final Girl and then killing her early, he keeps one of Clover’s key concepts intact. The villain, Stuntman Mike, uses a car rather than a knife to penetrate women, but his motive is typical of the subgenre’s killers. Tarantino states, “It’s a whole sex thing for Stuntman Mike. When he kills these girls, he’s not just murdering them, he’s raping them”.⁵⁵ While this is a subtext of slasher films, Tarantino’s script comes right out and says it. After Mike kills the first group of women by colliding with their car, Texas Ranger Earl shares his suspicions about Mike’s motive: “I’d guesstimate it’s a sex thing, only way I can figure it. High velocity impact. Twisted metal. Busted glass. Four souls taken at exactly the same time. Probably the only way that diabolical degenerate can shoot his goo.”

Like all slasher films worth their weight in red Karo syrup, *Death Proof* depicts the Final Girl as appropriating the killer’s phallic weapon and using it against him. *Death Proof* has three Final Girls—a multiracial group, no less, compensating for the slasher film’s tendency to make white women the central characters. These Final Girls are Hollywood stuntwomen who have their own muscle car. After Stuntman Mike terrorizes them, they don’t fall into hysterics or emotionally collapse. Instead, one asks, “Do you want to get him?” Her friends reply, “Hell yeah!” and “Fuck that, let’s kill the bastard!” A high speed chase ensues, and consists of driver Kim *rear-ending* Stuntman Mike repeatedly and growling “I’m going to ram this up your ass, motherfucker.” On occasion, Kim’s friend Zoe prods Mike through the open window with a large metal rod. As Clover observes, the slasher film is a tale of phalluses lost and phalluses gained, and the actual anatomy of the bearer makes no difference.

⁵⁴ Quentin Tarantino. Interview by Bryan Turek. Grindhouse: 100 Percent “Death Proof,” *Fangoria*, (March 2007,36-40,90), 38.

⁵⁵ Tarantino, Grindhouse, 39.

PART III

GROTESQUE AND ABJECT BODIES:

THE PERILS OF PENETRABILITY AND DEFILEMENT IN THE SUPERNATURAL FILM

Unlike the slasher film, the demon possession films and supernatural films in general rarely feature heroic women. Rather, women quite frequently become portals for supernatural entities because their bodies are anatomically more “open” than are men’s.⁵⁶ Clover analyzes several films in which possession is facilitated through oral or vaginal penetration,⁵⁷ resulting in either a grotesque pseudo-pregnancy or in the woman becoming “so completely colonized that she virtually becomes her [masculine] possessor”.⁵⁸ The demon-possessed woman is then exorcized/cured by male agency. In decades past, the male exorcist was frequently a priest or rabbi, but is now just as frequently a concerned husband, a college student, or an eccentric, occult-obsessed gorehound. Superficially, it appears that the woman is saved through male intervention, but as Clover notes, the great bait-and-switch of the supernatural horror film is that it is truly the man who is redeemed from delusions of impenetrability through the contemplation of the women’s grotesquely “open” body.⁵⁹ In this section, I explore three general types of supernatural films that exploit fears of grotesque, defiled, invaded, or colonized bodies—the demon-possession or religious supernatural film, the fantastic secular body-horror film, and the contagion-based body-horror film.

⁵⁶ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 71-72.

⁵⁷ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 76-80.

⁵⁸ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 102.

⁵⁹ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 85-113.

Chapter 6

Forces of Contamination: Defiled and Defiling Bodies

While the slasher film tries to ignore the Final Girl's sexual and reproductive capabilities, the supernatural film is obsessed with women's interior space, but only with the aspects that are apparently uncanny. It seems odd that such representations would still exist after science has demystified the female functions of menstruation and childbirth, but old cultural views of the body die hard, and even the most archaic ideologies can be internalized and lived out. For instance, recent studies in the field of psychology reveal that both men and women view menstrual blood as polluting.⁶⁰ Germaine Greer notes that "Hundreds of feminists have tried all kinds of strategies for filling the idea of menstruation with positive significance, but it remains a kind of excretion, the liquefaction of abjection."⁶¹

Historically, the body's apertures and their functions have provoked the most anxiety, and have been characterized as both grotesque and abject. Bodily openings inherently undermine perceptions of one's physical integrity, as they blur the distinctions between the self and the external world.⁶² "Low" functions such as urination and defecation are considered filthy and are therefore disavowed,⁶³ but sexual intercourse and pregnancy are more unsettling because of the intermingling of one's own body with another's. Clover notes that the physical vulnerability associated with orifices is often equated with emotional vulnerability, and cites a male analysand

⁶⁰ For more on this, see "The Fantasy of Dirt," cited in Kipnis, *The Female Thing*, 87-90.

⁶¹ Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 41.

⁶² See Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion grotesque vs. classical bodies in *Rabelais and His World*, (Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge: MIT, 1968).

⁶³ Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982) provides a more in-depth deconstruction of cultural views of bodily orifices and the female body as defiled and defiling.

as saying that his antisentimentality was like “denying that I have an asshole.”⁶⁴ But these ideas exist outside the realm of psychoanalysis. Kipnis notes that social anxiety about bodily apertures and their associations with different personality types and genders are expressed in everyday conversation: “She’s so ‘open.’ He’s a real ‘tightass.’ ‘You cunt.’”⁶⁵

Such associations become doubly problematic when one considers that the male body has historically been the standard of the normal human body. By that standard, women have one opening too many. Anthropologist David Gilmore writes in *Misogyny: The Male Malady*, “Misogynistic fear centers on the flesh that makes woman man’s opposite and renders her unknowable to him. Misogynists tremble before the bodily labyrinth: veins, intestines, sexual organs. With her lunar cycles and genital effluvia, woman destroys the idealist’s illusions of a pristine universe.”⁶⁶ Misogynists are obsessed with notions of purity and stability. As women’s bodies are constantly, visibly in flux, and are considered dirtier than men’s bodies, many theorists and historians feel that men seek to alleviate their anxieties by controlling women’s bodies through a variety of means, ranging from the blatantly horrific (foot-binding, female genital mutilation, forced pregnancies and abortions) to the subtly devastating (culturally mandated dieting, cosmetics, plastic surgery).

Just as vaginal overvaluation forms the basis of a purity-based standard of women’s worth, vaginal devaluation has been grounds for categorically vilifying women as both physically and spiritually contaminated and contaminating beings. The concept of the vagina as “the devil’s gateway” is alive and well in the supernatural horror film, especially the films of the 1970s and

⁶⁴ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 65.

⁶⁵ Kipnis, *The Female Thing*, 89.

⁶⁶ David Gilmore, *Misogyny: The Male Malady*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 57. See also Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) and *Pornography and Silence: Culture’s Revenge Against Nature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), and Jack Holland, *Misogyny: The World’s Oldest Prejudice*, (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006) for further discussion on how the concept of the female body as grotesque or abject transcends culture and religion, and is often perpetuated by “objective” scientific thought.

1980s. American and European films typically express this concept symbolically; most Asian films do nothing to disguise their contempt for women's bodies. A highly unsubtle example hailing from Japan is the semi-pornographic *Entrails of a Virgin* (1986), in which one female character is so insatiable that she masturbates with every object in sight—doorknobs, countertops, a severed arm. When she encounters a naked male demon, who is covered in mud and possesses a two-foot long penis, she implores him to “put it in” her, oblivious to her own anatomical limitations. The other women, all shallow, brainless models (all body, no soul), passively allow themselves to be sexually exploited by their employers, and then the same male demon. At the end of the film, the surviving woman, grotesquely pregnant with a demon hybrid, pats her distended belly and exclaims, “I don't know what I'm having, but I sure am excited!” In *Entrails of a Virgin*, women are at best passive, mindless receptacles for penises, demons and babies; at worst, they are sexually insatiable and willingly use their vaginas to bring physical and spiritual filth into the world.

Another type of supernatural horror is what Clover categorizes as the secular possession story, or what other scholars and film critics label “body horror.” Although “body horror,” a subgenre often credited to Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg has existed since the 1970s, the appeal of viewing the body in pieces has hardly died out, nor has the concept of loathing one's own flesh. Pinedo attributes this to the postmodern condition, in which “violence [as] a constituent of everyday life produces an unstable and paranoid universe in which familiar categories collapse. The body figures as the site of this collapse.”⁶⁷ Cronenbergian body horror exploits the fear that, even in the absence of a violent attack, our bodies are inherently unstable, mutable, and prone to spontaneous transformation. All bodies are open and in flux. For example, *The Brood* (1979) features a woman whose negative emotions such as anger and hatred are

⁶⁷ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 65.

literally “made flesh” in the form of immaculately conceived fetuses, which hang fruit-like on her body in amniotic sacs—genuine hysterical pregnancies. In *Videodrome* (1983), the male protagonist’s abdomen spontaneously opens to form an oversized vagina. The binaries of male and female, human and non-human, do not exist in these films.

