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Body Politics:

War and Nationalism in the Post-9/11 American Splatter Film

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD, The University of Auckland, 2015.
This thesis proposes a new reading of the splatter film, a subgenre of the horror film that has previously received little sustained analysis but shot to prominence at the box office along with a wave of other texts featuring torture following 9/11. Dubbed ‘torture porn’, the splatter film drew from metonymic images of the War on Terror – in particular, the images of abuse emerging from Abu Ghraib. This allegorical engagement is complicated in the splatter film by the way in which graphic images are presented without any sense of context or closure, so that their inclusion might be read as purely voyeuristic. This refusal of closure and denial of stable subject positioning ultimately renders these texts as postmodern.

However, this work departs from other readings to examine how the splatter film might contribute to a wider debate over the political potential of singular images under postmodernity. Drawing from Fredric Jameson’s (1981) notion of the ‘political unconscious’, this project argues that the violence of these images and their ability to be transcoded to current affairs renders them as particularly potent signifiers even when stripped of context and history. Jameson’s notion of the future potential of a ‘cultural text’ that might intervene in this commodification system by bringing historicity to the fore, is extended through the total violence of the splatter film. This thesis examines how the dystopian images of industrial decline in the splatter film might be seen as ‘jamming’ or working against predominant images of America in Hollywood – a formal quality that makes them particularly amenable to expressing cultural anxiety during this time. The notion of images that reverse and work against the dominant culture is extended through Jean Baudrillard’s (2003) notion of the nightmarish fantasies of collapse that return to haunt and jam the system. In doing so, this thesis examines how postmodern texts may from time to time interact with historicity in their narrative form.
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Introduction

I. The commodification of the War on Terror

In the period following 2003, a remarkable number of films were released that referenced the Global War on Terror. Many of the most controversial of these films belonged to a little-known subgenre of the horror film known as the ‘splatter film’, after the way that blood splattered following brutalities exercised on the skin. Emerging in the 1960s and propelling advances in the use of special effects to convey violence in film, the splatter film was an unlikely choice for a box office breakthrough due to the way its level of violence made it unsuitable for mainstream audiences. Splintering off mainstream horror, splatter films were largely low budget, independent enterprises that sought to push the boundaries of censorship. Limbs were torn off in phantasmagoric showers of blood, and protagonists regularly dismembered, disemboweled and decapitated. These graphic depictions of violence frequently positioned their producers and directors in direct confrontation with industry bodies such as the Motion Pictures and Producers Association of America, who sought to tone down or censor the violence before release for consumption. Still, these films were often so violent that they attracted an ‘R’ or ‘Restricted’ rating, limiting their potential audience and theatrical screenings. In response, producers adopted a straight to video model, targeting the films specifically at cult audiences interested in the violence. The sudden emergence of the splatter film into the mainstream, then, could be read as a significant shift in audience taste that warrants further investigation.

While the splatter film has occasionally crossed over into the mainstream (most notably when it hybridized with the teen slasher film in the 1970s and 1990s cycles), the level of extreme brutality that these films present means that it has remained relatively marginalized as a subgenre. The sudden popularity of films such as 28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002), Saw (James Wan, 2004), Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005) and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Marcus
Nispel, 2003) surprised many Hollywood analysts, who had previously seen the subgenre as unsuitable for mainstream release. However, in the period from 2003-2005, the splatter film drove a 78% rise in domestic horror box office, peaking at 7% of the US domestic market (2014a, 2005). This sudden popularity was also reflected in foreign markets, with director Darren Lynn Bousman’s Saw II and Saw III topping the international earnings lists for American-produced horror in 2005 and 2006 (Ryan, 2008, p.39). A new group of enfants terribles emerged as the auteurs heading this wave, dubbed the “splat pack” by critics (McClintock, 2006a, Keegan, 2006, Jones, 2006). These directors included Alexandre Aja, Eli Roth, Darren Bousman, James Wan, Neil Marshall and Rob Zombie, who described their films as homage to splatter films produced in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Jones, 2006). While these films clearly referenced this earlier cycle of the splatter film in style and narrative form, what made the post-9/11 cycle of the splatter film unique was the way that these films frequently referenced images from the contemporary politics of the Global War on Terror.

The post-9/11 splatter film often included overt references to the contemporary politics of torture, as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Eli Roth’s 2005 film Hostel, an American fratboy called Josh awakens quivering under a hood. An establishing shot positions the audience as if they have the perspective of Josh. The camera’s lens is partially obscured by fabric as we look in horror at torture instruments he is faced with on the table in front of us. Heavy breathing accompanies this soundtrack, before the camera cuts out to reveal him in an Abu Ghraib styled hood tied to a metal chair. While the scene bears clear verisimilitude to the images of US torture in the Abu Ghraib scandal of 2004, the film is not set in Iraq, but Slovakia. A prolonged torture scene follows in graphic detail. A man emerges dressed in leather clothing and stabs Josh multiple times with a drill in the chest, arms, and thighs. He then offers him the opportunity to escape, but as Josh moves for the door, his severed Achilles heels throw him to the ground. The camera turns to focus on Josh’s wounds, before he is dragged away to certain death. In the opening sequence of The Hills Have Eyes II (Martin Weisz, 2007), US soldiers simulate combat in Khandahar, Afghanistan at a US base in New Mexico. The scene opens with the non-diegetic music of a woman singing in Arabic, and images of burnt out cars, before cutting out to soldiers in the middle of an intense insurgency battle. An explosion throws the soldiers to the ground, and as they dive in slow motion a baby doll lands on top of their piled bodies. From out of the alleyway, a veiled
woman screams, “my baby, you killed my baby”, before exposing a suicide vest underneath her robes. She then bursts into laughter, revealing the whole scene as a simulation that is taking place in America. Similarly, the War on Terror takes the centre stage in *Homecoming* (Joe Dante, 2005), when Republican zombie soldiers return from Iraq to overturn the Florida ballot – a reference to the 2000 election when President George W. Bush was elected into office (which many people believe was rigged). In *28 Weeks Later* (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007), Britain is infected with a ‘rage’ virus, which causes people to lose their personalities and eat other people. The film shows a decimated Britain, where the Americans have been called in to help repatriate citizens into the ‘Green Zone’ – a reference to the demilitarized zone around the US camp in the central streets of Baghdad during the 2003 Occupation. While other films such as *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) were more oblique in their imagery, the inclusion of these metonymic images sparked a debate in American culture over whether the violence in contemporary horror might be seen as reflecting something about the audience’s unconscious perspectives on the Global War on Terror.

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1 *Homecoming* (Joe Dante, 2005) was a telemovie made as part of the series *Masters of Horror* for Showtime, but it has been included in this list due to its impact. *The New Yorker* called it “the best political film of 2005” (Sragow 2005). The series *Masters of Horror* featured one-hour slots made by prominent horror auteurs such as Takashi Miike, John Carpenter and Tobe Hooper.

2 Florida was a swing state in the 2000 election. The vote was so contentious that it was taken to the Supreme Court for final decision in the *Bush v Gore* decision of December 11, 2000. The Supreme Court halted the manual recount and declared victory to Bush by 537 votes.
The notion that the rise in popularity of violent horror might be linked to an audience response to the Global War on Terror gained currency when the director of the 2005 film *Hostel* Eli Roth appeared on the Fox News show *Your World Today* with anchor Neil Cavuto (2005). Cavuto framed the debate over violent horror within the United States as a paradox. At the same time as “everyday Americans found themselves exposed to acts of terrorism”, one fifth of the films released were composed of violent horror. Both Roth and Cavuto stood in front of a green screen that juxtaposed images leaked images from Abu Ghraib with segments of Josh being tortured in a similar hood in Roth’s film *Hostel*. While directors and actors in the United States often tend to downplay the political messages of their film in order to ensure a wide audience, Roth broke with this convention and explicitly addressed the politics of his films. “Thanks to George Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld there is a whole new wave of horror”, Roth responded. “The truth is in times of terror people want to be terrified but in a safe environment. Because with everything that is going on in this world, certainly with the war in Iraq and the horrible, horrible aftermath of Hurricane Katrina – where our Government did nothing to help anybody – you want to scream” (Cavuto, 2005). Roth claimed that the verisimilitude between the images of Abu Ghraib and his films was intentional, and was intended to be critical of the Bush administration’s announcement of War in Iraq.
Roth’s claims of a conflation between ‘real’ and ‘reel’ were important in framing a growing debate over the impact of popular culture on contemporary politics. Roth frequently used his films as a platform for critique of the Bush administration. In one interview he stated, “What’s worse – my movie or Dick Cheney? Nobody actually died in my movie. People actually die because of Dick Cheney, and he doesn’t allow you to see it” (O’Hehir, 2006). In later promotional tours for his second film, Roth claimed his films tapped into emotions surrounding the horrors of the war:

I get letters through my Myspace page from soldiers in Iraq. They’ve told me that Hostel is one of the most popular movies in the military base. I asked the solider: "Why would you ever watch a movie like Hostel after what you see during the day?" He said that he went out there in the field one day with his buddy, and his buddy saw someone with his face blown off. He didn't react. Following this, they watched Hostel that night. The guy was screaming and squealing in a room full of 400 people who were screaming, and they couldn't look at the screen. I said to him: "How is it you can see the real violence, but not take the movie violence?" What I realized is that when these guys are in the battlefield, they can't respond emotionally to violence. They have to respond to it tactically. They're not allowed to show fear because they're soldiers. They put on this brave face. But seeing these images, it's there. It's somewhere in your body and needs to get let out (2007c).

In this way, Roth attempted to counter critiques of the excessive violence in his films by highlighting how they were inspired by the prevalence of violence in our everyday life. His film Hostel II included a beheading sequence that has led to it being banned in the UK and New Zealand, and controversy in the territories it was released in. However, Roth claims in the DVD commentary to the film that the act of violence was based on Youtube videos of jihadists beheading soldiers and the journalist Daniel Pearl. Roth’s message was clear: if people thought his films were violent, the actions of the US military at war were much worse.

Although Roth’s politicization of his films has been read as contrived by some critics (Sharrett, 2009, p.32, Bernard, 2010, p.262, Cochrane, 2007), the notion that the violence in these films might be read as holding political meaning was echoed by other directors and
became popular during this period as directors mentioned it in interviews. For example, George Romero claimed that he encouraged Dennis Hopper to base his portrayal of the Machiavellian head of a gated community in *Land of the Dead* (2005) on a study of news footage of former US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld. The film also contains allegories that explicitly reference the War on Terror. In one sequence, a Latin-American character called Cholo who functions as a henchman for the wealthy in the gated community declares “I’m gonna do a jihad on your ass” once he discovers that he has been double-crossed by his employers. Similarly, Wes Craven has claimed that violent horror film became a vehicle for audiences to debate the morality of the War on Terror (Netburn, 2007). Directors therefore contributed to a debate over the political meanings of their work and its relationship to national allegory.

The notion that ‘reel’ horror might be read against ‘real’ horror was further propagated in the public sphere when film critic David Edelstein wrote a short article in February 2006 for the *New York Magazine*, “Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn’. Noting that there had been a movement on mainstream cinema and television screens towards the representation of torture, Edelstein cited a wide variety of texts from this period that showed sequences of torture, including *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), *The Devil’s Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005), *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005), *Red Dragon* (Brett Ratner, 2002), *Irreversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002), *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004) and the television series *24* (2001-2014). For Edelstein, the images in these films bore verisimilitude to the images of the sexual abuse and torture emerging from the US-run prison in Iraq, Abu Ghraib. The term ‘torture porn’ quickly entered the lexicon of critics and, as Steve Jones charts (2013, p.1), was used by critics to variously describe more than 40 films in the decade following 2003 (with many of the films being classified as such retrospectively). If critics had originally focussed on the similarities that the post-9/11 splatter film had to the 1960s and 1970s cycle, by the time of the publication of Edelstein’s article, the framework for reading these films had entirely shifted to one of torture porn and their reference to the politics of the ‘now’.

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3 Romero mentions this in *Undead Again: The making of Land of the Dead* (2005), the documentary that accompanies the DVD edition of *Land of the Dead*.
4 The term ‘Cholo’ is also an ethnic slur used to refer to Mexican-Americans of low income.
Introduction

Just how torture porn should be read, however, generated much disagreement among critics. For some critics, such as Beth Kattelman (2010, p.9), the emergence of torture porn offered a way of audiences to negotiate anxiety surrounding the War on Terror. Rather than challenging notions of torture, for Kattelman, torture porn works to reinforce ideologies of American exceptionalism and xenophobic tendencies that gave rise to its widespread use in the first place. Similarly, Christopher Sharrett (2009, p.32) views the wave as representing “the impulse towards destruction and suicide [that] has been basic to the conservative vision of America since its inception, preferring conflagration to social change”. However, others saw torture porn as offering a critique of contemporary US culture embedded within the nihilistic violence of these texts. For example, Douglas Kellner (2010, pp.7-8) noted that the films were reflective of some elements of conservative US culture, but the way that torture porn positioned these values as aligned with the monster meant that they could be read as an allegorical critique of the Bush administration. Similarly, Isabel Cristina Pinedo (2009, p.1) highlights how the staging of torture in these texts generates a sense of “recreational terror”. Nevertheless, she argues representations in torture porn become one of the crucial avenues for exploring the limits and justifications for state violence in the absence of its representation in the critical public sphere (p.10). Indeed, Edelstein’s original article highlighted how the subject positioning in these texts worked to encourage this exploration by oscillating between torturer and victim. In this process, “fear supplants empathy [making] us all potential torturers” (Edelstein, 2006). Comparably, Jeremy Morris (2010, pp.54-5) also emphasizes how the emphasis in critical studies on the moral condemnation of torture may overlook the way in which these films allow viewers to engage in empathetic experiences, as they identify with the person being tortured. For others, such as Kim Newman (2006, p.31), Jerod Hollyfield (2009, p.31) and Gregory Burris (2010, pp.2-11), the films are explicitly about America’s relationship to the world, functioning as an allegory for US cultural, economic and military imperialism abroad. Other theorists have contested that these films should be read as politically relevant at all. For example, Steve Jones (2013, p.70) and Craig Frost (2013, p.18) have argued that while torture porn was read as allegorical, such readings prioritize the text’s level of political engagement as the sole defining feature of its worth. Instead, both argue for a shift towards looking at how the construction of torture at a formal level in the text encourages particular relationships of reception for the viewer. The necessity in proposing this shift for both authors stems out of a desire to escape some of the moral condemnation that the phrase ‘torture porn’ generates to instead examine how fans participate in its experience.
Introduction

This thesis contributes to the growing literature on torture porn, but veers away from its use as a term to focus on how one particular subgenre – the splatter film – rose to prominence in American culture. The splatter film dominated the cinema that was referred to as torture porn, which begs the question of why these particular texts at this particular time? As the splatter film has been around since the 1960s, its sudden emergence into mainstream cinema as a cultural form expressing the antagonisms of the Global War on Terror makes it a particularly worthy object of investigation. The splatter film’s crossover into politics makes it exemplary of some of the debates surrounding postmodern culture, as while it includes political imagery, it deanchors these images from their historical basis. The meaning of the violence it presents is therefore contradictory: while the images of the War on Terror it presents might be read as political, the texts themselves are sold on the basis of this violence as a lure for cult audiences. This thesis narrows its scope to focus on the splatter film as an example in order to examine if there is something in the construction of its textual form that makes it particularly suitable to conveying a culture in crisis.

II. The War on Terror in America

The Global War on Terror was announced by the United States on 7 October 2001 as part of a response to the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon of September 11, 2001. The public face of the War in the US was oriented around the eradication of global terrorist networks. On the 7 October, 2001, President Bush announced that the US would be invading Afghanistan as a retaliation against the Taliban harbouring Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. On the 19th March 2003, the theatre of war extended to the invasion of Iraq, under the auspices of a dubious link between President Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, and the assertion Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction (a claim that was later disproved). The US narrative was one of liberating an oppressed people from a brutal dictator, as iconicized in their name for the invasion: “Operation Enduring Freedom”. Although much of the US media
Introduction

focused exclusively on the wars in these two countries, in reality the War on Terror was much more global, incorporating operations in Yemen and the North of Africa. It functioned as a watershed moment in US culture that propelled a Huntingtonesque narrative of a ‘Clash of Civilizations’ to the fore in framing America’s relationship to the rest of the world.6 In this conflict, democracy and capitalism were pitted against Islam, which was positioned as backward, barbaric and oppressive.

However, it quickly became clear that the people the US were attempting to liberate in Iraq were far from jubilant at foreign occupation that destabilized their societies, killed thousands of people, and allowed for the rise of militant groups. Despite Bush’s assertions that it would be a “short war” (including an ill-fated publicity stunt on the USS Abraham in May 2003 announcing the war was over), a number of events were contributing to a rising sense of unease about the US presence in Iraq. Investigators were unable to find any evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which were a key part of their argument under international law for invading Iraq. Moreover, the death toll of US soldiers was rising. The emergence of images of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib into this environment of waning support might be seen as a watershed moment in changing the perception of the US military abroad.

While there had been numerous allegations of prisoner abuse at US-run prisons in Cuba, Afghanistan and Iraq since the beginning of the Global War on Terror, these claims garnered relatively little media coverage or public attention (Gray and Martin, 2007, p.91). On the 28 April 2004, CBS’ 60 Minutes II broke the story of the ritualistic sexual abuse and torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib, allegations that were being investigated by the US Government as part of their Taguba Report (2004). The story was accompanied by a series of graphic images that had been taken by US military personnel, revealing them revelling in the abuse of detainees, who were often posed naked in compromising positions. One image showed Private Lynndie England together with her partner Private Charles Graber posing in front of a pyramid of naked and hooded detainees piled on top of another one. In another, England performs a “thumbs up” sign while a hooded detainee is forced to masturbate. Others showed a nude detainee up against a cell wall as he is threatened with barking dogs, Garner and

Specialist Sabrina Harman posing with thumbed signs over the dead body of detainee Manadel El-Jamadi, and the blood spattered walls of cells that were used for torture (Mayer, 2005). In yet another image, a hooded detainee stands on a box with his arms spread attached to electrical wires, after having been told that dropping his arms will cause him to be electrocuted. The images on 60 Minutes II were followed up with a story in The New Yorker by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh (2004). The graphic images of torture featured in the story were merely a fragment of more than 1,800 digital photographs evidencing abuse (some documenting rape and paedophilia - the latter where soldiers forced a teenage boy to be sodomized by a soldier).

With the release of the images from Abu Ghraib, the US faced a public relations crisis. As one defense analyst argued, while many Americans underestimated the impact of these images abroad, it was difficult to find a better advertisement for resisting US intervention. The images were widely circulated around the Arab world, causing outrage and sparking protests outside the prison in Iraq (Spinner, 2004, AP, 2004). Fearing that the images would severely damage the US war effort, the US Army moved to suppress the release of further images and President George Bush made the unusual move of addressing Arab audiences before his domestic voters, appearing in May 2004 on the US owned Iraqi network Al-Hurra/الحيّرة and the United Arab Emirates pan-Arab network Al Arabiya/بيئة the in attempt to assure Arab audiences that “this is not America” (Bush stopped short of offering an apology) (Stout and Neilan, 2004). Domestically, debate raged over whether this torture was part of US military culture. Editorials in prominent publications such as The New York Times (2004a), The Boston Globe (2004c) and The Economist (2004b) called for Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld’s resignation over the issue (with the latter publication’s May 8 2004 cover stating “Resign Rumsfeld”). Conservative political commentator Bill O’Reilly of the Fox News show The O’Reilly Factor (2004) complained that The New York Times was giving too much prominence to the torture issue, claiming that a torture story was on the front page for 47 consecutive days just after the scandal broke.

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7 Anthony Cordesman from the Center for Strategic and International Studies noted, “[t]hose Americans who mistreated the prisoners may not have realized it, but they acted in the direct interests of al-Qaed, the insurgents, and the enemies of the U.S. …These negative images validate all other negative images and interact with them” (Karon 2004).
The images provoked a debate in the US over what were the limits and justifications of state violence, and whether torture was a part of American military culture. The Bush administration responded by emphasising that those who engaged in torture were a small proportion of the soldiers, and that this was not military policy. The US government arranged for several Iraqis who had their hands chopped off under Hussein’s rule to receive prosthetic hands and meet with the President in order to highlight the brutality of Iraq (Miles, 2004). However, by June, the scandal was intensifying in the public sphere as a series of memos (known as the “Torture Memos”) were leaked to the press (Arnesen, 2004). Written by lawyer John Woo, the memos revealed that the US government had legally reclassified prisoners of the Global War on Terror as outside of the Geneva Convention and therefore international law.\(^8\) This torture included waterboarding, extra-judicial kidnappings and detention without charge for long periods, sleep deprivation and the holding of detainees in stress positions (Priest and Smith, 2004). The orders had been signed by US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld (Priest and Smith, 2004). In May 2005, the US military found itself facing another public relations scandal when *The New York Times* obtained another leaked report detailing the torture and death of two prisoners at the US-run prison in Bagram, Afghanistan in 2002 (Golden, 2005). The investigation highlighted how the use of such torture was routine in the prison, as well as how many of the detainees were held captive without charge. One of the detainees who died under interrogation was believed to have been a taxi driver who just happened to be driving past the prison at the wrong time (Golden, 2005). Torture and its necessity split the nation, who debated its merits in obtaining intelligence, and whether it was part of the “American way”.

Although the torture allegations did not ultimately impact on Bush’s re-election in 2004, polls indicated that it had a serious impact on the support for the War, and that voters were split between those who supported the US’ use of torture and those who did not. Bush initially received almost unilateral support when the invasion of Afghanistan began on the 7th October 2001, with an *ABC/Washington Post* recording his approval rating at a record 92% (Langer, 2001). Following the publication of the photos from Abu Ghraib, a Pew Poll recorded a 24%...
drop in the support for military action in Iraq, with 51% of Americans polled stating that they thought the war was going badly (Keil, 2004). Although torture had never previously been an issue that voters were polled on, a total of 32 polls were run on voters’ moral perceptions of illegal torture in the period between 2001 and 2009 (Mayer and Armor, 2012, p.441). Polls indicated that the split between Americans who supported the use of torture and those who opposed it was relatively equal (2012, p.441). As Truda Gray and Brian Martin (2007, p.90) argue, while the War on Terror’s framing within the media had been previously defined by official military discourse, the release of the torture photos from Abu Ghraib ruptured this framing so that the name of the prison became synonymous with torture for many in the US.

It is therefore little surprise that with backdrop of Abu Ghraib, the images of torture in the splatter film became controversial. The rise in films mentioning torture was accompanied by a similar rise in images of torture in television, spurning a debate that brought in human rights organizations and the US military. In 2007, the NGO Human Rights First released a report called “Torture on Television”, which documented the rise in instances of torture on television. Human Rights First claimed that prior to 2001, there were relatively few instances of torture on television, an assertion backed by the Parents Television Council, which also documents instances of torture (Bauder, 2007). The year 2000 saw 42 scenes of torture on US television, and by 2003 this had risen exponentially to 228 occurrences (Bauder, 2007, Buncombe, 2007). Examples of this torture included spy shows such as Alias, police procedural dramas such as The Wire and The Shield, the supernatural thriller series Lost, and science fiction series such as Star Trek: Voyager and Battlestar Galactica. Human Rights First argued that the representation of so much torture on television ultimately worked to justify the United States’ use of actual torture within the Global War on Terror (Buncombe, 2007). Torture was often presented in these series through a ‘ticking time bomb’ scenario, where its use was essential to save more lives, and was positioned as a normal mode of interrogation. Of these series, the most polarizing was 24, where Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) appeared to torture his way through the entire series, spurning a debate that brought in the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the US military. Bauer is the head of a fictional Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU), a government organization whose role was to prevent terrorism attacks in the United States. In the series, Bauer is frequently shown resorting to torture as a mechanism for extracting information on terrorist attacks. The Council on American-Islamic Relations argued that the treatment of torture in the series
generated negative stereotypes of Muslims by positioning them as the threat to be necessarily tortured (AP, 2005). In 2007, the military cooperated with Human Rights First to arrange a meeting between Brigadier General Patrick Finnegan from the West Point Military Academy, retired military generals and the producers of Fox’s 24 and ABC’s Lost. The human rights and military coalition urged the channel to reconsider the way that they introduced and resolved torture (Mayer, 2007). The military presence stemmed from concerns that troops were copying behavior that they had seen on television and film with prisoners. Ironically, the images of graphic torture that had made the images controversial in the first place came from leaked images of Iraqi prisoners at the US prison Abu Ghraib. The military’s involvement then could be seen as both damage control, and concern over troop behavior. The debate over whether depictions of violence in popular media created or reinforced societal behavior had come full circle.

III. Postmodern political culture

The splatter film might thus be read as having a certain kind of materiality for a period following Abu Ghraib. In this particular moment, texts that otherwise would not be read as representing recent political events were read through the lens of the anxieties of the body politic. The splatter film sat at the centre of a vigorous debate over meaning that pulled in patriotism, propaganda, and morality. In this cultural nexus, the splatter film transcended its prior readings through genre, and its meaning was laden with debates over what the morality of torture was, and what were the limits of state justifications for its use. The splatter film was lumped in with a whole range of other texts that were not from the same generic form, such as Passion of the Christ (a religious epic), and Irreversible (a rape-revenge drama). Despite this range, in film, the splatter film was the most consistent occurring subgenre to be considered an example of ‘torture porn’. This dominance makes it worthy of investigation –

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9 This resulted in the inclusion of a statement read by Kiefer Sutherland on February 7, 2005 before the 24 episode began where he emphasized that not all Muslims should be associated with terrorism: "While terrorism is obviously one of the most critical challenges facing our nation and the world, it is important to recognize that the American Muslim community stands firmly beside their fellow Americans in denouncing and resisting all forms of terrorism, So in watching 24, please, bear that in mind" (see AP, 2005).
what is it in the particular form of these films that makes them suitable to such a reading? The question of form is complicated in the splatter film, because it is spectacle rather than narrative oriented, and it has open endings that obfuscate a clear political reading. In order to answer these questions, I want to turn to Fredric Jameson, whose writings have centered on answering the question of how political meanings circulate within texts.

While Jameson is perhaps best known for his work on postmodernism, his writings have overwhelmingly focused on the role that the text plays in answering to and generating a sense of the social. Heavily influenced by the tradition of Marxist-Hegelian dialectics, Jameson takes the Hegelian position that History is something that can only be interpreted through philosophy in hindsight. Popular culture provides one of the best access points for interpreting the articulation of political ideas throughout history, as it is made for and consumed by the mass. For Jameson, the text provides a rare way of accessing History, as while History itself is composed of an indivisible contemporaneity of class antagonisms, in its crystallization into the text we are able to see a partial expression of ideas that contribute to the way History is socially shaped. These ideas are Utopian, in that they reveal not only information about the current order, but attempt to provide solutions to the contradictions that this promotes. The text then is always ideological, performing the function of “inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions” (1981, p.95). While each text functions individually, together the expression of social texts tells us something about class consciousness and what he calls the political unconscious (p.35). The access to this history is through genre, as it provides a way of analyzing the repetition of similar stories and their proposed ideological resolutions (p.107). Like the work of Claude Levis Strauss which Jameson draws from, his model presupposes that it is through analyzing the ideological structure of the text itself that revelations about its social totality are revealed (pp.120-4). Jameson’s model of textual analysis and its emphasis on the text as ‘already read’ propose a different way of reading texts than the modes that have dominated contemporary film studies, such as psychoanalysis, reception studies and audience studies.

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10 Jameson here is participating in a much broader debate that has underpinned Western Marxism and attempting to draw a synthesis between the work of György Lukács and Louis Althusser, of which there is only room briefly here to summarize. Lukács argues that the emergence of the literary novel, with its emphasis on historical realism, can be seen as reflecting a broader shift from feudal society towards the concerns of the proletariat. In contrast, Althusser argues that this attempt at totalization is overdetermined, and history is always the sum of competing antagonisms – and as such, is indivisible (see Jameson 1981, pp.48-61 and Homer 1998, pp.56-66).
His work proposes a Marxist turn which reinvigorates the debates over the text as ‘social totality’ in earlier film studies. Jameson cautions that this social expression is not straightforward or wholly representative of the society, as the production of texts has largely occurred from within the ruling classes. It is the role of the analyst then to engage in a process of *totalization*, or mapping the text back into its place in history. For Jameson, this process is not only necessary for textual analysis; it is critical in generating social change. Without this process of mapping the text back out onto the world, we are left without a guide as to how these changes might be manifested.

Jameson argues that this process of mapping the text becomes more complicated under late capitalism, when all areas of the economy become commercialized. His views on postmodernism are particularly relevant for thinking through the splatter film, because the movement towards torture in texts represents a world where politics has spilled over into the culture industries, and the circulation of ideas occurs in both domains simultaneously. The splatter film also contains many of the qualities which Jameson identifies as being the hallmarks of postmodern texts, so it is worth briefly outlining his position and its reference to debates on postmodernism here.

Jameson (pp.35-7) draws from the Marxist economist Ernest Mandel’s work *Late Capitalism* (1978) to argue that there is a significant shift in the capitalist structure that precipitates postmodernism. Mandel argues that in the period following World War II, capitalism enters a stage of rapid growth and globalization. He argues that this constitutes a revolution in automation enabled by a shortening in the life cycle of fixed capital. Mandel sees these shifts in the economy as constituting a third phase in the development of capitalism, one that he terms the ‘Third Technological Revolution’ (1978, p.191; also Jameson 1991, p.35). This Revolution is different from the “freely competitive capitalism” that characterized the 17th to 19th centuries, and the “monopoly capitalism” based on a coalition of business and state.11 In this third phase, the imperial foundations of monopoly capitalism are developed even further, so that monopoly surplus profits are sucked back into the former imperial centers rather than being kept in the colonies. The multinational company rises as a powerful entity, exploiting

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11 One of the founding texts on state monopoly capitalism is Vladimir Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular outline* (1917).
former colonial and imperial markets. Finance globalizes, and the struggle between countries that formerly were empires creates a permanent arms economy. This arms race works to subsidize the economy as well as simultaneously functioning as a mechanism for preserving the dominance of former imperial powers (such as the US, Iran, Russia and China) (pp.371-3). Advances in technologies for production allow for further penetration of capitalism into spheres of life that were previously untouched, appearing “as the period in which all branches of the economy are fully industrialized for the first time” (1978, p.191). Mandel (pp.571-5) argues that capitalist expansion is imbalanced under this new economy, and the drive for surplus profits presents a crisis for capitalism, which finds itself at once both expanded in dominance and vulnerable. The concentration of profits into multinationals and sectors of the economy makes it vulnerable, and in turn the state must grow in size to mitigate permanent inflation, subsidize core agricultural industries, and expand markets to cottage industries. While Mandel (pp.586-7) argues that the drive for surplus profits creates the necessary sense of alienation or antagonism that might eventually lead to the overthrow of the system, Jameson takes a much more pessimistic view. For Jameson (1991, pp.348-356), the expansion of capitalism into the cultural sphere means that the spaces for critiquing this sense of alienation are increasingly eroded, limiting possibilities for collective action.

Jameson extends on Mandel’s work to argue that postmodernism is the dominant cultural expression of late capitalism. Under postmodern culture, the commodity is fully reified, and no longer has the attempt at linking cultural expression to history that underscores modernist works. If modernism “was still minimally and tendentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself”, “postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process” (p.x). Postmodern culture reflects the increased separation between production and consumption under late capitalism, and also the fleeting nature of capital at speed. For Jameson, postmodernism is an attempt to map this new social totality of globalized capitalism, to situate ourselves in a world so complex and global that it is unreadable. Drawing from what Raymond Williams refers to as a ‘structure of feeling’, or the emotional experience of lived history,  Jameson argues that the experience of postmodern

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12 Jameson uses Williams’ term in his work Postmodernism Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism to refer to the feeling generated by the spatiality of capitalism (1991, p.xiv). It is developed further in his notions of “cognitive mapping”, which is the way individuals attempt to make sense of their relationship
texts is quite different to those under modernity. Rather than emphasizing allegory, postmodernism has an emphasis on the spatial, attempting to imagine technology and the networks of global finance, albeit in a fragmented way.

In a move that is consistent with the theorization of Utopia under Marxism, but potentially confused with the much newer discipline of “affect studies”, Jameson likely draws inspiration from Ernst Bloch’s 1954 work *The Principle of Hope* (a work he examines in depth in *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* [1971]).

Bloch argues that all societies produce “expectation-affect”, or Utopian ideas of what the ideal society would look like which can be analyzed through cultural products. Due to the way that these texts reflect the industrial conditions and therefore concerns of their bourgeois producers, they cannot be entirely trusted, but they still reveal something about the society itself. Jameson draws from Bloch’s notion of “affect” to argue that under postmodernism is a “waning of affect” or Utopian impulse due to the text’s weakened relationship to History. Instead representations of the unified Self are replaced by fragmented waves of sensations, which he likens to the expression of a “schizoid self” (p.14). It is this lack of a ‘norm’ or reference to the ‘real’ that makes political mobilization increasingly difficult. Texts no longer hold any claim to the ‘real’ or to history. Instead, culture recirculates cannibalized images of the past that lay claim to a kind of artificial nostalgia that is depthless and based on false stereotypes of the past (p.6). The weakening of History in the text collapses any political critique into *pastiche*, a kind of toothless satire. The expansion of capitalism into the cultural realm means “advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive

...to relate a work to any part of that observed totality may, in varying degrees, be useful; but it is a common experience, in analysis to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. This element, I believe, is what I have named the *structure of feeling* of a period, and it is only realizable through the experience of the work of art itself, as a whole (1954, pp.21-2).

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13 Jameson frequently makes oblique references to theory, and this is one instance that has caused a lot of confusion. While Jameson only mentions Bloch once in his work *Postmodernism* in relation to his concepts of asynchronous history, it is clear from Jameson’s earlier works that he is referring to ‘affect’ in terms of its appeal to a Utopian “philosophy of the future” (see Jameson 1971, “Ernst Bloch and the Future”, pp.116-128; Jameson 2008, p.388).
heterogeneity without a norm” (p.17). Capitalism is no longer something that we can imagine, let alone critique.

Jameson’s assessment of postmodern culture is bleak. However, it is important to remember that his work proposes a) a model of uneven development; b) a political call to resituating the text in its historical context; and c) the possibility for texts that surpass their mode of production and capture class antagonisms. First, Jameson’s work employs a model of ungleichzeitigkeit, or non-synchronicity (von Boeckmann, 1998, p.8) His model of capitalism is based on competing modes of development, where the cultural expression of one period rubs up against that of another. For Jameson (1991, p.6), postmodernism as expression becomes the cultural dominant, but there are still texts that could be considered as modern in circulation. Jameson follows Leninist and Trotskyist thought in suggesting that this uneven development is divided between the hyper-capitalist west, and the so-called ‘developing’ nations or ‘Third World’. Jameson (2000) aligns postmodern texts in particular with the expansion of American cultural hegemony, as expressed through the globalization of new organizations such as Fox News and CNN, MTV culture and Hollywood. Outside of the western nations, he argues the predominant textual mode of narration is modernist, and thus is where there are likely to be alternative, non-capitalist models of Utopia (Jameson, 1986, p.69). Second, he calls for the urgent mapping of postmodern texts back onto their world in order to construct their social totality. This requires looking through the text’s claims to false consciousness, such as pastiche and nostalgia,

14 Nostalgia under postmodernism for Jameson is not the same as it is expressed by earlier theorists such as Walter Benjamin. Jameson argues that nostalgia becomes entirely part of the commodification process, functioning as an inaccessible past that obscures the present. He says, I will... comment in advance on an expression, “nostalgia film”, about which I have some misunderstandings to regret. I don’t remember any longer whether I am responsible for this term, which still seems to me to be indispensable, providing you understand that the fashion-plate, historicist films it designates are in no way to be grasped as passionate expressions of that older longing once called nostalgia but rather quite the opposite; they are a depersonalized visual curiosity and “return of the repressed”... “without affect” (xvii).
Introduction

It is the central assertion of this thesis that the splatter film might be considered as both postmodern and a cultural text in its construction. It is postmodern for the way that it focuses on violence as spectacle, favouring this over the development of narrative. This violence in the text forms a central part of its reception, as it is the violence that these films are promoted and marketed on. The preference towards open-ended narratives in these films renders the inclusion of its political imagery problematic, as it refuses a stable ideological reading. In a Jamesonian sense, it is also postmodern for its emphasis on images of technology and surveillance, which attempt to ‘represent’ the new spatiality of our world. However, while the splatter film might be considered postmodern, it is also at this particular nexus of its consumption functioning as a ‘cultural text’, in that it brings to the fore the antagonisms underlying the structures of myth and nationalism at this particular point. The splatter film’s relationship to historicity in this particular moment might thus be read as representing a counterpoint to Jameson’s bleak assessment of postmodernity, as it represents a rupture where America’s relationship to the world and its dominance in late capitalism is folded back onto itself and problematized.

While the splatter film might be seen as an example of Hollywood as ‘global culture’ due to the way it is circulated and distributed on a mass scale, the images that it presents of American nationalism are nothing short of nightmarish and macabre. In contrast to the images of mythic nationalism that collectively inform American cinema, in the splatter film the audience is presented with images of national decay. The myth of individual triumph over adversity is collapsed and subverted into a Hobbesian “war of all against all”, where perpetual violence becomes the only way to secure survival. Protagonists are tortured on rusty, dilapidated industrial machinery, and the backdrop to these acts of violence often is the complete collapse of the social order into an inversion of American progress gone wrong. Factories are turned into torture chambers, progress stagnates, and rusting fields of 1950s automobiles sit as a reminder of a Golden Age that no longer exists. In splatter films set within the United States, the greatest threat to Americans stems from other homicidal Americans. In splatter films with international plotlines, Americans are threatened by other cultures that resent their presence and actively seek to eradicate them. Therefore, while the splatter film might be thought of as representative of postmodernism through its textual form, it also rails against this status by positioning the current order as a threat to stability. In this regard, while both Jameson’s concepts of postmodernism and the cultural text are useful in
thinking through the splatter, they perhaps do not go far enough in explaining its antagonisms. As much of the emphasis in reading Jameson’s work has dropped out his considerations of Utopia in the text, the notion of how it might function in the splatter film is particularly important to considering image culture under late capitalism.

IV. Image culture after 9/11

The splatter film’s peculiar symbolic materiality needs to be read not only against late capitalism, but also through the broader backdrop of a merging between political culture and popular culture that occurs in the post-9/11 period in the US. 9/11 marked a significant point in culture, as it highlighted the way that the globalization of broadcast news, together with the uptake of digital technology (which enabled the capture of the ‘event’ through cellphones and digital cameras), created an event that could be experienced globally. As E. Ann Kaplan (2005, p.39) argues, the power of 9/11 was the way that it created an iconic set of images – that of the Twin Towers collapsing – which could then be replayed again and again by news stations creating a kind of ‘mediated trauma’. For this reason, Jürgen Habermas (2003, p.28) argues that 9/11 constitutes the world’s first truly global event, received by “global witnesses” whose reception and debate constituted a global public sphere. In propelling a singular event to global significance, 9/11 became a symbol as well as a death toll and physical city trauma: it became a set of images that were shorthand for global geopolitics.

Many of the philosophers writing during this time highlighted the way that the interpretation of 9/11 appeared to mirror popular culture, emphasizing the absence in American culture of frameworks to ‘read’ the US back into its economic, cultural and militarily dominant place in the world. For example, Slavoj Žižek (2002) argues that the significance of 9/11 was that it remediated images that were already prominent in popular culture in order to have maximum symbolic impact. Žižek (p.17) proposes 9/11’s sense of being “seen before” was due to the way that American audiences had fantasized about their own destruction repetitively in disaster movies and thrillers, which frequently feature the desecration of iconic US
landmarks. Hollywood produced images with verisimilitude to 9/11 in films such as the *Die Hard* series (1998, 1995, 2007, 2013) and *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996). Žižek (p.16) highlights how this verisimilitude did not go unnoticed by Hollywood studios, who digitally removed images of the Twin Towers in films following 9/11, and delayed or halted the production of dozens of films featuring terrorism. The notion that cinema might be predictive of terrorist attacks on landmarks of symbolic significance was also shared by the Pentagon, who gathered a team of scriptwriters to brainstorm potential future targets immediately following 9/11. The attacks of 9/11 for Žižek were a “special effect that outdid all others” (p.12), inverting the plot of the disaster film (the latter of which shows the destruction and restoration of state order and dominance through their lack of closure). For Žižek (p.57), the US response to 9/11 was one of vengeance, engaging the state in a seemingly indeterminate cycle of retributive violence framed as the “Global War on Terror” – which despite its seemingly ‘novel’ status, functions as a new justification for the continuation of the old order. While 9/11 represented a desire for audiences to glimpse the ‘Real’, the trauma of the event would eventually be neutralized by the repetition of the images of the destruction until they became an empty signifier (p.111). Žižek’s notion of 9/11 as an image that reverberated off popular culture is close to Jameson’s notion of postmodern culture, even though his theories find their basis much more in psychoanalysis than in Marxism.

Both Jameson and Žižek’s contributions help explain an image sphere that overlaps with popular culture. However, they do not go far enough in terms of thinking through how images of terror can also function to disrupt the usual stream of images in popular culture. Part of the power of the negative images of torture in the splatter film was founded in the way that it reversed images of American power in popular culture. The US has a long history of collaborating with the culture industries for propaganda in times of war, and the period after 9/11 is no exception. Two months after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, there was a meeting at the White House to discuss Hollywood support for the war effort (November 11 2001). The meeting was co-organized by Bush’s Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove, Chief of the Motion Picture Association of America Jack Valenti (who was also a former advisor to President John F. Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon Johnson), and Paramount CEO Sherry Lansing, and included around 40 prominent creatives and studio representatives (Calvo, 2001). For Jack Valenti, the role of American cinema was clear: “contributing Hollywood’s creative
Jean Baudrillard’s work, although informed by a much more radical position than Žižek or Jameson, offers some insight into how we might view violent, iconic images as a politics of disruption. Baudrillard’s work, particularly from *The Mirror of Production* (1975 [1973]) onwards, is dedicated to a critique of Marxism and attempts to imagine an alternative system for thinking through capitalism. He argues that Marx and his followers, through basing their model of exchange on capitalism itself, end up instituting its bourgeois values (Baudrillard, 1993a, pp.221-2). Instead, Baudrillard proposes a model of symbolic exchange where the economy is based on the play of signs, which no longer hold referent to the Real. Despite his criticism of Marxist dialectical thought, his work contains an emphasis on the loss of historicity under late capitalism, which means tenets of his work are in line with Jameson’s, and allows Jameson to draw much of his inspiration for a society based on simulacra from Baudrillard’s work. For Baudrillard, it is the technological expansion of capitalism that enables the growth of sign dominance in contemporary culture, enabling their rapid exchange and expansion across global markets. His work since the Nineties shifts towards a concern with this globalization. In *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (1993b, p.10), he argues that Marx failed to predict how capitalism “would, in the face of an imminent threat to its existence, launch itself into an orbit beyond the relations of production, and political contradictions, to make itself autonomous, to totalize the world in its own image”. Globalization is symbolic culture projected as the end of History, as a singular entity that incorporates difference in order to make itself appear as a stable end point (even though
it also functions as a myth). In contrast to Marxism, Baudrillard argues that it is the success of the system that leads to its breakdown, and it is these reversals that give rise to new orders (capitalism supplants feudalism not because of its failure, but because of its success) (1975, p.51). Capitalism’s success as a global system will therefore ensure its eventual failure.

