

**NEW FRENCH HORROR:
THE EMERGENCE OF
THE HORROR GENRE IN
CONTEMPORARY FRENCH CINEMA**

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ABSTRACT

There is a strong and well-documented tradition of French Fantastic Cinema, from Georges Méliès, the surrealists, and Jean Cocteau, to the films of Jean Rollin, Luc Besson and Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Despite this tradition, however, it has been agreed that there is no genuine Horror genre tradition. Recently, however, we have witnessed a surge of horror films produced in France, such as *Promenons-nous dans les bois* (*Deep in the Woods*, 2000), *Un Jeu d'enfants* (2001), *Maléfique* (2002), *Haute tension* (*Switchblade Romance*, 2003), *Calvaire* (*The Ordeal*, 2004), *Ils* (*Them*, 2006), *Sheitan* (*Satan*, 2006), *Frontière(s)* (*Frontier(s)*, 2007), *À l'intérieur* (*Inside*, 2007) and *Martyrs* (2008). This research project will analyse these new French horror films, all made in the last twenty years and ask about the antecedents of this new genre, what impact they have made on French cinema and their relations to other international forms (US, European, Asian, etc.). The rationale of this research thesis is to analyse this group of films all made since the early 2000s, to investigate the trends, conditions, or incentives for the horror genre to emerge during this time, and to examine the trajectory of the horror genre within French cinema, what antecedents were in place for the genre to emerge, and the influence of other national horror cinemas. To what extent does this latest generation of French filmmakers look to American horror films and American filmmakers as their inspiration? As well as critically analysing the works in the context of a cohesive genre, utilising various concepts and methodologies most associated with the genre (abjection, the uncanny, trauma theory, body horror), this thesis will examine the causes and influences on this emergence and the popular, critical, and academic reaction and impact of the genre in France and internationally.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, French cinema has developed a strong tradition of what can be termed as the fantastic, or *le cinéma fantastique*. Examples of fantasy, surrealism, science-fiction, the macabre, and the supernatural can be found throughout French cinema history, from the films of Georges Méliès, the surrealists, René Clair, and Jean Cocteau, to Jean Rollin, Luc Besson and Jean-Pierre Jeunet. One of the key exemplars of the fantastic is the horror genre, itself a category that contains many sub-genres. Despite this, writers such as Guy Austin, Ben McCann, Steven Jay Schneider, and David Kalat have all pointed out a tendency to dismiss a genuine horror tradition in French cinema and that “[s]peaking about the French Horror Film is like discussing the hole of a donut.”¹ Since 2000, however, there has been a surge in horror film production in France, mainly by young, predominantly male, first (or second) time writer-directors. This surge has been successful in terms of critical attention and audience reception both at home in France and internationally. This research will focus on horror films produced between 2000 and 2010. Within these ten years, we will see that a genuine and coherent horror genre has become established. The films focused on include: *Promenons-nous dans les bois* (*Deep in the Woods*, 2000, Lionel Delplanque), *Le Pacte des loups* (*Brotherhood of the Wolf*, 2001, Christophe Gans), *Un Jeu d’enfants* (*Children’s Play*, 2001, Laurent Tuel), *Brocéliande* (2003, Doug Headline), *Haute tension* (*High Tension / Switchblade Romance*, 2003, Alexandre Aja), *Saint Ange* (*House of Voices*, 2004, Pascal Laugier), *Les Revenants* (*They Came Back / The Returned*, 2004, Robin Campillo), *Ils* (*Them*, 2006, David Moreau, Xavier Palud), *Sheitan* (*Satan*, 2006, Kim Chapiron), *À l’intérieur* (*Inside*, 2007, Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury), *Frontière(s)* (*Frontier(s)*, 2007, Xavier Gens), *Martyrs* (2008, Pascal Laugier), *Mutants* (2009, David Morlet), *La Horde* (*The Horde*, 2009, Yanick Dahan, Benjamin Rocher), and *La Meute* (*The Pack*, 2010, Franck Richard).

To begin this chapter, we need to define the horror genre. To do so, we first need to examine the fantastique.

¹ David Kalat, ‘French Revolution: The Secret History of Gallic Horror Movies’, in *Fear Without Frontiers: Horror Cinema Across the Globe*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Godalming: FAB Press, 2003), p.265; see also, Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema: An introduction* (UK: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp.135-136; Ben McCann, ‘Horror’, in *Directory of World Cinema: France*, ed. Tim Palmer and Charlie Michael (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), p.277.

Le fantastique / The fantastic

Le fantastique has a long tradition in French literary culture with works that include other-worldly or supernatural elements. It is in the works of writers such as Jules Verne (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers / Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, 1870), Villiers de l'isle-Adam (*Contes Cruels / Cruel Tales*, 1883), Guy de Maupassant (*Le Horla*, 1887), and Gaston Leroux (*Le Fantôme de l'Opéra / The Phantom of the Opera*, 1910), which contained strange new worlds, macabre plots, murder, strange creatures, and visits from the supernatural. In describing *le fantastique*, Ken Gelder reminds us that it was “a term long used in derogatory fashion, linked to tasteless excess, irresponsibility, delusion, even mental derangement” and that it was denied as a respectable literary field because “it was seen as a throwback to premodern times, utterly sensual, without intellectual content.”² In his famous rediscovery and analysis of the literary genre, Tzvetan Todorov divides the genre of the fantastic into three distinct categories: *l'étrange* (the strange or the uncanny: “events that seem supernatural throughout a story receive a rational explanation at its end”³), *le merveilleux* (the marvellous: “presented as fantastic and [...] end with an acceptance of the supernatural”⁴) and *le fantastique* (the doubtful hesitation between the other two opposing categories). He provides this definition of the fantastique:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality--but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us [...] The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. [...] The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event⁵

² Ken Gelder, 'Introduction to Part One,' *The Horror Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.11.

³ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (NJ: Cornell University Press, 1975), p.44.

⁴ Todorov, p.52.

⁵ Todorov, p.25.

If we consider Todorov's definition, it is easy to ascertain the relevance his work has had on the analysis of the horror genre. S.S. Prawer's *Caligari's Children*, Noel Carroll's *Philosophy of Horror* and James Donald's edited collection *Fantasy and the Cinema* all include discussion on Todorov and his theories. Matt Hills, who devotes almost a whole chapter on Todorov's theories in *The Pleasures of Horror*, suggests that while the definition of *le fantastique* does not necessarily concur with the horror genre "as [it] is typically discussed by critics, audiences and industry alike", Todorov's examination of the supernatural "resonates with much that is common-sensically described as 'horror'."⁶ Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier write more broadly, claiming the term "carries with it a much larger semantic field than its approximate English equivalent, fantasy. As a label, the *fantastique* can encompass fantasy, horror, fairy tales, gothic tales, surrealism, and anything in between".⁷ They go on to say they prefer to subscribe to French writer Pierre Gripari's definition: "The fantastique is everything that is not rational."⁸

During the silent era, many filmmakers experimented with the capabilities of the new medium, discovering camera tricks and special visual effects that lent themselves to the *fantastique* and the supernatural. The pioneer was Georges Méliès, whose "*féeries* or fantasy films"⁹ demonstrate a range of camera tricks and special effects which are still used today, such as jump-cuts, split-screen, multiple exposures, and matte painting. He made 530 films between 1895 and 1913¹⁰ in various genres, including comedy, literary adaptations, "documentary, staged re-enactments of current events, erotic or 'stag' films, [and] 'trick' films,"¹¹ but he is most famous for his works of the *fantastique*. These include films that displayed clever and entertaining visual effects such as *Un homme de têtes* (*The Four Troublesome Heads*, 1898), *L'Homme-Orchestre* (*The One Man Band*, 1900), and *L'Homme à la tête en caoutchouc* (*The Man with the Rubber Head*, 1901), and his fairytales (*féeries*) such as *Cendrillon* (*Cinderella*, 1899), *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* (*Red Riding Hood*, 1901), and *Le*

⁶ Matt Hills, 'Fantastic' Horror: Hesitation ... and Shock', *The Pleasures of Horror*, (London: Continuum, 2005), p.33.

⁷ Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier, *French Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror and Pulp Fiction: A Guide to Cinema, Television, Radio, Animation, Comic Books and Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present* (US: McFarland, 2000), p.9.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Elizabeth Ezra, *Georges Méliès (French Film Directors)* (UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.3

¹⁰ IMDb, 'Georges Méliès', <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0617588/#director>.

¹¹ Ezra, *Georges Méliès*, p.15.

Royaume des fées (*The Kingdom of the Fairies*, 1903). Méliès is considered the pioneer of the science fiction film with *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*, 1902), *Le Voyage à travers l'impossible* (*The Impossible Voyage*, 1904), and *20000 lieues sous les mers* (*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, 1907). He is also credited as making the first horror film *Le manoir du diable* (*The House of the Devil*, 1896), and several films dealing with nightmares, devils, and ghosts, including *Une nuit terrible* (*A Terrible Night*, 1896), *Le cauchemar* (*A Nightmare*, 1896), *Le cabinet de Méphistophélès* (*The Devil's Laboratory*, 1897), *L'auberge ensorcelée* (*The Bewitched Inn*, 1897), and *La caverne maudite* (*The Cave of the Demons*, 1898). Despite being the pioneer of special effects, science fiction, and horror cinema, “the distinction of ‘primitive’ par excellence has always been reserved for Méliès, whose *féeries* or fantasy films have helped categorize him as an imaginative but unsophisticated pioneer of early cinema.”¹²

The *fantastique* can be found in the crime serials of Louis Feuillade (*Fantômas* [1913-1914] and *Les Vampires* [1915-16]), the films of René Clair (*Paris qui dort* [1926], *Le Fantôme du Moulin-Rouge* [1925], *Le Voyage imaginaire* [1926]), and Jean Epstein (*La Chute de la maison Usher / The Fall of the House of Usher*, [1928]). The films of the surrealists were quintessentially *fantastique* in their dreamlike qualities and absurd or disturbing visuals, including Clair’s *Entr’acte* (1924), Fernand Leger’s *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), Germain Dulac’s *La Coquille et le clergyman* (*The Seashell and the Clergyman*, 1928), Man Ray’s *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (*The Mysteries of the Chateau of Dice*, 1929), Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and *L’Âge d’Or* (1930), and Jean Cocteau’s *Le sang d’un poète* (*The Blood of a Poet*, 1930). With a preoccupation for psychoanalysis and dreams, the surrealists presented images that would continually influence the horror genre, such as the head dividing in half in *La Coquille et le clergyman*, the eye sliced open by a cut-throat razor in *Un Chien Andalou*, and mirrors as portals in *Le sang d’un poète*. By exploring psychoanalysis there are strong connections between surrealism and the horror genre, both of which examine anxieties and nightmares and present representations of the disturbing, the absurd, and the uncanny. This is something we will examine more thoroughly later in the thesis. The *fantastique* continued through the 1930s and 1940s in the form of fantasy, mythology and fairy tales such as Cocteau’s *La Belle et*

¹² Ezra, *Georges Méliès*, p.3.

la Bête (1946), *Orphée* (1950), and *Le Testament d'Orphée* (1960), Jean Delannoy's *L'Éternel retour* (1943) based on the story of Tristan and Isolde, and Clair's *La Beauté du diable* (1950) based on Faust, supernatural comedies and romance including *Les Visiteurs du soir* (1942, Marcel Carne), *La Nuit fantastique* (1942, Marcel L'Herbier), and *La Tentation de barbizon* (1946, Jean Stelli), supernatural mysteries and dramas such as *La Charrette fantôme* (1939, Julien Duvivier), *Le Baron fantôme* (1942, Serge de Poligny), *La fiancée des ténèbres* (1945, Serge de Poligny), and *Coïncidences* (1947, Serge Debecque), and science-fiction films such as *La Fin du monde* (1931, Abel Gance), *Le Monde tremblera* (1939, Richard Pottier), and *Croisières sidérales* (1942, André Zwoboda). There were also ventures into the horror genre such as *Le Golem* (1936, Duvivier), *Le Loup des malveneurs* (1942, Guillaume Radot), *Le Main du diable* (1943, Marcel Carne), *Sortilèges* (1945, Christian-Jacque), and *Histoires extraordinaires* (1949, Jean Faurez).

As we can see the fantastique has a rich history and has become a considerable part of French cinema. We will leave this overview of the fantastique at this point but in chapter one there will be a historical look at the horror genre in France, with a specific focus on body horror. Both these sections will overlap and create a chronology of the French horror genre and chapter two will start by concentrating on the 1980s to the 2000s leading to the beginning of the New French Horror genre.

Horror

To discuss the horror genre in France, it is necessary to discuss some presumptions about French cinema and genre in general. Many writers and critics have claimed that genre discourse is something that was avoided in French film studies. French film journal *Positif* considered genre as being “fundamentally un-French”, seeing it as being “characteristic of the American cinema because of its industrial base.”¹³ While genre was used to discuss American cinema in terms of categorisation, commercial marketing and ensuring that the right products were sold to the right audiences, French cinema (and European cinema in general) was discussed in artistic terms: movements, schools, auteurs. This opposition between art and entertainment or, in Bourdieu's terms, between legitimate and popular art, high and low culture, could be

¹³ *Positif* no.2, as quoted in Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema 1929-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp.203-4.

seen as the defining distinction between French and American cinema. In her book *Cinema Genre*, Raphaëlle Moine argues that this neglect of genre research has “had the effect, with regard to French cinema as portrayed by French scholars, of giving the impression that this cinema, which has as many ‘popular’ and ‘commercial’ films as it does auteur films, is nevertheless a genre-less cinema.”¹⁴ Not only are genre studies seen as discussing commercial industry rather than art, but the horror genre is generally dismissed. Horror is not just entertainment, it is a low, degraded, childish and disgusting ‘genre’ whose only particular audience must be themselves low and childish; one that does not have to think about what they are consuming and who do not have to gain any more than the thrills and visceral scares experienced during the film itself. Another aspect, which affects discussions of the horror film is, as Fredric Jameson writes, “the effacement [...] of the [...] frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture.”¹⁵

Not only are genre studies seen as discussing the commercial industry, but the horror genre is also generally disregarded or dismissed. If we take Georges Franju’s *Les Yeux sans visage* (*Eyes Without a Face*, 1959) as an example, it is now considered a classic of the horror genre. While J. Hoberman calls it “a masterpiece of poetic horror and tactful, tactile brutality”¹⁶, Michel Jean states that it was “[a] film that was, for a long time, misunderstood, but which is incontestably a work of art.”¹⁷ When the journal *CinémAction* published a special edition in 1995 listing the top fifty directors of cinéma fantastique, Franju and Jacques Tourneur were the only French directors on the list. The two films which had put him on the list were *Les Yeux sans visage* and his later film *Judex* (1963), described as “two jewels that sparkle in the pantheon of the genre, amid a French cinema rarely inclined to deal in it.”¹⁸ At the time of release, however, it was either derided or loathed by the critics. *Sight and Sound* claimed that “The British press as a whole rejected it out of hand, finding it no more than nauseating”¹⁹, and Raymond Durnat writes that the press “disagreed as to whether it was actually too horrible to bear, or whether it incompetently failed to horrify, or

¹⁴ Raphaëlle Moine, *Cinema Genre* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p.xvi.

¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p.2.

¹⁶ J. Hoberman, ‘Mad Scientist Seeks Flesh for Fantasy in French Scare Classic’, *The Village Voice*, October 28, 2003, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2003/10/28/mad-scientist-seeks-flesh-for-fantasy-in-french-scare-classic/>.

¹⁷ Michel Jean, as quoted in Catherine Wheatley, ‘Les Yeux sans visage’, *Senses of Cinema*, February, 2007, <http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/cteg/07/42/yeux-sans-visage.html>.

¹⁸ As quoted in Kate Ince, *Georges Franju*, (UK: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.47.

¹⁹ Robert Vas, ‘Eyes Without a Face (review)’, *Sight and Sound* 29, no.2, April (1960): p.92.

whether it incompetently failed in every respect except horrifying.”²⁰ The main reason *Les Yeux sans visage* left a majority of the critics cold at its Grand Guignolesque shock tactics was due to Franju’s move into full-blooded genre filmmaking. Franju himself said in an interview, “When I shot *Les Yeux sans visage*, I was told: ‘No sacrilege because of the Spanish market, no nudes because of the Italian market, no blood because of the French market and no martyred animals because of the English market.’ And I was supposed to be making a horror film!”²¹ Some writers, however, even attempted to misdirect claims that it was a horror film at all, presumably in an attempt to justify the film’s artistic merit, alluding to German Expressionism and using labels such as mystery-thriller or suspense-film instead. *Cahiers du Cinéma* suggested that *Les Yeux sans visage* was actually “a film noir masquerading as horror, since it was beyond question that no serious artist would debase himself by making a horror picture.”²² Is it possible that the assumption that French cinema does not have a horror tradition is due in some part to this kind of critical misdirection? As slippery and negotiable as genre categorisation can be anyway, could there be texts that we could be categorised as horror been sold to us as ‘mystery-thrillers’ or ‘suspense-films’ instead? There has also been a tendency to include some of the titles we are focusing on in discussions of the New French Extremism.²³ Even at this point, there seems to be a need to dismiss the out-and-out horror labelling of, say, *Martyrs*, or *Frontière(s)*, and instead include them as titles within an art-house movement. This could be seen in the same light as dismissing a horror film under the label ‘suspense-mystery-thriller masquerading as a film noir.’

Although there is an almost interminable link between le fantastique and horror, while le fantastique has become critically acceptable, the attitudes toward horror are still one of a “derogatory fashion.” As David Kalat states, “the extent that respectable French filmmakers have deigned to explore the fantastic, they have only ventured as far as science-fiction or poetic fantasies, unwilling to traffic in the lowly and

²⁰ Raymond Durnat, *Franju*, (London: Studio Vista, 1968), p.79.

²¹ Georges Franju, as quoted in Kim Newman, ‘Les Yeux sans visage’, *Film Reference*, <http://www.filmreference.com/Films-Wi-Z/Les-Yeux-Sans-Visage.html>.

²² David Kalat, ‘Eyes Without a Face: The Unreal Reality’, *The Criterion Collection*, October 18, 2004, <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/343>.

²³ See Tim Palmer, *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema* (Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 2011); Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Tanya C. Horeck and Tina Kendall, *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Alexandra West, *Films of the New French Extremity: Visceral Horror and National Identity* (US: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2016)

disreputable genre of horror itself.”²⁴ Of course, the horror genre has always had a scandalous and seedy reputation. The very nature of horror is to confront aspects of our lives and imagination that we do the utmost to avoid. The horror text is designed to appeal to emotional states we do not want to have to encounter in our everyday lives: fear, anxiety, terror, repulsion. Why does an audience want to confront Dr Génessier and his murderous assistant stealing away young girls? Why do they want to see these young girls having their faces surgically removed? Also, why do they want to see behind Christiane’s mask at what is left of her destroyed and disfigured face? As Robin Wood writes, “The true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilisation represses or oppresses.”²⁵ There have been many attempts at defining horror, from Wood’s “return of the repressed” to Noel Carroll’s assertions that the horror (or “art-horror”, a representation rather than real horror) film must have a narrative involving the disclosure and confirmation of a necessary supernatural creature/monster/threat. “It is part of such stories – contrary to our everyday beliefs in the nature of things – that such monsters exist,” Carroll writes. “And as a result, audiences’ expectations revolve around whether this existence will be confirmed in the story.”²⁶ David J. Russell shares Carroll’s views: “The basic definition of a horror film may be centred around its monster character, and the conflict arising in the fantastical and unreal monster’s relationship with normality – as represented through a pseudo-ontic space constructed through filmic realism – provided the necessary basic terms for its (filmic) existence.”²⁷

Definitions of horror vary depending on whom you read and what you watch, while genre studies are fraught with questionable and slippery guidelines and boundaries. Where does a film like *Le Pacte des loups* fit in here: a historical, adventure, love-story, monster movie with action and martial arts choreography? All these issues of definitions of sub-genres will be discussed throughout the research.

Discussing the horror genre, Brigid Cherry suggests that “rather than thinking of [horror] as a distinct, unified set of films with shared conventions”, it should be viewed more as “an overlapping and evolving set of ‘conceptual categories’ that are in

²⁴ David Kalat. ‘French Revolution: The Secret History of Gallic Horror Movies’, in Schneider, Steven, *Fear Without Frontiers: Horror Cinema Across the Globe*. Godalming: FAB Press, 2003. p.265.

²⁵ Robin Wood. ‘The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s’, in *Horror, The Film Reader*, edited by M. Jancovich (ed.), London: Routledge, 2002, p.28

²⁶ Noel Carroll, ‘Why Horror?’ in Jancovich, Mark (ed.). *Horror, The Film Reader*. London, NY: Routledge, 2002. p.34.

²⁷ David J. Russell. ‘Monster Roundup: Reintegrating the Horror Genre’, in Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. p.252.

a constant state of flux. Put more simply, horror is not one genre, but several.”²⁸ Cherry suggest it is better to examine horror “as a collection of related, but often very different, categories.” She goes on to list the various sub-genres as ‘the gothic’, ‘supernatural, occult and ghost films’, ‘psychological horror’, ‘monster movies’, ‘slasher films’, ‘body horror, splatter and gore films’, and ‘exploitation, video nasties or other explicitly violent films.’²⁹ Susan Hayward narrows the genre down to three major categories: “the ‘unnatural’ (which includes vampires, ghosts, demonology, witchcraft, body horror), psychological horror (for example *Peeping Tom*, Michael Powell, 1959; *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), and massacre movies (for example *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Tobe Hooper, 1974)”.³⁰ If we look at Hayward’s categories, we can place the majority of the New French Horror films easily into one or two categories. Almost all the films fit an established horror film model.

New French Horror

The new French horror genre is not a specifically formed movement, school, or collective effort. Unlike premeditated movements such as the *Dogme 95* movement, the new French horror genre was not conceived from a manifesto, or a cause (even the Nouvelle Vague had their anti-establishment manifesto in François Truffaut’s essay, ‘A Certain Tendency in French Cinema’³¹). It did not even have a specific group of filmmakers with a sole intention (again, the Nouvelle Vague were critics for *Cahiers du cinéma*). As Lovell suggests, one of the indicators delineating a group of films together is in terms of what they are not, or what they are against; how did the new horror films differentiate themselves from the established genres?

The title of the New French Horror was chosen to coincide with several other movements and trends in French cinema, the obvious being the French New Wave. It also evolves from one of the important movements to precede it, the new French Extremity, or New French Extremism films, which paved the way in terms of pushing the boundaries of censorship and brazenly exploring what can be shown on the screen. This alone takes us into a minefield of issues surrounding definitions: ‘new’ as

²⁸ Brigid Cherry, *Horror* (London, NY: Routledge, 2009), p.3.

²⁹ Cherry, pp.5-6.

³⁰ Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.188.

³¹ François Truffaut, ‘A Certain Tendency in French Cinema’, in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott Mackenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp.133-143.

in brand new, it has not existed before, or 'new', as in a contemporary version of something old. 'French' takes us into the territory of defining the national and into discourses on the transnational and the global. In addition, talking about 'horror' is itself a challenging issue. What some may call horror, others may call a thriller, a comedy, science fiction, psychological drama, and this, we shall discover, is one of the pitfalls of genre categorisation.

The main aims of this thesis will be to investigate the trends, conditions, or incentives for the horror genre to emerge during this time, and to examine the trajectory of the horror genre within French cinema, what antecedents were in place for the genre to emerge, and the influence of other national horror cinemas. While we can see the influences of J-horror and the Italian *giallo* in these films, the main influence is unarguably American horror cinema from the 1970s through to the so-called torture porn trend in the 2000s. This research will examine these influences on this group of filmmakers, particularly in terms of discerning how French horror films use specific American horror models. We will discuss why these filmmakers seek to emulate these models at this juncture and explore what the use of an American model has enabled the films (and their directors) to achieve.

Deciding on which films were to be considered as part of the New French Horror corpus depended on several factors. The first is if it had to be made by a first or second-time director. A film such as *Trouble Every Day* (2001) is certainly a great example of a French horror film, but director Claire Denis was already an established director who had made her name outside the genre. The second is the obvious influence of previous horror films, and the following of established horror models, codes, and conventions. *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, chosen as the first film of the new genre, was directed by a filmmaker who had just graduated from film school, and the film is unapologetic about the appropriation of the 90s postmodern American slashers and Italian giallo films.

The structure of the thesis has been laid out in terms of certain horror themes, models, and sub-genres. Each chapter will examine a specific theme drawn out of the body of films. This will allow the research to consolidate the idea that not only do the New French Horror films follow certain models and established genre tropes, but they also fit neatly into established models of horror film criticism and theory. For example, chapter one on 'Bodies' offers an examination of genres focussed specifically on physical horror such as the slasher film and the transformations and mutations of body

horror. This in turn allows the chapter to discuss specific theories which have been associated with these genres such as abjection. This will also provide an overview of the history of horror and specifically body horror and the gore film in French cinema. Chapter Two will look specifically at the emergence and beginning of the genre during the early 2000s, examining the antecedents of the genre, the critical conditions, and the influences that were instrumental in forming the genre. Chapter three on 'Trauma' examines how the horror film represents physical and psychological traumas, looking at key concepts such as repression, nightmares, and dissociation, before moving on to the broader context of horror as a barometer of national and historical traumas. This concept of collective trauma is evidenced in discussions of specific moments in horror, such as the American science-fiction horror films of the 1950s, the 'American Nightmare' horror films of the 1970s, and post-9/11 horror such as torture porn. Chapter four on Apocalypse looks at how horror builds on fears of end-of-the-world scenarios including global pandemics, alien invasions, evolutionary mutations, and the recent revival of the zombie genre. These allow examinations of the uncanny and the sublime, two concepts which have been essential elements of the horror genre, as well as models of body horror and abjection. In chapter five on 'Spaces', we can find various genre models such as the ghost story, the haunted house, home invasion, and the trope of 'the cabin in the woods', and the theoretical horror models of the uncanny and the fantastic. The chapter focuses on the use of geographical settings in the horror genre, such as forests, mountains, campsites, houses, and how these spaces create uneasy feelings of claustrophobia, paranoia, and fear.

The focus of the thesis will predominantly be from an Anglophone point-of-view, from the initial stirrings of the genre online, in blogs, fan-sites, and horror magazines, and the critical and fan-based reactions to the films. In the UK and the US, particularly, horror fans have hailed these new French horror films as the latest major international horror movement since J-Horror and the East Asian horror boom.

CHAPTER ONE: BODIES

Introduction

From body horror to the *cinéma du corps* (cinema of the body³²), emphasis on the physical body has been an important aspect of the New French Horror genre. Body Horror plays with the concepts of physical boundaries and the consequences and disturbances of extending or rupturing these boundaries: disintegration, mutation, and transformation. Body horror focuses on the breakdown of the borders between healthy and diseased, human, and non-human, inside and outside. In the case of inside/outside, the border being manipulated and distorted is the physical body itself. Žižek examines the scene from *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986) in which a man watering his lawn collapses from an apparent brain aneurysm. The camera moves down past the man's lying body and continues beneath the perfectly mown grass to reveal crawling and clambering insects writhing beneath. This, as Žižek suggests, represents the idea of the seething, disgusting chaos that writhes under the seemingly perfect surface, the glimpse beneath a constructed reality. Žižek writes that the scene demonstrates "the discordance or contrast between reality, observed from a safe distance, and the absolute proximity of the real [...] moving forward from an establishing shot of reality to a disturbing proximity which renders visible the disgusting substance of enjoyment, the crawling and twinkling of indestructible life."³³ The physical body is shaped, groomed, and moulded like a protective casing to hide the core mechanics beneath the surface: the internal slippery mass of pulsing pumping muscles, organs, bones, tendons and glistening liquids that, despite being integral for wellbeing and survival, are kept hidden. The horror genre quite blatantly examines the breakdown of this identity, forcing us to look at what lies underneath. The breakdown between inside/outside does not merely distinguish between one side and the other, the differences between each side of the boundary, but rather focuses on the construction of something else. The *cinéma du corps*, or the New French Extremism, disturbed boundaries of censorship and taste offering images of extreme violence, sexuality, and bodily fluids and functions. This chapter will focus on these themes with

³² Tim Palmer, 'Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body', *Journal of Film and Video* 58, no.3 (2006): p.23.

³³ Slavoj Žižek, 'On David Lynch', *Žižek.UK*, March 1, 2012, <http://zizek.uk/on-david-lynch/>

an emphasis on ideas of infiltration, invasion (both of the home and the body), bodily identity and ownership.

Many of the New French Horror films deal with various concepts of bodily horror, from the loss of bodily control in *Dans ma peau* (2002, Marina de Van), to the rupturing of identity in *Haute tension*. These films explore the physical body in various ways as the causal site, the ground zero of the horror genre: from the body as a physical signifier of identity and representation to the body as a functioning living border between life and death, health and sickness, and cleanliness and order versus disgust and chaos. Writer and filmmaker Philip Brophy claims that contemporary horror cinema focuses “not so much on the broad fear of death, but more precisely on the fear of one’s own body, of how one controls and relates to it.”³⁴ The main film we will focus on is *À l’intérieur* (*Inside*, 2007, Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury) for several reasons. This film not only demonstrates themes of body horror, bodily violence, and scenes of graphic physical horror, all of which display the physical body as the locus for modern horror but also exemplifies the positioning of the physical body in terms of gender and sexuality. A heavily pregnant woman (Sarah, recently widowed and grieving) is harassed and threatened by a mysterious woman (known simply as La Femme in the credits) who firstly wants to break into the heroine’s house but then wants to cut her open to steal her baby. The film plays with the conventions of the home invasion film by merging it with the concepts of bodily invasion (both by La Femme and the baby).

This chapter will also examine the body of the viewer and the physical effects of experiencing scenes of fear and horror. The horror film has often been vilified for its base need to physically affect the viewer, moving beyond (or away from) the intellectual to the production of instantaneous physical audience response.³⁵ Just as the *cinéma du corps* films wished for visceral responses from their viewers, the New French Horror film relies on physical audience reactions, from experiencing bodily discomfort, to jumping in fright, shivering, feeling nauseous, gasping, and screaming. Works such as Linda Williams’ 1991 essay, ‘Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess’, will be utilised to discuss the connection between physical spectatorship and how specific genres, such as horror (and melodrama and pornography), can elicit a mimetic

³⁴ Philip Brophy, ‘Horrorality – The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films’, in *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (London, NY: Routledge, 2000), p.280.

³⁵ See Linda Williams, ‘Film bodies: Gender, genre, and excess’, *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): pp.2-13; Mark Jancovich, ‘General Introduction’, *Horror, The Film Reader* (London, NY: Routledge, 2002), pp.1-13.

bodily response. We will examine the ways physical viewer reaction plays into the successful horror film experience, as well as theories on haptic cinema, and synaesthesia, in which sounds and images can, whether implicitly or explicitly, trigger other sensory responses, such as taste, smell and touch. We will also discuss concepts of cinematic affect in which the film image is not merely a representation of events in the outer world but is created with and experienced as intensities and emotions. For example, when a viewer watches a scene from a horror film, they are not merely watching the scene as a detached spectator sitting outside looking in; they are experiencing it as a form of affective happening. To put it another way, when something shocking or disgusting happens on screen, the viewer physically experiences the fright or revulsion. The film we are going to focus on provides physically shocking images and moments of heightened pain, mainly from the pregnant protagonist.

Cinéma du corps and body horror

Contemporary French cinema has explored the function (and functions) of the physical body from the point of view of upsetting conventions of what is acceptable to show and discuss publicly, but also in terms of the physical reactions and responses intended and expected from the viewer. As a direct precursor to the new French Horror genre, the *Cinéma du corps* certainly pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable (if not acceptable, then at least permissible) in terms of showing the physical body in varying states of action, function, degradation, and abjection. The films display and examine the human body as functioning and natural, complete with physical desires, fluids, and leakages. James Quandt, in his now-famous 2001 article which coined the New French Extremity label, wrote that the Extremism filmmakers were determined “to fill each frame with flesh, nubile or gnarled, and subject it to all manner of penetration, mutilation, and defilement.”³⁶ This ‘penetration [and] defilement’ goes against the image of the French cinema as being “a classic realist cinema [...] little inclined to explore the fantastic or the grotesque.”³⁷ The *Cinéma du corps* aimed to shock audiences away from the perfection of the boundary-less surfaces, to show the

³⁶ James Quandt, ‘Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema’, *Artforum* 42, no.6 (2004): pp.24-27

³⁷ Ginette Vincendeau, ‘Women’s Cinema, Film Theory and Feminism in France’, *Screen* 28, no.4 (1987): pp.11-12.

creases, the folds, and the dirt, and to enter the boundaries between inside and outside. To a certain extent, this was also the function of body horror, to investigate how the body can be disorganised and disassembled, to dissolve the boundary between the outside and the inside and to go against the conventional rigid blueprint of the human form. Quandt describes “[i]mages and subjects once the provenance of splatter films, exploitation flicks, and porn,” now “proliferate in the high-art environs”, suggesting that “splatter films [and] exploitation flicks” are something new to French cinema. This implies that splatter films or body horror films were only introduced in the mid-1990s as an ingredient of the New French Extremism, and later as part of New French Horror. As we shall see, this is not the case.

The splatter film was aimed at audiences who desired more gore, over the top special effects, and gruesome violence. However, if we were to examine French history, bloodshed and violence as spectacle has been an unavoidable part of the cultural and historical image of France. From the public beheadings of the guillotine (the notorious symbol of the French Revolution) to the shows of the Grand Guignol Theatre, exhibitions of bodily violence and gore were ubiquitous and ‘played’ to appreciative mass audiences, in very similar ways horror films do with modern audiences.

While the public displays of execution by guillotine have undoubtedly had a profound effect on French culture (the last public execution was in 1939), and on tales of horror and the fantastique³⁸, other examples of gruesome spectacle were prevalent in the late 1800s. Vanessa Schwartz, in her book *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, writes about the popularity of public visits to the Paris Morgue, “where bodies were laid out behind a large display window for consideration by anyone who stopped by. As a free theater for the masses, the morgue fit into a modern Parisian landscape in which the banal and the everyday were embedded in sensational narratives.”³⁹ This form of spectacle, of mass entertainment, was widely promoted with the help of “the growth of the mass-circulated press and organized tourism. Crowds could walk by the windows looking in at the newly displayed bodies with the hope of glimpsing something they had not seen before with the expectation of a story. As Schwartz writes, “the spectacle of the corpse in the morgue’s display

³⁸ See Matthew Gibson, *The Fantastic and European Gothic: History, Literature and the French Revolution*, (Wales: University of Wales Press, 2013).

³⁹ Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.11.

window transformed the formerly eternal corpse into something ephemeral: current events."⁴⁰

This desire for the more gruesome news stories, as well as being shown the violent and horrific details, was one of the strengths of the Grand Guignol Theatre. It is perhaps one of the most famous and pertinent forerunners of horror films, particularly in terms of gore, shock value and special effects. Originally, when it first opened in 1867, the theatre specialised in dramatising current news stories, usually the more salacious and shocking the better. The producers/writers of the theatre realised that the most popular items were the stories containing quantities of sex, violence, and murder. To keep up with audience demands the theatre started writing their own stories. The Grand Guignol would become famous for its displays of torture, insanity, and murder. With the use of theatrical special effects and large quantities of fake blood, bodies were mutilated and dismembered live on stage. Audiences reportedly fainted and screamed, but there were also descriptions of bloodthirsty audiences shouting for more gore, more violence.⁴¹ These loud and boisterous audience reactions are examples of what Pierre Bourdieu would describe as reactions to 'popular' art. 'Popular' shows were performances, encouraging audience reaction and participation, rather than 'legitimate' works of art, which require a reverential distancing effect on the spectator. Performances with the express intention of audience participation were "based on the affirmation of the continuity between art and life."⁴² This attitude encourages the idea that horror and its audience are seeking instantaneous physical gratification, bypassing overtly intellectual stimulus for bodily reactions of revulsion, excitement, terror, and laughter.

Taking the Grand Guignol as a precursor for the horror film, with its predisposition for gory special effects trickery and gruesome makeup, is it possible to find examples of body horror or splatter film in French cinema? If French Cinema does not have a horror tradition this would seem unlikely. We shall see, however, there are plenty of films that play with the safety and the plasticity of the body, presenting examples of bodily transformation, dismemberment, and mutilation. Early cinema experiments with the concept of photographing the physical form, of capturing ghostly

⁴⁰ Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, p.49.

⁴¹ See Mel Gordon, *The Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror*, (US: Da Capo Press, 1997); and Richard J. Hand, and Michael Wilson. *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror*. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).

⁴² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (London: Routledge, 1984), p.5.

representations of the body, and with ways of manipulating the image of the body for different purposes. Georges Méliès made many shorts in which bodies were transformed, dismembered, beheaded, and so on. While removed from the realm of splatter films, Méliès readily experimented with dismantling bodies, including scenes of violence and horror fantasy. Many scenes from his films aimed at similar concepts to Brophy's "fear of one's body." When Méliès deconstructed and reshaped the physical form on-screen, audiences were shown the human body as a special effect. Later, the serials of Louis Feuillade, such as *Fantômas* (1913) and *Les Vampires* (1915-1916), included various states of the human body, including corpses, severed heads, detachable arms, and skinned hand gloves. In Martine Beugnet and Elizabeth Ezra's essay on an 'Alternative History of French Cinema', they discuss the differing attitudes to body horror (bodily dismemberment in particular) through the years: the dismembered limbs and exploding heads in Méliès' films delighted audiences, while the briefest glimpse of peeled skin in Feuillade horrified them.⁴³

An image in the fourth episode of *Fantômas* [...] in which a worker hammers a hole in a wall and blood gushes out, is a portent of things to come, a potent metaphor for the eruption of the corporeal. [...] Likewise, the violence of Feuillade's work resurfaces in contemporary cinema [...] in reaction to the 'bloodless' post-humanism, splatter contrasting patterns of blood all over the curtains and upholstery.⁴⁴

This focus on sudden gushing of blood and the homely, recalls abjection and the disturbance to our safe and clean lives. It also brings up Kristin Ross's ideas of French capitalist modernisation during the 1950s and 1960s and an obsession with cleanliness and order, what she calls borderless images: "there is no give to the surfaces, no tactile dimension, even an imagined one – just smooth shine."⁴⁵ As Julia Kristeva suggests about the idea of abjection, we avoid and reject any signs of our mortality, particularly sickness, filth, and decay,⁴⁶ Ross writes how French culture (particularly advertising) attempted to cleanse, or hide, any tainted aspects of the past

⁴³ Martine Beugnet, and Elizabeth Ezra, 'Traces of the Modern: An Alternative History of French Cinema', *Studies in French Cinema* 10, no. 1 (2010): p.16.

⁴⁴ Beugnet and Ezra, 'Traces of the Modern', p.13.

⁴⁵ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), p.84.

⁴⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

(occupation, invasion and Vichy collaboration, and post-colonial violence, fear and guilt of the Algerian War). This was attempted by over-accentuating the cleanliness, the shine, and the smooth veneer of the image. Images of cleanliness and shining, reflective surfaces emphasised an “eroticism of boundary loss.” As Beugnet and Ezra write, the splatter is a response to “‘bloodless’ post-humanism” and there is hardly a more potent image of the splatter film than blood gushing “all over the curtains and upholstery.” This image also recalls Asbjørn Grønstad’s article *Abject Desire*, in which he writes: “what can possibly be more remote from the pristine impenetrable non-tactility of the film image [than] the hideous, all-too tangible fluids of the human body.”⁴⁷ This chapter will later explore the relationship between the “non-tactility” of the image and the “all-too tangible” bodily image.

The Surrealists also had a preoccupation with disassembling and dismembering the human body. Examples include the splitting head in *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (*La Coquille et le Clergyman*, 1928, Germaine Dulac), the slicing of the woman’s eye in *Un Chien andalou* (1929, Luis Buñuel) and statues growing talking mouths in *The Blood of a Poet* (*Le Sang d’un poète*, 1930, Jean Cocteau). The surrealists often dismantled and reimagined the physical body as though it was some form of sculpting material. This mixture of bodily violence and manipulation of the bodily form is influential to the modern horror film, particularly in terms of body horror.

While the films discussed so far have comprised early examples of special effects spectacles, crime serials, and surrealism, throughout the 1930s and 1940s only a small number of fantastique films were produced which utilised any semblance of body horror. *La Main du diable* tells the story of a painter and his possession of a talismanic but cursed severed hand. Dismembered and disembodied hands appear quite often, from children playing with a dismembered hand on the street in *Un Chien andalou*, the possessed hand transplants of *Les Mains d’Orlac* (*The Hands of Orlac*, 1960, Edmond T. Greville), and the murder victim’s hand trapped sticking out of the boot of the car in *La Main* (*The Hand*, 1969, Henri Glaeser). Cocteau’s *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) not only included the imagery of the Beast itself but also scenes within the Beast’s enchanted castle, including a fireplace with human faces blowing smoke from their mouths, furniture made from moving human limbs, and arms protruding from the walls and holding out lanterns to light the way. This image of arms reaching out from

⁴⁷ Asbjørn Grønstad, ‘Abject desire: Anatomie de l’enfer and the unwatchable’, *Studies in French Cinema* 6, no. 3 (2006): p.167.

walls has appeared throughout the horror genre in films such as *Repulsion* (Roman Polanski, 1965) and *Day of the Dead* (George A Romero, 1985). In a scene in *À l'intérieur* Sarah is trying to chop at a hole in the bathroom door. La Femme grabs her arm, pulls it through the hole, and pins her hand to the door with a pair of scissors. Like one of *La Belle et la Bête*'s disembodied limbs, Sarah's arm protrudes and stretches through the bathroom door. This scene also recalls the scene from *Un Chien Andalou* in which a woman traps a man's arm in a door, and in close-up, we see ants crawling out of a hole in the palm of his hand.

