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„The Power of Pleasure in Pain -
The appeal of horror with special regard to gender-
specific differences in the reception of contemporary
American horror cinema“

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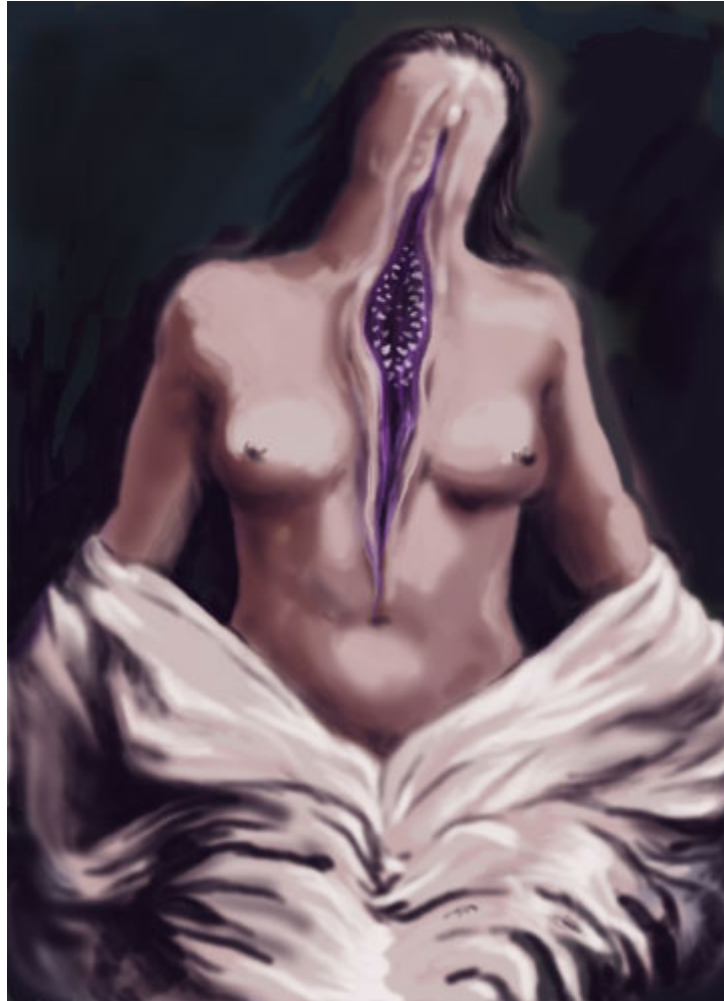


Fig. 1: VAGINA DENTATA © Natalie Sandells, 2005

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Introduction

For the question should not be “why horror?” at all. It should be, rather, why do *these* people like *this* horror in *this* place at *this* particular time? And what exactly are the consequences of their constructing their everyday sense of fearfulness and anxiety, their “landscapes of fear”, out of such distinctive cultural materials?

- Andrew Tudor -

The question of the appeal of horror is neither a simple one nor does it allow for a simple answer. A great number of scholars have attempted to explain the attraction of the genre on the basis of their academic métier, but they often run the risk of presenting a one-sided view neglecting other crucial aspects involved in the discussion. In this thesis I shall illuminate the subject from various significant perspectives within psychology and psychoanalysis in order to provide a valuable overview.

I shall divide this theory-based paper into three major sections. First of all, I will provide an introduction to the genre of horror as such. I will outline the origins and influences of horror cinema followed by a quick look at the genre's categorisation. Another focus will be the discussion about the problems arising from viewing graphic violence and the criticism the genre had to suffer. Then I will briefly outline the amount of academic areas concerned with the issue of explaining the appeal of horror. Since a great deal of theories are based on psychoanalysis, I shall also present some critical views on that approach.

The second part of this paper will be constituted of some of the most influential theories from the field of psychology, which are frequently based on the gratifying effects spectators gain from watching a horror film. I shall discuss the viable and overruled aspects of these theories as well as the differences arising from the spectator's sex. However, throughout this section I shall argue that some psychological accounts tend to a generalisation of the audience and neglect the significance of the individual's constitution and needs.

In the third section on psychoanalysis, though, I will investigate theories dealing with an ideal undifferentiated spectator. Since according to most scholars horror is a male genre, the focus will be on how and why sexual difference influences a spectator's liking for the genre. Psychoanalytical approaches are in general based on the idea that people repress certain fears that then strive to return in the form of the horror text's monster. In order to

clarify why men are said to prefer horror films I will outline what is, according to Robin Wood, oppressed and repressed in American culture, which he closely relates to the culture's Others. I shall argue that most categories are likely to be equally experienced by both sexes. However, woman as being one of these Others requires a closer look at the origins of patriarchal structures largely based on the sexes' individual psychosexual development, the Oedipus complex and the castration complex being the cornerstones of this discussion. Following that I will present the relevant aspects of Freud's essay "The Uncanny", focussing on the manifestations of castration anxieties as well as the cases in which self and Other become blurred. As a necessary complementation of and contribution to the theory of the uncanny I will present Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection in connection with Barbara Creed's notion of the monstrous-feminine. In the latter's elaboration of the abject she explains the female threat on the basis of woman's power residing in her relation to maternal authority which is opposed to the paternal order that structures patriarchy. Furthermore, I shall examine several theories of viewer identification which attempt to explain the identificatory positions the male spectator might desire to adopt, particularly with regard to sadism and masochism. Since I do not agree with the axiomatically treated assumption that horror cinema almost exclusively pleases a male audience, I will dedicate the final chapter to the gratifications a female spectator might gain from watching a horror film. For this purpose, I will focus on the representation of the empowered female as opposed to the processing of repressed content.

In summary, it can be said that this thesis is supposed to answer the first one of Tudor's fundamental questions in detail and the following three at least to some extent. Tailored to the focus of this thesis, the question could be posed as follows: *Why do men or women like a specific subgenre such as the slasher film in American culture of the 21st century?*

PART I – An Introduction to Horror

1.1. Emergence of a Fascination

In the late 18th century, a new literary genre emerged primarily in England, whose creators were amongst others Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe

and Mary Shelley. The new genre including literary works like *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or *Frankenstein* was to be called “The Gothic”, revolving basically around themes such as fear, terror, mystery, the supernatural, death, decay, and darkness. The authors of these works no longer aimed at gripping their readership with stories dealing with ubiquitous and always relevant issues such as love, religion, philosophy, or the meaning of life, at least not in the first place. They rather contemplated fascinating the readers by provoking in them intense feelings of fear, disgust, and tension, an attempt they succeeded in. The genre soon proved to appeal to a large audience and was progressed throughout the 19th century. Numerous famous writers produced Gothic novels, amongst them world-class works such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, as well as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. It is hardly suprising that after the cinematograph had been invented and introduced by the Lumière Brothers in 1895, there was soon a demand for Gothic stories to be translated into filmic language and told via the movie screen. Georges Méliès, one of the pioneers of early film history, is said to be the first to have produced a film marked by a Gothic ensemble. *Le manoir du diable*, released in 1896, laid the foundation for all the upcoming movies revolving around the devilish blood-sucking creatures doubtlessly finding their precursor in the literary figure of Dracula. Supernatural creatures of Gothic novels found their way into film versions of the literary originals or became the protagonists of novel filmic stories. As Rudolf Fehrmann states in his diploma thesis *Neue Ängste im modernen Horrorfilm*, vampiric creatures can be traced back to the myth of Dracula, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde set the basis for what was soon to be called the werewolf, and Frankenstein’s monster is indirectly represented in a number of films as the thing without a name (45). As prominent as these Gothic figures might still be, however, there has been a huge development in the elaboration and processing of themes and issues in the dread-provoking sector of films from the 20th century up to the present. The term Gothic was no longer enough to label the abundance of movies. The genre had opened up, covering a wider range of stories. It was then that the Gothic had to agree to its new status of subgenre of a much huger field within film genre variation. The term **horror** had come into being and has since then been commonly used.

1.2. A Genre that Scatters

It is indeed interesting what a large number of scholars, among them Mark Jancovich, Stephen Neale, Barry Keith Grant, and Andrew Tudor, have obviously felt the necessity to devote themselves to the issue of the horror genre as such. Almost every academic who dealt to some extent with horror films has in some way raised and treated the genre subject with regard to its definition and classification. The obvious problem, though, is that all of them came up with slightly different results, decisively complicating what should in fact serve as a guideline for cinephiles or students interested in the genre. Clearly there are specific labels that are hard to misunderstand due to their stressing of the movie's principal theme or protagonist. Examples are phrases such as "vampire films", "zombie films", "rape-revenge films", or the recently coined "teen horror" including films like *Scream* or *I Know What You Did Last Summer*.

In the original version of *Dark Dreams* (which he included in the revised version from 2009), Charles Derry split up the genre in three distinct categories. The Horror of Personality film was concerned with the human as the source of evil¹ (*Psycho*). The Horror of Armageddon film pictures apocalyptic scenarios usually evoked by aliens, zombies, or some sort of animalistic creature (*Alien*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Birds*). The Horror of the Demonic is illustrated in films in which the supernatural evil intrudes and threatens normality (*Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*). Although these categories might seem fairly evident and simple, Derry himself realised that they were not sufficient to comprise all of the movies released over the past few decades. Sequels, remakes, the Asian horror boom (J-Horror from Japan, K-Horror from Korea), comedy horror, and mockumentaries have complicated his categorisation. One must acknowledge that any genre develops in the course of time, and the horror genre certainly does so in parallel with the changing zeitgeist and conventions, and clearly the constantly recurring need for novel ideas, narratives, and special effects. That implies that genre categorisations must be revised on a rolling basis since they are likely to lose validity due to the increase of new movies. In her recent guidebook to horror, Brigid Cherry makes an attempt at establishing

¹ This category is frequently also referred to as psychological horror.

several subgenres comprising the very beginnings of the genre up to one of the newest developments called torture porn (including the *Saw* series).

Table 1.1 Categories of cinematic horror

The Gothic Films based on classic tales of horror, often adapting pre-existing horror monsters or horrifying creatures from novels and mythology	<i>Dracula</i> , <i>Frankenstein</i> , <i>The Mummy</i> (and all subsequent versions of these), <i>I Walked with a Zombie</i> and other traditional voodoo zombies, <i>Masque of the Red Death</i> , <i>Near Dark</i> , <i>Interview with the Vampire</i>
Supernatural, occult and ghost films Films that involve interventions of spirits, ghosts, witchcraft, the devil, and other entities into the real world, often featuring uncanny elements	<i>The Haunting</i> , <i>Rosemary's Baby</i> , <i>Exorcism</i> , <i>The Exorcist</i> , <i>The Amityville Horror</i> , <i>Suspiria</i> , <i>The Sixth Sense</i> , <i>The Others</i> , <i>Ring</i> , <i>The Grudge</i> , <i>The Eye</i> , <i>The Blair Witch Project</i>
Psychological horror Films that explore psychological states and psychoses, including criminality and serial killers	<i>Cat People</i> , <i>Psycho</i> , <i>Preying Tom</i> , <i>Eyes Without a Face</i> , <i>Repulsion</i> , <i>Carrie</i> , <i>The Hand That Rocks the Cradle</i> , <i>The Silence of the Lambs</i>
Monster movies Films that feature invasions of the everyday world by natural and secular ^a creatures leading to death and destruction	<i>Godzilla</i> , <i>The Birds</i> , <i>The Thing from Another World</i> , <i>Alien</i> , <i>The Host</i> , <i>Clash of the Titans</i>
Slashers Films portraying groups of teenagers menaced by a stalker, set in domestic and suburban spaces frequented by young people, the only survivor a female who (in the early cycles) has not participated in underage sex	<i>The Texas Chain Saw Massacre</i> , <i>Halloween</i> , <i>Friday the 13th</i> , <i>A Nightmare on Elm Street</i> , <i>Scream</i> , <i>I Know What You Did Last Summer</i> , <i>Cherry Falls</i> , <i>The Faculty</i>
Body horror, splatter and gore films (including postmodern zombies) Films that explore abjection and disgust of the human body, often involving mutation, disease, or aberrant and fetishistic behaviour (for example cannibalism or sado-masochism)	<i>The Brood</i> , <i>Videodrome</i> , <i>The Fly</i> (and other films by David Cronenberg), <i>The Thing</i> , <i>Tetsuo</i> , <i>Night of the Living Dead</i> , <i>Evil Dead</i> , <i>Hellraiser</i> , <i>Down of the Dead</i> , <i>Shaun of the Dead</i> , <i>Resident Evil</i> , <i>The Howling</i>
Exploitation cinema, video nasties or other forms of explicitly violent films Films focused on extreme or taboo subjects, including violence and torture, other controversial subject matter such as Nazi death camps, rape and other sexual assaults upon women	<i>I Spit on Your Grave</i> , <i>Last House on the Left</i> , <i>Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer</i> , <i>Man Bites Dog</i> , <i>Hostel</i> , <i>Saw</i> , <i>Audition</i> , <i>Ich i die K�ller</i> , <i>The Devil's Rejects</i> , <i>Irreversible</i>

^a Andrew Tudor (1989: 8) uses the term to distinguish creatures which are feasible according to the laws of nature (extra-terrestrial life may well be possible, even if we consider it unlikely) from supernatural creatures which we know cannot exist within the natural order (such as vampires, zombies and ghosts).

Fig. 2: Brigid Cherry's categorisation of horror subgenres (5-6).

By taking a look at such a classification, it becomes explicit that the very different faces of horror inevitably result in a variety of genre preferences. Most people usually do not prefer horror in general but rather one or more specific subgenres. Slasher films (or teen horror films) are particularly appealing to teenagers, vampire movies are usually preferred by female spectators (Cherry *RR*), and psychological horror as well as monster movies tend to have a widespread audience. Categorising a genre obviously serves a purpose, particularly with regard to the audience and the producers. As Jancovich appropriately remarks, the formulas making a genre pursue two specific goals.

First of all, they provide the illusion of choice, and secondly they set a standardisation in production and facilitate familiarity in consumption (10). However, I must clarify that I shall not strictly stick to specific denotations or classifications. Making use of technical vocabulary is certainly adequate at times, particularly when it is talk of a certain subgenre such as the slasher film. When I speak of the horror film, though, I am referring to the entire genre. I refuse to follow any prescriptive categorisation due to one simple fact: Contemporary horror films most often neither follow these rules. I therefore fully agree with Pinedo when she writes that “a postmodern work breaks down boundaries, transgresses genres, and is characterized by incoherence. [...] The postmodern genre operates on the principles of disruption, transgression, undecidability and uncertainty” (14, 17). However, when Pinedo speaks of the postmodern horror genre, she refers to films released since 1968. Throughout this paper, I will mention film examples from this period. The films I will examine in more detail, though, are those I refer to as contemporary horror films, that is movies released in the 21st century.

1.3. The Problem with Horror and its Audience

When people talk about movies, they are usually confronted with an opinion-based discussion. People watch movies primarily selected according to their preferences and then often tell what they like or dislike about it. This is in general a very subjective point of view. There is a phenomenon, though, which could have been observed since movies became mainstream. It is settled on a much more objective level, claiming that there are good movies of high contential and formal quality as well as bad ones lacking any acceptable aspiration level and which are not worth being discussed. The former category nowadays refers to a number of films, such as arthouse movies, spectacular sophisticated blockbusters, a number of works of film noir, movies referred to as classics, or masterpieces by highly esteemed filmmakers. The latter category, however, is the one into which almost all horror films fall. With the exception of a small number of movies which are appraised primarily because of their

famous directors² (some of which only jaunted into the horror genre), this genre is frequently excoriated. As Robin Wood properly states,

The horror film has consistently been one of the most popular and, at the same time, the most disreputable of Hollywood genres. The popularity itself has an unusual dimension that sets the horror film apart from other genres: it has an audience that is restricted to fans and others who wholly embrace the genre, while amongst the rest of the population there is almost total rejection; people either love or hate the genre, tending to watch horror films either enthusiastically or not at all (77).

Brigid Cherry fully agrees with Wood, also trying to give reasons for the undeniable bad reputation of the genre.

Horror cinema's outsider status derives largely from the fact that [...] it is designed to elicit negative emotions from its viewers – something that does put many people off. While its viewers do love to watch horror cinema and enjoy being vicariously scared in the safety of the cinema or living room, many people are put off or find such films distasteful (12).

Horror film viewers thus find themselves involved in a struggle the horror genre is confronted with and are constantly being forced to justify their taste and preference for this sort of films. This dilemma is also stressed by Udo Franke-Penski in the following quotation: "Noch immer sieht sich der Rezipient von Horrorfiktionen häufig einem Rechtfertigungszwang ausgesetzt" (20). I myself as an avowing horror aficionado was looked at askant fairly often when revealing my taste, or forced to run a marathon of explanations that could in any way clarify why I liked this genre. In particular more mature adults frequently appear to have severe objections to children watching horror films, especially when it comes to their own offspring. Their worries are certainly reasonable since this genre most often deals with violence and brutality in its utmost form. Franke-Penski defines the difference between terror and horror insofar as he refers to the former as rather concerned with suggesting violence whereas the latter presents it through a graphically realised and exposed atrocity (23). Concerns are particularly valid observing the development the horror film has undergone from its beginnings up to the present day. More and more extremely cruel and violent films have been shot and released in the past decades, showing that there is a growing demand for those due to the dissatisfaction with preceding visual aesthetics and issues. Franke-Penski summarises this phenomenon as

² See Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* or Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*.

follows: "Heute misst man die Fiktion nicht mehr an der Realität, sondern an den Fiktionen, die ihr vorausgegangen sind" (35). However, that which poses the real problem is that the horror film is considered to be liked mainly by adolescents, or strictly speaking *male* teenagers. Benjamin Moldenhauer terms it a "teen genre" (60), Charles Derry characterises teenagers as "the major audience for horror films" (163), James Twitchell states that "most of the audience are in their early and mid-teens" (70), and Carol Clover claims that "the preponderance of young males appears constant" (6). For the moment, I would like to skip reasons why adolescents prefer horror films, an issue to which I will return later on, and concentrate on the children frequently being referred to as victims of violence. A number of adults, parents and academics have made it their aim to fight against free and careless consumption of such films since they consider it a danger to young, often insecure and still unstable people. In his book *Wer hat unseren Kinder das Töten beigebracht?*, military psychologist Dave Grossman attacks the genre as follows.

Wenn die häusliche und gesellschaftliche Umgebung Kinder mit aufregender Gewalt überflutet, beginnt ein Prozess der systematischen Desensibilisierung und Konditionierung – nicht unähnlich dem, was einige Rekruten beim Militär durchmachen (63).

He is only one among a crowd of people who blame films and computer games that display violence for people's propensity towards violence, particularly with regard to the number of incidents that have happened in the previous years which involved teenage killing sprees or similar acts of violence. Schuller polemically advances the argument by claiming that desensitisation was no longer only a problem of misguided adolescents, but rather an expression of public cultural decay (qtd. in Moldenhauer 67). It can be concluded that Grossman and Schuller regard horror films and computer games solely as a severe threat to stable and controlled society since its influence on children is far too dangerous to guarantee a secure future. However, this fairly radical point of view seems unquestionably too one-sided. Considering that there is a huge number of consumers of horror films and games, there would certainly have to be more violent acts performed by adolescents. In addition, they seem to neglect several other factors that might play an important role in the development of a person's violent behaviour. One must take into consideration a human being's individual personality as well as his/her coping

skills when it comes to everyday problems, difficulties, or their very own insecurities and dissatisfactions. A further significant aspect might be a child's family surrounding, his/her upbringing, or whether he/she experiences enough love and appreciation. As a result, there has to be another way out of the dilemma in question, which I will be introducing in the following chapters.

1.4. Science at a Glance

In the past few decades, the horror film has not only aroused a great deal of interest in its regular audience, but also within the academic field of film and media studies. However, this does not mean that scholars primarily stick to analyses of films with regard to narrative structure, characterisation of the diegetic universe, camera work, the employment of light and colours, or the significance of sound and voices. In fact, the horror film has proved to have so much potential that these scholars dive into several other academic disciplines in order to borrow theories and ideas so they can obtain entirely new research findings. One important branch within film studies, though, is genre studies. A lot of research on the horror film, its definition as a genre and the categorisation of its subgenres has been done and at the same time has provoked much controversy and discordance. Another significant area outside of film studies concerned with the effects of horror film viewing on the individual and society is social psychology. Since this field deals with the effects of visual media, it is closely related to media psychology. Theories about the appeal and pleasures of horror regarding its spectatorship, exactly what I am concentrating on in this paper, emerged primarily in the 1970s. Those theories chiefly drew on psychoanalysis with Freud as its major point of reference. Psychoanalytical accounts were used for analysis as well as complemented, and empirical research was done as well. New sectors within this area were brought into focus, with viewer identification as one crucial example. However, psychoanalytical film analysis did not remain unmistrusted. It was attacked particularly by cognitivists for lacking empirical quality. Those scholars developed their own theories of spectatorship drawing on cognitive psychology. An interest in gender-specific differences of the appeal of horror emerged as well. Therefore, gender studies and eventually also queer studies took an

important place within the field of discussion. Horror films also had to suffer huge attacks in the 1970s after the release of the first slasher movies. Feminists addressed criticism to the in their opinion highly misogynistic texts. As a result, one can see that the horror film has indeed aroused a fair bit of attention in the course of the second half of the 20th century as well as in the present decade, not only as a means of cinematic entertainment, but also as an object for academic research and analysis.

1.5. Criticising Science

As I have already suggested in the previous chapter, psychoanalysis as a basis for film analysis has not been accepted by all academics. The field is without doubt the most prominent and widely discussed in horror film research, but there are several critics who have raised their objections. In 2004, Steven Jay Schneider published a book called *Horror film and psychoanalysis: Freud's worst nightmare*, in which he dedicated himself to presenting a selection of texts dealing with the weaknesses of the application of psychoanalysis to horror film studies. In the introduction he explains that

locating quality scholars ready and willing to contribute to a collection of essays all of which would apply psychoanalysis (of whatever species) to the horror film didn't seem like it would pose too difficult an editorial task. But neither did it seem too exciting an idea. More like preaching to the converted (1).

I do not plan to list and describe the whole range of articles criticising psychoanalytical accounts in this chapter. Instead, I would like to briefly present three fairly valid and interesting positions. The major representative of the first and simplest is Noel Carroll, who in his book *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* established a point of view rather contrary to psychoanalysis. For this reason he was Schneider's desired candidate for writing the afterword to his book. It must be immediately clarified that Carroll has no intention of completely discrediting psychoanalytical approaches to horror film. He rather sees them as a vital contribution.

Is psychoanalysis relevant to the analysis of the horror film? I think that the simple answer to this question is "Of course." It is certainly relevant, even apposite, to the analysis of many horror films, because many horror films presuppose, implicitly or explicitly, psychoanalytic concepts and imagery (257).

He thus claims that psychoanalysis can certainly be employed in film analysis, but he warns against the risk of considering it unquestionably true or granting it “any proprietary authority” because of the popularity it has gained in the course of the previous decades. He concludes by stating that “[t]hough many practitioners more or less presume that psychoanalysis is relevant to the analysis of all horror films, I think this presumption is mistaken” (269). So he simply advises the future analyst not to stubbornly focus on psychoanalysis, but apply it where themes and concepts are obviously psychoanalytically interpretable³ as well as recognise where it lacks applicability, which should lead the analyst to run in another direction, perhaps in that of cognitivism.

Another significant criticism of psychoanalytical analysis of horror film spectatorship revolves around the meaning of the concept of pleasure. In his essay “Philosophical Problems in Psychoanalytical Theories of (the Horror) Film”, Malcom Turvey first of all summarises the academic state of the art with regard to the relation between psychoanalysis and pleasure experienced through horror film viewing.

Despite their considerable diversity, psychoanalytical theories of film enjoyment share a basic form of explanation, one which is, I take it, essential to psychoanalytical explanations in general. They attempt to explain the viewer’s enjoyment of film by postulating the existence of an unconscious wish of which viewers by definition are unaware, a wish that psychoanalytical theory brings to light (70).

Turvey consequently distinguishes between intrinsically and extrinsically motivated horror film viewing, with the former denoting watching such films for the *sake* of watching horror films, and the latter as a means to the enjoyable end of overcoming repressed contents (74). The crucial problem he poses, however, lies in the understanding of the concept of pleasure, “which is that enjoyment cannot be separated from the thing that is enjoyed in the way that means and ends can be separated” (76). Turvey therefore is in line with David Perry’s definition of pleasure:

One cannot just have pleasure as one logically could just have a pain, ache, or tickle; one must get pleasure from something, take pleasure in

³ Certainly one could now ask for a precise definition of what is “obviously psychoanalytically interpretable” and how this can be recognised. Carroll gives numerous examples and explanations in his afterword, which I will not be discussing in detail due to their lack of relevance regarding this paper.

something, or feel pleasure [at] something. It is a part of the concept of pleasure that it have some object (94).