Baudrillard’s last work before his death, *The Spirit of Terrorism: Requiem for the Twin Towers*, extends his notion of failures under capitalism. He argues the politics of 9/11 were marked by a politics of terror that were the sign at war with itself (2002, p.57). This terror was powerfully articulated in two destructive images – the first, the image of the Twin Towers collapsing; the second, the image of torture at the US run prison in Iraq called Abu Ghraib. For Baudrillard, 9/11 is a *simulation* due to the way it engages in destruction as spectacle; however, in contrast to other simulations it is an image that jams or disrupts, resituating America into its place in the globe. For this reason, he argues, 9/11 was a “pure event” that eclipsed all earlier events in its spectacle (2002, p.17). Planned and executed for maximum impact, 9/11 represented the Other grasping the power of images and turning it on the West, collapsing the Twin Towers, a potent American symbol of the triumphs of capitalism, in a symbolic revolt. The terrorist violence is “not then reality backfiring, no more than it is history backfiring. This terrorist violence is not ‘real’. It is worse in a way: it is symbolic” (p.29). 9/11 represents the turning of the image on itself, a “terrorist intervention”, signaling a new phase of history where the singular image can increasingly threaten the whole (pp.97-8). Baudrillard sees in the symbolic attack on the Twin Towers a representation of the desire that accompanies the homogenized images of capitalism for their absolute destruction, but also a weakness in the system where pressure on a singular point can expose the façade.

The singular, violent, suicidal image of the destruction of our order is something that therefore might offer progressive potential even in its nihilism. It is the violent singularity that has the ability to disrupt and jam the system. For Baudrillard (2002, pp.64-5), this act of

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15 See Baudrillard’s work *The Illusion of the End* (1994).
16 Baudrillard makes it very clear he does not endorse terrorism. For a discussion of the moral implications of his work see Baudrillard et al. (2004). As Douglas Kellner (2005) notes, Baudrillard’s attack on ‘universal’ notions of globalization (to which he also consigns humanitarian notions of human rights) is problematic. However, as Kellner notes, it is possible to see Baudrillard’s position as a warning of the unpredictability that occurs once Manichean discourses are evoked and more moderate forms of opposition are suppressed.
terrorism goes beyond its identification with any particular group or religion, as it stands in for the destruction of the order itself. Baudrillard, then, proposes a way of thinking through images of the Global War on Terror in the splatter film through a different lens, as images that ‘jam’ other images. Without dispensing with the economic focus of Jameson, a fusion between these theorist’s methodological approaches allows us to map how the splatter might function as both exemplary of postmodernism, and simultaneously as a challenge to the dominant order of signs. Unlike 9/11, Baudrillard argues the images emerging from Abu Ghraib of torture could not be considered an ‘event’ because they failed to disrupt the stream of consumer images. However, they were equally dangerous because they undermined the authority of US power, countering American narratives of a “just war” in response to terror Baudrillard (2005). Instead, they demonstrated the “banality” of a “west at war with itself”. Rather than the destruction of ‘America’ as a sign from without, these images represented the moral corruption of the nation from within. As the images that the splatter film presents could be thought of as disruptive, Baudrillard’s framework of images that jam is a useful addition to thinking through how Jameson’s notion of the ‘cultural text’ might function in expressing antagonisms under late capitalism.

V. Theory and methodology

The methodological framework from this thesis is drawn primarily from Jameson’s notion of textual analysis, but with reference to his work on the image under late capitalism. As his notion of textual antagonisms during moments of cultural revolution does not go so far as to suggest what these images might look like, Baudrillard’s notion of the image that jams is extended into an examination of the splatter film. Although the splatter film might be considered as postmodern (for the reasons illustrated above and extended on in the first chapter), it still maintains a much longer history as a textual form, and it contains elements of narrative and non-narrative form that I suggest might preclude it towards embodying the antagonisms over the Global War on Terror at this particular time. The structure of this thesis moves from an examination of how the splatter film has been considered traditionally as spectacle rather than form, before moving to looking at how the splatter film is categorized
as a subgenre, and the key tropes that define it. Throughout this exploration, a dialogue is maintained between the splatter’s historical conditions, and the peculiar reference that it makes to the “now” in the post-9/11 period.

My approach conforms with Jameson’s tripartite model of textual analysis, which proposes contextualizing the text into three concentric spheres that move from the individual text to its totalization in its historical mode of production (1981, p.76). The first sphere is reading the text as an individual utterance. The second is positioning it in relation to its social and political moment (genre). Finally, the third sphere involves situating the text in the context of its broader historical mode of production (late capitalism). By examining the text through all three spheres, it is possible to identify the ideologemes, or individual political utterances that underlie the text’s attempt to smooth over the antagonisms that structure its production (1981, p.87). As there has been little academic attention to how the splatter film might be defined as a textual form or functions, this thesis turns first to problematizing its current categorization, before moving towards an examination of how it functions as a subgenre and narratological form. The argument then dovetails towards a consideration of how the splatter film conveys capitalism itself, emphasizing its attempt to spatialize capitalism through images of industrial culture and the nation state. Throughout this exegesis, there is a recurring theme of how the splatter film itself works to convey a sense of oppositional culture, utilizing violence and narratological forms that rebel against Hollywood norms. It is this sense of rebellion, I argue, that gives the splatter film part of its power in functioning as a cultural text during this period.

At a substratal level, a key concern of this thesis is also the way that narrative functions to shape the political meaning of violence, and hence its Utopian capacities. Although cinematic violence has received ample scholarship (particularly in relation to how it engages the individual spectator), there has been significantly less academic scholarship on the way that violence in texts might be seen as functioning politically. Our notions of what constitutes violence are often articulated through a binary opposition that positions violence as “irrational” and the antithesis of rational thought. However, Walter Benjamin argues in his 1921 work ‘Critique of Violence’ (1986) that violence is at its core an inherently political concept. For Benjamin (1986, pp.277-9), violence only comes into existence when it is mobilized by issues of morality, and it is institutionalized and controlled through legal
frameworks that determine its legitimacy. Drawing from social-contract theory, Benjamin (p.295) argues that in the process where individuals transfer their sovereignty to the state in exchange for protection, they also transfer to the state the ability to legitimate and define violence. While the state might work to endorse its own violence through mythologizing it as an act of “defense” (as in the White House’s attempt to redefine the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan as legal under US law, thereby circumventing international law), the state also works to render acts of violence outside of its endorsement as “incomprehensible”. In this sense, “the law’s interest in a monopoly of violence vis-à-vis individuals is not explained by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather by that of preserving the law itself” (p.281). Violence, then, by popular definition, refers only to those acts that exist outside of the law. For Benjamin, this opens violence up to a further proposition: violence is more properly defined “not by the ends it may pursue, but by its mere existence outside of the law” (p.281). Applying this to the question of class struggle, Benjamin (pp.281-3) demonstrates through the example of the workers’ strike that under certain conditions, the act of exercising a right might be seen as initiating an act of violence. Benjamin’s notions of violence go some way to explaining the dichotomous and confusing discourses that emerge around its appearance in film, where violent cinema is often decried by politicians for encouraging individualized, anarchic acts of violence, at the same time as many critics read its presence as supporting or complacently endorsing the incumbent power. It also helps to elucidate why only certain films are considered controversial, yet others, such as Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg, 1998) which includes incredibly graphic violence in its opening sequence, might be viewed as acceptable (in this case, because it offers a historical reenactment of the US landing at Omaha Beach on D-Day). Thus it is not just the way that violence is represented in a film that dictates whether it presents “good” or “bad” imagery, it is the way that it is narrativized to support or resist dominant mythologies of the proper conduct of force. Advancing the hypothesis that part of the controversy and debate surrounding the splatter film’s representation of torture stems from the way it works to undermine the stability of a righteous perspective, this thesis aims to provide an original contribution to discussions of the representation of violence in popular media, in particular the political role of violence within a text.

17 There has been considerable debate over whether both wars are legal under international law, as neither of the premises proposed for invading Afghanistan or Iraq could fall under the notion of self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.
The turn that I am proposing towards examining the text first and foremost as an object of formal analysis is not without its problems. Such a project sits uneasily alongside much of the contemporary work on torture porn after 9/11, which tends to emphasize the inclusion of torture in a text as sufficient for grouping and analysis, rather than its textual form. Hostel director Eli Roth has actively rejected the term ‘torture porn’, arguing that it is too emotive and is often used by critics who are not familiar with the cult histories that underlie the evolution of the horror film (Schembri, 2010). Certainly, the texts that Edelstein originally identify across film and television cover a wide variety of generic forms (2006). For example, it is difficult to argue that the positioning of torture as an act paving the way for spiritual salvation in a religious epic such as The Passion of the Christ is the same as 24’s introduction of torture as a ‘ticking time bomb’, as a necessary utilitarian act that sacrifices the life of one for the welfare of many. 24’s introduction and resolution of torture is in many respects structured by its generic adherence to the plot of a political thriller. My contention is that this lack of attention to textual form makes its analysis ambiguous, as the genre of the narrative impacts on its construction and reception as a text. This often leads to confusion and in terms of where the boundaries lie, with critics performing acrobatic manoeuvres to justify their categorizations. For example, Jeremy Morris (2010, pp.49-50) argues that despite Syriana’s (Stephen Gaghan, 2005) inclusion of sequences of graphic torture it cannot be considered as torture porn, rather it is a political thriller that includes instances of torture. Similarly, Steve Jones in his 2013 work Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw considers relatively mainstream cinema alongside low-budget sadomasochistic pornography remakes (such as The Texas Vibrator Massacre [Rob Rotten, 2008]) (pp.170-186). Therefore, while the prevalence of torture after 9/11 might tell us something about cultural shifts at the time, there is little to be gained by analysing various textual forms with differing levels of cultural penetration side by side. As the splatter film was the most common subgenre of cinema to be associated with this movement, and its analysis drove much of the debate over torture, I have decided to delimit my examination to this subgenre.

Part of what motivates this shift away from looking at ‘torture porn’ as a category is the way that its conflation between voyeurism and torture shifts attention away from how historicity functions in the text. For many people, the term ‘torture porn’ conjures up images of misogynist pornography. While there is certainly room for analyses of how gender functions in the splatter film, this thesis veers away from this debate, arguing that this is not the only
way that these texts can or should be read. However, as the debates around gender remain a flashpoint for many people (particularly those who are not familiar with the films), it is worth noting briefly that the way gender functions in the splatter film is much more complex than the term implies. First – as this thesis asserts – the splatter film is often much more concerned with the erosion of individual markers (of which gender is one) than enforcing them. These films generate part of their fear through the stripping of individual identity away, rather than through reinforcing these binaries (a topic I return to in chapter five). As Jones (2013, p.2) highlights, men are killed more than women at a rate of 2:1. Second, as Cristina Isobel Pinedo argues in her landmark work *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Viewing Horror Films* (1997), such analyses erode space for female agency by denying their pleasure in reception. Pinedo (1997, p.83) asserts, “if a woman cannot be aggressive and still be a woman, then female agency is a pipe dream. But if the surviving female can be aggressive and be really a woman, then she subverts this binary notion of gender that buttresses male dominance”. Pinedo’s points are important, particularly as audience studies of the post-9/11 wave have contested the conventional wisdom that horror film appeals primarily to young men (Clover, 1992, p.6). A survey by the production company Lions Gate (who produced the *Saw* franchise) found that the primary audience was women under 25, and that women are more likely than men to consider themselves as horror aficionados (Williams, 2006). Pinedo argues that the pleasure for women is not founded in gendered representations, but in the way that these films form a safe space to express rage at the current social order – a notion that is relevant to this examination.

**IV. Thesis structure**

This thesis is divided into five chapters that extend and develop the discussion about how violence operates within the splatter film. In this examination, I aim to complicate the binary oppositions through which the splatter is received: violence versus thought; body versus mind; and spectacle versus narrative. My goal is to complicate the way that postmodern texts might be seen as engaging with political imagery and broaden the ways we think about the reception of violence within filmic texts by juxtaposing the splatter film against its broader
social totality. Through highlighting how the splatter film can be “read against the grain”, I demonstrate how it is the unresolved antagonisms that the subgenre promotes in its representation of violence that make it extraordinarily popular during this time. The framework for this examination takes its cue from Jameson’s tripartite model of textual analysis of contextualizing the text into its individual, social and totality.

The first chapter elaborates on the dominant ways in which violent cinema has been read in order to demonstrate why these are insufficient for reading the splatter. As these approaches have been influential in shaping the critical reception of the splatter film, it is necessary to have an understanding of how they shape our interpretations of violent cinema before we progress onto a Jamesonian reading. In this chapter, I focus on three key critical approaches: violence as postmodern spectacle, ‘ultraviolence’ and youth culture, and psychoanalysis. The first approach considers the influence of violence as spectacle within texts as effacing or eroding political content. The second argues that the increased prevalence of violence since the 1960s is part of a shift driven by youth spectatorship. As Eleanor Townsley and David J. Slocum argue, this ends up becoming a “trope” or narrative framework through which the political changes that occur in the Sixties can be read.18 ‘Ultraviolence’ is an extension of this trope, and becomes a framework for communicating anxieties around consumer and youth culture. Finally, I examine how psychoanalysis has been a dominant framework that has shaped the reception of these films. Psychoanalysis tends to drag attention away from social totality and back onto gender. As a mode of analysis, it has been influential due to the subgenre of the slasher film. In this chapter, I examine how the splatter film and the slasher film have some fundamental differences that make it less suitable as a mode for analysis. Finally, I argue that all of these approaches are not sufficient in accounting for how the splatter film might relate to its totality.

The second chapter turns to the issue of genre in the splatter film in order to establish some of the primary tropes that will form the basis for a Jamesonian examination in later chapters. While recent critics have complicated the notion of genre, pointing to its inconsistencies and

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18 Although the term ‘trope’ has many different meanings in film studies, Townsley draws the term off Jameson’s article “Periodizing the Sixties” (2008, pp.483-515). Here the term “trope” functions as a narrative shorthand for reading History.
limitations, it is proposed that examining the splatter film’s emergence as a commodity resolves many of the difficulties in identifying exactly what a splatter is. Moreover, I argue that this approach demonstrates that while the splatter film is often thought of as a stylistic form, it is also a particular subgenre that is enabled by advances in the technology of special effects during the 1960s. This approach in tracing the splatter film’s development as a form, marketing, distribution and controversy forms the basis for a further complication of the body/mind dichotomy. Drawing from Jeffrey Sconce’s (2010) notion of ‘paracinema’, I examine how the splatter film’s reception might be structured around the creation of an oppositional cinema that, at the same time as emphasising the creation of bodily affect, is concerned with creating a critical distance between the viewer and the text. Finally, I discuss how this oppositional status has become entrenched within the broader cultural reception of the splatter film. Through examining how the splatter film is frequently the focus of moral panics, the consumption of these texts is positioned as a way of the consumer exercising their differentiation from mainstream audiences.

The third chapter returns to the binary opposition of spectacle versus narrative that is laid out in Chapter One to examine how the oppositionality of these texts is incorporated into the splatter film itself. The positioning against mainstream culture that is characteristic of fan culture (developed in the second chapter) is also integrated into the narrative of these films. Part of the reception of the post-9/11 splatter film is therefore founded in the way that these films work to violate conventions of Hollywood cinema, such as the Hollywood ending. The relationship between spectacle and narrative has therefore been under-theorized in these films, as the two are intimately entangled, engaging the audience in a sense of play regarding the violence in the films. Drawing from Fredric Jameson’s (1991, p.107) notions of narratives as providing “strategies of containment” for broader social problems, and Rick Altman’s notions of genre as a syntactical device, I argue that the central theme underlying these films is the disestablishment of authority. The splatter film presents a world where violence is social, relentless and all encompassing without providing resolution.

The fourth chapter returns Jamesonian notions of spatiality under late capitalism. The splatter film’s emphasis on violent assaults on the body can be read as representing the fear of the complete loss of our identity. In these films, the body becomes interchangeable with the
commodity, and bodies lose their individuality in favour of being offered up for consumption. The body is carved up into collections of fingers, eyes and meat, with the images of the abattoir and the factory functioning as a backdrop to the violence enacted on the body. The splatter film thus presents a nightmarish vision of industrialization in the way it represents the spatiality of capitalism, extending images of industrialism to their most violent ends. These perverse assemblages are made all the more frightening by the way that the splatter film frequently engages a disembodied surveillance gaze, giving the impression of technology that has turned on humanity, disintegrating individuality into commodity.

Chapter Five returns to the question of how nationalism functions within these films, by positioning the splatter film as a vehicle for circulating dystopian tropes of US nationalism domestically and abroad. Like Jameson’s notion of Hollywood as representing a global culture, the splatter film works to position America as a global hegemon (2000). However, this dominance is continuously threatened from within. This occurs in the splatter film through a process of ‘Othering’ America – the vigilante becomes the serial killer, the South a reminder of unequal progress and class divisions internally, and the zombie film highlights the fragility of the social order by juxtaposing it with its total collapse. This creates images that are American, but function to jam images from the dominant culture. Finally, I examine two examples of how the splatter film’s internationalization means that these discourses on American alienation are played out on a global scale through Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005) and Turistas (John Stockwell, 2006).

The conclusion synthesizes all of the ideas laid out in the previous chapters in order to make some observations about what the rapid rise in popularity might mean for myths of American nationalism at this time. I return to the torture images of Abu Ghraib, and also to the broader political environment to map these films back onto their social totality. In doing so, I resituate the splatter film as a “cultural text”, that through its lack of resolution and overt social antagonism might be seen as tapping into broader anxieties around the Global War on Terror and the rise of anti-Americanism following Abu Ghraib and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The reception of violence is positioned as much more complicated than many critics have previously read it as. And in this sense, the violent image has power.
Chapter One: Postmodern Ultraviolence In The Splatter Film

The splatter film is often situated within film studies as part of a broader shift since the 1960s towards violence as cinematic spectacle and entertainment (Prince, 2000a, p.2, Slocum, 2001, pp.20-1, King, 2002, pp.1-2, Schneider, 2004, p.xiv).19 The timing of this shift towards violence as an aesthetic and stylistic form corresponds with the emergence of postmodernism as a cultural category, and as such the emphasis on spectacle in the splatter film is frequently read against this shift. As Ashjøm Grønstad notes, “it is possible to view the sense of spectacle accompanying filmic violence as a logical product of the obsession with visibility that is associated with postmodern culture” (2008, p.151). The post-9/11 splatter film frequently introduces images of violence that are associated with the Global War on Terror, but they are problematized by the way that these images are stripped of their context and offered alongside graphic images of extreme violence. The incorporation of metonymic images of the Global War on Terror into the text sits in a fundamental tension with the splatter film’s presentation of violent spectacle, a juxtaposition that might be seen as exemplifying its role as a postmodern text. In this chapter, I explain how the splatter film’s presentation of extreme violence as spectacle might be seen as exemplifying some of the key debates in postmodern culture and the interpretation of violence. In doing so, I move through two key notions of postmodernity discussed in the introduction – the first, that postmodernism is a shift away from historicity associated with late capitalism; and the second, that postmodern violence can be seen as surface play. The latter notion is exemplified in the theoretical approach of ‘ultraviolence’, which views extreme violence as part of a cultural shift in Hollywood from the 1960s towards cinematic violence (Prince, 2000a, pp.5-6). In the third part of this chapter, I examine how psychoanalysis has positioned the spectatorship of violence as collapsing the space between the audience and the screen through its emphasis on the screen as generating bodily sensation. Finally, I argue that there is a

19 Geoff King in his work New Hollywood Cinema (2002, p.1-2) notes that there are diverging notions of what constitutes the ‘New Hollywood cinema’. In one approach, it is seen as the result of industrial changes that occur in the late 1950s; and in the other, it is seen as a shift in style influenced by the influx of independent films from abroad (King 2002, pp.36-48). This chapter considers elements of both approaches.
necessity within postmodern approaches to cinema to reintegrate the notion of how texts such as the splatter film relate to a broader social totality.

I. Postmodern politics in the splatter film

The splatter film routinely incorporates images of the Global War on Terror, but it does so in a way that is problematic. Political references are introduced, but ultimately displaced by an emphasis on the extended violation of the body. In some films, the War on Terror emerges as an oblique reference, such as the hooded victims in *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005) that function as a metonymic reminder of Abu Ghraib in a film that is predominantly about a group of tourists who are tortured in a factory by wealthy capitalists. In *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2005) images of Muslims praying to Mecca are intercut into a frenetic montage of zombies attacking and archival protest footage in the credit sequence that precedes the film. The juxtaposition of East and West together with apocalyptic images of social collapse functions as a spectre of the Global War on Terror that is never resolved or anchored within the film itself, other than implying that the zombie plague has collapsed all previous power structures into global chaos. In other splatter films, this reference is explicit but is only used as an inciting incident to progress the plot into violence. Three examples of this are *The Hills Have Eyes II* (Martin Weisz, 2007), *Zombie Strippers* (Jay Lee, 2008) and *Osombie* (John Lyde, 2012). *The Hills Have Eyes II* opens with US troops conducting a military simulation of street battles in Iraq, before shifting immediately to an extended battle between the soldiers and a group of homicidal, superhuman hillbillies who inhabit the abandoned mines. Similarly, Jay Lee’s *Zombie Strippers* uses the plot’s exposition to reference the War on Terror before changing tone entirely to a splatter film, where the plot’s pretence is forsaken for the spectacle of zombie strippers battling soldiers for roughly three-quarters of the film’s running time. *Zombie Strippers* opens with a news report, where the anchor announces that Bush has just won his fourth term as President due to a voting glitch in Florida, and that Arnold Schwarzenegger will retain his position as Vice President. Graphics on the screen, which show through colour the threat of terror for that day, parody the colour-coded terror alert tickers that were common onscreen on stations like Fox News following 9/11. The anchor goes on to announce that America is now embroiled in war with eight countries and one of its
Chapter One: Postmodern Ultraviolence in the Splatter Film

own states - Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Syria, France, Venezuela, Canada and Alaska. In this short opening sequence, the film parodies a number of political events related to the Bush administration: the 2000 Florida vote recount, when debate circulated over whether George Bush or Al Gore had won the election; the increasing overlap in the US between celebrity culture and politics; the selling of the Global War on Terror through continuous reference to the threat of domestic terrorism; and the willingness to go to war with multiple countries on questionable rationales. This satire however is quickly displaced by the focus on former porn star Jenna Jameson as a stripper, who despite being infected by a zombie virus, is able to continue running a strip club on a military base. In Osombie, the Global War on Terror functions as a thematic backdrop for the film’s spectacle of violence. In the film the US releases a biological virus that turns the infected into zombies to disable the Taliban, so that the Americans have an easier job in securing red zones because the Taliban are too busy biting each other. Instead, the Taliban use this to reanimate Osama Bin Laden so that his faithful can continue to use him in Al Qaeda tapes. While the film makes overt reference to the occupation of Afghanistan following 9/11, it is difficult to take a lurching zombie Bin Laden fighting buff American soldiers seriously, particularly when the film fails to establish whether this reference is a critique of the War on Terror or merely a backdrop to the action.

This odd juxtaposition between images that have clear political reference and images that are indulgent in violent spectacle is characteristic of the splatter film. The pace of the narrative is often relentless and, refusing narrative resolution, the splatter movie moves from one violent climax to another. Each climax is structured around a violent assault on the body, which is presented in graphic detail, often through the incorporation of a graphic montage of close-ups which in excruciating detail show the impact of violence on the skin. As Garrett Graham argues eloquently in the blog “A Postmodern Autopsy: dissecting the splatter film”:

*Of all of the terms that try to include the style of splatter, “Meat Movie” is perhaps the most helpful in terms of separating the splatter film from the slasher film. A splatter movie, as is being defined in this writing, requires more than just blood and violence. What separates the meat movie from the slasher movie is how much the human silhouette is broken. The old stand-by of the slasher genre is to simply bury a retractable knife into someone’s body and apply an ounce or two of Karo syrup. The meat movie takes it a step further and really tries to fragment the human silhouette either through some kind of serious dismemberment or by*
exposing more of the human anatomy. This includes disembowelment, removing organs, opening up a body cavity such as the chest or skull, removing the skin and exposing a serious amount of inner anatomy. The splatter film seeks to do more than just kill people. The splatter film is engaged in a post-modern attempt to understand what it means to be fragmented, dissected, and separated from one’s self. The binaries here is [sic] the whole and complete human being versus the mutilated and incomplete cadaver. The splatter film is not necessarily about being alive or dead as the slasher film is. It’s more about what’s happening to the human body and how that affects identity (Graham, 2009).

Graham’s central argument is that the splatter is much more than merely a style of special effects – it is the way that the violence is carried out in a film that categorizes it as a splatter film, rather than the fact that the film features blood and gore. This exposition of violence is complicated within the splatter film, which heavily employs special effects to push violence to the limits of its on-screen representation. This shifts attention away from the development of psychological suspense and towards the orgiastic display of violence. For example, in Saw III (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006), a former prisoner called Troy awakens in a room to find chains deeply embedded in his flesh through his shoulders, arms, hands, the side of his torso, his heels and his lower jaw. A tape recording informs him that he has 90 seconds to rip the chains out of his flesh before a bomb will go off, and that he must choose between certain death and the intense pain of removing the embedded chains. The film then cuts to a two minute long sequence compiled of frenetic editing and extreme close ups of the chains ripping from his skin, before the bomb explodes and he is killed in spite of his effort. Saw III contained so much contentious violence that it had to be edited down seven times under the orders of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) before it was allowed to be released with an ‘R’ rating (Billington, 2006). Despite its frequent introduction of political allusions and ‘moral’ themes (such as the way Troy is executed for his repeated prison episodes and inability to break the cycle of violence), the splatter film forms a complicated relationship with the voyeuristic consumption of this violence. At the same time as an audience might sympathize with Troy, or read the violence against him as punishment, the anticipation of the on-screen display of violence is positioned as the attraction for viewing the film.
This is complicated further by the way that the films frequently refute narrative closure, departing from the conventions of Hollywood cinema to leave the outbreak of violence unresolved. At the end of Saw III, the protagonist Jeff survives a number of tests only to find himself sealed in a room with three corpses, one of whom is his wife, who is killed by a collar around her neck embedded with shotguns. The splatter film presents a dystopian universe, in which ordinary Americans are engaged in brutal cycles of violence without hope of resolution. This lack of resolution tends to collapse the narrative into the violent image, a characteristic that might be seen as marking these films as postmodern due to the way they prioritize surface spectacle over depth. While the audience might develop some sympathetic identification for the protagonists who find themselves subject to violence, this subjective alignment is collapsed through the way that the splatter film prioritizes the destruction of the body into a mass of sinewy flesh. Garrett’s (2009) argument that a splatter film is much more than a style, that it is a narrative form that prioritizes the exploration of the body goes some way to explaining the tension between narrative progression and spectacle in these films. If the slasher explains violence as the product of vengeance, instigated by an individual who fixates on a group of friends and slowly slaughters them one by one (Rockoff, 2002, p.9), the splatter presents a diegesis wherein the only “logic” is irrational and random violence. It is this fascination with the extended display of the ripping apart of skin that has ensured that the splatter film has been unable to cross over into the mainstream in quite the same way as the slasher film did. The latter genre merged with the teen film in the 1970s-1980s cycle, and was reinvigoration in the post-Scream era of the mid-1990s. It is this emphasis on the graphic presentation of gore that has ensured that the splatter film has existed as a largely marginal form. This makes its emergence in the post-9/11 cycle as mainstream cinema particularly unusual.

The post-9/11 splatter film might be therefore described as a kind of political ‘meat’ movie, where references to the Global War on Terror sit uncomfortably alongside the emphasis on the presentation of visceral and explicit violence. It is this unusual juxtaposition that renders these texts as postmodern. In one of the most widely cited texts on postmodernism, Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991, pp.xviii-xxii), Jameson

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20 Mark Rockoff in his work Going to Pieces: The rise and fall of the Slasher film, 1978-1986 (2002, p.9) asserts that one of the key identifying tropes of the slasher film is that the killing is personal. Similarly, Vera Dika (1987, pp.87-9) highlights how the slasher film could be termed the “stalker” film for the way a lone killer isolates his victims.
argues that capitalism has transitioned from the old order of imperialism or nationalized capitalism to one of “late capitalism”, or the extension of the free market globally to a new phase of multinational capitalism that is dominated both by the west and by its fascination with images of technology. Political satire in the text is displaced by what he calls pastiche or “blank parody” (Jameson, 1991, p.6). Rather than the attempt to express a unified expression of the self that preoccupied modernist texts, postmodernism functions as the expression of what Jameson (1991, pp.26-8) refers to as a new kind of schizophrenic subject, de-anchored and alienated from their place in the world through the weakening of the links between production and consumption. Jameson (1991, p.25) associates postmodernism with a waning of affect, or a text’s relationship to history. Postmodernism compensates for this depthlessness by presenting texts as a series of intensities, ranging from the shocking to the ecstatic (1991, p.28). If as Jameson argues, postmodern images are marked by the way that they decenter history, then the post 9/11 splatter film is clearly postmodern: it displaces historicity by using references to it as a prologue for presentations of violence as an extreme intensity. The splatter film’s incorporation of imagery of the Global War on Terror might therefore be thought of as a kind of pastiche of contemporary politics, one which references current events, but through positioning politics as a sideline to spectacular cinematic violence, neutralizes its incorporation in the text.

As Henry Giroux notes (1994), this use of de-centered political imagery is not unusual in postmodern culture, which draws on political imagery in a process of decontextualization and recontextualization that is founded on the presentation of difference. Giroux argues that under postmodern culture, “advertising and consumption do not deny politics, they simply appropriate it” (1994). Giroux examines the example of Benetton, a clothing company which in 1991 removed all reference to its product from its advertisements and to present a series of shocking and controversial images taken from around the world by photojournalist Oliviero Toscani. These advertisements included decontextualized images of Sub-Saharan African conflict, terrorist bombings and mafia killings accompanied by the Benetton logo in the corner. For Giroux (1994), Benetton’s use of political images represented the shift towards consumption as differentiated by lifestyle grouping in post-Fordist society. The images were postmodern in that they were decontextualized from the historical conditions of their production, and recontextualized and repurposed to consumer ends as a marker of the purchaser’s difference. The heady political imagery in these texts thus came to represent the
consumer’s edginess and the brand itself, rather than the specific historical moments or social conflicts that the images represented. As Giroux summarizes:

In the world of international capital, difference is a contentious and paradoxical concept. On the one hand, as individuals increasingly position themselves within and across a variety of identities, needs, and lifestyles, capital seizes upon such differences in order to create new markets and products. Ideas that hold the promise of producing social criticism are insinuated into products in an attempt to subordinate the dynamics of social struggle to the production of new lifestyles. On the other hand, difference is also a dangerous marker of those historical, political, social, and cultural borderlands where people who are considered the "Other" are often policed, excluded, and oppressed. Between the dynamics of commodification and resistance, difference becomes a site of conflict and struggle over bodies, desires, land, labor, and the distribution of resources. It is within the space between conflict and commercial appeal that difference carries with it the legacy of possible disruption and political struggle as well as the possibility for colonizing diverse markets. Within the logic of restructured global capital markets, cultural differences have to be both acknowledged and depoliticized in order to be contained (1994).

Although Giroux is referring to advertising, his arguments on the depoliticization of imagery in postmodern culture are reminiscent of Jameson’s (1991, p.341), and could easily be applied to the splatter film. While the splatter film frequently introduces images or themes that could be seen as referencing the Global War on Terror, the way that the violence is narrativized in these films is problematized by its lack of ideological resolution. The splatter film frequently presents images that might be seen as referencing current politics, but these images, stripped of their context, lack history and are ultimately usurped by the film’s descent into extreme violence. Rather than offering a decisive critique or ideological position on these images, the splatter film offers them up as yet more images for consumption circulating in a global market. In the splatter film, the body becomes a battleground for this struggle, disrupting political allegory and collapsing it into the destruction of flesh.
II. Ultraviolence and the Sixties trope

What then are some of the existing frameworks for considering this spectacular violence? The emergence of this extreme cinematic violence is associated with the 1960s, and contrasted with the relative conservatism of previous American films constrained by the moral regulations of the Production Code in their representation of violence. As Stephen Prince notes, “ultraviolence emerged in the late 1960s, and films have never been the same since” (2000a, p.6). The term “ultraviolence”, from Anthony Burgess’ 1963 novel A Clockwork Orange (p.19), refers to the way that violence in these texts is positioned aesthetically as an end in itself. As Prince (2000a, pp.13-4) argues, ultraviolence has two defining formal characteristics – the positioning of violence as an aesthetic film style, alongside the graphic representation of gore and bodily penetration. The incorporation of violence into filmic form in the 1960s was considered controversial, and the debates that surround it being a shift in culture associated with both youth and pleasure has positioned texts such as the splatter film at the centre of debates over the impact and reception of violence.

The splatter film exemplifies ultraviolence, containing both graphic violence and stylized violence. The main goal of the splatter film is to produce a sense of shock in the audience. The display of graphic violence is notable in many sequences in Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005) for example, conveyed through special effects that depict brutalized skin, and a lingering camera. Graphic violence can be seen in the sequence where Paxton escapes from the industrial facility where rich capitalists pay to torture kidnapped tourists, and encounters his friend Yuki from the hostel in brutal agony. Paxton bursts into the room following an extended sequence that shows one of the paying torturers searing Yuki’s eye with a blowtorch until the heat melds her eyeball out into a grotesque protrusion. Unable to process the extent of the brutality that confronts him, Paxton panics and picks up a pair of scissors from the torture table that sits beside her. Cutting the protrusion off in close up, pus is shown shooting from the eyeball. Hostel also incorporates stylistic violence into the construction of the text, with close attention paid to how filmic technique might heighten the sense of discomfort for the audience. This stylistic violence can be seen in an earlier sequence featuring Yuki, where match on action editing is used to highlight the sense of impending doom that faces the
protagonists. Here the camera cuts from a long shot of Yuki screaming as an unidentified assailant attempts to slice her toe off with a giant pair of shears. The camera then cuts to an extreme close up of her toe being squeezed with the secateurs under pressure, before cutting to a match on action with another extreme close up of her best friend cutting her toenails in the hostel. The effect of juxtaposing the extreme violence of the torture chamber with the banal act of cutting the toenails - an act that many people find squeamish unless they are cutting their own toenails - is done to amplify the gore. This juxtaposition also demonstrates the way that violence is stylized in these films and incorporated into formal elements of these films such as editing.

Figure 1. Match on action editing as stylized horror in Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005).

The debate in film criticism over how ultraviolence as a style should be received has been influenced by the reception of a wave of extremely violent box office hits in the 1960s, where
the violence in the films was seen as reflecting the turbulent political environment of the United States. As Geoff King (2002, pp.1-2) argues, the Sixties has often been positioned as presenting a rupture in the traditional narrative form of Hollywood cinema, marking the emergence of what has often been referred to as the “New Hollywood”. By the end of the 1950s, it was clear that Hollywood’s so-called “Golden Era” was drawing to an abrupt end.21 The widespread uptake of television saw the audiences for motion pictures decline, placing pressure on studios to find new ways to differentiate the experience of movie-going from watching television. This shift in media technology was compounded by a marked shift in audience taste that saw an eclectic range of films dominate the box office, adding to the climate of economic uncertainty in an industry that had previously been defined by its Fordist production of genre films. Youth, mobilized by the post-war affluence America enjoyed after World War II, were exerting a marked influence on the box office popularity of motion pictures (Cook, 1996, p.922).

Hollywood responded to this shift in audience taste by altering its production practices. In the 1960s, foreign films were introduced into the domestic market by distributors seeking to exploit profits in the 1960s, and by the early 1970s, the number of foreign films screening outweighed domestic productions (Hubbert, 2011, p.293). These foreign films did not have to adhere to the same moral restrictions as domestic cinema and exposed audiences to new images of sex, immorality and violence. This created the conditions for Motion Pictures and Producers Association Jack Valenti to overhaul The Production Code of 1930 towards a ratings based system in 1968, which restricted content based on the age and perceived developmental impact on the viewer (called the Code and Ratings Administration). The moral norms around sex and violence in films produced under The Production Code had already been challenged internally by a wave of independent flicks, including the groundbreaking work of Herschell Gordon Lewis in making the first splatter films, Blood Feast (1963), Two Thousand Maniacs! (1964) and The Gore Gore Girls! (1964), along with the work of Roger Corman and his films that were denied Production Code approval, such as The Intruder (1963). As Eric Schaefer (2008, p.79) details, the established order of

21 The 1940s were Hollywood’s ‘Golden Era’ with the highest audience numbers for cinema viewing in history. By 1946, the domestic audience peaked with an estimated two-thirds of the US population attending the cinema every week (Cook, 1996, p.443). As Cook (1996, p.919) notes, this decline was fuelled by the rising cost of living – in the period between 1956 and 1972, the general cost of living rose 53.9% and was accompanied by a 160% rise in cinema admission costs.
filmmaking was also challenged by the import of “nudie cuties”, such as the films of Russ Meyer. In response to the rise of television, the increasing popularity of foreign films and the new audience tolerance for explicit themes, Hollywood also moved towards a production model where films were funded individually to allow for experimentation that targeted the youth market (Hubbert, 2011, p.295). These social and industrial changes, fuelled in turn by shifting audience tastes and social contexts, led to a breakdown of traditional aesthetic and cultural norms. In their place came the rise of cinema that critics referred to as the “New Hollywood” (Prince, 2000a, p.2, Slocum, 2001, pp.20-1, King, 2002, pp.1-2).

Violence had a key presence within the “New Hollywood”, with a new generation of directors such as Martin Scorsese, Sam Peckinpah and Sergio Leone establishing ultraviolence as an aesthetic mode that explored onscreen violence as a stylistic form. The popularity of these violent, anti-authoritarian films – *A Fistful of Dollars* (Sergio Leone, 1964), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) and *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) – was seen as reflecting the social upheaval of the time. This included the growing dissent over the Vietnam War, the recession, the oil crisis, the assassinations of John F. and Bobby Kennedy, the Watergate scandal, the rise of the counterculture, and the civil rights movement (King, 2002, pp.14-5). While some critics, such as the prominent *New York Times* critic Pauline Kael, saw films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* as presenting a critique of mass culture, by and large, the reception of the ultraviolence of New Hollywood was seen to reflect the social and moral decline of American cinema (as cited in Slocum, 2001, p.11). For example, Bosley Crowther saw the use of ultraviolence in these films as desensitizing audiences to, and therefore promoting, violence in society (as cited in Gold, 2000, pp.57-8). In this context, the “New Hollywood” quickly became the locus of censorship debates and a moral panic. For example, Christopher Sharrett (1999, pp.12-3) and Kendall Phillips (2008, p.66) both observe that violent cinema became a locus for discussing fears of youth delinquency during this period, citing the American historian Arthur Schlesinger’s warnings that youth culture was collapsing into a “pornography of violence”. In these debates, New Hollywood cinema and ultraviolence were seen as threatening the stability of society as a whole.

As Marc Bernard (2010, p.64) emphasizes, post-9/11 splatter films were heavily marketed on their stylistic adherence to this Sixties moment. Bernard sees this intertextuality as stemming
from industrial concerns – the splatter films produced during this time were initially intended for distribution on the DVD market, where the splatter film had held cult collector status since the 1960s. For Bernard (2010, pp.35-6), the splatter film should be primarily read through the political economy of its production, and the reintroduction of tropes from films produced in the 1960s and 1970s is an example of the cycles of genre production – an attempt to capitalize on an audience who are aware of the tropes and conventions associated with such films and have not been exposed to them for some time. Many of the splatter films released during this time were remakes of films from the 1960s and 1970s – such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003), *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2004), *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006) and *2001 Maniacs* (Tim Sullivan, 2005). Some of these films brought back the original filmmakers as advisors. Wes Craven’s was the producer for Alexandre Aja’s 2006 remake of his film *The Hills Have Eyes*, and the original cinematographer Michael Pearl was brought in to help capture some of the first film’s aesthetic in Marcus Nispel’s 2003 remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The success of films like *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) and *Hostel* also helped to revive the filmmaking career of director George A. Romero, who had only made one film in the 12 years previous. Romero was able to secure funding to make another three films that continued on the story of the zombie apocalypse series he began in 1968 with *Night of the Living Dead* (these films were *Land of the Dead* [2005], *Diary of the Dead* [2007] and *Survival of the Dead* [2009]). Romero also landed the role of Executive Producer on Breck Eisner’s 2010 remake of his 1973 film *The Crazies*, the compilations of short films *Deadtime Stories* (2009) and *Deadtime Stories 2* (2011), and on two horror documentaries (*One for the Fire: The Legacy of the Night of the Living Dead* [Robert Lucas and Chris Roe, 2008] and *Into the Dark: Exploring the Horror Film* [Johanna Wartio McEvoy, currently in post production]). The visual aesthetic of the 1960s and 1970s is also evoked in many post-9/11 splatter films through the incorporation of a grainy, low-budget aesthetic that bears more relation to the earlier period than the slick production values that dominated during the 1970s and 1980s at the height of the slasher film cycle in films such as *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978). Examples of the use of this grainy film stock aesthetic include Rob Zombie’s *House of a Thousand Corpses* (2003), which incorporates multiple intertextual references to splatter films produced in the 1960s and 1970s, and *Grindhouse* (Robert Rodriguez, Eli Roth, Quentin Tarantino, Edgar Wright, Rob Zombie, 2007), which includes mock trailers from this period.
While Bernard’s points on how the political economy of the industry influenced its production during this time are pertinent, the reintroduction of tropes from the 1960s and 1970s also functions to introduce connotations of the political turbulence and rebellious zeitgeist of this time. For example, the remakes of Wes Craven’s films *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) and *The Hills Have Eyes II* (1984) (*The Hills Have Eyes* [Alexandre Aja, 2006] and *The Hills Have Eyes II* [Martin Weisz, 2007]) update the original narrative to include a subplot which positions the deformed and homicidal hillbillies as the result of nuclear testing in 1945 to 1962. This move to reinscribe the narrative as referring to the period of nuclear testing is foregrounded in the film’s credit sequence, which shows archival footage of stillborn babies affected by Agent Orange and nuclear explosions intercut with images of the deformed hillbillies who will function as antagonists in the text. Director of the original *Hills Have Eyes* and producer of the remake Wes Craven noted that the addition of these elements adds a level of politicization to these films that he would have liked to have included in the original had he not been restricted by the political environment of the time.\footnote{See *Surviving the Hills: Making of ‘The Hills Have Eyes’* (2006) on the DVD edition of *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006).} Similarly, in Zack Snyder’s 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, Kyle Cooper’s title sequence shows vintage archival footage of civil unrest from within America and around the world in order to give the impression that a zombie virus has been released worldwide. The incorporation of such iconography situates these films within the broader socio-historical narrative of the ‘Sixties moment’, drawing parallels between contemporary politics and the historical milieu of the counterculture protests that shaped the 1960s. However, like the decentered images of the War on Terror that this chapter began with, these images of the 1960s are arguably problematic as they are left without clear ideological resolution and displaced by stylized violence within the text.