Currently, fantastic body horror (secular or supernatural) has largely been supplanted by the realistic body horror of directors such as Eli Roth, who prefer to explore the everyday realities of infectious diseases and torture. Roth’s torture films will be discussed in more detail in Part V, but it is interesting to note that his debut film *Cabin Fever* (2002) has the same characteristics of traditional possession narratives and is deliberately patterned after *The Evil Dead* (1982), a contagion-based zombie film. Even though bodies are invaded by a flesh-eating virus rather than by a supernatural entity, the film centers around the concepts of contamination and contagion, and concerns itself with bodily orifices and “bodies penetrated, invaded, and colonized,” and therefore meets Clover’s criteria of an “archetypal” occult horror film.⁶⁸ *Cabin Fever* (tagline: “Terror . . . In the Flesh”) is compelling because it is rooted in the director’s own experiences. At the age of 12, Roth contracted a rare disease that left him temporarily paralyzed and contracted a severe parasitic infection a few years later.⁶⁹ In his early twenties, a rare flesh-eating virus manifested itself when Roth’s skin peeled off during shaving.⁷⁰ *Cabin Fever*’s first major “gross-out” scene involves the male protagonist digitally penetrating his girlfriend and then discovering that her thighs and vagina are rotting away. This is simply a non-supernatural version of the supernatural film’s anxieties about vaginal contamination. However, men are equally vulnerable to infection. Horror is generated by the characters’ knowledge that their bodies are disintegrating from the inside, falling apart piece by piece. This is much more relatable than demon-possession, as

⁶⁸ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 80.

⁶⁹ Nemet-Nejat, Daniel. The Guru of Gore. *Penthouse*, June 2007, 18-19.

⁷⁰ *Cabin Fever* DVD director’s commentary, 2002.

everyone has experienced illness. Even a mild disease or viral infection feels like a biological betrayal on the deepest level. Like other modern films, two-sex distinctions between the sexes are dissolved by the knowledge that all of us are equally vulnerable and mortal.

More recently, supernatural films of the traditional type have undertaken the monumental task of rehabilitating the reputation of witches, vampires, and other monsters by making them heroic and portraying them as merely misunderstood victims of sexism or racial and religious bigotry. Often this is accomplished by aligning them with other persecuted groups, thereby making humans the true villains. For example, recent action-horror hybrids such as *Blade* (1998) and *Ultraviolet* (2006) respectively correlate their heroic vampires with African-American and Jewish identities. The supernaturally and divinely gifted race of *Nightbreed* (1991) was virtually destroyed during the European witch-hunts and forced to live in exile. Invariably, the “monsters” befriend a member of dominant human society, often creating reconciliation between the two groups. The werewolf movie *Ginger Snaps* (2000) addresses both the sexual double standard and menstrual taboos from a feminist viewpoint; sexual maturity is horrific because young girls are socially reduced to their sexual organs, merely viewed as “bitches in heat.” While it is encouraging that misogynist stereotypes of women’s bodies are disappearing, monstrous femininity made a useful foil for subversive stories of male vulnerability.

Chapter 7

Men are the New Women: Constructing the Penetrable Male Body

Clover asserts that supernatural films seek to liberate men from masculinity, allowing them to be better friends, husbands and fathers. One highly unusual demon-possession film is Sam Raimi's splatter extravaganza, *The Evil Dead* (1982), in which the male victim-hero is both emotionally *and* physically open. True to Clover's theories, the first female victim is indeed possessed as the result of a supernatural rape, although two other victims (one male, one female) are "opened" by conventional stab wounds, and the entry point of another female victim is implicitly oral. *Evil Dead* deviates from the subgenre in that the only "cure" for possession is "the act of complete bodily dismemberment" rather than exorcism. However, it is still consistent with other films of its type in that the violent antics of the possessed women merely provide a backdrop for what is ultimately "the story of a man in crisis."⁷¹

In this instance, the man in crisis is Ashley J. Williams (portrayed by Bruce Campbell), one of horror's rare examples of the Final Boy.⁷² In contrast to the masculine Final Girl, the Final Boy is gendered feminine, and is often given a female or unisex name. Indeed, Ash's personality in *Evil Dead* and its "splattstick" sequel *Evil Dead II* (1987) mimics the sort of rigidly stereotypical feminine behaviors typically displayed solely by heroines of the classical era. Ash is sensitive and romantic, but also often cowardly, irrational, and foolish---he cries openly, becomes ill at the sight of blood, is plagued by a peculiar inability to read maps, and is often incapable of rescuing himself or anyone else. On the set of *Evil Dead II*, director Sam Raimi felt that Campbell's screams were too masculine, and instructed him "scream like a woman."⁷³

⁷¹ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 65.

⁷² Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 63.

⁷³ Bill Warren, *The Evil Dead Companion*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 218.

Director Sam Raimi and long-time friend Bruce Campbell mutually decided upon a central male character because they felt that the Final Girl formula was already too predictable (due to the popularity of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween*), but wanted to deviate from the norm of the heroic male.⁷⁴ The *Evil Dead* films are quite remarkable in their objectification and fetishization of the tortured *male* body, as the curiously objectifying gaze of the camera invites the viewer to both suffer and savor Ash's physical agony. Quite simply, he is forced to endure a level of brutalization typically reserved for the female victim-heroines of the slasher or rape-revenge film. He is further feminized by sexual assault, violently humped by his headless girlfriend in the first film. Likewise, *Evil Dead II* originally included a scene in which Ash is orally penetrated by the same girlfriend's four-foot long tongue.⁷⁵ The uncut version of *Army of Darkness* (1993) briefly expands upon the theme when Ash mutters to himself, "A man's body is his own personal property . . . don't let anyone take that away from you." For both women and men, bodily penetration—whether accomplished through a weapon or sexual intercourse—presents a threat to corporeal integrity and self-containment, and should be avoided at all costs.

Given his physical and emotional "openness," it is not surprising that Ash is just as prone to demon possession as his female counterparts. To reclaim his body he is forced to subject himself to acts of purifying self-mutilation, most notably by amputating his possessed right hand, after which he compensates for the loss by grafting his chainsaw to the stump. For Ash, like other victim-heroines, suffering is a means of transformation, simultaneously resulting in the character's defilement and perfection. More importantly, characters such as Ash and Stretch "are triumphant survivors of the horror genre precisely because they have transcended their assigned gender."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Warren, *Evil Dead Companion*, 36-37.

⁷⁵ Warren, *Evil Dead Companion*, 212.

⁷⁶ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 107.

As Clover observes, “If Rambo were to wander out of the action genre into a slasher film, he would end up dead. If he were to wander into an occult film, he would end up reformed—a kinder, gentler man, at last able to communicate with his wife, children, parents, and neighbors . . . If action cinema mourns the passing of the ‘real man,’ horror in general urges it along, and occult films go so far to imagine a new, revised edition.”⁷⁷ This sort of revision seems to be a woman’s fantasy, but what is remarkable about both the slasher and supernatural subgenres is that predominantly *male* directors are critiquing traditional masculinity and offering more positive alternatives.

While Sam Raimi’s male hero Ash seems to have been created as a novelty—his femininity played as much for laughs as to produce empathy—directors such as Eli Roth appear to have a more personal stake in the representation of male openness, perhaps because his own experiences contradict the myth of the invulnerable male body. Just as women’s autonomy can be realized when women acknowledge and experience their own physical strength, the first step men take toward embracing emotional openness is acknowledging their own physical penetrability. This concurrent reconstruction of male emotions and male bodies also appears in the rhetoric of pro-feminist men⁷⁸ who wish to deconstruct masculinity and hold men accountable for rape, relationship abuse, and other byproducts of male privilege.

However, the portrayal of men’s bodies as weak and penetrable seems to be especially anxiety-producing, and positive images of sensitive, vulnerable Final Boys have not achieved mainstream popularity outside of the horror genre in the way that fighting women and masculine Final Girls have. Perhaps this shows that traditionally feminine traits are still undervalued, but

⁷⁷ *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 90.

⁷⁸ Some prominent examples include Michael Kimmel, Rus Erwin Funk, John Stoltenberg, and Robert Jensen.

also that if one is born into a privileged group, it is doubly difficult to give up one's sense of bodily autonomy and entitlement, even when this sort of entitlement is founded on delusion.

PART IV

INCOMPLETE BODIES:

THE AGONY OF HAVING A TWO-SEX BODY IN A ONE-SEX WORLD⁷⁹

In contrast to the slashers and supernatural films of the 1970s and 1980s, in which the villains respectively embodied a perverse or deviant brand of masculinity and femininity, the films of the 1990s increasingly portrayed “normal” gender roles as unhealthy. If the previous decade posited androgyny as the defining characteristic of healthy and “whole” individuals, the next logical step was to portray the remaining adherents of the two-sex binary as deviant and incomplete, as essentially “half-people.” The incompleteness of these characters is illustrated by the fact that they embody a hyperbolic form of masculinity or femininity. Their bodies are often cartoonish, their bodily comportment affected.

These films, often told from the killer’s perspective, not only denounce two-sex thinking and embodiment, they reverse the classical era’s double standard against female aggression. Male murderers are portrayed as killing because of a sense of entitlement or superiority over their victims. In horror films such as *The Stepfather* (1987) and *American Psycho* (2000), men are portrayed as killers not because there is a defect in their masculinity, but because their masculinity is *too* perfect. To internalize the masculine ideal is to see others—especially women and feminized men—as one’s inferiors. When this notion becomes embodied, it is much easier to inflict violence upon others, and to view one’s own body as invincible. In contrast, the story of female murderers is far more complex. Horror tends to be “victim-identified,” to side with the underdog. Although we may not agree with the sociopathic actions of horror’s new anti-heroines,

⁷⁹ This is a reversal of Hendershot’s chapter “The One-Sex Body in a Two-Sex World,” in *The Animal Within*, as horror reverses the norm of which model is healthy.

we are encouraged to empathize with them because of their prior victimization at the hands of abusive men and society as a whole.

