Juridically Minded, Justifiably Frightened:

Academic Legitimacy and the Suspension of Horror

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ABSTRACT

Juridically Minded, Justifiably Frightened: Academic Legitimacy and the Suspension of Horror

Graeme Langdon

As any reader of scholarly writing on the horror film knows, study of the genre tends to begin with tactful apologies and explicit declarations of the genre's academic legitimacy. Rhetorical maneuvers of this sort seem intended to reclaim horror from its law-fearing critics and its dubious status before the law. Yet, they betray a certain complicity between the academy and the law because they concede that something essential to the genre requires justification.

In this thesis, I read Film Studies' general inability to analyze the horror film without recourse to such supplementary acts of justification through Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the aporetic structure of Western sovereignty (1998). According to Agamben, the force of law resides in its capacity to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority (18). As I hypothesize, the academic justification of horror corroborates the marginality of the genre and affirms the sovereign soundness of interpretive thought in the face of an uninterpretable limit. This limit is the unreadable immediacy of horror's violence (its affect, or, appeal to the bare life of its audience), and like the *homo sacer* of Agamben's analysis, it is included in the form of its exclusion. The academic justification of horror admits something dubious about the genre, but suspends it beyond contemplation.

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INTRODUCTION:

THE UNDECIDABILITY OF HORROR

Assembled together in the dark of the Cineplex, the audience of a horror film seeks a peculiar experience from an idiosyncratic genre. Like any moviegoer, the horror fan joins strangers to indulge in a harmless encounter with the stuff of fiction. With horror, he or she finds fiction capable of inspiring palpitations, nausea, and bloodcurdling screams. When successful, the genre offers an adventure with affect one might rationally expect people would aim to avoid, and it does so by representation of activity that flies in the face of virtue and civility. The work of horror unravels with something of the emotive force of an actual encounter with violence, and yet, its audiences continue to seek out this flirtatious encounter with insecurity.

Properly understood, the experience is affective.[1] Horror realizes itself by appeal to its audience's capacities for both interpretive thought and belief. The genre trades on a supposedly dispelled credulity, but its characteristic depiction of monstrosity and the perpetration of violence could not be affective without equal and inseparable appeal to its audiences' faculties of reason. The horror film asks its audience to consider whether the monster that assails its protagonist constitutes a threat that the incredulous spectator would rather not meet outside of an ostensibly bounded experience with fiction. But the

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[1] In this thesis, my use of the term "affect" is meant to recall its function in the work of Spinoza as emphasized in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. As Brian Massumi notes in the introduction to his translation of Deleuze and Guattari's monumental *A Thousand Plateaus*, affect is "is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (1987: xvi).

genre must break with the mediacy of representation to fulfill its promise of an affective experience beyond incredulity. A horror film can successfully horrify only with its audience ferried beyond thresholds of expectation, disbelief, and interpretation, but these thresholds are crossed only by lines of identification, opposition, and evaluation.

In his *Philosophy of Horror*, Noël Carroll suggests that it is an audience's presumption of an "Enlightenment cosmology" that makes the horror monster's function as object of fear in narrative fiction intelligible (1990: 57). Only with a "conception of nature" that relegates the monstrous figures of earlier *mythoi* to realms of the "non-natural", writes Carroll, can entertainment proffer a violation of nature that is capable of an audience in the way that characterizes an encounter with horror (57). But if the genre has been a source of fright since the world's organization into knowable categories, one would be hard-pressed to determine the genre's function apropos of this knowledge. Horror seems equally suited to corroborate and contest the elementary conclusions of this project.

The genre deals in imagery and activity at odds with the conclusions of Enlightenment science and the prescriptions of enlightened modes of social organization. But one couldn't say that the genre is wholly opposed to the ideology of the Enlightenment because it casts this material as something to fear. The genre cultivates a fascination for that which falls outside of enlightened schemata, but it does so in a manner that corroborates the moralistic undertones of the Enlightenment opposition of the normal and the monstrous. Horror allows its audience to delight in deviant desires, but its function as something like an ideological steam valve subordinates the genre to the epistemic priorities that preclude the realization of such desires outside the cinema house.

And finally, the interpellating moment of fright is both occasion for one's performative reconstitution of his or her normalcy against that which is cast as monstrous deviation, and a shocking demonstration of the haphazard iterability and inevitable imperfection that characterizes enlightened fact.

Despite this essential ambiguity, one couldn't say that horror's producers and its audience explicitly, or even consciously, situate the genre in radical opposition to reason. At least until the 1960s, the typical horror narrative involved recourse to (generally pseudo-) scientific explanations for its monsters and their origins. Many of the period's most ferocious mutants, for example, are born of haphazardly prepared chemical solutions in poorly kept laboratories. Preposterous as these explanations often are, they portray positivistic science, causal reasoning, and rational thought as endeavors capable of accounting for the most unprecedented deviations from the categories of human knowing. And naturally, these films conclude with such epistemologies successfully mobilized in defensive strategies against the monster, whose deadly rampage provides occasion for its potential victims' defensive reassertion of the norm. In this way, the horror film affirms and reaffirms the pairing of knowledge and power that legitimates the most offensive acts of subordination.

Nevertheless, Mark Kermode notes that "even the most narratively reactionary, moralistic horror movies feed upon the ecstatic shock of speaking the unspeakable, showing the unwatchable" (1997: 155). In itself, the horrifying representation of violence and monstrosity produces an affect that cannot be entirely contained by the metaphor or meaning supposed to account for, repudiate, or vanquish those monsters that threaten the status quo. And as might be expected, the immediate force of

representational violence similarly routs the metaphoric conclusions of those who pursue progressive meaning in the genre. As a means to the emotional experience that postulates an ecstatic equivalence between the object of fright and its frightening representation, horror resists any decisive determination of its meaning.

So, while critics of various stripes have shown the Enlightenment and its accompanying truths to be little more than irreducibly contingent products of social construction and control, horror has always exploited the irresolution that haunts any totalization of the world, humankind's place in it, and the representational thought that grounds such extrapolation because the genre cannot be made to *mean* decisively. With horror, logic creates the conditions for an empathic substantiation of a monster that logic tells us cannot exist. This routing of logic is most radical because it cannot be assigned any determinate meaning. In his study of *The Fantastic*, Tzvetan Todorov identifies this quality in an early incarnation of horror proper (1975). "The nineteenth century transpired [...] in a metaphysics of the real and the imaginary," he notes,

> But today, we can no longer believe in an immutable, external reality, nor in a literature which is merely the transcription of such a reality. Words have gained autonomy which things have lost. The literature which has always asserted this other vision is doubtless one of the agencies of such a development (168).

If knowledge is knowledge because it is incontrovertible, the ambiguity of horror sets it against this supposed certitude. Horror gives its audience what Enlightenment science discredits and Enlightened civility forbids, and it is successful when the representation of such phantasms is "real" enough to inspire a response. The genre undercuts the supposed facticity of any ordering of the known and unknown, and as such, it sets an impasse for those who seek to produce conclusive knowledge.

As long as audiences have enjoyed horror, critics and academics have struggled with the genre's meanings and implications. Like the genre's heroes, who do battle with monsters predestined to rise from the grave or return in countless sequels, those who aim to interpret horror face a monster resistant to any binding determination of its meaning. Just as the protagonists of horror must contend with the violence that disrupts their worlds, readers of the genre are confounded by the irrecuperable force of horror's violence and its capacity to transcend representation. On the one hand, this violence is interpretable because it mediates those consequences that the horror film anticipates by intelligible opposition of protagonist and villain. But on the other hand, this violence resists one's efforts to interpret it because it is most immediately recognized and experienced as the frightening violence that the law forbids outside of the cinema house.

The pure force of this increasingly extreme violence is able to undermine the supposedly meaningful content that scholars find in horror because it revels in the vulnerability of what Giorgio Agamben has named "bare life" (1998: 8). Such life exists before political qualification in the figure of the "*homo sacer*", an individual possessed of "a capacity to be killed and yet not sacrificed, outside both human and divine law" (73). It is an incapacity to stand for anything more than simple biological life that nullifies the *homo sacer*'s possible value to the gods. Agamben's analysis of the *homo sacer* is valuable to the study of horror because the genre subsists by its rote extermination of marginal characters immaterial to metaphoric interpretations or the narrative arc that celebrates some hero's survival and the defeat of the villain. The bare life of these characters is valuable only insofar as its subtraction can elicit screams. And yet, *when we scream* we have abandoned the evaluative logic that disallows these characters a capacity

to assume much narrative significance. In this moment of fright, we are no longer dealing with "just a movie". The violence one sees has exceeded our capacity to assign it meaning, and we sympathize with these figures caught in its path.

The tendency among proponents of the genre has been to displace horror's capacity to ablate the intellectual separation essential to axiological reference by privileging the genre's capacity to inspire and work with thought at other levels. In work after work of academic analysis, the horror scenario is cast as metaphor or allegory for deeper and more redeeming meanings, but where this mission comprises a reader's project he or she must ignore the violence that characterizes the genre. This is analysis of the sort that might take the Frankenstein myth for "an existential parable" about an "isolated sufferer", as Frank McConnell does in *The Spoken Seen* (1975: 76), and Noël Carroll is right to wonder "where in this allegorical formulation can we find an explanation for the purpose of the unsettling effect of the charnel house imagery?" (160).

If we find no explanation or accounting for the violence of horror in the metaphoristic readings that find repressed desires and existential quandaries worked out in the genre, such analyses do not entirely omit the genre's violence and its capacity to affectively undermine meaning. As both Stephen Hantke and Jonathan Crane have shown, academic efforts to analyze and interpret the genre have tended to proceed by careful justification of the interpretation to come, explicit assertion of the genre's worthiness, and elaborate apologies for taking up with such questionable material (2007 & 2004). As Hantke suggests, this tendency to justify the study of horror is a means of circumventing horror's dubious status in our culture (197). And as Crane suggests, writers must apologize for the study of horror because their interpretive conclusions

cannot account for or contain the violence seen on screen (154). But sadly, both analysts miss the full import of this peculiar phenomenon. As I will demonstrate, such apologies and extraneous acts of justification *do function to include* the violence of horror in the interpretive study that omits it. The violence of horror is present in such readings in the form of these rhetorical maneuvers, which acknowledge something dubious about the genre, but absolve the writer from addressing it in the very same gesture. The genre's affront to meaning is included in the form of its exclusion, and suspended beyond contemplation.

Of course, this strategy is resorted to in an analytical atmosphere largely decided by detractors who, repulsed by horror's violence and unconvinced of its capacity to communicate meaning to any audience save the pathologically perverse, call for the genre's banishment. But proponents' justification of the genre operates by exactly the same logic and has something of the same effect as detractors' scorn, and not simply because such justification reaffirms the ordering of a threshold between validity and invalidity that demands the study of horror be justified. The critical justification of horror is an inclusive exclusion of the sort that Agamben has shown binds those without political qualification, such as the *homo sacer*, to the juridical order that otherwise abandons or banishes them. As the thinker notes, "The particular 'force' of law consists in [the] capacity of law to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority" (18). By readers' justification of their interpretive analyses of horror, interpretation posits a relation with the genre's non-relational operation beyond and against meaning. The violence of horror is wrenched from the order of its operativity beyond and against meaning, and yet denied

full admittance to the order of meaning because it appears only in the form of the censorial detour that allows interpreters of the genre to avoid it.

The inclusive exclusion that characterizes the individual interpretive analysis of horror similarly characterizes the justificatory discursive history of the genre because the endless justification of horror and assertion of its academic legitimacy concedes and suspends something essential to the genre that runs counter to the apparent rationale of such affirmation. If the study of horror did not risk something, readers of the genre would not need to justify themselves. If horror's capacity for meaning and academic legitimacy were decidable, academic analysts of the genre would not need to explicitly assert this as fact before the study that purports to find meaning in the genre and corroborate its academic legitimacy. But insofar as study of the genre is unwaveringly justified, and insofar as the academic legitimacy of the genre must be endlessly affirmed, the justness of the genre and its academic legitimacy are cast as undecidable. Like the banishment of the *homo sacer*, which Agamben notes excludes this figure from both the *ius humanum* and the *ius divinum* because it states that the *sacer* can be killed without punishment and yet not sacrificed (82), the endless assertion of horror's academic legitimacy situates the genre between an ineligible intelligibility and an intelligible ineligibility. The genre is suspended between orders of meaning and non-meaning, between political qualification and disqualification, neither inside the academy nor fully outside.

Insofar as the study of horror cinema is characterized by its practitioners' compulsion to justify their work, the genre's discursive history exemplifies something of the language and logic by which the broader field of Film Studies was able to assemble

itself into an academic discipline against negative classicists unconvinced of the form's capacity for meaning. As Dudley Andrew notes in a spirited defence of the discipline in this era of multi-disciplinarity, "Cinema studies began when lovers of film (*amateurs*) strove to legitimate their passion [and now] they are involved in an institutionalized marriage with the academy that perforce requires compromise" (2000: 342). Andrew traces the campaign for cinema's academic legitimacy through the early discussions and writings of philosophers and educated filmmakers for equally cultured audiences; the elevation of the filmmaker to the status of artist by the popularization of auteurism in France; the measurement of narrative film against works of literature in English and Romance language departments at American universities; and the dense theoretical work that began in the 1970s (342-4). So if Film Studies' marriage to the academy now requires compromise, the betrothal was won by demonstration of cinema's interpretive appeal to the phantasmatic thinking subject presupposed by such enterprises as the production and dissemination of knowledge.