While we have been discussing bodily dismemberment, the body in the horror film is also malleable and can be transformed and reshaped. Possibly the most famous example of bodily transformation is the werewolf story. While the Beast in *La Belle et la Bête* is more cat-like, the image of the Beast's face leering down on Belle can be extremely frightening. The features are human enough to make the fur, fangs, whiskers and pointed cat's ears even more disturbing. *Le Loup-garou* (*The Werewolf*, 1923, Pierre Bressol, Jacques Rouillet) and *Le Loup de Malveneur* (1942, Guillaume Radot) were two early werewolf stories, despite not showing any actual physical transformation scenes and only alluding to the actual monster of the title. In fact, in *Le Loup-garou*, we know the monster is not real. A murderer goes on the run taking his young son with him, and rather than letting the boy find out the truth, he makes up the story of the werewolf to cover for his horrific crimes. In a scene in Alain Resnais's *Providence*, a court judge tells the story of a man on trial for murder. The man explains he committed the crime out of self-defence because the victim was turning into a wolf. As he tells the court how the victim attacked him, he slowly begins to transform into a werewolf and is himself shot. It is only a short scene, but it is extremely effective in the slow build-up to reveal the transformation. Another film that promised werewolves was *Le Pacte des loups* about the legend of The Beast of Gévaudan, a huge wolf that attacked and killed many people between 1764 and 1767. In the film, we are led to believe the beast may be a werewolf or some other supernatural being. In the end, however, it is revealed as a huge wild cat, crossbred from a lion, tortured, and trained to kill on command, and encased in spiked armour to appear more threatening.

One film that did offer scenes of physical transformation was Jean Renoir's TV adaptation of the *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* story, *Le Testament du Docteur Cordelier* (1959). Here Jean-Louis Barrault is tall, slim, distinguished and upright with neat white hair as Dr Cordelier, but as Opale (the Hyde character) he is short (Cordelier's clothes

are far too big for him), with dark curly hair, bloated cheeks, hairy unibrow and hairy knuckles. While Cordelier stands still and upright, Opale is hunched, twitchy, slithering, always moving and swaying as if dancing.

While transformations were part of a fictional field of legends, fairytales, and horror stories, dismemberment, and disfiguration were things the public could experience and witness in real life. In the film *J'Accuse!* (1919 and remade by Gance in 1938) director Abel Gance used injured and disfigured war veterans as extras for the end scene when all the people killed in the war rise from the grave. The veterans who had returned from the war with extensive injuries and disfigurement were a stark reminder of the traumas the human body could go through. While advances in surgery and the application of prosthetics would attempt to hide or disguise any disfigurements, the sight of a limb or a face damaged in some way is a reminder of the fragility of the body. A fake appendage or a mask can also provide a sense of fear and the uncanny. The hand that is not quite a hand, the smooth, unemotional face, the mask that hides terrible secrets underneath. As Elizabeth Ezra writes in her book on Jean-Pierre Jeunet and his preoccupation with bodily dismemberment, “these images symbolize a cutting off of the past and, in particular, of unpleasant historical events.”⁴⁸ The fear of the deformed and disfigured is an element of horror found in novels such as Victor Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris* (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1831) or Gaston Leroux’s *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* (*The Phantom of the Opera*, 1909-1910). Franju’s *Les Yeux sans visage* also examined images of disfigurement but shocked audiences and critics with its “gratuitous shock effects of the face-grafting procedure.”⁴⁹ There were also reports of how strongly the film affected audiences. Seven audience members fainted when it was shown at the Edinburgh Film Festival⁵⁰, and during a non-commercial screening in France, a reporter from the newspaper, *L’Express*, reported more cases of fainting, writing that “the spectators dropped like flies.”⁵¹

Outside France, European horror and exploitation cinema was prevalent during the late 1950s and 1960s, particularly after the international success of the gothic horror films produced at Hammer Film Productions in the UK. This in turn influenced

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Ezra, *Jean-Pierre Jeunet (Contemporary Film Directors)*, (University of Illinois Press, 2010), p.14.

⁴⁹ Peter John Dyer, ‘Les Yeux sans visage (Eyes Without a Face)’, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 27, no. 314 (1960): p.36.

⁵⁰ According to reports, Franju’s response to this was, “Now I know why Scotsmen wear skirts.” Quoted in David Kalat, ‘Eyes Without a Face: The Unreal Reality’, *The Criterion Collection*, Oct 16, 2013, <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/343-eyes-without-a-face-the-unreal-reality>.

⁵¹ Kalat, ‘Eyes Without a Face: The Unreal Reality’.

an enthusiasm for horror in Italy. If we look at Hammer, for example, while many of the films produced followed traditional horror storytelling (such as classics of horror literature already filmed by Universal Studios such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *The Mummy*) along with gothic settings (typically set in the past and foreign castles, laboratories, cathedrals, villages), the films also pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable on-screen with the extensive use of make-up and copious gore effects all in bright colour. “[D]isdaining the vulgar lure of exploitation,” however, France “held stubbornly aloof.”⁵² This is despite the graphic gore effects of *Les Yeux sans visage*, the terrifying shock tactics, and brutal violence of *Les Diaboliques* (1955, Henri-Georges Clouzot), and the Hammer-influenced Gothic vampire story of *Et mourir de plaisir* (*Blood and Roses*, 1960, Roger Vadim).

In his article on ‘Biological Dystopias’, Guy Austin examines the body in French Horror cinema, particularly on the French specificities of scientific innovation and biological research. He describes how fears of bodily experimentation stemmed from concerns about French scientists who specialised in working on “parthenogenesis, transplants, genetics, and cloning over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”⁵³ Austin describes three French scientists as “real-life French avatars of Victor Frankenstein,” whose reputations “inform the troubling male scientists of modern French horror cinema.”⁵⁴ Marie François Xavier Bichat, an anatomist, claimed to have dissected 600 corpses, “many taken from the guillotine,”⁵⁵ for his *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* (1800). Claude Bernard was a physiologist who pioneered animal experimentation and wrote how an anatomist “delightedly follows a nervous filament through stinking livid flesh, which to any other man would be an object of disgust and horror.”⁵⁶ Alexis Carrel was a 1912 Nobel Prize winner for his work on vascular suturing and leading the way for organ transplantation. In 1935 he wrote *L’Homme, cet inconnu* (*Man, the Unknown*), a work that champions eugenics and went on to work on eugenics at the French Foundation for the Study of Human Problems for the Vichy government. These French scientists, Austin writes, would “inform the troubling male scientists of modern French horror cinema.”⁵⁷ He cites the scientists

⁵² Jonathan Rigby, *Euro Gothic: Classics of Continental Horror Cinema*, (Cambridge: Signum Books, 2016), p.66.

⁵³ Guy Austin, ‘Biological Dystopias: The Body in Contemporary French Horror Cinema’, *L’Esprit Créateur* 52, no. 2 (2012): p.104.

⁵⁴ Austin, ‘Biological Dystopias’

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

and surgeons of *Trouble Every Day* (Denis, 2001), *Alien Resurrection*, and in particular, Dr Genessier in *Les Yeux sans visage*. Austin reminds us that while Dr Genessier's surgeries go wrong in the film, in 2005 the first successful face transplant took place in France. He also points out that *Les Yeux sans visage* was "in part a fearful reworking"⁵⁸ of the work of geneticist Jean Rostand, whose 1956 book, *Peut-on modifier l'homme?* (translated and published in 1959 as *Can Man Be Modified?*), discussed new trends in modern biology such as artificial insemination, test-tube babies, cybernetics, and the possibilities of genetic cloning.

In *Traitement de choc* (*Shock Treatment*, 1973, Alain Jessua) a rejuvenation centre develops an anti-ageing formula with a secret ingredient based on the body parts and blood of young men. The human body becomes nothing but an ingredient, reduced to its material base, and then ingested by other human bodies. The reduction and recycling of the body as a physical material. Jessua would later direct *Frankenstein 90* (1984), a modern-day version of one of the quintessential texts of body horror, in which the materials are brought together again before being brought to life. In *L'Homme au cerveau greffé* (*The Man with the Transplanted Brain*, 1972, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze), a famous brain transplant surgeon with a fatal heart disease transplants his brain into the body of a young car accident victim. The surgery is a success, but the question then is on the identity of the patient. Is he still the young man from the car accident, or is he the surgeon in the body of the young man? This dichotomy is a specifically French argument, the mind/body split famously espoused by Descartes: "I think, therefore I am." Is it the driver or the surgeon that is the survivor of the operation? Is it the case that the surgeon's brain is potentially driving the young man's body? Again, here is the question of the body as being nothing more than physical materials. Is the surgeon's brain the life that brings the matter of the driver's body? In a scene in *The Tenant*, Polanski asks, "If I cut off my arm I say 'me and my arm,' but if I cut off my head I don't say 'me and my head.' What right has my head to call itself me?"

Despite Jessua, however, director Jean Rollin was the only French filmmaker who was consistently producing horror films during the late 1960s and 1970s. Many of them fit neatly into the realms of exploitation containing much nudity and sex scenes. Despite Rollin's reputation for mysterious, slow-paced atmospherics, many of

⁵⁸ Ibid

his horror films, such as *Les Raisins de la mort* (*The Grapes of Death*, 1978), and offer moments of graphic body horror and gory violence. In *Les Raisins de la mort*, a poisoned crop of grapes produces wine that turns all consumers into rotting, homicidal maniacs. One scene on a train shows a passenger, after drinking the wine, suddenly growing running sores on his face and drooling maniacally before going on a rampage. In another scene, a woman is crucified to a barn door and then decapitated with a hatchet. Here we have several body-horror tropes: ingestion, infection, contagion, transformation, rotting flesh, leaking bodies, cannibalism, and dismemberment. Jonathan Rigby writes, “A French gore movie was such an oxymoron at the time that an effects expert had to be called in from Italy.”⁵⁹

Here again is the idea that gore and body horror, represented something new to French cinema and had to be imported. The horror films with elements of splatter/body horror produced by directors from outside France only reinforce this idea. Directors such as Jesus Franco from Spain was one of the most prolific low-budget horror directors who, like Rollin, moved freely between horror and pornography. He received recognition for the Spanish production, *Gritos en la noche* (*The Awful Dr Orloff*, 1961), a virtual remake of *Les Yeux sans visage*; “a stroke for stroke remount [...] with even more gore (and sex).”⁶⁰ He made several films in France (the censorship laws were freer than in Spain) under various names and pseudonyms (Jess Franco, Jess Frank, Franco Manero, or Clifford Brown). Italian director Federico Fellini directed one of the segments in *Histoires extraordinaires* (*Spirits of the Dead*, 1968, Fellini, Roger Vadim, Louis Malle), a portmanteau of Edgar Allan Poe stories. In the story, *Toby Dammit*, Terence Stamp drives a convertible sports car before being decapitated by a thin wire stretched across the road; the camera slowly tracks onto a close-up of the wire, blood-soaked and vibrating. Polish directors Walerian Borowczyk, Roman Polanski, and Andrzej Zulawski, would make many films in France. These filmmakers came from surrealist backgrounds. Borowczyk, an animator and artist, directed many fantastique films,⁶¹ many pornographic. In *La Bête* (*The Beast*, 1975), a young woman dreams of being raped by a legendary monster with huge claws, fangs, and a gigantic erection. Borowczyk combines elements of fairy tales such as ‘Beauty and the Beast’

⁵⁹ Rigby, *Euro Gothic*, p.359

⁶⁰ David Kalat, ‘French Revolution: The Secret History of Gallic Horror Movies’, in *Fear Without Frontiers: Horror Cinema Across the Globe*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Godalming: FAB Press, 2003), p.277.

⁶¹ *Théâtre de Monsieur & Madame Kabal* (*Mr and Mrs Kabul's Theatre*, 1967); *Goto, l'île d'amour* (*Goto, Isle of Love*, 1968), *Contes immoraux* (*Immoral Tales*, 1973); *Docteur Jekyll et les femmes* (*Dr Jekyll and the Women/Blood of Dr Jekyll*, 1981)

and 'Little Red Riding Hood' while adding "numerous bared breasts, a gigantic lupine phallus, truly copious ejaculant and sensually executed bestiality."⁶² Polanski directed *Le Locataire* (*The Tenant*, 1976), the story of a lonely Polish man in Paris, losing his sanity and identity after renting the apartment whose previous tenant attempted suicide. He is convinced the other tenants are trying to turn him into the previous female occupant so he will repeat the suicidal act of jumping from his balcony and through the window-paned roof of the awning below. Zulawski's *Possession* (1981) is the story of a woman, played by Isabelle Adjani, who wants to divorce her husband. As he investigates, he discovers she has become lovers with what may be her own tentacled afterbirth. The monster is unexplained but in a long unflinching scene in a Subway tunnel, Adjani has a manic and violent seizure, smashing and spilling her shopping bags, convulsing, and rolling on the ground in either agony or sexual pleasure. The scene is played at such a level of intensity, her performance is like a dance, a contemporary performance piece. Adjani ends up sitting on the tunnel floor in a concentration of pain, a pool of blood copiously forming underneath her as she miscarries. She vomits what looks like milk, bleeding and oozing from underneath her hair, soaking her dress, and spilling all over the floor. This scene is an astonishing example of body horror with Adjani's body becoming an object of pure abjection. As she miscarries, every orifice is ejecting something. She vomits, she expresses liquids, she squats and, with intense concentration, pushes out all manner of poisons and wastes. However, in the true nature of horror, what is ejected becomes an object of gruesome fascination, of uncontrollable spectacle, and in Adjani's case, desire.

From the 1970s, all the way through to the 1990s, there were some examples of French body horror and gore, primarily from underground or independent low-budget productions. One director who made extremely gory horror films on extremely low budgets was Norbert Moutier, who directed under the pseudonyms N.G. Mount or Norbert George Mount. Shooting mainly on video and Super 8, he made such films as *Ogroff* (*Mad Mutilator*, 1983), "the first French slasher film"⁶³, in which a disfigured lumberjack goes on a killing spree, and *Trepanator* (1992), a mad scientist/zombie film set in a laboratory with displays of copious numbers of chainsaw-dismembered bodies and gallons of spurting blood. Another extremely low-budget example is *Il était une*

⁶² Garrett Chaffin-Quiray, 'The Beast (*La Bête*)', in *100 European Horror Films*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (London: BFI, 2007), p.10.

⁶³ Tyler Baptist, 'The First French Slasher Film: Mad Mutilator is Out Now!', *VideoNomicon*, <https://www.videonomicon.com/first-french-slasher-film-ogroff-mad-mutilator-out-now/>

fois le diable (*Devil Story*, 1985, Bernard Launois), in which a mutilated maniac wearing Nazi uniform murders his way through the French countryside. Both *Ogroff* and *Devil Story* seem to rely on improvisation and stream of consciousness, allowing the monster actors to rant and rave and jump around maniacally, and providing exceedingly long shots of the bloody aftermath, with bleeding victims and dismembered limbs. Everything seems to act as an excuse to get to the next spectacle of gore effects. Alain Robak directed films on a slightly larger budget, directing segments for the horror anthology films *Adrenaline* (1990) and *Parano* (*Wacko*, 1994), and *Baby Blood* (1990), a film which (along with *Trepanator*) is a true example of the term splatter film. This tells the bizarre story of a woman who is raped and impregnated by a snake-like monster leading her to develop a taste for killing and for eating human flesh. In terms of body horror, there are many ideas here that play on the idea of the body out of control, bodily invasion, impregnation, and incubation. A sequel was released in 2009 called *Lady Blood* (2009, Jean-Marc Vincent) which continued the over-the-top gore and disturbing imagery of cannibalism, pregnancy, and childbirth.

During the 1990s, leading up to and coinciding with the emergence of the New French Extremism films around 1995, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro's fantasy/science fiction films examined body horror tropes such as cannibalism (*Delicatessen*, 1991), mutation and genetic cloning (*La Cité des enfants perdus*, 1995; *Alien Resurrection*, 1997). The horror genre has always been a vehicle for exploring the negative and dangerous aspects of scientific advancement. In both *La Cité des enfants perdus* and, particularly, *Alien Resurrection*, we see the successful results of genetic cloning, but we are also forced to look at the grotesque results of how it can go wrong. Ripley, the main protagonist of the *Alien* series, discovers a room in which she discovers she is a clone. Displayed in cases are the previously aborted clones, mangled and deformed copies of herself. The uncanniness of the fractured and undeveloped copies preserved in liquid-filled tanks is made even more disturbing as we watch Ripley discover these failed copies of herself.

The modification of the human body (as Rostand's title suggests) is a standard topic for the science fiction genre, experimenting with mechanical and technological advancements and improvements. In the horror genre, experimentations with the human body, technologically or medically, usually result in some aspect of the human subject either losing control of one's own body, and therefore, losing one's sense of identity (whether psychologically or physically), or in the dissolution of the physical

body as it is either rejected or destroyed by the new technological advancement. One only has to think of films such as *The Hands of Orlac*, *Les Yeux sans visage*, *Trouble Every Day*, or *The Fly*, to see the various ways procedures such as bodily/organ transplants, blood transfusions and genetic splicing/cloning are such potent areas for body horror.

As Linda Williams suggests, bodily reactions are ways of gauging how successful a horror film is. Horror films are “measured in terms of screams, fainting, and heart attacks.”⁶⁴ Williams describes how the horror film elicits physical mimetic responses from the viewer: “the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen.”⁶⁵ Images of pain, fear, and repulsion urge the viewer to wince, shiver, and feel physically sick. The horror genre aims to give the viewer an actual physical response. If we consider the mimetic viewer reaction, one of the ways a film can create a mimicking device is by the effect of faces on screen. In *Haute tension*, *À l’intérieur*, and *Martyrs*, there are several scenes in which terrifying events take place in front of one of the characters. While the horrifying event is happening, the action cuts back to the characters terrified reaction. In *Haute tension*, Marie (Cecile de France) listens from her room as someone breaks into the house and begins murdering her friend’s family. Later, hiding in a closet, she watches through the slatted closet door as the friend’s mother is killed. The scene cuts between the mother being murdered, and Marie’s terrified reactions. These close-ups of faces responding to almost indescribable events provide the viewer with some form of identification, someone with which to emphasise, with which to mimic. These reaction shots also work the other way, providing a kind of warning system for the viewer. When we are presented with a shot of a character looking at something disturbing or terrifying, the viewer, in a form of mimicry, prepares itself for what is about to be shown. Marie, watching through the slats in the closet door, is unable to look away, her hand clamped over her mouth to stifle her screams, her eyes widening as the horror unfolds in front of her. Just like the act of switching the lights off and turning up the volume to get the most out of a horror film, there is also a mimetic urge to keep watching despite the urge to look away or switch off. Eyes widen, the mouth opens,

⁶⁴ Linda Williams, ‘Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, Excess’, *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): p.144.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

deep breath, eyes shut, hands up, turn away. It represents the pleasure of “getting the shit scared out of you – and loving it; an exchange mediated by adrenalin.”⁶⁶

Barbara Creed writes in her essay on Kristeva and abjection, that the pleasure of horror is in consuming disturbing images and absorbing the feelings of fear, terror, and disgust to be able to expel them:

In terms of Kristeva’s notion of the border, when we say such-and-such a horror film ‘made me sick’ or ‘scared the shit out of me’, we are actually foregrounding that specific horror film as a ‘work of abjection’ or ‘abjection at work’ – almost in a literal sense. Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening horrific images/being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, once having been filled with perversity, taken pleasure with perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject from the safety of the spectator’s seat.⁶⁷

This represents an attempt to answer questions many theorists have puzzled over – why do audiences enjoy watching horror films? If the basic proposal of abjection is the rejection of the disgusting and the shameful, just as the audience in Edinburgh chose to reject *Les Yeux sans visage*, what is so compulsive about images of torture, murder, mutilation, and terror found in the horror genre? Or, as Noel Carroll and Andrew Tudor, both ask, “Why Horror?”⁶⁸: “Are they sick? Are they disturbed people indulging nasty perverse desires? Or have they merely become so jaded as to be addicted to ever-increasing doses of violent excess?”⁶⁹

Creed’s theory of confrontation, to fill up on and eject images of abjection, proposes a kind of cathartic purging. Catharsis suggests that negative emotions are brought forward from the unconscious to the conscious to face and expel them. Noel Carroll, however, believed that the pleasures of the horror film have very little to do with this, “For it makes no sense for me to put my hand in a vise [sic] simply for the pleasure of having my pain relieved when the vise is loosened”. If catharsis is the release or evacuation of negative pressure, then images of the supernatural,

⁶⁶ Brophy, ‘Horrorality’, p.279.

⁶⁷ Barbara Creed, ‘Kristeva, Femininity, Abjection’, in *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (London, NY: Routledge, 2000), p.66.

⁶⁸ Noel Carroll, ‘Why Horror?’ and Andrew Tudor, ‘Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre’, in *Horror, The Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London, NY: Routledge, 2002), pp.33-45, and pp.47-55.

⁶⁹ Tudor, ‘Why Horror?’, p.47.

destruction, monsters, “have no correlate in ordinary life and, therefore, cannot be pent-up in the course of everyday events.”⁷⁰ Carroll believed, like Linda Williams, that the horror film (or “art-horror” as Carroll put it, to distinguish from actual, real-life horrors) had physical qualities such as “tension, cringing, shrinking, shuddering, recoiling, tingling, frozenness, momentary arrests, chilling (hence, ‘spine-chilling’), paralysis, nausea, a reflex of apprehension or physically heightened alertness (a danger response), perhaps involuntary screaming, and so on.”⁷¹

The body in the horror text has become fluid and mutable; its boundaries and form are no longer considered safe, secure, or solid. While body-horror examines the dissolution and destruction of the bodily form (something which is certainly played out in various ways in *À l'intérieur*), perhaps one of the most examined aspects of the body in the horror genre is in terms of identity and gender.

À l'intérieur (Inside)

Just as trips to the Paris morgue to view displayed corpses were hugely popular in the late 1800s, Elizabeth Ezra writes about the popularity of early medical films in which women were filmed during surgery. In 1898, Parisian surgeon Eugène-Louis Doyen filmed himself performing a hysterectomy. Originally recorded for training purposes, Doyen’s surgical films found popularity shown to audiences in travelling fairgrounds. Ezra writes, “It is precisely when medical science represents the female body that this private discipline is often turned into spectacle.”⁷² It is easy to see the relation here to contemporary horror films, particularly the slasher film, and the predisposition for slicing open and dismembering female victims. In fact, the tagline on the original French poster for *À l'intérieur* is “Ouvre-moi ta porte... Que je t’ouvre le ventre” which translates as “Open your door... so I can open your belly.” Here is the idea of home invasion turned into a bodily invasion. The woman is not only trying to break into Sarah’s home, but she is also trying to break into Sarah’s body to steal her unborn baby. In *À l'intérieur* there is a sense that the purpose of the film, or at least the purpose of *La Femme*, is to personify the goals of body horror and abjection: to cut open the heroine to reveal what lies inside (*Inside/À l'intérieur*) to the viewer.

⁷⁰ Carroll, ‘Why Horror?’, n9, p.45.

⁷¹ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.24.

⁷² Elizabeth Ezra, ‘Objects of Desire’, *The Cinema of Things: Globalization and the Posthuman Object* (NY: Bloomsbury, 2018), p.131.

The film is constructed as an elaborate cat and mouse game in which two characters race and fight over the prize. The prize is, however, inside and a part of one of the characters: to get to the unborn baby the expectant mother must be opened. As well as physical threats to the maternal body, the film is full of scenes of graphic violence, complete with blood splashing, spurting across walls, heads exploding, entrails spilling onto floors, and amongst all of this, there are the leaking fluids of impending childbirth.

The title *À l'intérieur*, or *Inside*, blatantly plays with these boundary themes. The dichotomy of inside/outside is everywhere in the film. From the opening shot of the baby inside the mother, the viewer is introduced to the film from the vantage point of being inside. This is disrupted by events occurring outside, resulting in injuries inside. Carrying on from there, we move to the wreckage of the car crash. Sarah is strapped into her seat while we see the husband slumped forward with his head bleeding. In a later flashback, Sarah remembers his head crashing against the windscreen, thrown by the crash from the safety of the inside of the car to almost being thrown outside. The camera is placed on the outside of the car windscreen looking in as the husband's head smashes against the glass pushing it forward but not entering through. This violent act of breaking through from one space to another space results in his injuries and death. This scene also signifies the act of giving birth: the crown of the husband's head pushing against the membrane of the windscreen, pushing (or being pushed) out from inside.

The main act of the film focuses on La Femme's attempts to gain access to a variety of insides. Firstly, she attempts to enter Sarah's house. Once in, she sneaks around the rooms without Sarah noticing. As Sarah sleeps, La Femme reveals her main intentions, to breach the inside/outside boundary of Sarah's own body with a large pair of sterilised scissors and steal her baby. One blade of the scissors enters Sarah's navel, drawing blood. She wakes up and La Femme slashes at her face with the scissors. She struggles with La Femme and pushes her off. She falls on the floor and crawls manically away, entering the next safe interior, the bathroom. She locks herself in and La Femme batters childishly and angrily at the door with her scissors, attempting to break down this new barrier. Occasionally managing to venture outside the room, Sarah keeps herself safe by locking herself inside and La Femme outside. La Femme is also an indication of this inside/outside barrier. She is dressed in large black boots, a long black dress and a black corset tied tightly around her. These black

boots and the corset represent the figure of La Femme as some form of a dominatrix, someone whose sole purpose and pleasure are to inflict pain. The corset, however, also represents restriction, repression, enclosure; tightened to hold a certain outer shape by keeping the inside in. As soon as she knows that Sarah is locked in the bathroom, and she is firmly inside the house, La Femme undoes the laces of the corset, allowing it to fall on the kitchen floor, breathing out a sigh of relief. Now that she has made her way into the house and closer to the unborn child, she can relax and let this restrictive barrier down. The entire film is, therefore, about the safety of the interior (the womb, the car, the house, the mother's body, the locked room) being threatened and harmed by something from the outside.

This is the basic tenet of Julia Kristeva's theories of abjection: keeping the inside in and the outside out. The actions of ingestion (allowing the outside in) and excretion (allowing the inside out) are necessary to keep the boundary between in and out clean, healthy and in working order. In *À l'intérieur* bodily borders are broken down and insides are quite liberally exposed and unconfined. As characters are murdered, blood spurts, bodily fluids splash out onto floors, somebody's head explodes all over the protagonist's face, and body parts are variously pierced, chopped, and split open. By the end of the film, both Sarah and La Femme have been seriously injured. La Femme has been set on fire and Sarah is on the verge of bleeding to death. To save her baby she allows La Femme to perform a Caesarean section. The film ends with Sarah's dead body dissected and splayed open and La Femme cradling the newborn baby.

There is a strong influence of the Italian *giallo* films evident throughout the film. The figure of La Femme is often presented in beautifully framed close-ups: red lips and the lighting of a cigarette, black leather boots, hands wielding a knife or a pair of scissors that catch and glint in the light. There is also a scene in which one of La Femme's victims has his throat cut and blood sprays fountain-like across a white wall, reminiscent of a similar scene from Dario Argento's *giallo*, *Tenebrae* (1982).⁷³

In an article on *À l'intérieur*, Ben McCann describes the film as having an "unrelenting visceral style" and that it "revels in its blood-drenched aesthetic [...]"

⁷³ "The art of murder (fetishization of violence and aestheticization of death) is also elevated to a new baroque, albeit self-conscious heights, as when a female victim's hacked-off arm spurts out blood and paints an unexpected fresco on a white wall." Philip Met, 'Tenebre', in *100 European Horror Films*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider, p.203.

visceral kinetic energy [...] nail-biting implacability.”⁷⁴ One reviewer wrote that the film would present seasoned horror viewers with some moments “where he’ll be forced to turn his head” and that some viewers “will feel like they’ve been slapped around with a meat tenderizer for nearly 90 straight minutes.”⁷⁵ These references to physical responses are extremely interesting but are far from new. Visceral reactions have often been used to describe horror texts, from “skin-crawling”, “hair-raising”, and “spine-tingling”, to “stomach-churning”, “bone-chilling”, and “blood-curdling”. The horror genre aims to give the viewer an actual physical response.

Physical responses

This concept of film triggering the viewer’s physical responses is not new. If we consider the boisterous shouting audiences of the Grand Guignol and the attempts made to make the audience physically react, it was also the desire of early film producers and promoters to similarly capture cinema audiences. Tom Gunning, discussing the very early films of pre-1906, evokes a *Cinema of Attractions* (a term he borrows from Sergei Eisenstein) a cinema that “directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself.”⁷⁶ At the time, film exhibition experiences “relate more to the attractions of the fairground than to the traditions of the legitimate theatre.”⁷⁷ As the appeal and shock of actualité films blended with the emergence of narrative fiction and the magical effects of camera trickery, audiences were repeatedly presented with images and films that subjected the spectator to “sensual or psychological impact.”⁷⁸ In a similar vein, Ben Singer talks about sensationalism.⁷⁹ He writes about the idea of “hyperstimulus”, a phrase used in 1909 to “describe the experiential quality of urban modernity.”⁸⁰ This hyperstimulus could be found in “sensationalist newspapers and satirical magazines” which

⁷⁴ Ben McCann, ‘Horror’, in *Directory of World Cinema: France*, ed. Tim Palmer and Charlie Michael (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), pp.284-285.

⁷⁵ Robert J. Lewis, ‘TIFF 2007 Review: “A l’interieur” (inside)’, *Movieforum*, Sep 18, 2007, <http://movieforumblog.blogspot.com/2007/09/tiff-2007-review-lintrieur.html>

⁷⁶ Tom Gunning, ‘The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde’, 1986, in N. Dobson, A Honess Roe, A Ratelle, C. Rudell (eds), *The Animation Studies Reader*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, p.20

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Eisenstein, as quoted in Gunning, p.21.

⁷⁹ See Ben Singer, “Modernity, hyperstimulus, and the rise of popular sensationalism,” *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (1995): 72-99, and *Melodrama and modernity: Early sensational cinema and its contexts*, Columbia University Press, 2001.

⁸⁰ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, p.8

expressed “a dystopian imagination [portraying] urban modernity as a series of sensory shocks and bodily perils.”⁸¹ With the advent of film, the sensationalism of the moving image and the popular entertainment of the cinema tried to keep up and surpass the rapidity and “intensification of the modern city [...] “the increasing visual busyness and visceral shocks exhibited in popular amusement happened to replicate the increasing visual busyness and visceral shocks of the modern metropolis.”⁸²

Sergei Eisenstein wrote about the cinema, and particularly on montage, as a means of creating bodily reactions, physical shocks, and the “Synchronisation of the Senses.”⁸³ As Lesley Stern explains, Eisenstein believed the moving body “was conceived and configured cinematically [...] not just [as] a matter of representation, but [as] a question of the circuit of sensory vibrations that links viewer and screen.”⁸⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* examined the way that the body was an entire receptive organ. He wrote, “My body is not only an object among all objects [...] but an object which is sensitive to all the rest, which reverberates to all the sounds, vibrates to all the colours, and provides words with their primordial significance through the way it which it receives them.”⁸⁵ If we consider these ideas of “sensory vibrations [linking] viewer and screen,” and the viewer’s body reverberating and vibrating to sounds and images, it is easy to conceive of images of horror and terror with heightened intensity creating amplified physical responses.

Other examinations of bodily perception include the Payne Fund studies of the 1930s, a sociological research project in which scientists measured young film viewers’ heartbeats, blood pressure and “galvanic responses.”⁸⁶ Other theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Andre Bazin, all discussed the idea of the physical sensory experience and the ‘realism’ of the cinema. Kracauer writes, “The material elements that present themselves in films directly stimulate the material layers of the human being: his nerves, his senses, his entire physiological substance.”⁸⁷ For example, the material elements in *À l’intérieur* focus on the physicality of the characters, which are viewed as being uncomfortable, heavy, hurt, pierced, sliced, hit,

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Singer, p.9.

⁸³ Sergei Eisenstein, ‘Synchronisation of the Senses’, *The Film Sense* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943).

⁸⁴ Lesley Stern, ‘I Think, Sebastian, Therefore...I Somersault: Film and the Uncanny’, *Australian Humanities Review*, <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-November-1997/stern2.html>.

⁸⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as quoted in Vivian Sobchack, ‘What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh’, *Senses of Cinema*, <<http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/conference-special-effects-special-affects/fingers/>>.

⁸⁶ Sobchack, ‘What My Fingers Knew’.

⁸⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, as quoted in Sobchack.

covered in blood and liquids, burned, and so on. When viewed, the “material elements” of a scene in which, for example, a hand is trapped in a doorframe, it is presented as physical stimulation on the very “material layers” of the audience. These elements stimulate the “nerves [...] senses [...] entire physiological substance” of the viewer. An image of a hand shut in a door stimulates the physical memories of what that may feel like, stimulating the nerves to understand the feeling. The image of a hand shut in a door does not need the mental process of viewing, decoding, and processing for an understanding of the image; the concept of bodily spectatorship, or haptic viewing, bypasses this. Our bodies instantly understand what the image means.

In his article, ‘The Startle Effect’, Robert Baird examines the way that horror films can cause the viewer to, almost literally, jump out of their seats. According to Baird, the main components of the film startle are “1 a character presence, 2 an implied offscreen threat, and 3 a disturbing intrusion into the character’s immediate space.”⁸⁸ This violent reaction suggests that the viewer is responding to a real and physical threat. Perhaps, the earliest and most iconic example of this phenomenon is the now legendary story of the 1895 screening of Lumière’s *A Train Arrives at the Station*, in which the audience physically flinched from the image of the approaching train. While this may only point to the naivety of an audience experiencing the technology for the first time, the startle effect has not disappeared from cinema, despite an always-increasing audience cine-literacy and awareness. Horror audiences especially, some would argue, must be more fluent in reading these devices than most and, therefore, less susceptible to being startled. If this were the case and horror films no longer produced the appropriate responses constituting the genre, for what reason would the horror audience keep returning to these films? Baird suggests that the startle response is always active and that horror films have needed to become ever more elaborate and sophisticated, but while the early Lumiere audience was convinced that the projected train was an actual train, modern audiences still respond to the startle effect in a very similar way. As Baird argues, “Film viewers can be startled by film sound and motion in part because the systems that immediately attempt to judge sound and visual motion make no distinction between real and apparent motion and real and amplified sound. Films can manipulate us, in part, by actually manipulating our environments, constructing energy fields we take, before reason, to be extensions of

⁸⁸ Robert Baird, ‘The Startle Effect: Implications for Spectator Recognition and Media Theory’, *Film Quarterly* 53, no.3 (2000), p.15.

the physical world.”⁸⁹ In other words, when a viewer watching a film sees a startling image, accompanied by an intense startling noise, their instant reaction is to believe it is actually taking place and to act accordingly.

Focusing on Baird’s statement that film viewers “make no distinction between real and [...] amplified sound”, the use of sound effects and music in *À l’intérieur* is particularly affecting. The soundtrack adds dimension, weight, direction, distance, and texture to a two-dimensional film. A silent image of a woman knocking violently on a bathroom door would insist the viewer adds the missing information by imagining the sounds. By adding the sound of the knocking to the soundtrack, it gives the image weight by reinforcing the connection between the hand and the door. It gives the image dimension by indicating the solidity, depth and texture of the door and the heaviness of the knock. Then it adds distance by conveying the closeness of the door and position to the person knocking, the distance between the door and the camera (the viewer), and in terms of echo and vibrations, hinting at the space on the other side of the door.

Claudia Gorbman lists the various reasons given for the need for sound within cinema (in her article, she focuses on the musical accompaniment of silent films). These include a standard theatrical convention, a distraction (or deterrent) from the noise of the projector, to aid the narrative, or as a social bonding device. Two of the most important reasons she gives are “an antidote to the technologically derived “ghostliness” of the images”, and “as sound in the auditorium, its spatial dimension compensated for the flatness of the screen.”⁹⁰ In the silent era, the positioning of the audience enhanced only the two-dimensionality of the image: rows of seats, one behind the other, all facing in a uniform direction towards a flat wall at the front of the theatre. The image, although large enough to fill an entire wall, inhabited only a single space. Sound, on the other hand, by its very nature, is atmospheric, multi-directional, and indeed, fills the air. By filling the atmosphere not reached by the flat screen, sound creates the illusion of depth. Gorbman writes that “the human body and the space in which it moved had been endowed with sound; sound, in turn, reinforced the reality-effect of those bodies and space.”⁹¹ The silent two-dimensional image of a hand knocking on the door, by excluding the very cause-and-effect of the action

⁸⁹ Braid, ‘The Startle Effect’, p.5.

⁹⁰ Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), p.53.

⁹¹ Gorbman, ‘Unheard Melodies’, p.52.

represented, only enhances the “flatness of the screen”; the synchronous sound of knocking fills the air around the viewer providing the film with dimension and solidity. The sound and the image together add weight, a corporeal essence, to the hand knocking.

So, what then are we to make of some of the sound effects accompanying the violent scenes in *À l'intérieur*? During these scenes, there is a mix of diegetic sounds such as stabs, slaps, screams, mixed with noises and sound effects, which may be non-diegetic. In one scene when La Femme attacks Sarah's boss, she repeatedly stabs him as he tries to climb the stairs. Each time the knife stabs him, a sharp, distorted electronic feedback noise erupts abruptly. While the sound of the knife thumping, or the man crying out, is diegetic, what are we to make of these sounds? This electronic screech not only acts as a shock device (a high-pitched jolt to startle the audience and in this case considered non-diegetic) but also signifies other sensorial aspects of the moment – pain, fright, intensity. It could represent the scraping of the knife through nerve-endings; the sharp, distorted screech signifying the sharpness, the high-intensity of the pain. It is as though the sheer physicality of the image and what it represents (a knife violently puncturing and slicing flesh), along with the sudden shock of the action, and the imagined feeling such an act would produce, forces a reaction from the viewer. The resulting sound effect acts as a crescendo of intensity. The distortion sound is synchronous with the knife stabbing (or later with the police officer kicking Sarah), but what weight, or dimension, is this conveying? As the music in silent cinema helped to add depth and dimension by filling in the space between the flat image and the audience, the stabbing soundtrack seems to solidify the emotions and intensities of the film, supplying various emotional and dimensional planes to the scene. Not only does the soundtrack provide spatial and temporal depth to the images, but it also gives the scene its affective sense of disturbance and violence. The space between the image and the viewer is filled and connected with the intensity and shock of each stab.

The tactile image

Describing the film experience, Walter Benjamin wrote, “It hit[s] the spectator like a bullet, it happen[s] to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality.”⁹² He also wrote, “The connection with tactility is paramount, the optical dissolving, as it were into touch and a certain thickness and density.”⁹³ The concept of the tactility of an image, along with Eisenstein’s concept of “sensory vibrations [linking] viewer and screen,” not only means that the viewer can somehow feel (rather than touch) it, it also implies that the image has the potential to touch the viewer. Steven Shaviro writes, “We neglect the basic tactility and viscosity of cinematic experience when we describe material processes and effects, such as the persistence of vision, merely as mental illusions. Cinema produces real effects in the viewer, rather than merely presenting phantasmic reflections to the viewer.”⁹⁴

Many writers, such as Shaviro, have theorised the tactile image and bodily perception. Laura U. Marks describes it as ‘haptic visuality’. The word haptic, as opposed to optic, means to ‘touch with your eyes’. Calling the image “connective tissue”⁹⁵, Marks writes that haptic visuality “enables an embodied perception, the viewer responding to the [image] as to another body and to the screen as another skin.”⁹⁶ According to Lisa Coulthard, haptic visuality, or “the haptic gaze,” is a “sensually inclusive approach to visuality [...] seen to interrogate the role of all senses (touch, smell, hearing) in the visual. In so doing, it reorients theoretical discussion and spectatorial experience away from narrative logic, character identification or even formal analysis and toward the phenomenological, experiential, sensual and corporeal.”⁹⁷ Vivian Sobchack calls the act of bodily perception ‘cinesthesia’, blending the terms ‘cinema’, ‘synaesthesia’ (“*involuntary experience* in which the stimulation of one sense cause[s] a perception in another”⁹⁸), and ‘coenaesthesia’ (“the perception of one’s whole bodily state as the sum of its somatic perceptions [...] the term is used

⁹² Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1936), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Henry Zohn, (Jonathan Cape, 1970), p.238.

⁹³ Benjamin, pp.144-145.

⁹⁴ Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.51.

⁹⁵ Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p.xi.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.4.

⁹⁷ Lisa Coulthard, ‘Haptic Aurality: Resonance, Listening and Michael Haneke’, *Film-Philosophy* 16, no. 1, (2012): p.18.

⁹⁸ Richard E. Cytowic MD, as quoted in Vivian Sobchack, ‘What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, Or Vision in the Flesh’, *Senses of Cinema*, April, 2000, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/conference-special-effects-special-affects/fingers/>.

to describe the general sensual condition of the child at birth.”⁹⁹) Cinesthesia is the film experience as perceived by each of the senses, for example, images of textures can provoke memories of touch within the fingertips. Describing a scene in which the image can be blurred and obscured, she writes, “Despite [...] the resistance of my eyes, my fingers knew what I was looking at.”¹⁰⁰ Sobchack and Marks often discuss cinesthesia and the haptic in terms of the obscure image, either abstracted in some way, out-of-focus, distorted, or in disorientating extreme close-ups. This distorted image, difficult for the eye to interpret, stimulates the other senses to ‘read’ and interpret it. To provoke a multi-sensorial experience, however, sight does not have to be restricted. Shaviro discusses the way images of extreme intensity can produce an excessive visuality, almost overloading sight, enforcing all other senses to become active participants. For example, in *À l’intérieur*, the scenes with La Femme punching and kicking the bathroom door, the anger and intensity she exudes, along with the close-ups of her fist hitting against the solid door, not only are we viewing and hearing what is going on, there is a sense that “[our] fingers [know] what [we are] looking at.” Other scenes rely on a kind of sensory recall, and an overloaded sensory imagining, of moments of pain. When La Femme stabs at Sarah’s face with the scissors, the wound goes down one side of her mouth, slicing open her lips. Watching that, our skin imagines what it would feel like; we may even recall cutting ourselves, slicing a fingertip on a knife, or the pain of cracking chapped lips. We recoil and wince as though we can feel the sudden sharp slicing of the blade. With every act of violence, every stabbing, slicing and piercing, somehow our bodies recall and embellish memories. Scenes like these make us aware of how fragile our bodies are, and our bodies react accordingly. As Elena del Rio writes: “As the image becomes translated into a bodily response, body and image no longer function as discrete units, but as surfaces in contact, engaged in a constant activity of reciprocal realignment and inflection.”¹⁰¹ Genres such as horror focus and rely on images of intense physical danger, pain and discomfort, as well as physical responses to fear and terror: panicked movements, wide eyes, heavy and laboured breathing, sweating, crying and screaming. If we return to Braid’s Startle Theory and the film viewer constructing “energy fields we take, before reason, to be extensions of the physical world,” and consider this along with

⁹⁹ Sobchack.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Elena del Rio, ‘The Body as Foundation of the Screen: Allegories of Technology in Atom Egoyan’s Speaking Parts,’ *camera obscura*, (Summer 1996), p.101

Sobchack's cenesthesia and Williams' mimetic body genres, it is possible to conceive of the film viewer experiencing a horror film in an immediate, sensorial, and intensely physical way.