J. David Slocum (2004, p.20) argues that the 1960s have become the predominant lens through which cinematic violence has been read by critics. Slocum (2004, pp.14-5) draws from Eleanor Townsley’s (2001, p.105-9) work on the Sixties as an anthropological lens to argue that this decade constitutes a *trope* within US culture through which social narratives are organized. For Slocum, the Sixties trope as a formative moment in shaping the reception
of ultraviolence “operationalizes a moral standard for liberals and conservatives alike” through which graphic violence in cinema can be read (Townsley as cited in Slocum, 2004, p.21). For conservatives, ultraviolence is often read as constituting the decline of the morals that provide social cohesion. For liberals, ultraviolence is often interpreted as a progression towards a postmodern culture of violent images without the guidance of a historical referent (Slocum, 2004, p.25). For Slocum, this sense of agreement across the political divide signals that ultraviolence itself functions as a trope for its interpretation. Ultraviolence is thus seen by both Conservatives and Liberals as promoting a culture where violence is an end in itself, without progressive political potential or the revolutionary aspects that traditional Marxist accounts might prioritize in their readings of violence’s role in shaping history (p.25). Without this transformative potential, ultraviolence is often read as reinforcing the dominant order by functioning as spectacle. For this reason, as Slocum (p.27) notes, there is remarkable agreement across the political spectrum that ultraviolence is to be seen through a nihilistic lens. This conflation of the so-called ‘Sixties moment’ with a shift towards ultraviolence is an important one, as it reveals how ultraviolence is also contextualized within a shift to a different and more “dangerous” kind of society. Moreover, the shift towards spectacle and intensity as a stylistic device, together with the periodization of this movement in the 1960s, means that it is frequently positioned as part of a shift towards postmodern culture (Sharrett, 1999, p.10, Slocum, 2001, p.20-1).

Slocum (2004, pp.22-3) argues this moral standard of the “Sixties trope” in shaping our conception of violence in cinema has become entrenched within the readings of violent texts. This is the case for effects theory oriented approaches of the 1960s and 1970s where violence in cinema is seen to encourage behavioural effects, and for the moralistic undertones to modernist approaches that situate these works as postmodern texts which produce “historically ‘depthless’ movies whose simulation of, and nostalgia for, the past are based in existing representations rather than any attempt to re-create a ‘real’ past” (p.25). Slocum argues that underlying such assumptions is the notion that ritualized representations of

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23 See Jameson’s “Periodizing the Sixties” (2008, pp.483-515), which is where both Townsley and Slocum draw the notion of the 1960s constituting a trope from. Jameson examines how a broad range of movements, such as postcolonialism, civil rights, the counterculture (and so on) get grouped together under the umbrella of a kind of “unified field theory” during this time (p.511). In retrospect, he argues that these changes can all be totalized as effects of what Mandel refers to as the Third Technological Revolution in capitalism. The ‘Sixties’ becomes the cultural narrative framework for reading through these changes.
violence play an important role in restoring equilibrium to both individual and community, a restoration that is lost in contemporary texts. In this process, “even the most graphic instance of film violence potentially becomes emptied of meaning or seeming originality” (p.27). Ultraviolence in cinema is then seen as oriented towards the pleasure of the consumer, reflecting a broader shift towards consumption in contemporary society and functioning as a flash point for the expression of anxieties around our future social constructions. In this sense, as Slocum argues, much of the contemporary debate on the role of ultraviolence in our culture has revolved around its reception, mirroring the policy concerns of effects theorists and governments, and prioritizing within institutions those views that echo this dominant position on violence (Slocum, 2004, p.27). While some of the considerations of postmodern violence attempt to challenge our underlying models of reception, they have overwhelmingly focused on the individual’s reception and psychological impulses. This presents violence in cinema as linked to the reception of fragmented individuals, rather than an exploration of its social role. As Thomas Schatz notes, “violence itself has become a venerable social problem that defies resolution, a tangle of binary oppositions and cultural contradictions that crucially informs our national character and our sense of community” (Schatz, 2004, p.1).

Slocum’s comments on how violence in film is frequently emptied of meaning by critics echo Walter Benjamin’s (1986, pp.278-9) distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ violence developed in the first chapter. ‘Good’ violence is that which is defined by the state as enforcing social norms. ‘Bad’ violence is that which exists outside it. Violence then, is often viewed as something that should be restricted and only discussed when teaching a lesson about social norms; violence should not be consumed for its mere spectacle. As Alfred Hitchcock argued in 1938, the reception of horror is divided into that which is educative, and that which is seen to be endangering the viewer through exposure. Hitchcock states:

*The term [horror], meaning originally ‘extreme aversion’, has been loosely applied to films which, to supply the desired emotional jolt, exploit sadism, perversion, bestiality, and deformity. This is utterly wrong, being vicious and dangerous. It is permissible for a film to be horrific, but not horrible; and between the two there is a dividing line which is apparent to all thinking people (as cited in Maddrey, 2004, p.21).*
While Hitchcock here is referring to Grand Guignol horror, his comments are equally applicable to the splatter film, which in its shift to the cinematic display of violence can be seen as operating outside of social norms to engage the viewer in the pursuit of dangerous pleasure.

Figure 2. Still from the Grand Guignol theatre, Paris, 1947 (Image credit: LIFE).

III. The Cartesian dilemma: Body versus mind in the splatter film

Hitchcock’s point on the opposition between “thinking” cinema and films that engage in violent spectacle exemplifies the way that ultraviolence has been perceived by critics. It is this dualism of body versus mind that underlies much of the criticism of the splatter film. Christopher Sharrett exemplifies this perspective when he concludes in his examination of the Saw series, “an attempt to evaluate these films seriously provokes doubt about such a project’s worth. Excruciating forms of torture and free-form bloodletting seem to be their

24 The term ‘Grand Guignol’ is named after the theatre of the same name open in Paris from 1897-1962, which featured on its billing a series of violent plays where the spectacle of the violence became the main attraction, focusing on themes of torture, mutilation, and surgery.
chief draw, not the inane moralizing that tries to provide intellectual cover” (2009, p.32). Sharrett concludes that the post-9/11 cycle’s emphasis on the visual, and the reiteration of what he sees as “conservative” themes, such as the patriarchal vigilante, positions this cycle of films as “part of a tendency that jettisons the horror film’s most progressive aspects, a project visible over the last thirty years” (2009, p.32). For Sharrett, the body is spectacle and therefore conservative: progressiveness is only intellectual – and this is missing from the post 9/11 splatter film. Under this dualism, texts that engage the body are seen as of lower cultural value than texts that engage the mind. However, critics approaching the splatter horror have made significant attempts to explicate the processes surrounding the reception of graphic violence, focusing in particular on how audiences’ identification with the protagonists complicates notions of gender. Although psychoanalytic approaches offer a number of significant observations on the processes at work within the splatter film, they still tend to be limited in their discussion of the social to notions of gender.

Linda Williams (1991, pp.2-3) argues that part of the ‘low culture’ status for horror derives from its positioning as a ‘body genre’. Williams argues that the experience of viewing film is one that is not only intellectual; rather, there are certain genres of films where reception is structured around the elicitation of an emotional response. Body genres are films that are experienced viscerally, such as the melodrama, the horror film and pornography (Williams, 1991, p.3). Williams (1991, p.3) associates this with films that rupture linear narration to engage in sequences of spectacle. The experience of viewing body genres is one that is punctuated for Williams (1991, p.4-7) by the generation of emotional excess, a bodily experience that cannot be adequately explained through theories that emphasize the role of the conscious mind in interpreting themes. This excess works to minimize the distance between the viewer and the text, as the text is experienced as a wave of sensations. It is this lack of critical distance between the viewer and the text that, she argues, is the most probable reason why they are considered as low culture, together with the fact that body genre texts frequently revolve around voyeurism of the female body (Williams, 1991, pp.6-7). For Williams, this excess is best interpreted through psychoanalysis, as it offers a framework through which excess rendered as perversion can be interpreted. Williams focuses on the role of gender in shaping our experience of this excess. In particular, she argues it is femininity that constitutes ‘excess’ in these films (Williams, 2001).
Williams’ conception of ‘body genres’ is particularly relevant to considerations of the splatter film, as audience responses often include heightened bodily tension (tense muscles, clutching armrests, etc.) during the play between victim and killer. This tension anticipates the carnage to come, and generates a compulsion to both look at the screen and look away during “gross” moments. As Gabrielle Murray highlights in her article “Hostel II: representations of the body in torture-porn” (Murray, 2008), part of the experience of watching horror is gaining pleasure from this experience of the violation of the on-screen body. In watching violent horror, Murray argues that the viewer is forced to confront their relationship with their own mortality. For Murray (2008), violent cinema is less about the “lingering Cartesianism’ of the disconnected voyeur” than it is about vision being connected to our bodily processes. This collapses the viewer into a visceral experience that is less about social commentary than it is a happening in the body: “the body is a sensory organ, the skin – a surface, a mediating boundary – a sensual field” as the body responds to a series of shocks on screen (Murray, 2008). For Murray, then, the experience is less about the identification with others in the text, and more about the individual, as reception is collapsed into a visceral reaction in the body. In contrast to Williams, Murray argues that the splatter film’s graphic focus on the dissolution of the flesh makes its reception less about gender, and more about the individual experience of feeling the body and its limits.

Williams’ emphasis on gender reflects the influence of Carol Clover’s (1992) influential scholarship on the slasher film, and is typical of the kind of readings psychoanalysis encourages of the horror film. The slasher film is a subgenre of the horror where a psychologically deranged killer (usually male) stalks and kills a group of friends (typically girls) (p.9). Clover draws from apparatus theory to examine the ways in which cinema encourages us to identify and align ourselves with particular characters. Her work constitutes an extension and complication of Laura Mulvey’s 1975 notion of the “male gaze” (Clover 1992, pp.206-215). Clover argues that the gaze of the slasher horror is a masculine one, drawing from audience demographics that situate the predominant viewer as young men (p.15), and the way that the killer is focused on stalking a particular female. She draws attention to the role of what she calls the ‘Final Girl’, who is the last standing character after all her friends have died (as in the babysitter Laurie in Halloween [John Carpenter, 1978])
Chapter One: Postmodern Ultraviolence in the Splatter Film

(pp.35-42). Clover is particularly interested in the way that the camera positions our gaze as mirroring that of the killer – a device that she refers to as the ‘I-camera’ (p.45). The killer’s weapons of choice are penetrative knives, which mirror the phallic nature of this masculine gaze (pp.31-2). While the audience is encouraged to identify with the sadomasochistic gaze of the killer, they also sympathize with the lead protagonist, who in this case is the same Final Girl who is being fetishized by the gaze. For Clover (pp.216-7), this causes cross-gender identification, as the male gaze is projected onto the protagonist. Clover (p.40) highlights how this is mirrored in the way the Final Girl is often given a masculine name. The slasher film is also notable for its trope of punishment for sexual transgression – characters who have sex outside of marriage are dispensed with almost immediately (p.33). While the trope of the Final Girl has been challenged (for example, David Huxley highlights how when a broader survey is taken, men are frequently the final characters as much as women), Clover’s work has been extremely influential in shaping critical appraisals of the reception of violent horror (Huxley, 2008).

However, this influence in shaping accounts of the gender is somewhat problematic when applied to the splatter film. Although the splatter film is frequently hybridized with the slasher film, it tends to extrapolate the threat it introduces off from one individual to a monstrous social (this is discussed further in Chapters Three and Four). This social emphasis can be seen, for example, in the zombie and hillbilly veins of the splatter film. The confusion between splatter and slasher films is rife across academic works. For example, in the works of critics such as Carol Clover (1992) and Judith Halberstam (1995, pp.138-40), the term “splatter” is often used interchangeably with the “slasher film”. Clover defines the splatter film as follows: “the slasher (or splatter or shocker or stalker) film is the immensely generative story of a psychokiller who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is subdued or killed by the one girl who survives” (1992, p.9). This psychokiller can be human (Peeping Tom [Michael Powell, 1960]; The Texas Chain Saw Massacre [Tobe Hooper, 1974]; Halloween [John Carpenter, 1978]) or supernatural (Friday the 13th [Sean S. Cunningham, 1980]; Nightmare on Elm Street [Wes Craven, 1984]). While drawing boundaries around the conventions of a genre is always problematic – particularly in the case of films such as The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, which can be considered as a hybrid of the slasher and the splatter film – this distinction is an important one and will become more evident in the next chapter, where the industrial imperatives of violent special
effects are discussed. However, Clover’s work is of interest in an examination of the splatter film for two reasons: first, the splatter film similarly works to complicate the gaze between torturer and tortured; and second, the splatter film also occasionally repeats the trope of the Final Girl.

If we take the issue of the gaze first before dealing with the Final Girl, we can see that this is complicated within the structure of the splatter film. As David Edelstein (2006) notes in his article on torture porn, the camera works to orient the viewer as both torturer and the tortured through subjective alignment. This tendency is demonstrated well by Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005), one of the most popular films in the post-9/11 wave of splatter films. Hostel follows the story of a group of fraternity boys who have gone on a drug and alcohol fuelled holiday across Europe in search of sexual experiences. Lured to Bratislava, Slovakia by the prospect of beautiful women who are open to short-lived sexual liaisons, the group eventually discover that they are the victims of a group who sells foreigners to other wealthy foreigners who are seeking the thrill of torturing and murdering other human beings, without legal consequences, in an abandoned factory. Much of Hostel is concerned with detailing the torture and violation of the body that occurs in this space. In the opening sequence, the credits roll over a series of shots that position the viewer as oscillating between the torturer and other obtuse positions. The non-diegetic sounds of a man whistling an upbeat tune and grunting as he works are layered over shots of soap splashing against the wall in a shower, water dripping on the ground, bloodied scissors dangling in close up, and blood being washed down a sink. Finally, the sequence shows an empty torture chair, prompting an associative link for the audience that the images they might have associated with an abattoir are from a torture chamber. Unlike the previous series of shots, which are taken from strange angles and appear ‘subjectless’, the final shot is a point of view shot from the torturer’s perspective as the door shuts. This gaze is complicated later on in the film, when the camera switches to the perspective of one of the protagonists as he awakens in a torture chamber. In these shots, the viewer is subjectively aligned with “Josh”, one of the victims. An iris shot, from his perspective as he comes into consciousness, shows the room in which he wakes up, oscillating between whip pan shots and close ups on torture objects to simulate his rush of adrenalin. The camera then shifts towards a more objective position as Josh is stabbed by a German doctor all over the legs and chest with a scalpel. In contrast to the way that Clover (1992) argues that the gaze is gendered in the slasher film, the splatter film complicates
notions of gender by the way it tortures both genders equally and appears to be primarily focused on the exploration of the body (of whatever gender) in various states of destruction. Unlike the slasher’s predominantly teen casts, the splatter film tends to incorporate in its casting a wide range of ages and social roles, a decision that reflects the way that these films often attempt to represent the complete collapse of the social.

Second, the splatter film frequently includes the trope of the Final Girl. As David Roche argues in Making and Remaking Horror in the 1970s and 2000s: Why They Don’t Do It Like They Used To (2014, p.115) the films from the post-9/11 period represent an evolution of the Final Girl due to the way that the woman in these films respond to contemporary trends. For Roche, the Final Girl has progressed to more of a ‘Final Woman’, who combines “moral righteousness with the physicality of James Cameron’s heroines, along with a post-feminism à la Destiny’s Child, that promotes “independent women” and “survivors”” (p.115). For example, Resident Evil (Paul Anderson, 2002), a film which is based on a video game of the same name, Alice (Milla Jovovich) takes on the role of an action hero. Awakening in an empty house with no memory of who or where she is, Alice is quickly joined by a group of commandos who work for the Umbrella Corporation, who reveal that the house sits on top of the Umbrella Corporation’s underground facility (‘The Hive’) and that they are there to investigate why the Red Queen, a computer that expresses itself through a hologram of a young girl, has sealed the facility. Alice and the commandos (including a similarly butch Michele Rodriguez as the protagonist Rain Ocampo) descend into the Hive, only to discover that the lockdown has been caused by a release of the T-virus, which turns all of the trapped workers into zombies that they must fight in order to escape. The film hybridizes splatter film and gaming conventions (such as first-person shooter shots) to present Alice as a largely silent but extremely strong woman, whose ability to fight ensures that she is the only one of the original protagonists alive at the end of the film. Although at the beginning of the film Alice is positioned as one of the employees of the Umbrella Corporation, as the film progresses, Alice’s moral stance is enforced through the revelation that she was feeding information about the Corporation to environmental activists. This act positions her in line with the film’s overwhelmingly anti-corporate message, where societal collapse is prompted by the secretive actions of the Umbrella Corporation in conducting illegal genetic engineering experiments. This trope of the woman who is both strong under pressure and exhibits moralistic qualities is repeated by a number of characters across a number of films – to name
just a few examples: Jessie (Eliza Dushku) in *Wrong Turn* (Rob Schmidt, 2003), The Bride (Uma Thurman) in *Kill Bill: Volume I* and *Kill Bill: Volume II* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003, 2004), Ana (Sarah Polley) in *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2005) and Clear Rivers (Ali Larter) in *Final Destination* (James Wong, 2000) and *Final Destination 2* (David Ellis, 2003).

As Roche (2014, p.115) highlights, the Final Woman is also marked by her ability to take on the qualities of the Other in order to fight back, a feature which Clover highlights in earlier slasher films. However, this voyeuristic gaze of control is complicated by the way that these Final Women frequently symbolically castrate their aggressors. In order to demonstrate this, Roche provides two examples: Erin in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003) and Beth (Lauren German) in *Hostel: Part II* (Eli Roth, 2007). Roche highlights how the figure of Erin is very different from Sally (Marilyn Burns), in the original 1974 version. While Sally is subjected to violence and only manages to survive by escaping, Erin in the 2003 version is active and fights back by taking on the qualities of the Other. After watching many of her friends die, Erin attempts to hide in the freezer of a slaughterhouse to escape Leatherface, a member of the homicidal Hewitt family with seemingly superhuman strength and unnaturally tall size who slays his victims with the eponymous chainsaw. Realizing that it is only a matter of time before Leatherface finds her in the building, Erin hides in a locker with a meat cleaver and makes noise to attract her pursuer to where she is hiding. When Leatherface opens the locker on the other side of the corridor, Erin pounces, severing his chainsaw wielding arm off with the meat cleaver. For Roche, the moment that Erin writhes around in Leatherface’s blood, gripped with the ecstasy of managing to hurt Leatherface marks a moment of symbolic castration, and also her transition into the Final Woman that allows her the strength to kill Sheriff Hoyt (another member of the family) later on in the film. The Final Woman engaged in symbolic castration can also be seen in *Hostel: Part II*, when Beth manages to maim Stuart, the man who is torturing her and lock him into the torture chair. However, after freeing herself she is still locked in the torture room, which is in a vast factory controlled by the Elite Hunting Club, a mysterious group of capitalists who pay to torture for thrills. At this point, a suited manager surrounded by a group of thugs enters the room. Beth, who has already been established earlier as a wealthy character, outbids her torturer in money to gain her freedom. However, the manager informs her that this is only part of the contract and that in order to be able to leave she must kill someone. Hesitating,
Stuart yells at her, “They're still gonna kill you, You fucking, stupid cunt!” Beth responds in shock, saying, “What did you just call me?” Stuart screams, “I called you a stupid fucking cunt!” Beth responds by using the scissors that she has been using as a weapon to castrate Stuart in a graphic, full frontal shot that shows both the penis being severed and Stuart writhing in pain. Throwing Stuart’s penis to the dogs on the way out, Beth coolly states, “you can let him bleed to death”. In contrast to the relatively comfortable cross-gender identification that Clover identifies then, the post-9/11 splatter film complicates the power dynamics of this gaze.

Roche argues that the emphasis on the Final Woman’s body in these films (as in Erin’s wet white singlet in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or Alice’s short red dress in *Resident Evil*), together with their reassertion of “right” and “wrong” femininities (the Final Woman outlasts other more sexually active or consumer-oriented women) works to resituate these characters within phallogocentric paradigms. However, as Isobel Cristina Pinedo (1997) recounts in her examination of the earlier slasher wave, such accounts work to minimize the pleasure that these films provide for women in the way that they always resituate the power of the gaze as residing in men. As Pinedo highlights, there is pleasure to be found in violent horror for women as well. Part of this pleasure, as the journalist Alex Williams (2006) notes, is undoubtedly due to violent horror shifting its mode of address to cater for its popularity among young women. Williams interviews horror director John Carpenter (who made one of the most well-known slasher films, *Halloween* in 1978). While Carpenter states that the primary market for horror during this time was young men, Williams traces how one of the primary markets is now considered to be young women under 25. Audience surveys from distributors show that 32 percent of the ticket buyers for *Saw II* were women under 25 years of age (compared with 28 percent of men the same age) (Williams 2006). These figures are corroborated with the ticket receipts from the French splatter film *Haute Tension/ High Tension* (2003), where 28 percent of the audience were women under 25 (compared with 24 percent of men the same age), and *Hostel*, where 32 percent of the audience were women under 25 (as opposed to 36 percent men of the same age) (Williams 2006). This movement towards considering female audiences might be seen in the way that some splatter films have incorporated women-centered themes into their plots – such as the way Erin in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and Brenda (Emilie de Ravin) in *The Hills Have Eyes* are equally preoccupied with defeating their aggressors and rescuing babies.
Psychoanalysis, while focusing on gender dynamics, provides interesting starting points for conceptualizing how these films might be working through the social, even when seen as postmodern texts primarily concerned with sensation and spectacle. As Matt Hills (2005, p.45) notes, Clover’s (1992) emphasis on the gendered body in reading the splatter film is influenced by Sigmund Freud’s notion of the ‘uncanny’, an approach that has been influential with other critics such as Robin Wood (1986) and Barbara Creed (1993), and has the ability to be read through both individual psychodynamics and a broader lens of the social. The concept of the uncanny first appears in Freud’s 1919 publication of the same name and comes from the German *unheimlich*, stemming from the word *heimlich*, which means “familiar” or “home”. The word *unheimlich* therefore refers to that which is unfamiliar or strange. For Freud, the uncanny “belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror” (1997, p.339). Freud argues that this experience of the uncanny is associated with the lustful pleasure associated with the intrauterine experience (p.339). Interpretations engaging the uncanny are primarily interested in the way that horror cinema might be seen as providing cathartic release or ways of working through repression. As Hills (2005, p.48) highlights, this reading of Freud’s uncanny as interpersonal and related to our repressed experience of gender is only one possible reading. Aside from the inauterine experience, *unheimlich* is also experienced through the social where “primitive beliefs seem to be confirmed” (p.48).

Posing this experience of the body as representative of the social uncanny, argues Hills, is best exemplified in the work of Robin Wood in his 1986 work *Hollywood: from Vietnam to Reagan*. Wood sees horror as a return of the repressed, as a way of negotiating the patriarchal order. As Hills highlights, while “Wood’s argument might be broadly Freudian, it also introduces the Marxist framework of ‘basic repression/surplus repression’ suggested by Herbert Marcuse” (2005, p.49). Basic repression is that which is universal and which we all share, it is that repression of our instinctual drives as humans which is necessary for survival, and surplus repression is that which is cultural, and necessary for social domination/organisation. Wood draws from Marcuse’s (1955) argument that order is maintained through a process of ‘Othering’, which represses elements that it sees as dangerous (an argument of Marcuse’s that is later contested in *A History of Sexuality* ([1977] 2008) where Foucault argues that despite this attempt at repression, society is rife with outlets
for that which exists outside of the norm). For Wood, repressed elements in our society are sexual energy; in general, bisexuality, female sexuality, and the sexuality of children. Wood argues that horror film works to construct a binary opposition of ‘Self’ versus the ‘violent Other’, in a complex “struggle for recognition of all that our society oppresses or represses” (1986, p.64). Horror film is thus engaged in a process of reflecting patriarchal culture in our wider society, and he reads horror against the backdrop of the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, where changes in gender politics (such as the Second Wave of Feminism) meant that the horror film functioned as an avatar for working through these shifts in power. Although Wood (2009) believes that this sense of radicalism has been lost in horror cinema, the notion that the horror film functions to work through repressed elements in our society is relevant to the post-9/11 splatter film, due to the way that it evokes images of the terrorist Other and complicates our relationship to them by positioning the viewer as both the torturer and the tortured. While Wood’s interventions (and psychoanalysis more generally) might be seen as useful, they are still limited to mostly gender-based discussions of the splatter film.

IV. Conclusion

As we have seen, the splatter film incorporates imagery of the Global War on Terror in a way that might be viewed as problematic. Like Giroux’s (1994) critique of politics under postmodern consumer culture, the splatter film incorporates images that have relevance to contemporary political events, but the way it pairs these images with violence as cinematic spectacle means that it works on one level to strip the images of their historical context. Images of the Global War on Terror are then recontextualized in these films in a way that might be seen as having more to do with being offered up for the viewer’s pleasure in consumption rather than advancing a critique of the politics of torture and imperialism during this era. In this sense, the splatter film might be seen as offering a pastiche of the politics of the Global War on Terror. Under this reading of postmodern culture, the splatter film might be seen as exemplary of the deanchored images that postmodernity gives rise to, where images of warfare are served up as yet another means of differentiating consumer products by providing ‘edginess’. The splatter film is postmodern in that it exhibits many of the textual characteristics that are associated with this period. Read through this lens, the postmodern
violence of the splatter might be perceived as conservative or as product of global Hollywood culture.

The second postmodern approach of ultraviolence considers the shift towards extreme violence in the splatter film as a response to a rising influence of youth culture on cinema. The positioning of ultraviolence as an aesthetic style works to flatten the political relevance of these texts. However, as Slocum (2004) notes, such a reading is not sufficient to explain the complex role that ultraviolence plays in shaping and challenging our concepts of morality, the body, and the relationship between the subject and state. To put it simply: at the same time as the violence in the post-9/11 splatter film is seen by some as enforcing the dominant order, it is also seen as threatening its collapse. As we have seen in the introduction, the threat of this collapse is one that is taken seriously by both theorists and social institutions, with the representations of torture in the post-9/11 splatter film prompting reaction from politicians, the military, human rights activists and citizens in an attempt to reinforce existing conceptions of “proper culture”. These contradictions signal that there may be more going on in the splatter film that needs further explication and analysis.

The third approach examined in this chapter of psychoanalysis is useful for illuminating how the individual desires that are engaged in the splatter film might be read as relating out to a broader social totality. In particular, psychoanalysis is useful for examining how the splatter film encourages subjective alignment through the notion of the ‘gaze’, working to position the viewer as both torturer and the tortured. However, many of these approaches centre primarily on readings of sexuality and gender. While these elements are contained within the splatter film, they offer little illumination on how the incorporation of political imagery might be read as relating back out to a social totality which engages other structures, such as the organization of labour, economic, political and military imperialism and the multinational structures of capitalism itself.

As Catherine Constable (2004) notes, postmodern theory is often seen as positioning the text as an empty and reductive form, there is room within the theory of postmodernists such as Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson for thinking through more “affirmative” postmodern
interpretations. Baudrillard’s (2002) notion of signs that jam other signs, such as the images of 9/11 and Abu Ghraib detailed in the introduction might be thought of as one way that that such a critique of capitalism could take place, even if this occurs primarily through other images that are themselves commodified examples of simulacra. In this sense, the images of the Global War on Terror that the splatter film takes up could be seen as consumerist in the way that they commodify images of terror, but also as resistive in the way that through the creation of difference they work to undermine official narratives of the wars that position the US as engaging in a ‘just war’ where the outcome is controlled. Similarly, Jameson (1991) argues that even though the subject is decentered in postmodernism, it still expresses something about the subject under late capitalism, and thus is still engaged in revealing truths about our society. Despite the emphasis in the splatter film on violence as an aesthetic mode, there is still the need to map these images back into its broader function within the social totality from which it emerges.
Chapter Two: Violence as Spectacle and Form in the Splatter Film

The splatter films that were released after 9/11 were not received in a vacuum. Rather, as Marc Bernard notes, their inclusion of graphic violence was conscious on the part of the producers in order to tap into a historical consumer base for these films (Bernard, 2010, p.95). The extremity of this violence means that the splatter film has frequently faced problems with censorship, and due to this barrier it has gone through four key distribution phases, linked to technological changes: the grindhouse (‘B’ movie) or drive-in theatre, the VCR, the DVD, and finally online streaming. Despite these limitations in circulation, the splatter film has experienced an underground popularity since the 1960s, and while its cross-over into mainstream cinemas in the post-9/11 period is unusual, arguably its reception in this period was particularly warm due to the oppositional viewing culture that its marginalized status created. As Jameson would argue, while this history does not wholly account for its particular materiality of its role as a cultural text in the post-9/11 period, its historical production and reception is significant in shaping its formal characteristics. Because the graphic representation of violence functions as a key reference point for the fan culture surrounding the splatter film, fan history is a logical place to begin an examination of the way that graphic violence functions in texts. This chapter extends on the notion that splatter film might be considered a ‘body genre’ (as its structure is geared towards generating emotions in the viewer), before examining how its traditional distribution works to position the viewer as both close to the text (in experiencing it through the body) and distant through their appraisal of this violence. Following Jeffrey Sconce’s notion of paracinema (2010, p.104), I argue that the reception of the splatter film is complicated as the pleasure of its viewing partially derives from its opposition to mainstream Hollywood cinema.

I. The splatter film as an industrial form
In terms of genre analysis, one of the most useful places to begin is to look at the industrial practices of how a film is produced and distributed, as film ultimately functions as a commodity for circulation on a capitalist market, as Steve Neale (2000, p.172) argues. Similarly, Rick Altman highlights the importance of how film genres are the product of an established body of signs familiar to the audience and the industry’s attempt to exploit and market these films in ways that refer to this corpus (a process that he refers to as ‘genrefication’) (1999, p.62). The emphasis of both Neale and Altman on the role of industry in constructing genre is of particular use to this examination due to the way that the industrial practices surrounding the splatter film structure much of its conventions. The emergence of the splatter film in the 1960s was made possible by technological innovation in special effects. While the term “splatter film” is often attributed to director George Romero – who, on the set of his 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead*, used it to describe the special effects process he undertook in constructing and blowing apart zombies in gruesome detail – the term has come to be associated retrospectively with a series of films in the 1960s which represented a special effects revolution in the portrayal of violence (Ochoa, 2011, p.57). The first splatter film is generally taken by fans to be Herschell Gordon Lewis’ 1963 *Blood Feast*, notable for being structured entirely around long sequences of graphic violence (Stine, 2001, p.13, Royer and Royer, 2005, p.13, Mathijs and Mendik, 2008, p.258, Paszylk, 2009, p.84). In *Blood Feast*, the loose plot of an Egyptian caterer called Fuad Ramses attempting to resurrect his dead wife by offering the sacrificial bodies of young girls functions as a pretense for graphic sequences of spectacular violations of the body. Narrative development is continually interrupted by sections where Fuad carves apart women in long takes featuring buckets of blood, and gathers body parts to return to the sacrificial ‘blood feast’ he is preparing in a large pot. In the first killing sequence in *Blood Feast*, we see Fuad hacking off a woman’s leg with a machete in vivid close up; in the second he slices off the top of a teenage girl’s head, also in graphic close up, and the camera shows him removing her brain; in a later sequence he grabs a young woman by the throat and pulls out her tongue. The camera focuses for a long take on the bloodied, disembodied tongue in Fuad’s fist in an exploration of the impact that violence has on the body. Throughout *Blood Feast*, Fuad’s kitchen is littered with hacked-up cadavers splattered in bright red blood, and close up shots linger on the decapitated head of another woman, with her brain material spilling across the table. As Crane notes of *Blood Feast*: in the splatter film, violence is “filmed with an unflinching eye that lingers with a connoisseur’s delight over all the sweet details of grilled, impaled, sliced, macerated, chopped, crushed, torn, diced, hammered, and minced flesh” (2004, p.162).
While *Blood Feast* was undoubtedly influenced by other films that were beginning to display violence in graphic detail, such as Georges Franju’s torture piece *Les Yeux Sans Visage/The Eyes Without a Face* (1959), Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) and Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (1960), Lewis’ film marked an escalation in on-screen violence – a lingering over the mutilated body – that was uncharacteristic of slightly earlier films. As Jonathan Crane argues in his chapter “Scraping Bottom”, *Blood Feast* marked an innovation in the representation of on-screen violence:

> Like a horror film counterpart to Larry Flynt, who took the pornographic camera from the surface of the body deep into the flesh, Lewis was the original filmmaker to sustain an unflinching attack on the body and the first to make the interior lacunae of the body his personal stomping ground (2004, p.162).

As John Cline and Robert Weiner (2010, pp.78-9) note, *Blood Feast* was produced in a period where the popularity of foreign cinema was beginning to challenge censorship, and Lewis took advantage of the associated loosening of restrictions. While the Production Code wouldn’t be overhauled by the Motion Pictures Association of America (MPAA) to a ratings based system for another five years, *Blood Feast*’s distribution was enabled via circulation among drive-in theatres, which were less regulated than cinema theatres in their censorship, and because it did not feature any nudity, it was not placed in jeopardy of The Production Code (Jones, 2002, p.262). Lewis quickly followed up his success with a string of films – *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964), *Color Me Blood Red* (1965), *A Taste of Blood* (1967), *The Gruesome Twosome* (1967), *The Wizard of Gore* (1970), and *The Gore Gore Girls* (1972). Again, screenings of these films were largely conducted in grindhouse and drive-in cinemas, along with sexploitation, Mexican-American wrestling films and Mondo films (these are films compiled of “shocking” and “exotic” images from around the world). As Keith M. Booker details in his *Historical Dictionary of American Cinema* (2011, p.158), grindhouse cinemas took their name from “bump and grind” burlesque theaters and were thus seen as “low culture” or “bad taste”, as opposed to the mainstream fare of Hollywood cinema. While this marginal status makes audience statistics difficult to track, there is some evidence to
suggest that these films were extremely popular despite (or, perhaps, because of) their heavy gore. As Anthony Szczesiul (2007, p.131) notes, the release of the second American splatter film, Lewis’ *Two Thousand Maniacs!* in 1964 proved so popular that he also capitalized on the drive-in success by releasing a novel of the film simultaneously.

In each film, Lewis attempted to raise the bar on the level of violence he had set, concentrating on elaborate sequences of flesh tearing apart from bone. For example, in *Two Thousand Maniacs!*, a film about Southerners who were slaughtered during the Civil War who return as ghosts to torture Northerners travelling through their town, sequences are crafted around the graphic depiction of death in spectacular sequences that are related to Southern traditions – an apple bobbing competition where a block squashes a protagonist in a lingering shot (the eyes visibly pop out of their sockets with the impact); a barrel filled with nails rolling down the hill; and being drawn and quartered by horses. As Lewis argues, the goal in his films was to shock as much as possible, “to outrage without being obscene” (Johnston, 2011). By his 1972 film, *The Gore Gore Girls*, this presentation of violence was reaching extremely explicit levels - in one scene, a woman’s nipples are cut off, with one breast squirting milk and the other chocolate milk (Stine, 2001, p.129).

It is worth noting that the shift towards special effects innovation in gore was not restricted during this period to the United States. Lewis’ work was preceded by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa’s landmark bloodbath sequence in his 1962 film *Sanjuro*, which probably set new cinematic records for the amount of blood on screen, and influenced later films such as Toshiya Fujita’s *Lady Snowblood* (1973) and Hideshi Hino’s ‘Guinea Pig’ films of the 1980s (the second of these *Guinea Pig: Flower of Flesh and Blood* (1985) depicted torture so accurately that when Charlie Sheen received a copy in 1991 he contacted the FBI to say that he had received a snuff film) (McRoy, 2004, pp.136-7). *Sanjuro* is relatively bloodless until the final sequence, when the ronin Sanjuro faces off with the Superintendent’s henchman Hanbei. Both remain still until Sanjuro moves swiftly with his sword, removing Hanbei’s arm and setting off an unrealistic geyser of blood that literally explodes out of his arm. During this same period, just four months after the 1963 release of Lewis’ *Blood Feast*, in Brazil José Mojica Marins, aka Zé do Caixão/Coffin Joe, released *À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma/ At Midnight I Will Take Your Soul*, a low budget horror that is also seen as providing one of the
foundational texts for the splatter film. Marins’ film featured two particularly graphic sequences in lingering close ups – in the first, a man’s fingers are severed by a broken bottle and, in the second, Coffin Joe kills another victim by pushing his eyeballs into his head until blood pours down his face. Marins went on to release two more sequels to À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma - Esta Noite Encarnarei no Teu Cadáver/ This Night I Will Possess Your Corpse (1967) and (40 years later) Encarnação do Demônio / Embodiment of Evil (2008). All three films starred Marins himself as a mortician, identifiable by his long nails, black robes and top hat; a character that he remained in continuously off set. Marins became a cult figure in Brazil, directing 36 films in total and hosting the horror television show Além, Muito Além do Além (Beyond, Much Beyond the Beyond) from 1967 to 1988, and reappearing in the mid-2000s on the horror television show O Estranho Mundo de José Mojica Marins/ The Strange World of José Mojica Marins. Due to the scope of my project, which is limited to films produced in the United States, these movements will not be covered here in depth, although the examples of Japanese and Brazilian cinema point to the international nature of splatter horror cinema since its beginnings.

Lewis’ work established a business model and a market for films where the attraction was not the psychological development of the characters nor the complex intricacies of plot, but the violence. To this day, the splatter film is marketed on its promise of violent special effects, a draw card that compensates for the frequent use of unknown actors in these films. The films in the post-9/11 splatter wave were promoted on their violence and adherence to genre over other factors, unless the film was attached to a big name producer, such as Wes Craven for The Hills Have Eyes (Alexandre Aja, 2006) or Quentin Tarantino as the Executive Producer of Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005). Thus the poster for Saw (James Wan, 2003) presents a man’s severed foot lying in a pool of blood; one poster for Hostel featured a man from the hips down holding a woman’s severed head in one hand and a knife in the other; and the poster for Martyrs (Pascal Laugier, 2008) represents a wide-eyed woman peeking from behind a bath clutching a scalpel, covered in torrents of blood. This promise of violence is repeated in the trailers for these films, which function as catalogues of brutalities. For example, in the trailer for the 2013 remake of The Evil Dead (Fede Alvarez), we see a compilation of the gory sequences that will occur in the film: a possessed lady crawls along the ground with her elbows at an unnatural angle; a woman slices through her own face chopping her lips off as she licks the knife seductively; a woman is burned alive while screaming; another cuts her
own arm off which is festering with pus and sores with a bread knife; a man chops an unidentified person up with a chainsaw; a plant grows of its own volition to entrap a woman and penetrate her vagina (she is wearing a skirt, but the vine wrapping around her leg implies this); and finally, another woman leans into a craft knife as she slits her tongue in two in close up. A heavy bass riff of four notes in the soundtrack precedes each violent act, distinguishing each item in the compilation. Significantly, like many other splatter films, the trailer gives away many of the climactic moments of the film, emphasizing the importance of extreme violence as a draw-card for splatter.

In the United States, Lewis’ pioneering work in special effects also paved the way for the establishment of a fan culture around the special effects artist as auteur. Although the notion of the auteur (the artist who leaves a distinctive stamp on a filmic text) is generally seen as applying to the director or cinematographer of a text, in the splatter film, the emphasis on violence and gore means that those responsible for special effects make an important contribution to the success of a film, and their significance is acknowledged by fans. The commercial success of Dawn of the Dead (1978), a film that returned an estimated $55 million for a low budget investment of $650,000, established both its director and its special effects artist as major players within the industry (Balun, 1989, p.5, Graham, 2009). Directed by George A. Romero, Dawn of the Dead brought in Tom Savini as a special effects artist. Savini, an ex-Marine and Vietnam War photographer, worked together with Romero to extend on Lewis’ techniques of representing violence, drawing inspiration from the images of dead soldiers Savini took during his deployment (Hayes, 2002). Savini and Romero were particularly interested in pushing the boundaries of on-screen violence in an attempt to represent this violence as graphically as possible. For example, in one scene, a zombie has the top of his head decapitated by a helicopter rotor – a feat that Savini and Romero achieved by searching for an actor with a low forehead and building up the forehead with latex so that the top part of his forehead could be decapitated in the most realistic manner possible (Savini, 2014). The film employed a heavy use of prosthetics, and as Caetlin Benson-Allot (2013, p.156) notes, Romero would often search for amputee actors so that he could then achieve the effect of blowing and ripping off their fake limbs. Shawn McIntosh and Marc Leverette (2008, p.40) argue that the commercial success of Dawn of the Dead contributed to the establishment of the fan magazine devoted to horror special effects called Fangoria in the following year and a growing fan culture that studied the effects as much as the films. Other
special effects *auteurs* who gained a cult following in these magazines include Rick Baker (*The Exorcist* [William Friedken, 1973]; *It's Alive* [Larry Cohen, 1974]; *An American Werewolf in London* [John Landis, 1981]) and Greg Nicotero (*Day of the Dead* [George A. Romero, 1985]; *Bride of Re-Animator* [Brian Yuzna, 1985]; *In the Mouth of Madness* [John Carpenter, 1994]; *From Dusk Till Dawn* [Robert Rodriguez, 1996]). The notion of the special effects artist as *auteur* is particularly important when considering the splatter film, as the drive towards the achievement of special effects that have been imagined but not yet realized, and the valorization of the artists who produce them, forms a vital part of the fan culture and reception around these films.