It is important to note here that the academy's furtherance of meaning simultaneously locates the institution at both the centre and the periphery of a political ordering of the world wherein inclusion and belonging are determined apropos of something or someone's capacity for meaning. As a place of education, the academy lends coherency to the political value of meaning, but risks cultivating thinkers capable of arguing the meaningful value of objectionable material (as with horror, or thought that aims to oppose the status quo). As a place of invention, the academy demands that its denizens produce new knowledge, but it asks that they do this within terms already decided. This paradox encapsulates the academy wherever its pursuit of knowledge

restricts itself to questions of interpretation or its status in the society that prioritizes meaning functions to delimit the terms in which its findings can make sense. Thus, Robin Wood begins an early study of Alfred Hitchcock by confronting a question that this thesis finds at the very centre of most academic writing on horror cinema. "Why", asks Wood, "should we take Hitchcock seriously?" (1965: 7). "It is a pity the question has to be raised. If the cinema were truly regarded as an autonomous art…it would be unnecessary. As things are, it seems impossible to start a book on Hitchcock without confronting it" (7). Clearly, Wood's aim is to situate the study of cinema within the already-acknowledged acceptability of Art History. And as such, he cannot help but affirm the stipulation that threatens to delimit all institutional inquiry: new knowledge must exceed that which came before it, but not in such a manner or to the extent that it is unrecognizable as knowledge.

Where it is bound to such logic, the academy's production of knowledge and meaning exemplifies the life of law, which such critics as Walter Benjamin (1996), Jacques Derrida (1982), and Agamben have variously shown sustains itself by the articulation that conjoins law-founding and law-preserving violence, constituting and constituted power. In Benjamin's system, law preserves itself by a dialectical rising and falling of the two violences, but he does concede that the two are fused in the legal violence of war and the police. The second two thinkers suggest that every articulation of law functions to both preserve and generate legal authority. In the academy's case, the application of its interpretive criteria to new fields is always also an affirmation of those criteria and the academy's authority to apply them.

Nevertheless, the passage from outside of the academy to inside does proceed through a particularly fecund zone of indistinction between nascent and established discourse. In this marginal space one works between a rousing obligation to demonstrate the legitimacy of his or her object of study and the freedom to do so with unfixed and emergent languages of thought. Accordingly, one finds that academics who strove to demonstrate the intellectual significance of cinema were among the very first to adopt and popularize structural semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and various strains of continental philosophy. So, while Film Studies might still occupy something of a marginal position in stuffier institutions, there is little doubting cinema's capacity for meaning or the film scholar's capacity to interpret this meaning and redraft the frontiers of knowledge (except, apparently, when the object of analysis is horror).

Insofar as the ordering of academia is always-already set, even the work that opens new horizons for thought cannot escape some corroboration of the criterion by which thought can legitimately constitute knowledge and the process by which the inclusion of this knowledge is decided. Thus, Dudley Andrew can argue that Film Studies is "worth making a home base for students even if they plan to leave home" (2000: 349), and assert an interpretive framework founded upon his vaguely moralizing differentiation of "the ambitious cinema of art" and "the standard cinema of genres" (1984: 11). Like any discipline, Film Studies indeed constitutes itself as a home, but it can do so only at the expense of something abandoned outside. The analysis that grants academic legitimacy to a particular work is always also a demonstration of its object's appropriateness for inclusion, and the soundness of the precept that distinguishes between what is appropriate and what is not—even if the fields to which these designations apply

can grow amorphously. Within the confines of this logic, it is an object's capacity for interpretable meaning, or valorization of the thinking subject that ensures its academic validation. And ostensibly bound to this logic, Film Studies' becoming-disciplined proceeds by demonstration of its capacity to think cinema in ways meaningful to the academy.

When the object of analysis is cinema, the institutional corroboration of this logic is somewhat disconcerting because it operates against the radical political promise cinema held for many of its earliest analysts. For early thinkers of the medium such as Benjamin, Abel Gance, the Soviet Formalists, and the Surrealists, cinema promised more than rote cultivation of the knowledge and meaning constitutive of the politics of the era and its exclusions. For these thinkers and practitioners of the form, cinema supplied a shock to thought capable of obliterating or transcending many of the epistemically oppressive criteria by which knowledge is decided. And yet, just as audiences found beauty and poetry in the work Louis Buñuel labels "a desperate, impassioned call for murder" (2000: 162), history has shown that rationalism and reason's capacity to capture experience by attribution of already understood meanings easily consumes this shock.

In *Cinema 2*, Gilles Deleuze suggests that we today can only smile at these early idealizations of cinema's capacity to shock audiences toward contemplation of their material circumstances (1989:157). By Deleuze's estimation, the power that pioneers of the form like Gance and Eisenstein attribute to the medium was always-already susceptible to capture in two ways. On the one hand, "The shock would be confused, in bad cinema, with the figurative violence of the represented instead of achieving that other violence of a movement-image developing its vibrations in a moving sequence which

embeds itself within us" (157). On the other, the shock would produce a "spiritual automaton [...] in danger of becoming the dummy of every kind of propaganda" (157). In either case, the supposed power of cinema is shown to amount only to a possibility, and one easily exploited at that.

Deleuze would prefer to see cinema proceed with a conception of the shock he gleans from Antonin Artaud's brief flirtation with the radical possibilities of the medium. In Artaud's work, Deleuze finds a conception of the shock that forces one to act against the intolerability of modern life, which is intolerable because it is characterized by a "break in the link between man and the world" (169). In contradistinction to the shock that constitutes the sublime "as intellectual totality which goes beyond the imagination" (157), Artaud conceived a shock that would force one to think one's "powerlessness to think the whole and to think oneself" (167). Deleuze favours such a shock because neither the whole nor oneself can exist as intellectual totalities in the uniquely alienating conditions of mass-mediated capitalism (167-70). Confronted with both the impossibility of thought and the intolerability of the world, the audience subjected to the shock Artaud extols is forced to abandon thought for belief: "not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world" (170).

What is interesting about horror cinema is the extent to which it doubly squanders the shock to thought that Deleuze finds in the proclamations of Gance and Eisenstein, at the same time that it offers something of the shock to thought Deleuze gleans from Artaud's oeuvre. The genre aims to manipulate its audience towards feelings of precisely the same tonality that State propaganda aims for, and it does so by its characteristic representation of violence—what Deleuze would label its "blood-red arbitrariness" (164).

By folding its apparent mediocrity (the "figurative violence of the represented") against its essential fascism, the horror film produces the affective encounter that resists any decisive determination of its meaning. The genre forces its interpreters to think their impossibility to think it, but when these interpreters cast horror's immediacy beyond contemplation, they reproduce the modern dissociation of humankind and its world.

What is strange about Deleuze's dismissal of "bad cinema", is its uneasy relation to the thinker's simultaneous commitment to art and philosophy as art. Deleuze's dismissal of "the mediocrity and vulgarity of current production" (164) is an originary decision on the identity of art that precludes a constructive encounter with work he chooses to exclude from the order of aesthetically significant art. If bad cinema's mediocrity is "quantitative", as Deleuze suggests (164), why should it be allowed to accrete unchecked or unadapted towards more creative and positive aims?

The appearance of "vulgarity" as the criterion upon which this exclusion is decided moralizingly presupposes the consubstantiality of entertainment unworthy of the thinker's attention and its audiences. For if, in Deleuze's schema, good cinema restores "our belief in the world" (182) and bad cinema appeals only to the *vulgus*, it almost seems like Deleuze would prefer to deny the *vulgus* the opportunity to restore its belief in the world. At no point does the thinker go so far, but he seems unwilling to think the spectatorial experience of the vulgar audience except apropos of the spiritual automaton's susceptibility to fascist manipulation (164). What is lost in his rather blatant dismissal of cinema that resorts to the figurative violence of the represented is the capacity of such cinema to exemplify the violence of fascism, to show representation's belonging to the

order of fascism, and force its audience to think its powerlessness to think beyond the indistinction into which the two pass.

The horror film proceeds by this trajectory, but it succeeds beyond this impasse with its audience forced by fright to believe in its connection to a world fraught with fascism and violence. With unmediated intensity, the genre offers everything that Deleuze finds in commendable cinema, and it does so by representation of the excruciatingly intolerable in life. There are the beginnings of a peculiar ethics here, but not an ethics with aims we could possibly determine. To do so would require suspension of the genre's capacity to undermine all ends assigned to it, and duplication of the inclusive exclusion that structures the carefully justified analyses of those who find meaning in horror. But if this ethics is lost on the side of ends, Deleuze's originary exclusion of "bad cinema" precludes any possibility of a constructive or intensifying encounter with the unfixable movement of horror's ambiguous ethics against what is "bad" in the work. And if this "bad" generates an ambiguity or "arbitrariness" that is easily pulled in more frightening directions, then artful philosophy should feel obliged to take bad art seriously.

I would like to suggest that bad cinema, or bad art, is so labeled because it operates outside of what is already and easily understood and accepted as art. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin infamously opposes cinema to more traditional and respected art forms like painting (1968). As any reader of the essay knows, Benjamin terms the latter "auratic", and suggests that the mechanical reproducibility essential to the production of cinema prevents such "cult value" from accruing to the motion picture (226). In my estimation, horror cinema is

particularly bad because it pursues "the fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment" that Benjamin suggests characterizes cinema in general (234) with greater intensity and more at stake. Horror offers to its audience all that is fearsome in the greater society of its dissemination, and it extends this offer with such compulsion that it can move its audience to scream. The genre forces its audience to experience the "closeness" that Benjamin attributes to cinema (223), and opposes to the feeling of "distance" one experiences before the work of auratic art (222). With this thesis, I hope to consider how the academic assignment of meaning to horror functions to retrieve horror from this closeness and its dubious status as "bad art". But inasmuch as these interpreters of horror must justify their analyses of the genre, they prove themselves incapable of demonstrating horror's perfect belonging to the order of meaning and interpretation.

Nevertheless, horror's capacity to undercut meaning is suspended beyond contemplation by its interpreters' supplementary assertions of the genre's academic legitimacy. This monstrous figure at the limits of law and meaning is held within by the inclusive exclusion that captures qualities of the work that are resistant to interiorization by this logic. By the interpreter's justified reading, the work of horror is split in two: that which can be shown to mean is brought inside, and that which defies the intelligibility of meaning is cast away. Such treatment is problematic because horror operates in the space between meaning and one's release from meaning.

The genre succeeds by rupture with the meaningful, but it does so by meaningful representation of such rupture in the diegesis. In the horror film, seemingly commonplace scenarios explode with the unlawful violence of a villain identifiable by its semiotic confusion of humankind's most meaningful oppositions. In the work of horror's

interpreters, this representation of rupture is made to mean. It is shown to stand for what it shows by the reading that must deny the emotive force of this intolerable representation of violence. And yet, the immediate force of horror's violence does appear in such readings in the form of the inclusive exclusion—the acts of apology and justification that concede horror's affront to meaning, but cast the genre beyond contemplation. In this way, those who assert the genre's academic legitimacy inadvertently posit an insurmountable undecidability. And yet, any fan of the genre will tell you that these readers are remiss in their elision of the manner by which horror forces a decision. This is an affective decision that the successful work of horror demands of its audience and it hinges upon a radical alteration of the ontological composition of the genre's audience: an increase in heart rate, or a twist in the stomach.

As Matt Hills has argued, horror must be rethought as process and event (2003). We need terms to think the *experience* of horror, and the modes of perception it interrupts and engenders. Ironically, we might find the beginnings of such thought on the side of the genre's detractor's rote pathologization of the genre and its audience. Horror may not be a sickness of the sort that reactionary critics suggest, but the genre communicates like one in the way that Artaud describes the plague in his *Theatre of Cruelty* (1958). When the work of horror is successful, when expectation, incredulity, and the pregiven are masterfully exceeded, an audience screams, taking the genre's representation of threat for threat. When the work of horror is unsuccessful an audience laughs at the perpetration of violence as the mutilation of the body and the monstrous characterization of otherness with ironic distance.

But if horror is an event or process, its peculiar discursive history functions as counter-process with the aim of capturing and containing horror and its unthinkable consequences. This thesis endeavors to delineate the coordinates of this capture by careful analysis of those passages in which horror's readers undermine the supposition that horror can mean by their very assertion that horror can mean. In the first chapter, I will show how certain writers vie for the attention of unsympathetic readers by apology, self-deprecation, and exclusive preoccupation with horror's most exceptional works. With the first two strategies, horror is unfavourably situated as exception to the institutional academic directive that the object of analysis be meaningful. With the third strategy, exclusive reference to work whose apparent artfulness and genius make it an exception to the genre proper serves only to corroborate horror's general dubiousness.

In the second chapter, I will show how the study of horror is guaranteed by writers' explicit affirmation of the genre's capacity for intellectually resonant meaning. Writers who proceed by this strategy generally aim to show that horror exemplifies the decidedly meaningful features of academically legitimate work, but some locate the genre's worthiness in its possession of qualities that distinguish it from the comparatively conformist cinema of traditional academic study. In such analyses the full complexity of the inclusive exclusion characteristic of sovereignty is made clear because the genre's interpreters counterintuitively argue that it is horror's relation to the rule as an exception that makes the genre an example of the rule.

In each case, horror's readers suspend the immediacy of the genre's violence beyond contemplation, but it is this very immediacy that forces the affective decision necessary for an audience to scream. Logic is abandoned when an audience is moved by

fright or revulsion, but that does not mean that this phenomenon cannot or should not be thought. In fact, new modes for thinking horror are needed now more than ever. For while the affective experience characteristic of horror is a peculiar source of pleasure in the Cineplex, the human capacity for fear is exploited by and implicated in the violence of what Naomi Klein has labeled "disaster capitalism" (2007), and the ignominious imperialism of those who purport to act against terrorism. This violence is able to characterize contemporary life because we are unable to think how it acts on and produces both individual and collective before and beyond thought. As such, more decisive analysis of the experience of horror might allow us to better understand the horrors of contemporary experience.

CHAPTER 1:

HORROR AS EXCEPTION

In the introduction to Ken Gelder's *Horror Reader*, the author inadvertently undermines his project when he proclaims that "this field is worth studying" (2000: 1). In spite of the meaningful content that the contributors to his anthology will go on to read as evidence of the genre's academic legitimacy, Gelder must still insist on horror's worth. With this thesis, I hope to unravel the paradox present in the discursive tradition that has proven itself incapable of interpreting horror without recourse to elaborate apology or supplementary assertion of the genre's capacity for meaning. Such rhetorical maneuvers function to pre-sell or guarantee the interpretive study of horror, and they do so against horror's negative reputation in our culture. And yet, these maneuvers also acknowledge something supplementary in horror that interpretive thought cannot fully defeat or defuse. There is something essentially unfixable in the genre that seems to invariably undermine any attempt to demonstrate its academic legitimacy.