Conclusion

From the spectacle of the guillotine, the exhibitions of the Paris morgue, and the gory, violent theatricals of the Grand Guignol, the human body has been a ubiquitous platform for French audiences looking to be disturbed or revolted. From the earliest examples of cinema, we can follow this fascination through the early surgical films made for scientific purposes that found their way into the entertainment tents of travelling fairgrounds, through to the dismembered body parts of Feuillade's crime serials, the bodily experiments of the surrealists, and the gore and exploitation cinema of the 60s and 70s. The New French Horror films continue this desire to splice open and dismember the human body. While we can find echoes of the filmed surgeries and hysterectomies in the face grafting scenes in *Les Yeux sans visage* and the final scenes of *A l'intérieur*, the New French Horror films tend towards the spectacular gore effects of the splatter film, aiming at shocking and disturbing the viewer and provoking a strong visceral response.

CHAPTER TWO: EMERGENCE

Introduction

This chapter will examine the immediate precursors and the emergence of the New French Horror genre in terms of the circumstances that were present and necessary for it to take place. While we can say there is a tradition of horror and the fantastic in French cinema, it was after the New French Extremism came to the fore in the mid-1990s, that it seemed possible for the New French Horror genre to emerge. This will prompt discussion of the conventions of the horror genre, as well as recognizing, promoting, and analyzing trends within the genre. For example, in terms of following global models of horror studies, this chapter will examine some of the critical and cultural conditions which encouraged, allowed, and even possibly demanded the genre to surface. Other factors that helped the genre to emerge include the newly expanding relationship between film and television in the 1990s and the development of production companies that provided opportunities for young first-time directors. Important to all of this are the influences of the filmmakers, and how these were instrumental in shaping the emergence of the genre. As we shall see, American horror cinema is a key influence, as well as horror films from Japan, the UK, and the Italian *Giallo* also had a strong influence as we saw in chapter one and later in this chapter. As Terry Lovell writes in her sociological case study on the formation of the French New Wave, a movement or a genre is determined by “the manner in which [...] the different types of variables combined to effect a certain result.”¹⁰² By examining these conditions, it will be evident that the production of the films not only follow specific horror models, but the critical evaluation also followed models.

Although there were some horror films produced in France during the 1980s and early 1990s, it was after the development of extreme cinema in the mid-1990s the New French horror film began to develop in the early 2000s and became a highly visible and viable product within French cinema. The emergence of the genre has questioned many presumptions about French cinema and French cinema culture. Many of these presumptions stem from the French/American cinema rivalry,

¹⁰² Terry Lovell, ‘Sociology of Aesthetic Structures and Contextualism’, *Structural Analysis of Mass Communication*, UK: Penguin Books, 1972, p.340.

presumptions such as 'genre' being solely an American marketing and distribution tool, and that French cinema only produces auteur-driven art cinema.

During the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) Treaty in 1993, France stood firmly against the US's dominance of the cinematic marketplace. Stating *l'exception culturelle française*, French Culture Minister, Jacques Toubon, refused to back down and determined that French cinemas should be predominantly for French films.¹⁰³ In support, President Mitterrand said *l'exception culturelle* fought for "the identity of our nations, the right of each people to have access to their own culture, the freedom to create and choose our own images."¹⁰⁴ It was agreed that cinema and television were granted as cultural exceptions, and while it was hailed as a victory by the French government, doubts were felt about how French cinema's infrastructure would hold together. However, leading up to the beginning of the 2000s, some trends brought international popularity to French cinema and genre-filmmaking in France. From the stylised aesthetic sensibility of the *Cinéma du look* films, the painterly historical selling-points of the heritage films, and the enormous international box-office success of the films of Luc Besson and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, French cinema was producing genre-driven films that were critically well-received and did well at the international box-office. Despite this, while the history, language, settings, and the actors in the *Cinéma du look* and heritage films were predominantly French, what was becoming apparent was an aesthetic and emotional set of values that were influenced, or borrowed, from American cinema.

Another important development that ensured support to the French film industry was the growing relationship with television. As Jean-Pierre Jeancolas says, "television needs film; cinema lives off television's money."¹⁰⁵ For first-time feature directors, it was essentially the production arms of television companies that were responsible for funding. If one looks at the funding and the production companies involved during this time, we can consider the role television plays in contemporary French film culture. In 1990 a law was passed in which television companies were encouraged to contribute towards film production. In exchange for screening rights

¹⁰³ See Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'From the Blum-Byrnes Agreement to the GATT affair', in *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity 1945-95*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Steven Ricci (London: BFI, 1998), pp.47-60 ; Bill Grantham, '*Some Big Bourgeois Brothel*': *Contexts for France's Culture Wars with Hollywood*, (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2000); Lucy Mazdon, 'Rethinking Remakes', *Encore Hollywood: Remaking French Cinema* (London : BFI, 2000), pp.1-29.

¹⁰⁴ President François Mitterrand, as quoted in Mazdon, *Encore Hollywood*, p.11.

¹⁰⁵ Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, *Histoire du cinéma français*, (Paris: Nathan, 1995), p.91.

and continued state accreditation, the major five terrestrial television channels TF1, France 2, France 3, M6 and La SEPT/Arte, are required to invest a percentage of turnover (at least 3%) back into film production. A separate film investment law, but one nonetheless crucial to contemporary film investments, extends to the Pay-on-demand Cable Channels such as Canal+ (who in 1998 created their own film and DVD production company, Studio Canal), TPS (La Télévision par Satellite), and CinéCinéma. "It is television broadcasters who have become the most important source of film financing," contributing to over "40 per cent of total investments in French film production."¹⁰⁶ In 2000, for example, French terrestrial TV channels invested approximately 561 million francs into 95 French films.

"The difference between cinema and television", Jean-Luc Godard once said, "is that you raise your eyes for cinema and lower your eyes for television."¹⁰⁷ There is a sense that this comment captured many critics' attitudes towards television. As Charles Drazin writes, Godard's remark "captured the derision with which so many French film-makers had regarded the medium." When Canal+ was launched in 1984, "540 feature films were broadcast on French television." By 1989, "this figure had more than doubled to 1,289." At the same time, cinema figures were affected, with admissions dropping "from 200 million in 1980 to only 118 million in 1989. The idea of 'cinema' remained appealing, but it had become in effect a *cinéma à domicile*."¹⁰⁸ Despite this, there was no denying the powerful aid that television companies provided for film production, exhibition and distribution, and "during the 1980s it was television that became the cinema's future."¹⁰⁹

One example of the partnership between cinema and television is the emergence of what became known as *le jeune cinéma* (literally *young cinema*), which can be seen as relevant to the emergence of the New French Horror directors for several reasons. Firstly, there are partnerships between film and TV, and the subsequent emergence of populist genre productions as well as the provision of opportunities for experimentation and promotion of a young group of new first-time filmmakers. In 1993-94, a series of television films called *Tous les garçons et les filles de leur âge* was commissioned by Franco-German TV station Arte. The series was

¹⁰⁶ Laurent Creton and Anne Jackel, 'A Certain Idea of the Film Industry', in *The French Cinema Book*, ed. Michael Temple and Michael Witt, (London: BFI, 2004), p.213.

¹⁰⁷ Jean-Luc Godard, as quoted in Charles Drazin, *The Faber Book of French Cinema* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p.366.

¹⁰⁸ Drazin, *The Faber Book of French Cinema*, p.367.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.366.

composed of nine hour-long films from nine directors who had been given the brief that the film must be about teenagers set in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, and it had to include a party scene. The series showcased a generation of emerging talent such as Claire Denis (who would later direct the horror film, *Trouble Every Day*, 2001), Olivier Assayas (*Demonlover*, 2002), Cédric Kahn (*Roberto Succo*, 2001, and *Feux rouges / Red Lights*, 2004) and Olivier Dahan (*Les Rivières pourpres II: Les Anges de l'apocalypse / Crimson Rivers II: Angels of the Apocalypse*, 2004). This series produced low-budget, gritty realist dramas which some critics likened to the beginnings of the Nouvelle Vague, “with the dynamism and freshness of the films attributed to the use of small budgets, light cameras and reduced crews.”¹¹⁰ Guy Austin even suggests that they were “[p]ossibly influenced by the ultra-naturalistic shooting practices laid down by Lars von trier’s Dogme manifesto in 1995”, listing a reliance on “handheld cameras and ambient sound, while often avoiding sound-track music in order to maintain the realist illusion”.¹¹¹ Despite initially referring to these directors and films that emerged in the 1990s, the term *le jeune cinéma français* has continued. The term consolidates the notion behind the constant resurgence and renewal within contemporary French cinema, “a generative force that supplants old cinema, shaping a field in constant flux”¹¹². This idea of young cinema rewriting the notions and traditions of French cinema reinforces the importance of first-time filmmakers finding opportunities to offer new or unusual work to audiences. This, ultimately, includes a new generation of first-time young directors interested in horror cinema, rewriting the traditions of genre filmmaking in France for new audiences.

Perhaps one of the most important of these young directors in terms of the New French Horror genre and the directors involved with the resurgence of French genre films is Mathieu Kassovitz, actor turned director of one of le jeune cinéma's key films, *La Haine* (1995). This film spawned a jeune cinema sub-genre, *cinéma de banlieue*. These films were set and produced in the poorer housing estates and areas on the outer borders of Paris, highlighting issues surrounding poverty, race, class, and immigration. Kassovitz was a confessed fan of American horror cinema, an influence which is evident in his serial killer thriller *Les Rivières pourpres (The Crimson Rivers, 2000)* inspired by *The Silence of the Lambs* (1993, Jonathan Demme) and *Seven*

¹¹⁰ Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p.221.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Palmer, *Brutal Intimacy* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), p.15

(1995, David Fincher). With the love of US cinema, particularly US horror and the films of Spielberg, Kassovitz once said in an interview, "It doesn't interest me to be successful in France. What I want to do is to make films that are successful in the US that then become a success in France."¹¹³ Kassovitz then moved to the US to make the horror film *Gothika* (2003) starring Halle Berry and Robert Downey Jr. and followed this with *Babylon A.D.* (2008), the science fiction action vehicle starring Vin Diesel. Although neither of these films was successful financially or critically, Kassovitz, along with Besson and Jeunet, not only mixed French and US cinema, producing genre-based commercially viable films but made it relatively acceptable to do so. As Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau write, there has been a significant shift in contemporary French cinema regarding authorship and popular cinema: "a new type of auteur has appeared, epitomized by Luc Besson and Kassovitz. Both developed an auteur persona but one based less on personal vision and more on high media profile, technical prowess and an address to a youth audience."¹¹⁴ Of the three directors, only Besson has had any real success in the US. *Léon* (1994) and *The Fifth Element* (*Le Cinquième Élément*, 1997) were both huge commercial and critical successes. Kassovitz has not had the same critical success since *La Haine*, and Jeunet's only US excursion *Alien: Resurrection*, was not well-received critically or commercially or by fans of the *Alien* franchise. Jeunet, however, went back home to produce *Amélie* (2001), one of the most successful French films ever made.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s came the immediate predecessors of the New French Horror cinema, the 'New French Extremism' films, or the *Cinéma du corps*. These films pushed the boundaries of censorship, violence, and sexuality, exploring ways of producing the limits of physical cinema. The filmmakers were unafraid of shaking audiences to their core with sudden acts of extreme violence, bloodshed, hardcore sex, and all manner of bodily fluids. These films had become hugely successful on the international film festival circuit, courting praise and condemnation from the critics, audiences and the festival juries in equal amounts. While Philippe Azoury calls it the work "of cinephile purists [...] cinema and contemporary modern art bound together",¹¹⁵ Carlos Pardo claimed that the films were poised "between

¹¹³ Mathieu Kassovitz, as quoted in Stuart Jeffries, 'It's hard for me to play romantic. I come across as a bit of a jerk', *The Guardian*, Monday 6 August 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2001/aug/06/edinburghfestival2001.edinburghfestival>.

¹¹⁴ Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau, 'Introduction', *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, p.7

¹¹⁵ Philippe Azoury. 'En écho aux photos de Jeff Wall,' *Libération* (July 11, 2001).

naturalism at its most bleak, its most hopeless, and the mannerisms of the most affected formalism.”¹¹⁶ Describing the New French Extremism, James Quandt writes, “Bava as much as Bataille, *Salò* no less than Sade seem the determinants of a cinema suddenly determined to break every taboo, to wade in rivers of viscera and spumes of sperm.”¹¹⁷ Although the New French Extremism films are not considered horror films, they are precursors to the New French horror films. The Extremism directors (including Catherine Breillat, Gaspar Noé, Bruno Dumont, and Philippe Grandrieux) were all capable of creating scenes that were shocking and disturbing. In the moments of violence depicted in the films, there is no denying the parallels with contemporary horror cinema. The axe attack scene at the end of Breillat’s *À Ma Soeur! (Fat Girl)*, (2001) could be straight out of a *Friday the 13th* film; the violent beating, rape and resulting insanity at the end of Dumont’s *Twentynine Palms* (2003) are almost David Lynchian in its sudden brutality and terrifying weirdness; the graphic bludgeoning in the strobing night-club in Noé’s *Irréversible* (2002) looks and feels like a moment from David Cronenberg’s body horror films. Critical and disparaging, James Quandt writes:

Images and subjects once the provenance of splatter films, exploitation flicks, and porn--gang rapes, bashings and slashings and blindings, hard-ons and vulvas, cannibalism, sadomasochism and incest, fucking and fisting, sluices of cum and gore--proliferate in the high-art environs of a national cinema whose provocations have historically been formal, political, or philosophical (Godard, Clouzot, Debord) or, at their most immoderate (Franju, Buñuel, Walerian Borowczyk, Andrzej Zulawski), at least assimilable as emanations of an artistic movement (Surrealism mostly).¹¹⁸

Despite these moments of extreme horror, the New French Extremism films were discussed as a serious, art cinema movement. These moments of horror and violence occurred occasionally during films that were focused on sexuality and identity. There were, however, some films that seemed to go beyond the arthouse boundaries in subject matter, shock tactics, and levels of disturbance, and arguably

¹¹⁶ Carlos Pardo, ‘Crime, pornographie et mépris du peuple: Des films français fascinés par le sordide,’ *Le Monde Diplomatique* (February, 2000), p.28.

¹¹⁷ James Quandt, ‘Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in recent French Cinema’, *Artforum* 42, no. 6, February 2004, <https://www.artforum.com/print/200402/flesh-blood-sex-and-violence-in-recent-french-cinema-6199>.

¹¹⁸ Quandt, ‘Flesh and Blood.’

entering more fully into horror film territories. Examples include *Seul contre tous* (*I Stand Alone*, 1998, No ), in which a lonely, angry butcher reaches breaking point and goes on a violent killing spree, *Trouble Every Day* (2001, Claire Denis), in which a woman has contracted (or has been experimentally infected with) a modern strain of vampirism, and *Dans ma peau* (*In My Skin*, 2002, Marina de Van), in which a woman's obsession with her leg injury evolves into a destructive fetish for self-harm, mutilation and self-cannibalism. These films produce moments that are genuinely gruesome, disturbing, and often terrifying, and which fit neatly into horror genre territories. Of course, this crossover between the arthouse and the horror genre is nothing new. We find it in discussions on German Expressionism and Surrealism; we find it in examinations on European genre directors, such as Luis Bu uel, Mario Bava, Dario Argento, Georges Franju, and Jean Rollin, and we find it in Joan Hawkins' book *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde*, in which three chapters focus on Franju.

What we find during the production of the New French Extremism films is the emergence of new production companies, the much-needed money, space, and platforms for a genre to grow, as well as ground toiled and readied by a generation of directors to allow new filmmakers and new film styles a chance to come forward. With the influence of *le jeune cin ma* and the New French Extremism, not only were new filmmakers given the encouragement to produce films on relatively low budgets, on subject-matters that were personal either in content or style, the New French Horror filmmakers were emerging in the wake of this controversial rethinking and remoulding of censorship laws and the limits of what was acceptable in terms of sexuality and violence.

This chapter will examine three films from the early 2000s, particularly in terms of production and their cultural positioning. *Promenons-nous dans les bois* (*Deep in the Woods*, 2000, Lionel Delplanque), *Le Pacte des loups* (*Brotherhood of the Wolf*, 2001, Christophe Gans), and *Haute tension* (*High Tension/Switchblade Romance*, 2003, Alexandre Aja), are three of the main texts that heralded the emergence in this century of a new French horror genre. Each of the films, in their way, espouses the inspiration and the conventions of the American horror film: *Promenons-nous dans les bois* and the postmodern slasher film; *Le Pacte des loups* and the CGI-driven monster film; *Haute tension* and the nostalgia for the brutality of the US horror films of the 1970s. Chronologically, *Promenons-nous dans les bois* is the earliest film in the corpus

and will therefore be considered as the first of this new genre. Despite this, it was not until later that the new French horror genre came to international critical attention. The second film, *Le Pacte des loups*, blends horror and action genres, with an international cast and crew, including renowned French stars, the US martial artist Mark Dacascos. With a large marketing campaign that ensured international interest, this film became one of the most successful French films screened in the US¹¹⁹ and was certainly very successful in France¹²⁰. With such success and the use of big-budget action scenes, monster special effects and state-of-the-art CGI techniques, this film represents another aspect of the beginnings of the genre, a respectfully knowing and conscious nod towards US genre cinema. The third film is *Haute tension*. A violent and controversial film, which produced much critical interest overseas, this was the film that forced the consideration of a viable horror genre being produced in France. *Haute tension* brought attention to several fantastique/horror films that had been made previously. These included films such as *Belphegor - Le fantôme du Louvre* (*Belphegor - Phantom of the Louvre*, 2001, Jean-Paul Salome), *Un Jeu d'enfants*, *Les Morsures de l'aube* (*Love Bites*, 2001, Antoine de Caunes), *Bloody Mallory* (2002, Julien Magnat), *Brocéliande* (2002, Doug Headline), *Maléfique* (2002, Eric Valette), and, of course, *Promenons-nous dans les bois*. Therefore, while *Promenons-nous dans les bois* will be discussed as the starting point of the genre, *Haute tension* is the film that instigated the genre as an actual idea, as a discursive concept.

The three films this chapter will examine all raise questions about the place of the horror genre within French culture, particularly concerning preconceptions of French cinema, debates on cultural tastes, such as the dichotomy of high and low art, and the infiltration of US cinema. The successful yet anomalous *Promenons-nous dans les bois* prompts a series of questions regarding art vs. entertainment, high vs. low art, European vs. American horror/film, or as Pierre Bourdieu would classify it, legitimate art vs. popular art.¹²¹ This last issue raised regarding US infiltration can be examined in each of the films. *Promenons-nous dans les bois* was blatantly marketed as a French equivalent of the US slasher film of the late 1990s. *Le Pacte des loups* incorporated big-budget CGI effects and was comparable to US horror

¹¹⁹ P.A. Hipp, '20 Highest Grossing French Films in the US', *Frenchly*, Nov 9, 2015, <https://frenchly.us/highest-grossing-french-films-in-the-us/>.

¹²⁰ 'Top 250 Tous les Temps en France (Reprises Incluses)', *JP's Box Office*, <http://www.jpbox-office.com/top100.php?view=2>. (see Appendix 3)

¹²¹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p.16.

blockbusters.¹²² *Haute tension* again paid respect to the US slasher film, this time focusing on the 1970s (*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* [1974, Tobe Hooper] in particular), but gained notoriety for its nihilistic tone, unflinching attitude to violence, and subversion of staple genre conventions. These links and connections to the US horror films of the 1970s and 1980s, the Italian *giallo* films from the 1960s through to the 1980s, the postmodern slasher franchise of the 1990s, and the incorporation of increasingly elaborate special effects and CGI in contemporary horror, all suggest a kind of dialogue taking place between these new films and their broader national/international and historic influences. This “dialogism,” as Mikhail Bakhtin termed it, opens up the continual to-and-fro response and reply of cultural texts and items. Bakhtin focused on the internal and external life of words as a process of making meaning, interpretation, and cultural connections, a “dialogism that penetrates [a word’s] entire structure, all its semantic and expressive layers.”¹²³ In this sense, a film can be seen as an intertextual series of images, scenes, and themes that are in response to other images and scenes, and part of a dialogue between one cultural item and another.

Promenons-nous dans les bois (Deep in the Woods)

When released in France in early 2000, *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, directed by Lionel Delplanque, received a positive critical response, and performed well at the French box office. Despite its success, the film was an anomaly for several reasons. Firstly, it was a horror film. Secondly, it was released during the height of the controversy surrounding the *New French Extremism* movement. Despite moments of violence, gore, nudity and sexual scenes, *Promenons-nous dans les bois* did not fit into the art film niche carved out by the other Extremism films. It did not follow the New Extremism art film model; its moments of shock and violence were made with a different aim and purpose. It was, to add another anomaly, a stalk-and-slash horror film strongly inspired by popular horror films from the US and Italy.

The story and plot of *Promenons-nous dans les bois* sound like a slasher film blueprint. A theatre group is hired to go to a large mansion in the woods and give a modern performance of *Little Red Riding Hood* to a creepy rich businessman and his

¹²² *Le Pacte des loups* had a budget estimated at FRF 200,000,000 (approx. \$29,000,000).

¹²³ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010), p.279.

autistic young son, along with the lurking, mysterious, and extremely odd gardener/butler/cook. Cue some debauched behaviour, drinking, drugs and partner-swapping promiscuity, followed by a string of violent, gruesome set-pieces as each member of the theatre group is murdered by a psychopathic masked killer. The set-up is straightforward: a group of attractive teenagers are brought to a sinister, labyrinthine setting and individually hunted down and murdered in various elaborate and imaginative ways. *Promenons-nous dans les bois* exhibited its horror conventions openly and, seemingly, respectfully. These include the setting of the old dark house (in the woods, no less), the mysterious and possibly dangerous manservant, the masked murderer (to continue the Little Red Riding Hood theme, the killer wears a Wolf mask worn during the performance) who at times takes on an almost supernatural, omnipresent and unstoppable presence. It also ends with a fight for survival by “the final girl.”¹²⁴ In Carol J. Clover’s theory, the strongest, most resilient, and most capable of surviving in a slasher film, is not the male action hero, or any of the male figures of authority. More than likely, it will be one of the female characters who survives the ordeal, goes on to watch all of her other friends die, and has to confront the killer at the end of the film. It is evident the director, Lionel Delplanque is influenced by a great many horror films discussed by Clover and is freely acknowledging these influences.

Born in 1972, Delplanque graduated from *ESEC Film School (École supérieure d’études cinématographiques)* in Paris in 1993. He wrote and directed the short films *Silver Shadow* in 1997 and *Opus 66* in 1998. Both shorts starred Corinne Barois and showed off Delplanque’s predilection for the horror genre. *Opus 66*, in particular, is a dark short horror film in which a couple (a husband and his pregnant wife), driving at night, stop to investigate a car parked in the middle of a dark and deserted woodland road. When the husband opens the car door, he finds the bodies of a man and a woman, both murdered, their throats cut. In the back seat is a cowering young boy, presumably the couple’s son. Terrified, they take the boy into their car and drive away for help. As they speed along, the driver hears something and turns to his wife. Her throat has been freshly cut, blood pouring down the front of her blouse. The husband turns to the back seat to see the boy provocatively licking the blood off the blade of a knife. *Opus 66* won the Audience Award at the 1998 São Paulo International Film

¹²⁴ Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI, 1992), p.35.

Festival, the Grand Prize for Short Film at the 1999 Gérardmer Film Festival and won Delplanque a Special Mention Award at the 1999 Capalbio Cinema Festival. With the success and praise of these first shorts, in 2000 he managed to make his first feature, *Promenons-nous dans les bois*.

Having previously produced *Opus 66*, Olivier Delbosc and Marc Missonier of Fidelité Films signed up to produce the film. Their production company Fidelité productions, formed in 1993 when they were at film school together, had become a success with its fair share of controversy thanks to the New French Extremism label. They had produced all of François Ozon's films (who also attended film school at the same time as Delbosc and Missonier; they produced his student films). Delbosc and Missonier were eager to get into genre filmmaking and after the success of *Promenons-nous dans les bois* they set up a production unit with Canal+Écriture, the development and screenwriting arm of the pay-TV Channel, called Bee Movies. "At that time," Missonier stated, "France was not producing genre films, partly because of the system in which the TV stations have a big part of the finance of a film."¹²⁵

However, despite playing a substantial part in the finance and success of film production, TV stations were not producing genre films. If genre films were a popular product, then it would seem logical to produce more in the hope of enhancing audience/viewer ratings. The first issue here is the theatrical rating system and how this affects audience figures. All theatrical releases have to acquire a recommendation from the *Commission de classification cinématographique* (Commission for film classification), which can give a film one of five ratings. These range from (Universal) Tous publics (suitable for all audiences), (-10) Déconseillé aux moins de 10 ans (not recommended for under 10 years), (-12) Interdit aux moins de 12 ans (forbidden for under 12s), (-16) Interdit aux moins de 16 ans (forbidden for under 16s), to (-18) Interdit aux moins de 18 ans (forbidden for under 18s). Once receiving the recommendation, the film is issued with a visa and can then be shown in the cinema. Horror, by its very nature, deals with sensitive subject matters containing violent, scary, and graphic material unsuitable for younger audiences. If a film is given an 18 certificate, it is "the equivalent in France of economic censorship as few theatres will dare show it, little advertisement will be possible, and no television network will be

¹²⁵ Marc Missonier, 'In Conversation: French producer Marc Missonier on low-budget filmmaking', *Australian Film Commission*, http://afcarchive.screenaustralia.gov.au/newsandevents/afcnews/converse/missonier/newspage_248.aspx (as accessed on 23/10/12).

allowed to broadcast it before midnight.”¹²⁶ By legally excluding many younger viewers, the limitations to audience sizes lead to restricted box-office figures.

Created specifically to produce low-budget genre films, Bee Movies would go on to produce some of the key early New French Horror films such as the haunted house/possessed children film, *Un Jeu d'enfants*, the cartoonish demon-hunting action film *Bloody Mallory*, and the occult prison film *Maléfique*. As Missonier says, “The 'strategy' was to prove we could produce smart films in that genre for little money (around €1m, \$1.6m).”¹²⁷

There are also significant links among the crew members of *Promenons-nous dans les bois* and it is possible to trace lines from the fantastique and genre films made within the last ten to fifteen years and leading on through the New French Horror films produced afterwards. For example, the film was co-written with Annabelle Perrichon, who had previously worked on the script for *Les Amants criminels* (1999, François Ozon). Cinematographer Denis Rouden, who had mainly worked in television and on short films, would go on to shoot *Un Jeu d'enfants* and thriller/genre films including Olivier Marchal's highly noir-stylised police thrillers *36 Quai des Orfèvres* (36, 2004) and *MR 73* (2008), and the gritty police TV drama series *Braquo* (2009). Perhaps links are more abundant among the special make-up effects artists who worked on *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, as this area is one considered an integral aspect of the fantastique/horror genre; the crew that creates the monsters, the make-up and the gore would gravitate towards further genre films, particularly the new horror films.

Philip Brophy writes there were “two major areas that affect the modern Horror film: (i) the growth of special effects with cinematic realism and sophisticated technology, and (ii) an historical over-exposure of the genre's iconography, mechanics and effects.”¹²⁸ This need for increasing sophistication and photographic realism heralded a boom in special make-up effects in the 1970s and 1980s. Horror films such as *The Exorcist* (1973, William Friedkin), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978, George A. Romero), *An American Werewolf in London* (1981, John Landis), and *The Thing* (1982, John Carpenter), brought special make-up effects, as well as the special effects artists themselves, such as Dick Smith, Tom Savini, Rick Baker and Rob Bottin, to the

¹²⁶ Axelle Carolyn, *It Lives Again!: Horror Movies in the New Millennium* (Canterbury: Telos Publishing, 2008), p.174.

¹²⁷ Missonier, *Australian Film Commission*.

¹²⁸ Brophy, 'Horrorality', p.5.

respectable foreground of horror genre discussion.¹²⁹ However, if French cinema was not producing horror films that required make-up, gore effects, or animatronic monsters, this raises the question as to why so many people were specializing in these fields, and so much make-up and special effects talent were being trained.

Considering *Promenons-nous dans les bois* in contrast to the American horror scene of the late 1990s, one of the main criticisms of the film was that it was simply pandering to the success of recent US horror slasher film franchises, such as *Scream* (1996, Wes Craven), *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997, Jim Gillespie), and *Urban Legend* (1998, Jamie Blanks), and it was relegated to rip-off/wannabe status. It was described as a film that offered “nothing that [had not] been seen before in any of the *Scream* style teen pics turned out by the US in such quantity.”¹³⁰ These films brought about a resurgence of popularity for the 1970s and 1980s slasher film to a new, modern cinema audience. In *Promenons-nous dans les bois* the codes and conventions of the slasher film are unashamedly displayed and referenced by the characters in the story. It was this playful knowingness that appealed to young audiences who were (or liked to appear) bored and unaffected by the contemporary horror fare that was being produced. When it was released in the US and UK, under the title *Deep in the Woods*, the connection to these films was fully exploited. This can be seen on the US film poster that, just like the posters for *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Urban Legend*, parades a line-up of the faces of the attractive teen cast. On the back of the Tartan DVD release, the film is described as a “nerve-shredding chiller for fans of *Scream*.”¹³¹ The critics inevitably latched onto the slasher parallels. *Promenons-nous dans les bois* was “touted as a kind of French *Scream*”¹³² and Philippe Met described it as a “postmodern, self-referential slasher [flick] more or less à la *Scream* [...] a visually stunning, skillfully manipulative or derivative, yet perhaps ultimately gratuitous exercise de style.”¹³³ *Cahiers du cinéma* wrote, “Delplanque has no other ambition than to remake the same films he is a fan of, not with jubilation, or

¹²⁹ This is particularly true after *An American Werewolf in London* (1981, John Landis) received the first ‘Best Make Up’ award at the 1982 Academy Awards. The award had been established after the Academy received complaints for not awarding the make-up work performed in *The Elephant Man* (1980, David Lynch) the previous year. Exemplary make up effects had received special honorary awards presented to William Tuttle for *The 7 Faces of Dr Lao* (1964, George Pal) and John Chambers for *Planet of the Apes* (1968, Franklin J. Schaffner).

¹³⁰ Geoffrey Macnab, ‘Deep in the Woods’, *Sight and Sound* 12, no.11 (2002): p.63.

¹³¹ *Deep in the Woods*, (2000, Lionel Delplanque), (Tartan Video, 2002), DVD.

¹³² Damien Love, ‘Deep in the Woods’, *The Scotsman*, Aug, 2000.

¹³³ Philippe Met, ‘Looking for Trouble: The Dialectics of Lack and Excess – Claire Denis’ *Trouble Every Day* (2001)’, *Kinoeye* 3, no. 7, June, 2003, <http://www.kinoeye.org/03/07/met07.php>.

irony, but in a studious and pathetic exercise.”¹³⁴ On the other hand, Richard Schweib stated, “Delplanque’s constant generation of stylish eerie imagery sets *Deep in the Woods* head and shoulders above most modern post-*Scream* (1996) studio-processed teen slasher fodder.”¹³⁵ While it is possible to find similarities to the contemporary US slasher/horror film, it is more difficult to discuss *Promenons-nous dans les bois* in terms of the postmodern horror film “à la *Scream*”. In the case of *Scream*, the postmodern label refers to how the film consciously references itself as a horror film. For example, one girl is quizzed by the killer on her knowledge of other horror films, and the characters realise they can survive if they follow the codes and conventions of the slasher film (do not drink, do not have sex, and never say “I’ll be right back.”) By performing these tricks with the characters, the filmmakers are also able to trick the audiences who are also following the codes and conventions to second-guess what is about to happen. In discussions on horror cinema, however, the use of the term ‘postmodern’ has almost become synonymous with ‘contemporary’, as if representing a specific time or historical turning point, as in ‘post-80s’, or late twentieth/early twenty-first century. This suggests that any horror film produced after this certain period could be considered postmodern. Andrew Tudor argues that “there has been a proliferation in [the] use of the expression “postmodern horror” as an apparently unproblematic descriptive term ... [F]or the most part, recent horror movies have been dubbed “postmodern” with little or no discussion of what that involves or implies.”¹³⁶ However, unlike the knowingly self-referential *Scream*, *Promenons-nous dans les bois* is not a postmodern horror film. It faithfully, and unapologetically follows the narrative rules and conventions of the slasher film.

Delplanque, though, claims it was not the 1970s/1980s American horror scene that influenced him most; instead, he cites the *giallo* films of Dario Argento and the gothic fantasy of Tim Burton. Colette Balmain wrote that the film “has little in common with the flattened pastiche of Wes Craven’s *Scream*, and a great deal in common with the more subversive and aesthetic [...] concerns of the European, and in particular the Italian, horror film.”¹³⁷ From the opening scene in which the camera slowly glides

¹³⁴ Stéphane Delorme, ‘Promenons-nous dans les bois’, *Cahiers Du Cinéma*, no. 548, (July – August 2000): p.77.

¹³⁵ Richard Schweib, ‘Deep in the Woods’, *MORIA – Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Film Review*, 2000, <http://moria.co.nz/horror/deep-in-the-woods-2000-promenons-nous-dans-les-bois.htm>.

¹³⁶ Andrew Tudor, ‘From paranoia to Postmodernism? The Horror Movies in Late Modern Society’, in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. Steve Neale (London: Routledge, 2002), p.105.

¹³⁷ Colette Balmain, ‘A feminist Fairytale: Lionel Delplanque’s Promenons-nous dans les bois (Deep in the Woods, 2000)’, *Kinoeye* 3, no. 13, November, 2003, <http://www.kinoeye.org/03/13/balmain13.php>.

towards the light of a keyhole and carries on through it into a bedroom, there is a strong nod towards the roving camerawork and the atmospherics of Argento. This also includes the music, the colour scheme, and the psychosexual violent exposition claiming psychological clues and pseudo-psychoanalytical pointers towards an explanation for the horrific events displayed.

While the influences of US and Italian horror can be easily spotted, there was still the danger that *Promenons-nous dans les bois* would not be taken seriously as a French genre film. If French cinema was a purveyor of legitimate cinema and high art, how could a horror film, categorized as a low, crude piece of popular entertainment, be produced in France? Not only that, but how could a horror film like *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, if nothing more than an anomaly, become the instigator for the proliferation of horror genre production? What conditions were in place for this film to be made, and what were the filmmakers' intentions for making a horror film in a cinema culture that actively dismisses the genre? Several factors may have contributed to the inception and production of *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, especially if we consider some key moments of change that occurred in French film production, distribution and exhibition and within both critical and fan culture during the 1980s and 1990s.

Firstly, there is the resurgence in popular genre filmmaking in France, particularly the fantastic, and the popularity and international success of the films produced. In his 'Film Notes' in the extra features of the Tartan DVD release, Alan Jones described the film and its success as "a monumental occurrence", and that "against all odds, a locally produced low-budget horror movie became a runaway box-office hit and confounded the French film industry's movers and shakers."¹³⁸ This suggests that *Promenons-nous dans les bois* achieved something new. In retrospect, this nominates the film as the beginning of the New French Horror genre. "Horror movies are rarely made in France and it had been decades since anyone had even tried to match the American or British imports that always did solid business in that territory," writes Jones. *Positif* championed the Hammer Horror film in France:

Horror has become in Great-Britain (sic), a new and clearly defined cinematic genre with its own rules and styles. There is much talk now of Free Cinema. However, by its power of suggestion, its frenzy, its invitation to journey towards

¹³⁸ Alan Jones, 'Film Notes', *Deep in the Woods*, DVD extras, (Tartan Video, 2002), DVD.

the land of black marvels and erotic fantasy, isn't the English horror film the true Free Cinema?¹³⁹

While it is a stretch to compare the careful staging and theatricality of the Hammer horror films with the improvisational documentary movement of Free Cinema¹⁴⁰, this does exhibit a passion for the British horror film from French critics. *Promenons-nous dans les bois* demonstrated that there was “a virtually untapped and massive audience for home-grown horror.”¹⁴¹ According to Jones, it was solely on the success of this film that big-budgeted productions, such as *Le Pacte des loups* and *Belphégor - Le fantôme du Louvre*, “were considered bankable prospects [...] For the first time since the heady days of Roger Vadim's *Blood and Roses* and Georges Franju's *Eyes Without A Face*, French fear was back in the nation's collective consciousness and, more importantly, with a Euro-horror style well and truly its own.”¹⁴² It is interesting, however, that Jones refers to the style of *Promenons-nous dans les bois* as being “well and truly its own” after reading the criticisms against the film copying US slasher films.

Another film that was accused by many critics of borrowing heavily from US horror cinema was *Le Pacte des loups*. It was seen as a blending of various genres that had proved profitable at the box office. While it has been described as *Dangerous Liaisons* meets *Enter the Dragon*¹⁴³, *Village Voice* critic Michael Atkinson called it a “neo-kung-fu-adventure-conspiracy-fantasy-monster-movie-aristo-farce.”¹⁴⁴ Despite this (or perhaps, due to this mix of genres), *Le Pacte des loups* was extremely successful at the French box office and is one of the most successful French films released in the US.¹⁴⁵

Le Pacte des loups (Brotherhood of the Wolf)

Production companies Fidelité Films and Bee Pictures were responsible for producing horror films at relatively low cost such as *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, *Bloody*

¹³⁹ Jean-Paul Török, 'H Pictures', *Positif*, no. 40, (July 1961): p.41.

¹⁴⁰ Christophe Dupin, 'Free Cinema', *Screenonline*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/444789/>.

¹⁴¹ Alan Jones, 'Film Notes', *Deep in the Woods*

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Atkinson, 'Sexy Beasts and Sweet Nothings', *The Village Voice*, January 15, 2002, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2002/01/15/sexy-beasts-and-sweet-nothings/>

¹⁴⁵ See appendix

Mallory and *Un Jeu d'enfants*. *Le Pacte des loups*, released in 2001, however, was one of the most expensive films produced in France, with a budget of approximately \$29 million. Producer Samuel Hadida, from Davis Films, and director Christophe Gans formed a partnership to create a film that could "rival Hollywood in both the domestic and international markets."¹⁴⁶ After grossing \$1.5 million on its first day in the US, Hadida said, "It proves that today in France, we can make a blockbuster."¹⁴⁷

Set in the 1700s, just before and at the start of the French Revolution, the film is based on factual events. It tells the story of the 'Beast of Gévaudan', a mysterious creature that attacked and killed over 100 people, mainly women and children between 1764 and 1767. After various unsuccessful attempts by hunters, soldiers and mercenaries, as well as enormous lynch mobs, the news of the events spread across France causing horror, scandal and panic. After various unsuccessful and well-publicised attempts and failures, King Louis XV sent the Royal botanist and naturalist, Gregoire de Fronsac (played by Samuel Le Bihan) and his Iroquois Indian blood-brother, Mani (Mark Dacascos), to track, kill and exhibit the beast at the Royal Zoological Society.

With the air and aesthetic of the heritage film, *Le Pacte des loups* is also a historical murder mystery. It was never revealed what the Beast was (a giant wolf, a hyena as often speculated, or a supernatural being such as a werewolf), and there are mysteries and theories about some of the local figures who may have trained the beast to do their bidding (the victims were mainly women whose bodies were often found in various stages of undress). There is also the main character of Fronsac. Having spent large amounts of time living with his Indian friends and travelling around the world, his methods are modern and scientific; he attempts to solve the mystery through the early uses of forensics and detective work, which is seen as nothing more than ineffective magic and showmanship. His methods of scientific detection and forensic knowledge add to the setting of the *Age of Enlightenment*. As well as being the Royal botanist and naturalist, with a reputation for proficiency in science and chemistry, Fronsac is also revealed to have been a decorated soldier, to have a fondness for philosophy, literature, and culture.

¹⁴⁶ Dayna Oscherwitz, 'Shaking up the historical (film): Christophe Gans's *Le Pacte des loups*/*The Brotherhood of the Wolf* (2001)', *Studies in French Cinema* 11, no. 1 (2011): p.44

¹⁴⁷ Alison James, 'Big-budget beast mauls French B.O.', *Variety*, February 1, 2001, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117793138?refcatid=19&printerfriendly=true>.

The film co-stars Mark Dacascos as Mani, Fronsac's Iroquois Indian blood-brother, rescued by Fronsac during the war in New France (now known as Canada). A Hawaiian-born martial artist/actor, Dacascos had previously starred in Gans's Manga adaptation, *Crying Freeman* (1995), and has several elaborately choreographed martial arts fight sequences. *Le Pacte des loups* is essentially a monster movie; the attacks are shot with a mix of suspenseful chase scenes, hyper-violent camera moves and editing, spectacular CGI effects for the rampaging beast itself, recalling US CGI-heavy monster films of the late 1990s such as *Species* (1995, Roger Donaldson), *The Relic* (1997, Peter Hyams), and *Mimic* (1997, Guillermo del Toro), and plenty of gruesome makeup effects and gory detail of the resulting violence.