Figure 3. The shooting of a zombie in *Dawn of the Dead* (George Romero, 1978), demonstrating the emphasis on special effects in the splatter film.
II. Censorship, controversy and moral panics

While the splatter film seeks to capitalize on the audience demand for extreme violence, it is this violence that has also positioned it frequently at the centre of censorship debates. This controversy was encouraged by the filmmakers themselves, who, particularly in the splatter films made between the 1960s and 1980s, sought to emphasize the controversial aspects of their films by drawing attention to how these films collapsed the distinction between “real” and “reel” violence. In a sense, the claims of directors such as Eli Roth, Wes Craven, Joe Dante, Alexandre Aja and George A. Romero that their films reference the politics of the War on Terror could be seen as the repetition of earlier marketing techniques. Early splatter horrors in the 1970s and 1980s frequently attempted to claim verisimilitude to real events. This can be seen in *The Last House on the Left*’s (Wes Craven, 1972) tagline “to avoid fainting, keep remembering it’s only a movie”. It can also be seen in *Snuff* (Michael Findlay, Horacio Fredrikkson and Simon Nuchtern, 1976) and *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980), where the directors attempted to drum up publicity for their films by positioning their films as being based on real life murders.

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25 See the DVD commentary of *Hostel: Part II* (Eli Roth, 2007).
26 Wes Craven notes, “the war was in the news and in our thoughts. Four of my nieces and nephews kids are involved in this war, so it is very close to home for me … A lot of films have been about torture which is a huge thing not only in the news but the dawning realization of what really goes on to maintain power and safety in the world” (Netburn, 2007).
27 “*Homecoming* was the bluntest film I ever made. Nobody was saying anything [about the Iraq war], they were afraid or they were buying the spin”, Dante notes. “But there were a lot of us who were angry and frustrated, and this golden opportunity came along to make any story I wanted provided it was a horror movie and it was cheap. There’s nothing subtle about it, but it’s how I felt, and how I still feel. We’ve changed presidents but nothing’s changed” (Huddleston 2010).
28 Aja states, “In 2006, it’s hard not to be influenced by what's going on in Iraq, London, everywhere else. Religion, gun law, the clash of societies all make up part of the recipe. I think many of the themes of *The Hills Have Eyes* may have even more resonance today – especially the way it taps into the fear of aliens in our midst and sudden and terrible violence striking at the heart of normal, comfortable society. But it was important also to show that this society is capable of brutality and destruction itself. The situation is not so black and white. The distinction between good and evil is always more complicated than it appears at first glance” (Alexandre Aja on *The Hills Have Eyes* 2007).
29 See *Undead Again: The Making of Land of the Dead* (2005), the mini-documentary that accompanies the DVD release of *Land of the Dead* (George Romero, 2005).
Both *Snuff* and *Cannibal Holocaust* are excellent examples of this tendency, because the directors attempted to claim that people were actually killed in the making of their films as a marketing strategy. *Snuff* claimed to be an actual “snuff” film (in which people are killed in the production), with the tagline “a film that could only be made in South America, where life is CHEAP!” (Stine, 2001, pp.221-3) *Snuff* incorporated a 1971 film called *Slaughter* made in Argentina by Michael and Roberta Findlay into a rehash made for the American market by producer Allan Shackleton. Acquiring the rights to the original *Slaughter* and, sensing that the film would sell better if it were repackaged, Shackleton filmed another ending where an actress is murdered by the film crew, implying that the events that occurred before were real and not constructed. Shackleton sent out press releases stating that he had discovered a snuff film. When this didn’t work, he sent then out press releases from an invented group (without realizing that another group had this name in real life) called Citizens for Decency expressing moral outrage at the film he had made (Stine, 1999). The story took hold, and *Snuff* was picketed by actual protestors, as well as receiving bomb threats. Shackleton’s publicity campaign was so successful that it outsold the mainstream commercial success *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* during its New York screenings (Donovan, 2004, p.29). Hearing the rumours of a ‘snuff’ film, the New York Police Department investigated but was unable to find any evidence (Stine, 1999). As a result, the rise of many urban legends about films where people are killed on camera is attributed to *Snuff*; and this filmic trope would be later explored in films like *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986) and *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005) (Pinedo, 1997, p.45).

Similarly, Ruggero Deodato utilized speculation over real murders in *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) to publicize his film, a move that effectively ended his career as a director for three years following its release. *Cannibal Holocaust* is an Italian production set in the Amazon and featuring members of the Yanomamo tribe shot in cinémathéque style. The film opens and closes with disclaimers stating its authenticity: the opening credits tell us that “for the sake of authenticity, some sequences have been retained in their entirety”, and it closes on a statement that a projectionist from the BFC has been fined $10,000 and sent to jail for two months for stealing the footage in the film. The remote location for the shooting of the film allowed for Deodato to capitalize on rumours it was a snuff film, and actors in the film signed contracts stipulating that they would disappear from public appearances for a year so that it would appear that they had died and propel the marketing for the film (DeVos, 2010, p.84).
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Deodato’s film was immensely popular in Italy for the twelve days that it opened at the box office (making an estimated US$2 million), before Deodato was arrested after the film premiered in Italy for murdering his actors, facing life imprisonment (Tweedle, 2010). The special effects in Deodato’s film were so realistic that he only escaped conviction by revealing the techniques behind how the film was made, and bringing his lead actors into court to prove that they were still alive. One of the film’s iconic images is of a Yanomami woman impaled by a stick through the groin and the throat, a feat which Deodato achieved by building a special bicycle seat for her to sit on and a lighter piece of dowel to sit in her mouth, before slathering her naked body with fake blood. Deodato was prosecuted under lesser charges of animal cruelty for the sequences where the Yanomami killed tortoises and ate monkey brains on camera (DeVos, 2010, p.84). While the film still remains banned in many countries (including New Zealand), it was released in Japan, and became the second highest grossing film in Japan in 1983 behind E.T. (Conterio, 2011). The film still remains one of the most controversial films of all time (Tweedle, 2010). Part of the realism of Deodato’s film came from its similarities to Napoleon Chagnon and Tim Asch’s ethnographic film The Ax Fight (1975), where the anthropologists gave the Yanomami machetes and then filmed them fighting over them. Deodato’s influence is paid homage in Eli Roth’s Hostel II, where Deodato appears in a cameo sequence slicing off the flesh of a quivering victim before dining on it at a candlelit dinner table as opera music plays in the background.

The influence of this marketing technique of the conflation between ‘real’ and ‘reel’ can still be seen within the filmic form of the post-9/11 splatter, in which films frequently remediate news reports or situate their stories within ‘real’ events in order to provide a sense of realism for the unfolding violence. For example, in the opening sequence of Dawn of the Dead, pixelated shots of foreign correspondents reporting from around the world that break up in a simulation of transmission interference are intercut with images of anchors covering the event in news studios. In the opening sequence of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003) the original opening of the 1974 film is drawn on heavily. The original opening began with an intertitle claiming the film’s authenticity: “the film which you are about to see is about a tragedy that befell a group of five youths, in particular Sally Hardesty and her invalid brother, Franklin… The events of that day were to lead to one of the most bizarre crimes in the annals

30 Deodato claims that Cannibal Holocaust made US$21 million (Conterio 2011).
of American history, The Texas Chain Saw Massacre. August 18, 1973”. The film then cuts to a series of close-ups of decaying corpses and decapitated body parts, each shown for a few seconds before fading to black and accompanied by the noise of an old camera flash, the effect of which is to place the audience in the position of the police photographer. While the remake sticks to these conventions, the intertitle is changed to a voice over narration, and authenticity is established through documentary conventions, such as ideational montages of photographs, voice-over narration and archival footage. The narrator states that over 13,000 pieces of evidence have sat in the archives for thirty years in the Cold Cases Division of the Travis County Police Department, a voice over that is accompanied by stills of the evidence and shots of tweezers holding up teeth, pieces of skin and an eyelid. The film then attempts to confirm this authenticity when the narrator states “none of this evidence was more compelling than the classified footage of the crime scene walk through”, at which point the film shifts format to footage reminiscent of Super 8 footage that situates the viewer in the position of the police filmographer. As Stine (1999) notes, the original’s claim to authenticity has contributed to a pervasive urban legend where there are still rumours surrounding whether The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (1974) is a ‘real’ event. The drive towards realism, then, might be seen as functioning as both a marketing and narrative technique to establish the milieu through which the film takes place.

The marketing campaigns of directors and producers like Shackleton and Deodato were not without their drawbacks, particularly when distribution changed to channels easier to access and moral panics arose in response. As Booker (2011, p.159) notes, the screening of B-grade films at grindhouse and drive-in theatres dropped off rapidly with the rise of the VCR (video cassette recorder) format in the 1980s, a move that generated new concerns about the ability of the splatter film to be shared under the radar of authorities. Films were increasingly released straight to video, a format that allowed for wider distribution of the splatter film. Caitlen Benson-Allot argues in her work Killer Tapes to Shatter Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File-Sharing (2013, p.16) that this technology of VHS (Video Home System) enabled the widespread and globalized circulation of the horror film, citing how by the early 1980s the demand for video content outstripped the amount of content being produced, contributing to a set of conditions where independent film with ribald themes could be circulated on international markets. The violence in the splatter film became a key point for the marketing of these films, and the ability to produce films straight to video without
having to account for the overheads of theatrical release and concerns surrounding theatrical distribution meant that the splatter film flourished during this time. The result was an expansion in the horror market, and 93 horror films were made in the US from 1980 until 1989, with horror and science fiction films constituting 40% of domestic rentals (Prince, 2000b, p.351). However, the rise in production and circulation of these films also prompted concerns by censors over their violent content and availability.

In the UK, this shift in format gave rise to a moral panic, prompting a debate that has had significant impact on the reception of these films. During the shift to the video format in the early 1980s, films that were on video were not regulated in the UK in the same way as cinema releases. As a result, splatter and erotic films were freely available in video stores. The lack of regulation of videos came to the attention of Mary Whitehouse, a member of the National Viewers’ and Listeners’ Association and a conservative Christian. Coining the term “video nasty”, Whitehouse argued that the distribution of these films in video stores was dangerous and that the tapes could easily fall into the hands of children, and should therefore be banned. By May of 1982, the issue began to get media traction (Petley, 2011, p.24). Front page coverage in newspapers such as The Daily Mail, The Mirror and The Daily Express sensationalized the content of these films, which attempted to link their viewing to violent crime and also over-exaggerated the content of these films (Petley, 2012). For example, the front page of The Daily Mail on July 1, 1983, proclaims “Ban Video Sadism Now”, and The Daily Express on November 24, 1983 claims on its front page headline “Four Children in Ten Watch Video Nasties: Six year olds are hooked on sex and horror films”. The latter article was based on a figure from the report Video Violence and Children by the sociologist Clifford Hill, who interviewed more than 6,000 children, teachers and parents (Evans, 1983). Hill claimed that video nasties were the “number one” item at children’s parties. As Martin Barker (2012) notes, there were considerable problems with the statistics which – aside from seeming improbable – included films under the category of “video nasty” such as American Graffiti (George Lucas, 1973). Furthermore, Petley (2008) observes that the high level of response from children to the films in the questionnaire might have stemmed from the extreme level of media attention surrounding titles that were considered as “video nasties” at
the time — that is, children were used to hearing them discussed. In 1982, the Government responded to pressure by conducting regular raids on video stores, arresting video store owners who stocked films that fell under the “video nasty” banner and prosecuting distributors under *The Obscene Publications Act 1959*, which ruled that publications had to protect the viewer from moral depravity. In 1984, the *Video Recordings Act* was passed with minimal opposition. This made it illegal for any film to be distributed that had not received a rating from the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC). The legislation was applied retrospectively, meaning any film that had been previously released was also subject to its ruling. Fines of up to £20,000 pounds were instituted for video stores that carried video nasties (Gosling, 1984). While the definition of moral depravity in this Act was vague, the Government swung into action, establishing a running list of 74 known films that fell foul of the Act (Lázaro-Reboll, 2012, p.145). A significant proportion of the 39 films that were taken to prosecution belonged to the splatter subgenre, with *Snuff* and *Cannibal Holocaust* both featuring on this list (Lázaro-Reboll, 2012, p.145). As Petley (2011, p.25) notes, while the “video nasty” moral panic was limited to the UK, it also becomes an important feature in defining the reception of these films, and during this period, the term became synonymous with the horror film.

Petley (2011) argues that the discourses in the 1980s in the UK on the splatter film and the extraordinary use of police powers to prosecute video store owners positions the response to these films in line with Stanley Cohen’s (1972) definition of the “moral panic”. Examining the subcultures of Mods and Rockers in Britain in the 1960s, Cohen argues that the media representation of these groups sought to situate them as sites of social deviancy that were then exaggerated in terms of their threat to the national level. The resolution of this threat was the reimposition of what he calls the “control society”, or the reassertion of behavioural norms which support the dominant culture (Cohen, 1972, pp.144-8). Applying Cohen’s definition to the video nasty, Petley (2011, pp.8-10) argues that the video nasty was situated in popular culture as the cause of all manner of moral ills, from bestiality to crime. Petley (pp.10-11) notes how the response to these films was shaped within the political discourses of the rise of Thatcherism, where social issues such as crime, poverty and unemployment were

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31 More recently, Joseph Robinson-Cimpian (2014) has conducted research in the tendency of children and adolescents to provide “mischievous” responses to surveys. He argues that questionnaires on children problematic due to the percentage of false answers — a finding that could easily apply to the moral panic around video nasties.
linked by the Conservative Party to the decline in moral substance of the individual. In this sense, Petley highlights that the way that these films function as leverage for politicians has little relevance to the content of the films themselves, providing a push-pull voting issue that allows politicians to rally support for their party while side-stepping wider social issues. Petley (2012) highlights that much of the discourse on these films in British culture situated the consumption of these texts as occurring within the working classes, thus positioning it as a justification for their education and control, at the same time as diverting attention from addressing the issues that contribute to their marginalized status in the first place.

Petley’s argument that the moral panic surrounding video nasties functions as a form of class control might be seen as conforming to the elite-engineered model of moral panics that Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda (1994) identify in their survey of critical literature on moral panics. Goode and Ben-Yehuda argue that theorizations of moral panics are divided into three main approaches, the elite-engineered model (the crisis is manufactured by the elite) (pp.164-5), the grass roots model (the crisis bubbles up from broader social consensus) (pp.161-4) and the interest group model (the crisis is seen as a threat by interest groups in the middle classes) (pp.165-6). Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s meta-analysis of moral panics draws attention to the way that moral panics are rarely the result of the elites alone; in order to gather momentum they must gain the support of both the general public (grass roots) and interest groups (the middle classes). While Petley potentially overplays the function that elites played in constructing the outrage around video nasties, and minimizes the broader popularity of these views among the lower and middle classes, his work is important for the way that it draws a critical lens towards some of the widely held assumptions on the impact of violent media, as well as highlighting the distortion that was inherent in many of the claims surrounding violent texts during these times. An example of this distortion can be seen in an interview with former Conservative MP Graham Bright in the documentary Video Nasties: Moral Panic, Censorship and Video Tape (Jake West, 2010). Bright, who introduced The Video Recordings Act Bill to British Parliament in 1984, claims in this interview that he pushed the Bill to stop people getting killed in the making of splatter horrors. Bright’s comments show how effective the marketing campaigns of these films were, with the claims to realism in these films taking on mythic proportions.
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The video nasty debate forms an influential frame for the debate over the splatter film in both the UK and abroad, despite the lack of critical evidence that supports a cohesive link between viewing violence on screen and enacting it in real life. Although much contemporary media studies scholarship has emphasized that the reception process is in part constituted by active audiences rather than passive receivers, the controversy over video nasties still remains a focus of censorship debates in the UK. Since The Video Recordings Act 1984, another two Bills have been proposed to the British Parliament arguing for stricter regulations on the censorship of video nasties, both of which failed to pass. The first of these, the ‘Alton Amendment’ began when Liberal Democrat MP David Alton commenced campaigning against video nasties following the murder of the two-year-old boy James Bulger by two ten year olds. Discourses in the media attempted to link Bulger’s murder to the boys’ viewing of Child’s Play 3 (Jack Bender, 1991), a movie about a ginger haired doll who is possessed by the soul of a serial killer (Petley, 2011, p.89). In 1992, his ‘Alton Amendment’ to The Video Recordings Act 1984 came before Parliament, but despite the support of eighty Conservative MPs the vote was abandoned (Brown, 1994). The second proposed Bill occurred in 2008 when the re-release of the 1976 Naziploitation film SS Experiment Love Camp (Sergio Garrone) led to Conservative MP Julian Brazier's lodging the ‘British Board of Film Classification (Accountability to Parliament and Appeals) Bill’, which sought to give Parliament the power to overrule censors. The Bill failed in the House, not least because the film had been on sale in the UK since 2006 after going through the BBFC’s censors uncut due to the way the film was relatively tame despite its marketing (2008a). The films during the post-9/11 splatter wave were no less controversial, and in debate over the Obscene Publications Act in October 2007, Hostel: Part II (Eli Roth, 2007) was cited by Conservative MP Charles Walker, who argued that while the BBFC had passed the film as suitable for a restricted audience with cuts, stills from the film possessed by an individual could still be seen as violating the Act (2007b). These debates are important because they tap into a wider censorship discourse that shapes these films in terms of effects theory. Like the UK, these debates in the US are often structured around the fear of uncontrollable youth and frequently linked with minimal evidence to horrific crimes. For example, in the US, we could look to the attempts following the Virginia Tech Massacre in April 2007 to link mass murderer Cho Seung-Hui’s actions to the South Korean splatter film Oldboy (Park Chan-Wook, 2003)

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32 Since the 1970s, the growth of reception theory has increasingly challenged the notion that media spectatorship is passive. Influential accounts such as Stuart Hall’s (1973) “Encoding-Decoding model” have worked to position the audience as active in constructing interpretation (see Ott and Mack 2010, pp.225-237).
through images that Seung-Hui took of himself holding a hammer and sent to NBC, which were reminiscent of the lead character in *Oldboy* Oh Dae-Su’s use of a claw hammer as a weapon in a two minute sequence of carnage where he takes on a hall of prison guards. Although police believed that Cho had repeatedly watched the film before the killings, an investigation showed that there was no evidence he had ever seen *Oldboy* (Sragow, 2007). Petley’s points on the attempted linkage of violent footage to moral decline, youth and class in the UK shows the way that the reception of these films is also structured by socio-economic constructions in society, meaning that violence is received in ways that are perceived to go beyond the bounds of personal pleasure and are elevated to the level of a social threat. The video nasty debate also evidences how, when it comes to the reception of the splatter film, facts are often dispensed with in favour of myth.

### III. Oppositional viewing cultures

There is some evidence that, like the advertising for these films in the 1970s and 1980s, audiences revel in opposition to what they perceive as mainstream culture, and that this structures part of their viewing practices and reception of these films. While the UK was cracking down on video-store owners, there was simultaneously a thriving market for these films, which was driven underground into a black market trade. Illegal, bootlegged copies were sold in flea markets such as Camden, and dubbed and circulated among fans. As James Kendrick (2004, p.162) highlights, this led to the extraordinary scenario where *The Evil Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1981) was both the number one ‘video nasty’ and the number one video rental in the UK. From 1982-1983, ‘suspense and gore’ titles constituted 48.5% of all British rentals (Kendrick, 2004, p.160). For Kendrick (p.172), the moral panic surrounding video nasties could be linked to broader British cultural fears surrounding the eroding influence of American culture (in particular Hollywood as a microcosm of the US). The notoriety surrounding these films meant that for many fans, the sourcing of the video

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33 For example, *Snuff* (1976) was one of the films that caused outrage in the initial reaction to video nasties. Fearing prosecution, the master copy was sent back to the US by the distributor Astra. However, raids uncovered illegal dubbing operations in Epping Forest (Chippendale 1982). Newspapers such as *The Daily Mail, The Mirror* and *The Daily Express* covered these raids frequently.
becomes an event in itself, with the act of researching, sourcing and importing films that are sometimes illegal being an involved act of fandom; the illicit nature of some of these materials adding to their allure and exoticism (Hawkins, 2000, pp.45-6). In the US, where these films were not subject to the same levels of censorship, the uptake of the VCR also led to the splatter film being pushed underground as traditional modes of exhibition in grindhouse and drive-in theatres died off. This also created a fan culture around the sourcing of films that were considered by mainstream culture as ‘naughty’. This can be seen in magazines such as Fangoria and Gorezone, as well as fan anthologies where authors frequently function as ‘guides’ to films that they may not have yet heard of and might wish to order. As Mark Bernard (2010, pp.106-122) argues, in industrial terms, this has led to the release of the ‘Unrated’ DVD or supplementary material (as in the alternative ending) being incorporated into the business model for selling splatter films. Director Eli Roth estimates that this potentially triples the audience for the film, although he notes that many production companies are still wary of Unrated films (as cited in Bernard 2010, p.93).

This relationship of the splatter film as a form of ‘bad cinema’ to the pleasure in its illicit consumption is something that Jeffrey Sconce examines in his landmark article, “‘Trashing’ the Academy: Taste, Excess and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style” (2010), where he argues that audiences recognize the oppositional status of viewing these films, and that this status contributes to part of the pleasure in their reception. Sconce highlights how the critic is also implicated in hierarchies of taste that are borne from class in their considerations of “bad” cinema, tending to situate themselves at an objective distance from B-films such as the splatter. In contrast, fans often draw on this transgressive status as a marker of its difference from mainstream Hollywood cinema. This is articulated in discourses where the ‘narrative form produced by this institution is seen as somehow ‘manipulative’ and ‘repressive’, and linked to dominant forces as a form of cultural coercion” (p.113). For Sconce, audiences are active consumers, who are aware of the cultural codes underlying the production of mainstream cinema that seek to preserve their ‘moral sanctity’ in the interests of producing good citizens (a moral sanctity that is institutionalized in The Production Code 1930’s reign over Hollywood cinema, and the censorship structures of each country, whether this be directed towards issues of sexuality and violence, or political censorship). The consumption of ‘bad cinema’ thus for some audience members functions as a rebellious act, where audiences take pleasure in the violation of the conventions and morality of Hollywood
cinema (p.113). To take an analogy from the music world to elucidate Sconce’s point, one might think of Dick Hebdige (1979, pp.62-6) arguing that punk as a subculture has a kind of anti-music, anti-commodity aesthetic that is built upon violating many of the conventions of traditional music through distortion and screaming. The interpretation of this aesthetic by punks within the subculture is built on this opposition to dominant culture. The violation of Hollywood norms in the splatter film, such as the romantic subplot and the restoration of social order, therefore might be seen as engaging active participation by the audience who revel in this rebellion. For Sconce (2010, p.106), then, the splatter film, along with a broad range of films that are considered as “bad taste” (including sex hygiene films, sexploitation and soft porn flicks, prison films, Nazi films, queer cinema and horror), is a kind of paracinema, which exists alongside and is comparable to Hollywood, as it is the conventions of the latter that informs the former’s interpretation by audiences.

Sconce’s conception of paracinema is very similar to the methods of resistance that Michel de Certeau argues in The Practices of Everyday Life (1984, p.xxiv), where consumers negotiate their relationship to capitalism by individualizing the products that it has on offer. For de Certeau, audiences are active and engage in a “tactical raiding” of mass culture to tailor it to their own needs. Sconce argues “for its audience, paracinema represents a final textual frontier that exists beyond the colonizing powers of the academy, and thus serves as a staging ground for strategic raids on legitimate culture and its institutions by those (temporarily) lower in educational, cultural and/or economic capital” (2010, p.111). As Joan Hawkins notes, Sconce’s work is important due to the way that it draws attention to the politicization of notions of “taste”; a quality that, as Pierre Bourdieu has taught us, is always tied to power relationships (Hawkins, 2000, pp.10-18). Good taste is defined by its allegiance to hegemonic power, rather than having an ‘objective’ quality that people have access to, and as such is class-oriented. Sconce (2010, p.107) argues that the target market for paracinema is often young and middle class, in contrast to the association it has had with lower class consumption in countries such as the UK. For Sconce (p.113), then, paracinema appeals to audiences who know the conventions of mainstream taste and, through actively violating these conventions, seek to distinguish themselves from their peers. Through this lens, it is possible to see how audiences not only forgive but enjoy the violation of conventions of mainstream cinema that frequently occur in the splatter film, such as ridiculous or weakly developed plots and bad acting (Lewis’ early films are a good example of both). Sconce’s (2000, p.46) assertion that
paracinema is frequently consumed by the middle classes is supported by Hawkins, who highlights how historically the practice of following cult film often involves significant outlay on sourcing rare works on VCR or DVD. The concept of paracinema is important in considerations of the splatter film, as it broadens analysis of the reception of violence from perceptions that reception is passive, and about the erasure of the distance between text and body, to discussions of how these films also engage audiences in active processes of critical appraisal that are social in their production.

For Sconce (p.105), the main goal of paracinema is to cause an affront, and he juxtaposes this confrontational strategy with “camp”, a term first associated with homosexual culture and later a term for a mode of ironic interpretation popularized by Susan Sontag. As outlined in her famous 1964 essay, Susan Sontag argues that camp is a style that is composed of “the sensibility of failed seriousness, of the theatricalization of experience. Camp refuses both the harmonies of traditional seriousness, and the risks of fully identifying with extreme states of feeling” (Sontag, 2008, p.49). Sconce argues that while camp and paracinema are similar in the way that they hyperbolize signs, they operate differently: “Camp was an aesthetic of ironic colonization and cohabitation. Paracinema, on the other hand, is an aesthetic of vocal confrontation” (2010, p.105). For Sconce, this means that the emphasis in the splatter film shifts away from the narrative and towards stylistic concerns in an aggressive hyperbolization of signs. As Julia Vassileva and Constantine Verevis note (2010, pp.643-4), this movement positions paracinema as both postmodern and radical in its appropriation of signs, forming a kind of anti-canon of consumer culture. The notion of paracinema then goes some way in explaining how the post-9/11 splatter film might incorporate images (and occasionally critiques) of the Global War on Terror together with other signs that do not seem to fit at all with this discourse, as in the pairing of a Global War on Terror parody with porn star Jenna Jameson in the opening sequence of Zombie Strippers (Jay Lee, 2008). This hyperbolization of signs can be found throughout the splatter film historically, whether it be the infamous zombie versus shark sequence in Lucio Fulci’s Zombi 2 (1979), Ash’s persecution by his own severed, possessed hand in Evil Dead II (Sam Raimi, 1987) or Paris Hilton’s murder in House of Wax (Jaume Collet-Serra, 2005).
Sconce’s notion that paracinema is equally about distanciation is particularly interesting when it is considered in the context of the violence that the splatter films present. Paracinema suggests that there are two simultaneous movements in the reception of the text – the first, one of feeling or experiencing the text encouraged by the splatter film’s use of realism to represent violence (a use that erodes the critical distance between the audience and the text); and the second, a reinstitution of this critical distance in the process of textual raiding. While this may sound contradictory, evidence of this critical distancing is embedded in the production of the texts themselves and is influenced by the fan culture that has sprung up around the construction of the violence itself. For example, it is not uncommon to find on Youtube compilations of the ‘best death’ sequences made by fans from their favourite splatter films. These are frequently overlaid with the fan’s music, in an example of produsage that demonstrates the shift towards the consumption of these films digitally. Directors are aware of the emphasis that audiences place on the critical appraisal of special effects, which is one reason why the film trailers are often compiled of moments from the killing sequences. As Eli Roth stated on his June 2007 press tour for the release of Hostel II:

_It's exhilarating, finally watching the movie with audiences. You dream, you have these scenes in your head and you're shooting them. But last night was only the second group of people to see it. And I'm really happy that the ending just kills. Because I knew that this ending would have to be the show stopper of the entire HOSTEL oeuvre of kills, this has to be the one that's gotta fucking bring the house down. And I have to compete with what's out now. HOSTEL came out against KING KONG and NARNIA, and it's amazing that it did what it did. But I realize that HOSTEL, PART II is competing with PIRATES and SPIDER-MAN and SHREK 3 and OCEAN'S THIRTEEN. These are monsters with huge movie stars. And I was like, if I have a great kill, great kill. If I can do that great kill that everyone's talking about, it will trump that weekend (Capone, 2007)._

This emphasis on the critical appraisal of special effects in these films also means that the

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34 Two examples of this are HorrorMetalDaniel’s ‘Best Horror Remake Death Scenes’ ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ghlxwVhiws](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ghlxwVhiws)) and Anthony Aguirreche’s ‘Best Horror Death Scenes 4’ ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zv3SSyLnVaU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zv3SSyLnVaU)). These are often low quality and sometimes consist of the viewer pointing their own video camera at the television. There is evidence to suggest this act of collecting special effects sequences was occurring as early as the 1980s, with Richard Neighbour’s article for _The Daily Mail_ ‘Hooked of the Video Junkies’ citing people who bought two video recorders to dub death sequences onto the other recorder (1983).

35 The term ‘produsage’ refers to the consumer/producer enabled by the rise of digital culture, and was popularized by Axel Bruns (2008, p.21).
success of the film is frequently discussed in terms of its filmic form, rather than the psychological suspense that builds before the protagonist is killed. There are numerous discussion boards online where fans share their opinion on how successful the special effects are, including the Internet Movie Database, Amazon, and a plethora of specialist fan forums such as BloodyDisgusting.com, SplatterPictures.net and SickFilms.com. The following discussion of the first turning point in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre by a fan (Evan Dickson on Bloody Disgusting) is typical of the kind of discourse on camerawork and special effects that can be found on these forums:

Once she tells them “You’re all going to die”, she puts a gun in her mouth and shoots out the back of her head. We see screaming and flailing, but the best part of this segment is when a camera starts in the driver and passenger seats, pulls back to see the reactions of the characters in the back seat, continues to pull backwards THROUGH the recently opened hole in the hitchhiker’s head, her head flops backwards towards the camera with a well-timed “thud”, and the camera continues out through the hole created by the bullet in the back windshield. Although the acting in that scene (if you want to call Jessica Biel frantically screaming “acting”) isn’t all that good, the practical effect is a really successful one. I have the Special Edition DVD (whoops, did I just admit to that?) and saw a little behind-the-scenes segment talking about that scene and how all it took was the prosthetic of the actress’s head and an endoscopic camera on the end of a long pole. The pole is what held the head in place, so as soon as the camera/pole rig was clear, the head flops. Simple, effective, and a cheap way to make a nice, gruesome gag that reminded me a lot of some of the shots accomplished by Raimi’s team on the Evil Dead movies (Dickson, 2012).

This fan example demonstrates that while the reception of the splatter film is one that is based in generating a sense of shock, it is also equally based in one of a distanced critical appraisal. Within the industry, this has led to an emphasis on special effects being created with elaborate prosthetics, as Computer Generated Imagery is often seen as “cheating” by fans.36

36 An example of this perspective can be seen in Robert Zak’s blog for The Independent ‘Modern Horror: Lay off the CGI and bring back the prosthetics’ (2012).
Chapter Two: Violence as Spectacle and Form in the Splatter Film

Figure 4: The tracking shot through the head in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Marcus Nispel, 2003).
The way that directors compete for audiences through the construction of hyperbolic violence means that there is an emphasis on special effects that will shock the viewer by their newness, which then become a gimmick that the film can be marketed on. Thus *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (Tom Six, 2010) shows us a mentally unstable scientist who kidnaps three victims and decides to sew them together so that they form a “centipede”, mouth to anus, so that they form one digestive system. The film follows the efforts of the protagonist who is first in the food chain (and takes longer to poison than her followers, who are literally consuming her faeces) to survive. Similarly, in the French splatter film *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier, 2008), our protagonist is entirely stripped of skin and left suspended in a tank of saline solution. However, it is when the splatter horror film crosses with comedy (the “splatterstick”) that the processes of critical distancing audiences engage in is perhaps most obvious. Here the violence is hyperbolized and included for the generation of comedic effect, of which the immensely successful *Final Destination* series (2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2011), *Tucker and Dale Vs. Evil* (Eli Craig, 2010) are good examples. In *Final Destination* (James Wong, 2000), the protagonists are stalked by the eschatological figure of Death after surviving accidents where they should have died. Death attempts to stalk them according to the order in which they should have died, using his supernatural powers to create deodands that conspire to provide ridiculous deaths, where humour is generated out of the improbable nature of the violence. For example, in *Final Destination 2* (David Ellis, 2003), our protagonists survive a car crash where they accidentally careen in reverse into a stack of pipes. One of the pipes breaks and pierces through the cabin of the car, and Kat realizes as the car comes to a halt that she was just millimetres off having the back of her skull impaled as she sits in the driver’s seat. Eugene, sitting in the back seat, is pierced through the torso by one of the poles and is carried away on a stretcher by ambulance staff to die later. Kat remains trapped in the car, and must wait to be cut out of the car by rescuers. A news van then arrives to cover the accident, which reverses onto a rock, rupturing the fuel tank and dripping oil. As the fireman arrive to cut Kat out of the car, she sits nonchalantly smoking a cigarette as the fireman accidentally deploys the airbag, sending her head backwards into the spike and killing her. As she dies, she drops the cigarette, which is picked up by the wind and then blown across to the leaking oil, making the news van explode and sending a fence post flying through the air at speed, slicing her friend Rory into three and the camera lingers to catch his body collapsing in pieces. The entire sequence is around two minutes long, with the chain of events resembling a kinetic rolling ball sculpture. In the *Final Destination* series, Death is largely invisible, and because we know which character will die next, the suspense is
generated through which inanimate object behaving badly will kill next, as well as the tension created through the near misses (such as when the pole initially pierces the vehicle near Kat’s head, but does not hurt her, or a massive tree branch falls near Thomas in the middle of this sequence). This tendency towards hyperbolic violence can also be seen in the Canadian film *Tucker and Dale Vs. Evil*, which is a comedy about two hillbillies in the Appalachian mountains of West Virginia who are harmless and friendly but are read by a group of nearby holidaying teens as homicidal maniacs due to the hillbilly splatter films they have seen. The film establishes the misrecognition between the two groups through a series of classic horror tropes in the opening sequence such as the slow drive by in the picket truck on a deserted road and the ominous gas station as the transitional point from America into the world of the small town. When one of the college girls (Allison) hits her head on a rock when diving into the lake, Tucker and Dale rescue her and take her up to their decrepit cabin to observe her vital signs until she comes to. The teens interpret this as Allison being kidnapped by murderers, and one by one attempt to fight Chad and Tucker, in the process accidentally killing themselves. For example, when the two college boys search for Allison in the woods, they find her helping Tucker and Dale to build an outhouse. Reading this as she is digging her own grave, they both accidentally kill themselves – one by running into a tree branch which impales him through the heart; and the other by lunging at Tucker as he stands next to the woodchipper, missing Tucker, and accidentally landing in the woodchipper himself. The way that extreme violence sits as comedic within these films is dependent on a level of familiarity with the splatter film’s conventions, and as such demonstrates how violence is perceived simultaneously through a generation of shock in the body and critical distance from the text at once.

However, if we return to Sconce’s point that the consumption of the graphic, the putrid, the gross, and the taboo is an act of consumer resistance, how then might we perceive the consumption of violence as resistive? The answer may lie in the way that inasmuch as the identification of patterns within genre might be seen as promoting particular ideological forms (Wright, 1975, p.130, Schatz, 1981, p.34), the formalization and representation of violence within the text is also viewed by cultural critics as patterning meaning, providing insight into the role that violence as ritual fulfills within our society (Giroux, 1996, pp.55-88, Pizzato, 2005, p.2, Hansen-Miller, 2011, p.181). As signalled in the introduction, not all extreme violence in films is considered equal – rather, censors and critics make assessments
on what constitutes “good” and “bad” violence that are based on their adherence to social norms. The work of Henry Giroux articulates this traditional model well. Giroux (1996, pp.55-88) distinguishes between three kinds of violence within media texts: ritualistic, historical and hyper-real (Giroux). Ritualistic violence, for Giroux (p.61), is exemplified by the action film, where stars such as Steven Seagal, Sylvester Stallone, and more recently Tom Cruise and Daniel Craig, enact a wave of carnage that at an ideological level is about the reassertion of the muscular, male individual, a project that reflects the emphasis on the individual in American society and capitalism more generally. Historical violence is found in the war film, or attempts to represent ‘real’ violence on cinema, which still convey the notion that this is a necessary violence on behalf of preserving the moral order (p.63). Hyper-real violence is the theatricalization of violence, the positioning of it as pure voyeuristic spectacle. He associates this with Quentin Tarantino’s films Reservoir Dogs (1992) and Pulp Fiction (1994), where there is an emphasis on violence that is realistic yet cinematic (p.64). If one of the precursors to paracinema fandom is a knowledge and familiarity of Hollywood conventions and what constitutes acceptable mainstream violence, then it is likely that fans also have an awareness of the different statuses applied to violence across texts, and the consumption of violence for some fans might be seen as a resistive act.

As I have argued, the splatter film often puts these extreme images of violence next to illusions of broader social commentary. The diegesis of the splatter film is based on anarchy, and social structures of control such as the police, the military and the Government are positioned as unable to control this violence, or are implicated in its spread (a generic trope I cover in more detail in the following chapter). The collapse of these social institutions in the splatter film draws attention to the way that violence might be thought of as explicitly social in its construction and reiteration within film. While the drive for violence is often conceived of as a private, individual desire, as Réne Girard argues in Violence and the Sacred (1977), violence should also be thought of as explicitly social and working through social issues. For Girard, the regulation and ritualization of violence is very much linked to the structuration of society. Desire, for Girard (p.104), is based on our mimetic interpretation and relationship to other beings, and is mediated through our desire to both model and rival others, a process that brings us into conflict with others. Societies attempt to regulate this tendency towards violence so that the community does not dissolve into perpetual violence by attempting to “scapegoat” this violence onto an individual: by rallying around one person as embodying the
“guilty person” that must be punished, violence performs the role of social sacrifice that enables cohesion between the community and the control of random violence between people (p.17). For example, Girard points to the role that the pharmakós plays in Ancient Grecian religion, where an animal or human is paraded outside the village before being killed at times of disaster (p.95). The pharmakói (victim) is expelled by the sorcerer as part of a ritual of purification, a purification that then extends to the social. Girard highlights that the selection of these victims is based upon their difference to other members of the community, highlighting how the victims are chosen on traits that highlight their outsider status – age, deformity, and disability. This “outsider” status ensures that family members do not seek revenge for their execution. The sacrificed then plays a crucial role in mediating our society – the more crucial the issue that they tap into, the more important their role as sacrificed is (p.18). Girard highlights the similarity between the outsider/insider status within contemporary conflicts where, for example, differing ethnic groups are seen as something that need to be controlled. For Girard (p.23) then, the formula in early societies for stability is unanimity minus one. Girard argues that the stable mythologization of violence within texts is important to maintaining stability, because the results of this breakdown are the perpetuation of further violence. Due to the way that our desires are mimetic, violence has the potential to be contagious, and it is through its condensation onto the sacrificial role of the victim and its subsequent repetition into myth that we are able to contain this violence. Although Girard’s notions of mimetic violence might be seen when applied to film as bordering on effects theory or enculturation, his notion that violence functions as a form of social mythmaking created through repetition is one that is of relevance to this project. It potentially explains why the violence in paracinema forms social cohesion for those that do not consume it, and how for those that do, film can be seen as a resistive act, positioning the consumer as ‘outside’ of mainstream culture.

Finally, it should be noted that the inclusion of oppositional themes is not exclusive to the American splatter film. The splatter film is a remarkably international form, and has been distributed and produced in a number of countries since the 1970s. Across these countries, the examination of themes that pose challenges to the hegemonic power is not unusual. For example, in Brazil, Coffin Joe fell foul of government for his critiques of Catholicism, being arrested for the perceived political content of his films following the military coup d’état in 1964 (Morf, 2002). Following his release, Marins also faced problems with censorship, to
which he responded strategically by attending military parties and attempting to recruit actors with political connections to continue his work (Marins, 2009). As Ekky Imanjaya (2009, p.143) notes, the splatter film in Indonesia has also had an oppositional status since the 1970s, where in films such as Eastern Horror: Satan’s Slave/ CorpseMaster (Pengabdi Setan and Sisworo Gautama, 1978) and Tales of Voodoo, Vol. 2: Ghost Ninja/ Primitives (Primif and Sisworo Gautama, 1980) the villains were positioned as sympathetic to the Suharto New Order Regime. At a time where dissidents simply ‘disappeared’, the splatter film provided a subtle form of criticism. Like the splatter in drive-in cinemas in the US, these films were screened in Layar Tancap, or all-night outdoor cinemas, where they were consumed mostly by the lower and working classes during this time (p.153). As splatter films from the New Order period are being re-released, these films now have a middle class audience who has access to the internet as a mode of distribution (p.153). Similarly, Jörg Buttgereit’s 1987 film Necromantik caused controversy within Germany for its allusions to Nazism and the origins of fascism in the working class, as conveyed through the main protagonist and killer Rob. As Linnie Blake (2004, p.196) points out, part of this controversy revolved around its inclusion of a miniature The Glass Man, a glass sculpture created for the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden in 1930 that became symbolic of Hitler’s desire for racial purity. This trend can also be seen at work in more recent international films such as Juan of the Dead (Alejandro Brugués, 2011), which is the first splatter film to emerge out of Cuba. With the tagline “Fifty Years After Castro”, Juan of the Dead was surprising for its themes and the way that it circumvented censorship (Burnett, 2011). The film features many sequences that parody Cuba’s socialist government, including a parody of the 1994 Cuban Exodus in a raft sequence and a scene where a car smashes through a Revolucion o Muerto (‘Revolution or Death’) sign. The film effectively aligns its story’s impending crisis with the failings of socialism: the zombies are not contained due to Government propaganda that minimizes the crisis, positioning the zombies as American dissidents. Juan, who has been unemployed under socialism, seizes the moment to begin a business where he disposes of people’s undead families, suggesting that the solution to the ongoing crisis may lie outside the current order. Another example that demonstrates this trend is the wave of Turkish horror in the 2000s where secular protagonists are seen as suffering from evil that is often exacerbated by technology and is incurable by western science. The only solution is Islam and the recitation of Islamic verses, reflecting a broader socio-political battle in Turkish politics of Islamist versus secular factions since the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Yaren, 2010). Although Hasan Karacadağ’s El Cin/ The Jinn (2012) is the only film in this wave that can be considered
violent enough to be a splatter film, the emergence of Islamist horror demonstrates both the transnationalist appeal of the wider genre, and that the oppositional status of the splatter film does not solely apply to liberal themes.\textsuperscript{37} Karacadağ’s experiments into horror began with his remake into Islamist themes of Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s \textit{Kairo} (2001), a relatively bloodless film about ghosts taking over the internet, following his attendance at film school in Japan (Nippon Cinema Eizou Juku). After training in Japan, he returned to Turkey and set out to make Islamist horror. He is well known in Turkey for bringing Imams onto the set and his beliefs that horror provides a mechanism for exploring what he perceives as the failures of western science and the benefits that Islam can provide in filling these gaps – a reading that could be read as a critique of the current secular government (Kara, 2008). The splatter film, then, is frequently positioned as oppositional to the hegemonic power not only through the way it includes extreme violence, but also for the way that it utilizes this violence to provide a critique of the current order.