The irresolvable problem that readers of the horror film confront in the genre is the immediate unassignability of its violence. Central to genre's counterintuitive allure and the inadequacy of representational thought to think this pleasure without recourse to justification, is the genre's capacity to suture the intellectual void between an incredulous thinking audience and the action on screen through its characteristic cultivation of fear

and representation of violence. For in the moment of fright, the text assumes the place of reality, and horror's audience abandons the interpretive thought that assigns frightening meaning to the action on screen. Such thought is lost in a moment of rapture in which what is seen and heard assumes the full fearsomeness of an actual encounter with such violence. And if this violence is experienced as nothing more than itself, how can it continue to encode meaning of any relevance to the thinking subjects the academy aims to cultivate?

As it is the genre's violence that complicates the academic endeavor to read horror by necessitating the project's supplementary justification, we may hypothesize that academic readers of the horror film confront in this violence a problem conceptually identical to the problem our legal system confronts in violence outside the law. For as Benjamin has sagaciously shown in his "Critique of Violence", our legal system maintains itself and its authority by its monopoly on violence (1996: 238). It is the extent to which the violence of the law penetrates life and writes itself on the body that guarantees the law, which aims to interiorize and subdue violence by subjecting it to legal ends. And against this effort towards totality, violence outside of the law threatens not by the ends it pursues, but by its mere existence outside of the law, divorced from legal and therefore intelligible ends (239).

Because cinema is not properly violent, one would think that cinema's representation of violence would escape the law's desire to forbid all violence but its own, but the frequent censorship, banishment, and regulatory rating of such work shows that this is not the case. As the stuff of representation and mimesis, the horror film can exist and continues to exist because it exploits the law's failure to fully monopolize

violence at the point where the experiences and interactions of legally regulated reality are taken up in culture as entertainment. But as Benjamin notes, the law will also intervene on activity that does not properly constitute violence in hopes of preventing future violence (245). Contract law, for example, can impose itself on the non-violent sphere of human discourse and understanding because the law fears the potential violence that can erupt from a misunderstanding between the parties in agreement (245). Thus, because horror stages activity inimical to the laws that govern the societies in which it is produced, and because law anxiously fears the possibility of the representation of this content communicating more than meaning, the genre threatens the law in the form of the potential misunderstanding essential to the representation of violence, and invites or risks revocation of its legal permissibility.

Ask any fan of the genre, and he or she will enthusiastically recount the histories of various horror films subjected to moral disapprobation, regulation, censorship, and banishment. This brazen knowledge suggests that it is precisely this treatment that comprises something of the genre's allure for much of its audience. As such, the horror film is for the law a little like the "great criminal" of Walter Benjamin's enigmatic critique, who arouses the secret admiration of the masses by his or her operation outside of the law's desired monopoly on violence (239). The horror film, like this figure in Benjamin's piece, poses a threat because of its existence outside the law that aims to monopolize violence (by subjecting it to a legal end), and occlude the possibility of future violence. So, while the content of cultural production is metaphysically beyond the scope of the law, works of entertainment and art become like Benjamin's great criminals by

showing such figures perpetrating violence in diegetic worlds sufficiently identical to the legal context in which the work is produced.

This status does not necessarily imply that the horror film is essentially opposed to the law, or, that the law invariably views it in this way. In the introduction to this thesis I note that the genre's characteristic syntax is just as easily adapted to projects of a reactionary or conservative nature as anything else; and Michel Foucault has identified the juridical operativity of something like Benjamin's figure of the great criminal as "delinquent" in disciplinary systems of the sort that Foucault dubs, "carceral" (1995). In such systems, the delinquent functions as an easily supervised and controlled counterpoint to a more diffuse general illegality. And inasmuch as delinquency differentiates "itself from popular illegalities," Foucault finds that it "serves to keep them in check" (279). While properly outside the law, the violence of the great criminal is wrangled inside by both the divestingly projective admiration of the general public, and the vilifying insinuations of the State. In a similar fashion, the horror film functions as both idealogical steam valve (cf. Wood 1978 & 2002), and the easily manipulated monster of carceral campaigns against more general illegalities—like juvenile delinquency, for example. Thus, Foucault therefore notes that the insidious efficiency of the carceral owes to the fact that it can "assimilate transgression of the laws in a general tactics of subjection" (273); and we see how the law's monopoly on violence actually manages to extend beyond itself.

Capture of this sort is a matter of attributing meaning, a matter of subordinating the violence of the great criminal or delinquent to the often-obscure quasi-legal ends of the carceral, and monopolizing interpretation of this figure's actions. But inasmuch as

this violence cannot help but show that it is perpetrated outside of discernible legal ends, the great criminal or delinquent remains a figure of immediately irreducible ideological ambiguity and tactical uncertainty. Whatever ends the violence of the great criminal is assigned, this violence is always, additionally, a threatening demonstration of its potential existence outside of the law. The great criminal or delinquent therefore inhabits an irresolvable threshold between acceptability and unacceptability; and the horror film, because it similarly shows its audiences this violence, is assigned the very same status. In this threshold, the work of horror is subject to the sort of legal intervention generally reserved for activity that properly constitutes violence.

When the law intervenes against the horror film it does so because it fears the potential transmission, or transmutation, of the genre's violence to realms other than the relatively safe order of representation that resides outside of the law's proper jurisdiction. And if horror amounts to such a threat because no external imposition of a legally intelligible end can fully contain material that is immediately accessible and strangely pleasurable to an audience as the violence the law and law-fearing fear beyond their control, then the law's intervention against horror may be viewed as an intervention against the radical unassignability of the genre's violence. As such, horror anticipates an emergency conceptually identical to the emergency that Benjamin suggests the law faces when an otherwise-innocuous isolated strike inspires the solidarity of other sectors, erupts, and assumes the momentousness of a general revolutionary strike. As Benjamin observes, the former's violence is excusable because it seeks only to establish more equitable law and legal ends within the legal system qua fact (240). But the latter's violence constitutes a more significant threat to the established order because it desires

more drastic change. The violence of the revolutionary strike amounts to an emergency before the law, and warrants legal intervention whilst the violence of the isolated strike does not, because it pursues no end intelligible from the seat of law—only ends that will necessarily remain unintelligible until existing law is abolished and the legal system itself is overturned (240).

Just as contract law aims to address the potential violence that can erupt from a misunderstanding between the parties in agreement, the law foresees a potential violence in horror's perceived lack of understandable content. It is the violence of horror's unique incapacity for meaning at the centre of any argument over its legal permissibility. The genre threatens law when the misbehavior it represents is misunderstood by its audience and mistaken for something other than meaningful corroboration of the law's monopoly on violence—mistaken, that is, for inspiration. At issue when the law intervenes against the horror film, is the genre's violent exploitation of the potential misunderstanding that structures representation itself as the presupposed disparity between what is seen or heard and what is meant. When the audience of a horror film screams, it has momentarily taken the violence on screen for an actually threatening manifestation of violence, and the mere violence of representation has transmitted itself to the order of law's proper jurisdiction.

In this light, the scholarly quest for meaning in horror cinema comes into view as a collective effort to retrieve the genre from its dubious status and vulnerability before and outside the law by assignment of intelligible ends to its violence. And in advance of such a project, the self-aware acts of justification that one finds in the prefaces and introductions of academic works on horror would seem to serve as a means of guaranteeing the analyses and conclusions yet to come. But it is the meaningless

violence of horror that such justification guarantees against; and insofar as this violence produces an affective experience in which it can no longer fully stand for anything other than itself, the academic who claims to read horror is thwarted from the very start. In studies that aim to demonstrate horror's worthiness as academic object, the supplementary justification of the genre ultimately betrays horror's imperfect belonging to the order of meaning and interpretation.

As such, the threat that horror poses to the legal system as "great criminal" is the very same problem it poses to the academy, which one might suggest maintains itself by a monopoly on meaning in the same way that the law does with violence. In horror, the academic analyst confronts an affectively forceful representation of violence resistant to the interpretation of representation's meaningful content because such representation is capable of transmutating itself beyond this very order, even if only to raise the hairs on the back of a spectator's neck. It is because horror represents violence outside of the law that it pushes against the sovereign security of meaning. In this light, horror's interpreters' justification of their analyses of the genre serves to suspend horror's violence by elision, acknowledging it only in the form of its inclusive exclusion.

We may therefore note that these readers' acts of justification don't act against, but in tandem with the law that banishes a film, and the disparaging denouncements of the law-fearing detractors of popular criticism who aim to vilify the genre before legal intervention becomes necessary. In each case, the work of horror is banished to a zone between acceptability and unacceptability because neither the legal ends of law nor the intelligible ends of academic interpretation can subsume its violence. This is not to suggest that the academic aims to duplicate the law's exclusions—he or she is simply

bound to the same exclusionary logic that Agamben has shown characterizes Western politics. Both law and the academy maintain themselves by monopoly on the assignment of ends (legal or interpretive), and the immediacy of horror's violence resists such assimilation.

For both law and the academy, the space of horror's undecidability and uncertain permissibility is nothing more than the irresolvable inequality of signifier (the violence of horror) and signified (a meaning or legal end that would bind this violence to law and interpretive thought) in any instance of representation. But because it is violence and its savage consequences that horror shows or offers as sign, the genre's inclusive exclusion is bound by the more fundamental inequivalence of *phonē*'s simple signification of pain and pleasure, and *logos*' more complex communication of meaning. And if, as Agamben notes, it is humankind's fulfillment of its capacity for the latter that signals its passage from the simple fact of living common to all species as *zēn* to the politically qualified "good life" of *eu zēn* enjoyed in the polis (7), then the juridico-academic inclusive exclusion of horror (a genre essentially preoccupied with the vulnerability of bare life) is conceptually identical to the process by which bare life is "set aside" in the polis and rendered vulnerable to the indiscriminate violence of the law that need not proscribe anything in order to apply to the life that belongs to the juridical order only in the form of its exclusion. Thus, horror is consigned to the very same threshold between outside and inside as *homo sacer*, the figure who can amount to nothing more than its bare life. This threshold is the state of exception in which the law can relate to an exteriority, and it is the very feature that Agamben suggests characterizes Western politics and our inability to think it.

This inability to think politics is conceptually identical to Film Studies' inability to read horror without recourse to justification. But with horror, that which is excluded is obviously not the bare life that our politics suspends between inclusion and exclusion. What Film Studies suspends beyond contemplation is a genre that invariably illustrates the violence of political exclusion because it revels in the violent extermination of characters included solely in the form of their vulnerability to the violence of the narrative. For Agamben, it is the sovereign who decides the state of exception that exposes bare life to the violence of the law. As this thesis posits, it is the academic writers who grapple with horror that constitute the undecidability of a genre whose diegetic world is conterminous with the state of exception. Thus, we discover horror's function in a thesis that seeks to expose an unsettling correspondence between the academy and the law. The genre is something like the limit figure and principle of both the law and the academy, and analysis of horror's discursive history cannot help but lay bare the juridical nature and exceptional politics that structure the academy where it remains bound to representational thought.

The perfect symmetry of both the academy and law's irresolvable issues with the representation of violence is found and played out in the remarkably congruous writing of horror's academic proponents and its law-fearing detractors in the sphere of popular criticism. The manner by which academic readers of horror suspend the genre's violence and affront to meaning through inclusive exclusion is structurally and consequentially consistent with detractor's scornful exclusion of the genre and the properly legal manifestation of this scorn in instances when horror films are actually banned by law. Academic interpreters of the genre must write around and against the already-

unfavourable situation of the genre, but like the genre's detractors, they proceed by a logically identical procedure of inclusive exclusion. Both proponents and detractors of horror maintain themselves in relation to an exteriority, banishing the genre's violent incapacity to mean in a context where the opposite—a capacity for meaning—functions as the criterion for political inclusion.

The inclusive exclusion appears quite explicitly in the writing of horror's more reactionary critics when they flatly refuse to address the genre. It is a common trope, and one found in a *Harper's* piece by Stephen Koch lamenting the success on the festival circuit of Tobe Hooper's grisly exploitation film, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). As Koch notes, "I hope to be forgiven if I spare both myself and the reader any detailed discussion of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*'s worthless content" (1976: 110). In a similar vein, *The Observer* critic, C.A. Lejeune explicitly refuses to name the actors and actresses who appear in Michael Powell and Leo Marx's *Peeping Tom* (1960) because she believes that her "normal" readers would not want to see such a "beastly picture" (1960: 23). In a brief survey of the critical reception of David Cronenberg's oeuvre, Ian Conrich notes that the *Sunday Times* critic, Dilys Powell, initially refused to review *Shivers* (1975) because she found it so "degrading" (2000: 37). By this strategy, horror's violent content is bound to the reactionary critic's assessment of the genre in the form of its exclusion. And yet, the violence of horror and the threat of emergency are often too great to simply ignore in this way. In such cases, detractors proceed by a different tack, and the scornful inclusive exclusion of horror takes another, more disconcerting form.

As I suggest in the introduction to this thesis, the scorn that horror faces is grounded in the rather reverential preconception that art and entertainment should serve

to corroborate and contribute to the sovereign soundness of the good in life, and that which is already easily understood as art. As Henry James Forman suggests, "A picture [...] is good if it complies with the national mores and bad if it conflicts" (1935: 134). Good art communicates respectable meaning and affirms the intellectual sovereignty of the viewer subject and subordinate to the law's monopoly on violence. Horror is "bad" because it does not offer the pleasant satisfactions of entertainment so defined. The content of its representation is, when realized outside of fiction, inimical to conceptions of normalcy, good taste, civility, and the law. And as the law forbids violence, horror's detractors repudiate its diegetic perpetration because of its capacity to undercut the epistemic certitude of the law and the systems of knowledge that hold it in high regard. Thus, the inadmissibility of horror would seem to hinge upon its apparent unwillingness to corroborate such things as normalcy, good taste, civility, and the law.