Hence Turvey criticises that psychoanalysis claims that people get pleasure from watching horror films because they rid themselves of repressed contents, although this is technically not possible if pleasure needs to have an object. There would have to be an obvious link between pleasure and the horror film itself. However, Turvey claims that there is no connection between the internal mental state that is enjoyed by the viewer and the horror film itself. It must be remarked at this point that Turvey's theory can only be granted value on the basis of the understanding of the concept of pleasure mentioned above. If this is declared to be true, there would in fact not exist such a thing as extrinsically motivated horror film viewing. The question which remains unanswered is what it is about the horror film that people find pleasurable then. I suggest that Turvey's argument is indeed a strong one, and I can therefore agree with him and Carroll insofar as psychoanalysis cannot be considered the unique answer to the riddle of horror film enjoyment. It can certainly be used for efficient analysis, but one must also take into account the other relevant areas mentioned before as well as several factors important in horror film enjoyment.

A third critical point of view is represented by Michael Levine, who also reflects on the issue of repression. A striking point is the presentation of Andrew Tudor's criticism of Joseph Gixti's "beast within" theory which is based on the belief that "human beings are rotten at the core" (Gixti 86). Tudor summarises Gixti's idea by saying that "the attraction of horror derives from its appeal to the "beast" concealed within the superficially civilized human" (Tudor 445). Both Tudor and Levine go on to criticise that psychoanalysis with special regard to repression does not claim at all a relation to the human being as "a bad person". In fact, Levine remarks that

if repression was incompatible with decency then we would all be indecent. But psychoanalysis strives to show how repression and its resulting neurotic activities are quite compatible with both "normalcy" and moral decency" (45).

Furthermore, Tudor "claims that if all people are supposed to have a "beast within", then explanations of why people like horror in terms [sic] a "beast within" fail to explain why only *some* people like horror and not others" (445).

Levine gives the answer to that question by mentioning the individual's particular psychosexual development, which would be based on Freud's writings on the stages of psychosexual development and the character types (45). This leaves us with two conclusions. First of all, it must be admitted that the psychosexual development of a specific person and its leading to horror film enjoyment might certainly be interesting, but also not convincing when it comes to the requirement of broad-spectrum data. One person's results do not necessarily speak for others. This means that common factors have to be selected, factors which are most likely to account for the majority of spectators. A framework of analysis has to be established, offering guiding principles necessary for obtaining data which could reveal facts about the collective. Secondly (and most relevantly considering the objective of this thesis), one has to bear in mind that psychosexual development is in detail not only different in every individual, but in general definitely different depending on both a person's biological sex and his/her gender development. According to Susan Golombok's and Robyn Fivush's summarisation of the psychosexual stages in children's development defined by Freud, males and females are fairly similar during the first two, that is the oral and the anal stage. "It is during Freud's third stage of psychosexual development, the *phallic stage*, that sexual identity is formed" (57). Hence at the age of about five when children start to shift their libidinal energy to their genitals, the issue of sexual identity and consequently gender identity become relevant. Therefore, if psychoanalysis is applied in horror film analysis, it seems inevitable to take into consideration that there is a strong possibility of gender differences in the reception and enjoyment of such films, which must not be neglected. This leads me back to the initial questions on which my argument is based. Assuming what has been discussed in chapter 1.3., namely that the horror film is a *male* genre, there would have to be something within psychoanalysis that can explain the genre's appeal to male spectators. What is it about the horror film that rather attracts men than women? And what can a horror film provide that is likely to attract a female audience?

At this point, I would like to clarify once more that I basically do *not* assume that the experience of pleasure derived from horror film viewing can only be explained on the basis of the gender dichotomy. In fact, I suggest that a great deal of other factors that explain the appeal of horror can equally account

for both men and women. The significant similarities as well as differences can be found in the various areas crucial for horror film analysis. Although I intend to focus on the differences deriving from gender, my task is to identify the two major categories first. I shall call the one “universal appeal” and the other “gendered appeal”. The theories and notions belonging to either of the two categories, the latter in particular, will be discussed in detail in the following two sections.

PART II - Psychology of Horror

In this section, I shall concentrate on one of the two major strands dealing with horror film analysis. In other words, I shall present the most influential theories deriving from the field of psychology. One must bear in mind, however, that these theories are usually used in order to explain the *effects* of horror in the first place, an issue which I have already briefly discussed in chapter 1.3. Nevertheless, they are not less viable in terms of expounding the reasons for horror film enjoyment. In addition, it must be remarked that the six acknowledged theories have been discussed in order to explain the attraction of horror both on the level of universal as well as gendered appeal. Some of them are not only closely linked to each other, but also include elements that will recur in the chapter on psychoanalytical accounts.

2.1. Catharsis

The term catharsis and its original meaning date back to Aristotelian times. The Greek philosopher is frequently said to have been the first who was dealing with the question of why an audience enjoyed watching tragic events happening on the theatre stage or reading about them in novels and tragedies. Aristotle came up with the idea that such stories should arouse the emotions pity and fear in the spectator or reader, which should subsequently lead to the pleasurable experience of catharsis. However, Aristotle himself never really defined the actual meaning of catharsis, which is why it was left open to interpretation and further development for other academics. The result is an

abundance of definitions of the term. Nowadays, it is frequently referred to as a purgation of emotions, “a release of strong feelings that leaves us feeling drained but also relieved” (Nightingale 45). Eventually in the 1970s, the concept was taken up by Feshbach, who proposed that watching violent visual texts would have a cathartic effect and lead to a reduction of aggressiveness. He thus exposed various groups of boys to either only violent television programs or non-violent programs. The fact that the group who had watched the violent material committed fewer aggressive acts led Feshbach to the conclusion that such programs really *did* have a cathartic effect (Freedman 89-90). In the following years, further research was done which could no more support Feshbach’s argument. In fact, scholars such as Bushman found out that violent films rather led to an increase of aggressive behaviour than to the opposite (Kirsh 108).

Although it has been popularly accepted for a while now that the catharsis hypothesis does not lead to positive results in terms of reduced violence, there are still people who advocate it. Fehrman defends catharsis by proposing that the hypothesis cannot be quantified. Since it spoke of a *reduction* of aggressive tendencies through their substitutional acting out while consuming violent depictions, it would be impossible to prove it empirically. In the end you can only count what is there (8). Contrary to this argument, however, Eicke and Eicke claimed that due to the massive increase of violent aggressive films and computer games and their consumption, the propensity towards violence as well as violent acts would have had to decrease decisively (189). I myself must admit that I fail to think of arguments that could explicitly support the catharsis hypothesis. Or in other words, in contrast to its currently discussed role within psychology, it appears to gain more relevance within the psychoanalytical area which I will be discussing in the third section. With regard to psychology, I claim that if the theory has no truth value, it should at least be treated neutrally. Eicke and Eicke for instance seem to imply in their statement that acts of violence were only performed by people who watched horror films or played violent computer games. They fail to acknowledge the fact that this is clearly not the truth. Apart from adults who are in general said not to be very likely to watch and enjoy horror films, one must bear in mind that aggressiveness in teenagers does not necessarily stem from horror film

consumption either. The number of horror films in the Western world has only increased in parallel with the violence displayed and thematised in the news, the overstimulation and consumption that more and more leads to indifference and discontent, or the change of the traditional definition of the family towards a 50% divorce rate that reduces children's feeling of security and trust and might leave them frustrated and confused.

In line with what I have already remarked in chapter 1.3., reactions also depend on the individual. Whereas one person might not be able to process the content of a horror film adequately and be motivated to act out violence, another might indeed (even though perhaps subconsciously) experience a cathartic effect. However, essential to what Fehrman suggested is a distinction between active and passive aggressiveness. I assert that every person has a certain aggressive potential. In some people it might be higher, perhaps also due to several factors concerning nature or nurture already mentioned before, in others it might be lower. Some act violently as soon as they are dissatisfied or being teased, others can cope better with their anger and find different ways of dealing with it. So if a person in whom aggressiveness only rests but usually does not come out in the open, also after being exposed to violent films or video games, it is still possible that this passive aggressiveness is reduced due to the consumption of the given texts. In this case, Fehrman's defense of the catharsis hypothesis would be justified.

Taking another look at the traditional Aristotelian definition of catharsis and its elaboration in 20th century psychology, one can realise that there is one significant distinction regarding the understanding of the term. Whereas Aristotle principally spoke of pity and fear, psychologists preferred to narrow their focus to emotions of aggression. Many of them seemed to neglect the fact that catharsis could as well refer to a process of purgation which enables the human being to cast off their fears. Clearly this connects perfectly to the act of watching a horror film. This understanding of catharsis offers an explanation of why people expose themselves to graphic violence. Experiencing situations of fear and dread in the safe setting of a cinema hall or the living room purges the human being of their anxieties. However, it seems rather unlikely that a person *consciously* chooses to watch a horror film to gain a cathartic effect. If you asked a person why he or she liked a horror film they would least probably

answer, “Because of catharsis, you know. By watching *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* I can free myself from all my fears.” A subconscious process which leaves the spectator content and relieved is indeed more likely. The combination of the key words “subconscious”, “fear” and “catharsis” leads inevitably to the application of Freud’s theory of repression. I do not want to anticipate the discussion of the issue at this point, though, and defer it to a subsequent chapter.

To conclude the current chapter, a remarkable and noteworthy notion of catharsis has to be presented. Contrary to several other researchers, Franke-Penski does not focus on either aggression or fear as the crucial emotion involved, but provides two coexisting theories. Furthermore, he does not restrict them to the already described cathartic process involving watching a program displaying violence and the simultaneous or subsequent purgation of feelings of aggression or fear. In fact, he takes a look beyond and attempts to explain what *other* process has to occur for catharsis to happen, that is the process of the spectator’s identification. Franke-Penski suggests two variations of catharsis. One is defined as the purgation of emotions of fear through the spectator’s identification with the victim, the other is referred to as the purgation of feelings of aggression through identification with the perpetrator. Hence according to him catharsis is the result of identification processes. It does not simply happen in the course of or after watching a horror film without any “active” spectator participation involved. The significant question to be raised, though, is whether there are gender differences in such identification processes. Do spectators randomly identify with either the victim or the perpetrator, or are they - depending on gender - drawn towards one of the given options? And if so, would catharsis not rather belong to the category of gendered appeal? The answer is clear: It certainly would. However, I shall treat viewer identification issues as well as Freud’s theory of repression in subsequent chapters in which their possible relevance regarding gender differences will be discussed. Although I have remarked that the catharsis hypothesis is in general considered disproved, its connection to repression and viewer identification will be outlined then.

2.2. Excitation Transfer

This model is based on the *Mood-Management-Theory* by Dolf Zillmann, developed in the 1970s. This theory implies that a major part of human behaviour is determined by hedonistic motivation, meaning that we basically act in order to increase positive emotions such as joy. This assumption also explains why we choose to watch certain programs. Hence horror films can be appealing because they are likely to raise a low arousal level. The excitation transfer theory goes one step further and implies that a high arousal level also leads to an intensification of emotions. In terms of horror texts this would signify that the more negative affective reactions the film produces in the spectator, the more a relieving and joyous experience the plot resolution will be (Kunczik 64).

This model indeed bears resemblance to the catharsis hypothesis discussed before. The main constituents making up these theories are fear and one's relief of it through watching a horror film. The major difference is that catharsis involves a pre-existent fear (assuming that Freud is applied), whereas excitation transfer refers to emotions of fear emerging in the process of watching a horror film. Thus excitation transfer explains catharsis-like processes as existent on a more obvious and conscious level. This model sure seems suitable and the process can certainly be mentally reconstructed by anyone. All of us know situations in which something provokes a rush of adrenalin and excitement, positioning us in a state of distress. It is the subsequent reduction and relief of distress, though, which makes us feel comfortable again. Clearly this does not mean that every person likes to intentionally put themselves in such a position of initial discomfort. Once again this needs to be explained with the difference regarding the nature of persons as well as their original level of arousal. Persons who are usually not keen on experiencing situations of distress, for instance persons who cannot imagine riding a rollercoaster or doing a bungee-jump, persons who do not seek the thrill, or people who are usually on a regular arousal level are less likely to be interested in watching horror films. Similar to the catharsis hypothesis, the excitation transfer model has also been used to explain adolescents' aggressive behaviour. Zillmann proposes that in such a state of arousal in which emotions are more intense than usual, a person would be more likely to act aggressively, "especially if aggressive behaviour is well established in someone's usual repertoire" (Hogg 452). This

utterance stresses a point I have mentioned several times before. Here an individual's nature as well as his/her coping skills are of essential significance.

Transfer does not favor antisocial behavior over prosocial conduct even following exposure to violent media content. Whatever behavior is prompted by existing conditions should be intensified according to this model (Tamborini 189).

Although this model has primarily been discussed without regard to a potential gender dichotomy, Glenn G. Sparks found in his studies from 1991 that there were indeed differences in the reception of horror films. He took already existing data from three different conducted studies and found that “especially for male viewers, self-reported ratings of distress to a frightening film were significantly correlated with ratings of delight” (84). Two key explanations for this were then given. One says that female participants rather tend to empathise with the victims in the horror story, meaning that distress and delight do not co-occur. “[H]igher levels of empathy were associated with arousal and coping behaviors (e.g., turning away, covering one's eyes) in response to a frightening film, and were negatively associated with enjoyment” (Oliver 518). It is rather negative affective reactions that are produced in the female spectator when watching horror films. Delight would be substituted by sadness, disgust, or similar negative emotions. As a result it can be remarked that this first explanation is closely linked to viewer identification studies, an issue I will be discussing later on as part of psychoanalysis. The second explanation, though, was given by Zillmann, who in response to the deviating results did *not* question his theory but the “badly” reacting female test subjects (Röser 46). He ascribes these reactions to a process which is set in a socialisation context that strictly separates the roles of men and women. In his view, the act of watching a horror film symbolises an initiation ritual that reinforces gender roles. Men and women are supposed to act according to their expected function. In terms of the cinematic spectacle this means that men would have to assume the role of the “protector”, and women the role of “protectee” (Sparks 84). Therefore, it would in fact be an inappropriate reaction of a woman to enjoy the horrific entertainment, which is why they cannot transfer excitation in an adequate way (Röser 46). This interesting theory is definitely worth exploring in detail which is why I will dedicate another chapter to it.

2.3. Sensation Seeking

The sensation seeking model exists parallel to the excitation transfer theory and is in fact closely related to it, since it is also explained on the basis of levels of arousal. Marvin Zuckerman defines sensation seeking as a characteristic of people who get pleasure from violent displays as in horror films. In his words, “[s]ensation seeking is a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience” (27). Thus sensation seekers are willing to take risks in order to increase their arousal level. Zuckerman traces this behaviour back to either too little noradrenalin-activity in the limbic brain or a certain insensibility towards stimulation in their noradrenergic system (Raab 156).

In order to be able to measure if someone is a high, regular, or low sensation seeker, Zuckerman developed a sensation seeking scale (SSS) which involves four major factors. *Thrill and Adventure seeking* refers to risky activities such as fast driving or extreme sports. *Experience seeking* engages the search for new impressions and experiences, represented by journeys or socialising with marginal groups. *Disinhibition* can be found in people who gain stimulation by heavy partying, drinking excesses, or promiscuity. *Boredom Susceptibility* refers to the characteristic of not bearing monotonous and repetitious activities (156). Although some scholars could as a result of their studies report a positive correlation between scores on the SSS and self-reported enjoyment of horror films, one has to bear in mind that a score on the scale does not necessarily imply an interest in horror. On the other hand, I claim that if you do get pleasure from horror texts, that does not automatically mean that any of the factors described above are applicable to you. I do not doubt that the scores on the scale and a liking for horror can correlate, but it would be more than inappropriate to generalise this theory and assume it for all horror fans. However, Zuckerman himself acknowledges this fact, so I can agree with him when he points out the following:

As with other kinds of phenomenal expression, we must be cautious about interpreting a preference in terms of a single trait or any disposition at all. There are many social facilitating factors that bring young people into these films (qtd. in Sparks 78).

An aspect of the sensation seeking model which has not yet been mentioned is its gender-related dimension. As part of a study conducted by Tamborini, both male and female undergraduates were shown horror films of which several had two distinct versions, one featuring a male and the other a female victim. The films had to be ranked according to the participants' preference. The analysis of the study showed that for the male participants, the SSS BS scale correlated positively with male and female victims, whereas for females there was a positive correlation with male victims. Moreover, for male subjects there was a positive correlation between the SSS Dis scale and graphic horror when the victim was female (Zuckerman² 154).

In summary, it can be stated that men tended to prefer horror films in which there was a female victim, whereas women were more likely to consider them pleasurable when there was a male victim. Indeed, there are several explanations for these results. One potential option is the significance of viewer identification which I have already mentioned in the chapter about excitation transfer. The most obvious answer would be that men identify with male characters, and women identify with female characters. Either way, we do not want the character we identify with to be the victim. Another factor is representation, especially when we look at the women's preferences. Women possibly feel like the victims of patriarchal society and thus enjoy the inversion of common gender roles. The third option, though, calls for a psychoanalytical investigation since it is dealing with the correlation of fear, otherness, repression, and several other factors. I will be discussing all of the three options at a later stage.

2.4. Emotional Gratification

In a paper called "Meta-Emotion and Genre Preference" published in 2007, Anne Bartsch attempts to explain how meta-emotions can influence a person's preference for horror. In order to clarify the meaning of meta-emotion, Bartsch gives the following explanation:

It says that people can have emotions about emotions much like they can have thoughts about thoughts. [...] Although each emotion has a preferred hedonic valence, this valence can be modified by the

simultaneous presence of a second emotion that reflects and evaluates the experience of the primary emotion (125).

Clearly this means that there is a primary emotion, the emotion which is immediately experienced. Apart from that, however, there is also a secondary emotion elicited by and about the first one. The concept works both ways. The primary emotion can be experienced as satisfying and enjoyable, for example the feeling of joy when a person whom we envy befalls something bad, whereas the meta-emotion involves guilt and shame due to our first nasty emotional reaction. On the other hand, the primary emotion can be one contained in the negative spectrum, whereas the meta-emotion has a gratifying effect. The concepts of emotion and meta-emotion can certainly be applied to the horror film. The primary emotion which is elicited by the horror text itself is most probably fear or a similar emotion which is not considered enjoyable in the first place. The meta-emotion, though, is what makes watching a horror film a gratifying experience after all.

As a first step, Bartsch summarises what gratifications can in fact be gained from emotions. The six factors she selects can as well be found in the preceding chapters of this paper. The first gratification refers to the fact that emotions can be pleasant, based on the mood-management-theory and arousal levels by Zillmann. The second gratification overlaps with Zuckerman's sensation seeking model, meaning that "emotions can satisfy a need for novel, intense, and sensational kinds of experience" (127). The third gratification refers to modes of reception, meaning that *emotional*, *diegetic* (delving into the fictional world), *socio-* (identifying with characters), and *ego involvement* (comparing the texts to one's own life) can be experienced as satisfactory. In fourth position Bartsch lists the factor that "emotions can be perceived as a challenge" (127). This basically refers to a spectator's coping skills. The better they can cope with strong negative emotions, the bigger is the gratification. This is why some people constantly look out for movies that are more frightening or that display more violence than the ones they have seen before. The fifth gratification Bartsch mentions derives from the assumption that "emotions can be morally valued" (128). Once again this leads back to an aspect of the excitation transfer theory, putting emphasis on the feeling of empathy and concern for others and its moral evaluation. As I have already pointed out,

studies have shown that particularly women are likely to produce such feelings of empathy for film characters. However, the horror film raises a problem regarding this gratification since the hero or heroine protagonists often act quite violently themselves, especially towards the end of film. Nevertheless their brutal actions can be justified because they usually have been mistreated before and so they have the right to defend themselves or take vengeance. Hence the spectator can safely identify with the protagonists and their acts of violence. The last gratification finally refers to “implications for the viewer’s identity and social status” (128). In this context, Bartsch mentions a study by Mares and Cantor, which showed that people with low self-esteem tend to prefer programs featuring characters who are worse off than themselves, upvaluing the spectator’s life since they gain the perception that they are not the only ones who are badly off. Another aspect of this gratification is concerned with adolescents who are assumed to like horror because it is considered an adult genre, which facilitates an identification with an adult role.

The gratifications mentioned above can indeed offer explanations for why people prefer a certain genre to others. The central question which is left to be answered in detail is why some people prefer the horror genre to, for instance, drama or action. It is a legitimate question many people have raised and many scholars have failed to answer. Why do people prefer films that elicit fear and disgust in the spectator? How can a person possibly undertake watching a horror film and even enjoy it? According to Bartsch and contrary to a number of people’s assumption,

it is not a preference for emotions like fear, disgust or sadness *per se*. Rather it is a preference for a specific kind of emotion *in the context of a specific set of gratification cues*. Horror preference for instance is a preference for fear and disgust in the context of sensational shock effects, suspense, challenges to coping skills, taboo violations, and so on (132).

This highly viable explanation, though, does not literally consider gender issues and possible reception differences. First and foremost it implies that genre preference is a matter of people’s individual needs. It depends on what the viewer is looking for in order to make watching a film a gratifying experience.

2.5. Curiosity & Fascination - Fear & Disgust

In the chapter dealing with the criticism of psychoanalysis, I have already mentioned the name of one of the most distinguished academics in this area, Noel Carroll. I have remarked that according to him, psychoanalysis can indeed be a crucial means for analysing horror films, but one should beware of overgeneralising and granting it the label of universal truth. Instead, Carroll came up with his own theory of the attraction of horror. His account is based on cognitivism, meaning that he repudiates the psychoanalytical level which is concerned with the unconscious mind and rather investigates the level of human actions as a result of conscious and rational thinking.

In his book *The Philosophy of Horror*, he first draws a distinction between horror and art-horror. The latter is in fact the sort of horror this thesis is concerned with, that is the fictional horror texts that frighten the spectators although they know the story is unreal. Furthermore, Carroll describes several factors and processes that interact in the creation and appeal of art-horror. The first essential factor involved is the existence of a monster, an anomalous being which is by definition harmful and impure (*H* 39). These features in turn effectuate the emergence of fear and disgust in the spectator, the two central emotions in horror cinema. The monster can therefore art-horrify the audience members, who think themselves in an emotional state resembling fear or disgust (qtd. in Cherry 157⁴). Eventually Carroll explains the connection between these emotions and pleasure by assuming that the main reason for watching a horror film is curiosity. “It engages its audience by being involved in processes of disclosure, discovery, proof, explanation, hypothesis, and confirmation. [...] What is revealed and disclosed, of course, are monsters and their properties” (*H* 35). Disgust, however, would be “required for the pleasure involved in engaging our curiosity” (37). However, according to Carroll it is not the monster itself that provokes pleasure in the viewers, but simply the process of disclosure. Monsters “are attractive, in the sense that they elicit interest [...] just because they violate standing categories. They are curiosities. They can rivet attention and thrill for the self-same reason that they disturb, distress, and disgust” (39).

⁴ I would like to briefly point out that throughout this paper when I quote Cherry I am referring to her book *Horror*. Quotations from her article “Refusing to Refuse to Look” are labelled *RR*.

Harking back to the element of disgust as essential for pleasure, one is at the same time provided with an explanation for people liking explicitly violent films such as *Saw* or *Hostel*. As Brigid Cherry states, “[h]ere the disgust is essential to pleasure, rather than contingent to it” (159). In this case, the spectator would take up a challenge, trying to prove to themselves (and others) that they can handle a high level of disgusting images. The better the viewer is able to cope with them, the bigger is the reward in the form of a pleasurable experience. This assumption might well sound familiar. Without doubt it reminds of what I have discussed in preceding chapters dealing with rites of passage and emotional gratification. In both cases (in the latter it is only a part) it is mastery of horrific visual material and coping skills in general which facilitate film enjoyment, even more so for a male spectator (as it is assumed).

However, Carroll’s account of the appeal of horror has not been left unquestioned. Although he warns against overapplying psychoanalytical theories, he fails to recognise the lack of general applicability of his own model. Amongst others it raises two central problems. First of all, Carroll assumes that monsters “elicit interest”, they arouse the audience’s curiosity. By laying the focus on curiosity as the major factor in terms of the appeal of horror, he precludes the possibility of people actually getting pleasure from being fascinated by monsters in different ways, or enjoying horror itself. In his view, the monster would be a terrifying and disgusting means to the enjoyable end. It could not provoke pleasure for its own sake. Pleasure would only be derived from the satisfaction of our curiosity in that object that “violates standing categories”, meaning that it symbolises something unknown, something unfamiliar, something frightening and fascinating.