\textbf{Figure 5. Still from \textit{El Cin} (Hasan Karacadağ, 2012).}

\textsuperscript{37}As Özgür Yaren notes, the figure of the jinn (genie) often stands in for Satan’s (Iblis’) place in western religious horrors (Yaren 2010). Jinns are not necessarily “good” or “evil” in Islamic theology, like humans they have free will and will also be accountable for their actions on the Day of Judgment. Due to jinns’ invisibility to humans, however, and their ability to become obsessed with particular humans, travel through space quickly and possess through touch, they become an ideal subject for the horror film.
IV. The splatter film as a market model

The rise in audience numbers tells us that in the post-9/11 period, the splatter film reached new audiences that it had not reached before. The splatter films that were successful at the box office brought in large audiences who were aged under 25 years (Williams, 2006). However, if audiences were new, the marketing of these films was shaped by the historical model of targeting cult audiences. The box office success of films such as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Marcus Nispel, 2003), Saw (James Wan, 2004) and Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005) could not be predicted on earlier audience success alone, but these breakthrough hits paved the way for the emulation of splatter as a model. Part of the attraction for studios in making splatter films is the low production budgets that offer potential for high returns, and also the way that shifts in technological formats have allowed for an internationalization of returns in recent decades. In a high-risk industry such as movie making, which requires large investments of capital, the production of genre texts enables a calculation of risk in terms of the text’s likely consumption by audiences. Due to the high costs of filmmaking, studios seek to spread their risk across films that are seen as responding to market demand, with the hope that while some may fail, others will succeed in providing financial return. Although horror forms only a small percentage of the total profits for Hollywood internationally (roughly 4% of total market share in 2013, down from a peak of 7% in 2007), horror films are seen as particularly attractive for producers and distributors due to the high ratio of return that they offer (2014b). As Terry et al. argue (2010, p.231), in contrast to the $100 million upwards cost of a blockbuster, the average production budget for a horror film is under $27 million and the average return is $45 million. Many of the films that headed the splatter wave were produced for under $10 million – including the breakthrough hit Saw (2004), which was made for $1.2 million and went on to earn US$103 million globally. This, together with the sequels that followed (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) made it one of the highest grossing horror franchises of all time with a worldwide gross of US$873,319,880 (Chang, 2011). Although the splatter film appears to have reached its peak box office in 2007, the 2013 release of World War Z (Marc Forster) starring Brad Pitt repackaged the zombie splatter film as a Hollywood blockbuster. This signals that the subgenre may still have some ability to resonate with wider audiences, and its adaptability for hybridization with existing Hollywood models for the production of big pictures.
As Steven Jay Schneider and Tony Williams (pp.4-5) note, in the last decade the horror international market has also gone under significant internationalization, a process that they situate as stemming from shifts in technologies towards the VCR and DVDs that enable the wider circulation of texts. Mark Ryan (2008, pp.140-141), violent horror’s continued production is partially enabled by the way that the splatter film’s traditional markets might be seen as fitting within shifting distribution models, drawing from Chris Anderson’s concept of the “long tail” under digital culture, whereby niche consumer products can be marketed globally via the internet with very little overheads. The DVD market is significant in the US, and roughly 59% of the market is composed of straight to DVD films (Lobato and Ryan, 2011, p.6). As Elberse and Oberholzer (2008, pp.10-1) observe, since DVD technology was introduced in 1997, this market has grown considerably, with merchants such as Amazon adding as many as 10,000 titles per year to their catalogue, and in the process repackaging old splatter films. This model of DVD distribution suits the splatter film, which has a historical fan base oriented around the collection of cult works (Hawkins, 2000, pp.41-9). This appeal to collector culture could be seen in the marketing for Saw III, where Lions Gate released a limited series of 1,000 posters fans could buy which were printed with the actor Tobin Bell’s blood (Bell starred in the film as the serial killer Jigsaw) (McClintock, 2006b). While the shift towards digital culture lowers the barriers to film production (in particular the wider availability of technologies for filming), it may also serve to reinforce the genre marketing of these films. As Ramon Lobato and Mark Ryan (2011, p.9) argue, this may influence producers to highlight the gore and violence in their films so that lower budget productions can appeal to this international fan base – a movement they identify as occurring within Australian horror. The shift to a digital environment also erases many of the censorship and state restrictions in distributing horror, as consumers are able to order online or stream videos. Mark Ryan (2008, pp.46-8) notes that this is encouraging more fluidity between national boundaries, softening previously impenetrable markets for the west such as Russia. Digital culture, then, has worked to encourage splatter production as a viable market model. In this sense, the splatter film is not so much an oppositional model, but one which commodifies opposition.
This transnational fluidity of the splatter film’s distribution has been present in its production since the 1970s. Splatter films that are produced outside of the US market frequently have a share of the US audience in mind. This can be seen across Italian productions of the 1980s (in particular the Cannibal and Zombie cycles), where American actors were frequently cast in lead roles. It can also be seen in Indonesian splatters from the 1970s, where producers catered for this market through the inclusion of western actors in their films, removing themes referencing Islam in the trailers, and subtitling the films in English, Japanese and Finnish (Imanjaya, 2009, p.152-152). In highlighting that the splatter film is frequently targeted at a western market, it is still important to underscore how much it is an international form that has proved remarkably popular across a number of countries. The post-9/11 period also saw the production of a number of splatter films across a wide variety of countries (some of which crossed over into mainstream box office popularity, and others that were consumed via DVD on the existing splatter film market). These included the UK films 28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002), Shaun of the Dead (Edgar Wright, 2004), Don’t Let Him In (Kelly Smith, 2011), and Inbred (Alex Chandon, 2011); Norway’s Thale (Aleksaander Nordas, 2012); Sweden’s Zon 261 (Fredrick Hiller, 2014); Australia’s Wolf Creek (Greg McLean, 2005) and Primal (Josh Reid, 2010); Germany’s Berlin Undead (Marvin Kren, 2010); Thailand’s SARS Wars: Bangkok Zombie Crisis (Taweewat Wantha, 2004); Japan’s Tokyo Gore Police (Yoshihiro Nishimura, 2008) and Mutant Girl’s Squad (Noboru Iguchi, Yoshihiro Nishimura and Tak Sakaguchi, 2010). Due to the way that the splatter film is consumed and circulated as a cult genre, there is considerable transnational exchange in the ideas behind its production – an exchange that can be seen the influence of Japanese cinema on Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005) and Kill Bill: Volume I and II (Quentin Tarantino, 2003, 2004). While there is not room to sufficiently track this exchange here, as my focus is primarily on US films produced after 9/11, the examination of the American splatter film still has a lot to tell us about how these films work. The films in the post-9/11 wave made most of their money overseas. If the splatter film is marketed around its oppositional status, it is fair to say that this popularity was reflected abroad, and may be read as leveraging a rise for darker images of America during this time.

38 This influence is considerably more obvious in Kill Bill: Volume I and II due to its revenge oriented plot of the woman who is wronged, but it can also be seen in director Takashi Miike’s cameo in Hostel.
V. Conclusion

To conclude, the production and reception of these films might be seen as intimately intertwined with oppositional practices, even if attempts to capitalize on their distribution might be seen as conforming to capitalist imperatives. The splatter film emerges out of a series of innovations in special effects during the 1960s that shape its focus on extreme violence and establish a business model for its production. In this shift, a fan culture grows around the notion of the special effects artist as auteur. From the splatter film’s early production there is an emphasis on claims to realism within the text as a marketing ploy to generate sales for these films. This collapse between “real” and “real” in turn fuels a moral panic which centres on the content of these films, establishing a notoriety that then feeds into an oppositional viewing culture. As Sconce (2010) notes in his discussion of paracinema, this oppositional viewing culture is based around the causing of an affront, taking images that the dominant and mainstream culture finds as objectionable in order to differentiate the audience as a consumer. Within this viewing paradigm, the consumption of violence becomes a resistive act, as part of the pleasure is derived from a transgression of Hollywood norms surrounding violence.

The recognition that audiences function as “textual raiders” in utilizing violence in the text is incorporated into the production of the splatter film itself, where directors and distributors structure the production and marketing of their films around catering for the audience’s desire to see hyperbolic violence. Posters, VCR and DVD covers, and movie trailers emphasize the violence represented in the film, as distributors attempt to distinguish their violence as different from other films that are already on the market. For the cult audiences that follow these films, the consumption of violence is often structured around a comparison to the special effects utilized to show these acts in other films. This means that as much as the pleasure in consumption is based around the generation of bodily sensation in response to the text, it is also organized around a sense of distance through critical appraisal of the text.
The oppositional viewing practices that structure the historical reception of these films is often reflected in the way that the splatter film takes up themes that are antagonistic to the dominant ideologies of the cultures in which they are produced. The creation of oppositional viewing cultures goes some way to explaining how decontextualized images of the Global War on Terror might be incorporated so heavily into the splatter films emerging in the post-9/11 period, as these images function as yet another sign which positions these texts as antagonistic to mainstream culture. At one level, it is possible to see these challenging social themes as reflective of the stripping of historical context as identified in the previous chapter. From this perspective, the counter-hegemonic themes that these films evoke might be read as merely another way of signifying the outlaw status of these films. However, this oppositional status might also be seen as allowing for subtle critiques of power that may not be as subject to censorship. In Joe Dante’s discussion of his 2005 film Homecoming, a film about dead American soldiers returning from the Iraq War as zombies to contest the 2000 Florida Election, he argues that the post-9/11 environment, splatter films were seen by independent directors as a way of slipping political themes through censorship in an industry tightly regulated for politics rather than violence (Goldstein, 2005). The splatter film, then, might provide an example of ways in which postmodern pastiche does not have the effect of emptying the text of political content, but radicalizing it during times of controversy.
Chapter Three: Narrative in the splatter film

Discussions of how violence is marketed visually as spectacle and received in terms of moral panic only go so far as to explaining its function within the splatter film. Notions of the splatter film’s reception as being structured around ‘excess’ (as discussed in Chapter One) often overlook the interrelationship that occurs between spectacle and narrative form within works that are considered as appealing to the body. For this reason, much of the interpretation of the splatter film has focused on its extreme violence rather than the identification of archetypal tropes that structure the articulation of stories that it presents. Through this lens, spectacle (violence) and narrative are positioned as binary opposites, with the spectacle detracting from the film’s narrative and causal links. Kirsten Thompson in her 1977 article ‘The Concept of Cinematic Excess’ exemplifies this view. She characterizes excess not through psychoanalysis, but as being moments of stylized cinema that are “counter-narrative” and “counter-unity” (p.57). In line with her work with David Bordwell on the ‘Classical Hollywood Cinema’ (a period that runs from 1917-1960), Thompson identifies narrative with the formal principles associated with American films produced during this period (Bordwell et al., 1985). ‘Excess’ then is associated with moments where the film departs from the cause-effect and goal-oriented narration associated with studio films from this era. More recently, this opposition between narrative and spectacle has been challenged within film studies. For example, Geoff King (2000, pp.2-3) has argued that the relationship between spectacle and narrative is much more complex in the Blockbuster. King’s attempt to challenge the opposition between narrative and spectacle is equally relevant to an examination of the splatter film. King contests that despite the Blockbuster’s model of visual spectacle through explosions, car chases and action sequences, many of these sequences serve to progress the narrative. He concludes that “[t]he relative absence of coherent plot or character development in specific instances… does not entail an evacuation of underlying themes and oppositions of a structural kind” (p.3). This chapter returns to the issue of spectacle versus narrative to complicate the way that the splatter film might also be seen as engaging in contemporary concerns. Although the splatter film operates in a transnational market, thematic concerns are often tailored to the nation state of its production, as in the
focus on authoritarian constructs and black magic in the Indonesian splatter film from the 1970s to the 1990s, or the more psychological, sexual orientation of New French Extremism in the 1990s. In the American vein of the splatter film, narrative form is frequently structured around the collapse of social institutions of law and order, a convention that can be found from its emergence in the 1960s to the films that were released after 9/11. The post-9/11 splatter film equates violence with instability, collapsing Hollywood codes of morality in a way that might be seen as corresponding to the anxiety over the governance of the time.

I. Genre and ideology

Defining what constitutes a particular genre is notoriously difficult. The post-9/11 splatter wave produced a broad variety of texts. While most of the splatters produced in the US or popular in the US at this time fell into three main veins – the serial killer film, the zombie film, and the hillbilly horror film (the differences between these three forms providing complications in itself), there are numerous examples of hybrid forms that are released during this time. These include the comedy splatter film, or ‘splatterstick’, of which the Final Destination series (2000, 2003, 2006, 2011), Undead (Michael Spierig, 2003), Shaun of the Dead (Edgar Wright, 2004), Night of the Living Dorks (Mathias Dinter, 2004), Boy Eats Girls (Stephen Bradley, 2005), Fido (Andrew Currie, 2006), Undead or Alive (Glasgow Phillips, 2007), The Mad (John Kalangis, 2007), Dance of the Dead (Gregg Bishop, 2008), Zombie Strippers (Jay Lee, 2008), Dead Snow (Tommy Wirkola, 2009), Zombies of Mass Destruction (Kevin Hamedani, 2009), Zombieland (Ruben Fleischer, 2009), Tucker and Dale Vs Evil (Eli Craig, 2010), and Osombie (John Lyde, 2012) are examples. The splatterstick’s shift to comedy means that these films are decidedly different in tone – for example, in Fido, a Canadian film that received limited theatrical release but was primarily intended for the DVD market, a radiation cloud has shrouded the earth and caused some of the population to turn

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into zombies. The only way to disable the zombies is to destroy their cerebral cortex by blowing their brains out (as per traditional cult movie lore). However, a company called Zomcon creates domestication collars so that some can be kept as pets. The plot revolves around a small boy called Timmy and his desire to keep his zombie Fido (played by Billy Connolly) despite the issues that Fido has with eating the neighbours. Here the comedy element means that the gore is frequently played for laughs, creating a horror/comedy cross in an otherwise light film. While some theorists, such as John Calweti (1985, pp.510-3) or Thomas Schatz (1981, p.37), would classify this according to a cyclical notion of genre whereby the conventions of the genre have become so entrenched that it enters a parodic mode, it still highlights the difficulties in defining the limits of what might be considered a splatter film. Other hybrid examples include *Warm Bodies* (Jonathan Levine, 2013), which is a romance splatter where a male zombie called ‘R’ comes to life again following his meeting with Julie and falls in love, and *My Little Eye* (Marc Evans, 2002), which is a hybrid of the splatter film and reality television and follows the plight of five protagonists who do not realize that the reality web series game show they have volunteered for is actually a snuff film. Such issues of hybridity mean that a more complex assessment of how genre functions needs to be developed before identifying how themes work in the splatter film.

In order to trace the conventions of the splatter film, then, it is first necessary to make some general observations about genre, as the approach that one draws from can significantly impact on the reading of a body of works. One of the most influential approaches to thinking through the way genre is reiterated through texts is proposed by Rick Altman in his 1984 article “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre”. Altman (pp.9-10) argues that genre has been approached in two ways historically: semantically, through the identification of codes that run across a body of texts (settings, themes, props, motifs, narrative devices), and syntactically, through the examination of how these codes relate to each other. The syntactic approach is influenced by Structuralism, and tends to focus on the way that themes might operate through the conflict between binary oppositions to structure narratives (such as John Cawelti’s work on the western as operating around the dialectic of civilization versus the frontier) (Cawelti, 1971). For Altman (1984, p.16), neither approach is sufficient alone – the semantic account prioritizes a range of tropes in a manner that reads these as ahistorical and inflexible, and the syntactic approach does not account for hybridized films such as the ones listed above due to the narrow definition of myth that it proposes. Instead, Altman proposes
that there is a need for a semantic/syntactic approach to genre that places these two elements into play to allow for the most flexibility in approaching the interpretation of film. Under this approach, the audience has expectations of syntactical themes that are prompted by semantic signals (p.17). Such an approach is useful, because it explains why a film like *Warm Bodies* incorporates semantic elements of the splatter film (such as graphic violence and zombies), but at a syntactic level is doing very different things than the zombie film. In *Warm Bodies*, the syntactical theme of order versus collapse is disrupted by the introduction of the romance plot and its emphasis on the culmination of heterosexual coupling.

Altman (1984, pp.8-9) distinguishes two further approaches that have been influential in considerations of genre: ritual and ideological. In the ritual approach, genres might be thought of as an exchange that occurs between audiences and filmmakers, in that filmmakers attempt to appeal to ideas that are seen as tapping into popular films. As Louis Giannetti argues, “the stylized conventions and archetypal story patterns of genres encourage viewers to participate ritualistically in the basic beliefs, fears and anxieties of their age” (1996, pp.345-346). Or, in the words of Andrew Tudor, “genre is what we collectively believe it to be” (1974, p.139). The second is the ideological approach, whereby films represent the interests of the elites, with genre “luring audiences into accepting deceptive non-solutions, while all the same time serving government or industry purposes” (original emphasis) (Altman, 1999, p.27). As Altman argues, the latter approach has been influential in film studies since the 1950s. While the ideological approach might be seen as positioning the audience as entirely passive, the ritualistic and ideological approaches are not necessarily as opposed as they might seem. According to Altman, one of the central components of Hollywood cinema is the way that it might be seen as engaging in cultural norms:

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*Hollywood’s masters of genre are not claiming that ‘this conduct presented as normative is in fact accepted as such throughout the culture’, but instead that ‘this conduct presented as a cultural norm and in fact so recognized by some will be used as a fundamental element of this particular genre’. Each genre game begins by positing a cultural norm, in order to permit the construction of generic pleasure as in some way contradicting that norm. In order to avoid undermining spectator suspension of disbelief, the conduct in question must have some legitimate claim to normative status.*

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40 As Garin Dowd (2006, p.16) notes, Altman draws from Fredric Jameson’s 1981 discussion of ‘magical narratives’ in making the distinction between semantic and syntactic elements of the text.
Chapter Three: Narrative in the Splatter Film

*though it need not be accepted by the entire society as the rule. In practice, this leads to a genre game that many audiences are willing to play* (p.157).

As Altman argues, some cultural norms have wider agreement than others, citing the almost universal condemnation of “unjustified violence and revulsion to those who have caused it throughout this century” (p.157). The splatter film’s incorporation of transgressive violence might be read as an affront to these norms, reinforcing Jeffrey Sconce’s (2010) conceptualization of paracinema as an oppositional viewing practice (as discussed in Chapter Two). However, this transgression occurs not only at the level of violent spectacle, but also through the ways that violence is narrativized within the text. At a syntactic level, the splatter film is engaged in an exploration of the binary opposition between order and anarchy, although little resolution is provided to the problems that this poses within the narrative. This chapter begins by outlining some of the key tropes that identify the splatter film, contrasting these in particular with the slasher film in order to demonstrate how the splatter film positions violence as social rather than individual. In the latter part of the chapter, I turn to the relationship between these tropes in order to examine how violence in these films works to undermine narrative stability. Finally, I argue that it is precisely the instability of splatter films that might be seen as giving rise to their popularity.

II. Tropes of the splatter film

a. Group violence

The splatter film is frequently confused with the slasher film. However, as I have suggested, there are fundamental differences between the two forms. First, as Adam Rockoff argues, “the slasher film is personal” in the way that it pits a psychologically disturbed killer against a group (who are usually teens) (2002, p.9). This emphasis on the singular killer means that the slasher film has been seen by critics as particularly fertile for psychoanalytical readings
(Clover, 1992, Halberstam, 1995, pp.138-160). In contrast, the splatter film is overwhelmingly social in its orientation, extending the onset of violence out to being propagated by the group. There are three main veins of the splatter film that were popular at the box office in the US following 9/11, and each of these locate the onset of violence in different ways (in the breakdown below I have also included less popular examples in order to demonstrate how they belong to splatter film tropes). Despite these differences in form, each vein orients violence as stemming from group culture.

The zombie film: Here violence stems from the outbreak of a zombie plague. The source of this plague is usually located as a virus, in which case it is generally accidentally released into the population by government or corporations who are conducting secretive development of genetic weapons (28 Days Later [Danny Boyle, 2002], 28 Weeks Later [Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007], Dawn of the Dead [Zack Snyder, 2004], Zombie Strippers [Jay Lee, 2008], Resident Evil [Paul Anderson, 2002]). The onset of the zombie virus is also sometimes metaphysical in its origins, as in director George A. Romero’s Dead series (1968, 1978, 1985, 2005, 2007, 2010), where “when there is no more room in Hell, the dead will walk the Earth”, and Exit Humanity (John Geddes, 2012), where the zombie plague is situated as the result of ancient black magic. In other films such as War of the Dead (Marko Mäkilaakso, 2011), we have no idea what caused the contagion, and the film begins en media res. On other occasions, the zombies are reanimated corpses from previous battles, functioning as a return of the repressed as with the Nazis in Dead Snow (Tommy Wirkola, 2009) and Blood Creek (Joel Schumaker, 2009), or the dead US soldiers that return from the Second Gulf War in Homecoming. Although historically the zombie film has its origins in less graphic horror such as White Zombie (Victor Halperin, 1932) and I Walked With a Zombie (Jacques Tourneur, 1943), the contemporary zombie film takes many of its features from George A. Romero’s film Dawn of the Dead (1978). When a person is infected by a zombie virus, all other parts of the brain die apart from the cerebral cortex, so that the zombie’s primary concern is feeding itself by consuming human flesh. The only way to kill a zombie is usually

41 The trope of the Nazi zombie stems from Nazisploitation films of the 1960s and 1970s, which tend to be a cross between Exploitation cinema and soft porn, and were predominantly produced in the US, Europe and West Germany. These films include Love Camp 7 (Lee Frost, 1969), Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS (Don Edmonds, 1975) and La Bestia in Calore/The Beast in Heat/SS Hell Camp (Paolo Solvay, 1977). In the 1970s, this began to hybridize with the Zombie film in films such as Shock Waves (Ken Wiederhorn, 1977) and L’Abîme des Morts-Vivants / The Abyss of the Living Dead/ Oasis of the Zombies (Jesús Franco, 1982).
to sever the head or explode its brains, as losing limbs is no impediment and in some films, removed limbs are still alive, if not able to move. This trope allows for the development of excessive gore. The tropes of the zombie genre are so well established that when directors diverge from these it can cause controversy with fans, as in the running zombies in 28 Days Later and Dawn of the Dead, or the zombies that walk underwater in Land of the Dead (George Romero, 2005). Occasionally, the zombies have the capacity to learn, a feature that was introduced in Day of the Dead (George Romero, 1985) when one learns how to use a gun, and exploited in Land of the Dead when an African American former service station attendant zombie attempts to lead an uprising against the humans.

The ongoing popularity of this vein of the splatter film is partially due to the way that the zombie plot has been successfully adapted as a backdrop for action in the gaming industry, in games such as House of the Dead (Sega, 1996/7), Dead Rising (Capcom, 2006), Red Dead Redemption (Playstation, 2010) and Dead Nation (Playstation, 2010). Resident Evil (Capcom, 1997) is an example of one of these video games that was so successful it crossed over into film, selling 275,000 copies as a game (2014c) and then returning US$102,400,000 for the first film in 2002, and spurning four film sequels (Resident Evil: Apocalypse [Alexander Witt, 2004], Resident Evil: Extinction [Russell Mulcahy, 2007], Resident Evil: Afterlife [Paul Anderson, 2010] and Resident Evil: Retribution [Paul Anderson, 2012]). In total, the five films grossed US$915,900,000 worldwide.

Zombie films are about both societal collapse and social contagion. The threat that an outbreak causes typically mobilizes protagonists, the police, the military and the government. All of these social institutions are positioned as unable to contain the threat, as implicated in its spread or as inhumane in its containment. The latter trope can be seen in the Italian film Rec (Jaume Balagueró, 2007) and its shot by shot remake for American audiences, Quarantine (John Dowdle, 2008). Both films follow the story of a group of protagonists who are locked in a building that has experienced an outbreak of the virus so that it can be contained. Unable to leave due to government attempts to contain the virus, they are forced to die one by one. The focus on representing the social means that casting often revolves around the representation of stereotypes, as directors attempt to convey what status or role people
had prior to zombification, such as the former service station attendant who leads the zombie uprising in *Land of the Dead*.

**The hillbilly film:** *House of 1,000 Corpses* (Rob Zombie, 2003) was the first film to break through into mainstream theatrical release during the post-9/11 wave, and it was followed by a string of other films including its sequel *The Devil’s Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005) *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchise (2003, 2006, 2013), *The Hills Have Eyes* franchise (2006, 2007), the *Wrong Turn* franchise (2003, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012), the Australian film *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean) and a number of other lesser known titles. The hillbilly film draws its tension from the clash between rural and urban ideals, Northern and Southern states, and progress versus stagnation. The plot generally follows the demise of a group of Northerners (in some films they are young, in others it is a family) who accidentally lose their way in the backwoods of the Southern states. In the process they encounter a group of homicidal hillbillies who take pleasure in killing (and sometimes eating) their victims. The group of people who are the killers are typically either a family who has turned vigilante (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* Marcus Nispel, 2003) or a community (*Wrong Turn* [Rob Schmidt, 2003], *House of 1,000 Corpses* [Rob Zombie, 2003] *The Hills Have Eyes* [Alexandre Aja, 2006]). The Southerners are generally Appalachian, meaning that the central axis on which these films operate is one of class as they juxtaposes the economic decline of the South with the wealthier Northerners who travel through (Clover, 1992, pp.124-137). Because the killers are a community, they often represent both genders, although sometimes some of the women and children are shown as being more sympathetic to the plight of the victims (*The Hills Have Eyes, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). In films such as *House of 1,000 Corpses, The Devil’s Rejects, 2001 Maniacs* (Tim Sullivan, 2005) and *Lynch Mob* (Brian Conrad Erwin, 2009) there are psychopathic female characters who use their status as Southern belles to seduce victims to their death by the community.

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42 *Wolf Creek* is unusual in focusing on a lone killer, but it maintains much of the rural/urban divide present in American versions of the hillbilly film. The film leveraged publicity around the Peter Falconio case, a British tourist who was murdered in the Outback on the 14 July 2001. The film was banned from release in the Northern Territories of Australia because it was thought that it might prejudice the jury in their decision (Mercer 2005).
**The serial killer film:** Splatter films that drew from the serial killer as part of their violence typically extended the serial killing out from an individual act to one that is a group activity. This is either motivated by morals – as in Saw’s (James Wan, 2003) premise that an elderly patient dying of terminal cancer kills people who don’t “value” their lives and recruits a range of accomplices to help him – or by capitalist enterprise from those who want to pay to experience murdering someone. Examples of the latter include Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005), My Little Eye (Marc Evans, 2005) and House of 9 (Steven Monroe, 2005). In Hostel, serial killing is subverted through its adaptation to a capitalist enterprise, and the killers are people who have paid to enact violence on kidnapped tourists who are selected on the basis of their adherence to particular social categories and who are unfortunate to stumble upon the Hostel in Bratislava, Slovakia, or have been lured by scouts across Europe to the Hostel (as in Alexi’s appearance in the Hostel in Amsterdam to lure Josh, Paxton and Óli to their deaths). In the first film, Paxton finds a business card for the Elite Hunting Club in the course of his escape from the torture factory that lists the going prices for potential victims: “Americans $25,000; Europeans $10,000; Russians $5,000”). Hostel: Part II (Eli Roth, 2007) shows us how members of the Elite Hunting Club bid on victims via applications online. Images of the victims are scanned from the passport that they surrender upon entry to the Hostel and calculate their worth as a victim based on their ethnicity, age and gender. In My Little Eye, the killings are broadcast via the web to paying consumers, and in House of 9, the nine individuals are told they must battle it out and the last remaining survivor will both live and receive $5 million, indicating that the killings are also part of a capitalist scheme. In Hostel and Turistas (John Stockwell, 2006), the rationale for the killing is also linked to unequal global development, as Slovaks and Brazilians’ engagement in the killings is positioned as stemming from a desire to ‘get even’ with Americans. In Hostel, this occurs through the way that the Elite Hunting Club supports the local economy, and in Turistas, American tourists are targeted and killed for their organs so that they can be recirculated into a global organ trade.

According to Carol Clover (1992, p.39), the key defining trope of the slasher film is “that the killer is recognizably human and distinctly male; his fury is unmistakably sexual in both roots and expression; his victims are mostly women, often sexually free and always young and beautiful ones”. In the splatter film, violence is not based on gender so much as it is on randomized social violence. In these films, while the killers are majority male, there are
women who participate in the murders as well. Examples of this include Jigsaw’s first victim Amanda, who is the only known victim to escape one of his traps but returns to become one of the central antagonists for the next two films, and is noted for her construction of traps that are inescapable (as opposed to Jigsaw’s traps which provide people with the option of severe mutilation or certain death). In Hostel, the Elite Hunting Club’s capitalist activities are positioned as fundamentally intertwined with the community in Bratislava, and the small town in which the killing factory is based provides the opportunity for killers to interact with their future victims in a controlled environment before they are taken away to be killed. Women are seen in a variety of roles – employed as lures, such as Natalya and Svetlana in Hostel, who are responsible for managing Paxton and Josh until they can be kidnapped and killed; employed in the factory in preparing victims for clients (as in the old woman that Whitney bites the nose off in Hostel: Part II); and as part of the capitalist elite who kills. An example of the latter include the notorious beheading sequence that is banned in Germany, Malaysia, Singapore and New Zealand, which features a woman called Mrs Bathory lying naked underneath a screaming Lorna suspended from the ceiling, whipping her with a scythe and bathing in her blood until she slashes Lorna’s throat. Hostel: Part III (Scott Spiegel, 2011) relocates the site of the killings to a factory inside Las Vegas, and in this film we also see a woman dressed in an alien suit who shoots arrows through Justin’s limbs. Thus while people indulge in their gendered fantasies, men and women are equally tortured and death is positioned less of the result of a gendered gaze which Carol Clover identifies as key to the slasher, and more as the corruption of capitalism.

These three key veins constitute the majority of the splatter films that are produced after 9/11 and which experienced popularity in the US. There are films released during this wave that could be considered as splatters that do not fall within one of these three storylines – such as Jeepers Creepers (Victoria Salva, 2001), Jeepers Creepers II (Victoria Salva, 2003), The Crazies (Breck Eisner, 2010) and Slither (James Gunn, 2006), which all rework the 1950s horror trope of alien invasion. However, what is consistent across all of these films is that the violence is positioned as the result of social rather than individual aberration, which positions these films as distinguished in form from the slasher film.
b. Weapons

The weapons used to kill differ between the slasher film and the splatter film in a move consistent with the splatter film’s emphasis on the exploration of the violation of the body. Rather than the penetrative weapon that critics such as Carol Clover (1992, pp.31-2) and Adam Rockoff (2002, p.7) see as being central to the slasher film’s exercise of misogynist power, as iconicized through Michael Myer’s knife in *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) the splatter film uses a broader variety of weapons. These include biting (as in the zombie film), the construction of elaborate torture machines (as in *Saw*), and frequent repurposing of medical tools to dissect the body on a torture table (as in *Hostel*). Consistent with the splatter film’s industrial emergence as a special effects genre, there is an emphasis on inventive deaths, as in Nora Carpenter’s death by elevator decapitation in *Final Destination 2* (David Ellis, 2003) deaths by wood chipper in *Final Destination 3* (Eric Heisserer, 2011) and *Tucker and Dale Vs Evil* (Eli Craig, 2010) and Nikki’s death by cockroaches in the mouth causing suffocation in *Hostel: Part III*. The splatter film, then, employs a broader variety of deaths and weaponry in its search for special effects.

c. The protagonist and the monster are conflated

The splatter film might be seen as representative of a broader shift within American horror cinema to the monster as coming from within the US, rather than from outside. In his book *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A cultural history of the Horror movie*, Andrew Tudor (1989) analyses the narratives of 990 horror films produced between 1931 to 1984. Tudor (pp.211-223) argues that horror prior to the 1960s is characterized by what he calls “secure” horror, where the monster is situated outside of the culture (in the form of aliens, the supernatural or other countries) and is neutralized as a threat by the film’s climax. In the 1960s this shifts to what he calls “paranoid” horror, where the threat is located from within and is thus much more difficult to resolve. Tudor argues that paranoid horror works to conflate the binaries of good/evil and right/wrong on which secure horror is based, in the process leaving the
audience with a sense of unease. Tudor (p.222) argues that this transition to unease corresponds with a crisis in the legitimation of postindustrial society and the failure of structures of authority. Joe Grixti (1989) and James Twitchell (1985) highlight that this collapsing of moral boundaries is representative of much earlier tropes in culture. For Grixti (1989, p.16), horror has been a feature of cultures since time immemorial. Twitchell (1985, p.69) argues that the sense of fear that horror engages with is due to the way horror is typically targeted at youth, and the iteration of fear it provides works to ritualize the passage from adolescence to adulthood. Horror, argues Twitchell, is thus a universal trope across cultures. Nevertheless, the shift that Tudor identifies towards much more “paranoid” horror is a significant one, and for many critics, the 1960s mark a shift towards an internalization of the villain into one that resides within America (Tudor, 1989, pp.192-5, Maddrey, 2004, p.6, Pinedo, 1997, pp.10-11, Simpson, 2000, p.11, Seltzer, 1998, p.2, Modleski, 1986, p.158). In the post-9/11 splatter film, the threat is often positioned as coming from within, as in zombies, hillbillies, serial killers or the export of capitalist systems to foreign nations (Hostel and Turistas). However, the splatter film internalizes this threat even further, as through the victim’s contact with the monster, they in turn take on the moral aberration that the monster represents.

The splatter film works to collapse the distinction between the protagonist and the monster so that by the end of the film the two are indistinguishable, meaning that the film structure operates around a process of doubling. The only way to survive a post-9/11 splatter film is to take on the qualities of the monster and engage in killing. Like the final shot of the 1973 version of The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (Tobe Hooper) that shows Sally drenched in blood and laughing maniacally after escaping Leatherface, the post-9/11 splatter film often ends on the protagonist’s bloodied, brutalized messy body to signal that they will never be the same again following their experiences. However, in order to escape, the protagonist must transgress moral norms surrounding violence. This can be seen in Hostel, where Paxton embarks on a campaign of murderous violence as he attempts to escape Slovakia. After shooting the client who has paid to torture and kill him, Paxton attempts to find his way through the building. During his escape, he notices another Japanese woman from the hostel (Kana) being tortured with a blowtorch in the eye, the heat melting her skin until it forms a long protrusion. Killing her torturer, Paxton considers the protruding eyeball before concluding that the only thing that he is able to do for her is to chop it off with scissors, an act...
that causes a large explosion of pus as Kana squeals in pain. Thus while Paxton is attempting to rescue Kana, in order to do so, he must take up the position of the torturer. Exiting the building and procuring a car, Paxton drives at speed for the train station with a screaming Kana. Spotting the people who recruited him to the hostel and are under the employ of the killing ring (Svetlana, Natalya and Alexi), Paxton runs over them at speed killing Alexi and Svetlana. The camera then cuts to a shot showing Natalya still alive and picking herself up off the ground. At this point, the camera subjectively aligns with Natalya, capturing her shock and sudden death as the car returns from out of frame. Members of the Elite Hunting Club reach the train station at the same time as Paxton, but Kana spots her disfigured face in a reflection and commits suicide by throwing herself in front of an oncoming train, which creates a distraction for Paxton to board another train undetected. Once he is on the train, he spots the Dutch businessman who he saw on the way out of the factory sewing up the remains of his best friend Josh. Paxton follows him into the bathroom when the train stops. As the Dutch businessman sits on the toilet, he accidentally drops a card for the Elite Hunting Club out of his pocket into the neighbouring stall. Paxton takes the scalpel in his pocket and uses it to sever his two fingers in a symbolic act that draws parallels to the way that Paxton was tortured earlier, when the German client severed two of his fingers off with a chainsaw. The associative link between these two close ups of two fingers being severed is that Paxton and the Dutch businessman are no longer torturer and victim, they are one and the same – a point emphasized through the way Paxton moves swiftly to slit the business man’s throat following this moment. Significantly, as he is performing this motion of slitting the throat, Paxton catches his and the Dutch businessman’s reflection in the metallic, shiny surface of the lever to highlight this doubling.\(^{43}\) In the Director’s Cut of Hostel that was not released, but is available on the DVD extras, this conflation of torturer and victim is highlighted further. Here, Paxton does not kill the Dutch businessman, but he kidnaps his little daughter Saskia instead, and the final shots show the train pulling away as Paxton covers Saskia’s mouth with his hands in an attempt to stop her from screaming for her father. As all of the Hostel films only feature the torture of adults, Paxton’s kidnapping of a child of around five years old signals a further moral transgression. To survive the splatter film then is to be left

\(^{43}\) As John Fawell notes in Hitchcock’s Rear Window, the use of mirrors to convey a doubling in characters was a trope he took from German Expressionism, where the mirror is used to convey schizophrenia. Fawell notes how Hitchcock instructed the art directors to use mirrors whenever possible in the productions of Vertigo (1958) and Psycho (1960) (Fawell 2001, p.74). The trope of the mirror as representing the protagonist’s split personality is therefore one that is well established.
traumatized, and to have resorted to the same morality of the monster in order to temporarily contain the threat.

Figure 6. Drenched in blood, Sally laughs maniacally in the final shot of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974).

Figure 7. Paxton catches his reflection in the toilet lever in *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005).

In many films, the collapse between the monster and the protagonist is signaled through the way that the protagonist must kill someone that they previously thought of fondly. In the
zombie film, this is a frequent occurrence, as loved ones are infected and then must be executed. For example, in *Exit Humanity*, Edward Young is forced to kill both his wife and son once they become zombies. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Erin is thrown by Leatherface down into his dungeon beneath the house that he uses to torture his victims and prepare their bodies as meat for the family’s cannibalistic consumption. Orienting herself to the new space, Erin is shocked to find her friend Andy handing on a giant meat hook above a grand piano, with one leg severed at the knee. Erin attempts to lift him off the meat hook but is unable to carry his weight, sending the meat hook deeper into his spine (a movement that is captured in close up with the sounds of the piano Erin leans on creating discordant tones which add to the horror of the scene). When Andy realizes it is not possible for her to save him, he begs her to kill him so that he will not suffer further from torture. Erin breaks down crying and refuses, before grabbing a nearby knife and stabbing him through the heart and collapsing underneath him onto the piano as blood gushes from his arteries onto her, the blood signaling her transition into the monster. Similarly, in *Cabin Fever* (Eli Roth, 2002), the outbreak of a biological skin-eating virus quickly dissolves the bonds between a group of friends as one by one they are infected. After isolating Karen by leaving her in the shed to die, Marcy is mauled by a German Shepherd owned by one of the surrounding campers. Her friend Paul comes running out of the forest in an attempt to rescue her, and finds her severed foot. Tracing the trail of blood to the shed, Paul finds the dog ripping into Karen’s flesh. As the dog senses Paul, it turns to run towards him. At this point the camera cuts to the perspective of the dog’s vision, as if the audience is running in a fast moving tracking shot. The film stock turns to red at this point to indicate that the dog represents imminent death. Paul manages to shoot the dog at the very last moment. He then returns to the shed. Rolling over Karen, he sees that not only is she dying of the infection, the dog has ripped off the lower part of her face exposing her teeth. He then beats her to death with a shovel to put her out of her misery. A long shot shows him emerging from the shed as the screen tints to blood, signaling that Paul is now part monster.
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Figure 8. Andy hangs on a meat hook in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003).

The collapse between the protagonist and the monster is often clearest in films where the protagonists are forced to fight each other, or they have the perception that they have to. As Isabel Pinedo (1997, p.191) surmises, “In the classical paradigm, the violent disruption is often located in or originates from a remote, exotic location. In contrast, the postmodern paradigm treats violence as a constituent element of everyday life”. The splatter film presents social cohesion as fragile, and easily falling apart once a threat is introduced. The zombie film is frequently populated by warring groups who compete for resources. In *Survival of the Dead* (George Romero, 2009), Plum Island is occupied by two competing families, the O’Flynns and the Muldoons. The Muldoons have been chaining up their undead family members and keeping them in roles that resemble their former lives. The Muldoons want to purge the island of undead and send out a radio announcement to annoy the O’Flynns asking survivors to come to the island as a sanctuary. The National Guard respond to this advert, but are all shot by the O’Flynns upon landing at the island because their presence would put a strain on the already scarce resources. The zombie film thus presents a society that has dissolved into total anarchy, with patches of territory controlled by small pockets of armed vigilantes. In *House of ‘9*, the nine victims are told that they must kill each other to survive, quickly quelling any hope of cooperation. The nine battle each other, forming alliances and double crossing each other out of desperation to be the last one left. The ease with which
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society collapses positions violence as the ‘natural’ order in these films, a kind of Hobbesian state of nature where violence begets violence in an endless feedback loop.