Told using a framing narrative during the French Revolution, the events surrounding the story of the Beast of Gévaudan are retold through the memories of Thomas d'Apcher. The time scale of the narrative ranges approximately from 1767 (the last year of the killings and the publication of Voltaire's *L'Ingénu*) to 1787 (the beginning of the Revolution). A young man during the events, now a rich Marquis, Thomas is trapped in his mansion, the crowds have mobbed outside his doors, demanding him to come out. This framing device not only provides us with some idea as to when the events are taking place but also reconfirms that the events about to be shown have become the events of legend and have been passed down through the centuries as a mix of memories, hearsay, and superstition. The framing device may at first be considered as the point of view of one of the main characters recounting the story to the audience with a kind of eye-witness authority, but as the actual story outside the framing device is told, we discover this character was not present during many of the most important events. These scenes are therefore presented "as an unauthorized history that challenges the authority of official history."¹⁴⁸ The story of the Beast and the killings during that period was ignored by most of France, and only recorded and written down afterwards. This produces an oral 'folkloric' quality to the story, with the film attempting to cover as many conspiracy theories as possible, as well as suggesting its own spectacular and dramatic ideas. This, however, is also an important angle to the idea of the success of a French horror film, especially one that recounts a legendary and tragic mystery from within the country's own history. The

¹⁴⁸ Oscherwitz, 'Shaking up the historical (film)', pp.46-47.

Beast of Gévaudan is promoted as a specifically 'French' legend, a nationalistic contribution to gothic myths, legends, and horror stories.

The film is framed by scenes set during the French Revolution, basing it not only in the historical heritage genre but also within a defining moment in French history; the "founding myth of France".¹⁴⁹ Raphaëlle Moine suggests that the specific historical setting of the French Revolution "attributes a political explanation to the ravages of the Beast of the Gévaudan, as the Beast turns out to be a creature manipulated by a group of particularly reactionary nobles to foment a climate of terror that will prevent the Monarchy from implementing liberal reforms. The story of the Beast thus becomes the narrative of the origins of the French Revolution!"¹⁵⁰ By setting these parameters to the film, the inner story then shatters perceptions of the historical and the national by filling the historical account with monsters, martial arts, forensic detective work, mysticism and the occult. While creating itself as a genre-hybrid, blending aspects of various box-office trends, the film aimed specifically to appeal to international audiences. "By borrowing from the traditions of Anglo-American horror or Asian martial arts," writes Austin, "*Le Pacte des loups* can be seen to occupy a universal space that seems removed from the geography and history of France itself."¹⁵¹ Despite the push to promote the history of the Beast of Gévaudan as a specifically French national legend, *Le Pacte des loups* is a 'transnational' film.¹⁵² Along with the combination of international genres, characters and actors, as well as the multinational production crew, Universal Studios paid \$2 million for the distribution rights which ensured overseas success.

In terms of production, distribution and exhibition, the film medium is very rarely situated solely within a specific national parameter. From the earliest years, film production studios have relied on international models. With contemporary modes of production, distribution, and exhibition, from online to digital, the bonds are no longer between two nations such as, for example, France and the US. The boundaries between national film cultures are dissolved when various countries are involved in

¹⁴⁹ Raphaëlle Moine, 'Generic Hybridity, National Culture, and Globalised Cinema', in *France at the Flicks: Trends in Contemporary Popular French Cinema*, ed. Isabelle Vanderschelden and Darren Waldron (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), p.43.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.43.

¹⁵¹ Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema*, p.164.

¹⁵² See Durovicová and Newman (ed.), *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, (UK: Routledge, 2009); Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (ed.), *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* (UK: Routledge, 2006); Andrew Nestingen and Trevor G. Elkington (ed.), *Transnational Cinema in a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transition* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

creating a global transnational production. *Le Pacte des loups* relied on various national cultures to produce its hybrid multi-layered style and aesthetic and relied on the financial and cultural interests of various national agencies to gain its success and cultural (and subcultural) capital. While *Promenons-nous dans les bois* shares aesthetic and thematic links to American and Italian horror cinemas, *Le Pacte des loups* shares links with American and Asian cinemas.

The production crew had considerable experience of working in America. The cinematographer, Dan Lausten had shot *Mimic* for Guillermo Del Toro; David Wu was the editor on *Bride of Chucky* (Ronny Yu, 1998); special animatronics effects created by the *Jim Henson Creature Shop*; CGI monster effects were co-designed by Val Wardlow who had previously worked on *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (Kenneth Branagh, 1994), *Dark City* (Alex Proyas, 1998), and *Lost in Space* (Stephen Hopkins, 1998); music was composed by Joseph LoDuca who had worked on director Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981), *Evil Dead II* (1987), and *Army of Darkness* (1992); and the martial arts fight sequences co-choreographed by Philip Kwok, who had previously worked in Hong Kong on *Hard Boiled* (John Woo, 1992), *The Bride with White Hair* (Ronny Yu, 1993), and on the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1997). One of the biggest influences on the look of the film are the fight sequences, which borrow freely from *The Matrix*, incorporating the slow-motion and the 'bullet time'¹⁵³ effects made famous by that film. The diverse cast and crew provided the film with a sense of transnational production.

Le Pacte des loups also had a strong cast of popular actors with either a strong audience appeal or strong ties to alternative or cult film culture, including Le Bihan, Dacascos, Vincent Cassell, and Monica Bellucci. Two of the younger actors, Jérémie Renier and Émilie Dequenne had both started their careers in the late 1990s starring in films directed by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. Renier made his feature debut starring in The Dardennes' *La Promesse* (1996) when he was fifteen and would later star in Ozon's extremely violent *Les Amants criminels*, considered one of the New French Extremism films. Dequenne made her debut in *Rosetta* (1999), winning the Best Actress award at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival (the film also won the Palme d'Or) and being nominated for Best Actress at the 1999 European Film Awards and

¹⁵³ 'Bullet time' was an effect incorporating multiple cameras taking images which are digitally composited together, so time and camera angle can be manipulated. The term bullet time was used in *The Matrix* to show in slow motion the flight paths and trajectory of bullets.

'Most Promising Actress' at the 2000 Cesar Awards. She later starred in the supernatural film *Écoute le temps (Fissures)*, 2006, Alanté Kavaïté) and the New French Horror film, *La Meute (The Pack)*, 2010, Franck Richard). As well as the young up-and-coming actors, there are some well-established and veteran actors, such as Jean Yann, Edith Scob, Bernard Farcy, Jean-François Stévenin, Jacques Perrin, and Philippe Nahon, all providing *Le Pacte des loups* with some cinematic gravitas and a sense of French cinema tradition.

The director of *Le Pacte des loups*, Christophe Gans, had already exhibited his penchant for genre filmmaking, as well as for making films aimed at pleasing mass audiences. A genre film fan, he started editing his genre fanzine, 'Rhesus Zero'¹⁵⁴ and co-founded the film magazine 'Starfix'. He went to the French cinema school IDHEC (*L'Institut des hautes études cinématographiques*) and directed a 15-minute short film in 1981 called *Silver Slime*, a horror film dedicated to Mario Bava, in which a woman is pursued by a leather-clad murderer. He made his professional debut directing one of the short horror stories in *Necronomicon* (1993, Christophe Gans, Shûsuke Kaneko, Brian Yuzna), a portmanteau of H.P. Lovecraft stories. An American film, it was produced and co-directed by Brian Yuzna, the producer of previous Lovecraft adaptations, *Re-Animator* (1985) and *From Hell* (1986, both directed by Stuart Gordon). His next film was *Crying Freeman*, a martial arts film based on a successful Japanese Manga, starring Mark Dacascos. This big-budget international co-production with an international cast was shot in English in Vancouver. It became "a cult classic" and Gans became "the figurehead for a widespread media buzz about a new genre revolution in French cinema."¹⁵⁵ After the success and critical attention of *Le Pacte des loups*, Gans returned to the US to direct an American horror film, *Silent Hill* (2006), a surreal and disturbing film based on the hugely successful computer game.

Le Pacte des loups co-producers were Hadida, who had produced Gans' previous films and would later produce *Silent Hill* (as well as the *Resident Evil* franchise, also based on a successful horror computer game), and Richard Grandpierre who would go on to produce some key new French horror films, including

¹⁵⁴ Eight issues on genre films, science fiction, horror, fantasy, and kung fu. More info on 'Rhesus Zero' at Movie Mags: <<http://www.moviemags.com/main.php?title=RHESUS%20ZERO>>; More info on 'Starfix' at Movie Mags: <<http://www.moviemags.com/main.php?title=STARFIX&etos=%&month=%&special=%>>.

¹⁵⁵ Charlie Michael, 'French National Cinema and the Martial Arts Blockbuster', *French Politics, Culture & Society* 23, no 3 (Winter 2005): p. 64.

Les Morsures de l'aube, *Irréversible*, *Ils*, *Dante 01*, and *Martyrs*. In between *Le Pacte des loups* and *Silent Hill*, Gans and Grandpierre also produced the first feature by director Pascal Laugier. Laugier's first short film, *Tête de citrouille* (1993), had impressed Gans and he was asked to direct a Making-Of documentary of *Le Pacte des loups*. This resulted in Laugier making two documentaries, one for the DVD release, *Le Pacte des loups: Les entrailles de la Bête* and one for television *Le Pacte des loups: Les coulisses du tournage* (both 2001). Gans went on to produce Laugier's first feature, the haunted orphanage/ghost story *Saint Ange*. Gaining mixed reviews, the film was, perhaps unfairly, overly-compared to *The Others* (2001, Alejandro Amenábar) and over-shadowed by the success of the haunted orphanage/ghost story, *The Orphanage* (*El Orfanato*, 2007, Juan Antonio Bayona). *Saint Ange* did not prove to be very successful either financially or in terms of critical attention, while *The Orphanage* was an international hit, consolidating Spain's reputation at the time as the European capital of horror filmmaking (thanks in no small part by the film being executive produced by Guillermo Del Toro).

Overall, there was a mixed critical reception for *Le Pacte des loups*. It ranged from praise for the new genre: "Astonishingly, the scope, ambition and panache of Gans' alchemical fusion of cinematic elements turns potentially base metal into gold [...] A little rich for refined palates, perhaps, but open-minded genre fans will wolf it down"¹⁵⁶ and "It's easily the most disarming and inventive movie made for genre geeks in years."¹⁵⁷ There was, however, derision at the film's over-dependency on imitating American cinema: "Don't be fooled by the 18th-century setting, French dialogue and subtitles: This action-packed, blood-and-guts extravaganza is more Hollywood than most American films."¹⁵⁸ While *Positif* applauded the film's attempts at producing a realistic and socio-historically correct monster film, they accused Gans of performing a "180 degree turn to indulge in his favourite exercise: effect. The film then swells the potential of the pharaonique budget to assume what it really is: a high range comic book adaptation."¹⁵⁹ Like *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, *Le Pacte des loups* attracted attention for openly flaunting its intertextual allusions. A "spectacular and dynamic

¹⁵⁶ Nigel Floyd, 'Brotherhood of the Wolf' (review), *Time Out*, <<http://www.timeout.com/film/reviews/68517/brotherhood-of-the-wolf.html>>.

¹⁵⁷ Atkinson, 'Sexy Beasts and Sweet Nothings'.

¹⁵⁸ Claudia Puig, 'Wolf' bites off too much from American films', *USA Today*, 11 January, 2002, <http://www.usatoday.com/life/enter/movies/2002/2002-01-11-brotherhood-of-the-wolf-review.htm>.

¹⁵⁹ Franz Garbarz, 'Le Pacte des loups', *Positif*, no. 480 (2001): pp. 39-40.

example of cross-genre cinema”¹⁶⁰, *Le Pacte des loups* could be seen in postmodern terms as a film of high-gloss aesthetics and a collection of cinematic references, a film made by fans for fans and cashing in on subcultural capital. It is also a film that dissolves borders in terms of the national and the historic, as well as the borders between high and low art, in this case between the mainstream hegemony of the heritage film and the low-brow genres of martial arts action film, the special-effects-driven monster movie, and the horror film.

It is necessary to be clear about the question previously asked about what is meant by the “beginning” of the genre. *Promenons-nous dans les bois* can be called the beginning of the genre in terms of chronology (it was the first of the New French Horror films produced), and *Le Pacte des loups* could be called the beginning in terms of international coproduction and opening the doors in terms of demonstrating the possibilities of box-office success and audience appreciation for the horror genre in France. If we consider the beginning of the genre as the start of a specific discourse, or the moment the genre was first brought to attention, then it was with the release of *Haute tension* in 2003. This film captured international critics and writers’ attention to the possibility of a horror resurgence in France and was responsible for bringing the discussion to an international platform.

Haute tension (High Tension / Switchblade Romance)

When first released in 2003, *Haute tension* (*High Tension* in the US, *Switchblade Romance* in the UK) was originally discussed as part of the New French Extremism films. The controversial attitudes towards sexuality, moments of extreme violence and the savage nihilistic atmosphere suggested the film would play to Extremism art-house sensibilities. After it was released, however, the film was seen as an example of extreme genre filmmaking with spectacular moments of audience-baiting violence and horror. There was no mistaking the impact of *Haute tension*, or its influences, and this was how critics, particularly overseas, first started to notice the recent penchant for extreme Horror films being produced in France. As Donato Totaro writes, “Several years after the startling release of *Haute tension* [...] we can begin talking about a

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

viable, exciting rebirth in French horror film.”¹⁶¹ Here we have the beginning of a critical discussion. The discourse on the New French Horror film had become an unmistakable fact, and by the time *Haute tension* had been released, the number of horror films to have been produced in France since 2000 had almost reached double-figures. Considering the attitudes previously discussed regarding the horror genre in France, this was a significant achievement. The general attitude was one of surprise. As well as the surprise, there was the praise the film received; it seemed to come along as an antidote to the postmodern ironic fare that had recently been produced in the US, as well as the glut of remakes and self-cannibalism of horror classics from the 1970s and 1980s. One critic wrote:

While Hollywood has been churning out toothless remakes of shocker classics like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween*, or lukewarm PG-13 remakes of successful Asian thrillers like *The Grudge* and *The Eye*, a generation of filmmakers re-invigorating the horror genre has cropped up in a most unlikely place: France. In a country known more for its frank portrayals of sex and meditations on philosophical ennui, an aesthetic of violence has emerged that, ironically, accomplishes what American auteurs have failed to do - recapture the grit, power, and above all, the danger of American horror in its 1970s heyday.¹⁶²

Haute tension tells the story of Marie (Cécile de France) and Alex (Maiwenn), two student friends going to spend the summer break at Alex's rich parents' house in the woods. Marie secretly lusts after Alex but keeps it secret. While they are all asleep, a pick-up truck drives through the woods and stops outside the house. A man, simply credited as *le tueur*, “the killer” (played by *Seul contre tous*'s Philippe Nahon), walks into the house and violently slaughters the entire family. While Marie hides under the bed and evades the killer, he abducts Alex, ties her and bundles her into the back of his pick-up truck. Marie sneaks into the back of the truck and unties her friend. Alex suddenly pulls a knife on her, accusing her of killing her family, slashes her face and escapes into the woods. The plot turns into a violent cat-and-mouse chase film with

¹⁶¹ Donato Totaro, ‘À l'intérieur: A Rebirth of French Horror’, *Offscreen* 12, no. 8, August, 2008, http://www.offscreen.com/biblio/pages/essays/french_horror/.

¹⁶² Simon Augustine, ‘List: The 8 Most Disturbing Films of the New Wave of French Horror’, *GreenCine*, June 17, 2008, <https://www.greencine.com/central/frenchhorror>.

Alex running away from Marie and Marie running away from the killer. This story ends with Alex waving down a car, Marie disembowelling the driver with a concrete saw, and catching up with Alex. She claims her undying love for her, telling her they will never be apart, and they will be together forever, at which point Alex stabs her through the chest with a crowbar.

Haute tension is an intense, brutal and controversial film that was discussed in the same terms as the New French Extremism films; and extreme was the buzzword when it came to critical reactions to the film. The murders were shocking and brutally presented: *le tueur* stabs the family dog, slashes the father across the face and then decapitates him using a heavy sideboard and a stair bannister. The mother has her throat cut, and the younger brother is chased into a cornfield and shot. Added to this were the gruelling experiences of Alex and Marie, prompting comparisons to torture-porn. When released first, it did not make a large impression on mainstream film journalists and critics, with much of the criticism aimed at the 'extreme' violence, and the unrelentingly savage and nihilistic tone of the film. *The San Francisco Chronicle* said the film was "very bloody, sometimes difficult to watch and sometimes just tiresome. Occasionally it's so extreme, what with all the screaming and the yowling, that it provokes unintentional laughter -- not the nervous kind, but the derisive variety."¹⁶³ Roger Ebert wrote, "The philosopher Thomas Hobbes tells us life can be "poor, nasty, brutish and short." So is this movie."¹⁶⁴ While Steve Rose of *The Guardian* wrote, "What follows is less a game of suspense than a drawn-out game of hide-and-seek, with the requisite false alarms and idiotic decisions. Almost everybody needs killing at least twice before they stay dead, and there's some questionable gender stereotyping to boot. If nothing else, though, it's a warning against selling axes in service stations."¹⁶⁵

The other reason the film received negative criticism was the final plot twist. This is hinted at in the framing sequences but only explained at the end. The actual film begins with Marie in an interrogation room, dressed only in a hospital gown, her back covered in scars and stitches. She is whispering something to herself. It then cuts to Marie running through the woods, stopping a car, her hand covered in blood

¹⁶³ Mick LaSalle, 'Blood and guts a la francaise -- quel horreur!', *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 10, 2005, <http://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Blood-and-guts-a-la-francaise-quel-horreur-2663895.php>.

¹⁶⁴ Roger Ebert, 'High' gets low marks for plausibility', *Roger Ebert.com*, June 9, 2005. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/high-tension-2005>.

¹⁶⁵ Steve Rose, 'Switchblade Romance', *The Guardian*, September 24, 2004, http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_review/0,,1311118,00.html.

flowing from a stomach wound. The next scene is Marie waking up from a nightmare. She is in the back of the car on her way to Alex's house. The film ends with the plot twist that Marie is actually the killer. *Le tueur* (Nahon) is nothing more than Marie's fantasy, the representation of her violent psychotic split. The first time we see the killer is the moment when Marie, obviously in love with Alex, masturbates in bed; "when she comes," *Le tueur* comes, too."¹⁶⁶ At the same time, the killer is also in the middle of sexual activity; a woman's head is seen moving up and down in his lap, apparently in the act of fellating *Le tueur*. This is not the case; he is masturbating with a woman's severed head. The fact that after he arrives in his pick-up truck, Marie is masturbating at the same moment he is masturbating at the same moment, adds to the Marie/killer psychotic split. Marie slaughters Alex's family while she believes it to be *Le tueur*. Now Marie has to save Alex to prove her love and that she is worthy. The final scene has Alex watching Marie sitting in the hospital interview room through a one-way mirror. Marie, however, stares at the mirror, seemingly seeing through towards Alex, grins and reaches her hand out towards her. This plot twist was far too much for many critics (and fans also) believing it merely an attempt to turn a decent slasher film into something more complex, a complicated psychological and philosophical puzzle. This twist ending was felt by many as a cheat, claiming it was "staggering for both its preposterousness and offensiveness, which undermines just about everything that's gone before."¹⁶⁷ As divisive as the ending may be, the film was generating a lot of discussion in journals, magazines, and online, and in doing so, was setting the basis for which a New French Horror genre was a viable discussion point.

Director Alexandre Aja had previously made *Over the Rainbow* (1997) which was nominated for Best Short Film at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival. His debut feature was the science fiction mystery *Furia* (2000) starring Marion Cotillard and Stanislas Merhar. Significantly, one of the film's production companies was Luc Besson's *EuropaCorp*. Co-founded by Gaumont executive Pierre-Ange Le Pogam in 2000, the studio takes on a range of production activities in France as well as film production, such as film and DVD distribution, sales of French TV rights, and advertising. The box-office success and high level of critical attention *Haute tension* received no doubt hinged significantly on the international reputation of *EuropaCorp*, which had produced

¹⁶⁶ Mikel Koven, 'Haute tension', in *101 Horror Movies You Must See Before You Die*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider, p.394.

¹⁶⁷ Trevor Johnson, 'Switchblade Romance', *Time Out*, September 22-29, 2004, <http://www.timeout.com/film/reviews/81339/switchblade-romance.html>.

a string of international successes. Aja states the film was written as “an ode to the 1970s American horror-slasher films I loved as a teenager.”¹⁶⁸ In the production notes for the film, Aja and co-writer Gregory Levasseur say:

The subject matter is quite simple. We are 100% in the genre movie register. We have one aim: to scare people! [...] We are steeped in that culture. We grew up with masterpieces of the genre, like THE EVIL DEAD, TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE, THE SHINING, MANIAC and HALLOWEEN. They were all films that frightened the pants off us as kids! Nowadays, most horror pictures use irony to take a sardonic look at the genre while still using its tricks, as if people are afraid of making an out-and-out horror movie. We wanted to go back to the roots of the genre and give audiences a real “battle for survival”, a real cinematic experience. There are no in-jokes or elements of parody in SWITCHBLADE ROMANCE. It's a bone-chilling story that is intended to chill a lot of bones!

He adds: “From the very beginning, we knew what we wanted. We did all we could to get audiences right on the edges of their seats.”¹⁶⁹ Aja also describes what he believes makes French horror films essentially different from US studio horror such as *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*: “I think our savage touch is more European than American. And also, [the American way is] always to be on the side of the victim, not the killer. But it's also the atmosphere. For us the story maybe could be a love story, a new kind of fairy tale. And a sexy love story between two girls is more French than U.S., I think.”¹⁷⁰ Here Aja is returning to the idea that French cinema is freer and more independently minded in its attitude to sexuality than American cinema. What he does not say is that the “sexy love story between two girls” is unreciprocated and is the impetus for the other girl's psychotic homicidal spree. It could also be read, therefore, that the girl's sexual desire is unnatural, dangerous and should be stopped at all costs.

Aja has become the most successful of the New French Horror directors, having successfully moved to the US to direct the remakes of *Into the Mirror (Mirrors, 2007)*;

¹⁶⁸ Alexandre Aja as quoted in Alan Jones, ‘The Bad and the Beautiful’, *Cinefantastique* 37, no 3, June (2005): p.4.

¹⁶⁹ Aja and Gregory Levasseur as quoted in *Switchblade Romance* production notes, <http://cinemaslive.co.uk/films/switchrom/Switchblade%20Romance%20production%20notes.RTF>.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

The Hills Have Eyes (2006) and *Piranha* (2010). In an interview in 2005, Aja said “In France they don’t like people who want to make genre films. They just want period movies, comedy and love stories. It’s very, very hard for us to make films in France right now.”¹⁷¹ When asked about the idea of a French horror movement or wave, director Pascal Laugier denies it exists:

The fact is that we are much more successful in foreign countries [...] What I mean is that even the horror fans, the French ones, they are very condescending about French horror films [...] It’s still a hell to find the money, a hell to convince people that we are legitimate to make this kind of movie in France. [...] My country produces almost 200 films a year and there are like 2 or 3 horror films. It’s not even an industry, French horror cinema is very low budget; it’s a kind of prototype. I think that a genre really exists when it’s industrially produced like the Italians did 600 spaghetti westerns. So we can’t really say that there is a wave of horror in French Cinema, I don’t believe it.¹⁷²

This quote is from an interview published in 2009. While Laugier may be sceptical about the existence of a specific movement or wave, the number of horror films produced in France between 2000 and 2010 (approximately eighty) is irrefutable, indicating an undeniable and significant trend.

¹⁷¹ Martin Sudderman, ‘Quelle Horreur!’, *Filmmaker* 13, no. 3, (2005): p.14.

¹⁷² Pascal Laugier, as quoted in John White, ‘Interview with Pascal Laugier (Director of Martyrs)’, *The Digital Fix*, April 13, 2009, <https://www.thedigitalfix.com/film/feature/interview-with-pascal-laugier-director-of-martyrs/>.

CHAPTER THREE: TRAUMA

Introduction

This chapter will look at conceptions of trauma as key elements of the horror genre, particularly focusing on how they can be used to examine and, in many ways, consolidate the New French Horror genre. Beginning with physical trauma, as in violence inflicted on the body, we can easily see the role this plays in the horror genre. One dictionary entry for trauma defines it as, “an injury (such as a wound) to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent” and traces the word to “Greek traumat-, trauma wound, alteration of trōma; akin to Greek titrōskein to wound, tetrainein to pierce.”¹⁷³ This definition, “to wound [...] to pierce”, is most appropriate for discussions on film violence and the spectacle of physical horror. New French Horror films, such as *Haute tension*, *Martyrs*, *A l'intérieur*, and *Frontière(s)*, have all courted controversy over their depictions of brutal and explicit physical violence and have been discussed in terms of their connections to trends such as Extreme Cinema and, as we will examine more closely, ‘torture porn’. Secondly, psychological trauma is present through many of the films, with depictions of nightmares, phobias, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), depression, and insanity resulting from a horrific event, acts of violence, or the loss of a loved one. These events and consequences could be experienced personally or witnessed occurring to someone else. Defined as, “a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury; an emotional upset,”¹⁷⁴ psychological trauma as portrayed in horror can lead us into discussions of misrepresentation, dissociation, and the inability to process the events or feelings taking place, imagining, or misremembering events, and flashbacks presented as moments of realisation, shock, and madness.

The horror genre is primarily about trauma, both physical (violence, injury, disfigurement, death) and psychological (terror, paranoia, nightmare, insanity). One need only examine the various horror sub-genres to see the preponderant role played by trauma. For example, body horror, in which the body is mangled, distorted, and transformed into various stages of breakdown, the zombie film, which deals with the various states of decay, disintegration, and destruction the human body can undergo,

¹⁷³ Merriam-Webster, ‘Trauma’, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma> (as accessed 19/11/20)

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

and the slasher film in which bodies are cut, stabbed, chopped, and destroyed in increasingly elaborate and imaginative ways. With progressively more complicated and authentic special make-up effects and gorier set-ups, the horror film strives to represent realistically (or hyper-realistically) the body in varying degrees of trauma. Another sub-genre is the ghost story, in which the haunting is almost always the product of some traumatic event. After a person dies or is killed horrifically, their ghost haunts the house, area, or object to exact revenge, or to warn others, the occurrence repeating and echoing the past in the present. This repetition and haunting is a good metaphor for the psychological effects of trauma, the recurring nightmares of an event that will not let itself be forgotten. As Cathy Caruth writes, trauma “extends beyond the bounds of a marginal pathology and has become a central characteristic of the survivor experience of our time.”¹⁷⁵ It is possible to see correlations between this idea and Clover’s concepts of the Final Girl in the horror film, “the one who did not die: the survivor [...] the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril,”¹⁷⁶ and see how trauma has become a central characteristic of the horror film.

While physical and psychological trauma can be considered integral elements of horror, other theories of trauma go beyond individual injury or shock. They focus instead on collective trauma and the effects of specific historical events. Many writers, including Robin Wood, Carol J. Clover, and Adam Lowenstein have discussed the horror genre in terms of historical and national traumas¹⁷⁷. In his examination on the horror genre called ‘Why Horror?’, Andrew Tudor writes, “thematic features can be treated as articulations of the felt social concerns of the time,”¹⁷⁸ including fears such as “xenophobia, anti-communism, [and] anxiety about technocracy and mass society.”¹⁷⁹ These articulations include the science fiction-horror boom of the 1950s in reaction to the threat of nuclear warfare and anti-communist paranoia, the independent horror movement of the 1970s into the 1980s with the fears of collapsing religious, moral, political, sexual, and familial norms, through to the trend of ‘torture porn’ in the 2000s in reaction to the impact of 9/11 and the prevalence of extremist-related acts of

¹⁷⁵ Cathy Caruth. ‘Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Trauma and Culture II’, *American Imago* 48 (1991): p.417.

¹⁷⁶ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, p.35.

¹⁷⁷ See Robin Wood, and Richard Lippe (ed.), *The American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film* (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979), and *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*; Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema and the Modern Horror Film* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2005).

¹⁷⁸ Tudor, ‘Why Horror?’, p.50.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.51.

violence, such as suicide bombings, beheadings, and torture, much of which was shown on the news and readily available on the internet. Theorists and writers, such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Roger Luckhurst,¹⁸⁰ have examined trauma in terms of memory and history, remembrance, PTSD, national and historical trauma (defining moments of shared and collective shock, fear, and anxieties), and representations of trauma in various aspects of culture.

This chapter will examine how New French Horror can be discussed in terms of historical and national trauma, evoking key moments from France's history including World War II, the War in Algeria, and iconic moments of civil unrest such as the protests of May '68, the pension strikes of 1995, and the banlieue riots of 2005, accumulating a repertoire of images and motifs. While examples of this repertoire can be found through a number of the new French Horror films, such as the use of riots as part of the plotlines in *Frontière(s)* and *A l'intérieur*, and images of the Paris skyline burning and large groups rampaging through the streets in *La Horde*, it is useful to discuss the idea of national/historical trauma in the form of an analytical framework, and especially how it helped form the viability of a national genre at that particular time.

One other concept to be examined in this chapter is the idea that a film itself could be considered as traumatised, as suffering a form of cinematic-PTSD. Narratives can become broken, pierced, confused, or misremembered. Formal tics and episodes can present themselves in visual or aural stylistic ways, such as sudden inexplicable noises on the soundtrack, disjointed and fractured editing, and excessive framing devices can all give the impression of some form of psychological break. Examples of these are prevalent in *Martyrs*, *A l'intérieur*, and *Dans ton sommeil* (*In Their Sleep*, 2010, Caroline and Eric du Potet). These films all deal with physical and psychological trauma, explicitly or implicitly reference historical events and gauge national fears and anxieties, and they also provide examples of narrative and stylistic representations of shock and traumatic breakdown.

¹⁸⁰ See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (NY: Routledge, 1992); Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 1995); Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008).

Physical trauma and torture porn

Beginning with physical trauma, many of the New French Horror films have been noted, and often criticised, for their excessive violence and representations of physical injuries. As expressed in chapter one, the human body is the ground zero, the causal site of the horror genre. Horror is about the fear of being hurt by something, the overpowering need to protect oneself from harm, while images of bodies being damaged and maimed are an essential element of horror. One comparison that has often been applied to the New French Horror films is to the almost predominantly American trend of 'torture porn'. Coined by David Edelstein, the term is given to films that combine "explicit scenes of torture and mutilation [with] terrific production values and a place of honor in your local multiplex."¹⁸¹ Edelstein focuses on films such as *Saw* (2004, James Wan), *Hostel* (2005, Eli Roth), *The Devil's Rejects* (2005, Rob Zombie), *Wolf Creek* (2005, Greg McLean), *Irreversible* (2002, Gaspar Noe), and *The Passion of the Christ* (2004, Mel Gibson). All these films follow Dean Lockwood's basic torture porn narrative, which "revolves around the attempts of an abducted character or characters to survive an ordeal [...] at the hands of their tormentor(s). Central to the entertainment is the spectacle of young adults, frequently bound or otherwise restrained and often, but not always, female, subjected to an ingenious range of lurid torture procedures and devices in dismal subterranean settings."¹⁸² Steve Jones defines torture porn sub-genre as having three qualities: "(a) [the films] were made (roughly) after 2003, (b) centralise abduction, binding, imprisonment, and torture (mental or physical), and (c) broadly belong to the horror genre."¹⁸³ Edelstein says he is "baffled by how far this new stuff goes" wondering "[w]here do you look while these defilements drag on?"¹⁸⁴ Increasingly explicit and cruel, these films "can be understood as exercises in endurance in terms of what the characters suffer and what the audience can bring themselves to watch."¹⁸⁵ Many of the New French Horror films could be considered as examples of this category. On more than one occasion they

¹⁸¹ David Edelstein, 'Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn', *New York Magazine*, February 6, 2006: <https://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/>

¹⁸² Dean Lockwood, 'All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of "Torture Porn"', *Popular Communication* 7, no.1 (2009): p.41.

¹⁸³ Steve Jones, *Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.8.

¹⁸⁴ Edelstein, 'Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex'.

¹⁸⁵ Erin Harrington, 'A Means to an End: Challenging the Notion of 'torture porn' in the French Film *Martyrs*', *Oculus: Postgraduate Journal for Visual Arts Research* 3, March (2011): p.11.

have been branded as examples of torture porn or accused of imitating the films, with *Saw* and *Hostel* often cited as the main influences. The director of *Frontière(s)* was accused of “brutalising his audience with fascist iconography and some nihilistic torture porn” and checking off “all the usual torture porn/backwoods horror clichés.”¹⁸⁶ Another critic said *Martyrs* was “a slick essay in Gallic torture porn,”¹⁸⁷ cut from the same “unrelentingly nauseating cloth as the ‘Hostel’ films.”¹⁸⁸ *Martyrs* director Pascal Laugier, however, denies the film as torture porn, arguing that “the film doesn’t talk about torture – it talks about the pain,” and labels the film as the “anti-Hostel.”¹⁸⁹ While torture porn focuses on the gruelling scenes of torture as a basis for the film, *Martyrs* offers it up as a rite of passage. One critic describes these scenes as “unflinching brutality that forces the audience to endure every second of the horrendous ordeal.”¹⁹⁰ The film watches the beatings received without any lingering close-ups, edits, or any kind of visual cues.

Edelstein suggests that the rise in torture porn reflects post-9/11 and post-Abu Ghraib anxieties. The images of US military personnel dominating and humiliating Iraqi prisoners forced a “national debate about the morality of torture,” while also asking, “[f]ear supplants empathy and makes us all potential torturers, doesn’t it?”¹⁹¹ In some films, torture becomes a means to an end, such as information, confession, answers. Watching people being brutally tortured is disturbing. When the victims can escape and exact revenge on the torturers, the viewer is offered the pleasure of seeing some form of justice done, even if that means more torture. During the second section of *Martyrs*, Lucie slaughters the family she believes tortured her as a child. Whether it is the correct family is in doubt as we are not sure of Lucie’s mental state. It is only in the third and final act when we realise that she was correct, the torturing begins again. We are relieved that Lucie managed to exact her revenge but at what cost.

¹⁸⁶ Jamie Russell, ‘Frontier(s) review’, *BBC*, March 9, 2008,

http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2008/03/10/frontiers_2008_review.shtml

¹⁸⁷ Xan Brooks, ‘Martyrs review’, *Guardian*, March 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/mar/26/martyrs-horror-film-review>

¹⁸⁸ David Jenkins, ‘Martyrs’, *Time Out*, March 2009, <https://www.timeout.com/movies/martyrs-1>

¹⁸⁹ Pascal Laugier, as quoted in Maddi McGillvray, ‘Subverting Gender Stereotypes in the New French Extremity’, in *Gender and Contemporary Horror in Film*, ed. Samantha Holland, Robert Shail, Steven Gerrard (UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2019), p.16. The original quote is from R. Carnavale, ‘Martyrs – Pascal Laugier Interview’, *Indie London*, 2008: <http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Film-Review/martyrs-pascal-laugier-interview>.

¹⁹⁰ Lee Griffiths, ‘Martyrs’, *Eye For Film*, March 2009, <https://www.eyeforfilm.co.uk/review/martyrs-film-review-by-lee-griffiths>.

¹⁹¹ Edelstein, ‘Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex’.

Psychological trauma

There is an example in an 1895 edition of *Popular Science Monthly* in which the term “psychical trauma” is used to describe “a morbid nervous condition.”¹⁹² In this sense trauma is more than a physical injury; it is a psychological, emotional wound. It is the psychic shock of an experience, such as a dangerous accident, the death of someone close, or even the witnessing of something appalling, frightening or distressing. On the website for the ‘Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)’, the definition of trauma is as follows:

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.¹⁹³

Trauma has been an integral aspect of psychology and psychoanalysis, the distinction being the workings of the mind and the symptoms which can affect these workings. In Freud's theories on trauma¹⁹⁴, there are clear distinctions between the two processes individuals go through after they experience a traumatic event or loss. Firstly, the process of mourning and ‘working through’: the healthy process of mourning when the individual can separate him/herself from the experience, or the object lost. They can ‘work through’ the event and its effects as something outside themselves; secondly, there is melancholia and ‘acting out’: the process in which the individual is unable to separate themselves from the experience. The individual either refuses or is forced to repeat the loss/event through internal self-torment, guilt, compulsive behaviour, and denial. This can lead to depression, delusion, and psychotic breakdown. In terms of the individual, there are different forms of trauma, which could be referred to; physical, psychological, or emotional. There is the physical trauma of violence to the body, there

¹⁹² Nathan Oppenheim, ‘Why Children Lie’, *Popular Science Monthly* 47, July (1895), p.386.

¹⁹³ SAMHSA, *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*, <http://www.samhsa.gov/traumajustice/traumadefinition/definition.aspx> (as accessed on 03/04/14)

¹⁹⁴ See for example, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920), in *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 11: On Metapsychology* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1990), pp.269-338; ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working Through’ (1914), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 12*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), pp.145-156; ‘Introduction to Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses’ (1919), in *Standard Edition: Volume 14*, pp.301-322; and ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), in *Standard Edition: Volume 14*, pp.243-258.

are the psychological/emotional effects of witnessing horrific events and the all-encompassing striving for survival and escape, and there are the psychological effects of madness, shock and neurosis. It is important here to distinguish what exactly is being discussed here: trauma as injury or wound of the flesh or trauma as breaking and disturbance of the mind. During the traumatic event, the psyche shuts down all meaning-making faculties. The symbolic abilities, language and representation, are closed off. The 'action/survival' side of the psyche takes over in an attempt to escape the event/experience unharmed and intact. This induces a kind of split personality in which the 'victim', or 'witness', experiences the event without reason or meaning, and only through heightened affects and emotions. This can lead to the experience being replayed and repeated in the 'victim/witness's' mind. As they were not read in terms of logic or meaning, the 'memories' (or traces of the event) are recalled, but misread and misrecognised in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, hallucinations, and phobias. This playback and repetition of the event suggests the mind trying to salvage meaning it was previously unable to claim at the time the event occurred. This protective splitting off is called 'dissociation'.

"We describe as "traumatic" any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield," Freud writes.

Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defence measure. At the same time [...] there is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead – the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can be disposed of.¹⁹⁵

One must only think of the various horror sub-genres to discern the influences of trauma. For example, body horror examines the various states and stages of trauma the body can endure and resort to, from disease, dismemberment, mutation, metamorphosis, decay, and disintegration. The examination could be more concerned with the physical manifestations of these states and the effects on the body, or with

¹⁹⁵ Sigmund Freud. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), reprinted in James Strachey (ed.), *The Penguin Freud Library*. Volume II, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, p.301.

the psychological and emotional results of these states, the anxiety, fear and revulsion of what the body is going through. The zombie film, again, deals with the various states of decay and disintegration the human body can undergo. The monster in the zombie film is the answer to our most basic question, what happens after death? The genre, however, also reads into the social disintegration and trauma of humanity in the face of extinction: what are humans willing to go through and do to each other to survive? Another sub-genre is the slasher film in which bodies are cut, stabbed, chopped, and destroyed in various, and increasingly elaborate and imaginative, ways. With progressively more complicated and authentic special make-up effects and gorier set-ups, the slasher film strives to represent realistically (or hyper-realistically) the effects of the body to varying degrees of trauma. Ghost stories and haunted houses are almost always the product of some traumatic event; a person is killed or dies horrifically, so their ghost haunts the house, area, object in the need of revenge or closure, or warning others, the occurrence repeating and echoing the past in the present.

While the concept of the “return of the repressed” is a necessary aspect of trauma studies, trauma is less an ideological imposition, or set of beliefs, but rather an event or circumstance that resists the ability to process and assimilate. While Freud suggested that trauma was due to excessive psychic stimulation causing the defences to fail, Jacques Lacan described trauma as the result of the inability to make meaning during the event. In Lacan’s concept of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and The Real, our abilities to project, conceptualize and negotiate our way through the world rely on our ability to create, label, and categorise meanings. Lacan once said, “it is the world of words that creates the world of things.”¹⁹⁶ While our sense of ‘Self’, ‘Identity’ and our immediate relation to the world are constructed via the Imaginary, we assemble meaning and order through the Symbolic via gestures, signs, and language. The Real is, according to Lacan, “that which resists symbolization absolutely.”¹⁹⁷

[T]here’s an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarises what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which

¹⁹⁶ Jacques Lacan, ‘The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis’, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), p.65.

¹⁹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The seminar Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, trans. J. Forrester, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.66.

isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence¹⁹⁸

The Real is the lack of meaning, the void, and the unrepresentable. It is the primordial chaotic soup on which our knowledge and understanding are built. This horror of things beyond our understanding and our abilities to comprehend evokes H. P. Lovecraft's tendency for writing about the unspeakable, the unimaginable, and the "terrible, indescribable thing."¹⁹⁹ Dissociation, in its attempts to make meaning out of the unrepresentable, provides the horror genre with one of its most effective and powerful tools: the inability to believe one's own eyes, one's judgement, or even one's sanity. The return and repetition of nightmares, the irresistible need to look into the darkness to see something beyond our comprehension, the distress of trying to grasp at something beyond our abilities to understand, is the basis of many horror stories. Horror writers such as Lovecraft, and M. R. James, wrote about characters that see or witness something, or some event, they do not understand and become haunted by it, and so desperately attempt to decipher the truth. They are compelled to return to a scene of horror, to repeat the nightmare, each time gaining a more horrifying piece of the image until they come face to face with something that defies reason, quite often sending the characters mad. In Shosanna Felman's essay on Henry James' ghost story *The Turn of the Screw*, she writes that the novel's ambiguity is integral to the unease it generates. This ambiguity, she argues, is lost in the various critical interpretations. She argues that rather than writers and critics attempting to decode these uncertainties and produce meaning, the focus should be where "meaning in the text *does not come off*, that which in the text, and through which the text, *fails to mean*."²⁰⁰ While Lovecraft's literary offerings of the "terrible, indescribable thing" work well within the written page, providing just enough hints and connotations to the reader to allow the imagination to conjure up the worst, the horror film has a more difficult time with visual depictions of the unrepresentable, either disappointing viewers by not showing enough or offering something that falls far short of expectations. Some of the New French Horror films take the traumatic event as the starting point of the story. This has long been a staple plot point of the horror story: an event causes a character

¹⁹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.164.

¹⁹⁹ H. P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (London: Penguin English Library, 2018), p.117.

²⁰⁰ Shosanna Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation', *Yale French Studies*, No. 55-56 (1977): pp.39-81.

to be considered overly emotional, vulnerable, or unstable, and through the story, they are in danger of losing touch with reality. *À l'intérieur* opens with a car accident and the death of a husband and an unborn child. *Vinyan* (2008, Xavier Gens) follows a grieving couple after they lose their young son in the 2004 tsunami in Thailand. *Dans ton sommeil* starts with the accidental death, or possible suicide, of a teenage son, who falls from a second storey window after an argument with his mother. Each of these films is told from the viewpoint of grieving characters, allowing moments in either the narrative or the formal aspects of the film to throw doubt on the accuracy and veracity of what the viewer is being shown.