Chapter 8

Pathologizing the Perfect Man, or, Why *American Psycho* Needed a Woman's Touch

If the filmmakers of the 1980s idolized androgyny, horror directors of the '90s continued the dialogue by examining the flaws within the traditional gender binary. For example, in contrast to his sensitive, effeminate characterization in *Evil Dead* parts I and II, in *Army of Darkness* (the series' third installment, which many fans find regrettably bloodless and sanitized) Ash embodies the absolute mockery of the typical action hero's hyperbolic masculinity, eschewing intellect and emotional maturity in favor of macho posturing, monosyllabic wisecracks, and an insatiable desire for superior firepower. However, his machismo comes off as so much play-acting, the final coping mechanism used to salvage his battered sanity. Raimi skewers virtually every masculinist icon loved and emulated by the American public, including John Wayne, Rambo, and the troubled protagonist of *Taxi Driver*.

If *Army of Darkness* lovingly pokes fun at dominant masculinity and offers it up for general ridicule, other films have been far less kind. One such example is Mary Harron's adaptation of *American Psycho* (2000). The original novel, written by Bret Easton Ellis, incited a public outcry due to its graphic depiction of sexualized homicide, some of which ran on for nearly a dozen pages. It is therefore ironic that the book would eventually be adapted to film by a self-proclaimed feminist.

The film version eschews the novel's graphic violence in favor of its satire of '80s consumer culture and its criticism of affluent white masculinity, which is largely defined by conformity. Psychopath Patrick Bateman and his peers are obsessed with surfaces. His existential crises may

be triggered by something as meaningless as not getting a reservation at his favorite restaurant, or the discovery that his coworker has a more attractive business card. His daily routine revolves around maintaining and improving the surfaces of his body. The countless hours spent obsessing over tanning, cucumber facial peels, and six-pack abs make his quest for the perfect masculine body look eerily similar to the fascist regimens employed by the women he despises. Bateman's sexual relationships are largely informed by pornography and are entirely devoid of emotional content. Not surprisingly, his victims are most often women, members of racial minorities, gay men, and people who are economically marginalized, all of whom he sees as less than human.

While there are many films of this type, "ideal" masculinity was occasionally criticized before "male-bashing" became trendy in the 1990s. *The Stepfather* (1986) was a damning indictment of the 1980s and the decade's emphasis on "family values." The villain, Jerry Blake, is an exaggerated and sinister version of the 1950s Sitcom Dad. He is a firm believer in "Ronald Reagan's America where the benevolent father rules with loving austerity, mother keeps house, and children respect their elders."⁸⁰ In search of the American Dream, serial-monogamist Jerry marries middle-class widows and single mothers, but when his ready-made families disappoint him, he kills them. *The Stepfather* is an atypical slasher film in that the villain is a *normal* man who is already inside the family unit, and that it features two female survivors who work together to defeat him. It is one of a small handful of films that criticize two-sex essentialism in terms of the male breadwinner/female homemaker binary.

⁸⁰ Pinedo, *Recreation Terror*, 89.

Chapter 9

Female Problems and Victims of Femininity

Since the 1990s, the more revolutionary aspects of the horror genre have been co-opted into mainstream entertainment. The Final Girl has been somewhat modified and grudgingly included into big-budget thrillers and action films, and the rape-revenge narrative has been sanitized and watered down to become the Lifetime Movie of the Week. As of the year 2000, new visions of femininity and female behavior have manifested themselves from the fringes of cinematic discourse. These new films portray women's violence as either entirely natural, or as an inevitable response to the confining roles society imposes upon women.

One noteworthy example is John Fawcett's *Ginger Snaps* (2000), an offbeat female-werewolf movie that seeks to establish the inevitable connection between lycanthropy and PMS. The story focuses on two misfit sisters Ginger and Brigitte, who hate life in the suburbs, dismiss their high school as "a mindless breeding machine," and share an obsession with suicide. Both also suffer from the delayed onset of puberty. Ginger is attacked by a werewolf when she first menstruates, and the symptoms of her transformation overlap disturbingly with the "normal" physical changes associated with female adolescence.

The film's feminist themes are impossible to overlook. As Oler notes, the sisters' apparent contempt for other women and for physical maturation is in reality disgust for sexual double standards, the imprisoning nature of feminine behavior, and a "desire not to be reduced to their female parts."⁸¹ As her activities become more violent, Ginger relies upon gender stereotypes to cover up the murder of one of her classmates, stating that society would never blame a woman for

⁸¹ Tammy Oler, "Bloodletting: Female Adolescence in Modern Horror Films." *Bitch* (21, 2003, 44-51), 49-50.

such a crime, especially if she is a teenager. “A girl can only be a slut, a bitch, a tease, or the girl next door,” she laments.

In contrast, most of the recent films fail to punish their sociopathic female anti-heroes on any level. Rather, these characters are supposed to elicit sympathy and viewer identification, and the murders they commit help them achieve some perverse type of self-actualization. Kyra, the frustrated artist in *Kolobos* (2000) kills because she believes she can create “divine beauty” through physical mutilation. The ultra-feminine protagonist of *May* (2003) has her heart broken in both heterosexual and lesbian romances, and so decides to create an ideal, unisex mate from the body parts of her former lovers.

In all cases, the rage of these female serial killers is palpable. Femininity is socially desirable, but not adequately rewarded. It is so associated with incompetence that women well into their adult years are treated like children. Justin Paul Ritter’s *KatieBird* Certifiable Crazy Person* (2005) takes this observation to a new extreme, as its middle-aged protagonist is perpetually regarded by the men in her life as incapable of making rational decisions, as a child perpetually in need of correction. Unfortunately, these men are not aware that she is a serial killer on a mission to rid the world of “bad” men, primarily abusive father figures and cheating lovers. When her lover/psychotherapist dismisses her as untreatable and wants to end the relationship, she subjects him to a variety of tortures including rape and the extraction of teeth, because she believes that an opened body, a body in pain, is “a living body of truth.” Much like the condemned prisoners in Kafka’s “The Penal Colony,”⁸² KatieBird’s male victims are forced to disclose or discover their moral guilt *through their bodies*. Her lover shows his “true face” when

⁸² In *The Metamorphosis, In the Penal Colony, and Other Stories*. New York: Socken Books, 1995.

his physical face is removed—under his respectable façade as a mender of women’s minds, he himself is a rapist and murderer.

Rob Zombie’s *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003) goes so far as to equate traditional femininity with insanity. Mother Firefly and her daughter Baby, both members of a larger family unit that enjoys mass murder, initially seem to be absolute constructs of male fantasy. The appropriately named Baby is caught in a time warp between childhood and adulthood, the awkward embodiment of the proverbial virgin-whore complex. Unable to let go of childish things, she retains a vast collection of babydolls, although hers have had their heads and arms chopped off. Her dress, speech patterns, and behaviors are deliberately crafted to gain male approval, and it appears that her life’s goal is to become a Hollywood star, cheerleader, or other object of heterosexual male desire. When a man snubs her, she reacts at first with infantile sulking, then gleefully tortures and dismembers him. Baby also never hesitates to brutally dispatch any women who pose a threat to her romantic fantasies, or who surpass her in popularity or ideal feminine behavior.

Likewise, Mother Firefly is a nymphomaniac who is male-identified to a fault and completely ascribes to heterotopic propaganda. In one scene she described how her former husband/lover set the house on fire in a violent rage, causing one of her many children to suffer disfiguring burns. Upon seeing that her guests are shocked and repulsed by her story, she rushes to the abuser’s rescue, clarifying that “Earl wasn’t a *bad* man. He never hit me or nothing.” Mother Firefly takes her maternal instincts from a charming to a grotesque level, having preserved all of her miscarried infants in jars that are brought out at family reunions and other festive occasions. Clearly, what the classical horror film idealized, *House of 1000 Corpses* vilifies.

Chapter 10

A New Double Standard: The Limits of “Victim-Identification”

A quick survey of horror films made in the 1990s and in the following decade reveals significant differences in the portrayal of male and female serial killers, particularly when these characters are the protagonists. Male killers such as Patrick Bateman of *American Psycho* and Jerry Blake of *The Stepfather* function as indictments of traditional masculinity—they are offered up as objects for scorn, not as sympathetic anti-heroes. Just as it seemed that the archetypal characters, the Heroic Rapist and the Righteous Serial Killer, had evaporated from popular film, female antiheroes emerged. If, as a filmmaker, you want your audience to identify with a rapist, a torturer, or a serial killer, you had better make your maniac a woman. Oddly, these recent female antiheroes have elicited very little public outcry, even though they embody the stereotype of “man-hating” feminism. This complete reversal of the code-era’s double standard regarding female killers could be the result of 1990s third wave feminism’s fascination with “bad girls,” or simply an extension of horror’s propensity toward victim-identification. The genre recognizes that women are victimized by society in ways that affluent white men are not, and seeks to hold men collectively liable. So while sadistic violence ideally should not be condoned, films of this type function as a corrective to the stereotypical notion that women are inherently “pure” and nurturing.