As something like law-fearing defenders of the status quo, horror's detractors aim to exclude the genre because they fear the threat it poses as bad art to established and meaningful values and the law. It is a monistic understanding of pleasure that precludes for horror's detractors the possibility that horror's representation of something as unpleasant as the violence it offers could function as entertainment and possess meaning. And as it is a capacity for meaning that would situate genre within the legal ends of the law and the law-affirming ends of good art, detractors must posit a dangerous lack of meaning that anticipates the fearsome communication of its violence as violence (and not sign) to realms other than representation. As mere representation, this violence is allowed, but insofar as the genre anticipates an emergency of the sort described, it must

be banished by negative and disparaging criticism in order to occlude the genre's contact with an audience.

For such critics, the exclusion of horror requires showing that the genre communicates nothing to anyone other than those incapable of understanding meaning. Because the genre offers no meaning to speak of, its audience must be those incapable of accessing the loftier and less immediate meaning of metaphor and analogy. Thus, in the discourse of those who aim to deny the genre the political qualification of meaningful art, the genre's exclusion hinges upon its projection onto, and association with those before or beyond the legalistic logic of interpretation: children, criminals, and the mentally ill.

It should not surprise us that the phantasmatic audience of this genre cast to the edge of belonging is comprised for horror's detractors of those groups denied the full rights and privileges of belonging afforded citizens in the contexts of horror's production. The ostensibly inconsequential matter of how people think and write about an admittedly marginal genre of popular entertainment not only duplicates the exception that includes bare life in the juridical order only in the form of its exclusion, but actually participates in and corroborates this very exception. Just as the law abandons the *homo sacer* incapable of meaning, horror's detractors exclude the genre by positing the coterminous sacrality of the genre and its supposed audience.

Perhaps the strategy for vilification and exclusion of entertainment most familiar to readers unacquainted with the discursive history of horror is reference to the negative effects the work can wreak on younger audiences apparently incapable of the intellectual distance necessary to distinguish good from bad and the activity of fiction from what is acceptable in the real world. Anyone remotely familiar with the vicissitudes of Western

culture knows that the susceptibility of children has been a concern of the morally upright since mass-mediation rendered entertainment of all sorts accessible to younger audiences. Forman's aforementioned delineation of good and bad cinema, for example, appears in his popular summary of an early and influential study of the negative effects movies—and horror movies in particular—can have on children. And less than twenty years after the publication of Forman's screed, Dr. Fredric Wertham published his infamous vilification of the comics industry and horror products, *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). More recently, "Britain's Video Recordings Act of 1984", empowered the British Board of Film Censors to cut and classify video releases because they could be accessed by children. As Mark Kermode notes, the terms of this act were extended by a 1994 Criminal Justice Act amendment in order to better address "the distress caused to young viewers who may view horror videos, and the supposed harm which youths who had viewed such videos may be inspired to wreak upon society" (158).

There is a twofold logic at work when we find horror banished by reference to its child audiences. The critic or censor posits that children lack the intelligence and wherewithal to not duplicate the behavior that is offered to them as entertainment, *and* that horror offers nothing but unacceptable behavior. In Freudian terms we might say that those who fear the effects horror can have on children do so because they believe that it can arouse the drives of the insufficiently oedipalized by representation of unoedipalized violence. The fear implicit in the banishment of horror by reference to its younger audiences is, as William Paul notes, "that these people not already fully formed might be deformed by such pernicious amusement" (1994: 4). Thus, horror is banished because its representation of violence would seem to possess this capacity.

It is little surprise then that horror's detractors refer to its adult audience as if they were the product of the negative influence the genre can have on a child. A popular tendency among horror's detractors involves implicating the genre's audience in the sorts of violence the films offer as entertainment. Through their simple consumption of the horror film, the genre's audience is consigned to the side of criminality. Roger Ebert suggests this correspondence in his review of Lucio Fulci's *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) when he disdainfully likens the film's audience to "vicarious sex criminals" (1980), and insinuates that only one with a taste for actual violence could possibly enjoy such material's representation in the cinema house. In Koch's aforementioned review of *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, the critic similarly posits the mutual deviance of text and audience by situating both in terms of a geography of crime. "It is a particularly foul item in the currently developing hard-core pornography of murder," he writes,

> fundamentally a simple exploitation film designed to milk a few more bucks out of the throng of shuffling wretches who still gather, every other seat, in those dank caverns for the scab-picking of the human spirit which have become so visible in the worst sections of the central cities (108).

Thus, Koch suggests that a disquieting similarity unites the unwholesome film, the urban areas whose problems with crime and degeneracy are in some way attributable to the film's presentation within their limits, and the lowly audience whose simple presence in such parts of town (let alone the "dank caverns" showing the film) clearly designates their disreputability. In his review of *Peeping Tom* for the British Film Institute's *Monthly Film Bulletin*, David Robinson posits the illicit nature of the work in question by comparing it to an even more disreputable work: the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, which was subject to legal ban in Britain at the time (1960). "It is only surprising

that while the Marquis' books are still forbidden here after practically two centuries," writes Robinson, "it is possible, within the commercial industry, to produce films like *Peeping Tom*" (65). By this gesture, it is inferred that those who seek out Powell and Marx's film deserve as much castigation as those who traffic in material the law explicitly forbids, and it is particularly telling that what is forbidden in this case is the work of a mind in the grips of perversion.

This is because detractor's exclusion of the horror film often pathologizes the genre by positing that it can appeal only to the mentally ill. In Mikita Brottman's treatise on infamously disreputable movies, the author notes a review of Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932) in which it is proclaimed that "Anyone who considers this entertainment should be placed in the psychological ward in some hospital" (2005: 18). In his reception history of *Peeping Tom*, Ian Christie notes that *The Daily Worker*'s Nina Hibbin dismissed the film because she felt it was "perverted nonsense" (1978: 56). At the time, Hibbin wrote that the film "wallows in the diseased urges of a homicidal pervert and actually romanticizes his pornographic brutality [...]. From its slumbering, mildly salacious beginning to its appallingly masochistic and depraved climax it is wholly evil" (1960). And if the horror film is masochistic, it should not surprise us that its detractors generally equate enjoyment of the genre with Sadism. In Julian Petley's review of British critics' responses to horror cinema, one reads of a *Guardian* reviewer's concern that Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* (1968) was "less concerned with narrative than with exploiting every opportunity for sadism" (2002: 34). And in John Trevelyan's memoirs, Britain's chief censor through the 1950s and '60s recalls his problem with films that were "both sadistic and nasty" (1973: 159). For his part, Roger Ebert reckons that

"There is no reason to see this movie except to be entertained by the sight of sadism and suffering" in his aforementioned review of Fulci's *I Spit on Your Grave*. More recently, Ebert informs readers of his review of Greg Mclean's *Wolf Creek* (2005) that "To laugh through the movie, as midnight audiences are sometimes invited to do, is to suggest you are dehumanized, unevolved or a slackwit" (Ebert WC review). And when David Cronenberg's *Scanners* (1981) was released over Easter weekend in Britain, *The Sunday People* critic, John du Pré noted "a perverted sense of timing" (1981). Like the previously detailed efforts to associate the horror film with children and criminals, this strategy functions to exclude the genre by associating it with a class of people not fully included in the juridico-political order. "[L]ike the 'mentally ill,' relegated to the sidelines of communities, societies, and consciences," notes Roger Dadoun, "the horror film leads a marginal existence" (1989: 44), but it is shocking how often this connection is explicitly affirmed in the writing of the genre's detractors.

Ultimately, negative criticism of this sort, which posits the villainous nature of horror by presupposing an audience limited to children, criminals, and the mentally ill, aims to establish a line between abnormal and normal audiences. The intention is to differentiate a class of people that horror can communicate to from those it can not, and a desire to do so clearly animates the *Spectator* reviewer who notes that Terence Fisher's *Dracula* (1958) "is clearly aimed at adults", but adds that she "hate[s] to think what kind of adults" (37 in Petley 2002). As Theresa Cronin notes of the British Board of Film Censor's suppression of the 2001 video release of Fulci's *I Spit on Your Grave*, what worries such vociferous critics is not necessarily the material, but the possibility of its enjoyment by abnormal audiences:

> [W]ithin this regulatory decision the 'problem' of cinema is clearly defined not as the text per se but as the inappropriate physiological and affective responses of the potential spectator, who is defined here not as a rational or 'reasonably minded' adult [...] Censorship in this instance has been founded on the basis of the possible responses of those who are, by their very definition, 'abnormal' in that they are not only aggressive but possibly sexually 'deviant' and potentially 'criminal'" (2009: 7).

This is not a new strategy in Britain. An unmistakable effort to differentiate normal and abnormal spectators, similarly characterizes the notoriously negative reviews bestowed on *Peeping Tom*. As noted above, Lejeune's refusal to identify the actors who appear in the film was based on her assumption that her "normal" readers should not see such a "beastly picture". In Isabel Quigly's review of the film in *The Spectator*, the critic asks "what are we coming to, what sort of people are we in this country, to make, or see, or seem to want (so that it gets made) a film like this?" (1960: 544). Quigly was so upset by the film because she felt that it "attempts to disguise itself" as a picture that "isn't for nuts but for normal homely filmgoers like you and me" (546). As Kenneth Thompson suggests, such reviews attempt "to normalize historically and socially specific forms of behavior as universal" (1997: 16). "Where [such] moral regulation is successful," he argues, "people accept certain forms of identity, practice and association as 'natural' or 'inevitable' and reject other forms as 'deviant' or 'impossible'" (16).

This effort to assert the genre's incapacity for redeemable meaning by associating it with audiences supposedly incapable of interpretation and normal understanding should surprise no one familiar with Jacques Rancière's analysis of the "incommensurable upon which politics is based" (1998: 43). The abovementioned detractors' exclusive attribution of any capacity to understand and enjoy the apparently sickly pleasures of horror to children, criminals, and the mentally ill functions to imply that the genre can

only communicate to those that exclusionary societies tend to view as incapable of understanding the politicized language of control and legal ends that Rancière finds exemplified in the question that asks, "do you understand?", but paradoxically implies, "There is nothing for you to understand, you don't need to understand [...] all you have to do is obey" (44-45). As Rancière suggests, this question's "manner of making itself understood, is to draw the line between [...] people who understand problems and people who have only to understand the orders such people give them" (45). In the case of horror's exclusion, we find this line transposed to protect the apparently normal and law-fearing audience from a genre that flaunts its refusal to concede to the moralistic prescriptions that define good taste and respectability before the law's monopoly on violence. Thus, horror's detractors suggest that the bad audience's apparently dangerous incapacity for normal understanding is mirrored in the genre by a lack of understandable (and therefore interpretable) content. And by this strategy, the genre's violent refusal to follow orders is cast beyond knowledge and understanding by an exclusionary knowing that reduces it to the unknowable fodder of infantile, criminal, and pathological entertainment.

Only with this line fixed between those who understand what renders horror inadmissible and those who do not, can the law-fearing detractor apply his or her scorn to that which is properly beyond the scope of normal understanding. As such, the abovementioned detractors address horror in precisely the same way that Agamben suggests that the law can apply to the exception, which is to say in not applying to it and withdrawing from it (17). Like the *homo sacer*, which Agamben notes is included in the juridical order "solely in the form of its exclusion" (8), horror belongs to the order of

intelligibility only in the form of its noted inadmissibility, its incapacity to convey respectable content and meaning to anyone other than those already consigned to the margins of society precisely because they lack a capacity to understand the language of control. Laid bare by the remarkable vehemence with which horror's detractors strive to distinguish their loathing of this material from the dangerous acquiescence of the mindless child, criminal, or lunatic, is the extent to which these defenders of good taste require the infantile, criminal, or pathological reading of horror's dubious content in order to first constitute the validity of their exclusionary interpretation of the genre's uninterpretability by normal standards.

When the law intervenes on matters that don't properly constitute violence, it does so, as Benjamin suggests of the prohibition against fraud's regulation of human understanding, in hopes of preventing future violence (245). But as Benjamin suggests, any attempt to control that which cannot properly be called violence must be read as a sign of the legal system's declining vitality and waning "confidence in its own violence" (245). I would like to suggest that this deterioration of the law is always-already presupposed by the human capacity for mimesis, and the representation of violence in particular, which makes possible something like the transgression of law while remaining wholly inside of the law. As such, the representation of violence confronts its audience with the essentially transgressive nature of law, which suspends its own validity and transgresses itself in order to apply to the exception and found new law. Horror has proven particularly threatening to the law because its unique representation of its characters' violent transgressions is affectively forceful enough to shatter the intellectual distance essential to representation and enact itself on the bodies of its audience.

It is against this complexity that academic proponents who purport to read and interpret horror must fight to demonstrate its capacity for meaning. These writers' explicit justification of their studies or supplementary assertions of the genre's academic worthiness would seem intended to assuage the anxieties of a stuffy academic environment reluctant to admit material so vilified in the abovementioned variety of popular criticism. But where the academic interpretation of horror proceeds by such justification, we find a demonstration of caution that cannot help but affirm something of the genre's dubious status. If these interpreters of the genre truly believed in the genre's capacity for meaning, there would be no need to pepper their introductions with this assertion. But insofar as supplementary assertion of the genre's academic capacity for meaning and legitimacy as academic object admits and acknowledges a lack of worth and incapacity for meaning essential to the genre, the very substance of this violence and affront to meaning is suspended beyond contemplation, included only in the form of its exclusion.

The various acts of apology and justification by which academic proponents of horror strive to assure their audience of their object's worth are perfectly symmetrical with the strategies that detractors deploy to undercut the genre. Whereas detractors of the genre banish horror's violence and affront to meaning as the unknowable stuff of audiences incapable of properly interpretive thought, these proponents of the genre admit and contain that which would seem to contradict their claims by self-aware elision. Any interpretive study of the horror film that must justify itself duplicates the non-relational structure of detractors' scorn, but there are two strategies by which horror's academic readers attempt to guarantee their analyses that are most explicitly consistent with the

detractor's assertion that the genre lacks respectable meaning. On the one hand, there are those studies in which the writer works only with those films that he or she takes for the genre's most exceptional works, and notes a distinction between the works in question and the genre proper. On the other hand, there are studies in which writers apologize for taking up with such dubious content, attempting to excuse the study as they confirm the inadmissibility of the genre. In the next chapter, we will consider the analyses of horror's more self-assure elucidators, but for now a look at the abovementioned studies will allow us to see how proponents of horror are prone to duplicate the logic that grounds the inclusive exclusion by which detractors dispense with the genre.