An example of how trauma (particularly trauma of the flesh) becomes the main focus, both in terms of plot and scenes of horror, is the film *Dans ma peau* (*In My Skin*, 2003, Marina de Van). It tells the story of a successful woman (played by de Van) who, at a party, walks outside in the dark, accidentally falls and cuts open her leg. She, however, is unaware of what she has done and walks back into the party with her leg covered in blood. She then goes to the hospital to have her wound treated. As the examination and the stitching takes place she explains to a concerned doctor that she did not feel any pain at all. As the story progresses, she is let out of the hospital and continues with her successful life. At the same time, she becomes obsessed with her scar and the fact that she cannot feel anything around it. This desire to feel something prompts her to continually play with and reopen the wound. It also begins an obsession with self-harm. At one point, during a dinner meeting with important clients, she takes her knife underneath the table and cuts slivers off her scar, and secretly puts them into her mouth while everyone is eating their meal. In a moment of uncontrolled desire, she leaves work one day, books herself into a hotel and begins an orgy of self-harm, which seems to last for days.

What this film does is express how personal physical traumas (in this case, the cutting open of her leg) can lead to psychological trauma. The curiosity of the traumatised flesh, the wound, leads to anxieties or obsessions concerning the fragility of the body. There is also a sense that touching a painful wound, scratching a scar, picking at a scab, points to a certain enjoyment, a desire to test the pain. As in the film, the need to prod, pick and open at a wound can be seen as a need to investigate the truth behind the wound. The fact that she did not feel the moment she wounded herself, her subsequent need to replay the events in order to fully experience them, suggests that she is going through a kind of working-through of past events. In the

same way that the meaning-making part of the brain closes off during moments of severe trauma, she cannot recall the moment her obsession with the fragility and wounding of her own body began. This need for repetition, for understanding, (as well as the repetition of her inability to feel pain as pain) turns into her desire for her own physical mutilation. As she cuts herself, close-ups of her face suggest sexual pleasure. Although the tendency is to conceive of the cutting as a form of escape or a negation of the stresses of reality; she is cutting herself to assert reality, and to negate the unreality of her everyday existence. She loses control of her emotions, she hallucinates the numbing or dismemberment of her limbs, her hand moves at the dinner table on its own accord. Slavoj Žižek writes that cutting is performed in order to return to reality. The act of cutting oneself, as in *Dans ma peau*, confirms the body's existence in reality: "it represents a desperate strategy to return to the Real of the body [...] cutting is a radical attempt to (re)gain a hold on reality, or [...] to ground the ego firmly in bodily reality, against the intolerable anxiety of perceiving oneself as non-existent."²⁰¹ This misfiring of recall, or dissociation, "is thus not a sort of cleavage that neuroscience theories infer: it rather involves a delay in attention to the event, and then a process of revision of memories linked with fantasy."²⁰²

Historical and national trauma: The American Nightmare and the French Nightmare.

Contemporary film studies have incorporated concepts of national trauma to examine the horror genre as a kind of socio-political barometer, gauging the fear and anxieties of its audience. Up until the late 1950s, horror films focused on the threat of the outsider, the foreigner, and the Other (stories were set in 'other' times, monsters came from 'other' lands, or visited from 'other' worlds), subsequent horror films theorised how the threat is either among us, caused by us, or that we were the monster. This was particularly evident in the analysis of the US science fiction horror boom in the

²⁰¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p.10. For more on *Dans ma peau*, self-harm, cutting, see Carrie Tarr, "Director's Cuts: the Aesthetics of Self-harming in Marina de Van's *Dans ma peau*," *Nottingham French Studies* 45, no. 3, 2006: pp.78-91; Tim Palmer, "Under your skin: Marina de Van and the contemporary French cinéma du corps," *Studies in French Cinema* 6, no. 3, 2007: pp.171-181; Eugenie Brinkema, "To cut, to split, to touch, to eat, as of a body or a text: Secretary and *Dans ma peau*," *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 14, no. 3, 2009: pp.131-145; and Guy Austin, "Biological Dystopias: The Body in Contemporary French Horror Cinema," *L'Esprit Créateur* 52, no. 2, 2012: pp.99-113.

²⁰² E. A. Kaplan and B. Wang, *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004, p.7.

1950s.²⁰³ While ostensibly presenting audiences with monsters from outer space threatening destruction and invasion, these films played on fears of nuclear power and annihilation, the increasing threat of Communism and 'un-Americanism', and the growing distrust and paranoia of one's own neighbours (familiar, yet still other). The threat was no longer from an outside presence; it was internal, it was local, and unrecognisable as a threat. The science fiction genre played on this paranoia and the narcissistic idea of anyone but us, anywhere but here. In films such as *Invaders from Mars* (1953, William Cameron Menzies), *This Island Earth* (1955, Joseph M. Newman), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, Don Seigel), and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958, Gene Fowler Jr), the threat was the neighbour, the doctor, the family, the parents, the husband. The giant monsters from *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953, Eugène Lourié), *Them!* (1954, Gordon Douglas), and *Tarantula* (1955, James Clayton), were created by nuclear fallout, so ultimately, created by us. The horror film was an expression (whether implicitly or explicitly) of socio-political and cultural anxieties and fears, and the influences of traumatic historical events.

In 1979, Robin Wood co-organised a retrospective of contemporary horror films at the Toronto International Film Festival and later co-edited a collection of essays using the same title, *The American Nightmare*.²⁰⁴ While primarily focusing on American (and Canadian) horror cinema of the 1970s, the *American Nightmare*, Wood explains, is "a patriarchal, capitalist nightmare which would apply to the whole of Western culture" which gains "a different inflection in each particular culture [...] as long as one doesn't assume that only America has a 'nightmare'."²⁰⁵

In the reviews for both *Frontière(s)* and *Martyrs*, the focus was placed on how the films alluded to specific events from France's most traumatic historical periods. In *Frontière(s)*, the film begins during the outbreak of riots in Paris after the election of a right-wing president. After escaping to the countryside, a young group of criminals are

²⁰³ See Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Reynold Humphries, 'Nuclear and Other Horrors', in *The American Horror Film: An Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp.56-82; Bill Warren, *Keep Watching the Skies!: American Science Fiction Movies of the Fifties* (US: McFarland, 2009); Steffen Hantke, *Monsters in the Machine: Science Fiction Film and the Militarization of America After World War II* (US: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2016).

²⁰⁴ Richard Lippe and Robin Wood (eds), *American Nightmare*. The introduction by Wood has been reprinted as 'The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s' in *Horror, The Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002). This was also used as the title for a documentary (*The American Nightmare*, 2000, Adam Simon) which examined the US horror films of the 70s, including interviews with scholars such as Clover, Lowenstein, and Tom Gunning, and filmmakers George Romero, John Carpenter, Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven, John Landis, David Cronenberg, and Tom Savini.

²⁰⁵ Robin Wood, as quoted in Florence Jacobowitz, 'The American Nightmare', *Cinema Canada*, Oct/Nov, 1979, p.21, <http://cinemacanada.athabascau.ca/index.php/cinema/article/viewFile/2319/2369>.

abducted, tortured, and murdered by a group of Neo-Nazi cannibals headed by an ageing father figure dressed up in Nazi uniform, lecturing on “the purity of blood” to his young *beur* (Arab) guests. One writer criticised the film for veering “dangerously close to the unpardonable, with images that evoke the Holocaust too strongly.”²⁰⁶ Another described it as an example of “Sarkozy horror,”²⁰⁷ which focuses on the fears of the rise of right-wing extremism, divisive ultra-conservative politics, and on Sarkozy’s presidential fear campaigns on immigration, class, teenage delinquency, and the threats to French identity. One writer called the film *Martyrs* a “depressing and insanely pretentious take on mortality and human experimentation”²⁰⁸, while another claimed, “all it really demonstrates is that there is something seriously rotten in the state of France.”²⁰⁹

Horror was analysed in terms of what Freud described as “the return of the repressed”, the seeping through of issues, desires and anxieties otherwise buried deep, hidden, or believed forgotten. These repressed desires are a way of maintaining the conservative, heterosexual, family-oriented status quo. Wood writes, “one can simply state the two elementary (and closely interconnected) Freudian theses [...]: that in a society built on monogamy and family there will be an enormous surplus of sexual energy that will have to be repressed; and that what is repressed must always strive to return.”²¹⁰ In the horror film, “[n]ormality is threatened by the monster,” with normality described “in a strictly nonevaluative sense, to mean simply “conformity to the dominant social norms”.”²¹¹ The monster in the horror film, according to Wood, is the destructive return of these locked-up desires and thoughts in regards to the Other. As Wood puts it, “the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilisation represses or oppresses.”²¹² These ‘abnormal’ monsters (the repressed) must be stopped for ‘normality’ (repression) to continue.

²⁰⁶ Manohla Dargis, 'After Making It Out of Paris, Finding There's No Escape', *NY Times*, May 9, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/09/movies/09fron.html?_r=0.

²⁰⁷ Neil Young, 'The 5th crossing Europe Film festival, Linz, Austria, 22-27 April 2008,' *Neil Young's Film Lounge*, April 23, 2008, <http://www.jigsawlounge.co.uk/film/reviews/the-5th-crossing-europe-film-festival-linz-austria-22-27-april-2008/>.

²⁰⁸ David Jenkins, 'Martyrs', *Time Out*, March 24, 2009, <http://www.timeout.com/london/film/martyrs>.

²⁰⁹ Peter Whittle, 'Also Showing: Martyrs', *Sunday Times*, March 29, 2009, p.14.

²¹⁰ Robin Wood, 'The Return of the Repressed', *Film Comment* 14, no. 4 (1978): p.27.

²¹¹ Wood, 'The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s', p.31.

²¹² *Ibid*, p.28.

Dissociation: cinematic and narrative trauma

While the first two parts of this chapter deal with individual physical and psychological trauma, and historical and collective national trauma, this last section will examine the idea of cinematic and narrative trauma: this idea proposes that trauma can somehow affect the narrative and the aesthetic form of the film itself. Trauma can result in symptomatic narratives, story structures, and aesthetics; the film itself can seem to be attempting to work through its very own traumatic subject matter. For example, the feral creature that attacks Lucie in *Martyrs* is originally presented to the audience as a physical reality, just as Lucie believes it to be. The narrative suggests that this projection of Lucie's fear and guilt is real, can physically hammer on doors and cause her dangerous physical harm. Only later when Anna is present during one of the attacks do we realise that there is no creature, only what looks like Lucie violently self-harming. According to Lucie, however, she is being cut and beaten by an outside presence. The narrative has become traumatised. Not only has it been explained that Lucie is suffering from nightmarish delusions, but the film has also been presenting these delusions as narrative reality. Up until now, the viewer has believed the existence of the creature, and the film has presented her as real. In the scene when Lucie as a young girl sees the creature sitting on the end of her bed, it cuts from a shot of Lucie to a shot of the creature, presumably from Lucie's point of view, as the creature is looking directly into the camera, at us, the viewer. The film is in the process of attempting to make sense of what has happened; this form of personal trauma as a producer of skewed narratives, twist endings, untrustworthy, multiple, or false points-of-view; the horror genre as a platform for traumatic misrepresentations.

It is here that issues arise about cinematic representations of trauma. How does a cinematic image truthfully portray moments of trauma in the light of dissociation? If a victim/witness of trauma is unable to make meaning of a traumatic event, does a cinematic representation of the trauma impose a false meaning? How can a film represent the unrepresentable? E. A. Kaplan writes, "As trauma implies a shattering of a culture's meaning-making scheme and representational modes, it is, as many critics insist, beyond the reach of representation."²¹³

²¹³ E. Ann Kaplan, Ban Wang (ed.), *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-cultural Explorations*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), p.8.

An example of this breakdown in representation occurs at the end of *Haute tension* when we realise that the girl, Marie (Cécile de France) and the killer (Philippe Nahon) are the same person; the killer is a figment of Marie's psychosis. We have a moment that is very similar to some theories on trauma, especially in terms of traumatic memory, misrepresentation, and misrecognition. Marie has experienced a psychotic break and has murdered the entire family of the girl she loves and tortured and almost killed the girl herself. Her mind has misremembered the events and, in an attempt, to produce meaning where she finds it impossible, her traumatised psyche has created the figure of the killer. In other words, the traumatic realisation of her actions has induced her to place the actions onto someone else, even if this person does not actually exist. However, just as we see the emaciated harpy haunting Lucie's psyche in *Martyrs*, the figure of the hulking trucker is presented to us as real. He exists in the diegetic world of the film as a physical dangerous person. The first time we see the killer is outside the house, away from Marie, and so, at no point are we to make the connection that they are in any way related. It could be argued here then that the film itself, like *Martyrs*, suffers its own form of traumatic misrecognition. At the end of the film when the truth is revealed, it is represented in a series of rapidly edited shots. The edits fizz and feedback, like an electronic short-circuit. As the twist is revealed we are shown the real events, in which Marie is killing the family. The figure of the killer has disappeared. This breaking through, this moment of realisation, does not quite fit into the frame of the film, it appears too shocking, too much to comprehend that the image seems to shake within the frame, the sound distorts, and edits are no longer clean but seem thick and clogged with hints of over-exposure and broken frames. This all represents the difficulties of the mind trying to make sense of the traumatic moment, where not all parts of the event are clear and what is recognisable causes distress and dismay.

This kind of misrecognition and dissociation is dealt with directly in *À l'intérieur*. The film begins inside a womb with a baby. Distant muffled noises can be heard, atmospheric embryonic noises, the engine of a car, muffled voices. Then suddenly we hear the squealing of tyres, a sudden thump sends the baby hurtling to one side, its expression pained as blood seeps floating into the amniotic fluid. This shocking scene fades to an exterior scene of a car accident. Two battered cars are angled together on a debris-strewn road. In one car, a pregnant woman regains consciousness in the passenger seat; her boyfriend is dead in the driver seat. The film then cuts from this

scene to a later scene with the woman in the hospital being examined. It is the due date of the baby and she is going to be induced the following day. She refuses to stay in the hospital, wanting instead to spend the night at home. Set during the 2005 Paris riots, the police are kept busy. While the woman settles at home, we are aware that an intruder has entered her house. A psychotic woman dressed in black is determined to cut and steal the woman's baby straight from her womb. We discover that the baby we witnessed during the car crash at the beginning of the film belonged to the psychotic woman; she was in the other car, and she lost her unborn child. The crash was the young woman's fault, and the psychotic woman blames her and believes she owes her baby. This idea of misidentification, or misremembering, is aimed at the audience, the viewer. It is the viewer who is being misled, who is caught in the throes of 'working through' and 'acting out' the traumatic events they have previously witnessed.

While *Haute tension* and *A l'intérieur* represent a dissociated narrative point-of-view, *Dans ton sommeil* provides the narrative as something to be wary of. The moments of trauma in the film are purposefully being misrepresented. In the film, a killer has murdered an entire family. As a neighbour is driving home one night, she helps a young man. He is terrified of someone driving a car and trying to kill him, presumably the murderer. She helps him to escape and becomes his friend. The audience, however, discovers that he is lying to her. The story he is telling does not tally with the images of the story being shown to the audience. While he is telling one story, we are seeing images from the actual story. The boy is a murderer who has just killed a family, and the man is the father and husband chasing after him. As the lies continue there is a sense that the psychotic make-believe of the young man represents the implementation and moulding of facts to smooth over trauma to pretend the shocking events did not take place. Of course, it is also safe to read it as the boy simply telling lies to get away with it. Either way, the fact the audience is being lied to, while the film is showing a possible truth at the same time, points towards a psychotic narrative split in which the viewer must determine what is real and what is not. At what point are the characters lying to us, and at what point is the film either complicit in this lie or adding to the confusion?

These examples tie in with discussions of how traumatic historical events are either represented truthfully and honestly, or alluded to in terms of narrative delusion, the imagery of nightmares and psychosis, and breakdown of conventions of the form.

In terms of trauma and memory, representations of dissociation and trauma can be seen as disruptions to linear narrative and form. The imagined characters of the harpy and the killer, who we believe to be interacting in the diegetic space and time of the film with the main characters, to the narrative which contradicts what we are seeing, there is a disruption that either requires deciphering or is suddenly and shockingly revealed and upsets everything that has gone before. These narrative disturbances evoke Deleuze's concept of "the crisis of the action-image" or, the distinction between the Movement-Image and the Time-Image. Whereas the Movement-Image can be seen as a common-sense "action/reaction", ("situations readily provoke actions that generate new situations, providing the constituents of the basic trajectory of narrative"²¹⁴), the Time-Image consists of "subjective images, memories [...], sound and visual dreams or fantasies, where the character does not act without seeing himself acting."²¹⁵ The example Deleuze uses to explain this concept is the film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959, Alain Resnais) in which one shot of a hand on a sheet cuts to a shot of a hand from the past. This is a breakdown in the conventions of action/reaction; instead, the first shot leads to a memory, which is displayed to the viewer as another shot. Past and present, memory and actuality are all presented in a single space and time.

In *Dans ton sommeil*, we see the boy's scared face as he tells the story of being chased by a murderer. The film, while still listening to his story, cuts to images of the same boy breaking into someone's house, the real past. From cutting to someone telling us one story to a shot of a different story, we have come out of the cause-and-effect narrative structure to be complicit with the boy's lies. In *Haute tension*, also, during the family massacre, Marie hides in a closet with slatted windows. Her friend's mother appears, looking in at her. *Le teuer* appears behind the mother and cuts her throat, and Marie must stifle her screams as she watches this happen. What is happening here is not what we see. Marie is the killer so she cannot be in the closet and yet that is precisely what the film is showing us. This disruption in time (she cannot be in the closet at the same time as killing the mother) and space (she cannot simultaneously be inside and outside of the closet) adds a level of complexity to the psychotic break that the viewer is not made aware of until the end of the film. Once

²¹⁴ Gregory Flaxman, 'Introduction', *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.5.

²¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Robert Galeta (UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005), p.6.

the twist ending is revealed, the majority of what we have previously seen (and believed to be diegetically true) is made unreliable and to some extent meaningless.

Trauma and dissociation are the products of intensity; the shocking event has produced levels of such heightened intensity that the meaning-making faculties have shut down. The intensity has created moments “beyond symbolisation.” If the moments are beyond the abilities of representation this could be seen to produce moments of cinematic trauma, moments in which the film loses the ability to represent. For example, in *Frontière(s)* there are several scenes, particularly moments of heightened excitement such as the two boys driving away from the farmhouse chased by Goetz in his truck, which seem to induce an aesthetic trauma. The rapid editing, the shaky handheld camerawork, the screams and shouts on the soundtrack produce a building tension. Within the edits, there are sudden glimpses of over-exposed film frames or the pixelated fuzziness of deteriorated digital images. Crackling flaws burst on the soundtrack. This represents the film becoming unstable and breaking apart due to its own intensity; the film is having trouble representing the over-intensity of the event. As Deleuze wrote, “The eye isn’t the camera, it’s the screen. As for the camera, with all its propositional functions, it’s a sort of third eye, the mind’s eye.”²¹⁶ The “mind’s eye” is reacting with various intensities and emotions. If the mind becomes traumatised, the film aesthetic loses stability. In this scene, beginning with a long shot of the two cars chasing each other along a path moving from the farmhouse, towards and past the camera, we are, in a sense, presented with the film’s point-of-view. It is a part of the story. The camera is still merely watching. The scene then turns into an array of shots from different points of view: the boys in their car, Goetz in his truck, tracking and swooping along outside both vehicles, in close-ups, mid-shots, long-shots. The soundtrack is a concentration of revving vehicles, the bashing of colliding and grating metal, the churning of grass and mud, and, of course, the boys and Goetz screaming and shouting at each other. The boys are screaming in pain, fear, and urgency to get away; Goetz is shouting and swearing that he is going to catch them. This cacophony adds to the rapid-fire editing, the handheld camerawork, and the shots of the instability of the physical film, all providing the idea of the traumatic intensity of the “mind’s eye.” The build-up of intensity produces these moments of flaws in the cinematic process as if to suggest that the film is too intense to be held in place. The

²¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p.54.

camera, the mind's eye, is experiencing its own form of traumatic dissociation, a breakdown in symbolisation. The intensity is reaching such a pitch that the meaning-making faculties are struggling to keep up; representation is deteriorating.

In the title sequence of *Martyrs*, the film footage of the two girls in the care home is aged, faded and worn. This could simply be what 'home footage' is considered to look like, particularly pre-video super-8 cine footage. Another reason for the film's deterioration is that the film has been viewed many times and in so doing has caused the film reel to the wear and tear to which celluloid was easily susceptible. Another possibility is to represent the idea of the past. The footage was shot in the early 1970s (a file card states it as 1971), and to push the later parts of the film as being 15 years later, this footage is aged to convey the idea of Lucie's trauma occurring in the past. Considering Deleuze's quotation here, however, there is another reading which pushes the idea of memory being degradable, vulnerable to disintegration, to fade and change with age. In the case of Lucie's memories in *Martyrs*, there is also the breaking down of meaning, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress and dissociation. Like Lucie's nightmares, violent outbursts and hallucinations, her symptoms obscure her memories, causing her "mind's eye" to blur, distort and disintegrate the image.

Martyrs

One such film that focuses on trauma is *Martyrs*, a film that is all about trauma, both physical and psychological, as well as a philosophical theme. It follows the revenge story of a woman who was abducted and tortured when she was a young girl. With her loyal childhood friend from care, she vies to track down her torturers and murder them. The hunt leads to a wealthy secret society, once again headed by an elderly leader (this time a woman simply known as Mademoiselle) with a penchant for turbans and rose-tinted sunglasses. The relentless torture scenes that follow, and the theoretical justification for the graphic nature of the scenes (continuous torture and excessive pain can lead to transcendence), have caused considerable vitriolic comments from critics. One critic said the film had the "reputation as the *ne plus ultra* of "torture porn," an experience so intense and shocking that it could never be topped."²¹⁷ The film caused controversy due to reports of shocked audience responses during viewings, critical

²¹⁷ Scott Tobias, 'Martyrs', *The AV Club*, 2009, <https://film.avclub.com/martyrs-1798206170>

reviews warning about the extreme brutality, and a very public protest by filmmakers and fans against the decision by the French Board of Classification to give the film an 18 certificate.²¹⁸ It examines the idea of traumatic repression, the effects of causing trauma, and the physical and psychological results of traumatic events.

The film is divided into three sections. The first begins with a young girl escaping from a warehouse. Half-naked, bleeding, bruised and beaten, hair cut short, she is terrified. As she runs away, she sobs and screams, as though the further she gets, the deeper the realisation sinks in. The scene is shot in such a way that once she escapes the warehouse, it cuts between a long shot of the girl running, the camera dollying in front of her, or following behind her, and various close-ups of her face, the wounds on her legs, and her bare feet on concrete. The editing keeps a fast pace as she escapes. Then the edits stop, holding on to the long shot of the girl running; her sobs and screams rise as if to say the need for action has passed. She begins to panic as the possibility of safety becomes real.

During the title sequence, we see Super-8 film footage of the girl (Lucie) in care. She is battered and bruised, her hair is cut short, and she wears a bandage over one eye. She does not speak or interact; she has terrible, violent nightmares. She is suffering symptoms of PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder. Another girl called Anna befriends her and promises to look after her. In the footage, her psychiatrist investigates the empty warehouse; the captors/torturers have all vanished, chains and a metal chair with a hole in the middle and a bucket underneath remain. The presentation as old amateur film reels, handheld and sometimes out of focus, complete with age deterioration, scratches, dirt and burn marks, light flares, and underexposure, all add a level of authenticity. There is also the idea that Lucie's memories are being pieced together after the event. The doctor says, "Lucie won't say what she endured." The footage is an attempt at piecing together her story, to make meaning of Lucie's ordeal; the scene begins with a title card with a case file number and date. The record is in the third person, created by someone else, and can only emphasise what is missing: the perpetrators and Lucie's testimony. At the end of the title sequence, the curtains are pulled back; the footage was being projected to Anna. The doctor and some police officers want to know if Lucie has told her anything and if

²¹⁸ More on this protest in Fabien Lemercier, 'Controversy over Pascal Laugier's *Martyrs*', *CineEuropa*, June 2, 2008, <http://archive.today/7R8I#selection-666.1-746.0>

she remembers anything about the perpetrators. Anna tells them, "She doesn't know who it was. Sometimes she thinks she remembers, sometimes she doesn't."

This scene is followed by Anna finding Lucie upset and bleeding in the bathroom. Her arms have been scratched but she insists: "It wasn't me. It wasn't me." That night Lucie barricades the door with a chair. Later Lucie hears something sneaking about the halls. The chair has been moved and there is something in the room with her. After hiding under the covers she hears something tapping on the end of her metal bed frame. When she looks out, she sees a dark, silhouetted, emaciated figure crouching at the end of her bed. It has long wild hair, scars glistening on its arms, its eyes visible in the dark. Its breath is wheezing and hoarse. The figure screeches and jumps, arms outstretched, towards the camera (Lucie's point of view). Lucie ducks under the blanket, her scream and the screeching of the thing carry over as the screen cuts to black. The title MARTYRS appears with an ominous rumbling, slowly moving towards the screen. The letters are stained with yellow (rust? pus? urine?) and as they get closer each letter gets turned on randomly like dirty, flickering strip lights. Cut to black with an ominous rumbling boom.

The second section takes place fifteen years later. We meet a seemingly ordinary, wealthy, and modern family in their large, modern home. The father cooks breakfast, the mother fixes the water pipes in a large hole in the garden, and the teenage son and younger daughter are playfully fighting over the son's girlfriend and about applying to college. Answering a knock at the door, Lucie is standing there with a shotgun. She enters and slaughters them all in turn. Before shooting him at the dining table, she asks the son, "Do you know what your parents did to me?"

From the out-and-out horror of the first section, ending with the monster sitting on the bed, the second section of the film veers off dramatically, firstly into home invasion territory and then into a violent revenge genre. After she has killed the entire family, Lucie recognises the mother and father as her torturers from a picture in the newspaper (the daughter won a medal at a swimming event). This newspaper clipping is stuck proudly to the family fridge. After she has killed them, she sits crying, rocking back and forth with the bodies of the mum and the girl, wiping their faces, kissing and shaking the mum, asking "How could you do that to me? How could you?" She phones Anna who comes to help her. Anna, it seems, spends her time looking after Lucie and cleaning her wounds whenever she gets hurt. She carries a medical bag complete

with bandages in her car. She is shocked to find that Lucie has murdered the family but is still prepared to clean up after her and bury the bodies.

Lucie is still being stalked and viciously attacked by the monstrous figure seen at the end of her bed: an emaciated, painfully thin, straggly-haired, naked feral woman with talon-like fingernails, who writhes about on the floor as if in pain. In the end credits, she is simply called *la créature*. Her body is scarred, and her mouth is ragged and torn. After Lucie has murdered the family *la créature* attacks her and injures her. Lucie believed that killing her abductors would end the attacks and give *la créature* peace. In flashback, we learn that when Lucie was escaping, she heard another woman moaning in a room. She sees a woman chained to a mattress, a flickering light bulb hanging above her. Lucie enters the room to get a closer look and sees that the woman has had her mouth sewn shut. She begs Lucie, mumbling and outreaching her arms to help her escape. Lucie hears a noise and runs away to save herself. The woman's tormented and muffled scream bridges over into the scene of Lucie escaping from the beginning of the film. *La créature* is a mental projection of her pain, fear and guilt. It represents her ordeal and what would have been if she had not escaped, and the guilt of sacrificing the woman to save herself and not knowing the fate of the woman. Rather than assimilate the fact of what she has done, leaving the woman behind to continue facing what she had experienced, the horror of this choice and the horror of the guilt she feels, she manifests this harpy to appear to her as a reminder of her choice. Lucie, we discover, is severely self-harming herself.

While Lucie has fallen asleep, Anna starts to drag the bodies (they have been hidden in the bath of the downstairs bathroom) outside and throws them into the deep hole with the water pipes. After discovering that the mother is still alive, Anna tries to divert Lucie's attention and smuggle the mother out. Lucie realises what is going on and catches her dragging the mother along the corridor. Lucie angrily pushes Anna out of the way and bashes the mother's head with the same mallet the mother was fixing the water pipes. Dipping her hand into the mother's blood she tells *la créature* that it is all finished, "They're dead. They won't hurt you anymore." *La créature* crawls to her and hugs her, a sad expression on its face. But the creature slices open Lucie's arms and starts hitting her head against the wall. Lucie runs out and jumps through a window. She realises that no matter what action she takes, she cannot fix or end the trauma, and so cuts her own throat and kills herself.

Again, the third section veers off into another territory. It starts with Anna discovering a secret medical facility underneath the house and finding a skinny, scarred, and terrified woman chained up in a cell, with a metal visor/helmet screwed to her head. Anna brings her to the house, takes her visor off (she uses a screwdriver to pry out the screws but the visor pulls off chunks of her scalp). Utterly traumatised, the woman reacts violently, furiously cutting at her own arms, scratching herself and rubbing her head against a wall. Suddenly, an armed group enters the house, shoots the woman in the head, and questions Anna about what has been happening. They take Anna down into the medical facility and chain her up. As Anna waits, the people are cleaning up the house, throwing all the dead bodies (the mother, daughter, the scarred woman, and finally Lucie) into the pit with the water pipes.

These people are the same group that abducted and tortured Lucie when she was a girl. The leader of the group is an ageing woman simply known as 'Mademoiselle'; she wears a turban, coloured sunglasses, and smokes from a cigarette holder. This is all shot with high angles from Mademoiselle's point of view and low angles from Anna's, to ensure the position of victimisation and power. Mademoiselle walks back and forth, free to move as she talks, sometimes even with her back to Anna. Anna, however, has no choice but to listen, to look up at Mademoiselle and to stay in the same lower position. Mademoiselle explains the reasons for the abductions and the torture to a terrified Anna:

It's so easy to create a victim, young lady, so easy. You lock someone in a dark room. They begin to suffer. You feed that suffering, methodically, systematically and coldly. And make it last. Your subject goes through a number of states. After a while, their trauma, that small, easily opened crack makes them see things that don't exist. What did your poor Lucie see? Nothing? Not even a monster or two? Things that wanted to hurt her? [...] People no longer envisage suffering, young lady. That's how the world is. There are nothing but victims left. Martyrs are very rare. A martyr is something else. Martyrs are extraordinary beings. They survive pain, they survive total deprivation. They bear all the sins of the earth, they give themselves up, they transcend themselves. Do you understand that word? They are transfigured.

Mademoiselle shows Anna a series of harrowing photographs of various women being tortured, executed, terminally ill, or have been in accidents, all of whom are on the point of death. Mademoiselle repeats to Anna, "look at their eyes." In each photo the women have their eyes upturned:

All of them, young lady. You hear me? They were all alive when photographed. Don't try to tell me that the notion of martyrdom is an invention of the religious. We tried everything, even children. It turns out that women are more responsive to transfiguration. Young women. That's how it is, young lady.

The group is a religious cult that believes enlightenment can be achieved when the physical body is traumatised to the point of death. In the moments before dying, the victims achieve transcendence. Mademoiselle and her group are torturing young girls to the point of death in the hope of finding out what happens after death. Anna is held captive in a cell, tortured and beaten regularly. Eventually, Anna falls into a kind of psychosis; she has an imaginary conversation with Lucie and falls into a state of "letting go." After more beatings, they take her to the "final stage." Her body is completely flayed, leaving only her face, and she is chained into a kneeling crucified stance. Anna reaches a state of transcendence. Her face is upturned, the shot tracks into a close-up of her eye and keeps going. The lights reflected in her eyes turn into a kind of blossoming storm cloud of lights. The soundtrack emits a vibrating, rumble, mixed in with whispering, and atonal choral sounds. There are strong visual and aural similarities to the 'Stargate' scene from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, Stanley Kubrick), an attempt to cinematically represent transcendence. Mademoiselle is called to come over at once. She crouches to Anna, who is now kept in a surgical bath, and asks her what she saw. Anna whispers something into her ear. The film ends with Mademoiselle telling her associate to "keep doubting" before shooting herself.

The first half of the film focuses on someone trying to regain meaning, or closure, after the traumatic suffering at the hands of another. While Lucie cannot come to terms with what has happened, she is suffering because of that lack of understanding. She is unable to construct meaning, piece together answers to what and why she was put through these experiences as a child. Fifteen years later she is still haunted (and attacked) by the events. She suffers from nightmares, delusions, hallucinations, guilt, and paranoia. Her trauma, her disassociated readings of the event

have created an externalised force from which she must protect herself, but also something to act for. This thing, this creature, is going to haunt her, injure her, and possibly try to kill her until she attempts to seek out the answers. The answers, she decides, will be found in venting her anger, suffering, and vengeance on her past victimisers. By destroying them she believes it will take away the fear that it may happen again, also by taking power over the creators of her (and the creature's) trauma in the first place. By taking their lives, by erasing them from existence, Lucie is trying to erase their memory.

The cutting of hair is a powerful recurring image in many of the new French horror films such as the kidnapped girl in *Frontière(s)* and Anna in *Martyrs*. These are direct references to the period during the Liberation in which thousands of women were put through public punishment and humiliation for fraternising with the enemy. They were paraded and taunted in front of the crowds and had their heads shaved in public. They are referred to as *les femmes tondues*, the shorn women. Scenes of female characters abducted, tortured, and forcibly having their hair cut off, triggers what Adam Lowenstein calls an “allegorical moment [...] a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined.”²¹⁹ Taking Lowenstein’s allegorical moment and these scenes which recall the *épuration* (the public trials which took place directly after the liberation) and *les femmes tondues*, links to scenes and images from other films can be ascertained. In *Hiroshima mon amour*, a film that tackles not only the Liberation but also the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, a French woman and a Japanese man have an affair. During the film both of their traumatic histories collide and intertwine with their (and the viewer’s) present. In flashback, the film reveals the man’s loss of his family during the bombing of Hiroshima and the woman’s previous love affair with a German soldier resulting in her public humiliation and the shaving of her head. Donato Totaro writes: “Many revisionist historical accounts interpret these acts against women as a form of scapegoat²²⁰ for the easy capitulation of France to Germany, the subsequent sense of French male humiliation under the Occupation, and the guilt over France’s collaboration with the Nazis. In short, patriarchal guilt over French

²¹⁹ Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation*, p.1.

²²⁰ For more on the idea of the scapegoat see René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), and Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

collaboration was mapped onto the female body.”²²¹ In *Calvaire*, (2004, Fabrice du Welz), Laurent Lucas is abducted by a farmer who believes him to be his dead wife come back to life. Lucas is punished for trying to escape by being tied up and having his hair cut off. The fact that Lucas is treated as a woman and is forced to wear a dress (and is believed by the farmer to be a woman), enforces the cutting of his hair to directly reference the concept and image of *les femmes tondues*, although by reversing the gender, *Calvaire* turns the guilt back onto patriarchal society.

The focus then is on how films represent trauma, in what context the representation is placed in the film, and what it says about the event either explicitly or implicitly. Consider *Martyrs*: the fascistic aspects of Mademoiselle’s organisation, the capture, incarceration, and torture of the victims, as well as images of cages, bodies being thrown into pits, emaciated bodies, the shaving of the victims’ heads (*femmes tondues*). These images all recall footage taken during WWII from concentration camps and the Occupation. Donato Totaro writes, “Given my reading of the film – that *Martyrs* is also ‘about’ France’s collective National (sic) guilt over the Vichy regime and French collaboration and questions of national race and purity – then you can add ‘political’ as a factor that makes *Martyrs* a multi-faceted transgressive horror film.”²²²

It is extremely difficult to examine concepts of national, historical, social trauma without discussing the events of 9/11, particularly in terms of how they have influenced media, cinema, and the horror genre. This event was experienced globally by the vast majority through images on television. These images have seeped into the cultural consciousness as an apocalyptic vision: the explosion of the plane hitting the second tower; the collapse of the buildings and the ensuing massive cloud of dust and debris chasing people down the street; the video footage taken at the scene during the collapse. These events, despite taking place in a single city, were ‘experienced’ on a global scale. As Alison Landsberg suggests, “Through the technologies of mass culture, it becomes possible for these memories to be acquired by anyone.”²²³ However, through television, the events were being mediated and meaning was being produced and provided for the ‘viewer’. The experience was, in a sense, being given

²²¹ Donato Totaro, ‘Martyrs: Evoking France’s Cinematic and Historical Past’, *Offscreen*, May, 2009, http://www.offscreen.com/index.php/pages/essays/martyrs_historical/

²²² Donato Totaro, ‘Martyrs.’

²²³ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), p.2.

'meaning'. Trauma and the horror film, however, are more concerned with the inability of the characters, and the viewers, to make meaning. This inability encourages fear and anxiety.

In the *New York Times*, an article published the month after the 9/11 attacks, discussed the idea that the horror film is about trauma: "The horror movie is just sitting there waiting to deal with this [...] It is one of the most versatile genres out there, a universal solvent of virtually any news issue. And it is now perfectly positioned to cop some serious attitude, to play a role where it's not simply a date movie but going further back, to the 1950's, where you have the movie as metaphor."²²⁴ It is not new to say that the horror genre dealt with representations of many of society's fears and anxieties, but this statement suggests that the horror genre is always waiting for something terrible to happen. Similarly, Linnie Blake points out the valuable connections between Trauma Studies and "the trauma-raddled and wound-obsessed genre that is horror cinema." According to Blake, trauma studies, "is an entirely apposite discipline through which to read that most traumatic and traumatised of film genres – cinematic horror, a genre here shown to undertake precisely the kind of cultural work that Trauma Studies takes as its subject."²²⁵ The images of *Martyrs* take on the meaning of the images of the occupation and the liberation. The horror genre takes societal nightmares and traumatic events that we may be repressing, that may be festering underneath the surface and displays them; whether in the shape of a monster, a killer, or more blatantly showing us images closely representing TV news footage or photographs, and by doing so, providing some form of confrontation and confirmation. The horror film allows these terrible moments to be vented rather than suppressed.

²²⁴ Robert J. Thompson, quoted in Rick Lyman, "Horrors! Time for an Attack of the Metaphors? From Bug Movies to Bioterrorism," *New York Times*, October 23, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/23/movies/horrors-time-for-an-attack-of-the-metaphors-from-bug-movies-to-bioterrorism.html>

²²⁵ Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p.1-2.

CHAPTER FOUR: APOCALYPSE

Introduction

There are many examples of French films that represent varying degrees of the apocalyptic, ranging from depictions of large-scale disasters and global catastrophes to post-apocalyptic dystopian futures.²²⁶ The apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic is typically categorised as a science fiction sub-genre, offering a glimpse of a possible (and hopefully distant) future. In terms of science fiction, the apocalypse provides scope with which to examine the limitations of (as well as the uncertainty and anxiety of) scientific and technological progress and the possibilities of extinction. The apocalypse film could also fit into the disaster film genre which, as Maurice Yacowar describes, like science fiction, “exploits the spectacular potential of the screen and nourishes the audience’s fascination with the vision of massive doom.”²²⁷ In an article titled *Apocalypse Then*, Elizabeth Ezra writes that early French cinema “witnessed an explosion of disaster films unique in the history of French cinema.”²²⁸ She states that the “images of wide-scale devastation [...] displayed for our viewing pleasure” were prevalent after the First World War because “the memory of destruction loomed large in the minds of French film-makers”²²⁹ and the fears that “[p]ost-war stability was perceived - and indeed, ultimately turned out – to be fragile and short-lived.”²³⁰ As well as World War, the cause of the apocalyptic event is typically due to advancements and experiments in science, medicine and technology, the effects of human abuse, greed and inattention to the planet’s resources, or from something beyond our planet. These threats impose themselves as global catastrophes in which humanity needs an escape route, a cure or antidote, or another world to inhabit.

The apocalypse/disaster genre also provides scope for filmmakers to show off their technical and directorial skills by producing the most spectacular displays of

²²⁶ Contemporary examples include *La Jetée* (1962, Chris Marker), *Weekend* (1967, Jean-Luc Godard), *Malevil* (1981, Christian de Chalonge), *La Dernier combat (The Last Battle)*, 1983, Luc Besson), *Delicatessen* (1991, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro) and *Le Temps du loup (The Time of the Wolf)*, 2003, Michael Haneke).

²²⁷ Maurice Yacowar, ‘The Bug in the Rug: Notes on the Disaster Genre’, in *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant, (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995), p.261.

²²⁸ Elizabeth Ezra, ‘Apocalypse Then: French Disaster Films of the 1920s’, *Studies in French Cinema* 1, no. 1 (2014): p.5. Some of the films discussed are *Eruption volcanique à la Martinique* and *Catastrophe du ballon ‘Le Pax’* (both 1902, Georges Méliès), *Charleston* (1923, Jean Renoir), *La Cite foudroyée (A City Destroyed)*, 1924, Luitz-Morat), and *La Fin du monde (The End of the World)*, 1930, Abel Gance).

²²⁹ Ezra, ‘Apocalypse Then’, p.6

²³⁰ Ibid, p.5.

special effects mayhem and destruction. Some of the biggest-budgeted US apocalyptic films²³¹ have all attempted to outdo each other with the massive scale of onscreen devastation, with various famous landmarks being destroyed to demonstrate the far-reaching extent of the disaster, numerous scenes of screaming crowds running for their lives, buildings being toppled, and famous cityscapes being laid waste. Paris has often been destroyed in US disaster/apocalypse films with landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, and the Sacré-Cœur, frequently seen demolished. Paris in ruins is also a recurring image in French apocalypse cinema, in films such as *La Cité foudroyée (A City Destroyed)*, 1924, Luitz-Morat), and *La Fin du monde (The End of the World)*, 1930, Abel Gance) to *La Jetée* (1961, Chris Marker). In Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien Resurrection*, the theatrical release of the film ended with the two main characters viewing a post-apocalyptic Earth from a window on their spaceship. In an alternative ending, the characters (played by Sigourney Weaver and Winona Ryder) visit Earth and discuss the future while contemplating a wrecked Paris skyline complete with Eiffel Tower broken in half. Here Jeunet, directing his first (and to date his only) film in the US, ends the film with the characters (one of whom has been stuck in Space for over 200 years) returning home not to the US but home to France.²³²

Ezra suggests this scene could be read “as a wry comment on Jeunet’s own career”, with Paris reminding us of his previous films and foreshadowing his next film, *Amélie*. “The alternative ending of *Alien Resurrection* is thus preview of Jeunet’s own geographical and cinematic return to his homeland.” Ezra also points out that this final image of the broken Eiffel Tower is very similar to the ending of another post-apocalyptic classic *The Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968). After believing they have crash-landed on another planet ruled by apes and gorillas, at the end of the film the main character realises he has been on Earth the entire time, after discovering the torso and the outstretched torch of the Statue of Liberty half-buried on a beach. These images of the shattered Eiffel Tower and the buried Statue of Liberty, two iconic symbols of prosperous cityscapes plundered and ruined, are enough to signify the post-apocalyptic. Ezra writes, “The fact that the Statue of Liberty was a gift to the United States from France and that the film is based on the French novel *La*

²³¹ *Armageddon* (1998, Michael Bay), *Deep Impact* (1998, Mimi Leder), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2003, Roland Emmerich), and *2012* (2009, Emmerich).