The second problem that must be posed once again involves the role of the monster. Carroll defines the monster as anomalous, harmful, and impure, but moreover as “not believed to exist now by contemporary science” (*PH* 27). This description is more than vague and problematic, since it neglects a number of potential and actual film monsters. Carroll seems to refer to supernatural beings such as vampires, werewolves, aliens, *Blobs*, ghosts, or witches. They are not only anomalous, but also known to be fictional creatures. However, there is another category of human monsters who embody the evil protagonists of slasher (*Friday the 13th*, *Scream*, *Halloween*) and splatter (*Hellraiser*, *Dawn*

of the Dead) films or exploitation cinema (*Saw*, *Hostel*, *Last House on the Left*), thus basically any movie that features a human (serial) killer. Cherry emphasises another striking aspect of Carroll's assumption.

When he also argues that the emotional responses of fear and disgust must be expressed by characters towards the monster within the diegesis of the film (in order for the viewer's responses to follow these cues), he also excludes those horror films with a sympathetic monster or a monstrous entity that does not horrify the characters (161).

Hence it is obvious that Carroll's theory shows several weak spots as well. Nevertheless, I consider some of its aspects fairly relevant and useful, which is why I will come back to them.

2.6. Rite of Passage

In the chapter about excitation transfer I have already introduced an issue which displays one significant aspect of the gender dichotomy with regard to reasons for horror film watching. I have discussed Zillmann's theory about gender socialisation processes in which the man is established as protector and the woman as protectee with the effect that men enjoy horror films more than women. Indeed this procedure is a product of patriarchal structures. It is explained by the expectations young people in their adolescence have to live up to, expectations that exactly define what a man and what a woman is supposed to do and act like. However, it is not only the extrinsic expectations that influence an adolescent's behaviour, but also his/her own motivation to act in a certain way which should result in their belonging to a specific group and marking their territory, in this case either a man's or a woman's. Without doubt this practice is essential in the formation of one's identity, and so it can be observed in a cinema hall while a horror film is being screened. Zillmann's and Weaver's (qtd. in Cherry 38; Zillmann 197) research showed two related modes of gender identity demonstration, especially with regard to male spectators. First, adolescent males were able to prove to their *peers* that they were "man enough" to stand the cinematic horror. Second, they were offered a chance to protect and comfort their girlfriends. Hence male spectators can prove themselves in two respects, both within the circle of their companions as a strong and equal male, and next to their dates as the strong and manly

protector of the weaker sex. Female adolescents, on the other hand, are expected to demonstrate their need for protection, usually by cowering away from horrid pictures, looking away, screaming in fright, or holding on to their boyfriends' strong arms. According to Zillmann and Weaver, these practices can be considered a modern rite of passage reviving what men and women were supposed to do in ancient times when there were still real initiation rituals by which men could prove themselves and subsequently be able to raise and nourish a family. Cherry summarises this assumption as follows:

Horror films are particularly appropriate for this ritual since they allow males to demonstrate their fearlessness, bravado and protectiveness towards women, while females are able to show their dependence on men and demonstrate their emotional reactions (38).

There is no doubt that display of power and strength, features that are certainly positively connoted, usually also do have a positive effect on the attendants, whether male or female. A crucial question, though, is what a woman's reward could possibly be when she displays weakness. According to Zillmann, "[f]emale adolescents can make themselves attractive, even romantically desirable, by showing their distress and helplessness – rather than by a show of self-confidence and independence" (198). The key aspect, though, is that Zillmann states the randomness of the females' acting. He refers to the demonstration of their gender role as "whether actually felt or pretended" (198). This means that women would in fact not be forced into showing their weakness. They can rather decide for themselves *what* they want to show their partners and in case they decide for the role of the protectee still indirectly be active. Clearly the same argument could hold true for male spectators as well, but in fact it is rather weakness that is less likely to be demonstrated on purpose. In conclusion, it can be stated that watching a horror film can be considered a ritual, the result of which is social gratification. This explanation of the appeal of horror neither claims that spectators enjoy horror for the sake of it. Nevertheless, it is a means for clear gender role demonstration and consequent sexual attractiveness.

However, this assumption is based on a specific circumstance in a specific social setting. The necessary ingredients include a group of (male) people or at least a dating couple as well as the act of watching a horror film together in either a cinema hall or in front of the TV. Only in these situations can

the male spectator expose his mastery of the horrific visual content of the text, whether to his peers or his girlfriend. It cannot be denied, though, that this theory neglects two other major options. Grings and Dawson justified the first one by stating that “[e]xposure to terrifying violence in solitude is atypical” (qtd. in Zillmann 197). Based on their research, it must be admitted that they are right, but still there is the probability of persons watching horror films on their own, without any friends attending. In fact, Grings and Dawson themselves admit that this case does occur; it simply is not the *typical* case. The second option refers to female spectators. One cannot rule out the possibility of a woman watching a horror film either on her own or in a group of girls. In both cases she would certainly not be attempting to attract her male companion by assuming the role of the protectee since he is in fact not present.

Imagining those two options, one must inevitably raise the question of why these people went to see a horror film then. Since the rite of passage theory cannot hold true for them, there must be another explanation for the appeal of horror. In these cases, the aforementioned psychological models such as excitation transfer or sensation seeking would apply, as well as the psychoanalytical theories I will be discussing in the following section.

PART III - Psychoanalysis of Horror

As I have already pointed out, psychoanalysis is commonly applied to the analysis of the horror film in terms of explaining its appeal. In fact, there are two major psychoanalytical theories preferred by the majority of academics. I am referring to Sigmund Freud’s theory of *The Uncanny*, as well as Julia Kristeva’s notion of *Abjection*. Both models are dealing with what is essential to the horror film, that is fear, anxiety, disgust, dread, loathing, terror, and similar comparable emotions and emotional reactions. No-one doubts that these are the reactions a horror film seeks to provoke in the spectators, otherwise it would not deserve the label “horror”. The crucial and seemingly omnipresent question, though, is why the audience willingly chooses to put up with the expectedly negative emotions they will have to go through. I have already presented the major psychological theories which to some extent explain the attraction of horror. It must be remarked, however, that the explanations given settle on a level quite distinct from the one of psychoanalysis. Within the latter area, scholars attempt

to explain the human being based on the dynamics of their unconscious. Cynthia Freeland appropriately remarks that “[h]orror films may aim at producing gut-level reactions such as fear, revulsion, anxiety, or disgust, but they also stimulate more complex emotional and intellectual responses” (273-74). Thus, due to its complexity, explaining the appeal of horror is a difficult task to do and should not only be discussed on the fairly empiric and “conscious” level of media, social, or cognitive psychology. However, the uncanny and the abject are not the only psychoanalytical theories relevant in this investigation. A number of academics committed to this genre also examined theories of viewer identification, a branch which is indeed significant when it comes to gendered reception and the question of *who* likes *what* and *why*.

3.1. The Significance of Repression

Before discussing the two principal psychoanalytical theories, it is indispensable to explain a concept which is basic and crucial to understanding both the uncanny and the abject as related to the horror film. In other words, a preliminary remark has to be made in order to grasp the appeal of horror on the basis of psychoanalysis and link it to the significance of the unconscious. The concept I am referring to was established by Sigmund Freud, who is commonly known to be the originator of psychoanalysis. He was the first to come up with the notion of *repression* as a vital element involved in the process of gaining insight into the functioning of the unconscious. The German word for repression used by Freud is *Verdrängung*, a noun denoting the process of pushing something away by force. This in turn indicates that there has to be an agent who pushes away as well as an object which is pushed away. Since this concept is related to the psyche, the agent must be a thinking subject, therefore a human being. The object, however, cannot be something concrete, but rather something abstract such as a thought or an idea. Regarding that which is repressed or pushed away from the conscious mind, there are two major definitions. Michael Billig summarises *Freudian Repression* as a process by which “people repress, or drive from their conscious minds, shameful thoughts that, then, become unconscious” (1). Hence, people are the agents who push shameful thoughts away. Cherry interprets repression in a slightly different way:

Freud, in what is referred to as repression, suggested that experiences in early childhood that caused anxiety were pushed down into the unconscious in order to 'get rid of them', but they can never be totally excluded from the mind (100).

In contrast to Billig, Cherry does not mention *shameful thoughts* as the repressed matter, but *experiences* that provoked *anxiety*. In addition, she points out at what time those experiences are made, that is early childhood. As we will see later, those experiences originate during the phallic stage, thus when a person's sexual identity is formed. Most significantly, though, Cherry remarks that the concept of repression does not involve a total erasure of those experiences from the mind. In fact, repression implies that a process of deletion or occultation of such experiences can by no means occur. Instead, the repressed matter is stored in a corner of the mind which is usually not accessible to a person, at least not on a conscious level. Nevertheless it does not rest there inactively, but it has an influence on our personality, thus on our emotions, desires, and beliefs, and subsequently on our actions. However, at this point it must be sorted out whether it is shameful thoughts or experiences causing anxiety that are repressed. A definition by Franke-Penski involving the equation of the processes of "repressing (fear)" and "feeling ashamed (of aggression and hate)" (37) implies that only experiences or feelings dealing with fear or anxiety are directly linked to repression. Although I would not deny the possibility of whatever shameful thought to be repressed, the alternative seems particularly relevant and reasonable considering the horror film. As Cherry goes on she then appropriately concludes the following:

If the unconscious contains things that were repressed in order to avoid anxiety, then perhaps the activities of monsters or the traumatic events that are played out in cinematic horror are a representation of all that which is contained within the unconscious (100).

This is doubtless the very key idea connecting repression and the horror film. The horrific and cruel crimes the "monsters" in the films commit are in the end nothing else than our own unconscious fears and anxieties transferred to the screen. Nevertheless this does not explain in any form why a person would go to the movies to eventually have their anxieties revealed as part of a work of popular art. Indeed it seems logical that the repressed content would cower forever in its corner of the mind, for it has not been repressed without cause.

The fact involving people watching a horror film and exposing themselves to their unconscious fears implies that precisely the return of the repressed must be a pleasurable experience. As Cherry outlines,

these repressed thoughts and desires need an outlet (perhaps in a safe context) and therefore can give some sort of perverse pleasure when revisited through characters, images and events in horror films (101).

Clearly the spectator might most probably not be aware of the factors involved in the creation of pleasure. They only know how they react to horror, and if they enjoy it, they will watch such films on a regular basis. The obvious link to catharsis⁵, though, is more than striking in this context. Earlier I have referred to catharsis as a subconscious process which facilitates a purgation of either feelings of aggression or fear. Repressed content includes such feelings, and this content does not only cease, but needs an “outlet” in order for the human being to be able to successfully cope with it. Of course, this procedure shall stay within the realms of both the possible and legality. Clearly, ridding oneself of aggression by killing other people, or of serious fears by confronting themselves with them⁶. Obtaining catharsis in a “safe context”, meaning watching a film in a setting such as a living room or a cinema hall, seems like the perfect solution, or in other words, entertainment combined with mental cleansing. Horror films are suited best, for they usually involve “images and events” that are likely to resemble human fears most closely. Moreover, there is also the possibility of identification with “characters” as an adequate way of attaining catharsis. Drawing on Franke-Penski⁷, identification with the masked serial-killer or the insane bloodthirsty patriarch would facilitate purgation of a person’s aggressive feelings, whereas identification with the screaming soon-to-be-murdered girl or the too-curious-to-be-good doctoral student would lead to the ridding of fears revolving around life-threatening events. However, catharsis as a result of watching violent and terrifying movies is then referred to by Cherry as a “perverse pleasure”, since pleasure is usually rather associated with delightful things *not* involving puddles of blood, mutilated body parts, intestines, knife-

⁵ Discussed in chapter 2.1.

⁶ Although strictly speaking it can be argued that especially the latter would not even be possible since the human beings are usually not consciously aware of what they repress, and a *self-induced* confrontation with one’s fears seems less likely to happen subconsciously than a murder or some violent act in the heat of the moment.

⁷ See chapter 2.1.

stabbing killers, human-dismembering cannibals, or psychopaths teaching lessons by torturing their fellow men.

To sum it up, stored repressed content, which is always negative emotions and experiences, needs to be released, which in turn functions adequately via watching a film involving images that can be associated with those negative emotions and experiences, resulting in a cathartic experience which is perceived as pleasurable.

However, when we take another look at the penultimate quotation given, we cannot identify a certain gender-specific clue or direction. In fact, we have to declare that the described process could occur in anyone. It suggests that all of us contain repressed fears which return as elements of a horror film. As a result, all of us would like watching horror films. So why is it actually male persons who make the majority of spectators? Do men have a greater need to have their fears resurrected on the movie screen? Is the return of the repressed indeed *that* significant in the creation of enjoyment, and if so, does this imply that men have a great deal more to repress than women?

In order to satisfyingly answer those questions, a further elaboration of the notion of repression is required. It is crucial due to the fact that this paper revolves around a discussion about universal properties and particularly gender-specific differences in the reception of visual horror texts. In other words, I distinguish between elements and factors ultimately creating pleasure that are shared by all human beings regardless of gender, and the ones that actually *do* make a difference based on whether a male or female person is watching. Out of Freud, Herbert Marcuse developed a model based on the distinction of two kinds of repression. Its significance is pointed out by Robin Wood in the following utterance:

It is the crucial distinction between basic and surplus repression that is so useful in relation to direct political militancy and so suggestive in relation to the reading of our cultural artifacts (among them our horror films), and through them, our culture itself (/ 108).

Without actually knowing the definitions of basic and surplus repression, one can easily learn from this statement that they are relevant for the topic of this paper. 'Political militancy' immediately implies (among others) the possible existence of a gendered dimension, which is moreover important regarding the

interpretation and analysis of cultural texts such as horror films. However, Wood simplifies Marcuse's model and defines the two kinds as follows:

Basic repression is universal, necessary, and inescapable. It is what makes possible our development from an uncoordinated animal capable of little beyond screaming and convulsions into a human being; [...] Surplus repression, on the other hand, is specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within that culture. In terms of our own culture, then, *basic* repression makes us distinctively human, capable of directing our own lives and co-existing with others, while *surplus* repression makes us (if it works) into monogamous, heterosexual, bourgeois, patriarchal capitalists (*Introduction* 108).

At the first glance, one can immediately recognise the word 'universal' as part of the description of basic repression. Without doubt it implies that this kind of repression applies to all human beings. The logical conclusion is that the scope of applicability is the same with basic repression and universal appeal. However, after close consideration it must be affirmed that they are in fact not congruent. Basic repression is what makes people indistinguishable, what unites them. It applies to each and every single person on earth. It makes no exceptions. As opposed to this, surplus repression cannot just cross any geographical, political, or cultural boundary. The basis on which basic repression occurs is the human being itself. The basis on which surplus repression occurs is culture. It is intimately bound to a specific culture, and therefore has different targets to be repressed than other cultures. Surplus repression is what unites a specific group of people, but separates it from another. It arises from a culture.

Certainly everyone believes to know what culture is, but a definition is often more difficult than anticipated. Clyde Kluckhohn gives various useful and adequate descriptions of the concept. "[T]he total *way of life* of a people", "the *social legacy* the **individual** acquires from his **group**", "*a way of thinking, feeling, and believing*", "an abstraction from *behavior*", "a storehouse of *pooled learning*", "a set of *standardized orientations* to recurrent problems", "*learned behavior*", "a mechanism for the *normative regulation of behavior*", "a set of techniques for *adjusting* both to extential environment and to other men" (qtd. in Geertz 4-5). The key terms involved in the understanding of culture are the ones I have italicised. Moreover, there are two terms opposing each other. On the one hand, there is the individual, on the other the group. The individual

indeed exists as an independent human being just like all the others (linked to basic repression), but he or she is also part of a collective, which can be achieved by the sharing of given values, beliefs, and behaviour, all of which are learned and practised so the individual's affiliation can be recognised. Returning to surplus repression, it must be acknowledged that there is evidently something that creates anxiety and therefore has to be repressed that is *specific to* a culture. As a result, one can also assume that certain (repressed) fears might be shared by the community, hence by all people belonging to the group.

As I have argued, universally repressed fears are not the only ones eventually involved in the constitution of the appeal of horror. Obviously, there is a gendered dimension as well. The remaining question revolves around the repressed content itself. On the one hand, there must be content that is universally repressed, on the other hand, content that is repressed by one gender in particular. However, there are two aspects that can already be determined. First of all, I must revise what I have stated before, namely that the universal appeal is created by factors shared by all human beings regardless of gender. Rather it is a possibility existing *within* a culture, meaning that universal and gendered repression and appeal are subcategories of surplus repression.

Regardless of whether universal or gendered, sameness or difference with regard to the objective of this investigation can only be assessed within one specific culture. This leads me to the second established aspect, that is *the* culture. As the title of this paper suggests, I shall restrict my observations to American culture, or in a wider sense the Western world. Wood claims that surplus repression facilitates that people grown up in and with American culture become monogamous, heterosexual, bourgeois, patriarchal capitalists. The categories of surplus repression responsible for those human offsprings, hence all that which is feared and therefore pushed away, will be discussed in the following chapter.

3.2. The Return of the Other

If repression plays such a significant role in the perception of horror and surplus repression in particular when it comes to gendered issues, one question

inevitably has to be raised: What is in fact repressed in American culture? In his essay "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s", Robin Wood first attempted to answer this question. In my opinion, he definitely succeeded in doing so. This is why his essay will be one of the major texts serving as a central basis for the analytic part of this thesis.

Most importantly, Wood emphasises the significance of a concept regarded as crucial to and inseparable from repression, that is the concept of "the Other".

Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with it [...] in one of the two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself (27).

Wood carries on by defining in what perceptive categories it is of psychoanalytical relevance.

[I]t functions not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is repressed (though never destroyed) in the self and projected outward in order to be hated and disowned (27).

Hence the Other is not only a product of what we repress that is coming from the outside, but also something residing within us, a part of ourselves we feel needs to be repressed since it does not conform to what we regard as acceptable in our culture.

Subsequently, Wood offers a number of versions of the Other (27-28). First of all, he mentions *quite simply, other people*, by which he basically refers to power relationships between human beings, especially regarding those between man and woman. In the second place he puts *woman* whom he grants particular significance. In the context of patriarchal structures, women used to be considered weaker and inferior. A decisive factor contributing to this image is man's repressed femininity which is projected onto women, disowning them as inferior. Thirdly, he mentions *the proletariat* which is othered by bourgeois ideology due to the latter's obsession with cleanliness, a fact regarded as linked to sexual repression in psychoanalysis. The fourth group includes *other cultures*. However, Wood stresses that if a culture is distant enough, it is exoticised rather than tried to be dominated. Contrary to that, Wood considers the fifth group as represented by *ethnic groups within the culture*. In terms of this category he stresses once again in what ways this othered group can

possibly be handled. "Those people" should either stay away from us or assimilate, with only one possible remaining difference that would be skin colour. In the sixth place there is *alternative ideologies or political systems*, an example of which is Marxism. The seventh category involves *deviations from ideological sexual norms*, headed by bisexuality and homosexuality. Wood claims that certain (bi- or homosexual) tendencies we cannot accept in ourselves cause hatred of others due to the manifestation of this sexual tendency in them. The eighth and final category includes *children* whose otherness arises from that which was equally repressed in ourselves by our parents.

These eight possible versions of the Other as perceived as such in American culture are thus representations of what is repressed in general and within ourselves. Subsequently, Wood defines horror films as "our collective nightmares" (30). If this assertion is true, though, it would imply that anyone of the same culture repressed the same and feared its return, leading once again to the one inevitable question: Why is it mainly men who are attracted to horror films? The answer lies in the fact that the aforementioned categories of the Other can indeed *not* be treated equally regarding people's perception of it. In fact, one must answer the question of who regards whom as their Other. Apart from personal individual differences, this seems to be basically a matter of gender. Revisiting the categories defined, it can be noticed that most of them are likely to apply to both men and women. However, there is one Other category that strikes as being particularly referred to one gender, that is woman. Clearly the Other woman is primarily considered as such by men. The circumstance of woman representing such an obvious and unavoidable Other is according to Simone de Beauvoir rooted in one crucial fact.

[I]t is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One. The Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the one. [...] If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change. Proletarians say 'We'; Negroes also. Regarding themselves as subjects, they transform the bourgeois, the whites, into 'others'. But women do not say 'We', except at some congress of feminists or similar formal demonstration; men say 'women', and women use the same word in referring to themselves (18-19).

In other words, women are lacking a subjective sense of gender identity strong enough to be the One not entirely subjecting themselves to male authority. Furthermore, they are lacking a gender-centric attitude necessary for being the One, not only the Other. As a result, they become the absolute Other, the most significant example of the gap between self and Other. The self/Other dynamics related to men and women do not balance each other due to women's lack of a collective self. Although it has been more than two millennia ago that Aristotle said "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness" (qtd. in de Beauvoir 16), this point of view still seems to be deep-seated in men, and more tragically even in women. As Wood has already implied, the binary of man and woman cannot be considered a balanced one either. Hélène Cixous suggests that it is rather hierarchically structured. Oppositions like that of man and woman cannot be treated equally. They are not only different, but one (the former) also dominates the other (the latter) (149).

At this point it has become tremendously essential to explain and outline the roots of this development according primarily to Freudian psychoanalysis. A number of psychoanalysts dealt with, discussed, and criticised Freud's works on children's psychosexual development and its consequences. One of them is Luce Irigaray, who provides a valuable analysis of Freudian theory in *This Sex which is not One*.

For Freud, the first phases of sexual development unfold in precisely the same way in boys and girls alike. This view finds its justification in the fact that the erogenous zones are the same and play a similar role: they are sources of excitement and of satisfaction of the so-called "component instincts" (34-35).

Boy and girl do not differ from each other. During the oral and anal stage, the child's attention is directed towards the mouth and the anus. However, the genital zones come into play as well. Whereas the boy realises that he can obtain pleasure from his penis, the girl notices the same regarding her clitoris. It is during the phallic stage, though, that they become aware of their genital and thus sexual difference. The beginnings of gender formation are located in this stage. This is the moment at which the paths separate, at which the boy starts becoming a man and the little girl stops being a "little man".

The difference between the sexes ultimately cuts back through early childhood, dividing up functions and sexual roles: “maleness combines [the factors of] subject, activity, and possession of the penis; femaleness takes over [those of] object and passivity” and the castrated genital organ (36).

To put it another way in the words of Cixous, “the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity” (149). This division arises when the children notice that the boy has got a penis whereas the girl has none. Although boy and girl now go through different stages of development, they both are confronted with the **Oedipus complex** and the **castration complex**.

The Oedipus complex describes the psychic operation of a complex of attraction, desire, love, hatred, rivalry and guilt that the child feels towards his or her parents. It takes place around the age of three to five years and explains how the child comes to identify with the same-sex parent (Cranny-Francis 51).

The boy's strong love and desire for his mother is coupled with rival and hateful feelings towards his father. When he eventually observes that contrary to him the girl has no penis, he arrives at one conclusion.

[I]f the penis is lacking in certain individuals, it is because someone has cut it off. The penis was there in the beginning, and then it was taken away. Why? It must have been to punish the child for some fault. [...] The fear of losing his penis, an organ with a very heavy narcissistic cathexis, is thus what brings the boy to abandon his Oedipal position: the desire to possess the mother and to supplant his rival the father (Sex 38-39).

The boy is convinced that the mother was castrated and fears the father could do the same to him if he discovered the boy's forbidden love for his mother. As a result, he represses his desire and identifies with the father. This process involving castration anxiety gives rise to the construction of a masculine identification. Very similar to the boy, the little girl also discovers that she is lacking a penis. However, in contrast to the boy who wants to save himself from the threat of castration, the girl recognises that the castration has already been performed on her. “She understands, finally, the prejudice – the anatomical prejudice – that is her fate, and forces herself to accept castration” (Sex 39). This also means that the girl develops self-hate and resents her mother, a process leading to penis envy. The only way to resolve penis envy is to substitute it by a desire for a child, introducing the necessity of shifting the girl's

desire to the father. Once accomplished, both boy and girl have experienced the positive Oedipus complex which involves the final desire for the opposite sex and identification with the same sex. This ideal case does not necessarily have to occur, though. Disturbances during the phallic stage lead to a very different result.