In a similar fashion, Matt Hills (2011, pp.116-7) argues that the narrative of Saw functions through a process of doubling and indeterminacy that is embedded in the complex games that Jigsaw proposes. Drawing from Mark Jancovich’s reading of 1950s B movies in relation to the Cold War, situates the anxieties expressed by the Saw films in relationship to a negotiation of the Othering of groups within society. Jancovich (as cited in Hills, 2011, pp.116-7) argues that the relationship between the “monster” and the victim is much more complicated in 1950s horror films than established readings have allowed for. Rather than the aliens “standing in” for fears of the Soviet Union as invading “Other”, the threat in these films functions around the play between Self and Other. According to Jancovich, “while the 1950s invasion narratives used the aliens as an image of rationalization and conformity, other horror texts of the period used aliens as an image of difference through which they investigated, problematised and even rejected the notions of ‘normality’ prevalent in 1950s America” (1996, p.83). Hills (2005) argues that the Saw series (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) is a postmodern reworking of these polarizations, one which is based on the instability of subject positioning, collapsing the distinction between the Self and the Other and calling into question the rationality of group thinking. While the serial killer Jigsaw functions as a vigilante who kills people on the basis of their perceived moral transgressions – the drug addict; the father who cannot pay attention to his other child following his other son’s death; the woman who has an affair; the skinhead who is racist – these killings do not result in the restoration of an established moral order; rather, the film draws a complex narrative that positions all characters as operating within murky moralities. Hills (p.116) highlights how when Eric Matthews accuses Jigsaw of killing people for his own pleasure in the second film, Jigsaw responds that he has never “killed” anyone, rather their deaths were the result of their own life choices. In Saw IV (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007) we learn that the choice he offers victims between extreme self-mutilation and death is taken from the motto of his ex-wife’s drug rehabilitation clinic: “Cherish Your Life”. Jigsaw here is referring to the choice that victims had prior to their kidnapping in living their lives according to societal norms, and also to the choice that they have when they encounter his traps. However, the brutality of what his victims are forced to do in order to survive works to undercut any moral superiority. For example, when Michael Marks is kidnapped by Jigsaw in Saw II (Darren
Lynn Bousman, 2005), he is targeted for his role as a police informant for Detective Eric Matthews. We later find out that Jigsaw’s motivation resides not in Marks’ collaboration with police, but in the way he has been working together with Matthews to falsify evidence in his cases. Marks wakes up to find himself his chest enclosed in a trap with nails protruding, that when it closes, will crush his head. The tape says:

Hello, Michael. I want to play a game. So far in what could loosely be called your life, you've made a living watching others. Society would call you an informant, a rat, a snitch. I call you worthless of the body you possess, of the life you've been given. Now we will see if you are willing to look inward, rather than outward, to give up on the one thing you rely on in order to go on living. The device around your neck is a death mask. The mask is a spring timer. If you do not locate the key in time, the mask will close. Think of it like a Venus Fly Trap. What you are looking at right now is your own body, not more than two hours ago. Don't worry, you're sound asleep and can't feel a thing. Taking into account that you are at a great disadvantage here, I am going to give you a hint as to where I've hidden the key is. So listen carefully, a hint is: it's right before your eyes. How much blood will you shed to stay alive, Michael? Live or die, make your choice.

Attached to the trap is a small mirror with which Marks is able to see his eye, which he must gouge out in order to find the key that is embedded in it. Marks is unable to bear the pain and dies when the timer goes off. While Marks is positioned as morally ambiguous, the excruciating torture that he must inflict on himself in order to be free from Jigsaw’s game works to complicate the morality of his transgression. For this reason, Hills (2011) argues that the Self/Other binary is collapsed into the image of the tortured victim, as there are no characters in the film that can be read as either essentially “good” or “evil”.
The \textit{Saw} films further this doubling between torturer and victim, monster and protagonist through the way that Jigsaw is only part of a network of serial killers. Jigsaw is ravaged by cancer and dies in the third film when one of his traps goes ‘wrong’, but he leaves behind a network of accomplices to carry on his games. Some of these accomplices are driven by their belief in his ideology (such as the reformed heroin addict Amanda, who believes that Jigsaw’s attempt to kill her ‘saved’ her life, and the doctor Lawrence Gordon); and others who have been forced into helping him, such as detective Mark Hoffman, and hospital intern Zep Hindle, who must help Jigsaw in order to obtain the antidote for the slow working poison in his blood. The interplay between Jigsaw and his convoluted maze of accomplices (many of which occur in more than one film), Hills (2011, pp.116-7) argues, means that the narrative is engaged in a process of “doubling”, or highlighting the similarities between the serial killer and his victims. This doubling is exemplified in the films by the way that the narrative is constructed through a continuous series of flashbacks that interweave and generate connections between previously unrelated events as the series goes on, and also the deliberate veiling of the killer in many sequences. This veiling is achieved either through the device of the so-called “pig’s head”, a mask resembling the decapitated head of a sow that Jigsaw and his accomplices wear during their killings to mask their identity, and the use of mechanized technology such as the tape recorder, the video screen and the use of a carnivalesque mechanical doll on a tricycle known by fans as ‘Billy’ to inform the victim of their fate. The
effect of these two techniques is that the audience is kept continuously guessing as to who is behind the murder. Moreover, as more accomplices are introduced, there are some who change the rules of the game. For example, Amanda begins killing for pleasure and designs inescapable traps where the victim dies anyway after completing their ‘task’. This can be seen in the trap for Detective Allison Kerry in *Saw III* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006) where the only crime announced is her interest in crime fighting, which makes “her dead inside”. She is placed in a trap in which a ribcage harness will spring open, ripping apart her chest, if she does not retrieve a key from the bottom of a flask of hydrochloric acid in time. Though the acid burns her skin, she retrieves the key in time and finds it does not unlock. The use of many accomplices with different motivations and a highly complex, interwoven storyline that ties the seven films together through flashbacks and flash-forwards, means that the audience is often engaged in guessing who the killer is.

That Jigsaw’s beliefs encourage protégés positions his killings as a social belief system rather than the acts of a crazed individual (Hills 2011, p.117). As such, Hills (2011, p.116) argues that the *Saw* series, while only ever indirectly referencing 9/11 and the Global War on Terror, engages in notions of what constitutes “righteous torture” and the way that these notions extend out of the beliefs of a social collective. Hills argues that it is precisely this instability
that positions the Saw series as reflective of the anxiety surrounding the U.S role in the War on Terror:

Caught between a symbolic distance from the “real” and a closeness to “real” objects of fear, the Saw films don’t merely “reflect” post-9/11 concerns. Instead, they code these concerns through ideological incoherence: they represent Jigsaw as a dangerous legitimator of righteous torture and as the source of a value system attacking America’s decadent immorality; they represent his victims as American and place them within the “horrorism” of the “enemy combatant” other. The Saw franchise doesn’t have a “message”; it isn’t singularly pedagogical or political. Yet it is not nihilistically meaningless gore-filled torture porn (p.121).

Hills’ argument that the Saw series’ political and social relevance is not reduced because of its indeterminancy – rather it is precisely this instability that grants it its allegorical power – is of use to us in thinking about how the post-9/11 splatter film might function at multiple levels which allow for the role that readings ‘against the grain’ might provide in these texts. Such a reading, Hills (p.121) argues, allows for the notion that graphic violence in films such as Saw are polysemic – “at once denotatively apolitical and, at one and the same time, connotatively hooked into a multiplicity of post-9/11 cultural-political anxieties surrounding the United States’ imputed decadence, the spread of threatening or “monstrous” belief systems, and the “justifiable” use of torture”. The moral ambiguity that Hills identifies in Saw and the emphasis on group culture can be seen at work across the films released after 9/11, and might explain why they were so popular. However, there are other movements at work that encourage this reading ‘against the grain’.

d. The corruption of law and order

The splatter film is oriented towards a decline into anarchy that is mirrored in the collapse of social structures. In this collapse, institutions that represent social order are often implicated or positioned as ineffective in stopping this decline, such as the police, the military and the Government. An example of ineffectiveness in controlling the progression into violence is
often seen in the hillbilly horror film, which frequently features the policeman who ventures out to rescue the protagonists or solve the crime and instead dies (such as *Wrong Turn*, and Detective Allison Kerry in *Saw III*). In *Dawn of the Dead*, the film’s opening credits show news footage of the President addressing journalists about the outbreak out of the crime on the White House lawn, before zombies presumably attack off screen and the President’s bodyguards shoot the journalists and they escape onto a waiting helicopter. In the zombie film, an outbreak frequently causes chaos and anti-social behavior as protagonists compete for resources. For example, in *28 Days Later*, our protagonist survivors Jim, Selena, and Hannah are lured to a military safe zone by a broadcast that informs them that a cure for the virus has been found. Once they get there, they find that the ‘cure’ is chaining up zombies to see if they starve without flesh (a hypothesis that later turns out to be true in the film’s diegesis). The untrustworthiness of the military is foreshadowed in a sequence at the dinner table, where Major Henry West establishes violence as the norm, rather than order: “This is what I’ve seen in the four weeks since infection. People killing people. Which is much what I saw in the four weeks before infection, and the four weeks before that, and before that, and as far back as I care to remember. People killing people. Which to my mind, puts us in a state of normality right now”. Following an incident where the zombies manage to break through the perimeter protecting the property, Major West confides in Jim that the only reason they advertised safe haven to uninfected was to lure women that the soldiers could rape. Shocked, Jim runs to grab Selena and Hannah to escape and is knocked out by one of the soldiers. At this point, the sound is distorted to reflect his disorientation and Major West appears above him, with a Hellenistic sculpture positioned in the right of the frame. As Brian Eggert (2007) notes, the statue is from of Laocoön, a Trojan priest of Posiedon who attempted to warn the Trojans against accepting the Trojan Horse from the Greeks, and his statue in this frame signifies that the military provide a place of false haven.
However, the trope of the collapse between monster and protagonist is also extended to implicating these institutions in the spread of this violence. For example, *Osombie* and *Zombie Strippers* position the source of the virus as stemming from military experimentation with biological weapons. Both films are a homage to *The Return of the Living Dead* (Dan O’Bannon, 1985), where the virus originates from the preserved remains being discovered in a warehouse from *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968), positioning Romero’s film as a ‘real’ event – an example of the intertextuality and self-referentiality that the splatter
genre frequently employs. At the end of *The Return of the Living Dead*, the government unleashes nuclear weapons that kill both dead and undead indiscriminately in order to contain the virus.

The splatter film also frequently includes transgressive policemen. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *My Little Eye*, protagonists appeal to policemen only to find out that they are part of the murdering group. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Sheriff Hoyt arrives at the scene and frightens the teens through his apparent disregard for the cadaver of the hitchhiker who has committed suicide in their van (“I bet she's real unhappy, real sorry that you're getting fuckin' her blood all over your goddamn arm. You know, back when I was a young patrolman, I used to love wrapping up these young honeys”). We later learn that Hoyt is part of the Hewitt family, and his assistance at the scene of the suicide is motivated by his desire to notify Leatherface of the group’s presence, paving the way for his arrival with his infamous chainsaw. In *My Little Eye*, the policeman arrives and shoots Emma in the back, before it is revealed he is a member of the snuff ring. In the *Saw* series, two of the police are corrupt – Eric Matthews and Mark Hoffman, and Hoffman is involved directly in perpetuating the killings as an accomplice of Jigsaw.

This trope of the transgressive policeman can also be seen in *The Devil’s Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005). The sequel to his first film *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003) switches perspective from the victims to the torturers, in this case the Firefly family and their friends. Although in the earlier sequences we are encouraged to align with the perspective of the victims of torture through the way that the camera frequently leaves the Fireflies and Otis Driftwood to focus on the conversations of the two couples they have captured and held hostage in a motel, once the victims are dead, the film then shifts mode to position the Fireflies as being persecuted by the police. This shift is signaled when, following a shootout between police and the Fireflies at the latter’s ranch residence, Mother Firefly is captured and held in a cell at the police station. Mother Firefly begins to taunt Sheriff John Wyatt, who is in charge of the police station, revealing that she killed his brother. This functions as a turning point within the film where Sheriff Wyatt rapidly begins to lose sanity. He yells at her:
You listen to me, and you listen good! I am gonna kill every member of your family! I'm gonna hunt them down like the animals they are, and I'm gonna skin em' alive! They are going to feel the pain and suffering of every last victim! They're gonna crawl on their hands and knees, and they're gonna beg me for mercy! But all I'm gonna have for them is pain! Pain and death!

Leaving the room and returning to his office, Sheriff Wyatt then begins to hallucinate that his dead brother is talking to him and urging him to kill the Firefly family in vengeance for his death. Sheriff Wyatt then returns to Mother Firefly’s cell and stabs her to death, before ringing up two bounty hunters who are known as ‘The Unholy Ones’ to help him track the rest of the family down (the name of these hunters here is explicit to signpost the transition from law enforcer to law breaker that Sheriff Wyatt is undergoing. When Sheriff Wyatt and The Unholy Ones finally track the Fireflys and their murderous friends down, Sheriff Wyatt brings them back to the Firefly household to begin torturing them through a variety of methods: nailing their hands to the chairs, staple gunning their bellies with crime scene photos, and chasing Baby with a horsewhip for sport. Sheriff Wyatt’s torture of the Fireflys and Otis functions as a doubling of the violence that the Fireflys meted out earlier. At this point the film entirely collapses into a cycle of unresolved violence – Tiny Firefly returns to kill Sheriff Wyatt, and then the survivors drive off in a Cadillac only to be stopped by a police block and killed in the resulting shootout. However, Tiny survives, leaving the possibility for a future sequence and the threat uncontained. In many ways, The Devil’s Rejects reworks the revenge Western (a subgenre that Zombie states was his inspiration for the film in the DVD commentary), but it entirely collapses the boundaries between order and anarchy so that the result is unremitting violence.

e. Open endings

The splatter film is therefore structured around a central organizing or syntactical principle of order (as represented by the maintenance of social institutions which channel violence into
acceptable forms) and anarchy (the collapse of these institutions into unfettered violence). Like many other horror films from the post-1960s period (such as those that fall into the slasher subgenre), the ending is left open and the threat uncontained. From film to sequel, it is the threat that survives rather than the protagonists. Thus in George A. Romero’s zombie films, each new film shifts focus to a new group of protagonists, without providing any continuity on the group from the film before. Similarly, Leatherface survives to stalk more unsuspecting travellers in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the zombie virus outlives the majority of the protagonists in films like *Land of the Dead*, and Jigsaw is able to continue his serial killing work posthumously after he dies of cancer by recruiting protégés. This lack of resolve is often parodied in the splatter film by the way a surviving protagonist is promptly dispensed of in the next film. This is seen brutally in *Hostel: Part II*, which opens with Paxton surviving his encounter with the Elite Hunting Club. Attempting to create a new life with his new girlfriend, Paxton is shown awakening in his remote country mansion to nightmares of his time in Bratislava. His girlfriend comforts him that he is now far away from the threat and it can no longer pursue him. The film then cuts to a shot showing his girlfriend waking up to the drone of a chainsaw. Locating the sound with a gardener pruning trees outside, she shrugs at him to communicate her annoyance at the rude awakening. Descending the stairs, she is then presented with a gruesome sight: Paxton’s decapitated body at the dining table with his cat lovingly licking his neck stump. The splatter film can therefore be categorized as a genre that undermines any stability in the moral order, leaving the threat unresolved through its nihilistic and dystopian structure. What then can we make of the politics of such nihilism and how does it relate to our earlier points on the oppositional viewing practices of these films?

It is here that the work of Fredric Jameson is useful, as he offers a much more complex interjection on the way that films function to articulate ideology through narrative structures. For Jameson (1981, p.60), genres provide one of the only places through which we can begin to access the group ideas that shape our society, as they function as a kind of collective narcissism that, through their repetition of myth, allow us to imagine Utopian ideas of future societies. Mass media for Jameson is not the production of false consciousness, “but rather a transformational work on social and political anxieties and fantasies which must then have some effective presence in the mass cultural text in order to be subsequently “managed” or repressed” (2007, pp.33-4). Jameson (1981, p.52) argues that the central function of
narratives is then to engage in “strategies of containment”, where ideological solutions to unresolvable problems are proposed and tested for a society that does not exist yet. The text raises issues or antagonisms. The attempt to resolve these issues through narrative closure means that the author or producer engages with notions of social totality. Thus, even in attempting to privilege one perspective or lock down elements of another, the text engages the totality of History (p.55). Jameson proposes a dialectical method that reads this struggle back into the text. Genre is of particular interest to Jameson because of the way that this totality is read against other texts. As Altman notes, this emphasis on resolution means that Jameson’s work is very similar to Tzvetan Todorov’s 1977 model of narratives, which argues that narratives tend to move from order, to the disruption of order, to order restored or improved and can thus be read as manifestations of social issues. However, Jameson’s model is more complex. Jameson (1981, pp.84-86) draws from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to argue that the text is dialogical; that is, it is engaged with a response to and anticipation of other texts throughout history. The text is thus both heteroglossic (containing multiple meanings) and polyphonic (speaking with multiple voices). This dialectical struggle is reflected back through the text through to its smallest unit of political struggle, which he terms the ideologeme (p.87). As Jameson notes, at the core of the “ideologeme, remains a conceptual antinomy, [which] must now be grasped, on the level of the social and historical subtext, as a contradiction” (original emphasis, p.117). For Jameson, then, the text presents contradictions that must then be resolved within the narrative, and these can be found in the artificial ‘endings’ that Hollywood cinema provides. Jameson sees these as manifestations of Utopian solutions to current problems in our social order.

This move towards anarchy and unresolved violence as the imminent horizon and ultimate destination of the film works to position these films in opposition to what David Bordwell (1986) refers to as Classical Hollywood narrational principles. As Bordwell argues, the plot of the Classical Hollywood film is geared towards this resolution of conflict: “at the level of the syuzhet, the classical film establishes a violation that must be then set right” (p.18). Drawing from screenwriting manuals, and also from a survey of 100 films made from 1917-1960, Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson (1985, p.16) find that this sense of closure, while sometimes incomplete, focuses on the resolution of the two principle causal units’ plot lines, one of which is frequently resolved through the culmination of a heterosexual romance story line. This sense of closure is emphasized through the inclusion of
an epilogue, which highlights how order has been restored in the film, as in the triumphant return of Hans Solo and his companions from fighting on the Death Star to an awards ceremony in *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977). As Isabel Cristina Pinedo (1997, pp.29-31) argues, the Classical Hollywood convention of closure is disrupted in the contemporary horror film, a characteristic that she argues works to position these films as postmodern due to the way that they collapse metanarratives. At the finale of the splatter film, the threat is left uncontained and unresolved. Following Andrew Tudor’s (1989) genre analysis of the horror film, Pinedo (p.85) associates a shift in the narratives of horror as occurring in the post-1968 period, where more films are left open-ended (ibid, p.85). Prior to this, the emphasis in horror film was on a plot which conformed more closely to Classical Hollywood narration: the film presents the ordinary world; this world suddenly encounters a violent disruption; the narrative progresses as the monster rampages despite peoples’ attempts to contain it; male military/scientists resolve and contain the threat (Tudor as cited in Pinedo, p.89). While this drive to resolution represents a clear syntactic Manichean order, the films from the late 1960s depart from this paradigm, leaving the threat as unresolved and coming from within the culture rather than through the emergence of an outside force. This emphasis on violence and lack of narrative closure has an impact on both causal logic of the narrative and on our conceptions of violence, asking us to question our myths of ordered normality.

The splatter film draws from its opposition to mainstream cinema conventions through parodying the Classical Hollywood epilogue, before disrupting it to descend the film into violence once more. In Breck Eisner’s 2010 remake *The Crazies*, the onset of an alien invasion results in the citizens of Iowa killing each other in gruesome ways for no apparent reason. Surviving the invasion and the military’s attempt to bomb the area to shut down the chaos, David and Judy walk across the plains towards the nearest town. A long shot of them holding hands in front of the bomb blast in the distance parodies the convention of the culmination of the heterosexual romance that punctuates the majority of the endings of Classical Hollywood Cinema. However, the film does not end here, and the final shots of the film show us their walk through the perspective of the military surveillance cameras, identifying the heat in their figures through the use of infrared vision before the words “Initiate Containment Protocol” flash up on screen, signaling David and Judy’s imminent death. A news report tells us that an explosion from the Dakon Pendrill Chemical Plant has started a massive fire, killing civilians, which the audience is encouraged to read as a military
cover up for their use of bombing, further entrenching the suspicion towards both Government and military that these films exhibit.

Figure 13. *The Crazies* (Breck Eisner, 2010) parodies the Hollywood ending.

This play on the traditional Hollywood ending is a common device in the post-9/11 splatter film, where a false ending is interspersed with some of the credits beginning to roll before the film opens again to reveal further events that destabilize any sense of resolution. Zack Snyder’s 2005 version of *Dawn of the Dead* demonstrates this kind of parody well – our protagonists escape from the zombies (who at this stage in the evolution of the series still cannot walk under water) by building a metal bus that will take them to a small boat on the water, and eventually to an island where they believe there will remain people who have not
been infected by the virus. They reach the boat, losing members of the group along the way to the zombie virus. As they pull away from the shore, Michael reveals that he has been bitten on the arm, dispensing of any hope of the hinted romantic subplot between him and Ana. He states that he will be staying due to his infection and they symbolically join hands in a shot that features the American flag billowing in the wind in the background. As they pull out from the shore, Michael shoots himself in the head to stop his conversion from man to zombie. The credits then begin to roll before they are interspersed with short bursts of handycam footage taken on the boat alternating before more credits that shows the decline of their situation. They encounter another boat only to find a half eaten still moving zombie in the chilly bin; the food on the ship is infested with maggots; there is a fire on the boat; they run out of water; and, finally, when they reach the island, it is shown to be inhabited by hordes of zombies, leaving the protagonists in exactly the same position that they were in at the beginning of the film. Significantly, the handycam drops to the ground to show a fallen zombie’s face before the film is tinted to entirely red to demonstrate that what they thought was resolution is now likely the protagonist’s death. Here, the shot featuring the American flag is taken from a low angle against bright skies – conventions that signal order has been reestablished. However, the shift in format to handycam draws attention to the unreliability of the filmic image and this re-establishment of order, a connotation that is reinforced through the film’s ultimate collapse into violent anarchy.

![Grainy handycam footage of a zombie](image)

**Figure 14.** Grainy handycam footage of a zombie is the final shot of *Dawn of the Dead* (2005), demonstrating a common technique of ending the film on confronting moments of violence.
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This technique of interspersing a false resolution with credits is also used in Rob Schmidt’s 2003 film *Wrong Turn*, when the two surviving protagonists burn the mutant cannibal hillbillies alive after a struggle. Stopping at the service station to get gas, the final shot of the film shows an image of a triumphant yet traumatized Chris ripping down a map of the South from the wall of the building, after being unable to find any attendants present. The camera cuts away to the inside of the building to reveal the attendant hiding behind the bench, aware of their presence and indicating his potential participation in the hillbillies’ murderous and cannibalistic lifestyle. The credits then roll with their accompanied soundtrack, only to be interrupted approximately a minute later by an image of a highway patrolman encountering the still smouldering burnt out cabin in the woods. As he pulls out his torch to go and have a closer look, a low angle shot shows him crouching down to pull a section of wood off one of the hillbillies’ bodies. This low angle shot reveals that one of the unnamed hillbillies has survived, and is picking up a piece of wood. He smashes this over the head of the highway patrolman, and literally towards the screen that the audience is watching. This disrupts the audience gaze by breaking the Fourth Wall, at which point the screen cuts to black. The effect of this rupture is that the viewer is placed simultaneously in a position of omniscient narration (in that they are able to see the hillbilly approaching the highway patrolman) and as the subjective recipient of violence (in that the assault on the highway man is also an assault on the screen itself). This notion of playing with the final moments of the film to create an effect where the violence might be seen as superceding the screen through audience positioning is common in the splatter film. The interspersion of this disruption in the final credits demonstrates the prominence of this as a trope of the splatter film, as it is dependent on the audience waiting through the credits to view the final outburst of violence that they expect from the film.
III. Narrative and play

As Michael Arnzen (1994, p.180) notes in his “Who’s Laughing Now… The Postmodern Splatter Film”, this expectation of anarchy positions the audience in a process of play, where the question is not who will be killed yet, but rather how they will be killed. Arnzen (p.179) argues that while there has often been an emphasis on the conservative narrative of the horror film – a threat is presented, resolved and order is restored - the splatter film celebrates its lack of conservatism through directorial play. Arnzen (p.176-8) illustrates this by detailing a sequence from the film Evil Dead 2, which picks up from where the first film lets off after Ash and his girlfriend find a deserted house in the forest with a book marked Necromicon Ex Mortis (Book of the Dead). The book, once opened, unleashes an evil spirit that possesses his girlfriend, forcing him to decapitate her. Arnzen profiles a sequence where the Evil Spirit now takes residence only in Ash’s hand, which then takes on a life of its own and begins attacking him. Ash’s only defense is to sever his own hand with a chainsaw, which then returns to attack him, animated through the use of a fast-motion sequence. For Arnzen, this sequence is postmodern because it “destroys the effect – via effects – of terror and calls attention simply to itself as a work of art” (p.180). Arnzen highlights how this hand against the body and mind sequence demonstrates what Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson refer
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to as the “postmodern unconscious” in both the way that it positions the protagonists and the spectators as schizophrenic, engaged in a process of “play” with Hollywood conventions (Arnzen, 1994, p.180). Gore and its anticipation becomes central to the text and functions as the only stable horizon within these films, in turn fragmenting the narrative and engaging the viewer in ludic play with the text as they attempt to predict what will come next. As Arnzen notes: “Splatter films are gore for stability's sake. The only surety in the fragmented narrative comes from ‘being ready for anything,’ both visually and narratively. And the only viewer expectation that is guaranteed fulfillment is the anticipation of gory depictions of violence” (p.179). In this sense, the splatter film might be seen as engaging the viewer in play as they free-flow in their anticipation of what might happen next given the parameters of the game that are already established (ibid). This notion of viewer engagement positions these films as a pastiche of the culture that produces them, rebelling against Hollywood conventions which prioritize narrative containment and resolution. Pleasure is instead derived from the lack of stability that these texts promote.

Figure 16. Ash's own hand attacks him in The Evil Dead II (Sam Raimi, 1987).
The splatter film’s drive towards gore means that it operates on a logic of disruption, eschewing stability in favour of the descent into violence. In this sense, it has as a central narrative device what we might refer to as a *diabolus ex machina* or “demon in the machine”, the opposite of the *deus ex machina* (“god in the machine”) Euripidean plot device where problems and obstacles for the narrative are resolved through the intervention of an extraordinary set of circumstances (Pavis and Shantz, 1998, p.95, Fletcher, 2013). In the splatter film, this is reversed, and good fortune is frequently undermined by a return to gore as the dominant milieu. This adds to the tension as the audience is engaged in a play of anticipating when the gore will return. A good example of how this play between temporary relief and the explosion of violence functions during the second and third acts of the film can be seen in *Wrong Turn*. Here, a group of friends is pursued by a group of murderous hillbillies and killed one by one. Chris and Jessie manage to survive the killings of their friends and numerous other near death experiences (including one of the hillbilly’s attempts to burn them alive in a treetop cabin) and happen upon a road out of the woods. As the pair emerge out of the night and the darkened woods, the lighting brightens on their faces as they stand on the top of a cliff admiring the road that lies beneath them. The bright lighting and the uncluttered *mise-en-scène* are conventions in Hollywood cinema associated with a return to normality, or in this case freedom from their ordeal. Suddenly, an axe flies through the air from off screen, past Chris’ head before embedding into a tree, signaling the return of the hillbillies. One of the hillbillies then pushes Chris off the cliff and kidnaps Jessie, tying her up back at their lair before she becomes food for the cannibals. Chris survives, and manages to flag down a highway patrolman. No sooner than this moment of relief occurring, the patrolman is shot with an arrow and the film descends into violence again. This sequence from *Wrong Turn* exemplifies how the splatter film makes regular use of off-screen space to create the sense that disruption could come from anywhere at anytime, and also how its form is structured around generating expectations and then promptly undermining them. The structure of the splatter film is thus a constant interplay between the establishment of temporary stability and its impending removal, and the establishment/presence of authority (law) and its subsequent undercutting.

Arnzen’s (1994) notion that the audience is engaged in directorial play is supported by Tania Modleski’s (1986) reading of postmodern horror. Modleski argues that postmodern horror has much in common with high art, which dedicates “itself to an attack on pleasure”, because
pleasure is the domain of mass-produced art (p.157). She argues that like high art, the postmodern horror undermines this pleasure, at the same time as its incorporation of horror besieges bourgeois culture itself. Postmodern horror “is as apocalyptic and nihilistic, as hostile to meaning, form, pleasure and the specious good as many types of high art” (p.162). It is worth noting that as much as the splatter film is engaged in an attack on mainstream culture, it often incorporates formal aspects that render it aligned with high art in its emphasis on experimentation at a formal level. This occurs in the way that the violence of the splatter film is often filmed through highly stylized shots. For example, in Saw, Amanda wakes up to find herself seated on a chair in a room with an iron contraption on her head. The image of a small wooden, carnivalesque doll appears on the television screen in front of her and informs her that her head is encased in a reverse bear trap, which is sewn into her jawbone and will explode if she does not find the key in her dead cellmate’s body before the timer goes off. The following sequence is tinted green in tone – a colour that is not commonly used in theatre or film as it makes people appear sick and is unflattering. Amanda’s shock at waking up in the room is shown through a frenetic montage of several shots of small sections of her body in a time period of only two seconds that are disorienting, the final shot lingering longer on an blurry image of the overhead light. The shots are accompanied by a screeching, metallic sound, signaling the violence that is about to come. The camera then provides a close up of Amanda’s face as she says “I woke up”. The camera zooms out at the same time as performing a jump cut to show the trap that encases her head. As she says, “all I could taste was blood and metal”, we cut to a long close up showing her hands restrained by duct tape to the chair she is sitting in. The camera then cuts to a series of 180-degree pans around her head that are continuously interrupted through the use of jump cuts. The editing pace gets faster until we have several jump cuts in the space of a few seconds that show her struggling to free herself, again with the metallic non-diegetic sound overlaid over the top. When she turns to face the television, which turns on to show an image of the carnivalesque doll, a loud bass sound building to a crescendo as it raises in tone is juxtaposed over her head turning quickly to compound the impact of the movement. The editing pace then slows as she absorbs what the doll has to say, and the sound effects heighten the sound of her breathing. The shot/reverse shot sequence which shows Amanda looking at the television is given tension by a low rumbling noise underneath the soundtrack and a series of subtle zooms into Amanda’s face and the television, the latter of which is doubled in movement by the film on the television also zooming in on an example of what happens to a polystyrene head when it is exploded using the same trap. As the tape cuts to interference, Amanda begins to struggle to
free herself. This is shown through a series of fast-motion, 360-degree pans intercut with shorter shots showing her face in close up. Both are overlaid with a heavy rock soundtrack, which adds a further layer of unease to the sequence with its extremely fast pace. This combination of frenetic montage, whip pans, zooms and fast-motion is common within the splatter film in representing violence. Here we can see how the emphasis in these films is frequently on form as well as content in spectatorship, with audiences appreciating the complex work that goes into constructing shots (as discussed in the previous chapter).

While Saw stylizes its violence, there are other examples of films that stylize the sequences of plot in between the violence and position the violence as gritty and realistic. This can be seen in Rob Zombie’s The Devil’s Rejects, where the world of the film is carnivalesque, inhabited by clowns (Captain Spaulding), deformed hillbillies (Tiny), and Blaxploitationesque pimps living in lurid, fluorescent lit whore houses in the backwaters (Charlie Altamont). The film has an excess of style, generated through the frequent use of film techniques associated with exploitation cinema of the 1970s such as the wipe edit and the freeze frame. However, when the sequences of torture begin, the film moves to a register of realism, covering the torture in slow edits and lingering shots that are designed to leave the audience uncomfortable. The splatter film can therefore be seen as particularly oriented towards an exploration of form, evidencing Modleski’s association between the contemporary horror film and techniques of high art.

As David Abel (2008, p.6) notes, this experimentation in form is also extended to the use of music in the contemporary horror film, which utilizes asynchronous, disjunctive and jarring sounds together with progressive rock music in order to generate “semiotic excess” for audiences, creating a “shock” encounter through the sense of visual and aural overload the combined signs create. According to Abel, “no popular cinematic genre has so completely re-appropriated the styles and techniques of experimental, avant-garde music(s) to these particular ends as thoroughly as the post-1960 horror film” (p.7). Like the sequence in Saw I have illustrated, the post-9/11 horror film frequently overlays heavy rock music to emphasize its violence. This can be seen at the end of My Little Eye, when the film rapidly shifts form from the reality TV mode of most of the film which is premised on its allegiance to realism to the inclusion of non-diegetic heavy rock music overlaid on shots of Emma struggling in the
policeman’s car after she realizes he is not a representative of the law. It can also be seen in the opening sequence of 28 Weeks Later, where Don is forced to abandon his wife and friends at the farmhouse so that he can survive the invading zombies. Don propels himself out a window on the second floor, and his running sequence is overlaid with progressive rock and the heightened sound of his breathing and the zombies who chase him grunting. The whole sequence is portrayed through the use of small sections of fast motion, fast-paced editing and montage in order to create a sense of movement within the film. The incorporation of rock music might be seen as furthering the sense of anti-establishment that the splatter film draws from.

IV. Conclusion

A syntactic and semantic analysis of genre reveals that there is much more at work in the structure of the splatter film than merely the incorporation of violence as cinematic spectacle. In this sense, the relationship between spectacle and narrative has been under theorized within these films. The structure of the narrative is intimately intertwined – the narrative is structured around building turning points that allow for the introduction of violent interludes. This drive within the narrative means that the syntactical opposition underlying the splatter film is one of order versus anarchy – in particular, the assertion and then destabilization of law and order. The narrative progression is structured by a sense of impending collapse and doom, which is ultimately left unresolved at the film’s climax through a denial of plot resolution or the ‘strategies of containment’ associated with much of Hollywood cinema. This emphasis on the eruption of anarchy in turn has a number of effects on the diegesis of the splatter film. Violence shifts from the individual to the group, community or nation, and in the process of demonstrating this, institutions that represent order in these structures are positioned as weak or complicit in the collapse (such as the police, the military and the Government). Violence is positioned as circular: once it is introduced it cannot be transcended. This is coded in the text through its unpredictability and is generated through the establishment of temporary milieus of relief within the narrative followed by a return to violence, the use of off-screen space to generate the sense that anything could happen at any
time, and the extraordinary range of deaths, where ordinary objects and situations can rapidly turn against protagonists. The splatter film is much more than an aesthetic style profiling violence; it is a narratological structure.

Much of this sense of nihilism within the text is generated through the way that the splatter film is hostile to Hollywood conventions and cultural assumptions – an antagonism that is ultimately dependent on audiences’ knowledge and familiarity of mainstream cinema. In this sense, the oppositional viewing culture that Sconce (2010) sees in paracinema is integrated into the text at a fundamental level. As Arnzen (1994) notes, this generates a sense of ‘play’ for audiences, who are familiar with the conventions of the splatter subgenre and anticipate the re-emergence of gore. Play is further integrated into the text through the use of experimentation at a formal level, such as the use of frenetic montage, jump cuts, fast motion, complex cinematography, a highly stylized mise-en-scène, and disjunctive and asynchronous sound. This sense of play is also present in the way that these films frequently parody the convention of the ‘Hollywood ending’ where major plot lines are resolved to generate a sense of closure. The splatter film frequently introduces images that audiences associate with the climax of Hollywood film, and then undermines these either before or during the credits. Significantly, this sense of play is also present in the way that the final shots for these films often breaks the ‘Fourth Wall’, with a final image that draws attention to the audience’s gaze.

As Modleski (1984) argues, at a narratological and formal level, the incorporation of the above techniques might be read as posing a challenge to the bourgeois subject that conventional Hollywood films address. This provocation is further entrenched through the way that the monster and the protagonist are conflated within the post-9/11 splatter film, meaning that there is no moral high ground through which the acts of violence can be read. Subject positioning is therefore complicated in the splatter film, as the transition the protagonist makes to torturer usurps Manichean distinctions between right and wrong. This in turn raises questions about what constitutes acceptable acts of violence, as regardless of the moral stance on its use, all acts of violence are ultimately based on brutality – a barbarity that is particularly evident when the act is shown in close up. This sense of ambiguity or ‘crisis’ in ideological positioning in the text may explain its popularity at a time of a lapse in confidence in US military actions abroad.
Chapter Four: Body and Commodity in the Splatter Film

The splatter film revels in its violent evisceration of both the body and Hollywood conventions, providing an explosion of violence that can be read socially. This politics of nihilism is firmly embedded in the splatter, which offers a diegesis where all hope is gone and the body and the ego that inhabits it are perpetually threatened by their fragmentation into meat. In this sense, the splatter film offers little hope of the “strategies of containment” that Fredric Jameson (1981, p.52) argues are inherent within the text, as all hope of resolution is collapsed into the perpetual violence of the “now”. The splatter film is thus best viewed as an apocalyptic text, but one without resolution, redemption or the establishment of a new order. Despite this nihilism, the splatter film contains fragments of the political, which in the destruction of the old order signal the construction of a new one. In the post-9/11 splatter film, there exists hope and pleasure in nihilism, fragmented in the fleeting images of the tortured and alienated body under capitalism. The total and utter annihilation of the body and the narrative in these films occurs against the backdrop of a mise-en-scène littered with the degraded objects of capitalism, with the presence of these atrophied metonyms of progress standing in for a broader critique of capitalism.

1. The fragmented body

As Jay McRoy (2010) argues in his chapter “Parts is Parts: pornography and the politics of corporeal disintegration”, the violation of the body that the splatter film presents is taken to its utmost extremity, so that it works to destabilize our ability to think about the body as a stable unity at all. This attack on the stability of the body then affects the stability of the narrative, meaning that the splatter film represents a kind of sublimation of collapse. McRoy’s arguments mirror those of Michael Arnzen’s on the splatter film’s extreme nihilism representing a kind of revolutionary postmodernism, where the logic of negation gives rise to a cultural expression which “portray[s] the postmodern condition as an optimistic vehicle for cultural transformation” (1994, p.179). This revolutionary postmodernism occurs through the
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way that these films extend the characteristics of postmodernism to their outer limit, such as fragmentation and spectacle, but through doing so, they conflate the boundaries between Self and Other, challenging the notion of a unitary moral perspective associated with the modernist bourgeois Self.

McRoy (2010, p.191) draws from the oft-cited parallels between hardcore pornography and the splatter film to examine how both have a logic that through their emphasis on disassembling and fragmenting the body challenge our ability to think about it as a stable unity. McRoy associates this focus on the body as fragmented with an expression of the schizoid ego in postmodern culture. Rewriting the maxim that “eroticism conceals what pornography reveals” to read “horror conceals what the splatter film reveals,” McRoy sees a symbiosis between the two genres in terms of the way that they work to challenge modern myths of organic wholeness (p.192). McRoy (p.193) argues that three of the key conventions of the hardcore porn film are illustrative of the way that it operates to challenge the notion of bodily unity: the extreme close up of parts of bodies, specifically the focus on genitalia and its intersection with other genitalia/body parts/objects; the “orgy sequence” (which focuses on multiple partners); and the use of editing techniques such as jump cuts, cross cutting and recycling of footage to extend the sexual performance sequence. As McRoy (p.194) notes, the use of these techniques puts the viewer in an almost “clinical position” to examine the sexual act, but also a subject position where it is often confusing where one body ends and the next body begins, with the emphasis on orifices in acts such as double penetration working to blur the boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The eroticism of sex is lost in favour of the representation of the primal act as both molecular and atomized, where “these sequences visualize the amalgamated pornographic body as a plane of ‘immanence’, a constant becoming rather than a fixed or naturalized entity” (p.195).

McRoy (2010) argues that this process of disrupting narratives through focusing on the compartmentalized presentation of the body is also present in the splatter film. Drawing from two close analyses of the films The Body Shop (J.G. Patterson Jr., 1973) and Pieces (Juan Piquer Simón, 1982), he argues that while the splatter film presents flimsy and stereotypical plots (particularly in terms of their patriarchal overtones), these metanarratives are ultimately collapsed by the film’s descent into the exploration of the body as fragmented unity. Any
attempt to divide or locate notions of subjectivity subsides when confronted with the body as fragmented meat, a collection of organs that highlights the way our notions of individuality are socially constructed and carried in empty, interchangeable vessels. As McRoy concludes, the Self/Other binary is collapsed at a biological level:

*Flesh, the organ that is most explicitly crossed/violated in both hard-core pornography and splatter films – is fantasy; skin, the very organ that seemingly defines the parameters of the human by separating us from that which is ‘not us’, is in fact an expansive permeable membrane, that stretched over arrangements of muscle, cartilage, and bone, functions at once as a point of resistance, and a method of transference (p.201).*

McRoy argues that this transgression and assault on the body is radical: by collapsing the body, the narrative is collapsed in the film, and in turn our stability of social narratives is collapsed. In other words, no matter what subjectivity is set up at the beginning of the film, or how stable this appears to be in terms of identity, this is promptly undermined as the film progresses, and the protagonist is either faced with dissolution into parts, or the threat of their dissolution of parts. McRoy’s argument on the fragmentation of the body is key to understanding the way that the threat of violence functions in the splatter film. In these films, the schizoid subject which lacks historicity is taken to its terrifying extremity, presenting the body as a collation of parts. Under this threat of total dissolution of identity, all claims to ego that are established in the film are lost. Garrett Graham’s (2009) notion of the “meat movie” is particularly relevant here, as present in this drive towards special effects ultimately results in the radical disintegration of the body.

The splatter film therefore might be seen as drawing much of its tension from the fear of the dissolution of the body and the removal of identity that this entails. This is clearly seen across all US veins of the splatter film that were popular after 9/11, as well as in the other national cinemas that contributed to a burgeoning transnational market. For example, in the zombie vein of the splatter film, lovers, neighbours and strangers are reduced to the embodiment of a virus where, upon being bitten, the only thing that remains is the cerebral cortex and its primal drive for eating flesh. Much of the central conflict in these films is derived from the
process where the protagonists are forced to accept this collapse of ego - for to rail against it only proves fatal. Thus in *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2005), Andre keeps his now zombie pregnant wife chained to the bed in a secret room, unable to tell the others for fear she will be shot (as she is when discovered) and locked in stasis as he refuses to accept the transition that his family has gone through. In the serial killer vein of the splatter film, the focus is not on dispensing with victims, but the audience’s subject positioning with the serial killer, as the insides of their victims are exposed in the most graphic ways possible, as in *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) and *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005). The French film *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier, 2008) demonstrates this “stripping” of ego in the most literal manner possible, as we watch Anna be abducted by a cult who are investigating the prospect of life after death by attempting to generate martyrs who might have a temporary connection to life after death. We watch Anna transform from a young girl to a woman, before the cult strip her entirely of her skin and suspend her in a surgical tank of saline to prolong the moment of death, but the markers of her individuality and former life are entirely erased long before this as she becomes a mass of sinewy tendons, muscles and nerves. The way that the body is positioned in the post-9/11 splatter film confirms McRoy’s (2010) claim that it is this radical collapse into the body as meat that renders any fragments of stability in the ego now unstable, as even surviving protagonists are subject to the perpetual present of this threat.
While all films that fall under the splatter subgenre contain this focus on the fragility of skin and the interchangeability of organs, this emphasis on the body as a fragmented collection of parts is particularly evident in the wave of hillbilly splatter films that rose to prominence at the box office following 9/11, such as *Wrong Turn* (2003, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Jonathan Leibesman, 2006), *The Hills Have Eyes (I and II)* (2006, 2007), *2001 Maniacs* (Tim Sullivan, 2005), *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005) and lesser hits such as *Hatchet* (Adam Green, 2006), *The Cottage* (Paul Williams, 2008), *Offspring* (Andrew van den Houten, 2009), *Flesh TX* (Guy Crawford, 2009), *Smalltown Folk* (Peter Ward, 2007) and *Inbred* (Alex Chandon, 2011) - to name just a few. The hillbilly film takes the disassemblage of the body to its extreme; the body is no longer one body violated, but is fragmented into its parts and organized by these parts. *Wrong Turn* demonstrates this trope well. When the group enters the cabin of the hillbillies in the opening minutes of the film, they are greeted with indiscernible meat: human meat mixed with animal meat in the fridge, and jars of mixed gendered fingers, eyeballs and toes grouped together according to body part. This classification via parts also extends to the remnants of their capitalist life, which exist in strange, dusty hanging mobiles and bowls, jars and containers of other objects that are similarly grouped as objects – car keys, mobile phones, cameras and photographs. Thus the body has no limits in its fragmentation, and is mixed up with its accoutrements and, on occasion, the body parts of other animals. This blending of the human with the animal is
literalized in films that feature cannibalism which, as Isabel Cristena Pinedo (1997, p.62) argues, give literal meaning to the term “meat movie”.