²³² Ezra, *Jean-Pierre Jeunet*, p.81.

Planète des singes, by Pierre Boulle, further underscores the Franco-American exchange in *Alien Resurrection*:

It is significant that the Parisian ending is the alternative ending, as French cinema plays a role of art-house alternative to Hollywood. However, this was not always the case. The devastation of the French landscape serves as an apt metaphor for Hollywood's effect on the French film industry, which dominated world markets until the First World War [...] The world whose end is represented in these films is a world in which France dominated the global film market. Jeunet's alternative ending evokes these films and the era whose decline they lament – an era when French cinema was not simply an “alternative.”²³³ (Ezra, *Jean-Pierre Jeunet*, p.81).

The original definition of the word *apocalypse* means “a revealing”, “a disclosure”; in Greek, *apokalyptein*, means to uncover, take the lid off, or unveil. The word originated either from the Bible and the Book of Revelations indicating the ‘Day of Judgment’, a vision of the future proffered to St John promising God's destruction of the wicked, the salvation of the righteous, and the revelation of a higher truth (a catastrophic wiping clean of the slate and starting again); or, as argued by Jeffrey Lewis, the word originated from Homer's *Odyssey*, with the hero Odysseus releasing and unveiling himself “from the enchantments of the nymph Calypso, hence Apocalypse.”²³⁴ Either way, the word refers to erasing and starting again on a global scale; or seeing beyond the veil at a previously undisclosed truth. This revelation of the new requires the necessary removal of the old. The term has evolved through a history of fictional works on global destruction, a history of prophesied future catastrophes, and many natural and man-made cataclysmic events. The apocalyptic now simply denotes the destruction of civilisation and the end of the world. Filmmakers have been drawn to mass destruction since the beginning of cinema. They have represented the end of the world from the divine (*The Ten Commandments*), the natural (*Earthquake*) and the man-made (*Dr Strangelove*). Films have shown us, in ever-increasing advancements in special effects spectacle and photo-realism, how cities, countries, and entire planets, can be threatened with destruction. This can occur through the seemingly

²³³ Ezra, *Jean-Pierre Jeunet*, p.81.

²³⁴ Jeffrey Lewis, ‘The Dual Nature of Apocalypse in *Watchmen*’, in Jan Baetens (ed.) *The Graphic Novel*, p.141.

unstoppable advance of global warfare, the massive killing and nightmarish genocidal acts committed in the name of war, to the contemporary threats of nuclear holocaust, viral pandemics, giant meteors, violent and catastrophic climate change, the revenge of nature, alien invasion, or robot and technological invasion. They have represented the apocalyptic, in which the viewer is witness to events leading to the possible end of the world; and the post-apocalyptic, in which humanity attempts to survive the ruins after the event has taken place. The post-apocalyptic continues to reveal the next stage, whether the utopian fresh start and the rebuilding of a new civilisation or the dystopian wasteland without hope and the total dissolution of society.

While both *Mutants* and *La Horde* are prime examples of tales of the apocalypse as the end of humanity represented in modern horror and science fiction conventions, the term apocalypse, as described in the 'Book of Revelations', deals more with the future and new beginnings. Angels were sent to show visions of the future to St John of Patmos (or John the Elder), where it was revealed to him that God was going to destroy the world and bring everyone to account. This Day of Judgment would deliver the good into Heaven and the bad to Hell. As well as the Judgment aspects of the story, many details have become staples of an apocalyptic visual repertoire: plagues, boiling seas, water turned to blood, earthquakes, and fire from the sky, immense wars, dragons and giant multi-headed beasts.

The blending of science fiction and horror is nothing new. In fact, it could be argued that genre-defining novels such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Robert Louis Stevenson, 1886), *The Island of Dr Moreau* and *The Invisible Man* (H.G. Wells, 1896 and 1897) are as much science fiction stories as they are horror stories: tales of 'mad scientists' incorporating new technology and scientific theories to create monsters. As Gary Hoppenstand argues, "the novel that created the genre was born with a monster for a father and a technophobe for a mother": Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

Many critics and historians of science fiction, myself included, consider Mary Shelley's gothic masterpiece to be the first science fiction story, and here Emily Auger takes this same novel as an early example of the genre of "tech-noir." Shelley's sinister cautionary tale of Victor Frankenstein's hubris, his overweening Promethean theft of the fire of life, and his all-too-human failing in refusing to assume responsibility for his pretension to godhood, directed the

fledgling genre down a dark path, a literary trail that eventually led to an overarching dystopian worldview of science and technology.²³⁵

The theme and the atmosphere of both *Mutants* and *La Horde* could not be more different. *Mutants* takes place in a bleak post-apocalyptic snow-bound laboratory; *La Horde* starts as an action-police-thriller with the apocalypse taking place somewhere off-screen. But both films deal with apocalyptic scenarios. The first concentrates on pandemics, viral infection, and the spreading of contagion: the wiping out of humanity through infection. In the second scenario, human life is not merely wiped out; it is transformed into something else, something inhuman. In fact, not only is humanity turned into something else, but humans also become the very threat to humanity. *La Horde*, on the other hand, takes place just as the apocalypse has started. While stylistically a very different film, it also deals with the idea that humanity will transform into the very thing that will destroy it. In this case, the result of the pandemic is the zombie, the living dead. The plot runs as follows: a small group of undercover cops are about to take revenge on a drug gang after one of their colleagues has been murdered. Once inside the gang's high-rise, the film races along with a series of gun battles, fights, arguments, and some gratuitous scenes of torture. The turning point of this hyperactive police action thriller is the scene in which a gang member, previously shot and killed, gets up and starts to eat other members of the gang. Soon, the entire building is surrounded and infiltrated by hungry, violent zombies, much like the shopping mall in *Dawn of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 1979) and the high rise building in *[Rec]* (Jaume Balagueró, 2007). To survive, both sides must work together to escape from the tower block only to find that the entire city has been taken over by 'the horde'.

Perhaps the most prevalent example of the apocalypse in contemporary horror cinema from the US and the UK has been the reimagining of the figure of the living dead as either the cause or the by-product of the catastrophe: from the shambling, flesh-eating living dead of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* series to the manic, sprinting monsters of *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002) and *28 Weeks Later* (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007), the remake of Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, (2004, Zack Snyder), and *Zombieland* (2009, Ruben Fleischer). With the success of *Night of the*

²³⁵ Gary Hoppenstand, 'Foreword', in Auger, Emily Elisabeth. *Tech-Noir Film: A Theory of The Development of Popular Genres*. Intellect Books, 2011, p.9.

Living Dead, the zombie became a popular European horror favourite during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in Spain²³⁶ and Italy.²³⁷ The success of *Dawn of the Dead* (co-produced and re-edited by Italian horror director Dario Argento for Italian audiences and released under the title *Zombi/Zombie*), prompted a series of flesh-eating zombie films in Italy. Made primarily to cash in on the success of *Dawn of the Dead*, Italian cinema had a reputation for making quickly produced low-budget imitations of successful films and franchises. Fulci's *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1979) was released in Italy only two months after *Dawn of the Dead* under the title *Zombi 2/Zombie 2*.

With the rising of the dead, cannibalism, and the spreading of contagion, the traditional zombie film has taken on a global scale with the living dead reconfigured as a viral threat, complete with safe zones, quarantines, medical warnings about how to defend yourself, desist and dispose of the dead, and advice on how not to get contaminated. The New French Horror films that deal with the contemporary living dead, such as *La Horde* and the short film, *Paris By Night of the Living Dead* (Grégory Morin, 2009), both display the zombie as a violent and lethal plague. With one bite the zombie contagion is passed on. It is no longer a case of the dead merely coming back to life; the 'zombie' virus effectively kills the living before bringing them back from the dead. As Adam Charles Hart writes:

Zombies chase the living, threatening to make their victims just like themselves. A zombie is a corpse that forces acknowledgment upon the survivors; it cannot be buried and ignored. It dies rising again *as that which is discarded*: the physical, material substance of the body without the intellect that holds it together as a human subject. Zombies produce spectacles of wounded bodies, blurring the line between monster and victim, and making the victim's wounds the very marker of monstrosity.²³⁸

²³⁶ Examples include *La rebelión de las muertas* (*Vengeance of the Zombies*, 1973, Leon Klimovsky), *La Orgia de los muertos* (*The Orgy of the Living Dead/The Hanging Woman*, 1973, Jose Luis Merino), and Amando de Ossorio's *Blind Dead* series (*La noche del terror ciego/Tombs of the Blind Dead*, 1971; *El Ataque de los Muertos Sin Ojos/Return of the Blind Dead*, 1973; *El Buque maldito/The Ghost Galleon*, 1974; *La Noche de las gaviatos/Night of the Seagulls*, 1975).

²³⁷ Examples of Italian zombie films include *Zombi holocaust* (*Zombie Holocaust*, 1980), directed by Marino Girolami; *Incubo sulla citta contaminate* (*City of the Walking Dead/Nightmare City*, 1980) by Umberto Lenzi; *Le notti del terrore* (*Burial Ground*, 1980) by Andrea Bianchi; *La notte erotiche dei morti viventi* (*Erotic Nights of the Living Dead/Island of the Zombies*, 1980) by Aristide Massaccesi (as Joe D'Amato); *Virus – inferno dei morti viventi* (*Zombie Creeping Flesh*, 1980) by Bruno Mattei. Lucio Fulci alone directed *Zombi 2* (*Zombie Flesh Eaters*, 1979), *La paura nella citta dei morti viventi* (*City of the Living Dead/Gates of Hell*, 1980), and *E tu vivrai nel terrore ... L'aldila* (*The Beyond*, 1981).

²³⁸ Adam Charles Hart, 'Millennial Fears: Abject Horror in a Transnational Context', in *A Companion to the Horror Film*, ed. Harry M. Benshoff (London: Wiley, 2014), p.335.

Here we have the apocalyptic concept of the dead rising. In Abel Gance's *J'Accuse!* (1919, remade by Gance in 1938), the shell-shocked war veteran warns everyone in his hometown that the dead will rise from the grave to accuse the living of allowing the war to take place. From the graves and the battlefields, the ghosts of the dead soldiers rise, many wounded and disfigured, and march through the towns of France. The image of the corpse emerging from the grave has influenced the horror genre in many ways and forms. Two of the most iconic figures in the history of the horror genre could be described simply as walking corpses: the monster sewed together from various dead body parts and brought to life in *Frankenstein* and the 'undead' vampire in John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). *Frankenstein* contested the clash between religion and science (while the creation is referred to as "monster", "creature", "demon", "devil", "fiend", "wretch", and "it", in a conversation with Frankenstein it calls itself "the Adam of your labours", and at one point says to its maker that instead of being "your Adam", it was instead "your fallen angel"). *Dracula* can be seen as an allegory of the fight against Satan (the name Dracula means dragon and in the *Book of Revelations*, Satan is described as the great red dragon; Professor Van Helsing, Dracula's nemesis, describes the vampire as "an arrow in the side of Him who died for man" and the band of vampire hunters were fighting "for the good of mankind and for the honour and glory of God", as well as incorporating the religious symbols of the crucifix, communion wafers and holy water as defences against the soulless vampires).²³⁹

The contemporary figure of the zombie, however, despite any biblical references to the raising of the dead, can be seen as the exemplar of the secular apocalyptic condition. More than that, the zombie has also become a key figure in critiques of materialist capitalism; the brainless shambling consumer, acting solely on impulse, literally consuming everything it comes across. As Evan Calder Williams writes, the living dead sub-genre provides "*the dominant vision of apocalypse in the latest stages of "late" capitalism.*"²⁴⁰ In Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, much of the film is set within a shopping mall, the protagonists barricading themselves in, leaving the zombies to shamble up and down escalators and browse the corridors aimlessly. Watching the zombies congregate outside the main doors clawing at the windows, one

²³⁹ Christopher Herbert. 'Vampire Religion', *Representations* 79, no. 1 (2002): pp.100-21.

²⁴⁰ Evan Calder Williams. *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* (Ropley: Zero Books, 2011), p.73

character says, “They’re after us. They know we’re still in here.” Another character replies: “They’re after the place. They don’t know why; they just remember. Remember that they want to be in here.” And in response to the question “What the hell are they?” the same character replies: “They’re us.”

Interestingly, the contemporary living dead figure has evolved to symbolise consumerism, considering that the zombie was originally a tool for production: the slave. Originating in Haiti in the seventeenth century, the zombie evolved from the cursed slave doomed to wander after death, to the product of witchcraft, superstition and voodoo²⁴¹ rituals in which people were turned into subservient living-dead slave-figures.²⁴² Haiti (named Saint-Dominique pre-revolution) was a French colony on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, colonised by France in 1697. The French captured and imported hundreds of thousands of African slaves to work on the sugar plantations. The folklore of the zombie sprung from the belief that death would free the slave and send them back home to “lan guinee” (literally Guinea, or Africa in general). Suicide, however, although common, would condemn the slave to an eternity of wandering the plantations: “an undead slave at once denied their own bodies and yet trapped inside them – a soulless zombie.”²⁴³ Due to the increased turnaround in the number of slaves being imported, the slaves soon outnumbered the French colonials. The French colonists had banned the practice of voodoo, or vodoun, the traditional Haitian religion, and had enforced the worship of Catholicism. The Haitian Revolution aptly began on 14 August 1791 with a voodoo ceremony. After over ten years of bloodshed, Haiti gained independence in 1804. The folklore grew during the revolution, with the zombie now seen as a product of voodoo, witchcraft and sorcery, produced to do the bidding of a master or voodoo priest (bokor).²⁴⁴ This practice continued after the end of French colonialism and during the subsequent US

²⁴¹ The original term is vodou, vodu, vodun or vodoun in Haitian Creole, or Vaudou in French. The word means “spirit” or “deity”.

²⁴² Film examples include *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932), *King of the Zombies* (Jean Yarbrough, 1941), or *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943), and later, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (Wes Craven, 1988).

²⁴³ Mike Mariani, ‘From Haitian Slavery to The Walking Dead: The Tragic, Forgotten History of Zombies’, *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2015.

²⁴⁴ For more on the zombie and voodoo culture in Haiti, McIntosh and Leverette recommend and cite Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Also see E.W. Davis, ‘The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombi’, *Journal Of Ethnopharmacology* 9, no. 1 (November 1983): pp.85-104.; Ken Gelder, ‘Postcolonial voodoo’, *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy* 3, no. 1 (2000): pp.89-98; Kyle Bishop, ‘The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie’, *Journal of American Culture* 31 (2008): pp.141-152; Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, ‘A zombie manifesto: the nonhuman condition in the era of advanced capitalism’, *Boundary 2*, no. 1 (2008): p.85.

occupation. The “post-colonialism zombie” became “the emblem of a nation haunted by the legacy of slavery and ever wary of its reinstatement.”²⁴⁵ In this context the zombie becomes synonymous with exploitation and slavery: “The exploited zombie labourer never works the fields for himself and the fruits of his labour land on foreign tables.”²⁴⁶

As described by Marc Leverette and Shawn McIntosh, the zombie is “a contranymic creature” meaning that zombies can be defined by two opposites: “From the living made to appear dead (as in Haitian culture [...]) to the dead rendered living (as in most of the zombie cinema that has appeared since Romero’s *Night*).”²⁴⁷ The zombie parodies the biblical concepts of everlasting life, of life after death, and resurrection; here the promise of judgment, redemption, and transcendence breaks down. The tagline for Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* is, “When there is no more room in Hell, the dead shall walk the earth...” The dead shall rise but remain as nothing more than shambling corpses, driven and fuelled only by the impulse to attack, kill and eat living human flesh. These reanimated all-consuming corpses are devoid of any signs of divine purpose or plan; in fact, the zombie is devoid of any signs of existence beyond physical impulses. Since Romero’s *Dead* trilogy, however, the zombie has evolved from the slow, methodical consumerist figures into the violent, almost athletic, creatures as seen in *28 Days Later*²⁴⁸ and the remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, frantically chasing and killing its prey. *La Horde* follows this framework, with the huge crowd of zombies sprinting, snarling, and hurtling through the apartment building consuming everything in their way.

The French zombie film

Taking into consideration the evolution of the living dead from the slave figure of Haitian voodoo culture, and the Americanised versions of the voodoo zombie in 1930s and 1940s Hollywood, to the flesh-eating reanimated corpses of Romero, and the viral

²⁴⁵ Mariani, ‘From Haitian Slavery to The Walking Dead.’

²⁴⁶ Kerstin Oloff, “Greening’ the Zombie: Carribean Gothic, World-Ecology, and Socio-Ecological Degradation’, *Green Letters* 16, Issue 1, October 26, (2012): p.34.

²⁴⁷ Shawn McIntosh and Marc Leverette, ‘Introduction: Giving the Living Dead Their Due’, in *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead*, ed. McIntosh and Leverette (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press Ltd, 2008): p.viii.

²⁴⁸ Although the creatures in *28 Days Later* (and *Mutants* for that matter) are not actually zombies in the traditional living dead sense, they are actually infected with a fatal mutating virus that kills and takes over the victims after death. See Kyle Bishop, ‘Dead Man Still Walking,’ *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 37, no. 1 (2009): pp.16-25; Jordan S. Carroll, ‘The Aesthetics of Risk in Dawn of the Dead and 28 Days Later’, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23, no. 1 (2012): p.40; Aiden Power, ‘Panic on the Streets of London,’ *Science Fiction Film & Television* 7, no. 1 (2014): pp.77-98.

mutations of *28 Days later*, the question to answer here is this: is there anything that distinguishes the French zombie film? In which ways can the zombies represented in French horror be distinguishable from US horror? In other words, are these zombies, in any way, particularly French in production, or are they simply designed to fit and continue the contemporary US zombie mould?

In France, the zombie appeared in a small number of horror films, mainly for the exploitation/pornography market.²⁴⁹ Horror director Jean Rollin, who was known as much as being a sexploitation director as much as a producer of languid poetic horror films, produced three zombie films, *Les Raisins de la mort* (*The Grapes of Death*, 1978), *Le Lac des morts vivants* (*Zombie Lake*, 1981), and *La Morte vivante* (*The Living Dead Girl*, 1982). Claiming to be influenced by Feuillade and Surrealism, Rollin's films contain slow poetic scenes of surrealism, gore effects, zombie make-up, and plenty of female nudity. These elements seem to add to the perception of the French fantastic, particularly French genre filmmaking of the 1970s. French low-budget exploitation and independent cinema of the 1970s "was a sex industry [...] The liberalisation of censorship gradually opened up to hard-core porn, which soon dominated the slates of exploitation producers."²⁵⁰ Complete with low-budget dubbing, and numerous alternative title changes, Rollin's zombie films fitted a uniquely European model looking for an international exploitation/underground audience. In terms of mise-en-scène, pace and themes, however, Rollin's films differ from the zombie films of Amando de Ossorio in Spain and Fulci in Italy. While still full of gory effects Rollin's films lack the fear or suspense, emotional narrative drive, and full-on gore spectacle. Rollin's films are, as one writer described them, "an odd, uncommercial blend of pornography and Gothic horror, entrancing and addictive to the select few."²⁵¹

While Rollin's zombies were seen as cashing in on the Romero/Italian zombie model, one New French Horror film made in 2003, *Les Revenants*, also known as

²⁴⁹ This includes films such as *Une vierge chez les morts-vivants* (also known as *La nuit des étoiles filantes*, *Christina chez les morts vivants*, *Christina*, *Princesse de l'érotisme*, *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*, and titled on video in the US as *Zombie 4: A Virgin Among the Living Dead*, 1973, directed by Jess Franco), and *La Fille a la fourrure* (also called *Naked Lovers*, *Starship Eros*, *The Girl in the Fur Coat*, and *The Porno Zombies*, 1977, directed by Claude Pierson), and *La revanche des mortes vivantes* (*The Revenge of the Living Dead Girls*, 1987, directed by Pierre B. Reinhard).

²⁵⁰ Kalat, 'French Revolution: The Secret History of Gallic Horror Movies', p.278.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

*They Came Back*²⁵², offers a very different interpretation of the idea of the dead rising. It provides a socio-political, as well as psycho-emotional, investigation of what would happen if all of the dead came back to life and returned to their families and tried to integrate back into society? The film opens with a shot of the open gates of the Cimetière Saint-Louis as a long parade of people come walking out. Again, we have the concept of the marching dead from Gance's *J'Accuse!* They are all walking very slowly, looking around them as if looking for someone, or wondering where they are and how they got there. The dead here are not the decomposed shambling corpses of Romero; they all seem fit and healthy, serene and calm. They are all dressed in white, grey and light colours, bright clean clothing and they all look well-groomed, clean, and healthy. They appear just as they did when they were alive and well, without any signs of decay, injury, or cause of death.²⁵³ As they walk down the centre of the town, traffic comes to a standstill; people stop and watch. Some people get closer, and approach recognised faces as this parade of the living dead slowly marches through the town. At an emergency meeting, the mayor announces, "Initial estimates, that remain very vague for now, mention more than 70 million men and women who are back in the world. In our town alone, there are no less than 13,000 persons. The flow of the dead lasted a little more than two hours. Then it ended suddenly, without any reason, just as it had begun."

Despite their appearance of health and cleanliness, there is something not quite right about them. They seem different, aloof, with a serene other-worldliness to them; they stare out to the distance, and they seemingly communicate with each other telepathically, as though they all share a common secret. In the opening scenes at the mayoral meeting, the mayor stands up and goes to a window as a councillor suggests, "these people died recently. Their memory is still present. We don't know the effect caused by the return of a recently deceased loved one. The process of return to families is likely to require more time than you think." Outside a woman is escorted across the lawn, she walks forwards on her own, looks up at the mayor with a peaceful smile and almost too slowly waves up at him. The mayor closes his eyes, disturbed. We later find out this is his wife. He sits back down and says: "today, like many of you,

²⁵² This has since been remade in France as a Television series called *Les Revenants* and translated for UK and US TV as *The Returned*. Since the success of the series (series 2 has been released), the 2003 film has been re-released under the title *The Returned*.

²⁵³ Phil Smith, 'Performative walking in zombie towns', *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 34, no. 3 (2014): 219-228.

I'm astounded. Astounded and overwhelmed by these events. Something unthinkable has happened. People who yesterday were dead have come back." There is a tracking shot moving down a bright street with people slowly turning and staring serenely and directly at the camera as it tracks past them. This vision of apocalypse foregoes destructive violence and almost reverses the idea of the end of the world into the overabundance of beginnings. The world becomes crowded and uncanny as the people who have died and who have been mourned are brought back without warning or explanation. The person who has been sadly lost, missed and buried is now sitting with their family again, sharing the beds of their loved ones, eating at dining tables, returning to work, and so on. Life does not go on, it unexpectedly and uncannily begins again.

The uncanny

This brings up the question of identity in terms of the zombie and the mutant: how much of a person's original identity is still existent underneath the monster? Flashes of recognition or memory occur but to what extent does this constitute identity? This also works the other way in which there is recognition of the undead/mutant by the victim. For example, in *Night of the Living Dead*, the heroine (Barbara) is trying to barricade a door against the grasping hands of the living dead. She falters when she recognises her dead brother's black leather driving gloves and sees his pale staring face appear in the doorway; this brief hesitation allows her zombie-brother to grab her and drag her outside. In *Les Revenants*, when family members are called to visit relatives who have been long dead, they pause and recoil in horror when they come face to face with them; the horror of the familiar faces that were long gone, the recognition of someone who logically should not be there. In *Mutants*, there is the continual horror that Sonia will still know Marco even after he has transformed and becomes dangerous and the fear that he will not recognise her. This recognition of a familiar face is rendered uncanny. The face of a loved one is, in some way or another, no longer the same. The uncanny is the reversal of the familiar and the unfamiliar; recognition and misrecognition; the possible and the impossible. What we believed to be true can no longer be true.

It is particularly interesting to look at the scenes above in the context of the term's origins, the German words 'heimlich' and 'unheimlich', which translate as

'homely' and 'unhomely.' These familiar faces, a brother or a husband, are rendered somehow unfamiliar. S. S. Praver discusses the uncanny in terms of another possible translation of the word *unheimlich*. The word *heimlich* also means secret or hidden. *Unheimlich*, therefore, would logically mean, "that which should have remained secret or hidden but has failed to do so."²⁵⁴

In his 1919 essay 'Das Unheimliche', Sigmund Freud analysed E.T.A. Hoffmann's horror story 'The Sandman.' In this story, a young boy has nightmares after hearing the story of the sandman, a monstrous figure who blows sand into the eyes of unsleeping children and plucks out their eyes to feed to its young. This boy convinces himself that his father's new business partner is the sandman. The boy finally witnesses his father's brutal murder and has a breakdown. When he grows up he is of a particularly nervous disposition. One day he is convinced he recognises the face of a customer as that of his father's business partner. Investigating the man further, he falls in love with a strange young woman. He becomes obsessed with her, despite his friends warning him of the affair. He is unaware that she is actually a highly sophisticated automaton. Freud writes: "an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes."²⁵⁵

In the above scene from *Night of the Living Dead* when Barbara realises her brother has become a zombie, it is when she sees his gloves that she recognises him. The object of clothing that connotes her brother directs her to look up at the pale, staring emotionless face of her undead brother trying to break down her door. What was once simply an item of clothing becomes a symbol of what is no longer there, emphasising the horror of what is now coming towards her. Here we have what is called "the uncanny valley"²⁵⁶, a term used to describe the anxiety and discomfort the viewer often feels when an object such as a doll or a robot, or a computer-generated character, is created to be as life-like as possible but somehow fails. Despite the advancements in making these objects as human-looking as possible, the elements which do not seem human enough, whether this is some unnatural movement, or even

²⁵⁴ S. S. Praver, *Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror*, (Oxford: De Capo Press, 1980), p.139.

²⁵⁵ Freud, 'The Uncanny', 1919, p.15, <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>

²⁵⁶ Mori, 'The Uncanny Valley [from the field]', trans. Karl F. MacDorman, and Norri Kageki, *Robotics & Automation Magazine*, *IEEE* 19, no. 2 (2012).

lack of movement, the texture or colour, or lack of emotion, are enough to cause displeasure and anxiety. Although looking at something which looks familiar, any hesitation between belief and disbelief causes the sense of the uncanny.

One might say that the prosthetic hand has achieved a degree of resemblance to the human form, perhaps on a par with false teeth. However, once we realize that the hand that looked real at first sight is actually artificial, we experience an eerie sensation. For example, we could be startled during a handshake by its limp boneless grip together with its texture and coldness. When this happens, we lose our sense of affinity, and the hand becomes uncanny.²⁵⁷

In one scene in *Les Revenants*, a mother and father walk into the community centre where the dead are being housed and identified. They have come to see their son who has returned from the dead. They walk in and look around them astounded at all the makeshift beds and all the people. As they hear a child crying somewhere, they both become wary. They follow a soldier. The camera tracks in front of them as they walk past various tents. In one is a man stroking a woman's face while she stares out at them blankly and peacefully (directly at the camera). In the next tent: a family looking shocked and uncomfortable, the mother crying; a young man staring blankly out at them. A Red Cross worker carrying a toddler dressed in white walks into another tent. A woman is looking confused and disturbed at the baby and, in close-up, the baby stares back at her. Another Red Cross worker standing behind her tells the mother: "Remember, you don't have to take your child right away." The woman looks scared and as if she is going to cry. All this confusion and discomfort is heightened by the peaceful, unflinching stares of the dead. The man and the woman have become agitated and uncomfortable, unaware of what is about to happen. The soldier tells them: "Your reaction may not be the one you hoped for. You don't have to hold your child. This is an initial contact. That's all. You can come back to see him as often as you like to get used to his presence again."

The next scene is intercut between two shots: the mother and father in close-up, side-view as they look off-screen to the left and a shot of the tent entrance with only the opening of the tent in focus, the background brightly overexposed and out of

²⁵⁷ Mori, 'The Uncanny Valley,' pp.98-100.

focus. They are waiting for the soldier to bring their dead son back to them. As the mother and father realise that something is happening, we see something unclear and blurred coming towards the tent. The atonal music has returned and builds with the scene. Cutting backwards and forwards between their reactions and the obscured action outside the tent conveys the build-up. The evolving emotions the mother and father are going through turn from fear as the mother covers her face with her hand, hopefulness as they realise someone is approaching, excitement, and back to fear again. The shots outside the tent are overly bright and unfocused. This is almost the opposite of 'walking towards the light', as the figure makes its way towards the tent opening it begins to sharpen and take shape until in close-up, the face of the boy peers around the opening of the tent. He walks in slowly right up to the camera for a big close-up and stares blankly but peacefully directly at us. As the atonal music heightens the scene holds on to this shot. It does not cut back to the mum and dad but stays staring at the boy's face staring back at us.

In this scene, the parents confronted by the dead son are pushed into the uncanny, firstly in anticipating seeing someone they know, then eventually seeing someone very familiar, and finally the realisation of the unfamiliar, though the source of this discomfort ultimately turns out to be overly familiar. Their son is sitting in front of them, smiling, alive and seemingly healthy; but their son died and was buried many years ago and so logically should not be there. This moment of unfamiliarity, and the realisation of impossibility, is the horror of the uncanny. In 'The Sandman' the horror of the uncanny is in the revulsion felt when Nathaniel realises that Olympia is not human: "Nathaniel stood paralysed; he had seen but too plainly that Olympia's waxen, deathly-pale countenance had no eyes, but black holes instead – she was, indeed, a lifeless doll."²⁵⁸ This misrecognition is a key component of the horror genre: the fear and discomfort felt when the apparent safety and normality of our surroundings suddenly appear unnatural.

Why were we equipped with this eerie sensation? Is it essential for human beings? [...] I have no doubt it is an integral part of our instinct for self-preservation. (Note: The sense of eeriness is probably a form of instinct that protects us from proximal, rather than distal, sources of danger. Proximal sources

²⁵⁸ E.T.A. Hoffmann, 'The Sandman,' (1817), p.15, <https://www.ux1.eiu.edu/~rlbeebe/sandman.pdf>.

of danger include corpses, members of different species, and other entities we can closely approach).²⁵⁹

In the horror text, our surroundings can become uncanny, our house seems unfamiliar and threatening, our family, friends and neighbours can somehow seem not quite themselves, even our personalities can seem strange, and our bodies can become unfamiliar.

The sublime

While the apocalypse promised an unveiling or revelation, the horror genre conveyed the fear and terror of what would lie behind such an unveiling. In the same way that we can suddenly be confronted with moments of un-revealing and the un-secret, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, stated that when confronted by scenes of expansive formidable nature, such as huge mountains, powerful waterfalls, or oppressive storm clouds, it could produce such intense emotions that it reminded him of the violence and indifference of nature and existence itself.²⁶⁰ Edmund Burke called it the sublime: that which elicits feelings of terror; nature that inspires awe and fear. Burke writes: “The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature [...] is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other.”²⁶¹ Burke separated the sublime from the beautiful (his book on the sublime was titled ‘A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful’). He argued that the sublime could not be beautiful and that it filled the viewer with fear to excite sensations of self-preservation. He wrote: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime.”²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Mori, p.99.

²⁶⁰ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, ‘The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody’, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* [1709], ed. Philip Ayres (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

²⁶¹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into The Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: And Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings* [1756], ed. David Womersley (Penguin UK, 1998), p.58.

²⁶² Ibid.

The incapability of fully comprehending or processing the spectacle is what Immanuel Kant calls sublime.²⁶³ This pause in comprehension offers the idea, Kant argued, that the sublime object must be viewed from an aesthetic standpoint. The sublime was an aesthetic judgment produced by an object beyond the viewer's capabilities to comprehend the vastness and the power of the object. If everything sublime is mediated then what lies behind, or beyond? The sublime represents the awe or fear of something that cannot be comprehended or conceptualised: "that which resists symbolization absolutely."²⁶⁴ Slavoj Žižek writes, "The sublime is therefore the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way, of the dimension of what is unrepresentable."²⁶⁵ The idea of representing the unrepresentable, or glimpsing what is beyond our comprehension, has always been a staple of the horror genre.

In *Mutants* the film is punctuated by continual shots of nature, scenes of large snowy mountains and deep forests swaying hypnotically in slow motion; a blizzard heightening as the story goes on, at times obscuring the view of the building. These returns to nature offer connotations of continuation; from the 'human' drama and horror of what is taking place within the building, the trees and the snow and the mountains seem powerful, immovable, and eternal. In *La Horde*, there is a scene on the rooftop when the characters first see Paris on fire and the rampaging horde below, they are struck by a moment of awe as they stare mutely trying to understand what they are witnessing. This moment of sudden immensity briefly defies logic and sense. As Elizabeth Ezra writes, "The permanence of the city and its grand monuments was no longer something that could be taken for granted; the symbols of its history majestically inscribed in its landscape had suddenly become ephemeral, vulnerable to the menace of annihilation."²⁶⁶ In *Les Revenants*, the opening scene with the crowds of the newly returned dead walking out of the cemetery and into the town, stopping traffic and pedestrians to watch; there is also the idea that all of the returned stare off into the distance, entranced by something they remember (or something they alone can see), something beyond everyone else's capabilities.

There have been many moments in the recent past that could be considered

²⁶³ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* [1764], ed. and trans. John T. Goldthwaite (California: University of California Press, 1960).

²⁶⁴ Lacan, *The seminar Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, trans. J. Forrester (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.66.

²⁶⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London; NY: Verso, 1989), p.203.

²⁶⁶ Ezra, 'Apocalypse Then', p.6.

as sublime in the sense of immense horror and incomprehensible awe and fear; scenes of terrifying natural disasters such as volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis; scenes of immense man-made devastation such as terrorist attacks, suicide bombings, and the collapse of the Twin Towers on 9/11. The newspaper and television images we have seen of these events all compile together into a contemporary repository of visions of the apocalyptic and the sublime. Representations of destruction in apocalyptic/disaster films have many images with which to compete and which connect and resonate with contemporary audiences. Any film that shows immense destruction within a city has many images to measure its impact and authenticity against. Other images which could be added to this 'apocalyptic' repertoire include footage of atomic and nuclear bomb testing, shockwaves decimating trees and buildings, images of devastated cities lain to waste, footage from the 1940s and 1950s of nuclear testing in the desert with soldiers watching awe-struck at the power and the immensity of the blast. The giant rising mushroom cloud is one of the defining images of the modern apocalypse. Despite the fear and dread these images and scenes inspire, there is something beautiful about the immense scale of the moment. One definitive example of the aesthetic beauty of the almost surreal power and the enormity of the nuclear explosion is the end scene from *Dr Strangelove* with the compilation of bomb blasts, and rising mushroom clouds edited absurdly to Vera Lynn's 'We'll Meet Again.' However, in both *Mutants* and *La Horde*, we are not witnessing the defining apocalyptic event, as such. While *Mutants* takes place after the event has occurred (we are told that it has already happened during the title sequence), *La Horde* begins before the event (or before anyone is aware of it) and allows the event to begin off-screen. The viewer is following the dramatic events between the police and the drug dealers. Hints of something taking place outside are briefly alluded to. The scene on the rooftop is the first time the characters (and to a certain extent, the audience) are aware of the scale of the event. These scenes of Paris burning and angry crowds running through the streets have a repertoire of images to draw upon from the Paris riots and protests of 1968, 2005, 2007 and 2015. Here again is an example of Lowenstein's concept of the allegorical moment, "a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history."²⁶⁷ The setting of the high rises in the Paris banlieues, the image of the Paris cityscape with billowing smoke and

²⁶⁷ Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representations: Historical Trauma, National Cinema and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p.1.

fire, the sound of the angry crowds parading past burning cars, advancing in a dangerous and threatening manner, these scenes all recall imagery seen on television and newspaper reports.

A scene that demonstrates the concept of the over-powering crowd, the horde, happens near the end of the film when the remaining characters are chased down into the basement. The horde previously held outside behind the apartment buildings barricaded glass doors have managed to break down the barriers and smash through. While trying to hold the zombies back, Ouess is injured, scratched across one hand. Knowing the likelihood of infection, he orders everyone to escape while he stays to hold them back. The following scene cuts between close-ups of Ouess's determined face as he prepares to fight the horde and various shots of the darkened car park with shadowy figures running towards him. The screeching and growling of the zombies intensify to convey the horde approaching. These shots of the running zombies are rapidly edited, often only conveying movement and momentum. Along with a sudden loud screech or a growl, the momentary noise and movement act as a shock device. The shots of Ouess are, in comparison, relaxed and determined. He has made his mind up to sacrifice himself; in close-up, his face is contorted with determination; he is readying himself. In one shot, from behind Ouess's head, we can see what he sees. The darkness erupts suddenly, and the volume of the screeching masses rises, as figures come sprinting out of the dark towards him. In a shot held on Ouess, he raises a gun in each hand and starts firing directly into the camera. As the crowds get closer, he charges through them, pushing and shouldering past them as if playing rugby. When almost overwhelmed, he jumps on top of a car. In a shot that was chosen for the poster, Ouess stands on the car staring down at the horde. They screech and raise their hands towards him. The shot has a sense of religious fervour, the outstretched hands desperate to touch his gown while he stands looking down at them. As he takes out the two guns in each hand and, in a shot that cranes up behind him, so we are looking down at his back and the extent of the crowd reaching up to him, he extends his arms out on either side of him, almost in the shape of a cross. There is a sense of the sublime in this: the inescapable enormity and monstrosity of what is taking place in front of him, the size of the crowd trying to grab him, the almost incapacitating immensity and hopelessness of the situation. Ouess is trapped there and has no choice but to watch them charge out of the dark towards him or reach up clawing at him. We are there with him as he sacrifices himself, the anger and determination all

building up like the crescendo of the music and the storming crowds. Again, there is a sense of awe in the shots of Ouess surrounded by the horde holding out his arms with his guns poised. The sense of enormity and intensity of such scenes bring about a pause in the viewer, a need to process what is being experienced.

In his book *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode examines the distinction between an “imminent apocalypse” (the end is nigh) and an “immanent apocalypse” (the end is already always taking place). While the imminent apocalypse suggests an event that will take place; the immanent apocalypse does not allow for any sense of closure or indeed, any actual end; it “denies the conventions of the search for answers, solutions and resolutions, or heroes racing to save the world.”²⁶⁸ The immanent apocalypse “reflects our lack of confidence in ends, our mistrust of the apportioning of history into epochs of this and that.”²⁶⁹ The science-fiction disaster film tends to focus on the occurrence of an apocalyptic event within a particular narrative-based period: being witness to and a survivor of the event or preparing for the impending disaster to take place as predicted. Kermode, however, sees modern apocalyptic texts as being less motivated by narratives of beginnings and endings. He argues that endings are “mini-expressions of a faith in a higher order or ultimate pattern that [...] lends a sense of purpose to our existence in the world.”²⁷⁰ Modern narratives focus instead on a continual state of transition “marked by ambivalence and confusion”²⁷¹ in which characters “lose their foundation in a forward-looking approach towards a grand, cataclysmic ending.”²⁷² We can link these states of “ambivalence and confusion” as disruptions to logical narratives to Todorov’s definition of the fantastic. If we consider Todorov’s assertion that the fantastic “occupies the duration of [...] uncertainty [...] that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event”²⁷³, we can connect it to Kermode’s sense of immanence, as well as Freud’s *unheimlich* as the moment when “the distinction between imagination and reality” is effaced²⁷⁴. We can also distinguish some of the defining traits of the horror genre emerging as confusion, doubt, anxiety, anticipation,

²⁶⁸ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.101.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Teresa Hefferman, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008).

²⁷¹ Kermode, p.101.

²⁷² Joshua Gunn and David E. Beard, ‘On the Apocalyptic Sublime’, *The Southern Communication Journal* 65, no. 4, Summer (2000): p.272.

²⁷³ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p.25.

²⁷⁴ Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.15

fear, suspense. This is the horror film's need to keep audiences in a heightened state and keep them second-guessing, waiting for something to happen, looking for danger. Pascal Bonitzer describes suspense as, "the prolonged, necessarily disturbing undecidability of an event. Suspense is the erotic prolongation of the trajectory of a coin thrown up into the air, before it falls on one side (tails: yes) or the other (heads: no)."²⁷⁵ In other words, the horror film makes us hesitate to induce ambiguity, fear of the unknown, and anticipate the, as yet, unimaginable or the indescribable.

In *Les Revenants* when the mother and father see their dead son again, the moment the son's face emerges from unfocused light until sharply filling the screen and staring directly at the camera (the parents and the viewer), this pushes the effect of the sublime away from the immense or the terrifying enveloping spectacle. It imbues the mundane, everyday and what should be beautiful (seeing a loved one's face one more time) into a moment of disbelief, disturbance, or uncomprehending abstraction. The fact that the boy's face stares at the camera and the scene does not cut back to the reaction shot of the parents leaves us with this sense of disturbance in the narrative convention. The scene seems incomplete and without the reaction of the parents leaves the scene open. As viewers, we do not know how long the scene will go on. Here is Kermode's "apocalyptic immanence"; the screen filled with the face of a dead child staring directly back at us for an inordinate duration. As his face moves into focus and fills the screen, the music hums loudly, bridging over into the next scene, enforcing the sense of unending, of immanence. By not cutting to the parent's reaction, but cutting away to a different scene altogether, we are left with a sense of uncertainty and continuance. By hesitating on the close-up of the dead boy's face longer than expected, the scene offers a moment of the sublime, a moment which expresses the idea of the sublime as "what is unrepresentable."