According to Freud, failure to complete this identification process may result in incomplete gender identity and possibly affect responses in situations involving authority (or underdeveloped conscience) or sex-role-appropriate behaviors (Wittig 214).

Incomplete gender identity refers to the process of non-successful gender formation. Boundaries between masculinity and femininity, activity and passivity, are blurred. The subject lacks a stable gender identity. He or she might also have problems handling *situations involving authority*, meaning that they do not act adequately by the rules and norms of society. These involve *sex-role-appropriate behaviors*, or in other words and above all the desire for a heterosexual relationship with the objective of reproduction.

If this discussion is taken one step further, things have in fact come full circle. The basic Freudian theories on psychosexual development lead back to Robin Wood's essay and the actual essential question: What is repressed in American culture? Thereupon Wood provides four major answers (AM 26), all of which are linked to each other and seemingly equally valid. First of all he mentions "sexual energy itself, together with its possible successful sublimation into non-sexual creativity". Regardless of whether man or woman, a person's attention should not be paid to more than the pursuit of a monogamous heterosexual union in which sexual intercourse is merely considered a means of reproduction. An intellectually non-creative labour is the safest way of guaranteeing such a lifestyle. The second answer Wood offers involves bisexuality which he reminds us to grasp in two different ways. Clearly he refers to homosexual tendencies in the first place, but he also views its significance in a more general sense. Bisexuality should as well be understood as representing anything that is *not* precisely masculine or feminine, manly or womanly. Anything that does *not* conform to the images of man and woman one has been imprinted on and raised with. In the third place Wood mentions female sexuality/creativity. The woman is expected to fulfil her role as a passive and subordinate being; any deviant behaviour is not acceptable. The last answer

involves the sexuality of children. According to Wood, the fact that a child is a sexual being regardless of his/her age has to be denied. Although Wood is talking about American culture, it is fairly evident that his answers do not only apply to this but to a number of other cultural areas as well, in particular the Western cultural sphere. It is also apparent, though, that his answers do *not* apply to man and woman in equal measure. Female sexuality as the major factor I am referring to is twofoldly repressed by men. First of all, female sexuality and the woman as a creative, active, independent, aggressive, and equivalent being cannot be acknowledged as such by men. Secondly, a bisexual tendency in the form of a man's femininity must not be revealed and extraverted and therefore has to be repressed. In fact, this target of repression extends in a well-marked form to the remaining categories as well. Sexual energy and creativity become even more "monstrous" when they are put on display by a female. A child's sexuality calls even more for repression when a girl is concerned. It is not the woman who needs to repress, though. Male sexuality is not at issue. Hence female sexuality is not an answer, it is *the* answer. It does not exist as an independent and equal answer, it rather comprises the others and flows into them. Female sexuality as major leading category, or in other words sexual difference as perceived by the man, and woman as embodiment, source, or symbol become the ultimate Other. That which is apparently weakly pronounced in women calls for a strong need for repression in men. Revisiting the Oedipus and castration complex, Cranny-Francis accurately concludes:

Because the girl's Oedipus complex is not destroyed by castration anxiety as it is in the young boy, the Oedipal stage is never wholly resolved and, as a consequence, the girl has a weaker need for repression (53).

So if the monster is the embodiment of repressed content and therefore the embodiment of the Other, and if the repressed needs to return, and if the return of the repressed in cinematic horror fiction is experienced as pleasurable due to its cathartic effect, then all of this offers a perfect answer to the question of why horror films appeal mainly to male spectators.

3.3. The Uncanny

3.3.1. *Approaching the Uncanny*

Customers who would like to buy Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* on commercial websites such as *Amazon* or via the homepage of publishing houses such as *PenguinBooks* are all confronted with the same review written by the American literary critic Lionel Trilling: "Freud did more for our understanding of art than any other writer since Aristotle". First and foremost, Freud is commonly known as the pioneer of psychoanalysis, but the above quotation clearly tells the future reader what to expect from the book, that is psychoanalysis as applied to and combined with art. In his essay "The Uncanny", Freud immediately emphasises the significance of aesthetics within his métier, but also points out that it is usually centered on beauty and simultaneously neglects the opposite. Since he describes aesthetics as the study of the qualities of our feeling, he insists on the necessary inclusion of less delightful areas like the uncanny. Freud properly acknowledges that this abstract concept does not only play a significant role in the exploration of the human's mind, but that it is also a favoured subject of works of art. Certainly it must be remarked that Freud preferred to concentrate on literature. A reason for this might have been the little advanced film history at that time. However, nowadays people could not imagine a world without films, and they are clearly considered a part of art, in common with literature, painting, or music. Therefore, horror films must be seen as works of art as well, and they can be treated and analysed as such.

As the name suggests, Freud's "The Uncanny" offers a vital basis for close reading on the part of psychoanalysis. Both the uncanny and the horror film are inextricably linked with the triggering of fear and dread. Freud refers to the uncanny as being located within the terrifying, though, as being distinguishable from that which is terrifying (45). Before going into detail, he takes a close look at the semantic meaning of the word *uncanny*, or rather the German word *unheimlich*. It is derived from *heimlich*, which interestingly has two very distinct meanings. It can function as an adjective either belonging to the word family centering on *Heim* (Engl. *home*), or referring to something kept hidden. Whereas the former connotation can be associated with familiarity, the

latter is concerned with secrecy. As a result, the common meaning of the opposite *unheimlich* can only form a contrast to the first assertion (51). Thus it refers to something *unfamiliar* and *uncomfortable*. According to Freud, however, this definition lacks sufficiency, since he remarks that it would not be accurate to claim anything new and unfamiliar was terrifying. Consequently he draws on Schelling's definition, who refers to the uncanny as "alles, was ein Geheimnis, im Verborgenen bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist" (51). It is not a coincidence that this understanding of the uncanny can immediately be associated with the process of repression and its relevance regarding the horror film. Indeed, according to Freud, none of the two notions could exist independently from the other. He assumes that any emotion is transformed into fear by repression. Since repressed content in turn needs an outlet, thus it needs to come to light, it is clearly an autonomous category of the terrifying.

[D]enn dies Unheimliche ist wirklich nichts Neues oder Fremdes, sondern etwas dem Seelenleben von alters her Vertrautes, das ihm nur durch den Prozeß der Verdrängung entfremdet worden ist. (70)

It can be concluded that the uncanny is neither something unfamiliar nor solely something repressed. In fact it is formed by the return of the repressed.

3.3.2. *The uncanny Other*

In his essay, Freud establishes a number of elements representing the uncanny, all of which arise from specific anxieties, feelings linked to uncertainty and unfamiliarity, or animistic and primitive beliefs. However, I shall immediately concentrate on and discuss the elements linked to what seems to be the major factor regarding gendered reception, that is sexual difference. For this purpose one can expose three central categories: castration anxieties, womb-like spaces, and the self/Other blur as related to sexual difference.

According to Freud, three basic uncanny elements can be traced back to **castration anxiety**. However, as Peter Hutchings accurately remarks, "it is clear that castration *per se* is not a major feature of the horror genre. [...] Clearly a figurative or symbolic reading is required" (65). The first substitution for castration anxiety Freud mentions is the idea of being robbed of one's eyes, a fear which is still rooted in many adults. According to him, no other organ injury is feared as much as that of the eye (59). The fear of losing one's eyes is

indirectly represented in most existing horror films. In the diegetic universe usually wreathed in darkness, the characters most often find it difficult to see the danger coming and escape certain death. In *The Descent*, a group of women gets lost on a caving expedition where they fall an easy victim to primeval beasts. Clearly, this is an extreme case of loss of sight. However, darkness as the principal horror film's setting is known to prove most characters' undoing. Losing sight means being claimed by death. Another element that can be ascribed to the castration complex is described in the following paragraph.

Abgetrennte Glieder, ein abgehauener Kopf, eine vom Arm gelöste Hand wie in einem Märchen von *Hauff*, Füße, die für sich allein tanzen wie in dem erwähnten Buche von A. *Schaeffer*, haben etwas Unheimliches an sich, besonders wenn ihnen wie im letzten Beispiel noch eine selbständige Tätigkeit zugestanden wird (Freud 73).

Dismembered limbs have certainly occurred with increasing frequency in the horror films of the past decades. It is in particular a decisive feature of slasher, splatter, and exploitation movies, in which the focus on the destruction of the body seems indispensable. A suitable example of a body part acting autonomously is shown in the horror comedy *Idle Hands*, in which a teenager's possessed and blood-thirsty right hand carries on its killing spree even after being cut off. Clearly, the most evident representation of castration anxiety is the female genital. At the sight of a vagina the man is immediately reminded of the threat of castration. Unquestionably, horror films do not usually involve the overt display of female genitalia. They gain considerable relevance in a fairly distinct sense, though. Female genitals not as metaphor of a threatening castration, but as metonym for the woman as castrator. This is closely linked to the myth of the *vagina dentata*, that is the toothed vagina. Barbara Creed, who in her books explains its significance in terms of psychoanalytical horror film analysis, provides a highly expressive quote by Stephen King.

[My greatest sexual fear?] ... The vagina dentata, the vagina with teeth. A story where you make love to a woman and it just slammed shut and cut your penis off. That'd do it (qtd. in Creed *MF* 105).

This theme is directly treated in *Teeth*, in which a chaste girl named Dawn is repeatedly mistreated by men, resulting in her vagina biting off those men's penises while they are trying to have sex with her. It is much more likely,

though, that the *vagina dentata* is represented indirectly in the horror film. According to Creed, Dracula or to a greater degree his brides “signify the original or archetypal vampire as female. Their fanged mouths may well be equated in the unconscious mind of the spectator with the *vagina dentata*” (PP 86). In particular the brides, luscious, voluptuous, and blood-sucking as they are, embody a threat arising from unbridled female sexuality and sexual appetite and their power to easily subject men. Here uncanniness is rooted in the woman taking over the function of the one in power after having robbed the man’s. Hence it is not necessarily the literal castration of the phallus, which would symbolise loss of power, that signifies a serious threat to men. However, it is the deprivation of male power and activity that remains the central uncanny aspect.

Apart from castration anxieties as representing repressed male fears, Freud also mentions a **womb-like space** as a source of the uncanny. In this context, female genitals gain relevance once again. They do not merely trigger castration anxiety, but also function as reminders of a human being’s first home, a place once familiar, that is the mother’s womb (75). According to Creed, the womb represents a desire to return to the “original oneness of things” (MF 28) when mother and child were still one. In other words, the womb represents a desire for a pre-separation-state, a time when the child has not liberated itself from the mother and formed a self yet. Creed argues that there are two central ways of thematising the womb in the horror film. First of all, houses, rooms, cellars, or other enclosed spaces can symbolise a womb (55). She claims that these spaces are usually crime scenes. *The Stepfather* begins with the sight of a family slaughter. In *Funny Games U.S.*⁸, a family is terrorised and tortured by two teenagers in their own home. In *The Haunting in Connecticut*, a boy is haunted by demonic spirits related to the former mortuary he lives in. Hence the familiar place associated with security becomes a place of agony and dread. Secondly, women who give birth to inhuman offsprings equally symbolise the monstrous womb, or rather the monstrosity of her reproductive capacity (56). One example of this is given in *The Fly*, in which the female protagonist dreams of giving birth to a giant non-human creature after her scientist boyfriend starts

⁸ As well as in the original identical Austrian version *Funny Games* (1997).

turning into a monstrous fly. Similarly, the women in *Blessed* and *Rosemary's Baby* are in danger of giving birth to the devil's son, the incarnation of evil.

With regard to the mother's womb, Freud also mentions that for some people the climax of the uncanny was the idea of being buried alive, another form of the longing fantasy of life in the mother's womb which was originally not something terrifying (74). Direct visual representations of live burial are not very frequent, though. Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, who in her writings on Gothic literature discusses live burial as a trope, adds another significant aspect alongside the relation to the mother's womb. She considers live burial a metaphor for repressed homosexuality. In her major work *Skin Shows*, Judith Halberstam advances this argument and goes so far as to say that live burial can be equated with parasitism.

Live burial is the entanglement of self and other within monstrosity and the parasitical relationship between the two. The one is always buried in the other (20).

This proposition becomes particularly relevant in terms of the third essential category I name the **self/Other blur**. One of the elements it comprises is the motif of the doppelgänger. The original meaning of doppelgänger refers to persons considered identical due to their physical sameness. Apart from the appearance, Freud also mentions the relevance of a person being able to possess the knowledge, feelings and experiences of another one (62). The doppelgänger motif is encountered by a child for the first time when it goes through the stage of primary narcissism, meaning that the child's attention is focussed towards itself. At this stage, a person's sense of self is still being formed. The child's ego has still not isolated itself from the outside world and the Other. This primary narcissism is usually overcome, but the doppelgänger can still manifest itself in the form of what we call our conscience, that is a part of the ego which is capable of self-reflection and self-criticism. If it gets pathological, though, it is isolated and separated from the ego (63). This is the moment the "twin" becomes a doppelgänger and thus uncanny. Basically, a doppelgänger is unsettling since it calls identity in question. It belongs to the I, but still it is not me. In his essay "Self as Other: The Doppelgänger", Gry Faurholt elaborates the doppelgänger motif as follows:

Specifically, doppelgänger narratives involve a duality of the main character who is either duplicated in the figure of an identical second self

or divided into polar opposite selves. These two modes of doubling have since the earliest studies of the doppelgänger motif been categorized as distinct types: firstly, the *alter ego* is an identical double; the 'duplication' of a protagonist who seems to be either the victim of an identity theft perpetrated by a mimicking paranormal presence or subject to a paranoid hallucination [...]. Secondly, the 'divided' or *split personality* features a monster double; the dark half of the protagonist, an unleashed vengeful fiend that acts as a physical manifestation of a dissociated part of the primary self [...].

Despite Faurholts strong conviction that his categorisation is commonly known and applied, I must clarify that the meaning of alter ego and split personality is sometimes confused, or rather are the two notions treated as equal. We can guess that Faurholt presupposes the existence of a physically identical double with regard to the alter ego. In contrast to the split personality which is more likely to occur in one single person, the alter ego would be a second identical version of the original. In traditional psychiatry, the dissociative identity disorder, that is the split personality, is characterised by "the presence of two or more relatively distinct and separate subpersonalities in a single person" (Campbell 290). However, the secondary or split personality is called the *alter*, or in other words the Other. Particularly in two contemporary horror films I shall discuss, the alter ego and split personality motifs either merge or are digested in a way that aims at creating a high level of suspense by irritating the spectators.

Clearly, visibility is the crucial factor complicating the doppelgänger motif. Literary texts often leave more space for interpretation. A doppelgänger may be mentioned, but still the reader cannot be certain of whether it is "real", an existing identical twin, a hallucinated vision, an imagined subject of an ill mind, or the dark side of a character which might seem like an independent person but simply rests within the implied character. The reader is not given the chance to actually see what is real and what is not, particularly when there is a first-person narrator. It is interesting, though, that in *Secret Window* and *Hide and Seek* this limited perspective is employed to manipulate the audience and set it on the wrong track. In both films the male protagonists are confronted with evil opponents who in the end turn out to be the men's dark halves. However, in *Secret Window* the enemy called John Shooter is visible throughout the movie. We assume him to be real since he is real for the main character Mort Rainey.

Shooter is Mort's paranoid hallucination which is seemingly real to the audience. Since we see both of them, we perceive them as two persons. The audience is provided with a double version of Mort. This is why the alter ego element comes into play, although it is not an identical version of Mort. The alter ego merges with the split personality.

In *Hide and Seek*, though, the evil perpetrator named Charly creates a paradox since he is on the one hand considered the little girl's imaginary friend but on the other hand commits violent acts that cannot be explained if Charly was in fact not real. The imaginary friend/David Callaway's dark half Charly cannot be seen at all, neither by the protagonists nor the audience. This is why he is indeed less real for the spectators who constantly have to question his existence. There has never been a hallucinated double visible for the audience. The small chance of us getting to see Charly which would confirm his being real is finally terminated when we learn the truth.

However, the crucial question is in what way the doppelganger motif in these two films is related to sexual difference. I argue that they are particularly relevant in this context because the doppelganger is constructed as the product of a symbolic castration, the undermining of masculine integrity and power on the part of a woman. Furthermore, repression is the central basis and breeding ground on which the evil doppelganger is created and develops. However, it is not what I call the primary repressed content from the phallic stage which is at stake in the first place. In fact, there is secondary repressed matter which is to some extent influenced by and contingent on the primary. For clarification it is necessary to return to Faurholt's definition of the alter ego, namely that it can be a subject's paranoid hallucination. According to what Freud concludes from his case studies, paranoia manifests itself in delusions of persecution rooted in repressed homosexual desire (Halberstam 108). The primary repressed content of the films' male protagonists, though, is not homosexuality per se. Rather it is the fear of being emasculated and reduced to a feminised version of themselves. The lack of proper masculinity resulting from the wife's betrayal and her subsequent loss is what the male heterosexual patriarch would equate with homosexuality. The fact that the male protagonists in *Window* and *Hide* have already been symbolically castrated then results in the secondary repressive process involving a secret violent wish or crimes they have already

committed. Hence the repressed returns in the form of the doppelganger, the evil Other striving to make up for the loss of phallic power. It is evident then that these limited-perspective-narratives are based on concealment, confusion, and irritation, until the truth is finally revealed. This also confirms Paradis' summary of one of Freud's assumptions within his theory of paranoia, namely that "it is necessary to analyze paranoids through the stories they tell about themselves" (60). In this sense, I must declare that with regard to paranoia I reject a clear restriction to the alter ego. I consider paranoia an essential element in the construction of the alter personality of a person suffering from dissociative identity disorder.

In *Window* the woman's significance regarding the doppelganger narrative is indicated for the first time in the initial sequence. Mort Rainey is sitting in his car in front of a motel and finally bursts into one of the rooms where he catches his wife Amy and her lover Ted lying together in bed, sleeping. The camera's gaze then leaves the room, transporting us to a cabin in the woods which it enters through a window finally showing Mort sleeping on a sofa. Six months have passed, we are in the present now, the story begins. Mort is roused from sleep by a knock on the door. When he opens he is confronted with a Southerner called John Shooter, who accuses him of having committed plagiarism by copying his short story. The fact that Shooter appears for the first time after Mort has been sleeping indicates that the motel sequence has been a dream of his. According to Freud, the repressed returns in dreams: "[A]t night we are visited by desires that we are ashamed of and must conceal from ourselves" (*TU* 29)⁹. We do not learn until the final revelation towards the end of the movie that Mort was pointing at Amy and Ted with a gun, intending to take vengeance for the betrayal. The dream therefore represents Mort's repressed desire to kill his wife which returns in the figure of Shooter. The dream also functions as a trigger for the return of the repressed manifesting itself in the Southerner.

When Mort finally reads the beginning of Shooter's short story "Sowing Season", he appears to recognise the words (and desire) as his own. The story is about a man who thinks that "a woman who would steal your love when your

⁹ It must be pointed out that Freud distinguishes between daydreams and night-dreams. Although it is broad day when Mort is dreaming, he is still sleeping which is in contrast to the daydream a precondition for the night-dream.

love was really all you had was not much of a woman", leading him to the decision that he had to kill his wife and bury her "in the garden she loved more than she loved him". Although Mort discovers that his short story "Secret Window" resembles Shooter's to a great extent, he claims to have written it several years before Shooter did. Shooter, however, keeps returning and demands either proof or a new ending to the story. One night when he surprises Mort in the cabin's yard he recites his own "perfect" ending: < "I know I can do it". Todd Downey said. He helped himself to another ear of corn from the steaming bowl. "I'm sure that in time her death will be a mystery even to me". > This utterance is particularly significant since it subtly points to the fact that the short story's protagonist is perfectly aware of the repressive process he would undergo. He knows that he was going to repress and forget that which he had done so that he himself would not have a clue how his wife had really died. In fact, Todd Downey seems to be one step ahead of his real-life version Mort. He appears to have already accepted his duality whereas Mort is still struggling against his dark half. He keeps neglecting the evil inside him and repeatedly attempts to convince his acquaintances of his innocence.

However, every time the repressed/Shooter returns it/he gets more and more aggressive, involving Mort in a series of criminal acts marked by increasing inexplicability. Mort even suspects Ted of having hired Shooter to harass him, a property characteristic of paranoiacs. According to Freud, paranoids "possess the peculiarity of betraying (in a distorted form, it is true) precisely those things which other neurotics keep hidden". Following that, "the delusional fears of paranoiacs" are "projected in a hostile sense onto other people" (qtd. in Paradis 60).

The climax is finally achieved when Mort discovers that his story was cut out of the journal that would prove he was not guilty of plagiarism. A voice resembling his own starts talking to him, explaining that it was practically impossible that Shooter could have done that. When Mort enters the cabin, he finds Shooter's black hat on the desk and puts it on. The voice asks him why he is wearing the hat and if he did so because Shooter wanted him to. Suddenly Mort turns around and looks into the camera. When the camera's gaze performs a volte-face we see another version of Mort, the one the voice belongs to. Now it can be concluded that this second Mort represents his conscience,

the self-reflective part attempting to help Mort put the missing pieces together. It reminds him of the details he has “chosen to ignore” and advises him to turn himself in before he “can do any more damage” and “kill anyone else”. It tells him that “there is no John Shooter”, that he had invented him, and that he should listen to his conscience instead of Shooter. However, Mort refuses to give in to his conscience. This is most explicitly displayed when he looks in the mirror where he can only see his own back side instead of his reflection. The self-reflective part of himself is gone, his dark side Shooter returns. After the Southerner has told him that he was nothing but Mort’s invention, we see all the crimes committed by Mort in retrospect. The crimes we assumed to be Shooter’s, among them the killing of Mort’s dog, the murder of his private eye and a neighbour, as well as the burning down of his former house. Mort finally understands why Shooter existed in the first place. He needs to “fix the ending” of the story. The repressed has finally returned and taken over control of Mort.

When Amy discovers that Mort’s study is full of carvings on the wooden walls, we learn the actual meaning of the name Shooter, which is supposed to be read as “Shoot her”, emphasising that his wish to shoot his wife at the motel has been buried but never forgotten. At the very end, when the sheriff visits Mort in the cabin to let him know that he was aware of him having killed Amy and Ted, Mort stresses the importance of a perfect ending to a story. While the camera’s gaze moves through the room, out of the window down to the garden which is now cultivated with corn, his voice recites the ending one last time: < “I know I can do it”, Todd Downey said, helping himself to another ear of corn from the steaming bowl. “I’m sure that in time every bit of her will be gone and her death will be a mystery...even to me”. >

Hence it is disclosed that Mort had killed Amy and Ted and buried them in the garden where the bodies would decay under the corn field he cultivated. Restoration of his masculine pride and activity could only be achieved by the destruction of the cause for his suffering and unstable gender identity. As soon as Mort was able to accept his evil side he could conquer his wife and take vengeance for his previous emasculation. At the end he is also aware that he has once again buried the returned repressed by murdering and burying his wife.

A fairly similar doppelganger narrative is presented in *Hide and Seek* in which psychologist David Callaway moves to a new home in the countryside with his 9-year-old daughter Emily after his wife's suicide. There they are repeatedly menaced by someone whom Emily identifies as her imaginary friend Charly. Eventually we learn that Charly is in fact David's alter personality which emerged due to the wife's adulterous behaviour. As in *Window* the wife turns out to be the root of all evil. Furthermore, *Hide* is like *Window* narrated on the basis of David's experiences and perception, which inevitably leads the spectators astray. It is characteristic of doppelganger stories such as the two discussed that the audience is provided with images telling one part of the story and revealing the missing part in flashbacks towards the end when the protagonist himself unravels the mystery.

Right at the beginning of *Hide* we are supposed to gain a wrong impression of reality. On New Year's Day, when the Callaway family has returned from a day in the park, we are shown the mother standing in the kitchen, swallowing pills with a glass of wine. When kissing the daughter goodnight, she tells Emily that she loves her in a sad tone. Back in her bedroom David asks her if she had something to talk about. His wife answers that "some things are beyond therapy". Her consecutive suicide in the bath tub indicates that she must have suffered from some sort of depression leaving her no other choice but to kill herself. However, one significant element which does not make sense yet is placed in contraposition. Right before David wakes up from his sleep and finds his wife's dead body, we are shown in a split second an image of his dream. Every time throughout the movie when David has the very same dream, we get to see a bit more of what it is about. Moreover, every time when he wakes up Charly has ramped and raged in the house and scribbled menacing writings on the walls. However, one sequence which is assumed to be a dream when David wakes up afterwards shows the neighbour Elizabeth visiting Emily in her room. When she opens the closet in which Emily suspects Charly to be, Elizabeth is attacked by someone we do not see and is thrown out of the window. Terrified from what David supposes to be his dream, he goes to Emily's room and discovers her drawing a picture of the scene in which Elizabeth was pushed out of the window by a man. David is even more confused and shocked as he sees the glass fragments on the ground beneath

the window and later finds Elizabeth's dead body in the bath tub. The mysterious and violent happenings make no sense to him, which is why he starts looking for Charly outside where he is overtaken by his male neighbour whom he has always been suspicious of¹⁰.