PART V

CONSUMABLE BODIES:

COMMODIFIED SEX AND THE TRAFFIC IN FLESH

In the past few years, there has been increasing concern about human rights violations such as human trafficking, genocide, and torture. Ironically, there has been a simultaneous increase in the mainstream appeal of pornography, which is certainly not the only sexist genre, but is the only genre that acts as a refuge for racial hatred. Rather than being ashamed of history's real-life horrors such as slavery and the Holocaust, pornographers exploit and make light of these tragedies.⁸³ As Catharine MacKinnon observes, "Asian women are presented as being so passive they cannot be said to be alive, bound so they are not recognizably human . . . Black women are presented as animalistic bitches, bruised and bleeding, struggling against their bonds. Jewish women [reach] orgasm in reenactments of death camp tortures."⁸⁴ Furthermore, women who are pregnant, handicapped, or ill are similarly fetishized and humiliated.⁸⁵ Hence, porn reaffirms, in the ugliest fashion possible, the notion of "essential" and "natural" gender and racial differences, or rather hierarchies. It reinforces binary categories of the two-sex model in the form of dominant/submissive, top/bottom, master/slave, *ad nauseam*.

In contrast, emerging horror subgenres see racism and sexism as linked, and dismantle stable categories of race and gender, often by attacking the sex industry. They acknowledge the

⁸³ For specific examples of racist and violent porn, see Diana Russell's *Dangerous Relationships*, which cites only *mainstream* films and publications. However, Russell often cites standard horror films as pornographic, simply because they depict violence against women. To categorize non-pornographic horror films such as *I Spit on Your Grave* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as "violent porn" requires a perverse unwillingness to address the feminist elements of these films.

⁸⁴ In *Are Women Human? And Other International Debates*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2006), 87.

⁸⁵ These stereotypes are not as overt in current mainstream porn released on DVD and video, but vicious portrayals of this type run rampant on online porn sites, which are less subject to regulation. In addition, it is not difficult to find online pornography that depicts "real rape," women being penetrated with baseball bats, and women who have sharp objects driven into their breasts and genitals.

fact that, as radical feminist John Stoltenberg observes, “‘Male’ and ‘white’ are hierarchical, class-based identities that result from acts, not anatomy . . . [and are] due far more to dominance than to difference” (401).⁸⁶ Although horror and porn are commonly associated because of their subject matter and are both thought to cause moral decay, I argue that the two genres are fundamentally different on an ideological and emotional level. Furthermore, they create very different bodily responses, and I believe this is the root of the genres’ incompatibility and the overall failure of the “horror-porn” genre.

⁸⁶ John Stoltenberg, Pornography and International Human Rights, in *Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography*, Christine Stark and Rebecca Whisnart, eds. (Melbourne: Spinifex, 2004), 400-409.

Chapter 11

The Ecstasy of Blood:

XXX Horror, Gorenography, and Other Aberrations

Although many horror films condemn pornography, there has been a virtual explosion of horror-porn hybrids, both softcore and hardcore. It is not certain if this should be attributed to the perpetually increasing jadedness of horror fans, who need a stronger dose of sexuality in their murder scenes in order to experience an emotional shock; or to the perpetual jadedness of pornography fans, who need a stronger dose of brutality in their sex scenes in order to achieve orgasm; or simply the need of pornographers to make more money by creating products intended to appeal to every imaginable preference.

This hybridization was inevitable. Horror and porn are similar in that they are both marginal and disreputable genres that have become linked in popular imagination. In the event that such films should have A-list actors, a respectable director, or serious artistic aspirations, the final products are respectively rechristened as “thrillers” or “erotica” in an attempt to obscure their shameful origins. Detractors of these genres decry pornographic sex as “too violent,” and the violence of horror films as “too pornographic.” This confusion is the result of the fact that both genres are obsessed with the idea of the body as spectacle.⁸⁷ Some film scholars have adopted the label “carnography” to bridge the genres’ treatment of physical boundaries. Others use the term “gorenography” in reference to graphic scenes of torture and murder that are purportedly intended to sexually arouse viewers.⁸⁸ In any case, I was intrigued as to whether

⁸⁷ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 61-62.

⁸⁸ These neologisms are respectively discussed in detail by Pinedo in *Recreational Terror* and by Jane Caputi and Diana Russell in “Femicide: Sexist Terrorism against Women,” in *Femicide: The Politics of Woman-Killing*, Jane Caputi and Diana E.H. Russell, eds., (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992).

these horror-porn hybrids would attempt to incorporate the feminist sensibility of the modern horror genre, or if they would conform to the misogynist and degrading norms of traditional pornography.

Many films I viewed were of the latter type. While it is true that most pornographic films portray consensual sex acts, the women consent in situations in which a sane person would not. A case in point is *The Last Whorehouse on the Left*, which has nothing to do with the Wes Craven classic, but does contain a vague horror theme. In five vignettes, women are put in vulnerable positions—alone in a house that is broken into, stalked by a stranger at night, trapped in a burning building—and are so turned on that they get naked (sometimes in public) and have sex with the closest men and/or women available, who are often their stalkers or would-be rapists.

A small handful of films had rather decent production values, acceptable acting, plot, character development, and even try to appeal to women by removing the demeaning elements common in much of pornography. The best of the group was *Dark Angels 2*, a vampire film that is also a decent example of “couple’s porn.” Not only are the sex scenes presented as consensual by normal standards, all of the couples have a history, and are often presented as being genuinely in love. There is actual conversation and foreplay before penetration, and the overall feel of the film is more consistent with how relationships actually work. The plot (and there really is one!) involves the last “pure” woman on earth (though not virginal), whose blood is the key to sustaining the immortality of a powerful male vampire. She has other significant problems, namely, her husband batters her and sleeps with other women. The hero of the story informs her that her husband’s abusive behavior is wrong—an amazing admission for a porno flick, though unfortunate in that the abuse isn’t “real” until a male calls it such. Conveniently, the husband is eaten alive by demi-vampires, leaving the widow and the hero to have amazing sex.

Although the film is more woman-friendly than the genre typically allows, it has some obvious flaws. As usual, the performer's bodies are too perfect and a bit artificial-looking, which undermines the more realistic aspects of the love scenes. There is a tendency to focus more on the performers' entire bodies and facial expressions and less on genital close-ups, which certainly humanizes the actors, but there is nonetheless an extreme reluctance to discard genre conventions such as the "money shot," which is unfortunate in that it makes male orgasm the standard of sexual pleasure.

Slaughter Disk was one of the most unusual and gruesome surprises I encountered in my viewing of the horror-porn subgenre in that it is a true horror film featuring hardcore penetration. The film is based upon a short story called "The Tape," in which the spirit of a murdered porn star takes revenge upon male viewers who abuse pornography and objectify women. The protagonist, Mike, is a pathetic college man who is so addicted to pornography that he cannot have a successful relationship with real women. His habit puts him in debt, causes him to lose his job, and even isolates him from his same-sex friends. But Mike isn't a "harmless" consumer. When he isn't pursuing his latest perverse or absurd fetishes (clown sex!), he participates in a drunken gang-bang at a fraternity party, an encounter that he only dimly remembers the next morning. Rather than worry that he may have committed rape, Mike predictably panics over the possibility that he may have had sex with a "fat girl."

One day, Mike learns of a new DVD so explicit that it is banned in every country. Delighted, he pays the website's rather exorbitant fee and the disk arrives in the mail soon after. The DVD's female anti-hero, Andromeda Strange, does indeed offer a spectacle different from standard pornographic fare. In the first scene, she masturbates until she ejaculates blood, then slashes herself with a razor. Mike is disturbed, but somewhat aroused by this display of female

masochism. In the subsequent scenes, Andromeda has sex with a variety of bound and gagged male victims, whom she treats as passive playthings for her *own* pleasure. Interestingly, she never achieves orgasm unless by self-stimulation. Perhaps orgasm is too associated with surrender and a loss of bodily control. After a standard scene involving a “cum facial,” Andromeda retorts, “Guess what else I like having sprayed all over my body,” slashes the man’s throat, and bathes in his blood. Another man calls her a bitch, and she bashes his head in with a hammer. Obviously, Mike is not prepared for this onslaught of misandrist snuff, but he can’t stop watching. In the final scene, Andromeda crosses over into Mike’s reality and then claims him as her victim. The self-conscious criticism of pornographic norms likely accounts for *Slaughter Disk*’s popularity among those female viewers who find most porn films degrading, according to director David Quitmeyer in an online interview.

I applaud Quitmeyer’s creation of a female character with true power and agency, but his film still cannot escape the dominant/submissive binary that defines the genre. Nor does the film make an attempt to show what women’s sexuality might actually look like—Andromeda spends the majority of time catering to male fantasies before brutally letting her “lovers” know how fundamentally wrong their desires are. Like conventional horror films, *Slaughter Disk* achieves a perverse form of gender equality by elevating the status of women, but also by literally and figuratively cutting men down to size—both socially and via physical mutilation.

But perhaps Quitmeyer’s methods really are more subversive. All hardcore porn films are designed to trigger an orgasm in their masturbating viewers, ideally when the performers reach orgasm. Feminist critics such as Catharine MacKinnon assert that male viewers are being conditioned to orgasm to the degradation of women.⁸⁹ *Slaughter Disk* seeks to deprogram this response in some obvious ways. During the more conventionally “sexy” moments, the camera

⁸⁹ MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, 88.

cuts away from Andromeda's sexual gymnastics to Mike masturbating. Something about his skinny, whipped-dog body, and vacant stare is the antithesis of sexiness. The message to viewers is "This is you," and this sort of identification is highly unappealing. And of course, the sexist male is killed at precisely the moment when the viewer is supposed to reach orgasm.

Slaughter Disk, although above average, is one of many examples of why horror and porn are incompatible in their emotional and physiological aims—porn aims to create sexual arousal (often in response to violence) while horror creates a terror response, nausea, or general disgust (as often in response to sex as to death).