In *Mutants* and *La Horde*, anticipation and suspense are produced through different devices. In *Mutants* Sonia is forced to watch as Marco slowly but inevitably transforms into the monster. Our suspense is in what will happen to him next, when will he become a danger, and what will happen when he is fully mutated? At what point will he attack her and how will she survive? In *La Horde*, the threat is mainly derived from outside; this group is trapped in a building surrounded by monsters and they need to escape. The suspense and anxiety, however, are situated inside with them. If one

²⁷⁵ Pascal Bonitzer, 'Hitchcockian Suspense', in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1992), p.28.

of them is attacked or killed, at what point will they become the next threat? It is this “prolonged [...] undecidability” that the horror film necessitates from the viewer: from which doorway, corner, or dark corridor will the monster appear next?

Body apocalypse

In the horror text our surroundings, our home, our loved ones can seem unfamiliar and threatening. Perhaps more powerfully than any other genre, horror examines the idea that our own bodies can become uncanny. As described by Brigid Cherry, the ‘body horror’ films “explore abjection and disgust of the human body, often mutation, disease or fetishistic/aberrant behaviour.” In the horror film, the human body is susceptible to transformations and changes, sometimes subtle, at other times abrupt and extreme. The connection between this kind of body horror (the undead, reanimation, physical transformation, or mutation) and the uncanny is the idea that some line has been crossed. In the case of the uncanny, the line is the division between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the seen and the unseen, the secret and the un-secret. In body horror, both sides of the line are the body itself. The skin could be considered as the actual line, the boundary between the outer body (the familiar, the seen, the un-secret), and the inner body – muscle, bone, viscera, bodily fluids, and so on. When these boundaries, created as a guarantee for a safe and habitable existence, are attacked and crossed, we have the basis for revulsion, fear, terror, and horror. Julia Kristeva writes that “[e]xcrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without [...] society is threatened by its outside, life by death.”²⁷⁶ This breaking of sacred boundaries is what Kristeva terms as “abjection”, that which does not “respect borders, positions, rules”, and which “disturbs identity, system, order.”²⁷⁷ According to Kristeva, the corpse is the ultimate form of abjection. Just as bodily wastes, such as faeces, urine, vomit, pus, and blood, are ejected from the body to protect itself, the corpse is, in a sense, our leftovers, our waste. Kristeva writes:

[Refuse] and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and

²⁷⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p.71.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.4.

with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border.²⁷⁸

Not only is it a reminder of our mortality and fragility, but it also brings our knowledge or certainty of our own identities into question. The corpse is the boundary between life and death, being and not being:

Such wastes drop so that I might live, until from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.²⁷⁹

The corpse is the centre of the horror film at its most simplistic: either someone, or something, is trying to kill us, or the thing trying to get us is already dead/undead (zombies, ghosts, vampires). More than that, stories of the living dead play with one of the key conceptions of abjection, the ejection of refuse, that which threatens the purity of the body, and therefore the stability of identity. A further step in the abject here is the idea of the waste that refuses to be the corpse (or the undead corpse) as a continuation, or a becoming, of something else. In *Mutants*, the living 'become' infected and 'become' the monstrous creatures; in *La Horde*, the living die and 'become' undead. A process is taking place here, not of ending, but of continuous becoming. In a similar fashion to an immanent apocalypse always in the process of taking place, the process from living to dead to un-living again is a continual progression. In the terms of Gilles Deleuze, there is a process of de-territorialisation (the shifting of cells and boundaries, mutation, disintegration) and re-territorialisation (reshaping, settling, and becoming something else). What is taking place is not something becoming other to an original, but something evolving and producing something else. As in Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), when Seth Brundle accidentally teleports himself with a fly, the result is not Brundle turning into a fly; both Brundle and the fly have merged, de-territorialising both Brundle as a human being and the fly as an insect. They have genetically spliced together to create something new. Their cells

²⁷⁸ Kristeva, p.1.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p.3.

have re-territorialised into a new species: 'Brundle-fly'. The same occurs in *Mutants*; Marco has become infected by the virus. Marco's cells are being de-territorialised by the virus. The virus and Marco will merge to create something new: in a process of mutation and transformation, a process of becoming, they will re-territorialise as 'mutant-Marco'. So, in a sense what is occurring here is not the apocalypse as the end, the destruction of the body, but the post-apocalypse, the body as we know it made up of flesh and blood, de-territorialised and unveiled to show what secrets lie beneath.

Mutants

In the film *Mutants*, a couple, Sonia, a paramedic, and Marco, an ambulance driver, are trying to escape to safety across the Alps after the outbreak of an ongoing pandemic that transforms anyone infected into homicidal flesh-eating monsters. After Marco has been injured during an attack (shot by a soldier they hoped would take them safely to refuge) they shelter in an abandoned building in the middle of the forest (a hospital, medical research centre, university?). While Sonia attempts to contact the military, Marco begins to show symptoms of catching the virus, including sporadic haemorrhaging, violent nightmares, bodily disintegration, and vicious, violent mood swings. As they both wait for the virus to mutate him into a monster, the girlfriend reveals that she once survived an attack; she was bitten by one of the infected without catching the virus. She believes that she may have the answer to a cure. As Marco grows increasingly sicker and more of a threat, Sonia agrees to his pleas to help him commit suicide. She drugs him but, unable to go through with killing him, drags him and locks him up in a basement room.

The relationship between Marco and Sonia and the fear of abandonment, of being alone, is one of the main focuses of the film. No matter what happens they must stay together and find a safe place. That is their goal. When Marco goes into a garage in search of petrol and supplies, he tells Sonia to stay in the ambulance and gives her the keys: "Lock yourself in. If anything happens, get out of here." Sonia replies, "I won't leave you." After Marco is injured and loses consciousness, Sonia drives them away in the ambulance calling to him: "Stay with me, ok? I'll find a safe place." These statements provide the emotional foundations for the horror of their desperate situation and pre-empt the horror to come. Their emotional responses and needs overwhelm

the objective truths and the actions required for survival. The poster tagline reads: 'Extinction is just a heartbeat away.' Here is the horror of watching a loved one get sick and slowly and painfully waste away. Sonia has to watch Marco gradually disintegrate and transform into a monster. Add on top of this the dilemma: what if the person you love will soon turn into something that will certainly kill you? This degeneration of connections, identity, relationships, conveys the essence of the apocalypse as the crumbling of our sense of the world we have formed. It also enforces the fear of homelessness, of being cut off from a sense of belonging; Marco and Sonia's words, "get out of here", "stay with me", "leave", "safe place", all amplify the sense of being adrift. The post-apocalyptic story is about the erasure of the concept of home, a situation that forces us to wander the ruins or wastelands to search for a new one. Here, also, is an example of the definition of Apocalypse as the destruction of the old to make way for the new. It is evident not only in the plot device of the viral pandemic wiping out humanity; it is in the wiping out of society and the social constructs of civilisation; it is also in the transformation of Marco, physically and mentally, wiping out all traces of his old humanity to make way for the newly gestating mutant.

While *Mutants* is an example of the New French Horror genre, the apocalyptic elements present themselves along the lines of traditional science fiction. On the back of the DVD sleeve, there is a quotation claiming *Mutants* to be, "One of the best sci-fi films in recent years."²⁸⁰ Are these conventions we have been discussing primarily and solely science fiction? How do the apocalyptic elements of *Mutants* present themselves differently in the context of the conventions of the horror and science fiction genres, as well as the various overlapping sub-genres found within? In other words, while the apocalypse/post-apocalypse can be argued to be subgenres of science fiction, what difference do the conventions of horror make to representations of the apocalypse?

To answer these questions, we must first examine the science fiction elements of *Mutants*. There is the main plot device of the viral pandemic that suggests a level of scientific or medical engineering. This is perhaps one of the key conventions of the science fiction genre, the results of scientific experimentation. In the film's opening credits sequence, we see a microscopic image of cells and capillaries being attacked,

²⁸⁰ As quoted by *Filmsfantastiques.com* on *Mutants* (Momentum Pictures, 2010), DVD.

creating a series of black vein-like networks. They darken and thicken as titles on the screen set up the back-story: The first cases appeared in early summer. In a few months, the virus decimated the population. The only hope lay in a message from the NOAH army base.²⁸¹

During these slow, hypnotic microscope shots, another scene is interspersed, cutting frequently and often for shock effect. In a forest, an injured woman escapes from a homicidal, snarling gang and runs downstream. Cutting backwards and forwards between the shots of blood vessels and the girl running through the trees creates tension. The scene also cuts from the calm, almost silent shots from the microscope (the build-up of an atonal hum resonates somewhere on the soundtrack) to sudden shock cuts of manic handheld shots, frantically edited with interruptive loud screeches and screams. Thinking she has escaped, the girl pauses and turns, only to be explosively run over by a racing ambulance. Blood and body parts cascade over the windscreen and the roof. Sonia and Marco have been forced at gunpoint by a soldier to drive into the snowy mountains. Sonia is frantically treating another soldier who has been bitten and is bleeding heavily. He starts convulsing and coughing blood into his ventilating mask. The other soldier forces Marco to stop the ambulance. In a long shot with beautiful snowy mountains in the background, she drags the body out to the roadside and shoots it twice in the head. There is a brief moment of pause as the soldier stands silhouetted against this bright background, her breath visible in the sunlight. A sudden cut to the title MUTANTS in black font with snowy-forested mountains in the background, as the slowly building soundtrack crescendos into screeching atonal music.

This opening sets the scene and the tone of the film: the manic screeching violence of the gang of 'mutants' (who are not fully revealed yet); the cold, bleached, almost black and white snowy scenery and photography; the desperation of the characters (everyone seems to be holding someone else at gunpoint; Marco says to Sonia about the soldier: "I don't trust her. She'll get rid of us as soon as she can," to which Sonia replies: "She's with the army, Marco. We need her"); the instances of silence and stillness interrupted by sudden outbursts of violence and gore; the graphic and painful moments of transformation; and the seemingly callous, automatic extermination of infected victims.

²⁸¹ Translations from English subtitles on the UK 2010 DVD release of *Mutants*.

Another post-apocalyptic trope in *Mutants* is the menacing band of scavengers. In *Mutants*, a gang of scavengers infiltrate the hospital just as Sonia has drugged and locked Marco away in the cellar. The leader, Franck, heard Sonia's message on the radio and pretended to be from the NOAH base. There are four of them: Franck and his volatile girlfriend, Dany; Abel, who has been bitten in the leg and is possibly infected; and Virgile, who is silent and maybe in shock (Sonia is warned by Abel: "He's tagged with us for three days now. If I were you I'd keep away. He's even crazier than those apes"). While tending to Abel's leg she sees he has a radio. He says it is broken, it receives but it does not transmit. She tells him her plan: "There's an army base called NOAH. Their helicopters pass over here." Abel says, "Forget it. The choppers never stop. They don't give a shit." The scavengers aim to gain medical supplies and to steal the ambulance for themselves. The figure of the scavenger is a quintessential post-apocalyptic archetype.²⁸² They encapsulate the ideas of survival and self-preservation. While the survivors are searching for one last hope, the scavengers have lost all hope in being saved and believe only in self-preservation, including attacking and stealing from other groups. They also embody the post-apocalyptic disintegration of social constructs, and the breakdown in law and order. While Sonia and Marco are shown as decent, honest, and caring, and desperately in search of the safety and security of a new society, Frank and his gang are, on the other hand, rowdy, loud, crude, dressed in leather with holsters, knife sheaths, and ammo belts. Their only goal is to take what they can to survive. They swagger, glare menacingly, and pose; they bully and threaten Sonia; they shout, laugh, and swear. All these traits add to the concept of the scavenger as being an outlaw or a bandit, a rogue who has found his place now that any semblance of laws and social constructs of decent and fair behaviour have collapsed. Franck and his gang have no qualms in beating up Sonia, threatening her life and stealing her medical supplies and her vehicle, if it helps their survival. We are not to trust Franck even though the apocalypse has rendered all survivors as scavengers in one way or another. To survive and keep going, one has to acquire food, water, tools, vehicles, petrol, weapons, shelter and so on, where one can, even if that means depriving someone else of the same means of survival.

However, can it be said that the scavenger is fundamentally a science fiction

²⁸² Examples of the scavenger appears in post-apocalyptic science fiction films such as *A Boy and His Dog* (1975, L.Q. Jones), *Mad Max 2 (The Road Warrior)*, 1981, George Miller), *Le Dernier Combat (The Last Battle)*, 1983, Luc Besson), *Waterworld* (1995, Kevin Reynolds), *The Road* (2009, John Hillcoat), and *The Book of Eli* (2010, Allen Hughes and Albert Hughes).

character archetype? Could it equally be a convention of the horror text? It may be more relevant here to consider the scavenger as a particular character type that can be found in the sub-genre of the 'post-apocalyptic,' whether science fiction specific or not. The scavengers found in *Mad Max 2* (1981, George Miller) and *The Road* (2009, John Hillcoat) are very similar to the scavengers found in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978, George A. Romero) and the TV series *The Walking Dead*. The main differences are the threats each group is trying to survive. Another element of contemporary science fiction is the concept of the dystopian future. The post-apocalypse is full of iconographic images of dusty wastelands, collapsed desolate cities with broken cultural landmarks. On top of that, however, to add bitterness to the dystopia, there is also the desperate clinging on to the utopian hope of finding or creating a new civilisation. In *Mutants*, the military base is the possibility that keeps Sonia going, even while she knows that Marco has been infected. The ending also offers a glimpse of utopian hope, albeit in an ambiguous way.

After the scavengers take over the hospital, Sonia begs them not to harm her by revealing that she is pregnant. While she agrees to help them, she manages to call the NOAH base with her position. Meanwhile, as more mutants make their way towards the hospital, Marco's fully-mutant self has awoken and manages to break out of the locked room. As the hordes of mutants break into the building and the scavengers are killed, Sonia manages to escape through a tunnel leading out into a fenced-off enclosure. Marco comes through the tunnel after her. He attacks her but pauses, sniffing at her and hesitating as if he remembers her or realises something. Does he recognise her? Does he sense that she is pregnant? In the moment of hesitation, she pushes him off into a coil of barbed wire. He is stuck there. She grabs a sharply broken drainpipe, dramatically raises it above her head and kills him. As mutants surround the fence, the NOAH helicopter arrives and the soldiers shoot them all. Sonia is helped onto the helicopter. A soldier asks, "Are you Sonia Duprey?" She nods and looks grateful and relieved. The soldier says, "We'll take good care of you and your baby." Sonia's relief slips and she puts her hands onto her stomach. What is so suspicious about the ending? As she holds onto her stomach the film fades to black with an ominous far-away echoing mutant screech. What does this mean? Is there a possibility that the baby might be a mutant? There is also a hint that the story of the pregnancy was just a lie concocted by Sonia to survive.

Here, again, we have elements that add to the dissolution of the home, with

firstly, the scavengers breaking in and taking over the hospital. While only temporary shelter, Sonia and Marco had set it up as their own until they could contact help. The taking over by the crude violent scavengers sullies the concept of this new home. There is also the possibility of a future home suggested by Sonia's unborn baby, the continuation of life and the continuation of a family line. The baby is a sign of the continuation of Marco after he has gone, the continuation of life and humanity. It also suggests the apocalyptic concept of getting rid of the old (the infected, violent, and ugly) for the unveiling of the new (the young and innocent).

Fighting for survival, mutation and transformation, and taking shelter from the dangers outside, are all conventions of the apocalyptic film genre. They are, however, also central to the contemporary horror genre. In films such as George A. Romero's *Living Dead* films²⁸³, Romero's *The Crazies* (1973) and its remake (Breck Eisner, 2010), David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975), and *Rabid* (1977), to *28 Days Later*, *28 Weeks Later*, and *World War Z* (Marc Foster, 2013), characters are trying to survive a pandemic created by scientific/medical engineering (or an unknown cause), searching for military and scientific intervention and a safe place, hoping for a miracle cure, scavenging for survival as the apocalypse occurs around them. In these films, the oncoming or post-apocalypse follows some generic science fiction traits such as collective groups striving together for survival, the hope of military evacuation and safety, genetic mutations, survivalists and scavengers, animalistic pack mentalities, and visions of demolished landscapes or landmarks. However, these films focus more on the destruction of the world in terms of physical casualties, mutations and monsters, past echoes and traces (ghosts and hauntings), and the individual as the site of annihilation.

Conclusion

The New French Horror genre has incorporated and utilised themes of the apocalyptic in ways that not only fulfil the needs of the current trends in contemporary horror, including the zombie and pandemic narratives but also in ways that help to define the contemporary horror genre in general. From the original definition of the apocalypse as an unmasking or unveiling, and the biblical vision of the end of the world complete

²⁸³ *Night of the Living Dead*, 1968; *Dawn of the Dead*, 1978; *Day of the Dead*, 1985; *Land of the Dead*, 2005; *Diary of the Dead*, 2007; *Survival of the Dead*, 2009.

with diseases, earthquakes, monsters, the rising of the dead, and the birth of the antichrist, to the mass destruction of the global disaster genre, this chapter has explored the haunting of the present by a destructive and 'annihilistic' future; an overhanging threat of the end of existence. From the uncanny, the sublime, the Real and the abject we can distinguish what can be called an apocalyptic nature of horror. The disintegration of our reality and the unveiling of what lies beneath, that which should remain secret. In terms of body horror, the apocalypse moved from a collective experience, the end of the whole world, the end of all of humanity, to a narrower focus on the body as the site of destruction: the painful and messy apocalypse one person at a time.

Here, again, is H. P. Lovecraft's penchant for stories about the "unspeakable", the "unimaginable", and the "indescribable thing". Describing the horror story, or the 'weird tale' as he preferred to call them, Lovecraft pointed out: "that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space."²⁸⁴ These "fixed laws," however, as demonstrated by the uncanny, the sublime, and the abject, are nothing more than constructs. Our concepts of reality are, as Lacan and Žižek are quick to point out, constructs which are essential in our "safeguard from the assaults of chaos". Without these safeguards in place, we are offered glimpses of the chaos underneath, the Real. The Real is the void, the abyss, the unrepresentable. This is the true apocalypse, the end of all things. We have assembled our lives in a way in which we are safe from the indescribable, the unrepresentable, and the void. We have constructed barriers around us in order to provide meaning, rationality, knowledge, comfort, and safety; and it is here we find the apocalyptic nature of horror. Horror is what lies beyond these borders. Horror is the apocalyptic thing that threatens the very foundations of our constructed world. By daring to represent the unspeakable and the indescribable, the horror genre throws into question our predilection for ignoring, or at least pretending to ignore, the possible destruction of our comfortable, safe, and moral existence.

Certain threads and themes emerge from this research. The theme of borders, or the rupturing of boundaries, is evident throughout. We have the boundaries of taste, censorship laws, and cultural presumptions and expectations. We also have the

²⁸⁴ H. P. Lovecraft, 'Introduction', *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, The Palingenesis Project: Wermod and Wermod Publishing Group, 2013: p.6.

preconceived borders of a national cinema within the context of international and transnational production, exhibition, and consumption. In chapter three the borders range from the disruptions between our constructed perceptions of reality and the nightmarish misconceptions of the traumatised mind to the rupturing of the boundaries between the past and the present. We also find the theme of the body, from the effects of violence and physical trauma to the reanimated corpses of the living dead, theories of abjection, and the apocalyptic destruction of human bodies. The destruction and desecration of the body is a key convention of apocalyptic horror with the end of the world taking place not only on a global, communal scale but also on a molecular level, one disassembling body at a time.

CHAPTER FIVE: SPACES

Introduction

This chapter will look at how various spaces and locations are utilised in New French horror films to symbolise a haunted and traumatised France. From the different regions of the country, differing urban and rural settings, and the various spaces utilised in these films, what are the French specificities of the genre? Geographically, spatially, and architecturally, how do the New French Horror films represent the physical locality of France? This will be examined in terms of the specific country, collections of villages, towns and cities, more uninhabited spaces such as forests, mountains and coastlines, and the undistinguishable spaces found at borders and boundaries. We will also examine smaller and more immediate spaces, such as houses, buildings, services, rooms, cells, hiding places, closets, attics, basements, and crawl spaces.

In the New French Horror, space is often linked to time, especially through traumatic hauntings. In her book, *Translating Time*, Bliss Cua Lim discusses the fantastic as a temporal discordance, a fold in which the past and the present co-exist and, in essence, are haunted by each other²⁸⁵. As a subset of the fantastique, horror utilises this fold in time to produce anxiety and fear. Ghosts and hauntings are disturbances that haunt the very flow of time. Ghost stories focus on the traumatic experience of a person or an event from the past being repeated in the present. This is something we previously discussed in chapter three on Trauma. The idea is that an event or experience can be so terrible, so intense, it becomes caught in the fabric of time, in memory, and the psyche, and repeated uncannily and terrifyingly out of context. These echoes or hauntings, recorded in intensity, are not only trapped in a temporal loop, but can also become attached to a specific object, setting, or location in which the event is taking place. Can we talk about spaces as though, somehow, they were traumatised? This has been an ongoing element of the horror genre, in which ghosts from the past haunt rooms, houses, buildings, desperate to communicate with the new occupants, to either ask for or offer help or to exact revenge.

The concept of the “dark place” is an iconic convention of the horror genre, from the deep forests of fairy tales to the castles and mansions of early Gothic novels (just

²⁸⁵ Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, The Fantastic and Temporal Critique* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2009).

look at titles such as *The Castle of Ortranto*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Wuthering Heights*). The dark or “‘bad’ place [...] is often the lair of something monstrous – werewolf, zombie or vampire.”²⁸⁶ In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, a range of locations has become iconic dark places, from the foreboding Castle Dracula, the dark and inhabited Carpathian Mountains, to Transylvania itself, which has become synonymous as the homeland of vampires. In French Gothic literature, there are examples of dark places hidden in otherwise beloved landmarks, such as the cathedral bell towers in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* or the secret passageways and underground sewers running beneath the Paris Opera House in *The Phantom of the Opera*.

In the New French Horror genre, the use of dark places is as prevalent and important as in any Gothic novel. The first part of this chapter will examine the various guises of the dark castle or mansion, from the ‘old dark house’ of *Promenons-nous dans les bois* (*Deep in the Woods*, 2000, Lionel Delplanque), the dark labyrinthine institutional buildings such as the haunted orphanage in *Saint Ange* (*House of Voices*, 2004, Pascal Laugier), the secretive university in *Les Rivières Pourpres* (*The Crimson Rivers*, 2000, Matthieu Kassovitz), and the prison cells in *Maléfique* (2002, Eric Valette), to the slaughterhouses and torture chambers of *Frontière(s)* (*Frontier(s)*, 2007, Xavier Gens), *Sheitan* (*Satan*, 2006, Kim Chapiron), and *Martyrs* (2008, Pascal Laugier). Some houses have been broken into and invaded, haunted either by psychological or supernatural threats, such as *Un Jeu d’enfants* (*Children’s Play*, 2001, Laurent Tuel), or by the physical threats of *Haute tension* (*High Tension/Switchblade Romance*, 2003, Alexandre Aja), *À l’intérieur* (*Inside*, 2007, Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury), and *Ils* (*Them*, 2006, David Moreau, Xavier Palud). All these houses and buildings have gone beyond their intended purpose; they have somehow become infected, or possessed, by their own dark histories. As Anne Troutman writes, “the house is not merely walls, doors, and windows, but a doorway to things beyond, a “capacity” of the senses and spirit [...] there is no distinction between outward and inward. We dwell in the home; the home dwells in us.”²⁸⁷ The house as an object exhibits a sense of personality, or agency, while the inhabitants of a house can become imbued with or haunted by this personality.

²⁸⁶ Barry Curtis, *Dark Places* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), Kindle edition

²⁸⁷ Anne Troutman, ‘Inside Fear: Secret Places and Hidden Spaces in Dwellings’, in *Architecture of Fear*, ed. Nan Ellin, p.143.

In the next part of the chapter, we will examine the dichotomy between the countryside and the city, the rural versus the urban. The city and the town are symbols of advancement, enlightenment, modernity, culture, but also of squalor, crime, depravity, and enclosure; the countryside is a symbol of purity, health, freedom, and tradition, but can also symbolise loneliness, backwardness, the wilderness, and religious piety. This opposition between the urban and the rural plays perfectly with the horror trope of the journey into darker, unfamiliar lands; the city dweller getting lost in the countryside, not understanding country ways and laws, or the country innocent being led astray by the promises, the delights, and evils of the city. Kristin Ross points out the “headlong, dramatic, and breathless,” rapidity with which French society grew from “a rural, empire-oriented, Catholic country into a fully industrialized, decolonized, and urban one.”²⁸⁸ She writes that the process of modernisation was so fast it “burst onto a society that still cherished prewar outlooks with all of the force, excitement, disruption, and horror of the genuinely new.”²⁸⁹ We will also analyse another aspect of the journey, the mysterious foreign land. This theme is found in films such as *Ils*, *Vinyan* (2008, Fabrice du Welz), and *Djinns (Stranded)* (2010, Hughes Martin, Sandra Martin), in which French characters are trying to either live, search for answers to a mystery, or survive in a foreign country in which unseen forces want to either destroy them or absorb them. We will then focus on the wilderness of France and the areas that are either uncharted or unpopulated. Expanses of mountains, forests, woodlands, moorlands, and beaches are, like the settings of folktales and fairy tales, often considered as dark places where people can be lost or come across their nightmares. These desolate areas are often represented as areas in which people can easily get lost, trapped, and unable of finding escape; places that are off-map, unknown and uncharted; but also, as areas in which dangerous, disturbing things may exist.

The old dark house

While the image of the ‘old dark house’ can be found in many of the New French Horror films, *Saint Ange* is the one film in the corpus that deals directly with the story of a haunted house. It tells the story of a young woman, Anna, who starts working as a cleaner at a Catholic orphanage emptied for the summer. Anna is hiding the fact she

²⁸⁸ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p.4.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

is pregnant and is, in a sense, on the run. Beaten and abused by her previous employer, we are left to assume he has raped her and is the father of her child. Attempting to keep the pregnancy secret, she tries to hide it by tightly wrapping a bandage underneath her clothes. Despite feeling the anxiety and shame of being a young unwed mother in a Catholic country during the 1950s, she does not want to give up her baby. Anna soon finds out that the orphanage is haunted by the ghosts of abandoned children and they want to take her baby for themselves. In the title scene, a woman dressed in black stands at a bus stop in the middle of the forest. As she checks her pocket watch, a bus comes round the path. It stops to let off a girl, Anna (Virginie Ledoyen), and it is obvious the woman has been waiting for her. They walk together through the forest, following a path through the trees. A subtitle appears on the screen indicating the film is set in the 'French Alps, 1958'²⁹⁰. They pass an old wooden signpost with the words 'Saint Ange' barely legible, the lettering brightening up and emerging from a dark background in the film's title shot. Eventually, they come into a clearing, climb some stone steps, and go through a creaking padlocked gate. As they walk forward, there in front of them is the orphanage, a large, imposing, and beautiful building. As this scene takes place in the bright sunlight, the house does not come across as forbidding at all, apart from in size. It is old and weather-beaten, but it is bright, clean, with lots of activity taking place outside, with porters loading luggage onto busses for a trip. At various times throughout the film, we have similar exterior shots of the orphanage, seemingly bright and peaceful. What this film does not do is introduce the house as being dark or formidable. The haunting takes its time, allowing Anna to become comfortable and feel safe with her new surroundings before offering her any hints that something may be wrong. The music is choral and pleasant, the scene is busy, the sunshine is bright, and Anna, despite displaying a sense of awe at the size of the house, does not seem afraid or disturbed by it.

The introduction to the house is similar in *Promenons-nous dans les bois*. A troupe of actors are hired to perform at a chateau in the woods by a rich eccentric for his autistic son's birthday. They stay the night and find a killer is trying to kill the troupe off one by one. Near the beginning of the film, the first time the actors see the house, they are driving towards it on a bright sunny day, appearing at the end of a long road in a bright clearing in the woods. The camera is pointing down towards the road and

²⁹⁰ This is the year of the Algerian political coup of May 13th which led to the collapse of the Fourth Republic and the beginning of the Fifth Republic with the return to power of Charles de Gaulle.

only tilts up to see the house as the car drives past as if having to look up to view it properly. The film then cuts to a shot of the car stopping and all the actors looking up at the house in awe. The house is tall, slim, and white, with jutting turrets and cone-shaped rooves, looking like a castle from a fairy tale. The film plays with various aspects of the fairy tale, particularly 'Little Red Riding Hood', the 'Three Little Pigs', and other tales of the 'Big Bad Wolf'. The film opens with a mother reading 'Little Red Riding Hood' to her son before she is murdered; the play the actors perform is also a take on the big bad wolf story, and the killer on the loose wears a wolf's mask.

These scenes show the characters in awe of the house. As they approach, the sight of the house does not fill them with anticipation and dread but with a sense of wonder. These houses are lulling the characters in, seducing with their architecture, scale, and grandeur. This is one of the tropes of the haunted house story: a house that attracts and lures people in. Sometimes the lure is the inexpensiveness of the property, the size, or the location. Sometimes the house itself somehow exudes a presence and attractiveness to the prospective tenants. In both *Saint Ange* and *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, however, the characters are staying at the house for work. The actors in *Promenons-nous dans les bois* are there on request of the wealthy owner to put on a show for his son's birthday. This is an opportunity for an independent troupe of performers to be paid well, as well as a chance to be fed and to sleep in the chateau for the evening. In *Saint Ange*, Anna joins a small group of cleaners that are going to clean the orphanage over the summer while all the children are away. Anna, however, is also in need of somewhere to live and somewhere to hide. Being unmarried and pregnant during the 1950s was highly frowned upon. So, for Anna, *Saint Ange* is not just a summer job in the beautiful Alps, it is a sanctuary, a safe place, while she thinks about what she is going to do after she has had the child.

On more than one occasion, however, we see the houses in the middle of a storm, lightning flashing against the house, shadows of trees streaking across the walls. In *Saint Ange* we see the forest trees and leaves blowing wildly, rain pouring down, the façade of the house lit up suddenly by lightning. In contrast to Anna's first sighting of the orphanage, here we have a more traditional, iconic image of the dark haunted house. Just as a bright busy scene of bustle and activity follows Anna's first sunny view of the house, this stormy dark exterior of the house is followed by a scene of Anna having a nightmare.

The horror film relies on a sense of spatial awareness, knowledge of the location, and where the characters are situated within the diegetic space. For elements of the horror film to work successfully (dread, suspense, anticipation, fear), the viewer reads certain clues and signs to map out the layout of the area. A lot of the time, the lack of this knowledge adds to the suspense or dread. It will, however, be rooted in the understandings of the surroundings. For example, if we see a character walking down a corridor towards a door, we instantly understand the logic of the spaces involved. If the corridor is dark and we are unable to see into the corners or edges of the space, we become very aware of what may be lurking there. We understand the construct well enough to be wary of the character moving along that space. We are also aware of the space behind the door; the door is an entrance to another unseen space in which any number of threats may be hiding.

In the opening pre-title scene of *Saint Ange*, for example, we see a large dorm room with neat rows of beds. A small boy is unable to get to sleep so gets up, walks out of the room, walks down a long dark corridor to go to the bathroom. A young girl, however, sees him leaving the dorm and wants to go to the bathroom with him. In the film, characters walk down darkened corridors, or towards doorways in many different scenes. Our understanding of the diegetic space helps us build the tension of wanting to know what is waiting at the end of the corridor, or behind the door. The children know their way around the orphanage at night; they can navigate their way down the corridors, into the bathroom and where the light switches are. As viewers, we are not necessarily aware of their knowledge. We assume they live in this environment, but the sight of the small boy getting out of his bed in the dark while everyone else is asleep, walking slowly across the lightning-lit dorm room lined with rows of beds, fills us with unease. The flash of lightning and crashing of thunder add an ominous atmosphere to the dark corners of the dorm, the shadows under the beds and the large swing doors the boy is walking towards. He does not seem overly uncomfortable with navigating his surroundings, but he does not like the storm outside. The oversized room, the low angled shot of the long, shadowy corridor, the huge swing doors with their two round windows, like owl's eyes, all add to the dark atmosphere. The children must go through large doorways and past a staircase with ornate bannisters, all shot at an ominous low angle. Once the two children enter the bathroom, the boy switches on the lights and they both seem very relaxed. While the girl sits on one of the toilets, the boy is playfully turning on the taps one by one looking for one that works. Once he

finds one, he drinks from it. The girl explains that the taps do not work because “the others” like to play with them. When he asks who she means, she replies, “The other children [...] you know, the scary children.” He says that this is just make-believe, so we know it is something the children have either talked about or heard of. He asks if she has actually seen them. She replies, “No”, to which he defiantly says, “So there.” This exchange is the basis of the haunted house story. Set in an orphanage the children have either seen or heard that “other children ... scary children” occupy the same building. As the boy suggests, not everyone has seen these children and so, in fact, they may not exist at all. They could be nothing more than ghost stories told to scare one another. Here is the basic tenet of the dark place, and of the ghost story: do not go to the dark place (the dark bathroom at night) or the ghosts (the scary children) will get you. It also pushes the disturbing idea that there may be others (something/someone) you do not know occupying your own personal and private space.

The scene continues with the boy returning to the bathroom, investigating the noise of running water; the taps he turned on having suddenly started working. The boy leaves the girl standing in the corridor. Now, on her own, with strange noises coming from the adjacent room, the girl is afraid. The boy too. He walks nervously into the bathroom and turns all the taps off. Something attracts his attention in the mirror hanging on a wall above a large bath. He slowly walks towards it and must stand on the edge of the bath so he can look in the mirror. As he does, the camera is looking down on him and the bath. The viewer can see the bath is filled with dirty muddy water. As he walks carefully balanced on the bath edge, we are convinced either he is going to slip into the water, or worse, something is going to reach out and pull him in. As he peers into the dark mirror, convinced he can see something, lightning flashes violently and the boy gets a fright. He slips and falls backwards, cracking his head heavily off the edge of a sink. The girl in the corridor hears the noise and slowly goes in to see if the boy is all right. As she does, the camera tracks her to the doorway but does not follow her in. The girl, on her own, with lightning flashing around her, walks into the bathroom towards the bath and the mirror. She walks around a pillar until she is out of frame. Lightning flashes again, and we hear her scream. This whole opening scene relies on the use of dark corners and hidden spaces. The corridors, doorways, and staircases are all presented in conventional horror mise-en-scene. Some scenes are shot with either low-angles or from odd, unnatural viewpoints (the slowly tracking shot

looking up from the staircase through the bannister, or the extreme high-angle shot looking directly down at the boy balancing on the bathtub), dark minimal lighting, the flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder. The children's knowledge of the space and relative comfort of navigating these spaces contrast with the viewer's unease and expectations. This space has been rendered frightening and uncanny with the darkly expansive corridors with their procession of large double doors, the ornate stairway winding, and the gigantic dark bathroom with its taps that turn on by themselves.

The unhomely

These two very similar scenes convey this uncanny presence of the haunted buildings. In *Saint Ange*, as Anna approaches the orphanage for the first time, there is a low angle shot as the building looms above her. In *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, as the actors drive up to the house, there is also a low-angle shot of the house towering over them. Both films then provide the buildings with their uncanny sense of presence in the same way – they cut from a shot of the building from the point of view of the characters to a shot taken from the position of the building, looking at them. Slavoj Žižek examines a seminal example of the uncanny point-of-view in a scene from *Psycho* (1960, Alfred Hitchcock). When Lila Crane makes her way up towards the Bates house, two shots are presented: the first of Lila climbing the steps, and the second of the house as she gets closer. Žižek suggests that as the shot of the house is taken from Lila's point of view, the other must be taken from the point of view of the house itself. He writes, "Here we encounter the antinomy between the eye and the gaze at its purest: the subject's eye sees the house, but the house – the object – seems somehow to return the gaze."²⁹¹ This sense of being watched, of being stared at by someone or something, can cause great moments of anxiety and paranoia. The uncanny point of view shot attaches the act of voyeurism onto objects which would otherwise be unnoticed. The way in *Saint Ange* the film cuts between Anna looking up at the house, and to the house itself, imbues it with a sense of dread, of malignancy. In *Saint Ange*, there are various scenes in which otherwise innocuous parts of the house are given this quality. Characters investigating strange noises look up empty stairways, down long hallways, into closets, and into mirrors, all of which "return the

²⁹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI, 2001), pp.34-35.

gaze". Lacan writes, "I can feel myself under the gaze of someone whose eyes I do not see, not even discern. All that is necessary for something to signify to me that there may be others there. This window, if it gets a bit dark, and if I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straight-away a gaze."²⁹²

It is extremely useful to examine *Saint Ange* and *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, and other haunted house films, in terms of the uncanny, particularly in the context of the term's origins, the German words 'heimlich' and 'unheimlich.' This translates as 'homely' and 'unhomely', which can be understood as the familiar and the unfamiliar. While the term homely may instantly denote a house or an apartment, in *Saint Ange* it refers to the orphanage, the children's home (whether they had a choice or not). The orphanage is transformed into an oppressive shadowy labyrinth of huge rooms, corridors, and doorways. The homeliness of shelter, company and sustenance becomes a prison for the "scary children" to appear fleetingly at the end of hallways, to peer out of mirrors, and to play tricks on stairways; what should provide the comforts and safety of home instead provides anxiety and disturbance.

Just as Freud talked about heimlich and unheimlich as homely and unhomely, or familiar and unfamiliar, he also pointed out that unheimlich can also be interpreted as being the fear of something 'too-familiar'. He explains how both interpretations of unheimlich "lead to the same result: the "uncanny" is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar."²⁹³ The uncanny is a product of suppressed or 'surmounted' beliefs, "held consciously by 'primitive' cultures, or by the ('primitive') young child"²⁹⁴. As we grow up these beliefs and fears we had as children are "surrendered as mistaken"²⁹⁵ and hidden away. The uncanny is the moment when "repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed."²⁹⁶ The once hidden becomes unhidden. If we take the uncanniness of our own homes, we can see the darkness of a stairway, an open doorway, or the darkness underneath the bed, as possible hiding places of monsters, as fears we have surrendered but which refuse to disappear. When confronted with these experiences

²⁹² Jacques Lacan, as quoted in Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory*, p.34.

²⁹³ Freud, 'The Uncanny', pp.1-2

²⁹⁴ Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror*, p.48.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Freud, 'The Uncanny', p.17.

it can cause us to question “whether things which have been surmounted and are regarded as incredible may not, after all, be possible.”²⁹⁷

Just as *Saint Ange* presents the haunted orphanage, other films in the New French Horror corpus present other buildings considered as institutional or public buildings rather than private homes, for example, the prison cell in *Maléfique* in which the occupants of a cell are attempting to escape after discovering a book of demonic spells. The enclosed spaces of the prison cell, brick walls, iron doors, and metal bars, become instead a shifting nightmare of passageways and psychological spaces leading the prisoners into hell. In *Les Rivières pourpres*, the case of a murderer and grave-desecration leads two detectives to the mysterious and secretive Guernon University in Modane-Avrieux in the French Alps. Critic Roger Ebert wrote about the setting for the film, “its mountain fastness doesn't look like a place for a ski holiday, but like a place where you could be lost and never found.”²⁹⁸ In contrast to the claustrophobia of *Maléfique*, here the film is filled with expansive landscapes, vertigo-inducing valleys and gorges, and imposing mountain edges, as well as the sprawling spaces of the University, modern on the outside, becoming darker and more Gothic the further into the depths of the building the film goes.

A different example of the home becoming unhomely, and the building turning into a dark place can be found in *Un Jeu d'enfants*, a film set in an apartment building in Paris. The opening shot is of a man reading a newspaper, the camera slowly tracking down to a story about a family perishing in a fire, with a photograph of the blazing balcony of an apartment. As we get closer, it cuts from the photo to a moving image of the fire. Then, in another abrupt cut, the film goes to the balcony before the fire. We then go into the apartment looking out of the windows to the balcony. The story follows a professional couple with two young children. An old mysterious couple appears one day at their door asking if they could look around the apartment, claiming that they once lived there as children. The wife lets them in and starts to show them around. She begins to feel uncomfortable with them but gets distracted by a telephone call from her husband. When she comes back to the room, the old couple has disappeared. She looks for them all around the apartment and finds them talking to the children in their bedroom. Disturbed, she tells them it is late, and they must leave.

²⁹⁷ Freud, 'The Uncanny', p.18.

²⁹⁸ Roger Ebert, 'The Crimson Rivers', *Roger Ebert.com*, August 10, 2001, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-crimson-rivers-2001>.

From this moment, there are signs that the apartment is haunted, and the children are beginning to act differently. It transpires the old couple have possessed the bodies of the children. The image of the large building with numerous apartments, rooms, and windows, just as in *Saint Ange*, holds just as much uncanny sway as the chateau in *Promenons-nous dans les bois*. The exterior shots of the apartment building contain many darkened windows from which to be gazed at. While each of the windows could potentially be someone's home when they are all darkened the number of possible eyes staring out without realising it adds a heightened sense of paranoia. In one scene the exterior is rendered uncanny and unsettling, shot at night-time with harsh angular lighting, and with the camera tracking in towards the building, giving the façade of the building a vertiginous shifting of weight, almost as if it is physically looming over the viewer. The inside of the apartment at the beginning of the film is fresh, modern, and clean with comfortable décor and furniture. The mother works from home in an organised home office. The children's bedroom with their toys and drawings adds to the atmosphere of comfort and safety. Once the first signs of 'possession' and haunting start, the film then reveals the areas of the apartment we assumed were safe and 'homely'. They are transformed into 'unhomely' dark places via lighting, sound effects, and camera angles. For example, the mother wakes in the middle of the night hearing voices coming from down the hall; sitting in her bed and having to walk down the hallway to check on the children now has an atmosphere of fear. In a scene near the beginning of the film, she sees the children have built a den out of sheets and chairs. She comes in and they reprimand her saying that she is not allowed, and the den is a secret. Later in the film when she sees the children are in the den again, the dread of having to lift the sheet to look inside is written all over her face. What was once part of her home life, has now become nightmarish and full of dread. What will she see if she enters her own children's bedroom? What will be there if she lifts the sheet of the children's den? What does it mean if she dreams of killing her own children? The husband starts to have violent hallucinations, the babysitter commits suicide by hanging herself, and the children are acting ever more suspiciously. Areas in apartment buildings such as basements, parking garages, communal hallways, and lifts, even the views from the balcony across to the apartments on the other side of the street, have all become strange and unsettling. The homely is now unhomely.