The process of disclosure is initiated when David has fled from his neighbour, being convinced now that it was that man who had stalked his family all along. As the door to one of the house's rooms opens, he discovers and unpacks several moving boxes in which he finds his psychologist equipment (headphones, recorder, empty notebook). Eventually a series of flashbacks shows both the missing parts of David's memory as well as the memories that could not be real. He and the audience realise that whenever he perceived himself and we saw him pursuing his job, that is listening to his patient's recordings and taking notes in his book, it was nothing but an illusion. Unlike Mort who created Shooter, David did not have a paranoid hallucination manifesting itself in another distinct person. The fact that he imagines himself doing things he never really did while his alter personality is haunting the house stresses the protagonist's self-betrayal accompanying the split personality more explicitly and personally than *Window*. Finally David remembers the cause of the emergence of his violent Other, meaning that the entire dream sequence is shown. At a New Year's Eve Party David had attended with his wife he caught her making out with another man. Another flashback shows him asphyxiating his wife in her sleep the following night and staging the scene as if she had committed suicide. The final flashback reveals that it had been David who threw Elizabeth out of the window.

When Emily enters the room, asking him if he can see now, we see David's reflection in the mirror. In contrast to *Window*, in which the missing reflection symbolises the disappearance of his conscience whereas the Other is represented by Shooter and finally himself, it is the mere image of David's reflection, the Other reflected in the mirror without the visible presence of the actual person which indicates that the alter personality has finally assumed control. This is confirmed when he tells Emily that "daddy's gone now". Like Mort who killed those who could have unraveled the mystery around Shooter, David intends to kill Emily, who is in fact the only person knowing about his

¹⁰ Very similar to Ted in *Window* whom Mort suspected of having hired Shooter to stalk and threaten him.

criminal deeds. However, he is finally shot by his friend Katherine, who then takes in Emily to live with her.



Fig. 3: Mort standing in front of the mirror, seeing only himself from behind instead of his reflection. His conscience, his self-reflective part, has gone.



Fig. 4: Although we are shown David's reflection, the actual person is not visible in this shot. Charly, his evil Other, has taken over control.

Apart from the discrepancy between both films with regard to Mort's triumph and David's destruction, they certainly share one remarkable property. The evil Other emerges to take vengeance for a symbolic castration performed by the men's wives through their adulterous behaviour. It is most interesting, though, that the Other, the strong one who is supposed to restore the familiar order and fix the unstable power relationships, is constructed as an evil, aggressive, violent man. Shooter and Charly accuse their creators of being weak, powerless, passive, castrated of their phallic sexual power. They express strong resentment towards them. Clearly they are in fact the other halves of Mort and David, those parts of them which they feel they need to repress in order to stay within the frame of legality and morality. However, the repressed does not settle for being suppressed but strives to raise to the surface by illustrating the faults of their counterparts. Shooter reveals to Mort that he "did them things so you wouldn't have to". When Shooter has taken control over Mort, he says about the latter that "he took the coward's way out", meaning that he needed to create that Other who should undertake the task of compensating for the lack of power without the self having to feel guilty about it. A similar tension of disbalance exists between David and Charly. When Emily tells him that her mother would have liked Charly, David wants to know what else he had persuaded her of. "He says he would have satisfied her" is her pithy answer. This other part of Mort and David combines feelings of repressed anger, guilt,

and shame, which are all directed at themselves and sooner or later vented on the sources of their frustration, their wives.

Both films employ the doppelganger motif in order to address not only the male fear of being symbolically castrated of their masculine activity, condemning them to a feminine passive position, but above all the fear of what they are capable of in order to make up for the wrong they feel has been done to them. Both protagonists and spectators, though, are supposed to come to that realisation steadily. In this context it is worth mentioning what Faurholt has to say about the two doppelganger categories in relation to the theme of “identity in crisis”. He states that in the case of the alter ego, the “I must identify as ‘I’ that which is not me”. As opposed to this, the split personality involves that the “I must other as ‘not-I’ that which is myself”. Apart from the characters in question being subject to either necessity, I claim that these formulae can be transferred to the audience as well. In the case of *Secret Window*, the spectator must identify as Mort that which is not him. In other words, it is up to the spectator to finally expose Shooter as being a part of Mort. In terms of *Hide and Seek*, however, the spectator must other as not-David that which is him. To put it another way, the audience needs to separate and denounce that evil part of David from the good part we used to regard as his whole personality. These are processes predominantly involving the audience at the end of the movie. Hence the representation of the uncanny by the doppelganger motif takes effect to a large extent when processes of disclosure and subsequently identification and othering occur.

So far I have discussed two doppelganger cases dealing with an evil alter personality emerging in the male due to their wife’s adulterous behaviour amounting to a symbolic castration. In *I Know Who Killed Me*, however, the doppelganger is embodied by a woman per se. Aubrey Fleming, a young pianist and writer, lives in a quiet town with her parents. When she disappears one day, the police assume her to be victim of a killer terrorising the village. Several days later, a driver discovers a badly injured young woman by the side of the road. She is brought to the hospital where she is identified as Aubrey. When she wakes up, though, she claims to be a stripper named Dakota. Even back home she swears she has no idea who the girl is the others believe her to be. Interestingly, when searching her computer, the police stumble on a short story

involving a girl and her alter ego Dakota. Eventually Dakota learns that Aubrey was one of a pair of twins born to a drug addict. Her father took one of the girls to raise her as their own child. Hence Dakota realises that she in fact has a twin sister. At the end she discovers that Aubrey was kidnapped and buried alive by her piano teacher. She kills him and frees her sister in the nick of time.

In contrast to the alter ego and the split personality, a twin can clearly neither be considered a doppelganger nor uncanny¹¹. However, it is the fact that neither Aubrey/Dakota nor the spectators know of the twin's existence that makes us *assume* a split personality. We are presented two versions of who we assume to be one person. On the one hand, there is Aubrey, a good girl who comes from a good family, who has a neat appearance and whose hobbies are playing the piano and writing. On the other hand, there is Dakota, a run-down stripper who makes a living in a cheap strip club. The spectator is not able to combine those two very distinct parts of the same girl, which gets even more confusing when the girl in the hospital claims not to be Aubrey. Moreover, she suffers from critical wounds resembling those the serial killer is known to inflict on his victims, although Dakota repeatedly insists that she has never been kidnapped. Eventually we learn that Dakota was physically experiencing Aubrey's wounds and pain which is said to happen with "stigmatic twins".

A significant element used for either distinguishing or confounding both girls is the colours they are accentuated with. Whereas Aubrey is supposed to be associated with the colour blue, Dakota's scenes/clothes are usually dunked in red. At the beginning of the film when Aubrey is at a football game, she is holding a blue rose in her hands, whereas the red roses in front of her house symbolise Dakota's existence and presence although she is still distant. Later when Aubrey is held captive at the killer's house her mouth is covered with a blue cloth. However, confusion arises when Dakota is wearing a blue coat at the hospital when talking to the officers. The climax of irritation is reached when she is driven home from the hospital, the camera focussing on the police car lights flashing in blue and red. This perfectly illustrates the ambiguity felt by both those surrounding the girl as well as the spectators. No-one knows who is in fact sitting in the car, whether it is Aubrey who for some inexplicable reason is lying to her acquaintances or has created an alter personality, or Dakota whom

¹¹ See Peters' dictionary of psychology which says that the term doppelganger does not refer to twins but to persons who are strangers to each other (129).

we are not sure to be really existent. However, the threatening uncanny effect is not merely produced by the suspense rooted in Dakota's emergence. It is rather the violent contrast she forms to Aubrey that disturbs the picture gained of the latter. By her misdemeanour, her cursewords, her openly displayed sexuality, Dakota calls into question the virtuous and bourgeois parts making up Aubrey's identity. This is most explicitly illustrated when Aubrey's boyfriend Jerrod visits her at home. He brings blue flowers symbolising that they are meant for Aubrey while he is welcomed by Dakota who is dressed in red. Since Jerrod refuses to believe that he is not confronted with Aubrey, Dakota takes him to her room to have sex with him, which is something Aubrey would not have done.

The most significant aspect in this scene, though, is that she is not at all handicapped by the bodily disfigurements caused by the mutilations. The cut arm and leg which would represent triggers for castration anxiety in the male or making them feel castrated has no weakening effect on Dakota. The fact that her mutilations do not pose an obstacle for her emphasise the importance of sexual difference in this context. Whereas men are in constant danger of losing their masculinity through castration which they in turn need to repress, women cannot be contained by repression at all. Dakota's power lies in the fact that regardless of the injuries she had to suffer, she can still be a (sexually) active and determined woman. This is most expressively shown when Jerrod who is sitting on the bed waiting for Dakota to make the first move is juxtaposed with the artificial leg which is being charged beside the wall. The castration symbol here represents the maintenance or even increase of strength and power on the part of Dakota while Jerrod appears more passively in the face of her inviolable active position.

Furthermore she is contrasted strongly with her mother Susan, the alpha woman and role model for Aubrey representing honourable and bourgeois values which are jeopardised by Dakota who obviously works against them. While she is having sex with Jerrod which Susan is forced to overhear, she initiates an act of symbolic catharsis by excessively trying to clean the pearly-white kitchen.



Fig. 5: The artificial leg being charged beside the wall. The castration symbol emphasises Dakota's active power and strength.

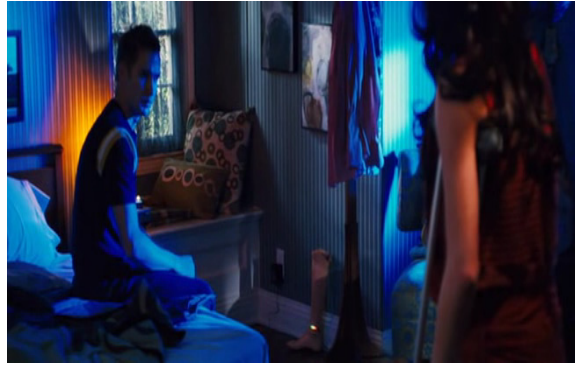


Fig. 6: Jerrod, who is passively sitting on the bed, is juxtaposed with the artificial leg.

Apart from the doppelganger motif which is differently processed in the three films discussed, they feature another prominent element they have in common. Earlier I have briefly explained the relevance of womb-like spaces in the construction of the uncanny. Hence it is interesting that in the movies the womb-like space is not only present but also inextricably linked to the doppelganger. The mother's womb represents a space where self and mother were still one, a condition which is desired in order to fill the lack created by separation. The uncanny womb-like space, though, expressively symbolises a reunion of self and Other, primary and alter personality. This is most obvious when Aubrey and Dakota are reunited when the latter discovers her sister in the grave in which she has been buried alive. The end of terror and pain is represented by the reconciling of the two sisters who by being born have not only been separated from their mother but also from the other. Clearly this is most expressively displayed when Dakota lies down clinging to her sister, assuming a fetal position. However, more significant in terms of male fears are the womb-like spaces in *Window* and *Hide*. After the traumatic experience with their wives, both men decide to move to an old house in an abandoned and quiet region. This is where their alter personality emerges and takes over control, fulfilling both Mort's and David's unconscious desire to merge with the Other, the one comprising activity and phallic masculinity the self is lacking.

One last detail playing a significant role in the construction of the uncanny is left to be brought up. Alongside repression there is another unconscious process engaging its subjects in redirecting specific energy, most likely libidinal energy, into something which would represent less of a menace to

their own identity and that of the collective. Stets and Turner summarise Freud's notion of sublimation as follows: "[It] rechannels energy from unacceptable impulses into more acceptable behavior, and in fact, Freud believed that the creative energy of people is fueled by sublimated energy from repressed impulses". This is a particularly worthwhile idea when we look at the horror film as such. In fact such a text is an art work which is nothing but the product of the meganarrator's sublimated impulses addressed to an audience which itself needs to cathartically process the incriminating mental material by watching instead of making a horror film.

Clearly it is no coincidence then that such artistic products also populate the majority of American horror films. In *Window* and *I know* these products are obviously represented by the protagonists' short stories. Mort's repressed Other is sublimated and processed in the story in which that same Other is in fact that perfect whole subject comprising both self and Other in the person by the name of Todd Downey. Aubrey's traumatic experience formed by the separation from her twin sister is digested in her story whose protagonist "always felt like half a person. Half a person with half a soul". It is interesting then that Aubrey writes that her protagonist could bring the two halves together only in her dreams. Reconciliation in the story is thus realised in a dream, which is as I have already remarked another manifestation of repressed material.

In contrast to these literary texts, though, the sublimated matter in *Hide* is represented by Emily's drawings of Charly. Evidently this fact creates a contradiction since David appears to be the one suffering from a dissociative identity disorder. Basically, this would imply that Emily herself needed to sublimate repressed content. At the end of the film, when Emily has just left the house with Katherine, the final shot shows another one of her drawings exposing a little girl with two heads, indicating that Emily had a split personality herself, which would in turn explain her excessive urge to fill dozens of sheets with her drawings. The fact that she is merely drawing Charly instead of her own alter personality might signify that her other half has not yet evolved enough, which is why her creative impulses are directed towards her father and his Other.

Having finished the discussion about the doppelganger motif I shall remark that parasitism need not only be represented by the doppelganger, but

also by creatures related to death and the supernatural. Freud describes this as follows:

Im allerhöchsten Grade unheimlich erscheint vielen Menschen, was mit dem Tod, mit Leichen und mit der Wiederkehr der Toten, mit Geistern und Gespenstern, zusammenhängt (71).

Apart from death, which is doubtlessly omnipresent in the horror film, there is particularly one creature rising from the dead that is significant in this context. Ever since the creation of *Dracula*, vampire films have flooded the market. The figure of the vampire has fascinated masses and even raised a proper fan community. Besides, it is probably one of the most adequate examples of the union of repulsion and attraction. The category of corporeal undead creates a natural paradox. The vampire is someone who is in fact dead, exsanguinate and without a heartbeat. This does not prevent him from moving and talking like a living person, though. Apart from a small number of films in which the vampire is visually presented as a ghastly monster, among them *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*, the audience usually gets to see a respectable handsome subject, eloquent in their speech and seductive in their behaviour. This makes them even more dangerous since their instinct of self-preservation drives them to suck human blood. According to Katarzyna Ancuta, “the vampire also represents one of the basic human fears: the fear of contamination” (106). By sucking a human being’s blood, the vampire can either cause their death or their transformation into another vampire. Either way, it represents a symbol and signifier of death, not only due to its paradoxical existence but also because of its lethal intentions. The vampire also contaminates in another way, though. Milly Williamson resumes post-Freudian theories as follows.

For Christopher Craft (1990) and Sue-Ellen Case (1991) the vampire is a subversive borderline figure which problematises representation and destabilises the boundaries of gender (157).

Whether male or female vampire, their enormous desire to bury their fangs in a human neck, an event representing a fairly intimate and sexually connoted union, undermines heterosexually determined orientations. Particularly the male vampire contradicts and unsettles because of him fully embracing otherness. According to Halberstam, “[h]e is monster and man,

feminine and powerful, parasitical and wealthy” (88). The threat emanates from “a body that is noticeably feminized, wildly fertile, and seductively perverse” (89). Masculinity is infected with a parasite named femininity. The threat of contamination can certainly be represented by the werewolf as well. Once bitten, the lupine parasite has lodged itself in the human being, causing a fundamental disruption of the border between self and Other, human and animal. This relates to another uncanny category described by Freud which is rooted in animism and involves a living person whom we assume to have bad intentions:

Aber das reicht nicht hin, wir müssen noch hinzutun, daß diese seine Absichten, uns zu schaden, sich mit Hilfe besonderer Kräfte verwirklichen werden (72-73).

Furthermore, Freud regards insanity as having the same origin.

Der Laie sieht hier die Äußerung von Kräften vor sich, die er im Nebenmenschen nicht vermutet hat, deren Regung er aber in entlegenen Winkeln der eigenen Persönlichkeit dunkel zu spüren vermag (73).

Freud describes here two opposing kinds of threat. On the one hand, the uncanny is aroused by another person whom we consider evil. On the other, it is represented by evil within ourselves. The former basically occurs when a person becomes threatening by means of supernatural powers, a circumstance that would most likely arise when this person itself is supernatural or possessed by a supernatural force. The latter would then relate to the awareness of *ourselves* being possessed by a mystical power. In fact, both cases only differ from each other in point of view. With regard to a filmic narration, it is the determination of either the protagonist or the characters we sympathise with which decides whether we are dealing with the first or the second case. Clearly the werewolf can be considered the product of a supernatural force possessing a human being. Although the traditional werewolf – contrasting strongly with the vampire – appears on the surface as a brutish and savage creature neglecting any feminine aspect (at least if it is male), there is one crucial contradictory factor indicated by Reynold Humphries.

The transformation of man to beast takes place once a month, an immediate parallel being set up with menstruation. I would argue that this transformation is a perfect case of hysteria, where the subject's repressed desire or fear of that desire inscribes itself onto the body (22).

The original Freudian conception of hysteria, which is either considered a symptom or a disorder frequently found in women, is explained by Yarom as

first, the unconscious struggle against disavowed incestuous longing and conflicting identifications with both parents, second, these factors being experienced as menacing and forbidden and therefore to be repressed, and third, the repressed material returns through the body in the form of conversion symptoms (viii-ix).

Disorders affecting sensation (sharpened senses typical of wolves) or voluntary motor function (physical transformation and the subsequent take-over of the wolf) (Campbell 229) characteristic of the lupine disease represent nothing else than conversion symptoms triggering the outlet of repressed Oedipal conflicts, most specifically regarding the failure to properly complete identification processes. The female hysteric/werewolf, lacking a stable female gender identity, displays her innate Other by “excessive miming of masculinity” (Weber 86). The male hysteric/werewolf, on the other hand, would usually be marked by the lack of phallic power which he has to compensate by imitating or miming masculinity (86). Hence the parasitical wolfish disease manifests itself in the unleashing of the repressed Other visible above all in the presumably transformed body.

3.4. The Object

3.4.1. *Approaching the Object*

In the 1980s, a new buzzword entered political and (in the wider sense) critical discourse – above all, critical discourse in the U.S. The word is “abjection”, and it represents the newest mutation in the theory of disgust (Menninghaus 365).

Abjection, which can also occur either as an adjective (abject women, abject art) or a substantival form of the adjective (the abject) (365), gained massive popularity in the 1980s owing to one key figure of French psychoanalysis. In 1982, Julia Kristeva published *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, which proved to have major influence on theories of horror, disgust, the body, and otherness, ranging from literature over the art of painting and sculpture to films and not least culture. As Menninghaus appropriately remarks, since then all cultural rules had to be read from the perspective of that

which they discriminate, that is the Other, that which cannot be assimilated. The abject became amongst others a synonym for homosexuals, ethnic minorities, AIDS patients, scandalous works of art, and women (366).

However, the theory of abjection creates one significant divergence with regard to what I have so far discussed in relation to the uncanny and repression. Whereas the uncanny categories previously explained chiefly connect with the phallic stage and the Oedipal conflict, Kristeva's abjection is rooted in the pre-Oedipal phase.

The abject confronts us [...] with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language (13).

Kristeva thus refers to a phase prior to what Lacan has termed the "symbolic order" associated with language, culture, and the paternal law (Evans 203). The semiotic as she calls it is what precedes the symbolic order and where abjection can be defined as that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Furthermore, Kristeva considers the abject that which is subject to primal repression, "the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat" (12). In addition she claims that

[t]he abject confronts us [...] with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder (12-13).

Hence the abject is what threatens to cross or disintegrate the border between human and animal, self and (m)other, a threat provoking in the child a narcissistic crisis (14).

3.4.2. The abject Other

With her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed has made one of the most influential contributions to horror cinema by drawing on Kristeva's theory of abjection. According to her, "[t]he abject is placed on the side of the feminine and the maternal in opposition to the paternal symbolic" (DD 122). This basic assumption has motivated her to read Kristeva's theory as descriptive, "as one

which is attempting to explain the origins of patriarchal culture" (*HMF* 76) and is therefore strongly related to the issue of sexual difference. Similar to what I have focussed on in the discussion of the uncanny, woman is established as the central source of horror. And as in the uncanny, where that which provokes anxiety is essentially related to the body (loss of eyes, dismembered limbs, female genitals, the womb, transformation of the body, inadequately gendered body), the abject gains particular relevance with regard to the female body.

Creed argues that the horror film can illustrate abjection in three different ways. First of all, it can involve images of abjection such as the corpse (10). For Kristeva "[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject." (4). The corpse as a wound associated with bodily wastes such as blood, pus, or the smell of decay, represents an instable border approaching and departing from us, reminding us of our own fragility. That body which shortly before used to be and exist on my side of the border now does no longer belong to me, but still I cannot fully separate from it. It is "[n]ot me. Not that. But not nothing, either" (2). Moreover, bodily wastes are considered unclean and polluting, they signify a threat to the body which is supposed to be clean and pure. Particularly when they are outside of the body, extravasate and become visible, they simultaneously become that which we need to expel and exclude, abject. But still they can never be fully expelled since they are part of the subject. In that sense, the corpse is "the most sickening of wastes" since it confronts the subject with an extreme and adverse kind of exclusion. "It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled" (3-4). Kristeva also distinguishes between two different types of polluting objects, excremental and menstrual.

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference (71).

Whereas the excremental pollution represents a threat on a fairly general and universal level, meaning that it can apply to both sexes, it is the menstrual that creates a dimension particularly associated with the female. Strictly speaking, it is the female body around which abjection occurs. Its status as

being polluted by menstrual blood makes it especially abject to men. However, female menstrual blood pre-eminently also becomes a parasite threatening the woman from within, especially the teenage girl who enters a stage of transformation into a woman with her first period. Ancuta remarks that “[t]he female body is often the abject territory for women themselves” (172), which is expressively displayed in *Carrie*. While the young girl is taking a shower in the school’s gym locker room, menstrual blood is suddenly running down her legs which results in her hysterically crying for help. Her class mates react by throwing tampons at her and shouting “Clean it up!” and “Plug it up!”, implying that she should restore a clean and proper body¹². This also relates to what Creed considers the second way in which abjection can be illustrated, that is the border. In the context of menstrual blood she refers to the border between the pure and the abject body (11). Similarly Magistrale remarks that

[i]n horror films that feature female monsters, the violated border is defined in terms that are significantly feminized: blood that cannot be appropriately contained or controlled, bodily organs – especially the vagina and mouth – that threaten the male with castration (6).

Similar to what happens at the beginning of *Carrie* menstrual blood is also a major element in *Ginger Snaps*. Shortly before Ginger is attacked in the park, she and her sister Brigitte discover the ripped and bloody body of a dog. After looking at her sister, Brigitte tells her that she has got some blood on her body, assuming it is the dog’s. Ginger pulls up her skirt, revealing blood running down her leg. She looks terrified and gazes around as if being persecuted. When looking at her bloody hand she says, “B, I just got the curse”. This utterance stresses that Ginger considers the passage into female adulthood represented by her first period a curse¹³. She cannot and does not want to accept that she is regarded as a woman now. She compares this development to a supernatural disease bringing with it pain and perdition. In fact, she is afraid of womanhood and femininity as if she foreboded that this was a sure sign of disaster and destruction. The border crossed by Ginger’s first menstruation thus represents both the male’s repressed fear of mature female sexuality *and* the

¹² Also see Cherry, pages 112, 115, 117.

¹³ It is interesting that in her book on the monstrous-feminine and the reproductive body, particularly in the chapter about PMS, Ussher also speaks of abject femininity as a curse (p. 84).

female child's sexuality. The border is not stable any more which makes the girl abject.

A significant relation of womanhood to the werewolf is established when Ginger bleeds even more after the attack. When she shows Brigitte her scars and the grey hair growing out of them, she suddenly starts menstruating again, the blood dripping on the floor of the school's restroom. Terrified the girls go to see the nurse who in detail explains to them the process of menstruation, showing them a poster of the female reproductive system. In the course of her explanations we can see the disgusted looks on the girls' faces. When Ginger wants to reassure if all of this was really normal, Brigitte goes on to ask about pain and hair that was not there before. "Comes with the territory" answers the nurse, even more stressing the parallel drawn between womanhood and animal. In other words it is the transformation into a woman and werewolf that is equalled. The notion of the werewolf as a monstrous creature can now immediately be associated with monstrous femininity, an uncontrolled and unleashed monstrosity set on mankind and above all men.