Arguments for the study of horror that make their case by reference to the genre's most exceptional works justify nothing but the works in question. By deeming such works exceptional, the approving analyst suggests that these films belong to the genre only insofar as they distinguish themselves from more generic material, which lacks excuse for its violent scenarios and depictions of monstrosity. As such, the academic's study is justified because the object of his or her analysis is shown to share the qualities that distinguish more treasured examples of artistic expression, but the presupposed artlessness of horror and its incapacity to mean is reaffirmed. In the introduction to this thesis, I note how Robin Wood makes recourse to this strategy in his impassioned demonstration of Alfred Hitchcock's significance and artfulness (1965). In the introduction to the second edition of their influential anthology, *Planks of Reason*, Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett betray a similar commitment to horror's most exceptional works:

> If this book had a single role in its original edition as the first academic

> critical anthology on horror, it was in establishing the genre's legitimacy within academic culture as the genre itself proved its significance in films such as *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Sisters* (1972), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *It's Alive* (1974), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *God Told Me To* (aka *Demon*, 1978), and *Videodrome* (1982). Academic writing about horror has, unfortunately, done relatively little to retrieve horror from the lowbrow designation to which it has again been rather deliberately assigned by the film industry (2004: x).

In this passage, Grant and Sharrett make their case for horror's study by reference to its most notable works, and their dismissal of more contemporary, "lowbrow" material affirms that there is little essential to the genre itself that deserves to be studied. Adam Lowenstein does the same when he suggests that such exceptional horror films as *Peeping Tom* (1960), Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960), Shindo Kaneto's *Onibaba* (1964), Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972), and David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) "border on the territory of a cinema conventionally perceived to exist at the furthest remove from the horror film: the art cinema" (2005: 6). If the object of Lowenstein's study is not art cinema per se, it certainly isn't horror. And if, as Lowenstein seems to believe, horror exists at the furthest remove from the cinema most beloved by the academy, then horror proper remains hardly worthy of study.

Readers of academic writing on the horror film find this self-contradictory attitude affirmed when otherwise serious studies begin with elaborate apology or indiscreetly self-deprecating remarks. In his previously mentioned excoriation of analyses that begin with this maneuver, Jonathan Crane finds this peculiar gambit deployed by Andrew Tudor (1989), William Paul (1994), Isabel Pinedo (1997), and Cynthia Freeland (2000). In the preface to Tudor's study, the author notes that "The worst thing about writing this book has been admitting to it" (vii). Paul's prefatory

acknowledgments include apologies to his wife for studying work in which "an infant in a snowsuit bloodily batters a woman's head with a kitchen mallet" (xi); and Pinedo expresses gratitude to an old friend who accompanied her to see horror films—"despite his better judgment" (xii). Freeland actually notes that such apologies have become something of a cliché in professors' books on horror, but nevertheless thanks her spouse for enduring some very graphic and unpleasant dinner-table conversations (xiii). What is interesting about Crane's admonishment of these writers for not taking their subject seriously is the fact that he resorts to similar self-deprecation in the acknowledgements of an earlier work on the genre. Much like Pinedo, he thanks his wife "for actually watching, against her better judgment, some of these films with [him]" (1994: vii).

The structure of such apologies and acts of self-deprecation situates the offending writers in-debt to various other individuals unconvinced that the horror film possesses a capacity for meaning. As such, the apologetic sentiment of the maneuver, and the acknowledgment that the comparatively minor transgression against normalcy that is horror fandom takes place within the more normalized setting of a monogamous (and generally heterosexual) union function to assuage the reader's fear that the study aims to demonstrate horror's relevance to normal audiences. For as Joseph Maddrey notes, "People tend to give you strange looks when you admit that you not only spend much of your time watching horror movies, but are in fact writing a book about the *cultural significance* of horror movies" (2004: 1). So if this gambit is meant to sneak the scholars' work past unsympathetic readers, it invariably undercuts the metaphoric and interpretive readings to follow because it concedes something disreputable and base in the genre capable of offending normal audiences.

When a work of analysis begins with the writer's apology for taking up with such dubious material, it asks that an exception be made to the rule that the academic object be meaningful. Whereas studies that limit themselves to the horror genre's most exceptional works aim to demonstrate that they are engaged with examples of meaningful work, this maneuver asks that the academy allow an exception to its apparent demand that the work analyzed be rich in meaning. The study excuses itself by the apology that notes the author's normative embarrassment for writing about this lowly genre, but only at the expense of the horror film and its audiences, whose deviance and sacrality is affirmed in the same fashion as it is in the writing of the genre's detractors.

There is some room within this logic for a subtle reappropriation of the derogatory labels that detractors of the genre foist on horror and its audiences. It is in this light that one must view horror's many fan cultures and what Jeffrey Sconce has dubbed para-cinema's reclaimative celebration of their marginal status vis-à-vis regulative norms and the listless acceptability of status quo art and culture (1995). In such cases, a proactive reclamation of the threshold to which these audiences are consigned by disparaging critics provides a space for community to develop around shared tastes. And in this space, one finds the belittling terminology of horror's detractors reformulated as the private language of specialty criticism that caters directly to these communities. The goals of such criticism are decidedly anti-academic, so it easily avoids the obligation to demonstrate the genre's capacity for meaning that institutional writers must contend with, but this is not to suggest that the community does not maintain its own rules by which it decides inclusion in exactly the same manner as the law and the academy. There is much to learn from the exclusions of fandom, but this thesis will continue to focus on how the

horror film problematizes the specific criteria for belonging that the academy shares with the juridico-political order.

CHAPTER 2:

HORROR AS EXAMPLE

Central to the peculiar appeal of the horror film is its capacity to convince its audiences that mere light, shadow, and sound constitute something of a threat to their physical wellbeing. When the work of horror succeeds in this regard, it is because the affective force of its representation of violence has bested the human capacity to recuperate experience by assignment of meaning and intelligible ends. But as I argue in the previous chapter, both detractors and proponents of horror neutralize this feature of horror by acts of inclusive exclusion.

We have seen how the genre is contained in the scathing criticism of horror's populist detractors as the unknowable stuff of infantile, criminal, and pathological entertainment. These writers argue that horror imperils the normative order by communicating its essential lack of meaning as inspiration to audiences incapable of intellectual thought. And by articulation of this connection, these critics deny the genre full inclusion in a manner conterminous with the process by which the purported audiences of horror in such criticism are consigned to, and held at, the margins of those societies in which they can only signify their incomplete belonging. Like Agamben's *homo sacer*, horror is included in such reactionary criticism in the form of its exclusion.

The reactionary critic's effort to contain horror by maneuvers of inclusive exclusion such as this finds its logical extension in the various degrees of sanction the genre confronts in the law itself. As the stuff of fiction and representation, the violence

of the horror film would seem to escape the monopolized order of law's applicability. But when the work of horror is actually perceived to threaten legal society in the way that its more judgmental detractors insinuate, the law will impose itself of the genre—as it does with non-violent matters—to prevent the future violence presupposed to inhabit horror in the form of its capacity to be misunderstood. In such cases, the law fears the horror audience's supposed incapacity to understand that there is nothing to understand in horror that is compatible with respect for the law's monopoly on violence.

As this *sometimes-impermissible* modality, horror calls our attention to an objective contradiction identical to that which Benjamin finds in the law's different attitudes towards the violence of the local strike and the general strike. The law regards the former with indifference, but when the strike spreads and begins to pursue ends unintelligible within the legal system, then the law will intervene against a violence it otherwise allows (1996: 240). Like the violence of the strike, horror's representation of violence sometimes escapes the law's monopoly on violence—as when it offers meaningful content intelligible inside of legal ends or amenable to legal purposes. But like the violence of the strike, horror's violence can be subjected to sanction because it is suspended in a zone of indistinction between law and chaos, where both law and interpretive thought can to apply to that which is properly beyond them as exception.

Academic proponents of the genre must account for and work around the stigma assigned to the genre, but in the previous chapter we saw how their efforts have have tended to duplicate the exclusionary practices of the law and the law-fearing. The supplementary acts of justification and apology that one finds in the introductory and prefatory passages of academic works on horror are clearly meant to assure a reluctant

readership that the material in question deserves or ought to be accepted where meaningful objects are analyzed and evaluated. But if such explicit assertion is meant to posit the genre's academic acceptability, it additionally concedes some basis for the genre's supposed illegitimacy and necessary justification. Criticism that makes recourse to such justification admits that its writers' interpretative conclusions cannot stand on their own. It concedes that there is something essential and unmentionable about the genre that precludes its proper belonging to the order of meaning and academic worthiness.

It is my contention that this ineluctable problem essential to genre is the immediate unassignability of its representation of violence and horrifying scenarios. Such violence is an affront to thought and the academy's desire to monopolize the assignment of intelligible ends in the same manner that the law aims to impose legal ends wherever a natural end might be profitably pursued by violence. The representation of violence cannot be made to mean because it forces, at least when successful, an affective reaction characterized by the audience's momentary belief in what is seen and heard beyond thought or interpretation. And as the academy most commonly treats texts as objects for hermeneutic investigation, it is natural that the academically bound analyst would exclude this violence.

But the rhetorical maneuvers that dominate the prefatory passages of academic work on horror suggest that simple inclusion is not case. The genre's violence and affront to meaning is included in these studies in the form of the eliding acknowledgement of these writers' supplementary justification of their studies. By this strategy, the interpretive study is able to apply to that which is properly beyond it and

uninterpretable in the same way that the assertively normal detractors of horror in popular criticism, and the law, are able to apply themselves to material outside the purview of normalcy and its regulatory enforcement as the stuff of pathological enjoyment. Because it absolves horror's interpreters from having to apply their criteria to the uninterpretable, this peculiar method for the interpretive containment of the non-relational violence of horror recalls the law's "capacity to maintain itself in its own privation", which Agamben names the "Ban" (28). The interpretive thinker's suspension of horror's violence is a maneuver of banishment perfectly symmetrical with that by which a sovereign power consigns the *homo sacer* who cannot stand for anything other than his or her bare life to the threat of death.

If academic critics' peculiar failure to address horror without recourse to such maneuvers of supplementary justification betrays a disconcerting harmony between their project and the law's condemnation of the mere representation of questionable activity, we must admit that a single criterion delineates both legal permissibility and academic legitimacy. Horror demands legal sanction and the extra-interpretive assurances of the interpreting critic because its violence cannot be wholly subordinated to legal ends nor assigned a definitive and intelligible meaning. For both the academy and law, horror fails to neatly mediate an already established and acceptable end. And yet, we have seen that this feature has not inspired the outright exclusion of the genre. Were horror wholly excluded, its violence would remain a threat to the law and the academy's respective monopolies on violence and the assignment of meaning. Rather, the genre's affront to each institution's rule is contained by the inclusive exclusion that neither includes nor excludes. The genre is suspended between regulated inside and unregulated outside,

where it figures, and perhaps flounders, as neither example nor exception of adherence to the rule.

We have already seen how a striking number of the horror film's academic interpreters begin their studies with apologies and self-deprecating remarks. Such apology asks for a temporary suspension of the academic stipulation that the object of serious study be redeemably meaningful. But the rule remains in force because the suspension of the rule is grounded in the capable thinker's apology for taking-up with such irredeemable work. In such cases, the sovereign authority of the rule is affirmed and horror's affront to meaning is suspended as the disreputable stuff of politically disqualified audiences like those in the writing of horror's detractors, incapable of discerning when an apology is due. And yet, there is another, more paradoxical tack that academic interpreters of the genre often take to surmount horror's apparently dubious status

Writing in a completely opposite direction than that pursued by those who apologize for studying the genre, other academic writers on the subject of horror cinema prefigure their analyses with explicit assertions that the genre meaningfully exemplifies adherence to the rule that the academic object be meaningful for the intellectual readers and viewers of academic valorization (cf. Gelder 2000; Hogan 1986; Iaccino 1994; Prince 2004; etc. below). In order to prove this claim, these writers must retrieve the genre from its detractors' scornful induction of its incapacity for redeemable meaning by presupposition of audiences restricted to those incapable of understanding meaning. Thus, the genre's worthiness hinges upon its interpreting advocates' dutiful

demonstration of its intellectual appeal to the normal thinking subject of academic valorization.

In point of fact, humankind's capacity to derive pleasure and intellectual satisfaction from a work of entertainment's cultivation of otherwise unpleasant emotions has been a particularly compelling subject for philosophical investigation since Aristotle identified the salubrious nature of catharsis in his study of tragic drama in the first book of his *Poetics*, *The Tractatus Coislinianus*, and the fragment *On Poets* in *Politics* (1987). As Aristotle notes, tragic drama can be seen as "accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions" (7). In *The Tractatus* he further specifies that "Tragedy reduces the soul's emotions of [pity and] terror by means of compassion and dread" (43). And in *On Poets*, he adds that "Habituation to feeling pain and delight in things that are like [the truth] is close to being in the same state regarding the truth [itself]" (58). In this view, the audience subjected to terror is offered purgation of unpleasant and unhealthy emotions, *and* occasion to cultivate its normalcy by fearful retraction from a fictional substitution for some terrible truth. And so, Aristotle inaugurates a tradition of thinking the questionable pleasure of unpleasant entertainment apropos of its function as a medium for meaning worthwhile to a normal thinking audience.