Chapter 12

Going All the Way: The Sexual Politics of Snuff

Anti-porn feminists of the second wave denounced the exploitative nature of mainstream pornography, and some argued that even more hateful forms of pornography existed on the black market. A particular cause of panic was the possible existence of “snuff films,” in which women or children are raped and murdered on camera for the sexual stimulation of viewers.⁹⁰ Ironically, several filmmakers exploited the controversy by creating clever fakes. There is no official proof that genuine snuff films exist, but the creators of faux-snuff seem to have perversely taken feminist rhetoric to heart by making their films very similar to conventional pornography. Two of the most infamous fabricated snuff films were made in Japan as the first installments of the *Guinea Pig* series. They would have been unremarkable had they been marketed as horror films, but because they boasted the claim of being “found footage” or careful reconstructions of real murders, and were marketed as underground porn films, they became the targets of criminal investigation.⁹¹

Given that the films portray the graphic torture and dismemberment of female victims, it is extremely disturbing that they were marketed as pornography⁹². Not surprisingly, both films, although lacking sex scenes of any type, have many parallels to standard pornographic plots. It is a validation of Catharine MacKinnon’s assertion that “The pornography of Asian women is almost entirely one of torture. The women are presented so passive that they cannot be said to be alive, so bound they are not recognizably human.”⁹³ *The Devil’s Experiment* (1985) opens on

⁹⁰ MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, 87.

⁹¹ Special Features. *Guinea Pig: Flower of Flesh and Blood*, special ed. DVD. Citrus Springs, FL: Unearthed Films.

⁹² Special Features. *Guinea Pig: Flower of Flesh and Blood*, special ed. DVD.

⁹³ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 200.

the close-up of a woman who appears to be the embodiment of purity and innocence. She is wearing a white dress, and she is lit with soft, angelic lighting. Her face reflects nothing but serenity. A long shot reveals that she is bound, but like the quintessential sacrificial victim, she does not struggle.

For the next forty minutes, she is subjected to a series of increasingly brutal yet survivable endurance tests, introduced as chapter titles such as “Hit,” “Kick,” “Claw,” “Unconscious,” “Sound,” “Skin,” “Burn,” “Guts,” and “Needle.” To assure us of the scientific nature of these “tests,” each strike is numbered, the duration of each torture is noted, and the temperature of the oil used to burn her skin is meticulously recorded. Her three male tormenters (all clad in black) shout obscenities at her. They call her a bitch, a cunt, a whore. They tell her she has nothing to live for, and to give up and die. They berate her for being passive and silent, and alternately for struggling too vigorously. By the end of the film, she is visibly soiled. This is not so different from the familiar pornographic conceit of the innocent virgin who is gang-raped and is therefore “dirty,” and the derogatory language is certainly identical. The victim in *Devil’s Experiment* is obviously a symbolic virgin, and when we recall that “virgin” sometimes means “untamed” or “unexplored,” it becomes clear that the woman’s body is meant to be explored by the most brutal form of male inquiry.

Flowers of Flesh and Blood (1985) expands upon this theme with even greater cruelty and a pornographic mindset so exaggerated as to be almost farcical. In this film, an independent career woman is abducted as she walks home from work. The maniac, wielding antique gardening implements and dressed as a samurai, drugs her and ritualistically hacks her to pieces. It must be noted that the drug deprives her of normal human emotions, even the ability to express pain or terror. The madman assures us (always speaking of the victim in the third person, but

never addressing her directly) that “The woman is at present in a state of ecstasy . . . Not only does she feel no pain, but the feeling is rather pleasurable . . . There is absolutely nothing more beautiful than this. I am going to show you the ideal of beauty.” At no point does the victim speak for herself, but rather appears completely serene. Thus she becomes a passive receptacle for his fantasies. Carol J. Adams identifies this narrative technique as the “absent referent,” commonly used in pornography: “With the absent referent, we do not have to ask of someone, ‘What are you going through?’ since there is no one there to ask.”⁹⁴

Each act of dismemberment is preceded by introductory comments. “Red blossoms of blood blooming from her wrist . . . A big flower emerges around her petal and wraps her body with blooms and fragrance . . . And now her bowels start dancing wildly and bloom many blossoms.” Of course, female genitalia have been likened to flowers in many cultures. The murderer’s constant likening of her fragmented body and wounds to flowers indicates that her whole body has become a substitute sexual organ, and there is, therefore, no need to depict sexual penetration. Indeed, it is the killer, not his drugged victim, who truly appears to be in a state of sexual rapture—fondling her dismembered limbs, french-kissing her severed head, and sucking her eyeball.

This is by no means a modern pornographic conceit. The murderer’s Samurai garb points back toward older practices in Japanese culture. Historian Nils Johan Ringdal asserts, “The knife is a well-known symbol of love in Japan. Homosexual Samurai usually stabbed one another in different parts of the body as double evidence of love and masculinity . . . One *tayu* [female prostitute] from the early 1700s watched her lover stick a knife in his sinew of his elbow to demonstrate his tolerance of pain; then she grabbed the knife and stuck it into her private parts,

⁹⁴ In *The Pornography of Meat*, (New York and London: Continuum, 2004).

right to the bone.”⁹⁵ Other proofs of love included tattooing the name of one’s lover on a well-hidden part of one’s body, pulling out one’s own fingernails with pliers, and cutting off a fingertip or toe. However, the *tayu* were high-class prostitutes who were trained not to express love, so open displays of infatuation often lead to a *tayu*’s being harassed and even tortured by her fellow prostitutes. “The only honorable way out, and the only proof of true love, was mutual *hara-kiri*,” more properly termed *seppuku*—a ritualized form of self-disembowelment.⁹⁶

Given the obscure historical references and the killer’s ritual of abducting only independent women, it seems that *Flowers of Flesh and Blood* is something of a perverse nostalgia piece that yearns for the “good old days” prior to women’s increased economic independence in Japan.⁹⁷ However, it is nostalgia for a society that didn’t truly exist. Director Hino Hideshi states that the killer’s adoption of a Samurai identity is merely part of his delusion, and is a perversion of Samurai ideals—even of the aforementioned practices.⁹⁸ After all, the woman is a passive victim and does not sacrifice herself for love.

Fred Vogel’s *August Underground* (2003) offered a grittier, more realistic take on the snuff film, but catered to jaded horror fans. Based on real incidents in which criminals videotaped their crimes, Vogel’s film looks disturbingly like a serial killer’s home video. The film starts out innocently enough: Vogel’s character tells his friend, the unseen cameraman, that he wants to show him something “cool.” The two young white men descend into Vogel’s basement and enter a dingy room plastered with pornography. In the center a naked woman is bound to a metal chair; her left nipple has been cut off. The rest of the film alternates between

⁹⁵ Ringdal, Johan Nils, *Love for Sale: A History of Prostitution*, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 224.

⁹⁶ Ringdal, *Love for Sale*, 225.

⁹⁷ See Jay McRoy, Simulating Torture, Documenting Horror: The Technology of ‘Nonfiction Filmmaking’ in the *Devil’s Experiment* and *Flowers of Flesh and Blood*. In Steffen Hantke, ed. *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*, (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 135-152 for more on this.

⁹⁸ Special Features. *Guinea Pig: Flower of Flesh and Blood*, special ed. DVD. Citrus Springs, FL: Unearthed Films.

depicting the two protagonists' mundane activities and their aimless kidnapping, torture, and murder of numerous women and men. The final scene involves Vogel's character anally raping a prostitute and bashing her head with a hammer.

Amazingly, the sequel is even more brutal and unsavory, but is more interesting because it breaks away from the stereotypical binary of the male predator and the female (or feminized male) victim. *August Underground's Mordum* introduces "Cristie," the girlfriend of the original film's murderer portrayed by Vogel. Cristie Whiles is also a co-writer and co-director of this sequel. One rarely sees women at the helm of such projects. In *Mordum*, Cristie, her brother, and Vogel's victims include both men and women, so a cursory reading may cause one to conclude that the mayhem has nothing whatsoever to do with gender, but is merely a case of the strong conquering the weak. A closer analysis implies otherwise. Cristie only victimizes other *women*. In one of the milder scenes, in which the trio abducts a heterosexual couple, she goads her brother into raping the woman, and then mocks her ("Poor baby, do you feel violated?"). The two men force the rape victim's boyfriend to cut off his own penis. Cristie, not satisfied with the previous rape (which merely gave her a penis by proxy), takes the limp, severed penis and stuffs it in the woman's vagina.

If the female victim-heroines of rape-revenge display their new-found masculinity by appropriating the killer's phallic weapon, Cristie one-ups them by taking a real penis from an emasculated male victim. The whole film depicts Cristie as desperately trying to be "one of the guys." Each time she tortures a woman, she says in effect, "Look, I'm not weak like them. I'm your equal." In addition to being a tokenized woman, Cristie also suffers from false consciousness. Her boyfriend Fred views her as property, as essentially no different from the other victims. This is revealed when she tries, albeit in a perverse way, to demonstrate her

sexual autonomy by having an incestuous affair with her brother. (Given the film's depiction of rape, torture, child-murder, cannibalism, and necrophilia, this consensual sex act is arguably the least troubling aspect.) This relationship is revealed in the first scene of the film and provides the only bit of cohesive storyline that explains later events. This later earns her a beating and in the finale, Fred murders her brother simply to punish her for being a "slut."