The key cinematographic device for rendering this dissolution of bodily form is the close up. In the splatter film, cutting to close up during a sequence where the protagonist is being attacked can signal an impending violation of the body. This can be seen in the shot of Josh’s ankles in Hostel, where the close up precedes the audience’s recognition that his Achilles heels have been slashed – which we realize moments later when he is told he is free to escape. The close up also provides a way of breaking up the body and toying with audience expectations over the violation of the body. In Hostel, the close up of Paxton’s two severed fingers forms a symbolic link with the close up of the Dutch businessman’s two fingers Paxton severs later that mark his transition from tortured to torturer (as discussed in the previous chapter). The splatter film also frequently features multiple close ups of severed body parts in order to set the tone for the protagonist’s demise, such as the jars of teeth and body parts in Wrong Turn and the collections of body parts in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.

The use of body parts as an indexical sign of violence is taken to an extraordinary degree in the Saw series, where its use becomes a key part of the narrative. At the end of Saw (James Wan, 2004), Dr. Lawrence Gordon severs his foot with a blunt hacksaw in order to pass the serial killer’s test and free himself from the chain around his ankle. The foot itself is elevated to an iconic level in the film, and is used by itself in the poster to advertise Saw’s release. The film returns to his severed foot in the later sequels Saw II (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005) and Saw III (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006) as a narrative continuity device. In Saw II, Gordon’s decomposing foot is shown in the final sequences of the film in the bathroom where he first removed it together with Zep and Adam’s cadavers in order to convey that he never returned to Adam with help after the first film. This is important as although the next four films left clues that Gordon might still be alive (such as the use of specialist medical equipment in traps), he does not return as a protégé of Jigsaw until Saw VI (Kevin Greutert, 2009) and Saw 3D (Kevin Greutert, 2010) where it emerges Lawrence also becomes a serial killer after his escape. In many ways the Saw series is experienced as a game for audiences, where they attempt to resolve the narrative incoherencies that are purposefully left for the audience in the
complex narrative and non-synchronous timeline conveyed through multiple flash-forwards and flashbacks. In *Saw III*, Gordon’s foot is glimpsed again, when we return to Eric Matthews in the bathroom, in the same place that the second film left off. His foot recurs in a flashback from Amanda’s perspective that occurs three days after the final events of the first film, and here it is used to orient Amanda, a former victim, as a participant in the serial killing. The foot also functions as a narrative device that is used to draw parallels between Dr. Lawrence Gordon and the two corrupt policemen, Matthews and Mark Hoffman, the first corrupt in falsifying evidence but not part of the killing ring, and the second Jigsaw’s first protégé. In the second and third film, Matthews is placed in the same trap as Gordon finds himself in – the choice between starving to death or sawing his own foot off with the blunt hacksaw. However, Matthews is unable to bring himself to cut his own foot, so he uses the toilet seat to bludgeon his foot until the bone breaks and he is able to squeeze his foot through the handcuff. In *Saw 3D*, the seventh film, Gordon returns to put Hoffman in the bathroom trap, but removes the hacksaw out of malice for his fellow apprentice serial killer. Hoffman must then use the toilet lid to escape in the same way as Matthews. The use of the same trap and its focus on the close up of the violated foot thus functions as a device encouraging audience comparison between the three men. The fragmentation of the body in the close up can then be considered a key device of the splatter film, which at its base is concerned with a stripping of the individual’s identity via the dissolution of the body into parts.

![Figure 18: Jars of body parts in *Wrong Turn* (Rob Schmidt, 2003).](image-url)
Figure 19. A collection of fingers in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003).

Figure 20. The severed finger as signalling the symbolic transition from tortured to torturer in *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005).
II. The fragmented ego

This tradition of the body as radically fragmented in the hillbilly splatter horror film is founded in the acts of the real life Wisconsin serial killer Ed Gein. A grave robber and killer, Gein was particularly interested in the body as a fragmented set of parts that could be collected and organized in ways that go well beyond our notion of it as an organic unity. When police raided his house on November 17, 1957, they were greeted with a site of unimaginable horror. Gein had disassembled his female victims, keeping their pieces in an assortment of parts. He chopped off his mother’s vulva, painted it silver and kept it in a box with other women’s parts. Human lips hung from the ceiling in a collection resembling wind chimes and skulls adorned his bedposts. Couches were covered in human skin. Gein was also clothing himself in parts from his victim: he had a belt made of women’s breasts and a full body suit reminiscent of Frankenstein out of different women’s skins. Body parts in the oven and the frying pan attested that he had also been eating his victims. When the crimes hit the news, Gein became quickly became known as one of America’s most notorious serial killers, and his actions have formed the inspiration for many movies, including Psycho (Alfred

The serial killer is often thought of by theorists as standing in for the social, but in the case of Gein, his use of the body was far from normative, constituting an aberration of our notions of the unitary self. As Phillip Simpson (2000, p.22) notes, the serial killer might be seen as a nationalist figure embodying the anxieties of American society following the end of the Cold War, a kind of “all-purpose cultural bogeyman” that captures domestic and sexual tensions emerging from industrial capitalism. For Mark Seltzer, the prevalence of the serial killer as a trope is representative of a “pathological public sphere” [original emphasis], due to the way it positions “the boundaries between the natural and the collective body, private fantasy and public space, intimacy and publicity … at risk in the matter of corporeal compulsive violence” (p.6). The trope of the serial killer might be seen as tapping into anxieties about the public performativity of death under mass mediated culture. As Seltzer highlights, the serial killer is “premised on the self as an empty category and as an effect of imitation and not its cause” (p.68). It is the ability for the serial killer to remain undetected in order to kill again that works to fictionalize the serial killer as representing what is positioned as the norm within American culture, that is, the white, American male. The serial killer thus becomes what Seltzer terms the “abnormal normal”, a violent specter that seeks to disrupt what Michel Foucault would refer to as the process of normalization, acting against the processes of socialization and governmentality that seek to establish the homogenization of discourses on ‘being’ in society (p.7). This representation of the serial killer as having the ability to avoid detection through their allegiance to societal norms can be seen in the media frenzy and moral panic that accompanies the portrayal of serial killers – as in the infamous phrase one of the attorney’s used to describe serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer – ‘dress him in a suit and he could be ten other men’ (p.10). Gein’s influence on the splatter film is important here, as while many of the more mainstream references in film to his killing focus on repositioning Gein as a bourgeois subject, as in the representation of Norman Bates as an articulate motel owner in *Psycho* or Hannibal as an intelligent, upper class killer in *Silence of the Lambs*, Gein himself did not fit many of the dominant social paradigms for serial killers. Gein was reclusive, lower class, and while his crimes were frequently positioned as Freudian in the way that he preserved his mother, the collection and repurposing of body parts is perhaps better configured through the Marxian notion of the commodity fetish (Marx and Engels, 1978,
Chapter Four: Body and Commodity in the Splatter Film

pp.320-1). Gein thus might be seen as representing the “abnormal”, an extreme rebellion against these processes of normalization. Gein’s influence on the splatter film can be seen in the collapse of notions of the unitary self into dissected, fragmented close ups which violate many of our codes of what constitutes “normative violence”.

In the splatter film, identity is linked to the presentation of the unitary body, and is always threatened by its collapse into skin, which is positioned as mutable in that it can be repurposed for different functions. Judith Halberstam (1995) in her work *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* argues that the representation of the monster in horror cinema is influenced by the way it works to conflate categories of race, gender and difference onto the Other. Examining the sequence in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Tobe Hooper, 1986), where the female Stretch is forced to wear the male protagonist LG’s face and the audience is placed in the position of looking through her and his skin, Halberstam argues that the splatter film works to destroy gender codes. For Halberstam, Carol Clover’s (1992) argument of audience identification with the ‘male gaze’ is not sufficient to explain the jamming of binary notions of identity that occur within these films – nor is psychoanalysis more generally due to its reductive nature. For Halberstam, in these films “sex is a metaphor for violence and not the other way around” (original emphasis) (1995, p.156). Stretch’s control of the voice through her role as a radio DJ rivals Leatherface’s, and her competent use of weapons such as knifes and chainsaws means that Stretch embodies “a female violence connected to female pleasure and male terror” (p.158). The emphasis on skin, and uncovering what lies beneath that skin, means that in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*:

*Stretch’s lethal performance of gender with an edge is not high drag but an intense blast of interference that messes up once and for all the generic identity codes that read femininity into tits and ass and masculinity into penises. The chain saw has been sutured and grafted onto the female body rendering it into a queer body of violence and power, a monstrous body that has blades, makes noise and refuses to splatter (p.160).*

Halberstam’s argument that the gender confusion presented in these films might be seen as resembling David Roche’s assertion presented in Chapter One that the Final Girl has evolved
into a Final Woman. Like the feeding of the torturer’s phallus to the dogs in *Hostel: Part II*, the splatter film contains many of these moments of symbolic castration and gender confusion. For example, in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Morgan is strung up by Leatherface on a meat hook and then gutted with the chainsaw through the groin.

However, Halberstam’s notion of gender confusion does not go far enough in explaining how these films challenge the notion of a unified body. In the splatter film, the primary focus is not gender, but the entire removal of any signifiers of the unitary self. Like Gein’s assault on the body as an identity and his repurposing of it to create objects of art, gender does not matter when the body is stripped of its skin down to its carcass. This stripping of the face as a final marker of identification is present in a number of splatter films – whether it be the slow decomposition of the former self in the zombie film (where frequently zombies roam around with portions of their faces ripped off) or the literal surgical stripping of the face. Three examples of the former can be seen in the post-9/11 wave of splatter films. The first is in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* when Erin and Pepper encounter Leatherface in the van for the first time. Having been persecuted by Sheriff Hoyt, who has dragged the only male away in the group to be killed after forcing him to simulate the hitchhiker’s suicide in the car (Morgan), Erin begins hot-wiring the van. She succeeds and the van drives for a few metres before one of the wheels fall off. While we have seen Leatherface earlier on in the film, Erin and Pepper have not, and the film shifts to their perspective here. We first see the chainsaw come plummeting through the bullet hole from the hitchhiker’s suicide, shattering the bloody glass. The chainsaw then comes down through the roof in the middle of the fictional *Mad Magazine* mascot Alfred E. Newman’s head, signaling the assault on the identity that is about to take place as well as functioning as a reference to the countercultural status of the youths. As they attempt to leave the van, Leatherface seizes Erin’s head, but is distracted by a running Pepper who he runs after and knocks down with his chainsaw, sending a flurry of duck feathers from her puffer jacket through the air. At this point, the pace of the editing slows, and Leatherface turns to Erin to be revealed for the first time. Rather than the Leatherface we have seen at the beginning of the film, it is revealed that he has stripped the skin off her boyfriend’s face and is now wearing it as a mask. Identity, then, in the splatter film, is always precarious and always at risk of being stripped away. Similarly, in *The Devil’s Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005) and *Hostel: Part III* (Scott Spiegel, 2011) the stripping of the face is used to signify the collapse of identity, a violation from which there is no return.
The fragmentation that McRoy (2010) identifies as being reflected in the camerawork and editing of the splatter further works to emphasize this process of decentering the individual. The threat in the splatter film to the protagonist’s organic unity is positioned as having the capacity to come from anywhere at any time, a device that works to heighten the anticipation.
of gore. Within the splatter film, the inability to identify or predict this threat is incorporated into the camerawork itself, which features a decentered camera that ruptures the subjective alignment that characterizes much of Hollywood film. Here the I-Camera that Carol Clover (1992, p.45) argues is a central device positioning the camera in alignment with the killer (as in *Halloween* [John Carpenter, 1978] and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* [John McNaughton, 1986], is de-anchored and shots of the protagonists are woven throughout the film that position them as if they are being watched, even when there is no one watching. While McRoy does not extend on the significance of this deanchoring and its relationship to subjectivity and spectatorship, the alignment of the camera is seen as important for encouraging and shaping identification and forms the basis for Clover’s argument on the psychological stalking of the slasher. As Christian Metz (1981) and Kaja Silverman (1983) have noted, the alignment of the camera with protagonists is important in encouraging identification. Metz argues in *The Imaginary Signifier* (1981, pp.42-56) that the camera is used in cinema to encourage us to align with the perspective of the protagonist. Following Lacan’s account of the Mirror Stage, the child experiences itself in a *gestalt* when it misrecognize itself in the mirror as a whole unity, creating an image of a unified ego that it then aspires to. Metz argues that cinema emulates this experience, and the encouraged identification with the protagonist causes the subject to project their desires on to the screen. Similarly, Silverman (1983, pp.222-227) argues that continuity editing in the Classical Hollywood system encourages an experience of *suture*, where the viewer is encouraged through seamless editing to identify with the subject positioning of the protagonist in the narrative. The splatter film, then, through its decentering of the subject works to disrupt this process.

This deanchoring of the subject through the use of camera alignment and editing in the splatter film provides the impression that violence can come from off-screen space at any time. For example, it is common for the camera to cut from an action sequence to a random low angle shot showing the protagonist’s feet, which together with the cluttered *mise-en-scene* gives the impression that they are being continuously watched. This visual disorientation is illustrated well in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, when Andy enters Leatherface’s kitchen. Andy’s exploratory journey is shown through a collection of shots that are edited together in a way that is designed to emphasize the shock and discombobulation that he feels as he enters Leatherface’s kitchen, encountering a collection of drying carcasses
and jars of human body parts. A shot shows Andy at eye-level to temporarily align the viewer subjectively with his point of view. The camera then cuts to an extreme close up of Leatherface’s beady eye peering through the peephole of the metal door adjacent to the kitchen; a door that as we have seen in previous sequences can be thrust open at any time to abduct unsuspecting victims before torturing and eating them, as well as recuperating their skin for clothing. The camera then cuts to shots from his perspective and another long shot, before an overhead shot from above the hanging skins disorients the viewer as to whether anyone is watching. The camera then cuts back to eye level before showing us another shot that appears to be anchored but is not, taken from the perspective one would see if they were hiding under the cabinet. The effect at a formal level is to emphasize the instability of the protagonist’s plight.

![Figure 24. Disembodied perspectives in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Marcus Nispel, 2003).](image)

This disembodied camera is also present in the 2005 Australian film *Wolf Creek*, which resituates the hillbilly film to the Australian Outback and is loosely based on the Peter Falconio murder case of hitchhikers who go missing in the desert. In this film, the camera frequently departs from the protagonists, taking unusual perspectives that are then edited in with more conventional continuity editing to provide the impression that the protagonists are being watched. At times this generates the omniscient sense of impending doom, as if Liz, Kristy and Ben’s fates were pre-ordained by demonic forces. The film begins with the trio
securing a car and then partying at the local backpackers in Broome before embarking hung over on their trip across the desert. As they begin their drive, a shot shows us the car travelling as viewed through a bullet hole in a crossing kangaroo sign, signaling that they are now entering a violent Australia. The group then pull up to Wolf Creek to go on the walk that they have planned. As they exit the car and are goofing around outside, one camera remains in the car and films them through the obstruction of the car window. Although there is no one in the car, the effect of this camera placement sends a clear message that from this point on in the film, we as the audience are unsure when the protagonists are being watched and when they are not. While the film reveals later on that serial killer Mick has abducted others in the same location, just how the car is disabled is left unanswered as his presence would have been obvious in the brightly lit sparse landscape of the desert, leaving the threat of violence as defying rational explanation. Thus although the gaze in the splatter film frequently shifts between torturer and tortured, it is also often disembodied – a camera technique that serves to reinforce the instability of order (and authority) in the diegesis.

Figure 25. Unusual camera shot demonstrating the sense of being watched in *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005).
Figure 26. The disembodied camera remains in the car in *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005).

III. The postmodern body

The splatter film, then, might be seen as collapsing notions of subjectivity into the body, a move that positions it as consistent with postmodern texts. Fredric Jameson argues that postmodernism represents a shift towards the body as the domain for the expression of the social. Within this paradigm, Jameson argues, the body stands in and is representative of the social, re-emphasizing postmodernism’s focus on the present. In his essay “The End of Temporality”, Jameson (2003a, p.718) argues that under postmodernism, the body becomes a key focus and is collapsed into a perpetual present. He identifies a shift that has gone on in our conception of the body from the eschatological, sacrilegious violence of death as a final act within traditional societies, to the emphasis on the body as in a continuous state of transformation (pp.713-715). This shift in representation corresponds to a shift in the mode of production towards late capitalism, where art fuses entirely with commerce. This emphasis on the body as both spatiality and temporality obscures the body’s relationship back to the
social, and as Barbara Best (2011, p.73) notes, the excess of affect (violence, pleasure, and other emotions) works to produce its opposite, flattening the ability of the text to generate ethical collective responses to capitalism that challenge its processes.\textsuperscript{44} Jameson (2003, p.718) argues that the action film is exemplary of this movement, collapsing historicity into a “violence pornography”. The experience of viewing this flattening of affect is one of the schizoid subject. As Jameson (1991, p.27) argues elsewhere, “with the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated moments in time”. Drawing from the example of the film \textit{Speed} (John de Bont, 1994), Jameson identifies four characteristics that mark this emphasis shift towards the body as perpetual present. First, the narrative device representing the threat is an axiomatic – by labeling the villain as a terrorist, the violence that he presents is beyond motivation; rather he represents an incomprehensible evil (p.715). Second, there is a constraining of space within the film that reduces the onscreen space to the body, positioning the body as the key focus of the text (pp.715-6). Thirdly, the pursuit is about maintaining speed and direction for an explosion that can never take place due to its violation of Hollywood conventions and our attachment to the stars. The constant presence of the threat of the explosion reduces the time in the film to an ever-present now, reflecting the temporality he associates with postmodernity (p.716). Finally, there is the emphasis on technology as networking and compressing space – the terrorist watches the events on television, and a camera is revealed on the bus (pp.716-7). \textit{Speed}, for Jameson, is representative of the way that postmodern texts flatten time and spatiality onto the body.

The splatter film conforms to many of Jameson’s points on the postmodern due to the way it collapses historicity onto the body. Like the lack of transcendental horizon or “outside” that the postmodern film promotes, the splatter film works to flatten its narrative onto the body through its focus on the exploration of skin. However, the splatter film extends this collapse into the body much further than the action films, thrillers, Gothic cinema or science fiction that Jameson (1992, 2003, 2005) discusses across the body of his works. Moreover, the splatter film also collapses the axiomatic of good versus identifiable evil that the action film is commonly structured around, so that all characters are engaged in a perpetual present of circular violence. In this sense, the splatter film lacks ‘strategies of containment’ Jameson

\textsuperscript{44} Note that Best is drawing from both definitions of “affect” here – Jameson’s notion of Utopia, and the more recent discipline of affect studies, which examines subjectively experienced feelings.
(1981, p.52) identifies by refusing to propose resolutions to the circular violence that it introduces.

In Catherine Russell’s work *Narrative Mortality: Death, Closure and New Wave Cinemas* (1995), she argues that death, like individual life, is always representative of the social. Drawing from Jameson’s model of the *ideologeme* as expressing class antagonism, and layering this with the works of Walter Benjamin, René Girard and Georges Bataille, Russell argues that death in cinema functions as a dialectical sign that is torn between the irruption of order and its containment. For Russell, death in the narrative creates a symbolic experience of “excess” that is difficult to explain through the confines of psychoanalysis (pp.18-24). Following Benjamin, Russell argues that death performs a dialectical function: reminding us of both our individual subjectivity through the threat of its erasure; and also the transcendence of death as an eternal process of change that occurs throughout history. Death therefore creates a symbolic experience of “excess” requires containment within the text. This excessive status of death is founded in the way that it exceeds and transcends our notions of subjectivity:

*The key difference between the corpse and the phallus, as privileged signifiers, is that the dead body is distinguished by its lack of symbolic unity. Its threat to cultural norms is precisely its status as an empty signifier of subjectivity, its designation of the void upon which the self is written (p.15).*

Death therefore is positioned as a fundamental problematic within the text, and one that must be resolved through strategies of containment. Russell argues the symbolic ritualization of death works to naturalize myth through its representation as rites through a body of texts, functioning as a site of meaning that gives validation to life (p.14). The splatter film complicates this validation of life by refusing to provide containment or resolution, presenting violence as a kind of Mobius strip that once it is entered, cannot be resolved.

However, to suggest that the splatter film was only about disruption, violence and the body would be to radically underestimate the processes at work in these films. The splatter film’s horrific tension is dependent on the way that it threatens the total erasure of “normal” existence – a normalcy that in the splatter film is marked by the routines of everyday life. The
splatter film often begins by establishing a normal milieu, situating the protagonists as engaged in their relationships, their jobs, and the sense of familiarity that provides one with the confidence that life will continue to unfold as it has always been. The violent event (serial killer, zombie outbreak, hillbillies) disrupts this normality, plunging the protagonists into a world where life can be taken at any moment. Normal spaces and existence are radically displaced once the violent event occurs, transformed into perverse representations that fit the order but do not function in the same way. In the serial killer vein of the splatter film, the city is transformed from teeming with life constrained by the banality of routine into the “dead spaces” of hotel rooms and abandoned warehouses where serial killers torture their victims (Hostel [Eli Roth, 2005], Saw [James Wan, 2003], Vacancy [Nimród Antal, 2007], House of 9 [Steven Monroe, 2005]). Similarly, the zombie vein places great emphasis on tracing the “outbreak” of the virus, with opening sequences depicting the results of mass chaos and carnage on shattering the fragile institutions that hold our current order together. Thus in World War Z (Marc Forster, 2013) we are presented with the sudden decline of order as the zombie virus breaks out in the middle of suburban New York, with police unable to control the zombies or the social panic once the virus breaks out. An extended sequence shows this rapid decline: one moment Gerry Lane and his wife Karin sit with their daughter in the traffic jams of New York; the next they are forced to flee as mass panic erupts when infected people run through the streets, biting others and spreading the contagion. Cars crash into each other and the police are shown as unable to control the onslaught of the flesh eating mobs as the city is transformed into a dangerous, uninhabitable zone. Images of explosions, fires and the decay of communications (as expressed through television news and the radio) are often profiled (as in 28 Days Later [Danny Boyle, 2002], Resident Evil: Apocalypse [Alexander Wirt, 2004], Dawn of the Dead [Zack Snyder, 2004], Diary of the Dead [George Romero, 2007], Zombieland [Ruben Fleisher, 2009]). The city becomes a shell of its former self; a trap for those that remain. In the hillbilly vein of the subgenre, the South exists as a discarded, dilapidated wasteland where the empty abattoir is now put to use for processing human meat by renegade families who exist outside the law. The remnants of those who veer off the road into the hillbilly territory remain in the vast fields of empty, rusting automobiles, or the tiny fragments of their belongings, such as cellphones, keys, sunglasses and photographs. Indeed, the splatter film generates much of its sense of disorder from taking familiar, everyday images of our capitalist quotidian lives and disorienting them so that they become violent, cold, brutal spaces. This inversion is unsurprising – in order to represent the decline of the dominant order, these films must represent a sense first of normalcy and then its inversion.
This syntactical relationship means that the splatter film is frequently engaged in representing images of capitalist decline.

Much of the horror of the splatter film across all the post-9/11 veins is drawn out of the blurring of the boundaries between human and commodity, a coalescence that functions within the text to draw attention to the fragility of the subject under capitalism. It is within these degraded images of capitalism that we find the remnants of what Jameson refers to as the ideologeme. The ideologeme, for Jameson, is the smallest unit of semantic meaning within a text. At the very core of the ideologeme is antagonism, a tension that is arranged around either its expression of abstract ideology or of class. For Jameson, the ideologeme is an amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudoidea – a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice – or as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the “collective characters” which are the classes in opposition (Jameson, 1981, p.87).

The ideologeme thus functions as a central organizing principle for the narrative, or lack of it, as it is this antagonism that arranges the expression of ideas within the text. This expression can either be reaffirming the current order, or challenging it. As Jameson notes, the identification of ideologemes often occurs at the level of the narrative. However, Jameson also argues that it is present in texts that have fragmented narration, such as the postmodern form of the splatter film. In the case of the splatter film, the ideologeme is expressed through fragmented, metonymic images of industrial atrophy and the narrative, both of which draw attention to the role of the subject under capitalism.

IV. Bad capitalism
This relationship between death and capitalist atrophy is exemplified in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series, which is set in the backwaters of an economically depressed Texas. As Naomi Merritt (2010) highlights, in these films the capitalist structure still stands, but now functions in a perverted manner. Rod Buxton (2011, p.1) argues that while Tobe Hooper intended the original 1974 film to be a critique of Reagan era anxieties, such as the gas crisis, the Vietnam War, and the Manson family killings, the 2003 version (directed by Marcus Nispel), its prequel *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Jonathan Liebesman, 2006) and sequel *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3D* (John Luessenhop, 2013) inflect the original narrative with post-9/11 anxiety and also the fears of the looming financial crisis, which began with the collapse of Enron in 2001. The Sawyer family of the original is renamed as the Hewitts, and in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning*, we receive a glib insight into how the family got this way. The film opens during the tail end of the Great Depression in 1939 with Leatherface’s mother giving birth to him on the factory floor of the meat works in a gush of blood. As the baby Leatherface is revealed, we see the deformities on his face. The mother dumps the baby in the bin, where he is discovered by another woman who is foraging for meat scraps and taken home to be raised as part of the family. The film then cuts to an older Leatherface working in the abattoir. Following the news that the meat works is being shut down due to a lack of financial viability, the boss’s assistant fires Leatherface, calling him an “oversized retard” and an “animal” for his deformities and his seemingly elective mute status. Leatherface seeks revenge by finding him later and bashing him to death with a sledge hammer, an act of rage against his employer for his ultimately disposable status as transient employee. This act of rage transforms the family, as his brother Charlie Hewitt, who has already gone mad due to a stint as a prisoner of war during the Korean War (which forced him into cannibalism) encourages his murderous tendencies even further. When the Sheriff comes to arrest Leatherface for the murder, Charlie lures the Sheriff to Leatherface, who by this stage has picked up his chainsaw as his symbol of anti-capitalist rage. When the meat works closes and the boss moves out of town, Leatherface and his family move in and subvert it to their own ends. The transgressions of Leatherface and his family are played out against the backdrop of corporate insensitivity and economic decline. However, in the process of enacting this rage, they also strip their victims of their identity, a process that is literalized in Leatherface’s signature killing act of skinning his victims and wearing their faces as masks.
Merritt is therefore correct in insisting that the remnants of the current order still exist, but now they are scrambled and dysfunctional (Merritt, 2010, p.207). The family unit and its enshrined mythology as a supportive structure remains, but it has been subverted towards violent ends. Symbols of the institution of order, such as the police, still remain, but they have been reoriented towards the entrapment of potential victims. Merritt (p.207) refers to this representation as one of “cannibalistic consumption”, where the distinction between human and commodity has been collapsed so that humans are now no different from factory farmed animals, and are skinned and prepared for consumption. Cannibalism is a central theme of these films; a mechanism that facilitates the notion that no one is above a sack of meat in the Darwinian struggle for survival.

The relationship between the body and the commodity in the splatter film is expressed through representations of an aberrant and perverse capitalism gone wrong, a motif that these films exploit to gain much of their tension. In the Saw series, the serial killer Jigsaw disposes
of his victims when the time runs out, the countdown timer symbolizing when protagonists literally “clock out” after being eviscerated by the complex machines of torture that they find themselves entrapped in. Throughout much of the series, the protagonists and the villains are engaged in perverse form of labour. Jigsaw and his apprentices spend long hours in the workshop setting up gargantuan rusting machines for murder that resemble Steampunk science fiction creations with their intricate mechanics, aged Victorian feel and multiple cogs. This connotation gives the machines that destroy their victims a distinctly industrial feel, which is compounded by the vacated warehouse spaces that Jigsaw and his accomplices stage their games in. Protagonists are forced to expend labour in order to attempt to free themselves, a labour of self-mutilation that provides the only hope of an escape. This labour is monitored through the use of surveillance cameras, where the serial killers are able to survey the toils of their subjects from a safe distance. The Saw series evokes industrialism, but not in the utopian sense of the alternative future offered by science fiction; rather, the order of the current city is undermined by the rogue spaces that erode it from within, a vision that is firmly entrenched in the “now”.

Figure 28. Amanda in a bear trap in Saw (James Wan, 2003). If the timer runs out before she retrieves a key from her comatose friend’s stomach, the trap will rip her head apart from the jaws.
While Christopher Sharrett (2009, p.32) highlights the vigilantism and rogue individualism of the Saw films, the prioritization of individual concerns is positioned as undesirable in the group traps of Saw V (2008) and VI (2009). In Saw V, five strangers are placed in a trap, unaware that they are linked through their participation in a real estate scheme to build a substandard building, resulting in a fire that caused the death of eight people. The group awake to find themselves restricted by collars around their neck, connected by wire to a giant
pulley machine and each other. A tape tells them of their connection and urges them to work together in order to release themselves. The keys for the collars sit in five glass boxes in front of them. However, the catch is that once they begin advancing the trap will be set off, and once the wire is retracted back to the machine in exactly one minute, they will be decapitated. Panic sets in and the group immediately begins fighting before one man sets off the timer, creating a rush for the keys. Fire inspector Ashley is unable to reach the key in time, generating the first big shock of the film as she is decapitated. Throughout the rest of the traps, the group bicker and fight, and one person is killed each time. Once the final two survivors Britt and Malick reach the final trap after dispensing with the others, they find themselves in a sealed room where bombs will explode killing them once the 15 minute timer is up. In the middle of the room lies a glass box with circular holes for putting one’s arms into and a circular saw inside the box under which sits a glass beaker, which is rigged to release the door. Observing the box, Malick queries why there are five arm holes when there are only two people left – a fact that leads Britt to the horrific realization that it had been possible for the entire group to survive each traps without dispensing with one of their fellow victims. When they slam the door shut to stop the bomb blast from the previous trap from entering the room, the trap begins. A video tells them that the size of the beaker is symbolic – it constitutes ten pints of blood, the same amount that a human being has in their body and that a person is able to lose half of this amount and still have a chance of survival. At this point in the film Britt and Malick decide to work together, losing half the amount of blood each so that they both have a shot of survival. Despite its nihilism then, Saw V is strangely communitarian in the way it emphasizes working together as the solution to violence.

This relationship between the dead body and the commodity, as Steven Shaviro notes, is taken to its extreme in the work of George A. Romero in his zombie films. Drawing from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s statement that “the only modern myth is the myth of zombies – mortified schizos, good for work, brought back to reason” (1983, p.335), Shaviro argues that the zombie represents an “allegory for the inner logic of capitalism” (1993, p.97). For Shaviro, the zombie represents an allegory for the role of the worker under capitalism, and also a rebellion against the regulation of the body as labour. The emphasis on the conformance of the body to norms, produced through the internalization of biopower in the Foucauldian sense, gives rise to a dead body that generates labour that can then be reaped by
the capitalist. The zombie scrambles this regulation, exposing its conformity by existing in a state between dead and alive, conformity and contagion, refusing to operate within the norms of society. Instead it is only driven by the desire to consume and contaminate other bodies, collapsing the system to perverted libidinal drives. As Shaviro highlights, this relationship between the dead body and the commodity is parodied in the original *Dawn of the Dead* (George Romero, 1978). In *Dawn of the Dead*, the second film in Romero’s zombie series, the film focuses on the plight of a group of survivors who decide that the best place to gather food and munitions is in the local shopping mall. Their plan becomes complicated when the zombies also begin to gather at the mall. While the virus has degraded the ego and any trace of the qualities that once made them human, the memory of the consumption of commodities remains and they begin to gather in their hundreds outside the mall, threatening the protagonists who have secured the mall and seek shelter inside. That the memory of consumption remains after all else is erased suggests two things: first of all that the zombies are an analogy for the mindless consumption that takes place under capitalism; and secondly, that this consumption is foundational to our experience of subjectivity. In Zack Snyder’s 2005 remake, the parallels between the zombie and the alive subject are emphasized further when the protagonists revel in shooting zombies who look like celebrities from the rooftop of the mall, dispensing with Jay Leno and Burt Reynolds, an act that implies that there is little distinction between the zombies’ wanton murder and the protagonist’s desire for random violence.

This allegory between the dead subject and nightmarish capitalist structures is further entrenched in *Land of the Dead* (George Romero, 2005), where the plot centers on the tension on the overthrow of a gated community called Fiddler’s Green by both the protagonists and the zombies. *Land of the Dead* opens on a community in Pittsburgh that has become accustomed to living alongside the zombies. Bordered by two rivers to keep the land bound zombies out and electric fences armed with military, the community is divided between the rich who live in a gated compound and the ethnically diverse proletariat, who are forced to fight to survive. The plot centers on the Machiavellian head of the gated community, Paul Kauffmann, who builds a fortified zombie-proof truck called the Dead

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[^45]: Michel Foucault extends on this concept of *biopower* in his works *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* ([1977] 2008). He argues in the transition from feudal society to democracy, science is utilized towards the management of populations through creating norms that the citizen must discipline themselves in order to conform to. He terms this new form of control ‘biopower’.
Reckoning which enables his workers to forage for food and supplies without getting killed. When the worker who runs the truck, a Latino called Cholo, fails to get a place in the gated community he moves to kidnap the truck, setting in motion a chain of events that threaten the stability of the community. At the same time, one of the zombies, an African American former service station attendant identified by the tag on his shirt as “Big Daddy” begins to show signs of consciousness, first by learning how to use a gun through acquisitive mimesis and then by organizing the zombie community to overthrow the humans, which they achieve by walking through the river. Romero’s fourth installment in his zombie series that began with Night of the Living Dead in 1968 offers a clear message: that capitalist modes of organization lead only to death. The analogy to contemporary America is entrenched through the way that he reportedly asked Dennis Hopper (who plays Kauffman) to base his portrayal on Donald Rumsfeld, and his choice of Pittsburgh for the locale, which was based on its status as a “Rust Belt” city, once the heartland of economic growth, now an industrial wasteland due to globalization and a declining population (Undead Again: The Making of Dawn of the Dead, 2005). Thus while Romero’s film is very much about an apocalyptic America suspended in the catastrophe, it also hints at a possible future could be created through revolution and uprising.

Figure 31. Big Daddy leads the zombie uprising in Land of the Dead (2005).
V. **Body/ commodity**

The splatter film’s collapse into the body might thus be read as representing broader concerns about the commodification of the body. Within the bleak environment of the splatter film, the body becomes yet another commodity that can be consumed, bought and sold. In this manner, the splatter film queries the notion of progress under capitalism, collapsing the subject into their commodification and positioning it as stripping away the ego and individual humanity. Humans are no longer separate individuals with rights and dignity, but exist entirely for consumption. This is represented in the splatter film through the iconography of the abattoir and the factory, which represent the disposability of human life. In *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), members of the Elite Hunting Club order their victims by their age and ethnicity via snapshots on a mobile phone. The receivers of these images then bid on the photo through auction, suggesting that the human being is now another commodity that circulates on the market. The victims are lured to Bratislava to be killed, murder that the townsfolk participate in, making the slaughter of victims just another tourist attraction. The discarded factory, dilapidated and filled with rubble is repurposed towards the production line of killing humans, who once tortured and murdered by paying customers, are cremated in the furnace. Throughout the *Hostel* films, the image of the factory looms large over the skyline, its black smoke tainting the horizon and representing fears of industrialization.

This human as commodity status is also highlighted through the motif of the abattoir, the meat hook and the carcass as in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2005), *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005), *The Midnight Meat Train* (Ryōhei Kitamura, 2008), *Three on a Meathook* (William Girdner, 1973), *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968), and *Cannibal Ferox/ Make Them Die Slowly* (Umberto Lenzi, 1981). The hanging of humans on meat hooks suggests that there is little difference between humans and factory farmed animals, disrupting the notion that man is the king of the food chain. In *The Midnight Meat Train*, this breakdown between consumer and the consumed means passengers are transformed into corpses hanging on meat hooks in the New York subway by a butcher called Mahogany (Vinnie Jones). Vegan photographer Leon (Bradley Cooper) becomes obsessed Mahogany and stalks him around the city. Leon discovers that he always takes the last train. One night, Leon dresses in a steel butcher’s apron and waits at a dilapidated train station to
see if the train will stop, brandishing his own meat hook as a weapon. The train does not stop
and races past, but Leon sights a woman called Maya who is on the train. Leon runs after the
train and manages to board it in an attempt to rescue her. Making his way through the
carriages, Leon discovers Maya being attacked by Mahogany in a carriage filled with semi-
alive and dead corpses hanging on meat hooks. Leon wrestles with Mahogany, before
throwing him off the train just before the last stop (allowing for his return and the final
battle). Outside is a cavern filled with human bones. The train electronically announces
“Please step away from the meat”. Leon recoils in horror as he discovers that the bodies are
for reptilian creatures who live in the cavern. After battling Mahogany and killing him, the
train’s conductor walks up to Leon and rips his tongue out of his mouth and eats it. The
conductor explains that the monsters have always lived under the city, and that they must be
fed human flesh. The conductor kills Maya and Leon then becomes the next Butcher. The last
shot is of him receiving a train schedule from a police officer. The Midnight Meat Train
entirely collapses the boundaries between human and commodity, presenting violence as part
of the institutional structure of the city itself.

Figure 32. Corpses on the London Tube in The Midnight Meat Train (Ryûhei Kitamura, 2008).
A frequently used motif that signifies the departure of the sanctity of the ego and its assault on individuality is the figure of the pig. The pig, with its connotations of the mass production of factory farming and the prioritization of consumption over nature is frequently used as an analogy for the plight of the protagonists in the splatter film. This consumption of nature occasionally turns on the protagonists, and the factory farmed animals gore their protagonists to death, as in *Isolation* (Billy O’Brien, 2005), *Squeal* (Tony Swansey, 2008), *Pighunt* (James Isaac, 2009), *Proie/Prey* (Antoine Blossier, 2009), and the rich capitalist Verger who feeds his victims to cannibalistic pigs in *Hannibal* (Ridley Scott, 2001). A spectacular example of this use of the pig as a metaphor for the status of humanity under industrialism is presented in *Saw III* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006). Here, the game is that Jeff must battle his way out of the industrial complex while deciding whether to attempt to save the victims he encounters in every room. However, there is a catch. Jeff has been selected by the serial killer Jigsaw for his inability to heal following the death of his young son by a hit and run driver, and each victim is someone associated with this incident. Jeff walks through a door entitled “Time to Let Go”, and the act of opening the door inadvertently causes a pig vat machine to start moving. Rotting pig carcasses covered in maggots and suspended on meat hooks are moved along a conveyor belt, dropped into whirring blades, and the remaining pig matter slowly begins drowning the judge who presided over Jeff’s son’s case. To save the life of the judge, Jeff must incinerate his son’s belongings, which he reluctantly does in the nick of time. The horror of this sequence stems from the way that the lawyer is collapsed into a porcine machine, in a strange aberration of industrialism turned on humanity. The *Saw* series draws further parallels between the status of human as commodity through the serial killer and his accomplices’ use of a rotting pig mask during kidnappings, functioning to hide the identity of the kidnapper but also as an allegory for the stripping of their victims’ identity down to meat.
Chapter Four: Body and Commodity in the Splatter Film

Figure 33. The rotting pig mask in the Saw series.