The house in the woods

The setting of the deep dark woods is a traditional trope of the French fairy tale, such as Charles Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* (*La Belle au bois dormant/The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods*), *Little Thumbling* (*Le Petit Poucet*), and *Little Red Riding Hood* (*Le Petit Chaperon Rouge/Little Red Cap*), and Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* (*La Belle et la Bête*). These dark forests are dangerous places children are warned not to enter, or places of endurance characters must make their way through. Often, characters would come across a house or cottage in the woods and attempt to take refuge there only to find it belongs to an ogre or a witch, or the big bad wolf has got there first.²⁹⁹ The house in the woods has become a prominent convention of the horror story, as famous a horror location as the foreign castle, the crumbling laboratory, or the old dark house. We can find examples in other French horror films such as *Haute tension*, *Ils*, and *Dans ton sommeil* (*In Their Sleep*, 2010, Eric Du Potet, Caroline Du Potet). In each of these films, some form of invasion or infiltration tarnishes the idea of the idyllic family home. The films start by providing beautiful shots of the houses and occupants sitting picturesquely in clearings amongst trees. As the disturbing story develops, however, the houses become dark, strange, and unhomely. In each of these films, the comfortable, insular safety of the home is disrupted by the intrusion of someone/something from the outside coming in. This distinction between the inner sanctum of home and the threats from outside are fundamental to the horror genre. The inner home can be the physical structure of a house, a village, or a town, or it can be a safe relationship with a loved one, a family, or a group of people. The threat from outside, from 'out there,' could mean a variety of things. In the horror genre, this 'outside' can have different interpretations, for example, from outside of the house, out of the town/city limits, out of this world, or out of our abilities to comprehend.

As in all childhood (and adult) fears, dark spaces, closets, underneath beds, stairways, basements, attics, windows at night, open doorways to dark rooms, all represent this sense of the uncanny, of being watched, of being waited on, of not being

²⁹⁹ See Colette Balmain, 'A Feminist Fairytale: Lionel Delplanque's Promenons-nous dans les bois (Deep in the Woods, 2000), *Kinoeye*, November, 2003: <http://www.kinoeye.org/03/13/balmain13.php#1>; Elizabeth Parker, 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Woods?: Deep Dark Forests and Literary Horror', in *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature*, ed. Kevin Corstorphine, Laura R. Kremmel (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp.91-100.

alone. These “dark places in which to hide or from which to flee”³⁰⁰ give the home the uncanny dread of being invaded, of being insecure, and of not being the safe personal haven from the threat of the outside world. These secret corners of the house, “if it gets a bit dark”, could be hiding something. The anxiety of being spied on by “someone whose eyes I do not see” is played upon in ghost stories and horror films. A character can sense someone is watching them, only to turn and see that no one is there; reflections of figures standing behind them glimpsed in windows, mirrors, or out of the corner of the eye; catching glimpses of something “which should have remained secret or hidden but has failed to do so.” What makes these scenes especially unsettling is that the films often allow the viewer a glimpse of these apparitions almost before the characters. By providing the viewer with these sudden, almost subliminal, shots of lurking figures, they experience almost the same sense of anxiety as the characters on screen. The viewer becomes wary of the dark spaces in the houses, is filled with the sense of the uncanny when otherwise familiar objects, actions, movements, scenes begin to seem alien or foreign and is made uneasy when information is denied to them.

What *Un Jeu d'enfants* also manages to do is transform the children's objects and games into something faintly sinister. The toys, drawings, and the homemade dens were mundane, everyday things found in the house of a family with two children. Once we are aware that something abnormal, possibly supernatural, is happening then we see the secret den, the family drawings, the breakfast plates, all in a different light. The contemporary horror film works with this idea to the point that anything if represented as such, could be considered sinister and uncanny. Pascal Bonitzer writes, “The more familiar or banal an object or an act is, the greater its capacity to inspire terror [...] the uncanny [...] occurs when a known object suddenly presents an unfamiliar aspect. It is the same, yet it is other.”³⁰¹ What we consider as household objects, items contained within our own homes, used within our everyday lives, collected, displayed and gathered to feel more at home are presented as conveyors of anxiety, fear, and the uncanny. Some examples of this include the use of mirrors or screens in *Saint Ange* and *Promenons-nous dans les bois*. In both films, we see main characters staring in the mirror and suddenly having their heads pushed against the

³⁰⁰ Troutman, p.145.

³⁰¹ Pascal Bonitzer, ‘Notorious’, in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Žižek, p.153.

glass, making it break. In *Saint Ange*, it is Anna's nightmare and in *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, one of the actresses is attacked by the killer in a bathroom and has her head slammed against the mirror. Both scenes are shot from one side of the mirror with the character looking almost directly at the camera. As their heads are pushed towards the camera violently, they slam against the glass of the mirror creating a shattering effect, seemingly on the film screen itself. Since films such as *Les Diaboliques* (1955, Henri-Georges Clouzot) and *Psycho*, the bathroom, which should be a place of intimate security, has become unhomely. Characters at their most private, believing themselves to be safe in their own private spaces, are at their most vulnerable.

The unsecret/unhidden

The definition of 'unheimlich' as being that which "ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light,"³⁰² is precisely the nature of the ghost story itself, the dead refusing to be put aside or forgotten. The "scary children" in *Saint Ange* and the boy's mother in *Promenons-nous dans les bois* have all met with untimely or violent deaths, their bodies hidden away, kept secret in unmarked graves, buried in walls and attics. The old brother and sister stealing and hiding within other people's bodies, refusing to grow old and die, is another example. Near the end of *Un Jeu d'enfants*, the mother is in the living room with the children. As she hugs them, she realises who they actually are and pushes them away. As we see her face in horror, we cut to shots of the old man and the old woman's faces peering up at her. They keep coming towards her asking her to dance with them but as she pushes them away, she sees they are the old couple clawing at her and calling her Mama. The father comes through and sees this, but he does not see the old couple. All he can see is the mother battering and threatening her children as they reach up to her. In a struggle, the father pushes the mother, and she hits her head when she falls. Some lit candles fall over and a fire starts. As the husband is holding on to his wife and the room fills with flames, only then does he see the children transforming into the old couple, staring blankly at him through the flames. The apartment on fire and the tragedy of the family burning to death shown at the beginning of the film was a flash-forward to the end of the film. We

³⁰² Freud, 'The Uncanny', p.4.

cut to the fire blazing on the balcony, which turns into a still image, which in turn transforms into the photo in the newspaper story. The scenes with the mother pushing away her children once she realises they are the old brother and sister, and the father seeing the old couple staring at him as the apartment goes up in flames, are prime examples of *unheimlich*, of the utter horror of a secret that has failed to remain so.

As the horror of abjection, something terrible or disturbing that should have remained hidden or secret has been revealed. This also relates to the fantastique (the fold in time that allows the past and the present to meet) and elements of trauma theory: the traumatic event, that disturbance in the past (that which should remain secret or hidden), resonating and reappearing out of context in the present. This can take the form of an echo, or ghost. The secret from the past, such as the terrible accident, the premature death, or the murder, creates such an intense traumatic charge it repeats to someone in the present, who will undoubtedly be convinced of ghosts and haunting. In *Saint Ange*, the “scary children”, Anna discovers, are the ghosts of sick, disabled, and unwanted children, smuggled over the border during World War II to escape Nazi imprisonment. If we consider this intense, traumatic stain in time is just as appropriate in terms of location and space. The echo of the terrible event replays itself in the location it occurred. The ghost of the murder victim is usually tied to the house or the room in which they were killed. For example, the ghosts of the children in *Saint Ange* are bound to the orphanage. As Tzvetan Todorov defined the fantastic as the moment of hesitation felt at the possible encounter with the supernatural³⁰³, Bliss Cua Lim discussed the fantastic in terms of temporal disturbances and folds in time and the dichotomy between homogenous and heterogeneous time. Homogenous time is linear and stable (our understanding of time in terms of clock time and calendar time), and according to Lim, is “an abstraction, a necessary illusion well suited to the demands of social life and to a consideration of our possible action upon things.”³⁰⁴ Heterogeneous time, on the other hand, is multiple, fluid, non-linear, and in constant flow. One can see how the tension between homogenous time, our controlled singular clock/calendar time, and the flowing, intangibility of heterogeneous time, can produce moments of the fantastic and the uncanny. If we consider linear narrative time (a story from start to finish) and the moments other ‘times’ or ‘dimensions’ make themselves known, visible, this sudden

³⁰³ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p.25

³⁰⁴ Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time*, p.39.

glimpse of something which should not belong there causes Todorov's hesitation, an inability to fathom the disturbance in our ideas of how the world works. If we think of the mother hugging her children in *Un Jeu d'enfants*, the sudden terrible and impossible realisation that they are not actually her children, the terrible hesitation heightens at the point when she looks down and cannot see the children's faces anymore but the scrabbling faces and hands of the creepy elderly couple who scared her earlier. The moment of horror and the fantastic in this scene is in the sudden switch from one state ('normality', 'reality') to another ('unreality', 'uncanny', 'fear'). It is also in the abject terror that what was real is no longer there; only the horrible and incomprehensible alternative remains.

Lim also discusses the ghost story not only in terms of time but also in terms of homogenous and heterogeneous space. Examining the theories of Henri Bergson, Lim writes:

[Bergson] beautifully intuits an experiential notion of space as a kaleidoscopic whole, a moving continuity that fills our gaze without interruption the moment we open our eyes. Confirming the evidence of our eyes, the surfaces of our bodies brush up against the world incessantly without ever finding a break in it, only an interrupted succession of difference, passing, and permanence, a durative extensity "in which everything changes and yet remains."³⁰⁵

According to Lim (and Bergson), space itself is in a constant state of flux. Rather than a solid singular determined space, our experiences are of an ever-changing, flowing set of complex information we decode as space. By examining the ghost film in terms of the "succession of difference, passing, and permanence", we can see how these ideas infer the concept of ghosts of the past haunting the present, the future tapping into messages from the present, and so on. Gilles Deleuze says, "There is no present which is not haunted by a past and a future, by a past which is not reducible to a former present, by a future which does not consist of a present yet to come."³⁰⁶ By experiencing the heterogeneous spaces that diverge, blend and meld, our understanding interprets this as anomalies within a homogenous space. Barry Curtis writes, "Haunting implies a temporal disruption that has a de-structuring effect on

³⁰⁵ Lim, p.154.

³⁰⁶ Gilles Deleuze, as quoted in *Groundhog Day*, Ryan Gilbey (London, BFI, 2004), p.88.

perceptions and alters the significance and often the shape of familiar spaces.”³⁰⁷ The ghosts in *Saint Ange* belong to the same space as Anna, occupying different times, but converging together; Anna, however, following her ‘logical’, ‘common sense’ understanding, experiences the ghosts as hauntings of the past infiltrating her, and the orphanage’s, homogenous time and space.

In the scenes in which mirrors are broken in *Saint Ange* and *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, there is the idea of spaces being infiltrated. The mirror that reflects the space we occupy becomes the space the violence is taking place. There is the diegetic space of Anna in the bathroom, but there is also the space of the viewer. From which space are we viewing this scene? The mirror itself becomes the camera in a sense. As to which way the camera is facing is questionable. Are we on the side of the bathroom looking into the mirror, or are we behind the mirror looking at the characters in the bathroom? This sense of not knowing where we are in the space adds a sense of the uncanny. There are also similar scenes in *À l’intérieur* in which windows are broken. One scene shows La Femme standing outside in the dark staring through the window at Sarah. As Sarah takes photos of her through the glass, La Femme stabs at the window with a knife causing a series of cracks to spread across the glass. The way the shot is presented, the viewer is on one side of the glass as La Femme seemingly stabs at Anna (at us), stabbing at the screen and causing it to crack. In another scene, as Sarah has a dream, there is a shock cut to Sarah’s husband smashing his head against the windscreen. Just like the scenes of the mirrors, the camera is on one side of the glass, the husband’s head colliding and pushing against the other side towards us almost makes it seem as if he is bursting through the film screen itself. The spaces these scenes utilise move from inside the bathroom, inside the reflection of the bathroom, inside the diegetic space of the scene, and the suggestion of breaking out of the film space and into the viewer space. The possibilities of spatial placement in the film helps to conceptualise the idea of heterogeneity, particularly when we are discussing the dissolution of spatial boundaries in the fantastic. It also helps us to realise the viewer requirement for understanding spatial awareness.

³⁰⁷ Curtis, *Dark Places*.

Mapping French horror

While the fantastic/horror film can traverse different spaces and points of view, and subvert our expectations of spatial boundaries and dimensions, the films we are discussing contain a semblance of spatial realism. If we consider the locations of the films, is it possible to discern how the horror genre uses these locations to represent an idea of France? Some of the settings we have discussed so far include a chateau in the woods, an orphanage in the French Alps, a house in the suburbs of Toulouse, and an apartment in Paris, locations that offer varied but recognisable geographical signs and representations of France. In terms of attempting to discern the specificities of a 'French' horror genre, location and setting, including landmarks, iconographic images and landscapes, all help to provide a kind of mapping process that represents coherent ideas of France. The film *Brocéliande* (2003, Doug Headline) is set in Rennes in Brittany, mainly in the University of Rennes and the nearby forests. The title itself is the name of a mythical enchanted forest of Arthurian legend and hints at the finds at an archaeological site. *Saint Ange*, *Les Rivières Pourpres*, *Vertige* (High Lane, 2009, Abel Ferry), *Mutants* (2009, David Morlet), and *Humains* (2009, Pierre-Olivier Thevenin, Jacques-Olivier Molon), are all set in the Alps, taking advantage of the steep mountains and valleys, dense forests, and vast stretching landscapes. The films *Belphégor: Le fantôme du Louvre* (2001, Jean-Paul Salomé), *Un Jeu d'enfants*, *À l'Intérieur*, and *La Horde* (2009, Yannick Dahan, Benjamin Rocher), are all based in Paris. *Belphégor* openly displays Parisian landmarks like the Champs-Élysées and the Eiffel Tower, with scenes of ghostly presences flying across the city, most of the film is set within another landmark, the Louvre. While *Un Jeu d'enfants* and *À l'Intérieur* are set mainly in well-to-do apartments and houses, *La Horde* is set in the banlieue, the suburbs on the outskirts of Paris. In one scene, the main characters stand on the rooftop of their apartment block looking over at central Paris. *Frontière(s)* and *Sheitan* start in Paris but move out to wide-open parts of the countryside.

From the outset, films can convey the geography of the story, whether set in a specific town or city or enclosed within a house or an apartment. In his introduction to *Cartographic Cinema*, Tom Conley writes:

A film can be understood in a broad sense to be a “map” that plots and colonizes the imagination of the public it is said to “invent” and, as a result, to seek to control. A film, like a topographic projection, can be understood as an image that locates and patterns the imagination of its spectators. When it takes hold, a film encourages its public to think of the world in concert with its own articulation of space.³⁰⁸

To give an idea of a place can be done in several ways. It can be shown on screen as a map (either a character looking at a map or shown directly on screen either as a static image or often animated with directional arrows and indicating specific regions), an intertitle with a place name, or it can be shown on a signpost or plaque. Often, location is coded as a series of visual cues, such as an ornate balcony, shutters, a city view, recognisable architecture, and the Eiffel Tower will signify we are in Paris. Conley writes, “A corollary is that films are maps insofar as each medium can be defined as a form of what cartographers call “locational mapping.””³⁰⁹ *Saint Ange* uses an intertitle (‘French Alps, 1958’) to set the location and it uses a signpost with the name of the orphanage (‘Saint Ange’) as the main title. With just two pieces of information, the film presents us with the idea of France. In *Vertige*, the leader of a rock-climbing group examines a map and explains where they are going. During the title sequence, we are given various extremely high shots of mountains, valleys, forests, and rivers, all of which give us a sense of direction and scale. There is an element of mapping the landscape to these shots, filmed using either a drone or a plane. After the title sequence, we are inside the car with the group as an intertitle comes up on the screen: ‘Croatia Aug 18’. In *Humains*, we are given a variety of indicators of location, from characters checking maps, cameras panning past train station signs, to characters explaining where they are going. At one point at the beginning of the film, a young assistant palaeontologist is hurrying with information to a meeting in a museum. He runs past a window. The camera pans with him but stops and looks out at the Eiffel Tower for a couple of seconds before the film cuts back to the assistant running. This short but blatant location marker is enough to give viewers the information they need to add not just a sense of spatial awareness but also a city in which to place the film. In *Martyrs*, however, this information is given to us in the

³⁰⁸ Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), Kindle edition.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

form of an investigative film recorded by the psychiatrists, including an information card containing the date, at Chamfors Industrial Estate in 1970. In this recording we are shown around the building, down corridors, into the room the girl was chained and so on. The psychiatrist gives us a tour and invites us into the room with “Here we are. This is where she lived.” Although there are few specific cartographic details here, there is a sense of making us aware of the spaces of the industrial estate. We are shown the steps to the entrance, the corridors, and the layout of the cell the girl was chained in, including the positioning of the bed and the commode in her room, with the psychiatrist giving us a guided tour.

By mapping locations in these ways, the films are grounded with a sense of spatial solidity. The viewer is given enough information to forge not only a sense of a place (a building, a town, a city) but the spaces and distances that form and shape this place. This can also apply to the trope of the journey from one place to another, whether familiar or not. In fact, in many horror films, the reliance on maps and general directions can lead us out of the familiar and into the unfamiliar. The journey takes us from one place to another, a route or a trajectory that can be followed on a map; a journey that is either completed or gets waylaid or disturbed somewhere along the way. In *Promenons-nous dans les bois*, *Calvaire* (*The Ordeal*, 2004, Fabrice Du Welz), *Sheitan*, *Vertige*, *Humains*, and *Frontière(s)*, the characters all must go on a journey to arrive at the dark place. In all these examples, we travel with the characters, who are often having fun and enjoying themselves. In many of the films, the journey is represented as a kind of passageway, moving from one land into another. In *Frontière(s)*, two of the characters, Tom and Farid, are trying to escape France. They drive ahead until they almost reach the border to Luxembourg and decide to stay and wait for their friends in an out-of-the-way motel in the forest. When they realise that they are safe, they relax, start making jokes, and light up a joint. The journey out of the city is shown as a montage of fast-motion streets, flashing street signs, loud rap music, laughing, and zooming noises, signifying the characters’ drunk and drug-addled state of urgency and energy. In *Vertige*, after consulting the map and discussing their trip, the car journey is represented as a montage of soaring shots of mountains, forests, rivers and high above the road watching the car. This sequence allows a sense of direction, of following a journey through the expansive wilderness, and of course, as the trip involves climbing and mountaineering (and as the film is called *Vertige*) all

the shots are from a flying high angle. The sequence also pushes the idea of travelling deeper into the wilderness and further from civilisation.

One concept that has been a constant staple of horror, particularly in terms of the journey, and in terms of the dichotomy of inside/outside, is the opposition between the rural and the urban. While the city is a symbol of modernity, industrialisation, progress, and innovation, it adversely represents congestion, squalor, crime, and depravity; in contrast, the countryside, while being a symbol of purity, cleanliness, and tradition, also represents superstition, distrust, incest, and puritanism. This dichotomy between rural and urban, and the story of someone from the city getting trapped, hunted or discovering something terrible can be found in many New French Horror films. In *Frontière(s)*, the group on the run hiding in a rundown hotel in the country, to discover they are among neo-Nazi cannibals. In *Calvaire*, another city performer becomes trapped and taken prisoner in a small farming village. In *Sheitan*, the young Parisian partygoers are led by a beautiful girl to the countryside on Christmas Eve: “You can go to my place if you want in the country.” Once they reach a farm, they are used and slaughtered in a Satanic ritual. The countryside is represented in each of these cases as isolated, secretive, paranoid, violent, sustaining old traditions, means of survival, and moral and religious beliefs. Carol J. Clover discusses this in terms of “urbanoia,” a theme in which people from the city either visit or move to the countryside. “Going from city to country in [a] horror film,” she writes, “is in any case very much like going from village to deep, dark forest.”³¹⁰ Despite the criminality and hedonism of the characters from *Frontière(s)* and *Sheitan*, the deep, dark countryside is “a place where the rules of civilisation do not obtain.”³¹¹ In *Frontière(s)* and *Sheitan* alone, this entails fascism, incest, rape, murder, cannibalism, and Satanism. The opposition between the rural and the urban also indicates the “shift from a predominantly agricultural to an industrial economy.”³¹² Discussing *Sheitan*, Marc Olivier writes that the “idea that Satan is a white country shepherd once again illustrates the conflicted vision of two Frances.” One is “the idealised pastoral construct of ‘gaulois terroir’, or soil culture”, and the second is “a youthful cosmopolitan diversity through shared secularism.”³¹³ In both *Sheitan* and *Frontière(s)* both groups escaping

³¹⁰ Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, p.124

³¹¹ Ibid

³¹² Keith Reader, ‘Representations 1930-60: The Geography and Topography of French Cinema’, in *The French Cinema Book*, ed. Temple and Witt, p.153.

³¹³ Marc Olivier, ‘Border Horror: Identity Anxiety in recent French Cinema’, (Recorded lecture), *BYU Kennedy Center*, May 7 May 2008, <http://kennedy.byu.edu/archive/#961>.

from the city are racially mixed, hedonistic, and morally questionable. In *Sheitan*, the group are eagerly looking for alcohol, drugs, and sex, willing to drive miles with a stranger for the sake of a party. The fact it is Christmas Eve also points to the lack of any religious or familial bonds. In *Frontière(s)*, the group is mixed of North African or Maghrebi descent, they have shot at the police after committing a robbery, and they smoke a joint while they drive out of the city. Yasmine, the main character, is pregnant by Alex but plans an abortion. This gives the idea that these characters are going to meet their fate, in the same approach as the characters in US slasher films. The more morally dubious the character was (drinking, drug-taking, nudity, sexual promiscuity), the more likely they would fall victim to the killer. These characters and situations are actively demonstrating the conventions of the opposition between the urban and the rural, between the modern but morally dubious, and the traditional but superstitious and archaic.

Foreign spaces

The logical conclusion of the rural/urban divide is the idea that the countryside is almost a foreign land. In *Frontière(s)*, when driving out on the country roads, Farid asks Tom, "Are we still in France?" Tom responds, "Sure. France in the Middle Ages. Makes you miss the council estates." They arrive at a crossroads with a signpost, one sign pointing to the right – "Frontière / Border", and the other pointing towards a Motel. They drive towards the motel to wait for the rest of the group, driving along an empty road leading off into an empty, dark landscape. As they arrive at the motel, Farid gets out and stares in bewilderment. It is just a motel (albeit a dark motel in the middle of the night) surrounded by a patch of trees but it is as though he has never seen anything like it. This sense of 'otherness' the country exhibits is a feature of urbanopia. The person from the city is suddenly confronted by the otherworldliness, the beauty, or the emptiness of the rural landscape.

Is is a good example of a lot of the ideas we have been discussing in this chapter, such as the urban/rural divide, the homely becoming unhomely, and the setting of the house in the middle of the woods. This house displays early signs of either being haunted or having been infiltrated by someone or something. It has plenty of dark places in which to hide, such as numerous corridors, closets, a large attic, and crawlspaces. It has also been recently bought by a couple escaping the city and

moving to the countryside. The couple has moved from France and bought their house in a forest on the outskirts of Bucharest. They have moved to the Romanian countryside to renovate a large cottage in the woods. Lucas is a writer and Clémentine has taken a job at a local school teaching French to Romanian children. As they settle into their new lives and their new home, the signs that the house may be haunted start to show themselves. Lights are switched off and on, other electrical devices such as the television set are switched on abruptly, strange noises like clicking, whistles and grunts emanate from somewhere outside, or very possibly inside the house. Figures are seen crossing windows in darkened rooms, standing at the end of hallways, or just out of the corner of the eye. On more than one occasion the viewer is shown glimpses of the mysterious figures standing behind the characters. As cameras pan across, we catch sight of figures the characters do not see. We return to the idea of subliminal catches of things “which should have remained secret or hidden but has failed to do so.” It turns out not to be ghosts after all, but what first seems like burly teenagers in hoodies, twirling football rattles. This in itself is a terrifying prospect; the house invaded by the symbol of societal breakdown: violent, delinquent youth looking for trouble. At the end of the film, however, we discover the gang is made up of schoolchildren, possibly the very ones Clémentine has been teaching. After the couple is murdered, one final shot shows the seemingly huge, silhouetted figures lumbering through the woods, as they pass the camera out of the trees and onto a path, we see a school bus pull up at the end of the road. Almost in an instant, these dark figures pull off their hoods, stop swaggering, and transform into small running children on their way to school. A title card at the beginning of the film claims the film is based on a true story. At the end of the film, after we watch the children get onto their bus, there are more title cards. They tell us the police found the bodies of Clémentine and Lucas five days later. The four murderers caught were between the ages of 10 and 15. “During the first interrogation, the youngest amongst them declared: “THEY wouldn’t play with us...”.”

The fact that Lucas is a writer and Clémentine is a teacher infuses the set-up with a sense of middle-class intellectualism. Clémentine discusses her situation with another teacher at the beginning of the film. She has only been in Bucharest for three months and she is having difficulty adjusting and learning to speak Romanian, and yet her job is to teach the children French. She tells her friend, and later her boyfriend, that the children are sometimes difficult and ill-behaved. It comes across as her job to teach the children to behave properly, to teach them a lesson. The fact that her job is

to teach the Romanian children French conveys an air of “cultural superiority through linguistic dominance,” and, as Ben McCann writes, this superiority fails when the house is invaded by children “no longer learning or speaking French but communicating via coughs, clicks and sibilances.”³¹⁴ As she leaves the school to drive home, we are given a very quick tour of the outskirts of the city, which look worn and slightly dilapidated. As she gets out into the country to her own house, we discover that the house is being renovated and painted. Again, the signs are there that Clémentine and Lucas are there to fix things. Having decided not to have children themselves, they are seen as liberated, modern, intellectuals. Their outlook is not Conservative, Catholic, or traditional. Their attempts to control the Romanian children in school, and their house, are in vain and could symbolise the fears of France being overrun and dominated by delinquent youths. In an article called “French Horror in Romania,” it is suggested that *Ils* exploits “anxieties concerning Romania’s accession to the European Union”³¹⁵, and that it plays with “fears of being overrun by a throng of homeless Romanians who will challenge the autonomy and dominance of French culture.”³¹⁶ The tagline for the poster was “You will never feel safe at home again.”

Other films set outside France include *Vertige* that follows a group of rock-climbers on a trip to Croatia. Like *Ils*, *Vertige* fosters the anxieties over immigration and border control as a threat to the idea of France as a unique cultural identity. But it also plays on the fears of what is kept secret in the wildernesses of European countries. The location in *Vertige* is an example of the countryside as wilderness, and despite some beautiful landscapes and views, the journey here is into the “deep, dark forest,” where monsters await. *Djinns*, set in the Algerian desert in 1960, follows a French patrol stranded in a village haunted by vengeful desert spirits; this returns to theories of national trauma, collective feelings of guilt and the Algerian war. *Vinyan*, a French/British co-production, is set in Thailand soon after the 2004 Boxing day Tsunami. A mother and father lose their young son during the tsunami. Six months later, the mother sees a videotape of the area and is convinced she sees the figure of her son still alive. The journey leads her and her reluctant husband into the jungles of Thailand where they are captured by a tribe of orphaned children. They kill him, while

³¹⁴ Ben McCann, ‘Pierced Borders, Punctured Bodies: The Contemporary French Horror Film’, *Australian Journal of French Studies* 45, no. 3 (2008), p.230.

³¹⁵ Corry Cropper and Marc Olivier, ‘French Horror in Romania Review of *Ils*’, *Lingua Romana* 5, no. 1, Fall 2006, <http://linguaromana.byu.edu/2016/06/09/french-horror-in-romania-review-of-ils/>.

³¹⁶ Ibid

she is adopted as their new mother. Again, we are lured deep into the “dark place.” The jungles, swamps, and rivers they are following lead the characters “off map” and into uncharted and unknown territories where anything may be waiting.

Conclusion

The New French Horror films use spaces and locations in a variety of ways to follow the genre archetypes of the Dark Place. While some films play on fairy-tale and Gothic conventions with the use of the deep dark woods, the old dark house, and abandoned and labyrinthine buildings, often the dark place can be found in a Parisian apartment building, a bright and spacious modern home, or an idyllic country chateau. It is in the modern and the comfortable, or the reassuringly recognisable and every day, that we can find the best examples of the disturbing effects of horror, particularly in terms of the uncanny. By examining both possible definitions of heimlich and unheimlich we can identify how our personal, safe, and private surroundings can become unfamiliar and frightening. The homely can become unhomely, and things that should remain secret and hidden become unsecret and unhidden. This links us back to the idea of abjection, the revealing of things we did not know were there, and things we should not, or do not want to see.

Another way of exploring the unhomely is to consider what exactly is regarded as home. In terms of location and space, it is not merely a physical space or house, but also your street, your village, town or city, and the country you call home. In the horror genre, straying out of the constraints of home can lead to dark and dangerous places, from the fairy-tale warnings to not enter the deep dark woods because that is where the wolves live, to the dangers of crossing borders, even if it is only leaving the busy, bright lights of the town to the silent, darkness of the countryside. The concept of urbania, and the urban/rural divide, has been used many times in the New French Horror films. The films provide enough information to give an idea of France, with the Parisian city dwellers searching for parties and pleasure, or running from the law, and country folk holding backwards, often murderous, beliefs and customs. The journey is away from home, from safety, but is ultimately towards something else’s home. This is the journey in the New French Horror genre, the journey into the bad place (or the deep dark woods) which leads us towards danger.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this research, examining the emergence of the New French Horror genre has allowed for some pertinent and fascinating issues to be addressed. Firstly, is the assumption that the history of French cinema lacks a horror tradition. This assumption is noted through much of the work written on French horror³¹⁷ and this thesis dispels this claim by presenting historical reviews through the lenses of the fantastique and body horror. While the fantastique produced works of the supernatural, the gothic, fantasy, and “everything that is not rational”, body horror was evident from the influence of the Grand Guignol, surrealism, through to exploitation and gore films and on to the cinéma du corps. From both historical reviews, it is evident that there is a horror film tradition in France that warrants closer study and promotion.

The main purpose of the research was to examine the emergence of the New French Horror genre with a particular focus on the influences, the antecedents, and the critical conditions that were in place to encourage the genre to develop. In terms of influences, evidence of the films following specific horror patterns and models has been demonstrated, particularly the influence of American horror cinema. Dividing the thesis into specific subject areas not only allowed the demonstration of developed horror themes but also for the examination of critical methods commonly applied to each of these themes. For example, the chapter on ‘Bodies’ focuses on films that deal with body horror themes, the influences on the filmmaker of established works of body horror, and to demonstrate how established film theories concerning the body can be used to analyse the films. In other words, the films follow a specific model, and the critical evaluation also follows specific generic theoretical models. This pattern was adhered to through each chapter, dividing the films into specific themes (bodies, trauma, apocalypse, and spaces), and drawing on some of the main critical theories of the horror genre, such as Freud’s work on the uncanny³¹⁸, Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed on abjection³¹⁹, Freud and Robin Wood on repression³²⁰, and Tzvetan Todorov and Bliss Cua Lim on the fantastic.

³¹⁷ See David Kalat, ‘French Revolution’, p.265; Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema*, pp.135-136; Ben McCann, ‘Horror’, p.277.

³¹⁸ Freud, ‘The Uncanny’.

³¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*; Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, and Creed, ‘Kristeva, Femininity, Abjection’, in *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder.

³²⁰ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), in *Standard Edition: Volume 14*; Robin Wood, ‘The Return of the Repressed’.

In terms of antecedents, in the chapter on 'Emergence' we examined the beginning of the genre through three key films, *Promenons-nous dans les bois* (the earliest film in the corpus), *Le Pacte des loups* (the first international success and an example of international co-production), and *Haute tension* (the film that started the critical discussion of a viable French horror genre). Via these three films, we discussed the antecedents of the genre, the texts, filmmakers, and movements that helped to pave the way forward. The *cinéma du look* made genre films and exciting glossy aesthetics popular, while also allowing Luc Besson to direct some of the most phenomenally successful French genre films, *Nikita* (1990), *Leon* (1994) and *The Fifth Element* (1997), allowing producers and critics to believe that action-based genre films were a viable, popular, and lucrative area of French cinema. This was followed by the impact of *le jeune cinéma français*, a strategy focused on promoting low-budget first-time filmmakers and providing exhibition and production opportunities including partnerships with TV production companies, shared spaces with established auteurs, and extensive marketing and promotion. Add to this the controversial *Cinéma du corps* and the breaking down of censorship laws regarding representations of on-screen sex, discussions and displays of sexually explicit acts, and scenes of shocking, brutal and disturbing violence. If we consider these three movements beginning in the mid-80s leading up to the year 2000, we can see the pattern developing that allowed young filmmakers passionate about horror films to produce their first films. There is the development of popular genre-lead films with definitive inspiration from advertising, US commercial cinema, and music videos. There is also the assistance and encouragement of young first-time directors and the backing of film and TV production companies to finance, produce and exhibit new work, and the critical attention of films produced by some of the key figures of contemporary French cinema, offering some of the most shocking, gory and violent moments in recent French cinema. All of these developments have opened a series of doorways and provided opportunities for the new French horror genre to grow.

Films such as *Haute tension*, *Martyrs* and *A l'intérieur* were originally discussed as an example of the *Cinéma du corps/New French Extremism* movement, and while there are reasons why this could be a valid descriptor (moments of body horror, shocking violence, etc.), there are also details why it does not fit into that category. The *New French Extremism* consolidated the ethos of extreme, confrontational art house films, producing films to provoke audiences with scenes of hardcore sex, bodily

fluids, rape and extreme violence, while still achieving recognition as 'serious' films worthy of critical attention. They were also considered worthy of premiering and competing at prestigious film festivals, such as Cannes, Venice, and Berlin, despite often receiving strong negative audience reactions, such as walkouts, physical illness, and demands for censure. *Haute tension*, *Martyrs* and *A l'intérieur*, on the other hand, do not fit the art film mould of the *New French Extremism*, aiming instead at following conventional narrative structures and satisfying horror genre conventions. While the shocks and the gore were still extremely strong, often driving debates on violence and censorship, there was an element of over-the-top entertainment, narrative drive, and satisfying horror audience expectations.

As we have examined, one aspect of the horror films produced in France was the influence of US horror sub-genres: *Haute tension* and *A l'intérieur* were stalk-and-slash films, *Martyrs* starts as a revenge film, and moves into torture porn, while all three followed the pattern of the home invasion film. The New French Horror directors, including Alexandre Aja, Pascal Laugier, Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo, have openly admitted their love of American horror cinema of the 1970s and 1980s (as well as the Italian *giallo* slashers of Mario Bava and Dario Argento) and the inspiration is visible throughout their works. In fact, as we have seen, many of the directors have gone on to direct horror films in America, some more successfully than others. Aja, in particular, has been very successful and has established himself there. Others, such as Maury and Bustillo, have not been so successful or well-received in the US, and have continued directing in France.

Throughout the study, we can consider the horror genre as a metaphor for the dark place in French cinema. The 'emergence' occurred like an inevitable scourge on the image of French cinema, from the popular aesthetics of the cinema du look to the bodily fluids and violence of the New French Extremity, the 'emergence' was a response to the notion there was "no such beast as the French horror film."³²¹ The genre can also be seen as a form of dissociation, an anxiety attack caused by nightmares of traumatic events. The apocalypse of the horror genre was the disintegration of the body, the breaking down of borders between inside and outside, safe and unsafe, life and death, the unveiling of the unrepresentable. Again, the bodies within the horror genre go beyond the notion of celebrity or sexuality or pleasure. The

³²¹ Kalat, 'French Revolution.

bodies are malleable, mutable, and capable of turning inside out, breaking down barriers of abjection. Bodies, as the horror genre constantly remind us, are messy, leaky and capable of breaking down. Spaces in the New French Horror genre are, as we have said, are dark spaces. Roads, paths, corridors lead to corners, doorways, rooms where anything could be waiting. In France, the famous cities and landmarks, the uncharted mountains and forests, the rural and urban divide, the borders and what lies beyond, are all capable of horror. All these themes and concepts connect the films within the New French Horror genre.

One of the contributions this work makes is in providing a record and an examination of a specific moment in French cinema and horror cinema. By focusing on the development of a genre in a new area shows the relevance and importance of the research. This work is also impactful in the way it introduces critical and varied theoretical connections between areas of film studies such as film history, film theory, French cinema, and horror studies.

The focus of the research is from an Anglophone film studies perspective. Further research on the subject from a French film studies or French cultural studies angle would provide an interesting critical lens and extend the scope of this subject.

APPENDIX 1

NEW FRENCH HORROR

Promenons-nous dans les bois (*Deep in the Woods*, 2000) Lionel Delplanque

Les Rivières pourpres (*The Crimson Rivers*, 2000) Matthieu Kassovitz

Les Morsures de l'aube (*Love Bites*, 2001) Antoine de Caunes

Le Pacte des loups (*Brotherhood of the Wolf*, 2001) Christophe Gans

Un Jeu d'enfants (*Children's Play*, 2001) Laurent Tuel

Brocéliande (2002) Doug Headline

Maléfique (2002) Eric Valette

Bloody Mallory (2002) Julien Magnat

Dans ma peau (*In My Skin*, 2002) Marina de Van

Haute tension (*High Tension/Switchblade Romance*, 2003) Alexandre Aja

Dead End (2003) Jean-Baptiste Andrea, Fabrice Canepa

Calvaire (*The Ordeal*, 2004) Fabrice du Welz

Saint Ange (*House of Voices*, 2004) Pascal Laugier

Les Revenants (*They Came Back/The Returned*, 2004) Robin Campillo

Ils (*Them*, 2006) David Moreau, Xavier Palud

Sheitan (*Satan*, 2006) Kim Chapiron

À l'intérieur (*Inside*, 2007) Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury

Frontière(s) (*Frontier(s)*, 2007) Xavier Gens

Vinyan (*Vinyan: Lost Souls*, 2008) Fabrice du Welz

Martyrs (2008), Pascal Laugier

Vertige (*High Lane*, 2009) Abel Ferry

Dans ton sommeil (*In Their Sleep*, 2009) Caroline du Potet, Eric du Potet

Mutants (2009) David Morlet

La Meute (*The Pack*, 2009) Franck Richard

Humains (2009) Jacques-Olivier Molon, Pierre Olivier Thevenin

La Horde (*The Horde*, 2009) Yanick Dahan, Benjamin Rocher

Proi (*Prey*, 2010) Antoine Blossier

Le Village des ombres (*The Village of Shadows*, 2010) Fouad Benhammou

Djinns (*Stranded*, 2010) Hughes Martin, Sandra Martin

APPENDIX 2

New french horror films at the French box-office³²².

Films	Year	Admissions
1. <i>Le Pacte des loups</i>	2001	5 179 154
2. <i>Promenons-nous dans les bois</i>	2000	749 417
3. <i>Les Morsures de l'aube</i>	2001	436 965
4. <i>Sheitan</i>	2006	313 461
5. <i>Ils</i>	2006	251 302
6. <i>Saint Ange</i>	2004	235 767
7. <i>Un Jeu d'enfants</i>	2001	231 642
8. <i>Brocéliande</i>	2003	201 029
9. <i>Haute Tension</i>	2003	110 544
10. <i>Frontière(s)</i>	2008	100 186
11. <i>Martyrs</i>	2008	91 236
12. <i>Maléfique</i>	2003	85 347
13. <i>Vertige</i>	2009	79 980
14. <i>A l'intérieur</i>	2007	70 839
15. <i>La Horde</i>	2010	58 584

³²² Data from JP's Box-Office cross-referenced with box-office data from IMDB.

APPENDIX 3

Top ten horror films at French box-office according to *JP's Box-Office*.³²³

Films	Year	Admissions
1. <i>The Exorcist</i>	1974	5 397 450
2. <i>Scream 3</i>	2000	2 654 418
3. <i>It</i>	2017	2 223 006
4. <i>Scream</i>	1997	2 207 347
5. <i>Scream 2</i>	1998	2 153 587
6. <i>Annabelle</i>	2014	1 538 114
7. <i>The Faculty</i>	1999	1 522 329
8. <i>It Chapter 2</i>	2019	1 496 163
9. <i>The Conjuring 2</i>	2016	1 470 179
10. <i>The Nun</i>	2018	1 394 105

This list does not take into account the different sub-genres that can be considered as horror. For example, *The Sixth Sense*, *Jaws*, and *The Shining* are categorised as 'thrillers', and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is considered 'fantasy'. *Le Pacte des loups* is categorised as 'Adventure – Action'.

By searching through the top 250 films at the French box-office³²⁴, the list of films generally considered as belonging to the horror genre looks like this following table.

³²³ *JP's Box-Office*, 'Les entrees en France: Genre: Horreur', http://www.jpbox-office.com/v9_charts_total.php?view=2&filtre=genre&infla=0&variable=13

³²⁴ *JP's Box-Office*, 'Top250 Tous les temps en France (Reprises incluses): Inclus tous les films sortis Jusqu'en 2021', http://www.jpbox-office.com/v9_top100.php?view=2

Films	Year	Admissions
1. <i>The Sixth Sense</i>	1999	7 799 130
2. <i>Jaws</i>	1976	6 261 062
3. <i>The Exorcist</i>	1974	5 397 450
4. <i>Le Pacte des loups</i>	2001	5 179 154
5. <i>Bram Stoker's Dracula</i>	1993	3 166 906
6. <i>Jaws 2</i>	1978	2 967 354
7. <i>Scream 3</i>	2000	2 654 418
8. <i>The Shining</i>	1980	2 359 705
9. <i>It</i>	2017	2 223 006
10. <i>Scream</i>	1997	2 207 347

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