I am extremely curious about what message Whiles wanted to convey by creating and portraying this character, but no commentary track exists for *Mordum*. As with the *Guinea Pig* films, a structuralist analysis reveals many parallels to pornography. When sadistic women are portrayed, they are often acting to please their male lover/master. This has been a common element in "high" literary porn such as *The Image* and *Story of O*, as well as "low" pulp fiction such as *A Man With a Maid*, badly written Victorian-era pulp erotica in which the "hero" kidnaps and systematically rapes his ex-fiancé in revenge for jilting him; she loves it and becomes his accomplice in the kidnapping and rapes of numerous other women. The few sadomasochistic fetish films I managed to obtain exclusively portrayed dominatrices torturing other women, often in service to a more powerful male master. None of these parallels should surprise us, as the killers in *August Underground* are portrayed as consumers of pornography.

Christie is not only disturbing because she resembles a certain female archetype within pornography, but also because she bears an unsettling resemblance to real-life "sex-radical" women (and men) who have hijacked the fringes of third wave feminism and the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender community. Like most feminists, they affirm their right to sexual pleasure on their own terms. Unfortunately, these so-called sex radicals often achieve sexual pleasure at the expense of other women, and so rabidly defend all forms of sexual desire that they tend to side with pornographers, pimps, and even pedophiles.

For example, sexual assault activist Christine Stark cites sex-radical Carol Queen's accounts of feeling entitled to buying services from prostitutes, and mocking those prostitutes who feel coerced or degraded by their "work," dismissing them as "absexual" and "not sex-positive."⁹⁹ Queen further sentimentalizes the "rights" of prostitute's "clients": "Will she honor the desires of her clients or trash them as perverted? Does she believe that everyone has the right to sexual satisfaction? Does she honor sexual service and feel positive about providing it?"¹⁰⁰ This perspective overvalues the importance of sex and orgasms, and undervalues basic human rights. Ironically, (according to Stark) Queen herself doesn't put herself in the position of servicing men for her livelihood. Other sex radicals, such as Donna Minkowitz report deriving sexual satisfaction from the abuse of other women: "The 1992 gang rape trial of college football players in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, was a bonanza for my fantasy life, with both a baseball bat and a mocked-at, retarded victim."¹⁰¹ Female-to-male transsexual Pat Califia has written a number of books endorsing sexual sadism, incest, and pedophilia. Both as a lesbian "pro-sex feminist" and then as a gay man, Califia has attempted to normalize these sexual practices by labeling them as "liberating" and as "intergenerational sex." Of the appeal of being a dominant in a lesbian sadomasochistic relationship, Califia writes "We select the most frightening, disgusting, or unacceptable activities and transmute them into pleasure . . . I like to hear someone ask for mercy and protection . . . I want to see the confusion, the anger, the turn-on, the helplessness . . . she feeds me the energy I need to dominate and abuse her."¹⁰² Califia's sadism is not limited to consensual role-play. In 1983, Califia carved a swastika into a non-consenting

⁹⁹ Christine Stark, *Girls to Boyz: Sex Radical Women Promoting Prostitution, Pornography, and Sadomasochism* in Christine Stark and Rebecca Whisnart, eds. *Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography*, (Melbourne: Spinifex, 2004, 278-294), 280.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Stark, "Girls to Boyz," 281.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Stark, "Girls to Boyz," 286.

¹⁰² In P. Califia, *A Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality*, *Advocate* (December 27, 1979), 19-21, 27-28.

female “partner’s” arm. The victim and her friends retaliated by assaulting Califia.¹⁰³ Of Califia in particular and of female sexual sadists in general, Catharine MacKinnon quips, “The good news is, it’s not biological.”¹⁰⁴

Who will liberate sex from cruelty?

¹⁰³ Stark, “Girls to Boyz,” 281.

¹⁰⁴ “Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: Pleasure Under Patriarchy”. *Ethics*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (Jan 1988, 314-346), 331.

Chapter 13

Objects of Desire: Horror Confronts Pornographic Phallacy

There has been a significant backlash against the mainstreaming of pornography. Independent horror films—particularly those of the torture subgenre—have increasingly featured anti-pornographic themes, typically portraying the genre as decidedly sadistic, and, as Dixon describes it, “badly lit, badly photographed, and possessing the returned gaze of nothing so much as captured Nazi concentration camp footage in which victims are tortured for sport and amusement.”¹⁰⁵

Robert Parigi’s 2003 film *Love Object* is one of many films that criticize the pornographic fallacy, that is, the phallocentric assumption that the desire of women is to fulfill the sexual desires of men, no matter how brutal or perverse. The feminist notion that pornography distorts men’s perceptions of women is illustrated by protagonist Kenneth’s visit to a porn shop, a scene that takes on a hallucinatory quality as he becomes increasingly entranced by the sight of silicone-enhanced, eager women and the prospect of sadistic and exotic sexual acts. But then there is a sharp jump-cut back to reality, which is a cruel shock—Kenneth is surrounded by real women, who are often dumpy-looking, pregnant, elderly, and/or generally disinterested in sex.

Kenneth buys a super-realistic, \$10,000 sex doll. He grows to see the doll as human, and real women as objects. He decides to embalm his real girlfriend with a plasticizing agent so that she will be perfectly compliant, and gets away with his crime because patriarchal society refuses to acknowledge it. The film ends with the implication that he will victimize other women. Parigi treats male violence against women as a continuum beginning in “harmless fantasy” that develops

¹⁰⁵ In *It Looks at You: The Returned Gaze of Cinema*, (Albany: SUNY UP, 1995), 131.

into objectification, and ends in femicide. To emphasize the pathological nature of the pornographic mentality, Parigi depicts it as manifesting itself as a disfiguring purple stain that “marks” the film’s perverts. The visit to the sex shop is the catalyst that transforms Kenneth’s personality. While extreme in its view that men are so easily influenced by pornography, it is merely an exaggerated version of Catharine MacKinnon’s theory that pornography “institutionalizes a sub-human, victimized, second-class status for women by conditioning orgasm to sex inequality,” and that the pornographic mentality encourages men to experience women as compliant objects.¹⁰⁶

Love Object is only one of many horror films that explore male fantasies involving passive women in the form of sex dolls and/or corpses. Other films to tackle the subject with varying degrees of competence include *Dead Doll*, *The Coroner*, *Autopsy: A Love Story*, *Marrionier: A Doll Horror Story*, *Living Doll*, and *Mail Order Bride*. One of the most gut-wrenching is the Spanish film *Aftermath*, in which a forensic pathologist brutally violates a female corpse during the course of her autopsy—ramming a knife into her vagina and copulating with her entrails, all the while creating homemade pornographic photographs of the assault—then unceremoniously dumps her organs into her abdominal cavity before feeding her heart to his dog. The film’s unspeakable acts of necrophilia have nothing to do with sexual desire. Rather, the dead woman is merely a blank screen on which the surgeon projects his rage. Perhaps the film’s concluding scene is the most shocking—the surgeon is unmasked and shown walking leisurely around his cozy, sunlit house. He is not a monster, but an average man.

The 2006 film *Feed* adds another layer of complexity to anti-porn rhetoric. Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin faced opposition from sex-positive feminists, who asserted that porn could be liberating for women, that alternative sexualities, such as consensual

¹⁰⁶ MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, 88.

sadomasochism, could be empowering, and that women should have complete control over their bodies, even if that means working in the sex industry. *Feed* addresses these issues by portraying a bizarre spectrum of behaviors between consenting adults, including the real-life case of a German man who consented to be eaten. This film addresses an obscure subculture within the BDSM¹⁰⁷ community, known as feeders and gainers. The gainer, usually a woman, is fed until she is so obese that she is completely dependent on her male partner. Of course, numerous pornography websites are devoted to this paraphilia. The would-be hero of the film, Phillip, is an Interpol agent who investigates legal violations on “internet porn” sites. While investigating the fat appreciation fetish site, he discovers that the pornographer Michael is force-feeding the models to death. When he tries to save one of the models, who is near death, he is shocked when she rabidly defends her abuser.

Although *Feed* addresses a very obscure subject, the overall message is that pornography “models” and sexual submissives are often so brainwashed that their consent cannot be considered genuine. Pornographers and dominants merely prey on their low self-esteem and create the illusion of a caring relationship. The film’s villainous pornographer often adopts feminist rhetoric about healthy sexuality and body image, but in reality despises women. Michael tells heavy women that they are beautiful, and encourages them to gain more weight. His ideal of beauty becomes just as oppressive and destructive as the mainstream cultural mandate to be very thin. In an especially gruesome twist, these women’s bodies literally become products to be consumed, and he feeds this product to new victims.

¹⁰⁷ BDSM denotes “bondage and discipline,” “domination and submission,” and “S & M” or sadomasochism.

Chapter 14

The Incredible Torture Show: Why the Slasher Film is Dead

Since 9/11, slasher films have largely been supplanted by what one may accurately call “torture films.” One may attribute this to the fact that, in the post-*Scream* era, the slasher genre has exhausted its originality, and stabbings perpetuated by masked maniacs seem a bit trite, even dull. Viewers, who were once scandalized by explicit rape-revenge films, for instance, have become bored with the relatively tame (i.e. quick and not overtly sexual) murder scenes of the slasher subgenre, and perhaps even more tired of the shallow teen characters that populate the lesser of these films.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, many recent films have hearkened back to the standards set by 1970s exploitation horror—prolonged torture scenes, graphic rapes, and a break from standard horror formulas. While most of these films are independent, the box office success of these films—including *Wolf Creek*, *House of 1000 Corpses*, *The Devil’s Rejects*, *High Tension*, *Martyrs*, *Saw*, and *Hostel*—implies that this trend is not isolated or likely to go away soon.