The search for meaning in audiences' enjoyment of such entertainment intensified during the Enlightenment, when, for the first time, the sort of imagery that serves as causal trigger for this assumedly counter-intuitive gratification was rather suddenly found to defy the most constitutively definitive categories of human knowledge. Besides the first works of English gothic literature, the German *Schauerroman* (shudder novel), and

the French *roman noir*, literate audiences of the late 1700s also saw the publication of a number of erudite studies that sought to address the increasing popularity of these genres. With the 1757 publication of his essay on tragedy in the *Four Dissertations*, David Hume seeks to address the manner by which audiences are "pleased in proportion as they are afflicted" (1965: 29). That same year, readers were treated to Edmund Burke's account of the perplexing pleasure we derive from pain in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1968:134-5). And in 1773, John and Anna Laetitia Aikin tackle this tricky subject with a fragment "On the Pleasure Derived From Objects of Terror" (1773: 119-37) and "An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which excite agreeable Sensations" (1773: 190-219). It is testament to the protean nature of horror that such estimable thinkers were unable to resolve the issue, and critics continue to grapple with the genre.

Accompanying the horror film's rise in prominence and popularity during the modern era, one finds attempts to account for the genre's appeal by both its expert practitioners, and a newly birthed species of expert analysts specializing in its study. In his 1927 treatise on his craft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, H. P. Lovecraft suggests that an instinctual taste for cosmic awe and the unknown fuels his readership's consumption of his work (1973). And in a similarly self-reflective study, Stephen King, has argued that the genre "appeals us because it says, in a symbolic way, things that we would be afraid to say right out straight, with the bark still on" (1987: 31). As King notes, horror "offers us a chance to exercise [...] emotions which society demands we keep closely in hand" (31). Edgar Allen Poe's musings on his craft seem limited to questions of form, but a recent *New Yorker* piece by Jill Lepore suggests that Poe only

took up with horror for the lucre, the comparatively great earnings to be had writing in such a popular form (2009). While this appears a simply economic formulation, Poe's commercial preoccupations suggests some sense that the pleasure an individual finds in horror might have something to do with the legitimizing nature of its scale, its corroboration by so many others.[1]

Among more properly academic writing on the genre, one finds as many hypotheses to account for horror's intellectual appeal as there are epistemologies to delimit study. In the introduction to this thesis, I suggest that horror exploits something of the metaphysical uncertainty that Tzvetan Todorov ties to the rise of fantastic literature during the Enlightenment, so it should not surprise us that the pleasures of horror have been attributed to the exciting experience of "hesitation", which Todorov suggests characterizes the pleasures to be had with the fantastic (Heller 1987). In Terry Heller's view, this hesitation interrupts the rational reader's simple differentiation of the real and the imaginary (40).

Couple this feature of horror with cinema's apparent capacity to complicate its spectators' differentiation of dream-life and reality, and it is little wonder that many analyses of the horror film account for its pleasure with psychoanalytic concepts.[2] Academics have produced analyses that attribute the pleasure of horror to its capacity to represent the return of repressed emotions and desires (cf. Britton et al. 1979; Twitchell

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[1] As Lepore notes, Poe was actually embarrassed to be toiling in such a base and vulgar form. Throughout his career, the author made a concerted effort to elevate his prose and demonstrate his capacity for loftier art (2009). Thus, even a progenitor of the genre had anxieties about the horror's artistic and intellectual legitimacy.

[2] It was the cinema's apparent capacity to confuse dream-life and reality that made the medium an object of fascination for the structuralist popularizers of psychoanalysis (cf. Metz 1977).

1985; and Wood 1978 & 2002), and its satisfaction of various voyeuristic desires (Giles 1984). Weary of the phallocentrism of both psychoanalysis and horror cinema, but still eager to work with both, Carol Clover has suggested that horror is pleasurable because it allows for a simultaneous indulgence in and disavowal of forbidden desires that is remotely resistant to the patriarchal logic of other mainstream cinema (1992). And in a similarly critical hermeneutic endeavor, Barbara Creed has argued that horror offers the pleasure of confronting abjection (1986 & 1993).

Beyond the scope of psychoanalysis, Noëll Carroll's aforementioned study of the genre proceeds with cognitivist perspective and attributes horror's appeal to its revelation, by means of engrossing disclosure narratives, of creatures that violate cultural categories (1991). In a similar vein, Andrew Tudor suggests that horror's "categorial" transgression is pleasurable because it gives expression to and aims to resolve its audiences' experiences of social fragmentation (1989: 40). And Alex Neil suggests that the thinking audience of a horror film derives pleasure from its differentiation of the unpleasant emotions conjured by certain "things, or states of affairs, or situations" represented in the genre and that which is conjured by the representation itself: a comparative mediation (1992: 62).

If this brief survey of analysis of this sort shows horror to possess a variety of possible meanings, it is because the genre is essentially unlocalizable. Its survival, like any genre of popular entertainment, has depended upon its capacity to appeal to a variety of audiences over a considerable stretch of time, and its capacity to resist the fixity of intellectual comprehension. But this tendency to rout the question of horror's meaning through a phantasmatic thinking audience who finds the genre appealing because it offers

the meaning identified in a particular study betrays a fundamental anxiety that has haunted analyses of the genre since its crystallization during the Enlightenment. Haunting any study that pursues the redeemable pleasures of horror is some sense of the genre's essential inability of horror to fully stand for anything redeeming without a thinking subject to corroborate the metaphor that a writer purports to dwell behind the violence. So, while I am inclined to agree with Andrew Tudor's observation that "When we ask 'why horror?', precisely what we are asking is far from clear" (1997: 444), it is clear that this question functions to suspend that which in horror resists the assumed clarity of interpretive thought, and preserve interpretation in the presence of that which it cannot relate to.

In what seems like every case, the specific and immediate violence of horror is ignored by the reading that takes this violence for metaphor, the mere mediation of a particular meaning. But where the genre's violence is made to mean, its function as pure means to an affective negation of the means/ends structure of representational thought and interpretation is ignored. Except, that is, in the form of this peculiar tendency to guarantee the genre's belonging to the order of meaning by reference to an audience capable of understanding such meaning—*and*, in the more contemporary tendency to apologize for or explicitly justify one's study of horror cinema that dogs academic analyses of the genre. In such cases, the supplementary guarantee of a capable thinker (indeed, a thinker capable of the remarkable analysis one often finds in academic works on horror) admits and abandons the genre's violent affront to meaning in the very same gesture.

This is Jonathan Crane's issue with academic writing on the horror film that begins with apology. For Crane, the apologies of such writers have become endemic in horror criticism and betray an interpretive approach unable to address the genre with "complete, untrammeled ease" (2004: 152). As Crane suggests, these writers' tendency to treat the carnage seen on screen as metaphor and focus exclusively on the hidden meanings behind this violence involves denial of "the gruesome spectacle that has long since become the singular hallmark of the genre" (153). However, Crane misses the rather paradoxical fact that the violence of horror *is* present in such studies. Its presence takes the peculiar form of the eliding apology that cannot help admitting that something suspect animates the genre even as it casts this feature beyond contemplation. And like the apologies of horror's less self-assured advocates, the violence of horror is similarly suspended in the supplementary assertions of horror's academic legitimacy by those who read horror for meaning.

When analyses of horror's content are preceded by assertion that the genre has the capacity to mean, we may conclude that the analyst is unsure whether this meaning can stand on its own. I have already noted Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett's observation that their hermeneutic landmark, *Planks of Reason*, was initiated to "[establish] the genre's legitimacy within academic culture as the genre itself proved its significance" (x), but another brief survey will reveal many more examples in which an academic writer explicitly states that the genre exemplifies its adherence to the rule that demands meaning. Cynthia Freeland, for instance, begins *The Naked and the Undead* in this way when she proclaims that "horror films [...] are very interesting for philosophers and for feminists in general to consider" (2000: 11). In a similar fashion, James F.

Iaccino begins his *Psychological Reflections on Cinematic Terror* by asserting that "there is considerable merit to approaching this topic from the Jungian point of view, namely an *archetypal analysis* of the horror film" (1994: xi). And introducing his aforementioned study of gross-out horror and comedy, William Paul affirms the appropriateness of his object of study by suggesting that he views "these films not only as key expressions of their period but also as more fully achieved artistic expression than has generally been granted" (1994: 5). Neverthless, I've yet to find the academic work on horror that begins with an act of justification so forthright as Ken Gelder's proclamation that "this field is worth studying" (2000: 1).

Inasmuch as such studies seem bound to proclaim the genre's exemplification of those qualities the academy values and requires before it will admit the new, they paradoxically admit the genre's failure as example. In the introduction to this thesis, I note that Steffen Hantke views the justification of horror as a response to the situation set by unreceptive detractors unwilling to concede the genre's worth. As Hantke notes, such "affirmation wouldn't be necessary if everybody else were wholeheartedly agreeing" (196). But Hantke fails to note that affirmative and justificatory maneuvers of the sort we find in academic writing on horror also corroborate the detractors' scorn detailed in the previous chapter by conceding that something in the genre seems to require such excuses. The supplementary justification of horror's intellectual worthiness aims to compensate for the violence that horror's interpretive readers ignore in their quest to demonstrate the genre's capacity for meaning. But if such justification is deployed to absolve these writers of the absolute impossibility of decoding the immediacy of horror's violence, the ceaseless iteration of such acts of justification betrays an insecurity that obfuscates these

writers' interpretive conclusions. The remarkable iterability of such justification shows us that contemporary readers of horror have failed to decisively cast the genre as an example of wholly meaningful work.

Even stranger than this tendency to supplement the interpretation of horror with extra-hermeneutic assertion that the genre is capable of meaning is the specific content that these studies identify as evidence of the film's operation within the confines of academic worthiness. Across these studies, and across almost any study that concerns itself with the genre's meaning or intellectual appeal to a thinking subject, one finds an interpretive preoccupation with the horror narrative's violation of the assumed truths that give meaning to human experience. It is the genre's very violation of meaning that is taken to constitute its meaning. The genre's unique challenge to the sovereign stability of the ontological categories of human knowing, the security of a legally regulated everyday or normative order, and the soundness of normatively repressive psychic states and rational thought, is read to mean.

Scholars have gone to great lengths to show how the horror film defies the most fundamental oppositions generally held to delimit and define human ontology and existence. As previously mentioned, Noël Carroll suggests that the genre's popularity is most readily attributed to its preoccupation with categorical impurity. Monsters are impure, he writes, "categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete or formless" (32). As Barbara Creed argues, such monsters and the wounds they inflict are boundary-defying figures of what Julia Kristeva has named abjection (1986 & 1993). In a somewhat similar vein, Carol Clover has shown that dualistic conceptions of gender are undermined by the slasher film, which "presents us with hermaphroditic constructions"

(1992: 55). And as Clover notes, the "Final Girl" is interesting because she possesses both feminine and masculine traits, and assumes narrative function as both "female-victim" and "male-hero" (51-5). With these traits, the Final Girl generally manages to out-maneuver her attacker, but such outcomes are never guaranteed: in general, the horror film offers no assurance that its subjects will survive to see the credits roll. For the duration of the horror narrative, its potential victims necessarily hover between life and death, but as Carroll notes, villainous figures such as the zombie, the ghost, and the vampire similarly confuse our relatively modern demarcation of life and death (43). Even Agamben dedicates some space in his treatise on the discursive origins of sovereign power and bare life to consideration of how the ontological hybridity of the wolf-man or *wargus* divides this figure between the forest and the city. As such, the wolf-man is denied the existential harmony of full belonging to either the *physis* or the *nomos*, the orders of bare life and politically qualified life (104-5). And if these categorically impure figures can frighten—as opposed to the similar the configurations of say, fantasy—it is because the horror film casts their impurity as a threat to the *nomos*. They are frightening because their affront to the category structure by which humankind understands its world functions to disrupt a diegetic world analogous to the *nomos*.

Thus, readers of the genre have also focused on the significance of the horror film's violent disruption of a diegetic world recognizable to its audiences as something like the normative order of their everyday existence. Obviously, this is a requirement of the genre that works towards an evocation of fear, for as J. P. Telotte notes, "whatever chills [...the horror film] elicits have their source in the movie's ability to convince us that its threats have some measure of reality about them" (2004: 23). And so, Andrew

Tudor notes that "all horror movies are variations on the 'seek and destroy' pattern [in which] a monstrous threat is introduced into a stable situation [… and] rampages in the face of attempts to combat it" (1989: 81). Carroll offers a similar formula to account for the meaning of the horror narrative when he notes that "In works of horror, the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the normative order" (16). And with a remarkable economy of words, Robin Wood summarizes horror with a strikingly basic formula: "normality is threatened by the Monster" (1978: 26). Such interpretations find horror's meaning in its violation of meaningfully normal situations, and render this violation normally meaningful.

As the violence of horror destabilizes a recognizably stable situation, the genre's interpreters have suggested that meaning is to be found in the genre's demonstration of the contingency and vulnerability of such situations—both on-screen and in the analogous reality in which such cinema can be meaningfully frightening. "Fundamentally," notes Paul Wells, "horror texts engage with the collapse of social/socialized formations" (2000: 9-10). But horror's special significance for the writers that find such meaning in the genre is their sense that horror does this critically. This is Wood and his colleagues' position (cf. Britton et al.), and it is Pinedo's as well. As she argues, horror's violence "disrupts the world of everyday life; it explodes our assumptions about normality [… and] violates our assumption that we live in a predictable, routinized world by demonstrating that we live in a minefield" (2004: 91).

As Pinedo observes, horror's violation of the everyday doesn't originate from some exceptional source outside the quotidian. "[I]t is more accurate to say that horror exposes the terror *implicit* in everyday life", she writes, noting horror's preoccupation

with "the pain of loss, the enigma of death, the unpredictability of events, [and] the inadequacy of intentions" (106). Writers on horror seem to overlook the genre's revelation of the violence that lurks within legally regulated reality in the form of the law's violence, but this is an essential element of the terror implicit in everyday life, and must be noted here. For Pinedo, it is a population's necessary repression of this terror that makes the everyday seem natural and safe, but in horror she perceives a metaphorical transmutation of "the 'natural' elements of everyday life into the unnatural form of the monster" (107).

The assumption that horror represents the emergence of repressed psychic content has become something like gospel amongst academics interested in the genre since the notion was first proffered and popularized by Wood and his colleagues in hopes of addressing a glut of fascinating horror films in the 1970s and "the centrality of the horror film" in American culture (Britton et al. 1979: 29). The "true subject" of horror, notes Wood in a seminal piece that first appeared in *Film Comment*,

> is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses, its reemergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression" (1978: 28).