However, it is crucial to take into account that the monstrous-feminine is constructed in the context of masculinity. As I have remarked earlier, the female werewolf (or hysteric) is the offspring of an unstable gender identity excessively imitating masculinity. The transformation is accompanied by the growth of hair on her body and a tail possibly representing the phallus. These physical attributes stress Ginger's rejection of femininity. It is the appropriation of masculine features, though, that allows her to actually represent monstrous femininity that is employed to attract and destroy men. *Ginger Snaps* therefore is an interesting example of how masculinity and femininity can be combined in order to construct monstrosity as a conglomerate of unfixed gender identities eventually representing a threat to the male sex.

Another example of abject femininity represented by menstrual blood is given in *Hurt*, in which a widowed family together with a foster child move to their uncle's salvage yard. One day the teenage boy Conrad and his foster sister Sarah are home alone. When he is in the kitchen having a snack he suddenly notices a stain of red fluid on the floor. After having touched it with his fingers he assumes that it is blood and follows the traces outside. In the front yard he finds Sarah trying to entice a wolf with a piece of raw meat. Assuming

now that the blood was dripping from the meat, he corrects her for wasting a perfect dinner steak. The next shot shows Sarah's legs revealing a trail of blood. Sarah and Conrad both notice it at the same moment, leaving them embarrassed. Conrad eventually takes Sarah back to the house, saying "Let's get you cleaned up". The spectators recognise that he is forced to deal with an uncomfortable situation which he immediately wants to get over by getting her to restore a clean and proper body. When he has given her tampons she asks how to use them which he does not want to explain to her. He tells her to read the instructions on the pack and then refers to his girlfriend who shall visit in a moment.

Whereas the border between the clean and defiled female body and thus the border between child and woman is treated in *Carrie* and *Ginger Snaps* as abject to the girls themselves in the first place, abjection is immediately related to a male figure in *Hurt*. Here it is Conrad who has to deal with the abject situation together with Sarah, complicating the male/female, man/child, brother/sister relationship. Sarah's first period marks the final loss of purity and innocence. The symbolic transition to womanhood indicates the monstrosity she harbours, announcing that from now cruel mayhem was going to rule. Conrad's discomfort and inability to appropriately handle the situation leading him to leave Sarah in the house and make out with his girlfriend instead drives Sarah to eventually kill Elise, the girlfriend. Due to the abject experience Conrad and Sarah shared she is denied a status similar to Elise's, that is woman as fetishised object. Womanhood seems to be desired by Sarah, but since it is accompanied by abject bodily wastes Conrad is confronted with and presumably disgusted by he refuses to regard her as anything else but a child, driving her to fully unveil her monstrosity.



Fig. 7: Ginger discovers that she has the „curse“.



Fig. 8: Trail of menstrual blood on Sarah's legs.

Clearly, the border is in general a crucial factor in the construction of the monstrous in horror films, which can be immediately related to Freud's uncanny as well. Horror texts display the border between life and death (the undead; the corpse; live burial), natural and supernatural (living person threatening us and/or themselves by means of supernatural powers), wholeness and fragmentation (dismembered limbs; female genitals representing lack of penis, self and Other (doppelganger; live burial as metaphor; disease; etc.). The border between good and evil is certainly one of the most remarkable elements thematised in horror cinema. Kristeva defines this as follows:

The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior.... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. [...] Abjection [...] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady (4).

This ambiguity is particularly well displayed in narratives where the doppelganger represents a person's evil Other (*Secret Window*, *My Bloody Valentine*, *Hide and Seek*), or in slasher films where a trusted member of the group of teenagers or young adults often turns out to be the killer who has had all planned from the outset (Billy and Stu of *Scream*, Will Benson of *I still know what you did last summer*, Henry of the slasher series *Harper's Island*). The monstrous-feminine gains particular relevance in this context. In *All the boys love Mandy Lane*, it is Mandy herself who turns out to be the one having planned her friends' murders with the help of her best friend Emmet whom she

misled to be her ally. Jennifer of the splatter film *Jennifer's Body* becomes a slaughterous succubus whose victims are exclusively her male peers. In both cases, the alluring and luscious bodies of the female killers obscure their true nature, which makes it practically impossible for the male sex to unmask them. Their attractiveness is their masquerade, a trap into which men easily and helplessly fall.

However, when a child is the source of evil the degree of abjection rises even more. In *Hurt* and *Orphan* the young girls prove to be far from innocent. In fact, they attempt to destroy their respective family by sowing the seeds of discord and thus tearing it apart. Again it is their aspect leading the protagonists astray. Their infantile appearance is a disguise for what lies underneath, the calculated and ruthless crimes they are capable of. By the time the ones affected finally detect what is going on, it is often too late.

Eventually, Creed claims that the third way in which abjection can be illustrated is intimately related to the construction of the maternal figure. This certainly results from the significant role of the mother in the process of the child's attempt to break away from her. The pre-Oedipal mother becomes the first object of abjection; she herself becomes abject. A familiar significant aspect in this context is the body in relation to filth and defilement or cleanliness. In her writings about Indian defilement rites, Kristeva asserts the following:

A split seems to have set in between, on the one hand, the body's territory where an authority without guilt prevails, a kind of fusion between mother and nature, and on the other hand, a totally different universe of socially signifying performances where embarrassment, shame, guilt, desire, etc. come into play – the order of the phallus (74).

According to her, the body with its wastes such as blood, vomit, pus, or urine is initially nothing filthy yet. This maternal authority is opposed to the paternal law by which that what has previously been "without guilt" suddenly becomes shameful and embarrassing, impure and defiled.

Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self's clean and proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws within which, with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take shape (72).

In these premises it is the paternal law which forces a "prohibition placed on the maternal body (as a defense against autoeroticism and incest taboo)"

(14). Hence the maternal authority is that which has to be repressed. As a result, the repressed related to the abject in horror cinema stems from a person's longing for that phase when there were no rules and taboos yet. This might be a valuable reason for the fact that some people gain pleasure from viewing blood and excrementally polluted objects in film. Creed refers to this as "pleasure in perversity" (13) which perfectly matches Kristeva's assumption that "[t]he abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law" (15).

Moreover Creed remarks that the abject was in general often defined in relation to sex. "In many societies, abject sexual behaviour would include incest, homosexuality, sado-masochism, bestiality, and necrophilia" (MM 8). This assertion about perverse pleasures associated with the abject likewise confirms what Cherry remarked about the horror cinema, namely that it is a sort of perverse pleasure to revisit the repressed on the screen via characters, images, or events¹⁴. The incest taboo seems to be a particular focus of several contemporary horror films. It must be pointed out, though, that the maternal figure per se does not directly play a role. The abject taboo is rather constructed around female children or teenage girls who are oscillating between childhood and womanhood. The passage into womanhood accompanied by the activation of their reproductive function is the significant element as for which they can be associated with the maternal and hence the abject. In addition, it is usually an intruding female who threatens to disrupt the nuclear family, meaning that those girls are either foster or stepchildren. One might claim that this fact makes it less of a taboo since there was no possibility of incest with biological relatives. However, it is rather the family as kin including specific common rules that is at stake. The girls represent danger and monstrosity in so far as they provoke an abject incestuous situation, whether the man was longing for it or not. They lead men into forbidden temptation, disrespecting any prohibitions and feelings of appropriate guilt or shame.

In *Hurt*, Sarah is obviously interested in her foster brother Conrad. One sunny day she sits on a scrap heap on the yard, putting on some lipstick. Conrad enters the yard, collecting junk for his art project. When he looks up, he notices Sarah making up her face. In the next instant, he runs to Sarah, asking

¹⁴ See chapter 2.1.

her where she got the make up from since he recognises it as Elise's (who was killed before by Sarah). Conrad pushes Sarah against a bus wreck questioning her about Elise's whereabouts. After he angrily insults her saying that she was full of shit (a vulgarism indicating that Conrad grasps Sarah as being abject, as comprising abjection), she suddenly kisses him on the neck. Conrad is startled, lets go of Sarah, and touches his neck as if to make sure that this has really happened while Sarah can run away. With Elise's purse in his hand he stumbles through the desert, over and over touching his neck as if he had been infected with a disease. Evidently he knows that what Sarah has done to him was wrong, against the rules, and feels repelled, which as in the sequence dealing with Sarah's first period drives him even more to his girlfriend Elise¹⁵. Sarah's behaviour confronts him with abjection and therefore submission to maternal authority, which he seeks to compensate by concentrating on his girlfriend who is rather only (fetish) object than subject or abject.

In *Teeth* the circumstances are fairly different. Here it is the female protagonist's aggressively disturbed stepbrother Brad who desires an incestuous sexual relationship. After Brad has caused the mother's death by refusing to help her when she suffers from a collapse, Dawn decides to take vengeance by seducing her brother and employing her toothed vagina. Standing in front of the mirror she paints her face to make her more desirable, which is accompanied by the sound of rattle snakes. The voice over functions as a reminder of the figure of Medusa whom Creed relates to the vagina dentata (*MF* 105) and thus as a warning of the menacing danger. When Dawn finally offers herself to Brad on his bed, he briefly recognises that what they are planning to do is "too fucking weird", which still does not keep him from proceeding. When he is inside her enjoying the sexual intercourse, he asks Dawn "Do you see what we've been missing?" and goes on to say "We always knew that it would play out this way eventually, didn't we?". While starting the next sentence with "Ever since we were little kids..." he touches her lips, followed by the both of them exchanging looks. She slowly opens her mouth, now representing the vagina dentata, which is followed by a flashback memory they share.

¹⁵ He does not know yet that she is dead, so he keeps looking for her until he finds her abandoned car, followed by him confronting Sarah. Unsurprisingly she tries to kill him then.

In this scene we can see Brad as a young boy holding up a bloody finger, followed by young Dawn smiling at him. At this moment they both remember that Brad had already molested his sister sexually when they were kids, and Dawn's vagina dentata had already been actively defensive then. Strictly speaking they have always remembered the incident (Brad suspiciously looks under Dawn's dress to make sure everything is "normal"), but by sharing the memory when he touches her lips he recognises what Dawn really intends to do. The toothed vagina eventually bites off Brad's penis and drops it when Dawn stands up. Whereas *Hurt* deals with the threat of abject sexuality and femininity per se, in *Teeth* it is abject female monstrosity that is employed to punish the brother for his forbidden desire. Both narratives clearly deal with abject sexuality as a threat to the male sex. In *Hurt* it is the boy's failure to indulge in an incestuous relationship that unleashes Sarah's rage even more. In *Teeth* it is the boy's desire for an incestuous relationship that is used against him. Either way, the incest taboo proves the male's undoing.



Fig. 9: Brad touching Dawn's mouth.



Fig. 10: Close-up of Dawn's face and mouth.



Fig. 11: Young Brad showing his bloody finger.



Fig. 12: Young Dawn smiling with gratification.

A further interesting aspect in this discussion is Kristeva's reference to abjection as a rite of defilement.

The various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art [...] (17).

Hence the abject is something defiled which according to the paternal law has to be purified, purged of filth. This cathartic process used to be induced by religion. Compared to the artistic sublimation of the uncanny, though, the abject can be purified by art as well. This is exactly what Creed considers the “ideological project of the popular horror film”.

The horror film attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) in order finally to eject the abject and re-draw the boundaries between human and non-human. As a form of modern defilement rite, the horror film attempts to separate out the symbolic order from all that threatens its stability, particularly the mother and all that her universe signifies (14).

Creed thus outlines that the abject is constructed by the **monstrous-feminine** which in turn centers around the maternal figure. Consequently, she establishes a number of horrific representative categories of the monstrous-feminine: the *archaic mother* (*Alien*), woman as *possessed monster* (*The Exorcist*), woman as *monstrous womb* (*The Brood*), woman as *vampire* (*The Hunger*), woman as *witch* (*Carrie*), the *femme castratrice* (*I spit on your grave*), and the *castrating mother* (*Psycho*).

The archaic or primeval mother is marked by her parthenogenetically caused existence, meaning that no male was needed for reproduction. She embodies sexual difference outside of the symbolic order and the masculine. This is why she is considered frightening to men. According to Creed, the archaic mother occurs in horror films (such as *Alien*) not only in the images of birth or womblike imagery¹⁶, but also the representations of the primal scene (50). Laplanche and Pontalis, who distinguish three original fantasies “claim[ing] to provide a representation of, and a solution to, the major enigmas which confront the child” (qtd. in Mayne 87), explain the primal scene as a picture of the origin of the individual, that is the moment when mother and father conceive the child. Usually it is referred to as the child’s sight of the sexual relation between mother and father which it considers a scene of violence. The primal

¹⁶ See chapter 3.3.2. in which I discussed the uncanny womb-like space.

scene exists alongside fantasies of seduction and castration, both of which would rather be associated with the Oedipal phase.

Orphan proves to be a perfect example of how horror can be constructed through the uncanny and the abject, particularly focussing on elements such as abject sexuality, the incest taboo, the Oedipal conflict, the archaic mother, and the primal scene. The story revolves around a nuclear family who after the mother's miscarriage adopt a 9-year-old girl named Esther who turns out to be pure evil attempting to destroy the family. The figure of Esther is a construction of three major breeds of female monstrosity. First of all, she evidently represents a strong castrating force, which is particularly conspicuous in relation to her elder brother Daniel. He is the only one who from the beginning rejects and does not trust the new sister. Apart from the fact that his suspiciousness is justified, he immediately feels threatened by Esther since she attracts all the attention. When he acts out his aggression by shooting a bird with a paintball gun, he is devastated, crying and regretting what he has done. Esther offers him a brick and coldly tells him to kill the bird to end its pain. Daniel says he cannot do it, which results in Esther crushing the bird. She has assumed Daniel's responsibility and at the same time appropriated and thus undermined male power. In a further crucial sequence Esther kills the nun who committed her to the care of the Coleman family and now has told them about Esther's past crimes. Incidentally Daniel gets to observe Esther and his little sister Max stepping down from the treehouse after the killing. Assuming that he has not been noticed by Esther he enjoys a good night's sleep. He wakes up, though, when he feels a Stanley knife held to his throat. Esther forces him to tell her what he saw and if he told anyone. When he swears he had only seen them leaving the treehouse Esther shifts the knife from the neck to his private parts, saying: "If I find out that you're lying, I'll cut your hairless little prick off before you even figure out what it's for". This utterance does not only function as an obvious literal castration threat. The fact that he subsequently wets his pants shows that he has already been emasculated which is even more stressed when Esther makes him aware of his mishap. Her power lies in the fact that she systematically terrifies, threatens, and humiliates him. She takes advantage of his weakest spots and moments (regret after killing the bird; feeling unobserved and safe while sleeping) in order to most expressively demonstrate her

ruthlessness and cruelty. These are the moments she clearly upholds a dominating position.

Basically, domination is also a significant element in relation to the remaining two kinds of monstrosity Esther represents. The mother's penis envy might be reactivated after she has lost her baby which would have been a substitution for the phallic lack. The desire for a child now has to emerge again, which results in the couple adopting Esther who represents the substitution for the baby. However, the mother cannot manage Esther at all. Although both females try at the beginning (Esther of course only pretends), they do not get along with each other, as if the mother was punished for trying to replace the lost child and fill the phallic lack by all means. This discord, though, is based on the simple fact that Esther conceives an incestuous desire for her father. Clearly an Oedipal conflict, or as C.G. Jung has termed it an *Electra conflict* (154), is at stake here. Esther does not seem to have resolved this conflict at all. She appears to be stuck in a phase in which she is sexually attached to her father and strongly resents her mother because she is to blame for the girl's castration and furthermore a rival in the battle for the love of the father. Esther's misguided desire and inadequate behaviour finds expression in her manipulating the siblings, sabotaging the parents' relationship, and attracting the father's attention. She is clever to find ways by which she can get close to him. One night she interrupts the parents' sexual intercourse pretending that her sister Max could not sleep, followed by her saying "I wanna sleep next to daddy" and huddling up against him. In another scene she remarks that she liked it "when it's just the two of us". She even hurts herself to gain the attention of the male parent. She wants to be desired by the father, which is why "she is always on her best behaviour" with him whereas she tries anything to seclude the mother from the family. When she has finally managed to make her mother appear mentally ill so that she is committed to the hospital she arrives at the climax of her carefully planned seduction scene. However, since she cannot wait for the father to seduce her she reverses roles and takes over the reins. While he is in the living room drowning his sorrows in a bottle of wine, Esther tailors one of her children's dresses to a woman's evening gown and puts on make-up and high heels. She joins her drunk father who is confused by Esther's appearance. Sitting close to him she tells him that she loves him and kisses him on the

cheek several times, finally whispering “Let me take care of you”. The father is obviously shocked and tries to explain to her that he loves her as a daughter. However, Esther reacts by playing out the poor-child-card coupled with a solidarising attitude pretending she is the only one who understands what he is feeling. Eventually she attempts to soothe and seduce him by saying that he is “a good father...and a handsome man”. Now John has fully figured out Esther’s intentions, jumps up and tells her to go to her room. Esther has not succeeded in executing her plan. By over and over tearing apart the family to finally get to seduce the father she wanted to take the place of the mother. To be exact she was planning to become a substitute for the mother, the woman who was loved, desired, and finally seduced by *him*. Her longing to be the substitute and her mature dressing and acting indicates that she wants to trigger the father’s Oedipal desire by representing the figure of the Oedipal seductress.

However, female monstrosity is depicted in a third crucial way which is constructed through the figure of the archaic mother. She is introduced at the beginning of the film with images constituting Kate Coleman’s nightmare about the birth of the baby she miscarried. When she is at the hospital being driven to the delivery room in a wheelchair she suddenly starts bleeding heavily, leaving a trail of blood on the white floor of the corridor. While the doctors are trying to deliver the baby, Kate is screaming in pain and fear. Eventually the nurse shows her the kid which is barely recognisable since it is completely covered in abject blood. The nightmare about the monstrous baby forebodes the abject monstrosity Esther was going to yield. Furthermore, the archaic mother is depicted in images of the primal scene, that is when Kate and John are having sexual intercourse. However, those scenes are not a mere product of a child’s fantasy. In fact Esther is both listener and spectator. After she has witnessed her parents having sex in the kitchen, which they eventually notice, Kate decides to talk to Esther to explain to her what she was seeing. When she tells her that this was something grown-ups do when they love each other, Esther simply replies: “I know...They fuck”. Clearly the mother is shocked since the primal scene does not at all constitute an enigma for the child. Esther’s inadequate knowledge, language and maturity leave her suspicious and alarmed. Eventually, Daniel is looking for evidence against Esther in the treehouse when she joins him. She reveals the sledge she killed the nun with as

well as Max' drawings showing the murder. "It's always better to burn the evidence" is what she says before she sets the treehouse on fire. This points to the fact that her family is known to have burned in a house fire of which she was the only survivor. We can now conclude that Esther was the one who killed her previous family in order to keep her secret, namely that she suffers from a hormonal disorder causing her infantile appearance although she is a grown woman in reality. The crucial aspect, though, is that she has to kill the mother by whom she exists in order to be able to abandon her status as a child. This is the only way she can erase the evidence of her (biological or adoptive) origin and assume the role of the mother. She intends to go back to that origin and rewrite her history by taking the place of the mother. In that sense she would be regarded as a parthenogenetic human being and hence a monstrous form of the archaic mother. By destroying the Coleman family and seducing the father¹⁷ she wants to create a new family with her being the primal source of genesis. Her intention is most expressively displayed in her drawings the father eventually discovers in her room. When he pulls down the pictures showing Esther's crimes and her resentment for the rest of the family (especially the mother), a huge drawing of the primal scene is revealed underneath. It shows the parents indulging in the act of love, although we can now assume that the woman is meant to be Esther.



Fig. 13: John discovers Esther's drawing of the primal scene.

¹⁷ Since she does not succeed in becoming the father's lover, though, she finally kills him.

With regard to the archaic mother it must be remarked, though, that she is different from the pre-Oedipal mother who has already integrated in the symbolic order. This is also why she stands in marked contrast to the castrating mother who is like the pre-Oedipal mother subject to patriarchal law. The castrating mother is commonly known as the “phallic mother”, a perception Creed rejects. The phallic woman, going back to the infantile awareness of the penile mother anterior to their knowledge of castration, is always presented as related to the penis which, however, cannot be related to castration.

The penis, as such, is not an instrument of incorporation or castration but of penetration. In representations of the penis as an instrument of violence, it doesn't threaten to castrate but rather to penetrate and split open, explode, tear apart. It is the mythical *vagina dentata* which threatens to devour, to castrate via incorporation (157).

In chapter 3.3.2., I have already discussed the *vagina dentata* in relation to the uncanny and the sight of the female genitals. However, in terms of the monstrous-feminine Creed stresses the significance of the woman as castrator, meaning that she is not only uncanny but to a greater degree abject. The primary texts for Creed's analysis of the castrating woman and mother were *I spit on your grave* and *Psycho*, the first of which can be considered a rape-revenge film.

Cherry Falls illustrates how horror can be constructed through a conglomerate of various types of the monstrous-feminine. The slasher narrative centres on a town of the same name in which a psychopath dressed up as a woman starts killing the community's virginal children. At the end the teacher Leonard turns out to be the perpetrator who took vengeance for his mother's rape and his own mistreatment. In this film, castration represents both cause and instrument of evil. Leonard's mother Lorelee Sherman is the source of perdition, which is first indicated when the town's sheriff examines her abandoned house. He walks down to the dirty cellar which is furnished with objects you would usually find in a person's room. Eventually he discovers a cradle with a straw mobile hanging over it. When he pulls away the blanket in the cradle, a baby doll with a chain around its neck is revealed. This doll represents what Derry would call an identity symbol, an icon that appears frequently in horror of personality films. He defines it as an “object that reflect[s] on the characters' identity and (in)sanity” (DD 49). Since the sheriff's discovery

is accentuated with voice over cries of a baby/young child that is being beaten he and the audience now assume that Lorelee Sherman has had a child. This child is represented by the identity symbol, implying that it was abused and probably suffered mental damage. When the distracted sheriff leaves the house an over-the-shoulder shot shows us that he is observed by a person who because of her long hair is assumed to be Lorelee. When we learn that it was in fact Leonard it becomes even more explicit that the house and particularly the cellar are a representation of his mother's womb. The teacher obviously felt the masochistic urge to go back to that place where he was still united with the mother. The same holds true for the cellar in his own house where he eventually keeps the female protagonist Jodi and her father the sheriff prisoners. This womb-like space where he is symbolically surrounded by his mother gives him comfort and makes him reveal his true face. This is where he wants to have the truth about his mother's rape uncovered and plans to take the final vengeance. Juxtaposed with his identity symbol the baby doll and moving its lips as if it was speaking he orders the sheriff to "tell us about what happened 27 years ago...when you were veeery drunk". A flashback is now used to visually accompany the father's story. He narrates that he and three friends of his were just celebrating the end of senior year when they saw Lorelee at the side of road, her car broken down. When they ask her to get into her car she refuses to do it, so they start teasing her. Angry at the boys she calls one of them a "homo". This turns out to be a big mistake since it is taken as an insult by the guys. This is when Lorelee functions as a castrating woman for the first time, unsuspectedly verbally depriving them of their masculinity and power. The boldness of imputing them with femininity related to homosexuality triggers a defense mechanism finding expression in sexual aggression. They "pour booze down her throat" and rape her one after the other. Eventually the boys grab the one now known as the sheriff who is lying on the floor almost unconsciously and throw him on top of her, supporting him in being the last to rape her. Back in the cellar, though, the sheriff confesses that he knew what he was doing. Leonard, now in full dress, tells him that Lorelee was in fact in love with him: "She never had the nerve to approach you before you raped her. And after you raped her there was no-one to tell...Except me." Another flashback now shows us little Leonard sitting in a cradle, his mother stroking him with a flicking object. That

what was assumed to have happened is now confirmed. Lorelee has turned from castrating woman to castrating mother. The sexual abuse she had to suffer and her involuntary violent submission to the boys have caused her to take out the pain and anger on her son who is punished for looking “like the one person your mother loves and hates the most”, revealing that he is in fact the sheriff’s son. Domination by a female, that is his mother, and the subsequent emasculation have caused Leonard’s insanity. His mother must be considered the cause of his ill nature. By killing the town’s and particularly the rapists’ children he wants to point to and punish the abject crime he refers to when speaking of “a stinking hypocritical world [...] where rapists become the pillars of the community”.