Whereas slasher films focused on women’s fear of and reaction to victimization, torture films tend to focus on the male story, or have a surviving group rather than a Final Girl or Final Boy. However, several torture films are concerned with the construction of the body as product in consumer culture, often by portraying the use of pornography or the purchase of sex from prostitutes as a “gateway experience” invariably leading to the desire to purchase murderous “pleasures.” Another common trait is to exploit the xenophobic and racist fears of American audiences, for instance, by having American tourists go on backpacking trips through Slovakia, China, or Brazil, and then run afoul of the locals. But eventually, like gender, the concepts of

¹⁰⁸ See Adam Rockoff’s *Going to Pieces* for a detailed history of slasher films, their critical reception, and their eventual decline.

race and nationality are revealed to create artificial divisions between people where none should logically exist.

While many of the aforementioned torture films allow the male killers to escape punishment, Eli Roth's 2005 film *Hostel* inflicts karmic justice on those who treat women as objects. It is also an ideal example of how the torture subgenre undermines stable categories of race and gender, and disrupts the genre convention of the Final Girl as outlined by Clover.¹⁰⁹ Inspired by a Thailand-based website that offered the opportunity to shoot someone in the head in exchange for \$10,000, it is primarily yet another example of a horror film that views porn and prostitution as "gateway" experiences to murder.¹¹⁰ *Hostel*, a virtual epic of male entitlement, follows three college students Josh, Paxton, and Oli (respectively Jewish, Latino, and Icelandic) on a backpacking trip through Europe, beginning in the strip clubs and brothels of Amsterdam. They later travel to a Slovakian hostel where the girls are promiscuous and eager to do "anything." Since Roth loves the concept of instant karma, the Slovakian hostel is merely a front for Elite Hunting,¹¹¹ a chain of "snuff brothels" where rich men can pay to torture and kill for sexual gratification. Unable to see the humanity of prostituted women, the three young men are themselves reduced to objects for another's enjoyment.

What is remarkable about the film is that, through similar set design and camerawork, Roth scrupulously portrays the brothel in Amsterdam and the torture house in Slovakia as essentially the same institution. Likewise, to balance the three entitled male protagonists, Roth gives us three equally entitled male torturers—the Dutch Businessman, the German Surgeon, and

¹⁰⁹ *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 35.

¹¹⁰ Eli Roth and Quentin Tarantino, Executive Producers' commentary on *Hostel*. Lionsgate DVD, 2006.

¹¹¹ This concept is borrowed from Erich Fromm's *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Henry Holt, 1992), 156, in which Fromm differentiates "elite hunting" from primitive hunting, in which the objective is to obtain sustenance. Fromm states, "'Elite Hunting' seems to satisfy the wish for power and control, including a certain amount of sadism, characteristic of power elites."

the American Client. The torturers are, for all practical purposes, no different from the protagonists. They have merely journeyed further down the same road. In one disturbing scene, the manic and jovial American Client justifies himself to Paxton, “I’ve been all over the world . . . every strip club, every whorehouse . . . the bottom line is, pussy’s pussy . . . But this, this is something you *never* forget.”

The commonality between the torturers and the protagonists is what radical feminist John Stoltenberg calls the “eroticism of owning,” which he views as the underpinning of male sexual identity. “Unless he feels like a sexual owner, he can’t feel like a real man . . . owning another human being through sex makes gender make sense; it lends an emotional and physical resonance; it lodges social gender in bodies and brains.”¹¹² Since sexual ownership is foregrounded in racial, economic, and gender inequality, it is no surprise that bodies of oppressed individuals are constructed as commodities to be bought and consumed. American men traveling abroad feel entitled to the bodies of women, particularly women of impoverished nations. Torture, which is also portrayed as a sexual act, can only be afforded by the wealthiest men. The name of the snuff-brothel chain, “Elite Hunting,” reminds us that this is a luxury for the rich, and hunting itself is often used as a metaphor for sexual conquest. Furthermore, in some countries, brothels are euphemistically known as “houses of slaughter” because of the cruel use of the prostitutes.¹¹³ Women and feminized men are not sexual equals. They are prey.

If *Hostel* is foregrounded in issues of male entitlement and the cold, exploitative heart of the sex industry, racial tensions are an important secondary element. Characters are willing to casually denigrate or torture others on the basis of race or nationality, but these categories are implied to be completely arbitrary. Josh, the Jewish-American, has blonde hair and blue eyes.

¹¹² John Stoltenberg, *Pornography and International Human Rights*, in Christine Stark and Rebecca Whisnart, eds., *(Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography)*. Melbourne: Spinifex, 2004, 400-409), 403.

¹¹³ Adams, *The Pornography of Meat*, 11.

The Latino character Paxton is the most representative of American values, implying that America is indeed a “melting pot” where distinct ethnic identities are dissolved. Along with blurring racial identities and ideas about cultural heritage, Roth loves to undermine stereotypes and tidy categories in general. *Hostel* is populated with female pimps, butchering doctors, and roving gangs of violent children. In the midst of this chaos, the audience is likely to identify with Josh, who appears to be the quintessential, phenotypically Anglo-Saxon Final Boy. When Josh is killed early in the film, the audience is left without a sympathetic character with which to identify. This undermines not only audience expectations that the most androgynous character will survive, but that the survivor will be white and non-promiscuous.¹¹⁴

However, the surviving male does eventually become reformed and “open,” much like the men of supernatural films. Paxton, the most sexist and entitled of the protagonists, is transformed through torture. Significantly, Roth didn’t want Paxton and the male victims to behave like “macho action heroes.” Instead, these men cry, scream, and plead for their lives. They may vomit, or lose control of their bowels and bladder. The loss of perceived sovereignty over their bodies is first and foremost a humbling experience, a reminder that, at the end of the day, we are all just “pieces of meat.” Since physical openness translates to emotional openness in horror films, the experience of losing fingers and being penetrated with a weapon allows Paxton to realize his commonality with women. When he escapes his would-be murderer, he is able to identify across race and gender lines to rescue a female torture victim, whom he now sees as fully human rather than a sex object. *Hostel* is a perfect example of Judith Halberstam’s observation that “the genders that emerge triumphant at the gory conclusion of a splatter film are literally posthuman, they punish the limits of the human body and they mark identities that are always

¹¹⁴ This revision of standard formula is an excellent corrective to the most glaring flaw of the 1980s slasher film, which occasionally featured a likeable multi-racial cast, but featured a Final Girl (or Boy) who was almost invariably white and middle-class.

stitched, sutured, bloody at the seams, and completely beyond the reaches of an impotent humanism”¹¹⁵

Hostel: Part II (2007) exaggerates the criticism of violent masculinity, relocating the American Client’s entitled mentality from the lunatic fringes to the rotten heart of the story. In one of the creepier scenes, two rather amiable Abercrombie-and-Fitch-looking guys named Todd and Stuart (Elite Hunting’s newest clients) are jogging together and discussing a mutual friend and noting how *different* he was after returning from summer break. “It’s like he’s killed somebody. He doesn’t need to say anything; you can sense it like an animal senses it . . .” This conversation continues a bit longer before Todd declares with admiration, “Clearly he has the balls to do what few others will . . . What we are about to do today will affect us the rest of our lives. People will fucking fear you. *Linda* will fucking fear you.” To be a “real man” is to prove oneself through violence. Real men don’t need women’s love or respect if they can earn their fear instead. Unlike the clearly deviant killers of slasher films, the wealthy, often likable, torturers of the *Hostel* series represent mainstream Western masculinity. Lest we overlook this crucial point, Todd denounces the notion that they are sick and reassures his friend that “We’re the normal ones.”

With the exception of a female-on-female torture scene¹¹⁶ that references the blood fetish of historical figure Elizabeth Bathory, the torture scenes in general portray men’s loathing of women and reflect a pessimistic view of male sexuality. In her controversial book *Intercourse*, Dworkin argues that intercourse in patriarchal, misogynist society is often “the pure, sterile, formal contempt for women; but that contempt can turn gothic and express itself in many sexual

¹¹⁵ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 114.

¹¹⁶ While women figure prominently as procurers for Elite Hunting, only a very small percentage comprise its client population, implying that women in general do not develop the sadistic kinks of their male counterparts. However, the presence of even a few female torturers disrupts any essentialist assumptions and reiterates that the mentality of sexual ownership is a learned behavior.

and sadistic practices that eschew intercourse per se. Any violation of a woman's body can become sex for men . . . ”¹¹⁷ The female torture victims are meant to represent a threatening form of femininity that the male clients wish to eradicate or punish. Todd's victim is dressed whorishly in a pink satin teddy and fishnet stockings, and he accuses her of using her looks and sexuality to manipulate men. Stuart's victim is a stand-in for his wife Linda, whom he perceives as a stereotypically frigid, castrating, career-driven bitch. *Hostel: Part II* is pessimistic about the possibility of reforming its male characters, as evidenced by the character arc of the initially reluctant Stuart, who promises to save the woman he paid to kill and then tearfully confesses “I'm not that guy.” Unfortunately, he is referring to the kind of guy who is easily swayed by sentimentality and female “manipulation,” and quickly descends into absolute sadism. In contrast, tough-guy Todd has an attack of conscience, and is swiftly punished for his rejection of the “normal” male role.