Wood, Andrew Britton, Richard Lippe, and Tony Williams all read the violence of horror to encode an assortment of various desires and fears that they maintain are otherwise held in check by minds conditioned to contain aberrant thoughts (Britton et al. 1979). Accordingly, Wood declares that "the effect and fascination of horror films is [attributable to] their fulfillment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us and which our moral conditioning teaches us to revere" (1978: 27). In this view, horror's meaning is to be found in its violation of the ways we contain meaning and regulate our capacity to

create it. Thus, Pinedo maintains that "Horror exposes the limits of rationality and compels us to confront the irrational" (94). And if "Horror films assert that not everything can or should be dealt with in rational terms", as Pinedo suggests (95), she locates horror's meaning in its representations of breach with exactly the sort of thought that proceeds by the assignment of meaning.

These writers take horror's violation of the sovereign soundness of humankind's conceptions of its ontology, everyday, and thought for evidence of the genre's appropriateness for inclusion as academic object. The very content that these writers suggest comprises horror's exemplification of noble subordination to the almost golden rule that the scholarly object be meaningful is, in fact, in excess of meaning. As such, the position of those academics who justify the study of horror because it can mean, but who offer interpretations of the sort delineated above, is logically identical to the position argued by another class of academic proponent whose writing is characterized by the assertion that the genre's academic legitimacy lies in the peculiar fact that it exceeds the rule that requires meaning by saying more than the conventional object of interpretation.

In such cases, the study of horror is purported to be a just endeavor because its object escapes the purview of the almost juridical prescriptions of good taste and intellectualism that tend to delimit the free exploration of a given subject in traditionally venerated art and culture. Such criticism maintains that horror's disregard for more conventional tastes frees it to say more, or offer more radical meaning than other genres. Accordingly, Mark Jancovitch introduces an anthology of academic writing on the genre by noting a surge in contemporary horror writing in which "the horror genre is claimed to be interesting because of its supposedly marginal, and hence subversive, status as a

disreputable form of popular culture" (2002: 1). As William Paul argues, "the very grossness of these films may in fact be salutary *because* of their willingness to confront things we normally feel compelled to look away from" (1994: 20). But if Paul clearly has some inkling of the affective force of such cinema, he dedicates his book to unearthing the metaphorical meanings behind those things "we normally feel compelled to look away from." In studies like Paul's, the justifying academic never seems to argue that the work of horror does not mean, or does something other than convey a deeper or less conventional meaning as I suggest in the introduction to this thesis, but how could he or she? Employed to find meaning, the academic who reads horror seems bound to situate even that which exceeds conventional meanings and interpretations within the order of intelligible meaning.

In his introduction to *The Horror Film*, Stephen Prince adroitly situates the worthiness of studying a genre that exceeds conventional meaning within meaning by comparing reading horror to reading other genre works. "Like other genre movies," he notes, "any given horror film will convey synchronic associations, idealogical and social messages that are part of a certain period or historical moment" (2004: 2):

> One can analyze horror films in terms of these periods or moments, just as one can do with Westerns or gangster movies. But, unlike those genres, horror also goes deeper, to explore more fundamental questions about the nature of human existence, questions that, in some profound way, go beyond culture and society as these are organized in any given period or form. Here lies the special significance of horror, the factors that truly differentiate it from the other genres and make it conform most deeply with our contemporary sense of the world (2).

In this example, the "but" that is supposed to distinguish horror from other genre works is recast as an "and"—simply another feature indicative of its appropriateness. Thus, David J. Hogan suggests that "the horror film warrants serious study because it is also the most

vivid and unrestrained" (1986: xi), and Tony Williams suggests that such material allows for enlightening analysis because, "the horror film is a genre of excess" (1996: 17). For these writers, the genre's meaning *in excess* of the exemplary academically appealing work is the very quality that makes it a noteworthy example amongst the class circumscribed by the academic stipulation that works mean.

It seems odd to speak of an exception amongst meaningful and intellectually redeeming works in terms of its exemplary adherence to the academic rule that the object of study be meaningful, but it is not so odd if we recall and extend the striking similarities between the academy and the law delineated in the previous chapter. For, as Agamben notes, the presuppositional structure of the law, which first constitutes and maintains itself by suspending its own validity to apply to that which is outside it as exception (18), is identical to that of language, which "must maintain itself in virtual relation [to the nonlinguistic…] so that it may later denote it in actual speech" (20). In both cases, the rule that governs the class first constitutes itself by its sovereign demarcation of an exception, as non-belonging, at the very centre of the class. "Inscribed as a presupposed exception in every rule that orders or forbids something" notes Agamben, "is the pure and unsanctionable figure of the offense that, in the normal case, brings about the rule's own transgression" (21). And as Agamben infers, this figure is identical to what we refer to when we speak of an "example", a replication of the rule dissociated from its class and order of operativity and emancipated from its very subordination to the rule in order to demonstrate its belonging. "In every case", notes Agamben, "exception and example are correlative concepts that are ultimately indistinguishable and that come into play every

time the very sense of the belonging and commonality of individuals is to be defined" (22).

So if an excessive genre like horror can meaningfully belong to the academy it is not entirely, as James Twitchell notes, because the "canon of literature is being expanded" (1985: 9). Rather, a genre like horror can belong to the institution because the properly juridical foundation and preservation of something like a canon demands that it endlessly expand to interiorize that which threatens it through its mere existence outside. Therefore, when academics take horror's exceptional status for exemplification of the rule, they are merely affirming Agamben's observation that the juridical exception actually dwells within law, at its very centre even, and indistinguishable from the example, in the form of the law's potential suspension.

In point of fact, all genres are genres of excess as Williams suggests of horror. As something like laws governing and routinizing cultural expression, genres need to violently transgress themselves if they are to survive. The genre that cannot reinvent itself for an always-evolving audience and context of dissemination is bound to lapse out of relevance and public favour. Therefore, genre is a phenomenon perfectly analogous to law. As Benjamin (1996), Derrida (1982), and Agamben (1996) note, the law maintains itself in force by articulations of violence that both found and preserve law; and every genre work does the same for its formula. In the case of genres, the successful iteration of a formulaic combination of what Rick Altman has labeled "semantic" and "syntactic" elements (2000) serves both to preserve this or that genre and create it anew. Thus, Ivan Butler suggests in an early survey of the genre that horror fails when it does not adequately exceed itself:

> The trouble with many Horror Films is that they promise too much. In example after example, tension and suspense are worked up with admirable ingenuity, effective minor shocks being injected en route. If the film is to be finally satisfying, however, the promise must be fulfilled—the ultimate climax exceed all that has gone before" (1970: 13).

But this could be said of any other genre work, and dutifully accounts for "the trouble with many" westerns, musicals, comedies, et cetera. Like law, genre survives to the extent that its articulations create and preserve its rules.

Horror's special significance, the very substance of its excess in relation to other genres, is to be found in the manner by which it conflates this transgression of itself as something like law with its transgression of the quasi-juridical strictures against which conventional culture is measured. Only by *a violently excessive* representation of its characters' violation of the coherent constancy of those ontological categories that give meaning to human existence, the natural normalcy of a legally regulated everyday, and the sovereign soundness of repressive mental states and rational thought can the genre elicit the response that is its central promise from an audience that expects such violation. The genre exceeds itself in order to exceed its audiences' expectations, their capacity for disbelief, and produce the affective experience that is horror's central promise. It is therefore essential that we think horror's transgression transversally.

In casting the horror film as an exceptional example of the academically worthy work, its academic proponents approach the true significance of the genre—the ultimate reason for its denigration by law-fearing critics and banishment by the law—but sadly miss the full import of such a breakthrough. Horror can be both exception and example of the meaningful work because its demonstration of rupture with the meaningful is equally a demonstration of the violence by which meaning can make sense and sustain

itself. By representation of violence, horror exemplifies the violence of representation, which Fanie de Beer has shown to presuppose a specific conception of reality and violently reduce the multiple to laws and regularities (1996). As a metaphorical violation of humankind's most meaningful epistemological categories, horror exemplifies the essentially violent nature of metaphor, which communicates its meanings by violent negation of the categorical singularity of its terms. And by its generically legalistic exhibition of violence, horror exemplifies law's ignominious dependency on violence for its continued operativity and survival. So if, as Agamben notes in his analysis of the grammatical example, an example must violently extricate itself from its class in order to exhibit its belonging and show how the normal case can communicate (22), the horror film becomes such an example by representation of scenarios that violently remove themselves from the inevitably violent order in which meaning is constituted.

Insofar as horror exemplifies how representation and metaphor communicate by violence, the genre removes itself from these orders with the very same results that Agamben suggests come to pass when the grammatical example extricates itself from its class. In order to show its own signifying and belonging to language, notes Agamben, the grammatical example must suspend the meaningful content that defines its belonging to language in the normal context (22). The example cannot belong and show its belonging at the same time. And in a similar fashion, horror's exemplification of the violence essential to mediatory mechanisms such as representation, metaphor, and the law necessitates rupture with the mediation characteristic of these orders. When the horror film is successful, its violence ceases to convey meaning and stands only for itself: an

immediately frightening threat to its narrative agents and audience alike. And in this way the genre assumes the affective force that it trades in.

This is not to say that horror makes no appeal to rational thought, or that no thinking is involved in this process. The genre's audience must first understand that something is meant to be frightening before they can be frightened by the further depiction of this thing's involvement in the perpetration of carnage. And when an audience screams, it is because that audience has too fully accepted the significance cultivated by the work of horror. It is because that audience has thought itself to the limits of its febrile understanding and yet must face more. The genre proceeds through representation and metaphor by demonstration of rupture with such techniques for founding and preserving meaning, and it succeeds when it exceeds itself and the audience expectations that once defined it.

Bound by an apparent obligation to produce meaning, the academics that read horror for content regrettably impose an end where there is in fact a threshold. By taking horror to "say more", these academics take the genre's rapturous exemplification of the violence that defines representation, metaphor, and meaning for a more facile exemplification of rupture with representation, metaphor, and the meaningful. As a result, these thinkers' readings retrieve horror's operation in excess of meaning and reinscribe this radical feature within the sphere of intelligible ends. And so, we see the mechanisms of capture at work in the seemingly paradoxical studies of horror's academically meaningful content initiated with justificatory remarks like Hogan's aforementioned claim that "the horror film warrants serious study because it is also the most vivid and unrestrained."

But insofar as horror trades in violence and fright, its inscription within a territory bound by legitimate and knowable ends is always threatened by the affective immediacy of this violence. Thus, the genre's law-fearing detractors and the law regard horror as something like Benjamin's great criminal because its legalistic exemplification of the violence of law can constitute a threatening withdrawal from the contained and inconsequential orders of representation and metaphor. And similarly, the ceaseless justification of horror cannot help but cast this genre as something like the academy's great criminal because it admits that the immediacy of this violence cannot be subordinated to intelligible and meaningful ends. So while the ceaseless justification of horror casts the genre's academic legitimacy as undecidable, it also functions to defer the affective implications of this violence in perpetuity. Neither inside nor outside, this violence is abandoned by the inclusive exclusion of justificatory maneuvers that admit this violence but suspend it beyond contemplation and consequence.

The fact that contemporary writers still grapple with the justness and meanings of horror in precisely the same manner as the Enlightenment writers who sought to understand the genre's popularity and pleasure suggests that the genre's legitimacy is destined to remain undecidable until we learn to think of horror as a process or event. The special significance of horror is not the meaning it offers, even if this meaning exceeds that offered by more respectable works of art and culture. Any fan of the genre will tell you that its popularity and pleasure is to be found in the experience it offers. Horror risks banishment by the law, invites the disapprobation of law-fearing critics, and seems to necessitate its suspension by those who cast themselves as its defenders because it possesses a capacity to spirit its audience beyond legal and intelligible ends.

CONCLUSION:

THE EXPIATION OF HORROR

If we can accept Agamben's postulation that the aporetic structure of the state of exception has long undermined human experience as the dubious means of Western politics and its exclusions, it should not surprise us that a genre such as horror, which concerns itself quite explicitly with the violence typical of political exception, should suffer the peculiar discursive history outlined in this thesis. For with its characteristic representation of natural ends pursued by violence, horror recalls behaviour that is disallowed in civil society except in the figure of a Hobbesian sovereign or the law, which assumes the place of such a sovereign in more democratic milieus. The genre invites the wrath of law because it wrests violence away from the legal monopoly that seeks to contain it, and offers it to an audience otherwise predestined to wallow before the law that is in force without significance. But the genre is doubly dubious because it represents this violence within the greater structure of scenarios that mirror the vicissitudinous insecurity that Agamben suggests characterizes life in the State of Exception. And given these preoccupations, it is little wonder that the genre has always remained dubious, and must be consigned to a threshold where its permissibility remains always in doubt.

It is similarly little wonder that horror presents such difficulty to the academic interpreters who rush to redress the genre's dubious status in legalistic societies. By representation of activity inimical to the law, horror aims for an affective response that

supersedes interpretation. While academic interpreters have rightly detected meanings in horror that alternately defy and corroborate the law's monopoly on violence, their conclusions cannot fix horror to an intelligible end. Even as the anticipated end of some narrative trajectory, horror's demonstration of violence wrought on politically unqualified life resists the assignment of such ends. And because this unreadability threatens always to dissolve any readable meaning assigned to the work of horror, it must be suspended beyond contemplation by the eliding apology or justification that neither includes nor excludes. Thus, the genre suffers a similar banishment as those who wallow before the law. It is consigned to an academico-interpretive state of exception that mirrors our exclusionary politics.

With this thesis, I have hoped to imply that the academy occupies a special place in the sort of exceptional society whose objective contradictions serve as the object of Agamben's critique. In fact, we have seen that the academy's privileged role in our society exemplifies the very ambiguities that characterize our law and politics of exception. For while the academy freely administers its decisions within the non-violent sphere of understanding and language that Benjamin locates outside the law's rightful jurisdiction (244-5), these decisions constitute their field in a manner perfectly analogous to the sovereign administration of the polis and law's dominion. In both cases, the determination of an object's capacity for understandable and linguistically articulable meaning functions to assimilate that object and corroborate the respective institution's authority to make such decisions. And where popular confidence in the academy's authority over seemingly extralegal matters like understanding and language are won or allowed to grow, the institution accrues a corresponding degree of influence on the

political situation that shares this preoccupation with significance. In such situations the assignation of academic worthiness anticipates some measure of political qualification, and the academy functions like a threshold beyond and before the sphere of law's proper jurisdiction.