It is interesting, though, that he inverts the traditional slasher convention by slaughtering virgins instead of sexually active teenagers. Usually the psychosexually disturbed killer destroys all that which signifies the sexual activity he is denied and moreover the forbidden sexual activity of the females. In contrast to that tradition Leonard selects his victims in order to destroy everything that is pure and innocent about them. This naïve purity made Lorelee seem weak and defenseless in the eyes of the boys, which basically made her the perfect rape victim. However, at the same time the virginal children function as replacements for Leonard’s mother, whom he wants to punish for his own mistreatment. He re-enacts the mother’s rape by penetrating the kids with his crescent, the only moments in which he *seems* to employ male power.

However, the crucial element I have not discussed yet is his masquerade. In the traditional slasher hoods, capes, and masks are employed to cover what hides underneath and to create a new identity. In these slashers we usually do not get to see the real person underneath. In contemporary slashers, though, the psychopath’s primary masquerade is normality. The evil hides behind the mask of an average appearance, white heterosexuality, and an average profession. The white heterosexual teacher Leonard is a prime example of such a masquerade. The interesting aspect, though, is that his obvious masquerade is that of a woman, or strictly speaking his mother. In contrast to the traditional slasher in which the killer compensates his unstable gender identity by using the phallic weapon, Leonard’s principal instrument of power is femininity. Only by appropriating feminine looks he is granted the

power he is denied as a man. Due to his psychosexual disturbance he would not be able to conquer males as a male. The castrating monstrous-feminine eventually empowers him to use the phallic crescent to kill his victims. Although castration and penetration function in combination, it is still the former which is far more seized and emphasised. Leonard feels can only deprive his victims of their power by playing the role of a female. This is expressively displayed in the scene where he kills his first girl victim. Instead of immediately slashing her, he pushes her against a tree, rubs his body against hers, and touches her lips, intending to eroticise the moment and appeal with his feminine looks. By all means, this confusion of castration and penetration only points to the fact that the monster's power and hence his/her danger lies in his/her failure to adopt one specific gender identity and the willing decision to unleash this gender-confused monstrosity upon the town of Cherry Falls.



Fig. 14: Leonard moves the lips of his identity symbol, the baby doll.



Fig. 15: Femininity and masculinity merge when the killer grinds the phallic weapon with red polished fingernail.

Apart from the monstrous-feminine I would like to set up another category of the abject closely related to the previous investigation, which I shall call the **self/Other border**. In relation to the uncanny I have discussed the self/Other blur, but what is at stake now is the border itself that if it is crossed disrupts the distinction between self and Other. With regard to the (female) body around which abjection occurs, it is skin which can represent the border the abject has no respect for.

The body's inside [...] shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's "own and clean self" (Kristeva 53).

Skin's significance in relation to the horror film is more than obvious. Skin separates the human beings and their bodies from the outside world. It protects us from that which constantly threatens us from outside. Horror film monsters, though, do not cease to cross the border, break the skin and infect us with otherness and death. Psychotic killers slash teenagers with their knives, chain-saws and hooks, vampires and werewolves permeate the human with their fangs. Clearly, this process also works the other way round. The monster within is also protected by skin. It can even function as masquerade for those who might threaten it. The monster hides underneath human skin in order to purport to be normal, not different from the others, not dangerous. When the skin breaks, the monstrosity inside comes to light. This happens particularly with transformative monsters where skin itself becomes the primary site of transformation, the abject territory (Ancuta 159). As part of a ritualistic celebration on the night of Halloween, a bunch of initially seemingly normal women in *Trick 'r Treat* suddenly start transforming into werewolves, ripping their own skin open and apart, revealing their true lupine aspect. Skin and their attractive feminine appearance is not only masquerade for the inhuman underneath, but also for the inadequate gender role they assume. As Halberstam remarks,

improperly or inadequately gendered bodies represent the limits of the human and they present a monstrous arrangement of skin, flesh, social mores, pleasures, dangers, and wounds (141).

Nevertheless, the werewolves in *Trick 'r Treat* constitute a case quite different from what Halberstam refers to. In fact, she bears on the construction of what Clover used to call the "final girl" (35), the female protagonist survivor of slasher and splatter movies who is presented as boyish and therefore facilitates identification for the male spectator. The final *girl's* body, such as Laurie's of *Halloween*, is improperly gendered masculine as Clover would argue. In contrast to the adequately gendered feminine girls who are destined to be slashed one after the other, extraverted masculinity is what eventually saves the final girl's life. The film usually ends with her assuming a phallic weapon (often the killer's) and killing the perpetrator with it. She places herself on the same level of the killer (assuming he is gendered masculine at least due to his phallic weapon) and beats him at his own game. The she-wolves' appearance,

however, implies a perfectly adequate gendered female. But yet that which lies under their skin is far from passive and weak femininity. The monstrous has always been under the skin and does not have to be equipped with a phallic weapon. Whereas the final girl masculinises herself with her looks and the phallic symbols with which she can *penetrate*, the werewolves have monstrosity introverted, being themselves the weapons that devour and *castrate*¹⁸. In her analysis of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, Halberstam elaborates the concept of the final girl since she criticises that according to Clover only gazes of identification could shift, but that there was still a maintenance of female victims and male monsters. According to Halberstam, though,

[t]he technology of monsters when channeled through a dangerous woman with a chain saw becomes a powerful and queer strategy for enabling and activating monstrosity as opposed to stamping it out (143).

She thus emphasises on the one hand the significance of the woman as monster and on the other hand the queerness accompanied by this monstrosity. There are no longer stable categories such as masculine and feminine. Boundaries separating gendered classes are blurred. “Gender splatters” over the border, becomes abject and forces the emergence of a new species of the monstrous-feminine.

3.5. The Gaze of Identification

Hitherto I have primarily been concerned with sexual difference in the horror genre in relation to repression and most notably the uncanny and the abject. There is another psychoanalytical area, though, which has focussed to a considerable extent on issues of gender-specific reception and pleasure regarding the horror film. Within this branch, discussions revolve around a Lacanian concept termed “the gaze”, which denotes “something that the subject (or spectator) encounters in the object (or the film itself)” (McGowan 5). In other words, there is talk of the spectator’s look at the images and characters on the screen combined with processes of identification which are crucial to

¹⁸ I am well aware that I am comparing an actual human “victim” to a supernatural monster. However, it is the significance of skin as harbinger of monstrosity or pretence of normality that is in the centre.

spectatorship studies. In order to fully understand the significance of the gaze, it is inevitable to briefly explain what Lacan has called the “mirror stage”. Lacan claimed that when the child sees its reflection in the mirror for the first time, it perceives it as being part of itself. Only by and by does the child realise that the image exists separate from the self. Hence the reflection does not only represent self but also Other. The problematic aspect arises from the child’s wish to go back to the state when there was only a unified self¹⁹. The Other thus creates a lack which produces in the subject the desire to be filled.

The filling of this void in turn can be accomplished by the cinematic gaze, or in other words by the images of the Other on the screen (Cherry 131). In the spectator’s view those Others are whole, unified, unfragmented, ideal. The spectator’s desire for an idealised self is therefore projected onto that Other. However, not all Others are created equal. The real question is with whom a male spectator would identify, and what the woman’s preferred object/subject (or abject) of identification could be. In fact, there is an abundance of widely differing theories of viewer identification with regard to gender, few of which I shall present. An interesting fact, though, is that many of them including some feminist ones focus on the male spectator or define scopophilic pleasure, that is the pleasure derived from looking, from a male-centric point of view. One of the most influential feminist essays on the gaze is Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”²⁰. Drawing on the Freudian idea that woman represents for the man the threat of castration, she proposes the following.

The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object [...]; or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous [...]. This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The first avenue, voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness (840).

¹⁹ This certainly sounds familiar in the context of the abject and the subject’s desire to go back to a time when it was still one with the mother.

²⁰ First published in the magazine *Screen* in 1975.

This theory can perfectly be applied to the slasher movie on which most scholars focus since this subgenre primarily provides a narrative involving a bunch of sexually active and sultry teenage girls who are killed by a psychosexually disturbed (and at least in the classic slasher frequently male) psychopath. Regardless of whether the male spectator voyeuristically identifies with a male character or fetishises the attractive females, the look remains with the man. As Rodowick appropriately resumes, “it is fundamentally a source of control or mastery and as a product of patriarchal society it is fundamentally masculine” (11), which is why it is called the *male gaze*. This sadistic tendency on the part of the male is equally well reflected in Edgar Allan Poe’s famous statement saying that “the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (qtd. in Bronfen 59).

However, the voyeuristic gaze offers the male spectator two possibilities of identifying with the male character. According to Mulvey, he would most likely identify with the male hero who saves his female companions. The problematic aspect arising from this theory is that the slasher film usually features a final *girl* saving the remaining survivors and destroying the killer, not a final *boy*. Roger Ebert provides a possible solution to this problem, introducing the significance of the point-of-view shot which is commonly used in the slasher to objectify the female victims-to-be. “The more these movies make their killers into shadowy non-characters, the more the audience is directed to stand in the shoes of the killer” (56). Hence the male spectator does not identify with the saviour, but the punisher. This theory is fairly restricted, though, since a slasher film might not consist of a series of point-of-view shots and the voyeur represented by the look of the camera might not be the actual killer or not specifically male at all. Fully accepting Ebert’s argument inevitably leads to the conclusion that the male spectator would “identify with absence rather than with a female character” (Cherry 133). This is where Clover provides an interesting hypothesis based on cross-gender identification. Although she acknowledges man’s tendency towards sadism, she argues that the male spectator is not necessarily tied to an identification with a male character.

[T]he striking tendency of modern horror to collapse the figure of the savior-hero (formerly male) into the figure of the victim (eternally female) leaves us with an arrangement whereby a largely male audience is in the hands of a female protagonist – an arrangement that self-evidently exposes the ability of male viewers to identify across sexual lines (227).

In this context, Clover particularly stresses the significance of male masochism. The final girl thus becomes the perfect figure for identification. She is usually presented as boyish which facilitates identification in the first place. However, she also offers the male spectator the chance to identify with her initial status as a terrorised victim, cathartically acting out male masochistic fantasies associated with the feminine. Eventually they can identify with her power and strength when she in sadistic and masculine-marked tradition kills the perpetrator with the phallic knife. Hence identification for the male spectator oscillates between sadism and masochism. Linda Williams finally articulates what Clover's model adds up to, namely that "horror films' appeal to the emerging sexual identities of its (frequently adolescent) spectators would be sadomasochistic" (*FB* 150). She notes that this form of sadomasochism is accompanied by the combination of (male) activity and (female) passivity unified in the male spectator, which is most expressively constructed in what Clover calls the "active investigating gaze". Whereas it was previously the killer who was the bearer of the gaze, observing his future victims without them noticing him, it is eventually the final girl who upturns the look, "making a spectacle of the killer and a spectator of herself" (Clover 60).

However, Williams appropriately recognises that the final girl is never presented as a fully active subject in relation to pleasure as defined in a masculine context. The final girl is indeed in an active position after having appropriated phallic power, but this power is only granted in combination with the denial of phallic pleasure (151). Whereas the sexually active girls are killed one after the other, the final girl is usually the only virtuous one. Abstaining from sexual intercourse guarantees her survival. Since this narrative convention has long been treated axiomatically, two problematic aspects with regard to contemporary horror cinema must be pointed out. First, the slasher tradition is turned upside down in *Cherry Falls* due to the fact that the killer's victims are in fact those who have not had sex yet²¹. Maintenance of virtue leads to sure death. Second, and more importantly, the final girl does not necessarily have to be presented as virtuous, boyish, or a mere victim who strikes back in the end. The characters of Sidney of *Scream* and Julie of *I Know What You Did Last*

²¹ Also see Cherry, page 27.

Summer both are constructed in relation to their boyfriends with whom they are sexually related. In the more recent slasher *The Hitcher*, Sophia is presented as an attractive alluring young woman. Apart from the eye-catching feminine aspect of Mandy in *Mandy Lane*, she is also believed to be a victim rather than the actual villain she turns out to be. The classic final girl facilitates identification because of her bisexual components. However, it could be concluded then that the new final girl as frequently constructed in contemporary horror films significantly complicates identification for the male. In fact, this implies either a return to an identification with the male protagonists, either the boyfriend, a possible hero, perhaps the killer, or an increase of fetishistic scopophilia due to the large number of femininely appearing females. The significance of male masochism would thus plummet drastically, sadism and voyeurism would again be the major scopophilic factors.

At this point, though, I consider it necessary to take a closer look at the meaning and origin of the opposing terms sadism and masochism, the former of which is regarded as masculine- and the latter as feminine-identified. To put it another way, the male spectator is supposed to be the sadistic bearer of the look whereas the female spectator is supposed to identify with the object of the gaze presumed to be the female victims. Gaylyn Studlar, however, counters this argument with her model of masochism. First of all, she clarifies that masochism is a form of perversion rooted in a pain/pleasure desire. Subsequently, she makes a crucial distinction between masochism and sadism with regard to their origins. Whereas she ascribes sadism to the Oedipal stage and patriarchal structures, she positions the emergence of masochism in the pre-Oedipal stage. Sadism would thus be embedded in the symbolic order where it is ruled by the law of the father and the desire to dominate. Masochism, on the other hand, has its origin in a time when the child has not yet undergone the castration complex and become aware of sexual difference. Masochism is based on the longing for a restoration of the bond with the mother. It is unlike sadism not defined by domination but fusion.

Overriding the demands of the incest taboo, the castration complex, and progress into genital sexuality, masochism is a "subversive" desire that affirms the compelling power of the pre-Oedipal mother as a stronger attraction than the "normalizing" force of the father who threatens the alliance of mother and child (609).

Hence Studlar claims the spectator can indeed neglect identificatory gender conventions as instructed in the symbolic order due to his desire to submit to maternal authority. Identification of a male spectator with a female character is therefore absolutely possible if not more likely than a sadistic identificatory position. A remarkable parallel that can no longer be denied must be drawn to the notion of abjection, which is likewise concerned with the pre-Oedipal and maternal authority. Putting oneself in a state of abjection is both repulsive and desirable. Drawing on Studlar's model, then, it can be concluded that abjection is experienced via masochism and can be cathartically experienced via identification with the victim. Stewart, who in this context drew the same conclusion (38), provides a most appropriate Kristevan explanation for clarification.

It follows that *jouissance* alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully. [...] One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones (Kristeva 9).

Submission and surrender to domination accompanying masochism can only be regarded as pleasurable by the male spectator when experienced outside of the paternal law in an abject situation where there are no borders and rules. Desire is felt within the symbolic order, *jouissance* is experienced within the maternal authority. The significant factor here is that both desire and *jouissance* are related to the experience of pleasure. However, following what I have previously discussed, one conclusion can be drawn: Pleasure in sadism is related to the Oedipal involving the castration complex and incestual taboos, which is in turn constructed by the uncanny. Pleasure in masochism, though, is related to the pre-Oedipal and maternal authority, which is visually digested in the form of the abject.

3.6. Gratifications of the Female Spectator

The reader might well have noticed that within the psychoanalytical area I have so far concentrated primarily on how the *male* spectator can take pleasure in watching horror films. I have discussed the role of repression in the construction of the monstrous in the cinematic narrative. I have presented male-

centric theories of the Other based on the traditional gender binary. I have explored the horrific power of the uncanny due to its being rooted above all in castration anxieties represented by the female figure and features. I have investigated the concept of the abject constructed by the monstrous-feminine. Eventually, I have offered some of the most influential theories of viewer identification with regard to horror cinema. However, throughout the previous chapters I have completely neglected the role of the female spectator. Although horror is considered a genre preferred by male spectators, it must not be denied that there is a female audience as well. In the chapter dealing with psychological theories I have already presented some of the reasons why a female spectator might enjoy watching horror films. Within the field of psychoanalysis it gets fairly difficult, though. Most theories about male spectatorship are based on the effects of castration anxiety, which cannot affect women at all. One problematic aspect arises from the origins of the abject, though. As I have discussed earlier, abjection is located in the realm of the pre-Oedipal before sexual difference and the symbolic gain relevance. Superficially speaking, this would imply that both men and women could equally be attracted to and disgusted by the abject. However, separation from the mother and the subsequent desire to go back to that unified state and fill the lack is likely to be experienced in different ways by a male or a female child. In the attempt to break away from the mother and eventually form a sexual self, the boy might be more likely to desire separation, whereas the girl abjects herself by separating from the mother. Mary Ann Doane thus argues that the female spectator's anxiety derives from the abject, constructing the counterpart of castration anxiety, that is separation anxiety (qtd. in Rodowick 29)²². The argument Doane puts forward is fairly complex. Furthermore, as far as my research has taken me I could not find sufficient investigations on the abject with regard to gender-specific differences in its reception. This is why I shall shift the discussion about pleasures of the female spectator to a quite distinct level, which is that of representation.

According to Mulvey, the man is the "bearer of the look" whereas the woman connotes "to-be-looked-at-ness", meaning that she is reduced to an image in the film and cannot appropriate a look for herself (837). Doane argues

²² For further information see *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* by Mary Ann Doane.

that “[t]he woman’s exercise of an active investigating gaze can only be simultaneous with her own victimization” (qtd. in Williams *WW* 61). Following that, Williams, who equates seeing with desiring, claims that the woman is most likely to refuse to look since she is “asked to bear witness to her own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation and murder” (61). The female spectator would thus reject a complete masochistic identification with the victim. However, I have already noted that masochism is a combination of pain and pleasure, meaning that it can certainly be gratifying. This holds true for the female spectator in particular since woman is traditionally more closely associated with masochism than man. As Massé puts it, “the need to look [...] signifies not only the spectator’s desire to possess power over others, but also power over his/her own suffering” (qtd. in Ancuta 100). Masochism is therefore not only a form of submission, but also a conscious decision to take control over the pain one is going to experience. In line with that argument Benjamin states that “in order to understand submission we need to see it also as a desire to be dominated” (52). This form of masochistic identification, though, is merely restricted to the (female) victim. In fact, there is a second way in which women can identify with a horror film’s character and take pleasure in it.

Williams argues that “the monster’s power is one of sexual difference from the normal male” (63), a feature it shares with the woman. By gazing at the monster and exchanging looks with it, an affinity between monster and woman is recognised, acknowledging their “similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing” (62). Women are therefore likely to identify with the Other in the narrative since they themselves are othered. This means that they identify not only with the victimised Other, but also with the powerful monstrous Other. This leads me to the third and most significant form of identification for the female spectator. In her account on the monstrous-feminine, Creed argues that “[t]he presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity” (*MF* 7). I do not deny that the monstrous-feminine plays an important role in terms of the representation of male anxieties, but I am also convinced that its potential for a gratifying experience for the female must not be underestimated. As Isabel Cristina Pinedo has appropriately noticed, Creed focuses all too much on the male spectator and neglects the pleasures female viewers “gain from seeing

however partially or temporarily the overturning or disintegration of the symbolic order" (67). Freeland provides one single example in which Creed indirectly speculates about female gratifications in *The Exorcist*.

Regan's carnivalesque display of her body reminds us [women] quite clearly of the immense appeal of the abject. Horror emerges from the fact that woman has broken with her proper feminine role; she has "made a spectacle of herself" – put her unsocialized body on display. And to make matters worse, she has done all of this before the shocked eyes of two male clerics (qtd. in Freeland 19).

The monstrous-feminine who is separated from the symbolic order does not only represent a threat to men. The fact that it cannot be contained by patriarchal power makes it all the more appealing for women since the feminine is for once not represented as submissive and passive. This subversion empowers women to identify with a sadistic rather than a masochistic position. Snelson and Jancovich acknowledge that "female viewers were attracted to female monster movies such as *Dracula's Daughter* out of purely sadistic desire to see men terrorized on screen" (qtd. in Cherry 145). This assumption applies above all to slasher films in which the final girls eventually appropriate sadistic power, strike back, and destroy the killer. Pinedo writes that "[t]he slasher film stages a fantasy in which humiliation is transformed into unbridled female rage" (86). The female viewers enjoy that the supposed female victim subverts the positions of power and returns the killer's aggressive impulses, providing "a cathartic outlet, and in some cases even an expression of feminist feeling" (86). The crucial aspect here is whether the cathartic experience is undergone by a man or a woman. Whereas the male spectator can get rid of his *fears* by watching a horror film, the female spectator is given the opportunity to free herself from feelings of *aggression* rooted in her submission in a patriarchal culture. The problematic aspect, though, is that the final girl is traditionally coded masculine. Only through her resemblance to a male she is finally able to stand up to the killer and crush him. This supposition can no longer hold true for contemporary horror cinema. I have already noted that in films from the past decade final girls are not necessarily represented as masculine. In fact, they are often presented as self-confident, beautiful, sexy girls who do not hesitate to openly display their sexuality and still can be the survivor heroine of the movie. Female spectators might find it difficult to identify with a masculine woman in a

film, but if this woman “can be aggressive and be *really* a woman” (Pinedo 83), the character most likely has more potential for a successful identification. Particularly nowadays where the feminist and emancipatory movement is more present and effective than ever, where a great deal of women tend not to restrict their primary task in life to being a good housewife and mother and rather establish a life of their own including academic training and work, the female spectator is likely to long for identification with female characters who are likewise in control of their life and actions. Women who, however, do not have to decide for either the one or the other. Women who do not pass on a partner and children in order to get an education and a good job, but who choose a combination of those.

In this context it is worth introducing a recent study conducted by Katy Gilpatric on violent female action characters (VFACs) in contemporary American cinema. Her research was supposed to show if VFACs constituted empowering images for women, or if they reinforced traditional gender roles. Her study relies on typical gender traits, of which the masculine stereotypes include *dominant, aggressive, competitive, independent, ambitious, self-confident, adventurous, and decisive*, whereas the feminine stereotypes comprise *affectionate, submissive, emotional, sympathetic, talkative, and gentle*. So far I myself have distinguished masculinity and femininity by attributing the labels active and passive to them. In terms of women I have also concentrated on the appearance and clothing. However, I find it difficult to stick to the labels Gilpatric used, particularly because I have just argued that many women in contemporary society tend not to stick to their traditional role. Ambitiousness need not exclude affection. Self-confidence does not mean that submissive behaviour is impossible, although I admit that a generally submissive person might not be consistent with self-confidence. However, the real problem I see with regard to the study is that Gilpatric seems to indirectly criticise her findings, or rather her interpretation of her results. The study shows that 58.6% of VFACs were presented in a submissive role to the male hero, and 42% were romantically related to him. She then concludes the following:

This research provides evidence that the majority of female action characters shown in American cinema are not empowering images, they do not draw upon their femininity as a source of power, and they are not a kind of “post woman” operating outside the boundaries of gender restrictions. Instead, they operate inside socially constructed gender

norms, rely on the strength and guidance of a dominant male action character, and end up re-articulating gender stereotypes²³.

Apart from the fact that I consider it dangerous to claim to have “evidence”, I find it interesting that Gilpatric completely disavows any possible empowering effect VFACs might have. The most problematic aspect, though, arises from her proposition that those women do not rely on their femininity as their primary source of power. Unfortunately she never explains how she expects women to achieve that. Aggressivity is clearly a necessary feature of a *violent* female action character. It appears as if Gilpatric based her assertion on what she calls the gendered motives for violence which had to be specific to a single scene (meaning that issues such as jealousy or revenge arising from the plot were not included). The motive was coded feminine if the VFAC engaged in violence for the sake of protecting a child or a loved one. It must be concluded that only in such cases the woman could be considered powerful and feminine at the same time. However, the study showed that this motive was least represented. Of course I am aware that Gilpatric’s study focusses on the action film whereas this thesis concentrates on the horror film. It is evident, though, that action and horror heroines rarely differ from each other decisively²⁴, especially regarding those who are purely human without having any superpowers or chimeric features. Notwithstanding that, and in particular with regard to female horror protagonists who possess an unrealistic property (werewolf, vampire, vagina dentata), I feel constrained to argue for a redefinition of violence-related femininity. Instead of regarding violent female power as being rooted in the wish to protect a beloved person, the contemporary horror heroine (or villainess) tends to display a kind of monstrosity whose power lies in the fact that it is a conglomerate of traditional masculine and feminine features selected to create a new stronger femininity. Acceptance of masculine features and turning them into a new kind of feminine is the key process, resulting in voluptuous activity that is neither *solely* uncovered to satisfy a male’s desires nor eventually sadistically punished. This femininity can be equated with a narcissistic monstrosity aiming at the satisfaction of the female’s own needs and desires without stubbornly picking one gendered side and acting within a

²³ No page numbers are given.