The anti-porn politics of the torture subgenre may be attributed in part to ideologies typical of horror for the past three decades. Although the torture film has tried to distance itself from the slasher film, it shares the same view that sexually penetrating someone is no different from penetrating them with a weapon. Violence and sex are so interchangeable that it is no surprise if cinematic killers derive sexual gratification from torturing their victims, and that the victims themselves are consequently feminized.

¹¹⁷ Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse*, (New York: Basic Books, 1987, reprinted 2006), 175. See also Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, (New York: Pedigree Books, 1979, reprinted 1981).

Chapter 15

A Defense of Sex-Negativity

Given that anti-porn feminism has failed spectacularly even in more mainstream feminist communities, which tend to identify as “sex-positive,” why has the horror genre taken up anti-porn arguments? I have yet to find a director who has admitted to being influenced by the works of Dworkin and MacKinnon, although the grim and apocalyptic tone of their writing would logically make good fodder for the creators of horror films. A pro-sex or anti-antiporn feminist’s defense of pornography as empowering for women is not likely to be as inspiring to horror writers as porn actress Regan Starr’s statement, “I was being hit and choked. I was really upset, and they didn’t stop. They kept filming. You can hear me say. ‘Turn the fucking camera off,’ and they kept going.”¹¹⁸ Between testimonials such as this and recent media attention to human trafficking and forced prostitution, the sex industry has enough horror stories of its own, and it is quite possible that the directors of horror films are simply reaching the same conclusions.

It seems that feminists who oppose pornography and male creators of horror reach the same conclusions, although they approach the subject matter from different perspectives and life experiences. For example, the attitudes of *Hostel*’s male characters are inspired by Eli Roth’s own *disembodied* work in the sex industry. To offset the expense of his student films, Roth worked for *Penthouse* online. He was paid to have cybersex with subscribers, who believed Roth was a female porn star.¹¹⁹ Roth was also alarmed about the rise of mainstream “humiliation porn.” In an interview for *The Pit of Horror* online magazine, Roth declares, “I don’t want to cram

¹¹⁸ Quoted in D.A. Clarke, Prostitution for everyone: Feminism, globalisation, and the ‘sex’ industry, in Christine Stark and Rebecca Whisnart, eds., *Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography*, (Melbourne: Spinifex, 2004, 149-205), 150.

¹¹⁹ Nemet-Nejat, Daniel. The Guru of Gore. *Penthouse*, June 2007, 18-19, and “Eli Roth: Biography.” *Internet Movie Database*. <<http://www.IMDb.com/name/nm0744834/bio>>. Retrieved 20 January 2007.

morality down anyone's throat but that's what influenced the story . . . I've noticed a trend in pornography lately, where there are all these humiliation sites . . . And you know it's fake, but there is still someone at home jerking off to this shit and getting off on humiliating girls. Sex is not enough anymore . . . ”¹²⁰ Roth also states that some men are bored with the conventional illicit pleasures of doing drugs and having sex with prostitutes. “Nothing touches them anymore, so they start looking for the ultimate high. Paying to kill someone, to torture them—that's the ultimate form of prostitution.”¹²¹ Is this so different from Catharine MacKinnon's assertion that, “Killing, murder really, is the ultimate sex act in pornography”?¹²²

When horror engages with pro-sex rhetoric rather than merely critiquing entitled victimizers, it is often with skepticism and suspicion. Many “sex-positives” advocate all forms of consensual sex between adults,¹²³ and practitioners of alternative sexualities such as those within the BDSM community have adopted the watchwords “safe, sane, and consensual” as governing values. Since feminists typically want people to control their own bodies, but also want to end hierarchical binaries and the abusive behaviors that go with them, the issues of consensual sadomasochism and sex-work as empowering continue to be controversial. Recent films such as Marian Dora's *Cannibal*¹²⁴ (2006) and Brett Leonard's *Feed* (2006) address these issues and raise several important questions. Who decides what is safe, sane, and consensual? To what extent should we have freedom to decide the fate of our bodies? Are our desires really ours to begin

¹²⁰ Eli Roth, interview by John Gray. *Pit of Horror: Online Horror Movie Resource*, 2005.

<<http://www.pitofhorror.com/newdesign/promo/hostel.interview.htm>>. Retrieved 23 January 2007.

¹²¹ Quoted in Andrew O'Hehir, Beyond the Multiplex: A new release that ranks among the greatest of all Holocaust films. Plus: Horror king Eli Roth defends his excess. 5 Jan 2006.

<<http://www.salon.com/ent/movie.review/2006/01/05/btm/index1.html>>. Retrieved 26 May, 2007.

¹²² MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, 96.

¹²³ I use the term “sex-positive” loosely. Originally, the term was adopted by people who wanted to destigmatize sex, or who wanted sex to be about mutual pleasure. However, a brief survey of Internet blogs reveals that the term “sex-positive” and its supposed opposite “sex-negative” are used quite recklessly, often to denigrate individuals who are celibate or who aren't willing to try specific sex acts. For example, a generic accusation is often something like, “If you aren't comfortable with vaginal fisting, you are too repressed and sex-negative.”

¹²⁴ *Cannibal* is based on the real-life story of a would-be cannibal who used the Internet to find a willing victim. In this film, the victim is more deranged and sinister than the killer.

with? Perhaps this is a conundrum because even the most “normal” and “healthy” sexual and romantic relationships are traditionally characterized and defined by the dominant/submissive binary.

I believe that desires of any type can be created for us, imposed upon us. The desire to be punished, to be humiliated, or to become completely dependent on another is very often the result of internalized oppression and self-hatred. Conversely, a sense of entitlement or ownership over the bodies is taken for granted by members of dominant groups. As John Stoltenberg observes, “. . . owning another human being through sex makes gender make sense; it lends an emotional and physical resonance; it lodges social gender in bodies and brains.”¹²⁵ Since sexual ownership is foregrounded in racial, economic, and gender inequality, it is no surprise that bodies of oppressed individuals are constructed as commodities to be bought and consumed. To move beyond this sense of sexual ownership, hierarchical binaries based on gender, race, and class will have to disappear.

¹²⁵ Stoltenberg, *Pornography and International Human Rights*, 403.

AFTERWORD

Horror is an ideal genre to analyze when examining issues of corporeality and unconventional gender roles because it is obsessed with the body as spectacle, not only exploring elaborate and excruciating death scenarios, but also exploiting fears about sexuality and sexual penetration in particular. It is one of a few genres (including pornography and the “tear-jerker”) designed to elicit a specific *bodily* response in viewers. Horror (like its predecessor Gothic literature) has a greater subversive potential because its “Gothic bodies disrupt stable notions of what it means to be human. They break down the demarcations between animal and human, death and life, and male and female.”¹²⁶ This disruption of binary thought is crucial in any attempt to reform or dispose of gender roles, and in any serious examination of bodily experiences, as men and women’s bodies are more similar than different. At the risk of oversimplifying matters, the overarching trend of horror since the 1970s has been to illustrate this similarity by treating women less like “pieces of meat” and men increasingly as such.

Currently, horror is undergoing a revival, and many upcoming projects are being made both for and by women. As Dixon notes, many feminist filmmakers in the horror genre have already “pulled off one of the most subversive acts in postmodern cinema: they have taken a thoroughly disreputable and marginalized area of cinematic discourse and reclaimed it . . . positing the female viewer as the giver/bearer of the gaze.”¹²⁷ In the future we can hope to see films that will make binary concepts of gender obsolete, creating a new gender that “splatters, rips

¹²⁶ Hendershot, *The Animal Within*, 9.

¹²⁷ Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Transparency of Spectacle: Meditations on the Moving Image*, (Albany: SUNY UP, 1998), 138.

at the seams, and then is sutured together again as something much messier than male or female.”¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 143.

GLOSSARY

Final Boy. A term coined by Carol Clover to refer to the lone male survivor in a horror film.

While the Final Boy is relatively uncommon in modern horror films, he is typically portrayed as androgynous or even feminine, presumably as an antidote to the hypermasculine hero depicted in traditional narratives.¹²⁹

Final Girl. A term coined by Carol Clover referring to the lone female survivor depicted in the majority of modern horror films, particularly within the slasher subgenre. The Final Girl is usually virginal, possesses androgynous or masculine traits, and is often more independent and self-reliant than her peers.¹³⁰

Slasher films. A sub-genre of horror films that peaked in popularity from the late 1970s through the mid-1980s. The plot of “typical” slasher film involves a group of teenagers being systematically killed by a masked or deformed maniac, who is eventually vanquished by the female survivor.

Snuff films. A genre of films featuring the authentic torture and murder of women and/or children for the sexual gratification of viewers.¹³¹ To date, no genuine snuff films have been discovered. The films discussed in this analysis are clever simulations, and have more in common with pornography than with the horror genre.

Torture films. A sub-genre of horror films that has achieved mainstream popularity after 9/11. The subgenre is characterized by the explicit, prolonged torture of its unfortunate characters, and often focuses on issues such as sexual sadism, human trafficking, and pornography. At the printing of this manuscript, many films of this sub-genre

¹²⁹ *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 63.

¹³⁰ *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 35-41.

¹³¹ MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, 87.

unfortunately lack any meaningful social commentary or artistic merit, suggesting an imminent decline similar to that of the slasher film.

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