But if the academy enjoys a freedom to influence the field governed by law from a berth beyond legal control, it can exercise this privilege only in excess of itself. For where the academy is regarded as an authority on matters of meaning and understanding, the polis will have already acknowledged the object or idea whose academic worthiness or legitimacy is an accepted fact. In order to preserve its authority to affect the society whose politics prioritize meaning, the academy must extend beyond the already-known to assign intelligible ends where there were previously none. Thus, the academy maintains its influence in society by the more dynamic dimension of its bifold obligation to both preserve *and generate* knowledge. And inasmuch as the institution generates this knowledge to later preserve it (the more passive dimension of its bifold obligation), the academy is at once inside and outside itself.

As unusual as the academy's excessive relationship to itself and the law may seem, it shares this paradoxical distinction with the rule of law itself. For as Benjamin has shown in his infamous critique of the subject, the law's interest in a monopoly on violence requires the occasional imposition of legal ends in areas where law holds no established jurisdiction (238). In legal efforts to squash the revolutionary strike, for example, Benjamin perceives a contradictory response to a violence sometimes regarded with indifference. But as Agamben notes in his more extensive meditation on this contradiction, the law can apply to an exteriority in this manner because its rules are

based on the presupposition of an exception that "maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension" (17-8). And where the rule of law maintains *itself* in suspended relation to such an exception, it constitutes a paradoxical threshold between juridical order and chaos in which both inside and outside are exposed to the violence of law (18). If Agamben is right, the academy comes into view as a threshold to but another threshold, and its extralegal constitution of a space analogous to the polis assumes the dubious air of a legalistic, or, exceptional extension of the logic it shares with our politics.

In those contexts where the academy is acknowledged as an authority on such logic, its bifold obligation to preserve and generate knowledge can only mirror the law's essential reliance on both law-preserving and law-founding violence. In Benjamin's view, it is the ignominious unification of these two forms of violence that invests the police with the formless authority necessary to enforce the law where "no clear legal situation exists" (243); and with the academy, this commitment to both maintain and create knowledge similarly animates an institution simultaneously given to corroborate and transcend the legalistic ordering of life in which it is situated. On the one hand, this bifold obligation excuses work intended to defy our culture's paradigmatic veneration of meaning by the preservation of that which is strategically driven towards obsolescence in other realms of experience, and by the propagation of new and radical knowledge in spheres not yet codified by the hermeneutic strictures of the State of Exception. But on the other hand, I get the sense that the fulfillment of this bifold obligation threatens to subordinate even the most radical research to an intellectual affirmation of meaning's primacy in our politics, and the imperialist application of this logic to interiorize

whatever resides outside.

With this thesis, I have hoped to demonstrate how radically-minded research conducted in the absence of a *clear intellectual situation* might be subsumed by the corroborative function of this bifold obligation toward ends compatible with an epistemic reverence for meaning as it is already defined. For if the academy exceeds itself in pursuit of the same quality that our politics privileges above all else, the institution's every assimilative decision also functions to affirm the sovereign soundness of meaning and its place in our politics. And if, like the law, the academy can affirm this criterion even in the absence of a clear intellectual situation, then even the study of material possessing intensities opposed to meaning's function at the centre of our politics is predetermined to reduce its object to mere sign of that object's capacity for academically legitimate meaning.

By no means do I mean to suggest that such assimilation is wholly or essentially negative. It seems impossible to imagine how we might think the fear, anxiety, and alienation that characterize life in the threshold that Agamben names the "state of exception" without the academic valorization of such extra-institutional thinkers as Benjamin, Freud, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Furthermore, one wonders where our world would stand without Film Studies' rigorous analysis of a technology such as cinema, which Deleuze celebrates for its capacity to restore our belief in the world itself. There is simply no denying that the academic legitimation of such critical thought and this once-revolutionary medium has revealed new horizons for thought and engendered concepts for critical intervention against the exclusionary tendencies of Western politics.

Nevertheless, the explicitly cautious handling of horror cinema detailed in this

thesis nags at me because it suggests that the academy deals with exteriority in the same manner as law. In academic writing on horror cinema, representational thought grapples not only with a once dubious and always delirious medium, but also with its haphazard utilization for the representation of that which the law must monopolize at any cost. But the academy maintains itself, and the sovereign soundness of meaning, in the face of this unreadable violence by recourse to a supplementary act of justification that includes this violence only in the form of its exclusion. The violence of horror is consigned to a threshold between inside and outside, and suspended beyond contemplation.

In the first chapter of this thesis it was shown how academics ostensibly convinced of the genre's academic legitimacy suspend the question of horror's inclusion by undermining its capacity for meaning. These writers do this by two strategies: first, they explicitly restrict their focus to works they deem exceptional; and second, they reserve space in their acknowledgements for apologies to respectable acquaintances and colleagues for taking up a subject as objectionable as horror. In both cases, and regardless of the generally illuminating studies to follow, horror is negatively situated as the stuff of dubious enjoyment and circumspect intellectual contemplation.

In the second chapter of this thesis it was shown how horror's academic legitimacy is paradoxically undercut by its interpreters' supplementary assertions that the genre possesses a respectable capacity for meaning. Whether these writers posit horror's operation within familiar fields of meaning, or the genre's meaningful operation in excess of these fields, their recourse to such extraneous acts of legitimation inescapably admits that there is something dubious about the genre and corroborates the logic of horror's suspension at the threshold of acceptability and academic inclusion. This questionable

feature, included only in the form of its exclusion, foregrounds the unreadable immediacy of horror's violence, and it is this feature that spirits the audience of a horror film beyond interpretive thought.

I have undertaken my analysis of the ceaseless justification of horror suspicious of this peculiar phenomenon's effects and implications. It is my sense that the academic perpetuation of the undecidability of the horror film betrays the failure of interpretive and representational thought to think beyond the limits it corroborates and creates. Were such thought able to assign meaning to the representation of violence, there would be no need to suspend it beyond contemplation by the eliding acts of apology and justification that one finds in the prefatory pages of academic works on horror. But while this violence is suspended beyond contemplation, this does not mean that it is wholly excluded from such analyses. The immediate affective force of horror's violence is included and neutralized—in the form of its exclusion—in any study that begins with apology or justification. In this way, interpretive thought maintains itself in relation to that which it cannot include in a manner perfectly analogous to the law that maintains itself in relation to the exception. Insofar as a writer's apology or supplementary justification simultaneously acknowledges the dubiousness of horror's violence and absolves the writer from addressing it, representational thought can apply to an exteriority by withdrawing from it. Is it possible that these writers who so boldly tackle this fearsome genre are afraid or anxious that any effort to know this violence will send them spiraling from the secure seat of reason and undercut their analyses of the meaning horror mediates? Are such writers afraid to abandon the interpretive thought that allows them to

maintain a measure of critical distance from the ambiguously shocking text that aims to move them in other ways?

As I suggest in the introduction to this thesis, such acts of justification function to exempt the interpreting academic from confronting his or her impossibility to think the work of horror as totality. Because it aims to spirit its audience beyond interpretive thought, the horror film strives to produce a shock like that which Deleuze finds at the heart of Artaud's enigmatic conception of the cinema. As Deleuze notes, cinema's special relevance to a civilization that feels disassociated from its world is the medium's capacity to produce a shock that forces one to think one's "powerlessness to think the whole and to think oneself" (167). Confronted with the impossibility of thought, the only option left for an audience is to believe once again in its connection to the world.

Horror offers a shock to thought because it ferries its audience beyond a threshold of disbelief. When an audience recoils from the horror film's representation of violence, it has confronted and surpassed its incapacity to think rationally about the events on screen. To the extent that horror's academic proponents recoil from this affective leap, they refuse to think the impossibility of thought. Thus, the genre's academic proponents' work functions in closeted collusion with the genre's detractors' refusal to engage with material that they maintain targets those incapable of thought.

With this thesis I have hoped to show that academic proponents of horror and the genre's detractors have always pursued their separate ends in concomitance; and we have seen how the justifying analyses of horror's academic proponents are structurally identical to the scorn and banishment the genre's detractors heap on horror. But, what was previously little more than a hidden formal similarity has reached its culmination or

consummation in the academic refusal to justify more contemporary horror. I am referring here to that subspecies of horror modern audiences have come to know as "torture porn", and as Hantke notes, horror's erstwhile defenders seem entirely unwilling to argue its academic worthiness (198). While violence has always been the interpretively insurmountable feature of horror cinema, torture porn amplifies this problem for its interpreters because it offers very little besides such violence. Even when the work of such horror strays from the representation of the grizzliest acts, it does so only in anticipation of further wallowing in the theatricality of torture and the vulnerability of the human body. As such, this cinema offers nothing to interpret. Its violence is surely unjustifiable; but is it possible that Film Studies' failure to address the violence in earlier horror has allowed the genre to reach this point?

The justification of horror was and persists as an act of endless deferral. More than aiming to guarantee the legitimacy of its object, such justification functions to preserve representational thought in the face of its limit: the uninterpretable immediacy of violence. As such, the academic justification of horror recalls Derrida's attempt to demonstrate the essential justness of deconstruction in "Force of Law" because both projects seek to vindicate interpretation in face of the aporia that it cannot surmount. As Agamben notes, deconstruction's recourse to endless deferral repeats the ontological structure of the sovereign exception because it maintains itself in relation to an aporetic exteriority (59). And in a similar fashion, the proponents of horror who must indefinitely postpone the encounter with horror's violence corroborate the exclusionary logics of Western politics and law's subsumption of life.

As Benjamin enigmatically suggests in his "Critique of Violence", our only release from the law's monopoly on violence comes in the form of divine violence, the violence of god (249). Only this violence, notes Benjamin, can shatter the mythical violence of the law, which writes itself on the body. And yet, despite the importance he gives it, Benjamin refrains from defining divine violence with any positive qualities. "If mythic violence is law-making," he notes,

> divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood (247-8).

In this way, divine violence fails to produce the physical results most readily associated with violence. But beyond this, Benjamin also maintains that such violence is unrecognizable "because the expiatory power of violence is invisible to men" (252). What are we to make of this violence definable only in the negative and whose abstract association with divinity further casts its possibility in question? With the remainder of this conclusion, I would like to offer some initial thoughts on how we might assimilate this divine violence to horror cinema's mimetic representation of violence.

If an impossible unrecognizability characterizes divine violence, this is also the essential quality that Adam W. Chalmers has suggested distinguishes mimesis in Benjamin's thought (2004-2005). As any reader of Benjamin's infamous paper on the mimetic faculty knows, the critic conceives of similarity in terms of its instantaneous and transient nature. "It flits past", writes Benjamin, and "its production by man—like its perception by him—is in many cases, and particularly the most important, tied to its flashing up" (1999: 722). Chalmers' special contribution to the understanding of this

concept consists in conjoining Benjamin's enigmatic remarks on mimesis with Benjamin's reading of Proust. As Chalmers notes, what Benjamin respects in Proust's writing is the author's unparalleled "pointing finger" (51 in Chalmers), or, his capacity to produce and perceive similarity. In "On The Image of Proust", for example, Benjamin writes that

> Proust's most accurate, most conclusive insights fasten on their objects the way insects fasten on leaves, blossoms, branches, betraying nothing of their existence until a leap, a beating of wings, a vault, show the startled observer that some incalculable individual life has imperceptibly crept into an alien world (1999: 242).

Combining Benjamin's analysis of Proust's pointing finger with the critic's understanding of mimesis as something that "flits past", Chalmers finds reason to conclude that similarity for Benjamin is actually unrecognizable, like an insect's camouflage, and identifiable only after the fact (51-2). Benjamin's conception of mimesis therefore shares an essential quality with divine violence. And if the horror film banks on the failure of its audience to distinguish between representation and its content, it is not a stretch to equate its violence with that of god.

If divine violence strikes without bloodshed, then it shares this quality with the mimetic representation of violence. Obviously, the representation of violence takes place without spilling blood (more often than not it is some combination of corn syrup and dye), but there is a more significant similarity worth alluding to here. As Benjamin notes of divine violence, "a profound connection between the lack of bloodshed and the expiatory character of this violence is unmistakable" (250). "For blood is the symbol of mere life", he notes, and the bloodless violence of god expiates "the guilt of mere life—and doubtless also purifies the guilty, not of guilt, however, but of law" (250). Divine

violence acts to release the individual from the monopolistic violence of law that writes itself on the body/bare life of the individual that it abandons. And as we have seen, the immediate force of horror's representation of violence emancipates its audience from the interpretive thought that forces a thinker to suspend the affective intensities that animate that thinker.

Of course, the affective intensity that this thesis attributes to horror is not limited to works of the genre. The audiences of comedy are equally familiar with the experience I suggest characterizes an encounter with horror. Laughter is a corporeal animation that, like fear, requires that an audience suspend or surrender the interpretive thought that tells it the action seen on screen is meant to move it in this way. In fact, affect and representation inhabit each other as potentialities, and the affective rupture that horror desires from its audience is a regular aspect of our daily lives. When mere conversation turns to tears, or, when a chance encounter inspires a sudden wave of nostalgia, for example, an individual is spirited beyond him or herself and the body that law subjects to its monopoly on violence. But as Deleuze notes, cinema's capacity for affect is special because it forces us "To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which nonetheless cannot but be thought" (170). Or, as Benjamin notes in *One-Way Street*, "In the cinema, people who are not moved or touched by anything learn to cry again" (1996: 476). Given this capacity, the film that inspires its audience to scream in terror assumes a special significance in the society predicated upon fear and insecurity, as ours sometimes seems. Horror may corroborate or contest the exclusionary practices of our politics, but until we learn to think and feel its violence we shall never know.

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