²⁴ *Alien* f.i. served as a primary text for Gilpatric’s study. This film is a typical blend of science-fiction, action-thriller, and horror.

prefabricated frame. In this context, an expressive example is given by Andrea Kuhn in her analysis of *Candyman*. She argues that its power to fascinate female spectators lies in the fact that the (attractive, married and professionally successful) heroine is finally embracing her monstrosity.

The woman establishes herself as subject by using the Candyman, now object of her desire, to rewrite the story and to make herself hero. In this case, her association with the world of the archaic mother, whose source she certainly seems to be, does not simply result in her punishment, but rather helps us to see through the patriarchal construct of the female martyr who discovers the power and lure of a femininity unleashed from Oedipal restraints that scares all the Trevors to death.

The woman is no longer a mere object of the man's or the monster's desire, but makes herself a subject capable of objectifying and submitting others. However, in *Candyman* Helen, the female protagonist, is fully feminine only so long as she becomes the Candyman's successor. When she is accidentally summoned by her adulterous husband, she appears in a ghostlike nightgown with her head bald and burned. She is not exactly a woman any more, but in fact a gender-confused monstrous being. On the other hand, though, she makes her husband's killing resemble an act of sexual gratification, moaning, tilting her head back, closing her eyes in ecstasy. This indicates that there is still pure femininity in her, also manifested in her very feminine make-up with the mascaraed eyelashes and the red lipstick. *She* desirously objectifies and seduces *him* (Trevor) just like *Candyman* previously seduced *her*. Her power, though, is only granted as a supernatural monster. In contemporary horror cinema women more often appear to be really feminine and still prove to be strong and capable. A marginal case, though, is represented in the final scene of *The Hitcher* when Grace takes vengeance for her own previous terrorisation and her boyfriend's murder. At the last crime scene she declares that she is done running and decides to finally stop John Ryder, the hitch-hiking killer. When he wants to walk away, she grabs a gun, follows him and shoots him several times. Eventually he is kneeling in front of her. On the surface he is now the subjected one, she is the subject in power. This is when they exchange looks expressing the power relations that are still not inverted. John can see the contemptuous and hateful, but also painful look on Grace's face. The pain she cannot hide is what in fact makes him smile at her with content. Complacently he says to her: "Feels good, doesn't it?" However, the power only seems to be

be fully hers when she answers “I don’t feel a thing.” With this declaration she places herself on the same level as John. This cruelty and heartlessness in her voice finally provokes a look of surprise, failure to success and fear on John’s face before she shoots him in the head. This is the only moment when she has full power over him, which is merely achieved by her pretending indifference just like he is indifferent. In order to really subject him she has to partially give up her position as female victim and assimilate to the male perpetrator. Clearly she is an attractive woman finally destroying the male killer, but still she is denied a fully feminine subject position in the end.

Real monstrous femininity is well represented by the character of Dawn in *Teeth*. As opposed to several girls and women who need to appropriate penetrating (or phallic) weapons such as guns, knives, or hooks to destroy the killer, her fatal weapon is part of herself and her body. Dawn is a coy, celibate and Catholic girl who has decided to wait for having sex until she is married. When she meets a nice boy whom she likes, she start to feel her uprising sexuality. While masturbating, she fantasises about the wedding night with the boy, which is suddenly interrupted by the vision of a monster’s large mouth equipped with long sharp teeth. Dawn is frightened, asking herself what’s wrong with her. When she spends an amusing day with the boy in a laguna and finally ends up with him making up in a cave, he gets overaroused and tries to rape her after she has turned him down. This is when the vagina dentata is first employed. It bites off the boy’s penis which leaves both teenagers screaming and terrified. In the course of the narrative, Dawn is over and over taken advantage of sexually. The crucial aspect, though, is how she handles that. Whereas she is extremely afraid of herself and her castrating sexuality in the beginning, she more and more accepts her monstrous feature as the movie goes on and finally uses it to punish the men who try to wrong her. She employs her external femininity (appearance) to attract men and her internal femininity (genitals) to destroy them. Whereas she previously makes herself the object of desire that reinforces the man’s masculinity, she later makes use of her biologically most feminine body part to literally castrate and emasculate the man. Dawn traps men with her masquerade femininity (her apparent feminine looks) and finishes them with her innate femininity, the real monstrous

femininity²⁵. Both examples mentioned clearly point out that a necessary distinction between the phallic woman²⁶ and the castrating woman has to be drawn. Evidently both perform an empowering function with regard to female identificatory processes. The phallic woman, though, has to appropriate masculine power to destroy the male. Her power lies in the fact that she turns the tables and shows the man how it feels to be dominated by the phallus. However, the phallic woman might also symbolise the male's desire for the disruption of the patriarchal order. Those women whose only chance of killing the evil is to appropriate the phallic weapon show that the phallus is primarily used as an instrument of destruction, pointing to the fact that the patriarchal system suffers from a lack of efficiency in terms of desired moral values of a contemporary society. In 1992 Jancovich already appropriately detected that

[t]he absence of positive male heroes is related to the wider loss of faith in the structures of American society. The slasher subgenre uncovers feelings of vulnerability within contemporary society; [...] they also present traditional forms of authority as either the cause of the problem, or, at the very best, ineffectual in providing a solution (qtd. in Fehrmann 56).

As opposed to the phallic woman who is constructed in relation to male power, the castrating woman seems far more progressive. She is granted a form of power she in fact harbours within herself. Female power is here constructed as completely independent from the male. In this context one particularly interesting theory gains major relevance. Susan Lurie challenges the Freudian castration complex theory by claiming that the woman's power lies in the fact that she is *not* castrated²⁷. Hence, according to Hollinger, her threat lies in the "potency of nonphallic sexuality" (300). Sexual difference is thus not that which weakens but empowers her. It can be concluded that the appealing factor of female strength and power can be constructed through both the phallic and the castrating woman, although the latter is more genuine since her power resides in her femininity, giving rise to the final triumph of feminine monstrosity.

²⁵ Compare Stamp Lindsey's analysis of *Carrie* in her essay "Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty".

²⁶ Phallic woman here denotes a woman who has appropriated phallic power, f.i. by means of a weapon.

²⁷ For further information see her essay "Pornography and the Dread of Women" in *Take Back the Night* by Laura Lederer.

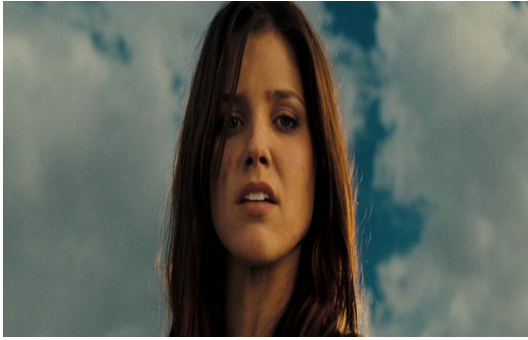


Fig. 16: Grace pretending to feel nothing before shooting the hitcher.



Fig. 17: Grace in emotional pain after killing John Ryder.



Fig. 18: Dawn trying to figure out how to escape from the old lustful man's car.



Fig. 19: Dawn after deciding to unleash the vagina dentata to punish the man.

The woman as the object of desire is a significant aspect not only when it comes to fetishisation on the part of the male spectator. Its construction can likewise have a positive gratifying effect on the female spectator. A recent study conducted by Cherry has shown that women not only appeared to enjoy strong and capable characters, but that their fascination with monstrosity was mainly rooted in the relationships developing between the characters (*RR* 172). This is why a number of women prefer vampire movies to other types of horror. In most vampire narratives (*Twilight*, *True Blood*, *The Vampire Diaries*), the female protagonist becomes the male vampire's object of desire who is finally seduced by him and becomes his companion. This familiar course of action gets particularly interesting when we look at what Slavoj Žižek has to say about the vampire. According to him, the vampire has no reflection because he exists outside of the symbolic order. Since it is not separated into self and Other, the Other cannot be reflected in the mirror (126). This in fact means that the vampire shares one important characteristic with the monstrous-feminine, that is their independence from the symbolic order. Thus it seems quite evident that the female spectator feels a strong affinity with the vampire. Apart from vampire

films in which women are mostly in the vampire's shadow, other contemporary horror films tend to construct the woman as object in relation to supernatural monstrosity coming from themselves, especially when they turn into vampiric, demonic, or werewolf creatures. The disease they are infected with in fact makes them look healthier and more attractive and/or makes them act out their sexuality, which is always noticed and exploited by the male characters followed by their punishment and destruction.

The post-transformative state is characteristically displayed in the scene in which the girl parades into the space of her professional domain, usually accompanied by a rocking voice over song. After Ellie of *Cursed* has been attacked by a werewolf, the formerly unnoticed woman slowly transforms into a strong, self-confident, and above all attractive female who is gazed after by the men. Wearing a colored blouse and her hair open and wavy she enters the foyer of her office where she is noticed by the porter. Ginger of *Ginger Snaps* who considers the transformation into a woman a curse suddenly is a sexually appetant teenage girl who seduces and kills one man after the other after the werewolf attack. After she seems to have fully accepted her lupine nature, she is at the zenith of her sexual self-confidence. The former baggy-clothed outsider now enters the school wearing a tight shirt and skirt. She is shown walking down the corridor in slow motion while the boys are whistling and screaming. Almost the same scene takes place after Jennifer of *Jennifer's Body* has been possessed by a demon. Whereas her school mates are dressed in black, blue and grey, she shines out with her tight pink top spotted with hearts and her pink heart-shaped earrings when she confidently walks down the corridor in slow motion.

In this film, female spectators are provided with three possible attractive identificatory positions. On the one hand, there is Jennifer, the voluptuous supermodel-like high school girl who after she has undergone a black magic ritual transforms into a lupine demonic beast who like Ginger seduces and rips apart her male classmates. However, the supernatural virus she has been infected with makes her look sick when she has not had enough human meat to eat. When her friend Needy tells her that she looks tired, Jennifer responds annoyed: "My skin is breaking out, my hair looks dull and lifeless". This utterance stresses what is metonymically considered attractive and feminine, or

not attractive and not feminine, respectively. Feeding on the boys' flesh, though, is like therapy restoring her strength and health. Acting out her monstrosity is the only way she can live and above all be a feminine woman. Monstrosity is therefore a necessary complement of femininity. Needy, on the other hand, is presented as a classic final girl. She is very smart but looks quite unappealing with her uncombed hair tied up, her unfashionable horn-rimmed glasses, and her simple unflashy clothes. Initially she seems to be dependent on Jennifer²⁸ since they have been long-time friends even provoking a sexual tension between them. This is first displayed when Needy and Jennifer are at a concert of the rock band Low Shoulder. Needy enjoys that they are holding hands, but a disappointed look appears on her face when Jennifer melts with adoration for the lead singer so that she lets go of Needy's hand. Another homoerotic moment occurs when Jennifer after her possession turns up at Needy's house. Jennifer, who is covered in blood, presses Needy against the wall, touches her body and licks her neck, enjoying her friend's fear. The climax of sexual tension is reached when some time later Needy finds Jennifer lying in her bed. Initially, Needy is angry and confused, but then Jennifer starts caressing her and we see the two kissing in close-up and finally making out. However, Needy suddenly discontinues, indicating that she still represses her homosexual drive. Only when she is eventually scratched, bitten, and thus infected by the demonic disease by Jennifer, she is not contained by repression any more and becomes fully monstrous. Not only does she now act out aggression and violence, but she also looks quite different, particularly because she does not wear glasses²⁹ and does not look terrified and insecure any more but confident and determined.

To sum it up, female spectators' identification might shift between three possible positions. First of all, there is Jennifer who represents the monstrous-feminine almost from the beginning, the boys' attractive object of desire and eventually their sadistic punisher. Second, there is Needy, the good girl and good friend who in the end becomes the heroine when she first restores the order by killing evil Jennifer and finally uses her newly-obtained supernatural

²⁸ It is certainly no coincidence that she is called "Needy".

²⁹ Wearing or not wearing glasses produces a Clark Kent/Superman effect. Glasses tend to signify insecurity and a lack of attractiveness, whereas the absence of glasses represents strength and attractiveness.

power to take vengeance for her friend by destroying the members of Low Shoulder who have caused Jennifer's possession. Third, there is an identificatory position constructed through queer sexuality. I have already remarked that women are likely to identify with the Other since they are othered themselves. According to Cherry, female spectators generally tend to identify with othered queer characters regardless of whether they are male or female, even if homo- or bisexuality is only implied (153).

However, Judith Halberstam offers an additional hypothesis with regard to queer sexuality. In one chapter of *Skin Shows* she discusses Freud's case studies of paranoia in a male and female. In chapter 3.3.2., I have already discussed that according to Freud paranoia finds expression in delusions of persecution rooted in repressed homosexuality. Halberstam criticises that Freud regards the cause of paranoia as a sort of sexual perversion, a view she repudiates and attempts to refute (112). With regard to male paranoia (or paranoid Gothic) Freud claims that due to his repressed homosexual desire the paranoiac feels persecuted by men (108). The case of female paranoia (or Gothic paranoia) is slightly more complex, though. The woman of Freud's case study reports that she felt photographed while having sexual intercourse with her lover, hearing ticks resembling those of a clock or camera, respectively. Although Freud at first cannot establish a connection to homosexuality which he considers a precondition for paranoia, a further revelation of the woman leads him to the desired conclusion when she tells him that she suspects an older woman at work of having an affair with her lover. Freud thus concludes that the woman takes the part of the mother in a primal scene fantasy, the ticking signifying not only clock and camera but above all the knocking of her clitoris and hence her desire (121-122). Although initially the invisible persecutor (the photographer) might seem to have been male, the primary persecutor and cause of the woman's paranoia (the older woman) is of the same sex. According to Freud, the female paranoiac's persecutor has to be female just like the male paranoiac's persecutor has to be male. This hypothesis can be applied to the female protagonists of *Jennifer's Body*. After Jennifer's transformation she indeed seems to persecute Needy. Several times she suddenly appears when not expected by her friend, usually followed by a homoerotic scene. In these cases Jennifer can be regarded as the explicit and real representation of

Needy's homosexual desire. In one significant sequence, though, paranoia is displayed in its classic form. The spectators are shown two alternating narratives. In one of them, Needy and her boyfriend are making love for the first time. In the other, Jennifer seduces and brutally rips apart one of her admirers. Needy suddenly sees a fictitious puddle of blood emerging on the ceiling, of which some drops seem to fall on her face, accompanied by screams in voice over (or voice off for Needy). When she turns to the right she can see one of Jennifer's victims sitting on an armchair, Jennifer lurking behind and grinning at her. The dead boy and the evil girl are only real for Needy, only her and the audience can see them. Terrified by her own paranoia she runs away. It is interesting here that Needy receives her paranoid vision while having sex with her boyfriend. The utmost intimacy of the heterosexual union causes the delusion, the moment of intended but wrong pleasure reveals Needy's real desire. The blood dripping from the ceiling and the screams can be compared to the ticking of the clock, Jennifer and the boy victim watching her signify the climax of paranoia. As Halberstam remarks, "[p]roductive fear [...] circulates through the power of the gaze but also through the power of directed listening" (127).

However, in horror films in which women frequently are destined to be victims of murder, mutilation, and rape, a female character's paranoia is not necessarily restricted to female persecutors. As we know, a great deal of psychopathic killers are male. They are not phantoms of a paranoid mind but indeed do persecute their (frequently female) victims-to-be which is usually only realised by the final girl (or final characters) who has a hard time convincing her fellow men of the imminent danger. With this in mind it is certainly true when Meyers claims that "[a] femicidal culture promotes and even demands paranoia as a necessary, even healthy strategy of self-defense" (88). In certain horror narratives, female paranoia is therefore perfectly justified and moreover the only chance the character has in order to survive. Halberstam adequately affirms that it is "the consciousness that we may be being watched, that saves the woman and allows her to look back. The women who are not worried about being watched within the horror film very often die" (126). Female paranoia therefore does in fact not necessarily imply repressed homosexuality, but it functions as a sort of proclamation for women's solidarity, or as Halberstam

argues, homosociality (135). It is a means of defense against oppression and a mark of women's uprising in a patriarchal society. It sure stresses female and feminine significance, but it cannot be considered an unquestionable proof of disavowed female homosexuality. Homosociality in general plays a significant role in contemporary horror films which feature female monstrous killers. Their female peers are usually the only ones (or part of a very small group of people) who know are aware of their friend's monstrosity. Although they know she is dangerous and murderous and therefore must be destroyed, they stick with her so long as the danger to society finally becomes unsustainable. In *Orphan*, the little stepsister of evil Esther proves to be solidary until she has nearly destroyed the family. Similarly, Needy supports Jennifer until her boyfriend is killed by her, but eventually appropriates Jennifer's supernatural monstrous powers. In *Ginger Snaps*, Brigitte is on her sister's side, trying to help her and over and over cleaning up the mess Ginger made. The climax of solidarity is reached when Ginger, now having fully transformed into a werewolf, has attacked their friend Sam. Although Brigitte is terrified, she crawls towards her sister and Sam who is sitting on the ground bleeding heavily. We can see that she is disgusted, but instead of helping Sam she dunks her hand into his blood and starts licking it off her fingers. She attempts to internalise abject monstrosity in order to bond with Ginger and prove to her that she is still on her side. However, Brigitte fails to contain the blood and eventually vomits it out.

All of the cases mentioned prove that women/girls are willing to align with female monstrosity until the threat to society or to their family gets too big. Although they look they refuse to see for the sake of the overturning of the patriarchal order. The image of the monstrous-feminine represents the woman's object of desire, a subject she partially fears and partially admires. The female as a "subject who watches as well as a subject who is watched" (Halberstam 127) offers female spectators the possibility of identifying with at least two desired positions. The combination of a woman who is considered the object of desire (whether by a male, or as in the homoerotic scenes in *Jennifer's Body* in which both girls represent each other's object of desire separated from any possible diegetic male fetishisation, or as the monstrous female in general with whom female spectators might easily identify with) and can still be a looking and acting subject is certainly a necessary and effective strategy to attract female

spectators. As Halberstam appropriately states, the power not only of feminine paranoia but rather feminist critique “lies in its ability to read lack and disfigurement productively and to exist with loss without nostalgically yearning for wholeness” (123). This adds up to one predictable conclusion phrased by Kelly McDowell:

A consideration of woman as something other than lack or the stand-in for the male possessor of the phallus allows for greater freedom to develop new subjectivities outside the limits of a phallic framework (1048).

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to answer the one substantial question revolving around the appeal of horror in a number of ways. I have shown that none of the theories and concepts presented obtains a special status that isolates it from the others. On the contrary, this thesis made evident that every single theory is to some extent related to another one. This is why an equilibrated overview is tremendously important in this discussion. Focussing on one concept would involve the risk of ignoring relevant aspects that should in fact be taken into consideration. Whereas psychological branches often fail to consider the unconscious, psychoanalysis appears to disregard significant social factors. However, to bring it down to a common denominator it can be concluded that the appeal of horror is largely contingent on how gender roles are constructed within a specific culture. Although there are a number of cultural fears shared by both men and women, the major themes processed in many horror films appear to address fears and desires that are strikingly gender-specific. Even though these fears and desires might change in the course of time, they seem to be the most stable ones rooted somewhere in our psyche, influencing our needs and deeds. I shall let Tony Magistrale cut right right to the chase of the matter and conclude this thesis with the following declaration:

[A]t its best the horror film is perhaps most like a visit to a trusted psychoanalyst. [...] [N]othing else, future horror films will continue to provide us with insights about what it means to be human (18).

Filmography

Alien. Dir. Ridley Scott. 1979.
All The Boys Love Mandy Lane. Dir. Jonathan Levine. 2006.
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Abstract

Aus dem Schauer-Genre genannt „The Gothic“, welches in der englischsprachigen Literatur weltbekannte Klassiker wie *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, oder „Der Untergang des Hauses Usher“ hervorbrachte, entwickelte sich im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts die Gattung des Horror. Diese umfasst nicht nur literarische Werke, sondern vor allem auch eine Fülle von Filmen, die in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten großen Anklang fanden und der Markt daher mit immer neuen Kreationen sowie Neuverfilmungen und Fortsetzungen versorgt wurde. In den 1970er Jahren erregte diese Gattung auch erstmals das Interesse verschiedenster akademischer Disziplinen, welche in erster Linie die Fragestellung behandelten, wieso Horror solch eine anziehende Wirkung auf so viele Zuseher ausübte. Wenig überraschend war allerdings, dass dies in eine Menge von sich unterscheidenden und manchmal widersprechenden Theorien resultierte, die basierend auf dem Spezialgebiet des jeweiligen Akademikers erklärt wurden und begründet waren. Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es jedoch, die bedeutendsten Theorien über die Anziehung des Horrorfilms, vor allem psychologische und psychoanalytische, zu präsentieren und diskutieren und mit Filmbeispielen des 21. Jahrhunderts zu veranschaulichen.

Diese Arbeit ist unterteilt in drei Sektionen. Der erste Teil soll eine Einführung in das Genre darstellen. Die Ursprünge des Horrorfilms werden kurz dargelegt, worauf verschiedene mögliche Kategorisierungen der Gattung vorgeschlagen werden. Außerdem werden diverse Theorien diskutiert, welche sowohl das Genre per se wegen seiner Gewaltdarstellungen als auch die Psychoanalyse wegen Fehlens empirischer Aussagekraft angreifen.

Der zweite Teil der Arbeit beinhaltet die Diskussion sechs verschiedener psychologischer Theorien und Konzepte, aufgrund derer man die Vorliebe für das Genre erklären kann. Hier nähere ich mich auch dem Fokus der Arbeit, nämlich der Bedeutung von geschlechtsspezifischen Unterschieden bei der Rezeption des Horrorfilms. Dennoch werde ich darauf hinweisen, dass manche dieser Theorien außer Acht lassen, welche Rolle die individuelle Beschaffenheit einer Person sowie ihre Bedürfnisse spielen.

Im Gegensatz dazu werde ich mich in der dritten Sektion, welche sich mit der Psychoanalyse beschäftigt, auf Theorien konzentrieren, die von einem idealen

undifferenzierten Zuseher ausgehen. Da das Genre allgemein als ein männliches bezeichnet wird, werde ich untersuchen, wie und warum der geschlechtliche Unterschied die Affinität des Zusehers beeinflusst. Im Zentrum steht dabei die Annahme, dass der Mensch bestimmte Ängste verdrängt, welche dann in Form des Monsters im Horrorfilm wiederkehren. Zu diesem Zweck werde ich einen Essay diskutieren, in welchem Robin Wood erklärt, wer und was in der amerikanischen Kultur unterdrückt und verdrängt wird, was untrennbar mit dem Konzept des Anderen verbunden ist. Da die Frau als ein solches Anderes bezeichnet wird, werde ich Theorien über die Ursprünge patriarchalischer Strukturen diskutieren. Die psychosexuelle Entwicklung der Geschlechter, vor allem in Hinblick auf den Oedipus Komplex und den Kastrationskomplex, spielt dabei eine signifikante Rolle. Im Anschluss werde ich die relevanten Aspekte von Sigmund's Freud's Essay „Das Unheimliche“ präsentieren, wobei ich mich sowohl auf die Manifestationen der Kastrationsängste als auch die Fälle, in welchen das Selbst und der Andere ineinander übergehen, konzentrieren werde. Neben Freud beabsichtige ich Julia Kristeva's Idee des Abjekts vorzustellen und durch Barbara Creed's elaboriertes Konzept des „monstrous-feminine“ zu ergänzen. Laut Creed kann die Bedrohung durch die Frau und die daraus resultierende Macht durch ihre Verbindung zu der mütterlichen Autorität erklärt werden, welche wiederum in Opposition zu der das Patriarchat strukturierenden väterlichen Ordnung steht. Neben Freud und Kristeva werde ich auch verschiedene Theorien über Identifikationsprozesse des männlichen Zusehers darlegen, welche sich vor allem auf die Relevanz sadistischer oder masochistischer Motivation stützen. Da die Frau als Liebhaberin des Horrorfilms aber oft außer Acht gelassen wurde und wird, möchte ich das abschließende Kapitel dem weiblichen Publikum widmen. Zu diesem Zweck werde ich untersuchen, wie das Bild der aktiven, starken, befähigten Frau im zeitgenössischen Horrorfilm einen Anziehungspunkt für die Zuseherin darstellen kann, vor allem durch die Untergrabung männlicher Autorität und das Umstürzen der patriarchalen Ordnung.

Lebenslauf

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