The killing of humans is also frequently tied to the capitalist motivation of the accrual of wealth in the splatter film, as in the Hostel series, where director Eli Roth claims his motivation for the film was spurned from encountering a “real” website where punters could pay to shoot poor Indonesians in the head, the compensation for their death being the notion that their families would live on. In the French film Martyrs (Pascal Laugier, 2008), where the search for religious salvation is turned into the organized torture of victims in a Fordist manner, employing a whole group of people in the ongoing search to generate martyrs who have a connection with the afterlife and are able to convey information on what it is like. The film opens in an abandoned factory in the middle of Paris, where Lucie has been tortured as a child, and as the film goes on, the investment that the killer cult have made in their project: a further country house with an underground torture chamber. Director Pascal Laugier cites his motivation for making the film in the idea of a capitalism that is turned onto the consumption and eradication of humans, stating:

*when society is completely driven by the power of money, the ...anything is possible. Everything is allowed... It’s not worse than going to Asia and fuck some... you know, because you can afford it. Because [capitalism] ... breaks all the taboos of the power of money it’s very, very possible that one day some people with a lot of money will try to break the last thing that makes us all the same, all equal, that is to say Death. That’s an idea, and maybe it’s a poetic idea, but it’s very connected to the world we are living in* (Foster, 2012).
Similarly in *My Little Eye* (Marc Evans, 2002) and *House of 9* (Steven Monroe, 2004), the individual right to life is displaced by consumption. Participants are confined to a house and the only way to become free is to be the last human standing (by killing the others, or surviving their attempts to kill each other). Survival is linked to the accumulation of funds—one million and five million dollars respectively. *My Little Eye* draws from the convention of the reality game show to demonstrate this demise: participants willingly enter a game show/reality TV webcast to remain in a remote house surrounded by snow in the middle of the country. They are told that if someone leaves, everybody loses. Towards the end of the six months, the group receives packages in the mail that contain a gun, a bottle of champagne and the news that one of the contestant’s family members has died. The violent act that sends the narrative into decline is precipitated by a man called Travis, who wanders in from the woods claiming to have never heard of the show. That night, he wanders round the house talking into the cameras. One of the contestants then discovers that his backpack is doused in blood, an event that the participants put down to a producer’s plot to unnerve them so that they do not have to pay out the money. The next day, they wake up to one of the contestants hanging from a noose outside, an event that propels the group to seek outside help when the producers do not arrive. One of the other contestants, Rex, uses his laptop and the GPS device found in Travis’ backpack to gain access to the internet, and is stunned to find that there are no Google results for the webcast TV show online, only a heavily encrypted site. Hacking into the site, Rex discovers his speculation has been correct: they are part of a snuff film where subscribers from around the world pay money to access their deaths. In *House of 9*, just who is behind their torture and confinement is left much less clear: Lea survives the panic and chaos that ensues when the housemates begin killing each other, and at the end of the film, the steel door opens to reveal daylight and a large bag of money. In this sense, these films represent the ultimate terror that human beings under capitalism are threatened by the commodity, mirroring the way that critics such as Stuart Ewen (1988, p.71) have argued that the subject under capitalism is now a “commodity self”, engaged in a process of self-improvement where autonomy is signaled in the group through the accumulation of reified objects. Together with the images of capitalist atrophy, this foregrounding of the relationship between the commodity and the human engages these films in a different relationship with the catastrophe than the haunted house, as it underscores the urgency of needing to break free from these paradigms, even if it is not signaled how in the film.
As Merritt (2010) notes, a key theme through which this collapse of the boundary between the body and the commodity is conveyed is that of cannibalism, which pervades the zombie film and the hillbilly film in particular. In the zombie film the whole city collapses into the desire for cannibalism, functioning as a violent act that tears apart any attempt at maintaining the hierarchical organization of society. In the hillbilly film, cannibalism is frequently presented as a practice that continues on outside of the law, with pockets of people continuing to engage in this practice. Cannibalism presents the ultimate collapse of the distinction between subject and object, as human beings now exist solely to consume each other in a Hobbesian war of all against all. Merritt also draws from the work of Bataille, in particular his notions of taboo and transgression (p.219). Bataille argues that the development of taboos against violence is linked to the development of tools and work that allows for the transformation to take place from animals to humans (as cited in Merritt, pp.218-9). Taboos on violence allow for the suppression of unproductive activities and the channeling of social energy into work, encouraging the social body to conform. As it is the enforcement of the taboo on the regulated body that gives rise to its violent transgression, Merritt argues that cannibalism in these films can be seen as a revolt against the system. The collapse of the boundary between subject and object that is presented in the splatter film is thus a rebellion against the regulated conformity of the body under capitalism, but it is also a reminder of the fragility of the system that is imposed over humanity (p.228). In this way, the splatter film’s explosion of violence functions as a reminder that the system is artificial and that even in the attempt to regulate bodies into order, the breakdown of this conformity will always be a part of capitalism itself. Moreover, Bataille offers a lens through which we can think about violence as part of a broader social process that is not necessarily moralistic. His notions of base materialism that contextualize abjection within a broader system of violence work to challenge the notion that capitalism is equivalent to progress, rather exposing it as a system that abstracts and regulates human desires (Bataille, 1985, pp.45-52). Like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri’s argument that capitalism is composed of both production and anti-production, Bataille shows how a breakdown in the order is not something that comes from outside of the system, it is something that exists within it at all times (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p.31). It is the foregrounding of this collapse between the subject and the object, and also the way that this breakdown in order is positioned as part of the system itself that makes the splatter film’s politics so horrific.
VI. The surveilled body

The notion of a subject/object collapse is extended in the splatter film through the way that the body is subjected to constant and terrifying surveillance. As Evangelos Tziallas (2010) argues, within the splatter film the body is subjected to a technological gaze. Tziallas (2010) relates this technological gaze to the work of Michel Foucault and Nicholas Mirzoeff, who argue that the contemporary body is subjected to the constant panopticism of the state as a means of maintaining control. The illusion of freedom and civil liberty in democracy is created through the foundation of surveillance as a mechanism for capturing aberrations, bodies that do not conform to the system. The knowledge of this surveillance means that the subjects regulate themselves according to these norms. The establishment of a technological society is thus both progressive and nightmarish at the same time, and freedom is accompanied by regulation. Tziallas (2010) argues that this “technological gaze” in torture porn (or for our project, the splatter film more broadly) works to contest the voyeuristic gaze that cinema is based on. The notion of continuous surveillance through technologies such as CCTV infers that the gaze itself is now “objectless”, concerned with the continuous recording of events rather than the individual subject itself. For Tziallas, it is this “objectless” gaze introduced through the frequent use of surveillance cameras, video, the internet and the mobile phone that provides part of the terror of these films and also its symbolic reverence to the images of torture occurring from Abu Ghraib. Beyond the signifiers of the cloaked hood and the torture chair as representative of the dark side of the Global War on Terror, it is this objectless gaze that mirrors the loss of subjectivity in contemporary times and the Orwellian intrusion of the state into the private sphere. Extending on Tziallas’ notion, we can see that it is this objectless gaze that threatens both the voyeuristic and Imaginary identification that cinema’s auratic consideration of individual authenticity encourages.
The horrors of technology and surveillance are a constant throughout the splatter film, which revels in its remediation of events through the use of contemporary technology. Even after all the humans are dead, the surveillance lives on, the only constant in the total rupture of the system. Thus at the end of *Resident Evil* (Paul Anderson, 2002), a film about a military corporation that develops a virus to reanimate the dead (a common rationale behind the outbreak of violence in the splatter film), Alice’s awakening in a deserted hospital is remediated through multiple surveillance screens. Having survived the outbreak of the violence created by the Umbrella Corporation and escaped from its underground and secret headquarters called “The Hive” (a metaphor for fears over the power and secrecy of the transnational corporation, and also the labour of its workers who are gassed by their bosses once the virus breaks out), Alice comes to from unconsciousness to find herself strapped to a hospital bed. Her shaved head and multiple incisions attest to her being experimented on, but it is the locked status of her room and her unconsciousness that has allowed her to survive the outbreak within the hospital. The camera oscillates between close ups of her confusion and slow realization of her position, and the remediation of these shots through television screens in an adjoined room with multiple screens where she has been surveilled while she has been presumably tested on. The silhouette of a lifeless zombie listlessly walks back and forth in the foreground, signaling that while everyone is dead the surveillance lives on. As she walks out into the hallway and towards the empty, apocalyptic Racoon City, a panning camera shows...
her image through security cameras on two screens. The film implies that even as humanity collapses, the dead circuit of surveillance lives on.

Technology is frequently positioned as an intrusion that is meant to provide safety, but rather functions as key to the participants’ demise. In the Saw series, Hostel, My Little Eye and House of 9, technology is utilized to track the victims’ every move and their distress prior to their murder. In Saw, the deaths are mediated through multiple screens as Jigsaw and his accomplices watch the “games” play out. The inception of each game is demarcated through the disembodied voice of Jigsaw providing instructions on how the game will work, distorted through technology to disguise his voice and replayed through a tape recorder or video screen. At times the puppet doll “Billy” on a tricycle emerges during the instructions or at the completion of a task to re-emphasize the disembodied nature of the violence. This desire to surveil in the Saw series is underscored by Jigsaw himself in the first film, which opens with two victims chained to a grotty bathroom in a warehouse room with no exit. After the doctor Lawrence Gordon saws through his own foot, Adam is left alone in the room. When Jigsaw’s accomplice Zep enters the room, Adam beats him to death with the toilet seat cover. Believing Zep to be the serial killer, Adam searches his body only to find yet another tape recorder, which reveals Zep was instructed to hold Lawrence’s family captive and participate in the game in order to gain a cure for the slow-acting poison that is pulsing through his body. At this point, the corpse that has been laying dormant in the sealed room the whole time begins to stir revealing itself as Jigsaw, who has paralyzed himself with drugs so that he could be in the room surveilling the games for the whole duration. Technology is also often utilized towards tricking the participant into believing a false reality. In Hostel (2005), this is shown through the Elite Hunting Company’s use of cellphone images of decapitated heads on spikes to fool the group that their friends are still alive and simply do not want to catch up with them. Oli and Yuri’s heads are photoshopped onto a background image of Bratislava, suggesting that the technology is untrustworthy. Technology, then, in the splatter film is positioned as untrustworthy and its use is frequently associated with death.
The equation of technology with death is often mirrored by the way that these films incorporate the “technology gaze” as one that is military, highlighting the role of the state in utilizing this technology. This technological gaze can be seen at work within the British film 28 Weeks Later (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007), which follows the plight of a post-apocalyptic Britain six months after the “rage virus” breaks out, converting the population into bloodthirsty zombies. The film opens by situating the outbreak within a continuation of the first film, as Don and his wife Alice’s small country cottage is invaded by infected citizens who have followed a terrified young boy to their house. While Don escapes, his wife and the child do not. A series of intertitles over aerial images of mainland Britain tell us about the carnage that has taken place: 15 days after the virus breaks out, Mainland Britain is quarantined; 28 days later it is destroyed. After five weeks, the infected die of starvation. At 11 weeks, an American led NATO force enter London. After 15 weeks Britain is cleared of infection. At 28 weeks, reconstruction begins with citizens being ferried back into the “Green Zone” on the Isle of Dogs (a title that refers directly to the Green Zone or highly secure zone established in Baghdad by US troops during the Iraq War). Don’s children, Tammy and Andy, are with a group of Britons that are being repatriated into the region. The film establishes the high military presence by a number of shots that are taken through military vision. A sequence inside the Green Zone shows a group of snipers communicating with their friend in a helicopter about their boredom in being forced to look after the repatriated citizens. The camerawork carves up the space through the sniper’s vision, as whip pans zoom...
from one sniper to another, showing the Green Zone entirely carved up by military space. A reverse close up through the sniper Doyle’s telescope showing his eye staring out over the space further entrenches the fact that this is now military space. The snipers joke about the people that they see through their telescopic vision into their windows, transforming the people they discuss into objects for voyeuristic consumption rather as people. The film then cuts back to Tammy and Andy’s journey into the city, a journey where shots that subjectively align the audience with their perspective are constantly intercut with shots from the military surveillance. The message of the film is clear: the subject of contemporary Britain has now been collapsed into one that is the object of American military surveillance.

Paul Virilio (1989) argues that it is not cinema that has influenced our perceptions of war, but it is war that functions as a scopic regime that is increasingly integrated into cinema. For Virilio, “war is cinema and cinema is war” (p.26, original emphasis). Contemporary society is a society dominated by technology and speed (the latter of which Virilio terms dromology), and it is this technology that allows for occupying powers to claim spaces before they put troops on the ground. Virilio’s conception of contemporary society is thus somewhat similar to Jameson’s in the emphasis that he places on technology and spatial geography, but for Virilio, the military industrial apparatus has completely taken over our vision. For Virilio, the occupation of territory is about the control of space, and our new spatiality is now punctuated by the surveillance of the citizen. While Virilio’s theories have obvious relevance to the new remediated spaces of war at a distance via drones and other technologies, he argues that this intervention of technology into space begins in World War II (p.49). The splatter film, with its representations of the subjectless body, frequently draws from these images, and a military technology gaze is often incorporated to convey the horror of the alienated body. The splatter film’s obsession with the dead circuit of surveillance technology, transforming the traditional subject alignment of Classical Hollywood cinematography and editing into one that is objectless might be seen as an example of Virilio’s assertion.

This transformation of spatiality into one that is governed by military and the supreme power that it holds to transform subject into object is conveyed in a key sequence in 28 Weeks Later where the virus erupts in the Green Zone. Tammy and Andy, upset at their status of being controlled subjects in a military compound, try to remember what their mother looks like.
Unable to remember, the pair decide to sneak out of the Green Zone into the uncontrolled area. Once they arrive at their old residence, they are stunned to find their mother still alive. When the military stream into arrest the pair and bring them back into the quarantined area, they bring the mother back. Tests reveal that she is infected, but unlike other beings she has not turned, and as the military decide to terminate her life, her husband Don is using his caretaker pass to get into her room. He finds her alive, but not realizing that she is infected, kisses her on the lips and is overtaken with the rage virus. He then bashes her to death, killing her by pushing her eyeballs into her skull (an act which features as a metaphor for the loss of subjective vision that is about to occur). The camera then cuts to a grainy and underdeveloped frenetic montage of Don bashing soldiers he encounters to death. That the shots are visually anchored by his shoulder signals that the gaze is now objectless, as we see events through the blurred vision of an infected corpse who only sees meat in front of him. In the centralized surveillance room, the General declares that the military are to initiate containment protocol. The citizens are herded into an underground garage and locked in. However, Don, now an infected corpse, finds entry to the containment holding and begins infecting others, creating hundreds of running people with the virus. The people who are alive press themselves in stampede against the locked doors, eventually bursting through them and people spill out onto the streets. The General, observing the outbreak through his surveillance cameras, declares Code Red: the elimination of all civilians in order to contain the virus. Snipers on the roof begin shooting everyone in the square below, an event that is conveyed through the a fast montage of handheld shots from the people below panicking in the square; shots taken through the snipers’ rifle sites, and shots taken through the surveillance cameras of the General’s central command. A montage shows the soldiers’ faces wincing as they are positioned one after the other in profile demonstrating that their subjectivity is now also collapsed as they work together as a killing machine, rather than as individual humans with moral judgments.
Figure 36. Citizens are converted into targets in the Code Red killing sequence of *28 Weeks Later* (2007).

Figure 37. The military controls suburban space through the surveillance room of the General in *28 Weeks Later* (2007).
This conflation between the technology and the military gaze in the splatter film occurs frequently in the zombie film, where the reinstitution of the state is associated with a loss in consideration for individual human rights and life. Thus in the Spanish horror film *Rec* (Jaume Balagueró, 2007) and its American remake *Quarantine* (2008), the protagonists are confined to an urban building when a zombie virus breaks out. Any way out is blocked as the building is sealed and anyone who does find a way will be shot by the snipers outside. The protagonists are left inside to battle it out until they are bitten and succumb to the virus. In *The Crazies* (Breck Eisner, 2010) and *State of Emergency* (Turner Clay, 2011), the protagonists are similarly confined by an uncaring military into small communities that are destined to be decimated. While at a utilitarian level, such confinement may make sense in terms of the Government’s need to control the spread of the virus, this is always complicated by the way in which the audience is aligned subjectively with the protagonists’. The government or military threat to subsume this gaze is therefore aligned with a threat to also eradicate the audience’s subjectivity. This threat is highlighted in the credit sequence to Zack Snyder’s 2005 *Dawn of the Dead*, where following a dramatic opening that charts the collapse of Milwaukee civilization from the outbreak of the zombies, frenetic images of zombies on the loose are intercut with protest footage. The sequence begins and ends with images of the Middle East, providing an uncontextualised referent to contemporary events.
The first image shows Muslims praying to Mecca, and the last an American journalist covering the outbreak while US soldiers are overcome by running zombies, the collapse of both societies signaling a moral undercurrent that we are both the same. Other images in the frenetic montage show people battling with riot police and an army truck running people over. In order to underscore the threat that the US government provides, shaky handycam footage shows the President and the First Lady attempting to board a helicopter before zombies arrive. The zombies and the journalists are shot, with one of the soldiers literally shooting at the screen due to the camera being situated with the cameraman. The message is clear: no life has intrinsic value in this world, and relying on the old orders will not be enough to save you. The sequence is accompanied by the vocals of Johnny Cash’s 2002 song “When the Man Comes Around”, a song about the Revelations section in the Bible that charts the onset of the Apocalypse. The Biblical references here seek to situate the Apocalypse with the now, and their association with protest footage functions as an interrogation of the current order which signals the need for its demise. As Charles Derry (2009, p.244) notes in *Dark Dreams: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film from the 1950s to the 21st Century*, the parallels between the Global War on Terror and the terrifying collapse of the US are drawn strongly in *Dawn of the Dead*: even the coffee shop in the middle of the mall is named “Hallowed Ground”, the name used to refer to Ground Zero. For Derry, it is these references to 9/11 and the Global War on Terror that are iconicized through the figure of the zombie, who reflects the popular discourse on terrorists being citizens who “turn” in their ideology, raising the question of whether they should be eradicated now. This problematic is frequently embedded in the zombie film in the character who is part of the group before they are bitten, and when they should be killed (before or after they turn into a zombie). Under this technological gaze that looks for signs of disorder rather than individuality, all humans are potential sources of aberration. While human life and human concerns continue, the machines lie watching to check for signs of non-conformity.
The military gaze in the post-9/11 zombie film is also frequently extended to its conflation with the same kind of “medical gaze” that Foucault identifies as the marker of biopower under democracy. The zombie film frequently features sequences where one of the group falls victim to the disease and then is kept for testing on as if they are an animal for potential cures. In this scenario, the subject loses all of their rights regardless of their “dead” or “alive” status, as in Abraham Lincoln versus Zombies (Richard Schenckman, 2012), Exit Humanity (John Geddes, 2012), 28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002), 28 Weeks Later (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007) and Resident Evil (Paul Anderson, 2002), which all feature protagonists who have been chained or confined in order to be tested on for cures, sacrificing the one for the many. In 28 Days Later (2002), this allegory between human and test subject is brought to the fore in the opening sequence, which zooms out from an image of multiple televisions conveying news footage of the Rage virus to show a chained monkey watching the screen a la A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971). The assertion of order then is associated with the decline of individual rights. Within these films, there is frequently an exploration of the doctor as the mad scientist trope, a figure that stems from the way that science is positioned as being unable to resolve the threat that resides within these films. For example, in Exit Humanity, Emma is kidnapped by the Confederate General Williams, who has established his own Confederate outpost to attempt to repopulate America following the zombie outbreak. Emma has been bitten but somehow manages to be immune to the disease
so she is confined to a room for medical testing by Medic Johnson, a doctor who seems to have no idea what he is doing but takes pleasure in the torture of others in his search for a solution to the disease. This perversion of the medical gaze also runs through the Saw series, where it is revealed that Dr. Lawrence Gordon, having sawn through his leg above the ankle in the first film is now working as one of Jigsaw’s accomplices and providing guidance on the traps that require medical mutilation before the subject awakes, such as placing the key behind Michael’s eye socket in Saw II (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005) and sewing Trevor’s eyes shut before the Mausoleum trap in Saw IV (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007). In The Human Centipede: First Sequence (Tom Six, 2009), it is a German doctor who is obsessed with creating an organism with one single digestive system, signaling the danger of science gone wrong. In the Hostel series, the table with the neatly lined up torture implements functions as a visual simile for the doctor in surgery, but here the instruments are turned to the destruction of the body rather than to its restoration. Hostel: Part III (Scott Spiegel, 2011) takes this analogy further with a twist on the torture factory that shows the victims waking up in an anatomical theatre where operations are staged as in the early modern university. One by one, the victims are brought out for medical torture by a doctor. A glass screen separates them from the tiered seats of the paying viewers, who have gambled on the odds of the victims’ responses to each escalating violation. In the splatter film, the perversion of the medical gaze works to challenge the assertion of this biopower, exposing it for what it really is: an attempt to organize and categorize bodies.

As Allen Feldman (2005) notes in his work “On the Actuarial Gaze: From 9/11 to Abu Ghraib”, the gaze is a crucial instrument of power for the policing of deviant bodies and in the globalized nature of postmodern society there is an overlapping of the gaze from military to medical. Feldman argues that the gaze on the bodies of the detainees at Abu Ghraib works to situate threat and risk through its containment of excess onto the body of the detained prisoner. Feldman (2005, p.214) situates the photos at Abu Ghraib as reflective of the shift towards catastrophic representations in postmodern culture, arguing that they work to contain risk and threat into the voyeuristic spectacle of viewing the Other. While Feldman’s argument that the act of viewing these photos from a safe distance detached from the Iraq War satisfies voyeuristic desire to see the war may be true in some cases, the photos also generated unease in public discourse about the US role in Iraq, which suggests that Feldman’s claims are slightly over-determined. However, what is useful about his work is the way that he brings
the works of Foucault, Ernst Bloch and Virilio together in order to highlight the way that contemporary society is shaped by scopic regimes, and that these differing modes of viewing overlap to reinforce matrixes of power. As I have suggested, while the incorporation of the violent image itself is potent (as Susan Sontag notes on the Abu Ghraib affair, “photographs have an insuperable power to determine what we remember of events”), it is also the way that these images are positioned in the text that determines how they are read (Sontag, 2004). In the splatter film, the displacement of this gaze from the subjective alignment that Classical Hollywood Cinema traditionally encourages onto the clinical, objectless gaze of the state apparatus in postmodern society and its association with impending horror works to generate a sense of unease about the way subjectivity is positioned under late capitalism.

The post-9/11 splatter film frequently challenges the audience’s gaze, incorporating them as spectator at the same time as simultaneously undermining the stability of this position. For example, in My Little Eye, a code is hidden in the DVD cover that allows the audience to enter it into their DVD player to be able to control the camera angles through which they view the action in certain points at the film, mimicking the positions of an internet subscriber to the snuff scheme (like a video game, at other points, the narrative sequence takes over). Another of the DVD’s functions called “Conversations of the Company (Eavesdropping...
Chapter Four: Body and Commodity in the Splatter Film

Track)” allows the viewer to rewatch the film while hearing the conversations of the elusive snuff ring. The film is shot through the conventions of reality TV, and the action is shown from multiple angles that are often obtuse. However, in the final sequence of the film, the gaze is turned back on itself when Travis (Bradley Cooper) is taken back to the Cop’s safe house following the action. Travis has already been established as one of the antagonists, who was sent into the house to disrupt the other contestants into violence. Emma, still alive but bleeding profusely, is locked into another room which also has multiple cameras capturing her demise. Travis asks the Cop if he is allowed to view Emma through the peephole in the door, placing his eye up to view her. The camera moves to capture a shot of Travis’ eye peering through the hole, before it turns to blood red when the Cop shoots Travis through the back of the head. Similarly, in the last sequence of Diary of the Dead (George Romero, 2007), the audience is placed in the position of viewing found footage from the zombie crisis on the internet (the film is shot entirely through handycam footage as if it were taken by the protagonists). The footage shows rednecks tying up a female zombie to a tree and using her for target practice. Overlaid on top of this footage is a voice over from one of the protagonists, Debra, calling into question the worth of humanity:

Jason once said he thought he could help, maybe even save some lives. This is the last thing he downloaded before he died: a couple of hometown Joes who went out to shoot at targets. But that day, they used people. Dead people. You know, just for fun? There was one target that was different from the rest. A woman... tied by her hair to the branch of a tree. The boys had this one set up just for kicks. They got out their favorite 12 gauge and... [at this point the woman’s head is blown in two by bullets] Are we worth saving? You tell me.

The splatter film, then, frequently turns the gaze on its audience in order to challenge the role that surveillance has in contemporary society.

VII. Conclusion

The splatter film’s logic of narrative collapse is extended to an assault on bodily unity, challenging the notion of the unified bourgeois self. The emphasis on the presentation of
body parts through the convention of the close up works to undermine notions of gendered embodiment and identity, threatening the ego with the dissolution of the body into parts. This deanchoring of subjectivity is incorporated into the cinematography, which frequently violates Hollywood conventions of subjective alignment to present a disembodied camera. This functions to generate the impression that violence is capable of emerging from anywhere at any time, underscoring the anarchic nature of the text. The brutalization of skin thus stands in as a metaphor for the fragility of identity itself. Thus while protagonists fight to preserve their identity and bodily unity, this is always at threat from the repurposing and fragmentation of the body to other ends. A large part of the horror generated by these films centers on the way that the monster or villain desires to remodel the protagonist’s body into uses that go beyond our normative concepts of why one might kill another, in the process breaking taboos that surround the narrativization and reification of death within western culture. This repurposing of the body commonly includes cannibalism, the making of the body into decorative or wearable accoutrements, or the flaying of skin and spectacular deconstruction of the body for the monster’s pleasure.

This shift from the expression of the body as unified self or ego to the body as a commodity in the post-9/11 American splatter film means that these films can be read as an allegory for the threat of the commodified self under capitalism. The action frequently takes place in front of a mise-en-scène that is littered with objects representing atrophied capitalism, such as the factory, the meat hook, and rusting industrial machines that only exist to tear apart the organs of humans. These films go to considerable effort to highlight the parallels between the factory farming and the status of the individual human under capitalism. The pig becomes a metaphor for the disposability of individuals under capitalism. This works to violate the sanctity of the goal-oriented protagonist and the enshrinement of the individual that is central to the ideological constructs of much of Hollywood cinema. Instead of the exceptional individual who, despite the odds, survives until the end and overcomes their challenges, individuality is always imperiled by a larger system that has little regard for individual demands for human life.

It is perhaps not surprising then that these representations of crisis in the system occur in the post-9/11 period where the system is viewed as failing or corrupted on multiple levels – fears
about the internal surveillance of domestic citizens, the increasing militarization of US culture, the accumulation of wealth under capitalism and its devastating effects on those who are lower in the system, and the rise of a technology based society. The splatter film is thus nihilistic on multiple levels – its assault on the body, assault on the narrative and its depiction of class relations. This extension and identification of the ideologeme in the splatter film reveals that while the splatter film might seem like violence for violence’s sake, the expression of this violence is also mediated through the social structures that give rise to it as a text. The splatter film links industry and capitalism in its critique of the current social order, and in this sense, despite the bleakness of its postmodern destabilization of the subject, could be considered to be echoing modernist themes of the fear of the loss of humanity under capitalism.
Chapter Five. The Collapse Of Empire

As we have seen, the splatter film poses an assault on Classical Hollywood narration and cinematic strategies of subjective alignment while simultaneously working to align the body with the nightmarish commodity under capitalism. However, this collapse is not limited to the demise of the body. The American splatter film frequently engages with the rich iconography of signifiers of American nationalism and dominance, symbology that when paired with the horror themes of collapse renders these images as dystopian and unstable. This theme is taken to its extreme in Eli Roth’s *Hostel* (2005), where two young fraternity boys are lured across Eastern Europe to a torture chamber where the tables of Americans as wealthy consumers are turned, and they become the consumed. Throughout the film, their experience of torture is linked to their status as Americans as hostile locals sell them on to be bought and sold on a market where their nationality becomes the indicator of the price of their murder. *Hostel*’s exploration of unease around the US’ position in the world is echoed in a number of other films that were released during the period, such as the botched army preparations in *The Hills Have Eyes II* (Martin Weisz, 2007), *Zombie Strippers* (Jay Lee, 2008) and *Osombie* (John Lyde, 2012); the retaliation of exploited foreign cultures in *Turistas* (John Stockwell, 2006), and the unease surrounding the US military’s occupation of Britain in *28 Weeks Later* (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007). In representing the US military as fumbling and inadequate, these films might be read as reflecting audience anxieties over the occupation of Iraq. In films that were set in the United States, the nation is no less menacing: patrolled by vigilantes and bands of militia, domestic locations are rendered as menacing. As Anna Briefel and Sam J. Miller argue in *Horror After 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror* (2011, p.4), the relationship between the horror films that were produced after 9/11 and allegory is complex, and not necessarily straightforward in their representation. However, it is possible to identify the common theme across the body of works produced in this time of a challenging and reworking of American dominance in global culture.
Chapter Five: The Collapse of Empire

I. Nationalism, cinema and globalization

Jameson argues that under late capitalism, Hollywood culture becomes no longer representative of American nationalism, but of global culture itself. In his article “Globalization and Political Strategy”, Jameson (2000a) argues that when the demise of the nation state is debated under globalization, critics are really talking about the threat to national culture that is proposed by the rising power of the United States as a cultural and economic empire. For Jameson, the seeming “universality” of American multinational capitalism is part of a process that refines and subsumes earlier forms of imperialism. The first phase for Jameson (2000) is founded in the period prior to WWI and is marked by colonialism in a manner similar to other empires such as Japan, Russia, Belgium and England, with US territories including Liberia, Guam, the Philippines and American Samoa. Following WWI, the US then begins to pursue an interventionist strategy of destabilizing nations in order to manipulate its geopolitical position that intensifies with the Cold War and its emergence as a global superpower following WWII. As Jameson argues:

*Now perhaps we have a third stage, in which the United States pursues what Samuel Huntington has defined as a three-pronged strategy: nuclear weapons for the US alone; human rights and American-style electoral democracy; and (less obviously) limits to immigration and the free flow of labour. One might add a fourth crucial policy here: the propagation of the free market across the globe. This latest form of imperialism will involve only the US (and such utterly subordinated satellites as the UK), who will adopt the role of the world’s policemen, and enforce their rule through selected interventions (mostly bombings, from a great height) in various alleged danger zones (2000).*

For Jameson, the notion of America as “global policeman” coincides with the radical expansion of the cultural industries and the aggressive pursuit of foreign markets for Hollywood films. The circulation of American global culture is strategic: the narrative in these films attempt to position US concerns as “universal” against the nationalism of resistant states (Jameson, 2000). In this way, the culture industries play an important role in bolstering the ideologies of US cultural and economic imperialism and cannot thus be seen as separate from these projects. While Jameson’s claims sound like they are overextending the significance of cinema in the economy and its role as a global ideological apparatus, his claims mirror the works of a number of theorists that are interested in the split between so-
called ‘developing nations’ as exploited for resources and cheap labour, and the highly industrialized nations accompanied between emerging middle classes of leisure and their focus on consumption. Hollywood plays a vital role in extending this reach by virtue of its global capacity to reach citizens, leading to an unequal media environment marked by a digital divide in communication technologies and access to broadcasting. While the transnational structure in other industries, such as digital communication and growth of pan-national news sources (such as Al Jazeera, Russian Television and Chinese television) are beginning to change this dynamic slightly, it is in cinema that America remains dominant.

As Steven Crofts argues in “Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s” (2006, p.44), this pursuit of foreign markets has a long history, and the cultural domination of Hollywood in global markets since 1919 has been documented (in fact, by 1928, Hollywood films constituted 85% of the films screened globally). This early dominance meant that Classical Hollywood Cinema functioned as a yardstick to which other national cinemas were compared, and many of the characteristics traditionally associated with Classical Hollywood Cinema, such as the goal oriented protagonist and the need for narrative closure were incorporated into the cinemas of other nation states (p.44). While some states have closed off their media and developed extensive state apparatuses, built regional markets based on shared language or cultures, produced Hollywood and national hybrids, or established their own alternative art cinemas, as Crofts notes it is still Hollywood that has the most globalized reach (estimated at 62% of the global market in 2012) (Hoad, 2013). For this reason, Jameson argues that Hollywood is globalization and American culture is global rather than local. A number of theorists have noted how Hollywood themes are explicitly tied to themes of American culture, including the notion of American exceptionalism and the ability of the US to function as a mediator within global conflicts. As Willie Stein (2010) observes in his study of 1980s action film heroes, the plots of films such as Die Hard (John McTiernan, 1988) and Rambo: First Blood (Ted Kotcheff, 1985) frequently feature American strong men exerting their muscular power over both ‘terrorists’ and territory, entrenching and sanitizing the role of American interventionism overseas.

For Jameson, film, due to its circulation under global transnational capitalism is exemplary of the shift towards postmodernism, an economic system which seeks to repress the influence of
its mode of production in the text. Film increasingly loses its link to history, and thus its ability to imagine real alternatives to the political system, functioning as a self-referential horizon that distributes highly mediated images, which in themselves are representative of the simulacrum rather than maintaining their referent to the real (Jameson, 1991, pp.93-6).46 Rather than nature, technology is increasingly enshrined, a movement that he sees as particularly occurring in the science fiction film and the thriller. Jameson argues in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992, p.5) that there is an urgent need to map the ways in which this new transnational, delocalized capitalism functions a global hegemon that challenges the borders of the national. In casting American culture as global, Jameson positions Third World nationalism as one of the only spaces through which to imagine alternatives of the current system (Jameson, 1986, Jameson, 1992, p.188).

Jameson’s arguments are perhaps more easily understood against the backdrop of a body of theory across sociology, economics and cultural studies that positions late capitalism as being based on the transition from Gemeinschaft (community oriented bonds) to Gesellschaft (indirect interactions based on contractual relationships between individuals), a distinction first proposed by the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (Tönnies, 1988) and then built upon as processes of “detrationalization” by sociologists such as Anthony Giddens (1991) and Zygmunt Bauman (2001). As Vincent Miller (2011, pp.184-206) argues, this process of detritionalization, or the separation between production and consumption and the shift towards contract based relationships has been intensified by the development of digital technologies that encourage a network society. Scott Lash and John Urry (1987) conclude that this transnationalization of capital has generated two distinct spaces – the first, the highly mediated postmodern spaces of first world economies (pp.292-6); and secondly, the global impoverished poor that remain largely absent from this representation due to their lack of visibility (p.304). The dominance of Hollywood cinema, then, with its focus on imagining and naturalizing lifestyles that are largely unattainable for most (while avoiding the representation of inequality) might be seen as a shift towards a reflection of the hegemonic structures of class and wealth under late capitalism. It is our inability to conceive of this total system in its complexity, and late capitalism’s incorporation of the fragmentation of desires

46 Jameson acknowledges the Lacanian use of this term and his notion that the ‘Real’ exists beyond the Symbolic and is therefore inaccessible. However, Jameson’s focus on historical materialism means that he is interested in the way that the text relates to social totality, so he does not entirely dispense with this notion.
as markets, that completes postmodernism’s ability to efface its existence as a system (p.637). For Jameson, this drive towards the celebration of the microgroup is reflected within cultural studies itself, where attempts at totalization of the text have been superseded by the focus on identity politics (pp.598-635).

If Hollywood and American culture is global, then the splatter film is dedicated for a large part to destroying this image through the way it incorporates and destroys symbols of American nationality and culture. Hollywood moved to censor many of the movies coming out after 9/11 and reassert patriotism, but the splatter film presents a different image of an America in decline. The splatter film is littered with images that function as metonymic for the surveilled body under late capitalism. These images are also frequently tied to images of the decline of US culture, whether it be the near constant inclusion of the American flag, the terrifying subversion of the nuclear family into the killing mob, or the reworking of the frontier myth into one of decline. The splatter film is thus frequently engaged in undermining the symbology of economic dominance. This parodying and questioning of American patriotism has a long history within the splatter film, both in productions that originate from within the US, and productions that are from other national cultures (as in the anxiety surrounding US troops repatriating Britain in *28 Weeks Later*, which is traced in the last chapter). The splatter film experienced a surge in popularity following 9/11, not just in domestic markets, but also in other foreign markets. If, as Fredric Jameson argues, postmodern global culture is also Hollywood hegemonic culture, we might read this surge in popularity as corresponding to its ability to represent both domestic ennui and also the rise in anti-Americanism that occurred during this time.

II. Collapse from within

a. Nationalism
Chapter Five: The Collapse of Empire

The splatter film is littered with signifiers of a specifically American decline, and many of the films that were most popular in the post-9/11 wave of splatter films might be seen as representing this either explicitly through the examination of American cultural myths and the incorporation of motifs such as the American flag and fields of rusting American 1950s cars. In others, such as the Saw series, this nationalism is less explicit but still seeps through with the representation of tropes such as Jigsaw as the vigilante and the incorporation of the detective story in the police’s failed attempt to solve the crimes. Nationalism in cinema is often discussed as the being constructed and represented through the repetition of images and myths. In this sense, as Rick Altman (1999, p.198) notes, genres can be seen as either the heir to notions of the traditional public sphere, or as processes that mirror the construction of myth building in the nation. In the case of the splatter film it contributes to both processes – it provides an extension of the public sphere for images that challenge myths of American geopolitical dominance circulated in other more mainstream texts, and it also participates in the creation of iconic images of America that then circulate on a global market.

As Stuart Hall (Hall, 1996, pp.611-618) argues, the nation is a discursive construct in that it is a system of cultural as well as territorial power that seeks to gloss over the fragmentation that exists within the nation and the suppression of this resistance through violence. This expression of nationalism for Hall is one that is based on iterations of unity, to which he identifies five key discursive strategies in maintaining the notion of the nation. The first is the establishment of the “narrative of the nation” that seeks to emphasize the unity of the nation and is maintained through its endless repetition (or as Jameson would argue, “strategies of containment”) (Hall 1996, p.613; Jameson 1981, p.105). Second, national discourses are established through an emphasis on origins, continuity and timelessness in this expression in order to position the status quo as something that has always been (Hall 1996, p.614). Third, there is the invention of tradition and the repetition of this tradition as unifying ritualistic events through which the national community can engage (p.614). Fourth, there is the foundational myth that establishes the origin of the nation (p.614). Finally there is the idea of a “pure, original people or ‘folk’ on which national identity may be symbolically founded (p.615). Hall’s conception of nationalism as a repeated set of stories is relevant for many of the films to emerge out of Hollywood, which frequently repeat and iconicize myths of American independence and unity, as well as representing the power of the individual through the institution of the goal-oriented protagonist who overcomes adversity and a series
of challenges to conquer these by the end of the film. While the splatter film frequently evokes all of these myths of nationalism, its anchorage of these myths to a collapse into disorder works to destabilize their iteration, meaning that the America of the post-9/11 splatter film is continuously presented as in a state of apocalyptic nihilism where order can no longer be established due to the threat of collapse that exists from within.

b. The Southern Other

This erosion of patriotic space from within and without has a long history in the splatter film. The second splatter film to be made in the US was Herschell Gordon Lewis’ 1964 *Two Thousand Maniacs!* a film that was remade as *2001 Maniacs* (Tim Sullivan, 2005) in the post-9/11 wave. Lewis, a former Professor of Literature at Mississippi State University, together with former Paramount Studio executive and Alabama native David Friedman, set out to make the gore version of Vincente Minelli’s 1954 film *Brigadoon*, which is a musical about game hunters in the Scottish Highlands who discover a town, only to slowly become aware that their new friends are the ghosts of people who died 200 years ago (Szczesiul, 2007, p.131). If *Brigadoon* could be seen as a Hollywood fantasy version of the Scottish highlands with its painted sets, *Two Thousand Maniacs!* is its dystopian antithesis. Rather than the beautiful Scottish lasses who just happen to be waiting for passing by Americans of *Brigadoon*, *Two Thousand Maniacs!* reorients the plot to cover a group of vengeful Southerner ghosts who return to avenge their death at the hands of Union soldiers. In doing so, Lewis presented an America that was on the verge of rupturing from tension from within. As such, it can be seen as representative of the shift that Andrew Tudor (1989, pp.221-233) notes within the horror genre more generally to the monster coming from within US culture rather than as an outside force. In the case of *Two Thousand Maniacs!* this collapse stems from the violent foundations of US society that have been repressed.

Lewis’ film features a heavy use of Confederate symbols, and it is this alignment of the Confederate flag with fervent and murderous patriotism from which *Two Thousand Maniacs!*
draws much of its horror. The film opens with the banjo theme song “The South’s Gonna Rise Again” signaling that the theme of this film will be the return of the repressed. A group of Northerners is shown travelling across the country, the license plate on their car reading “Land of Lincoln” in a move to further entrench this sense of opposition. This is followed up by shots of townspeople waving Confederate flags as they prepare for the anniversary of their own massacre by their fellow countrymen, calling into doubt nationalist narratives that seek to position the North’s winning of the Civil War as progress. The film then cuts to a group of Southern children torturing a cat with hangmen’s nooses, a symbol that also recalls the South’s violent participation in lynchings. The cat is labeled with a piece of card as “Damn Yankee”, in order to anchor and highlight the animosity that lies beneath the two visions of America. The Northerner tourists are diverted towards the township by members of the village, who have sneakily changed the direction of the road signs. Once they arrive in the town, the Mayor then invites them to join the commemoration of the community’s founding and to experience “Southern hospitality”. One by one the Northerners are separated from the group and are tortured and killed in violent and inventive ways (dismemberment, being drawn and quartered by horses, death by giant boulder and rolling inside a barrel peppered with nails down a hill). The death machines are carnivalesque and sometimes draped with Confederate flags (as in the Confederate branded barrel with nails), implying the villagers’ festive enjoyment of this process and also an alignment between group expressions of nationalism and violence. Eventually two of the protagonists twig to their fate and escape. When they finally reach the police to complain, the town has disappeared, rendering the force of the state as ineffective in controlling the violence that simmers from within.

As Joseph Maddrey (2004, pp.3-6) notes, terror and violence have always been a part of American national culture and cinema, but in the splatter film, this violence is often aligned with national institutions. Two Thousand Maniacs! is an important film in this respect for the way that it contextualizes the violence of the splatter film within contemporary nationalism. It sets the generic tropes for a number of hillbilly films that follow, including the mainstream crossover Deliverance (John Boorman, 1972), which is commonly associated with bringing the hillbilly trope to cinema. As Allison Graham, Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee note, within Hollywood cinema, the South becomes the image of the projected ‘Other’ within, and

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47 For an account of how these punishments mirror actual historical records, see Szczesiul (2007).
the discourses on unification between the two sides have a long history of being shaped through media texts (Maddrey, 2004).

*Two Thousand Maniacs!* is significant for its introduction of “Southern gore” in a wave of subsequent films that would focus on the plot device of the rural Southerner murdering the unaware Northerner, a narrative format that has proved surprisingly consistent (Graham). In the period following 9/11, there was as much of a resurgence in the hillbilly as there was a shift towards torture porn, with films like *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre, Aja 2006), *The Hills Have Eyes II* (Martin Weisz, 2007), *Wrong Turn* (Rob Schmidt, 2003) and its sequels (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012), *Slaughter* (Stuart Hopewell, 2009), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Jonathan Liebesman, 2006), *The Texas Chainsaw 3D* (John Luessenhop, 2013), *House of 1000 Corpses* (Rob Zombie, 2003), *The Devil’s Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005), *Offspring* (Andrew van der Houten, 2009), *Flesh: TX* (Guy Crawford, 2009), *Header* (Archibald Flancranstin, 2006), *Carver* (Franklin Guerrero Jnr., 2008) and *Tucker and Dale versus Evil* (2010). There were also a number of films produced in other territories that adapted this trope, including *Calvaire* (Frabrice Du Welz, 2004, Belgium), *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005, Australia) and *Inbred* (Alex Chandon, 2011, UK). The image of the dilapidated South, as Jay Watson (2011, p.232) argues, is linked to a sense of alienation occurring from within the US itself.

As McKee and Barker (2011) argue, these images of the South respond to historic domestic politics that focused on the South as a social problem and have now been incorporated into Americana cultural forms. As McKee and Barker state:

> the fallen plantation, in particular the ruined house at its center, has undeniably served as a national symbol of unrepentant pride and the failure to recognize defeat and as such, it has served as a mythic repository for all the shifting specters of our national wrongs, the historical legacy of U.S. slavery, and the persistent blight of poverty (p.4).

McKee and Barker (2011, p.5) argue that the representational strategies in Hollywood cinema resemble those of Edward Said’s “Orientalism” (1995), projecting an image onto the Other that represents more about the subject than its vision (Said, 1995, McKee and Barker, 2011, p.5). The South is exoticized but degraded, representing “imagined geography” rather than
actual territory and peoples, providing a way of generating distance between social groups within the nation and glossing over the internal differences of the nation (p.5). Although the antebellum South had originally been valorized in iconic texts of the 1920s and 1930s such as Gone With the Wind (1939, Victor Fleming) as Andrew Leiter (2011, p.5) notes in his survey of Southern portrayals in cinema, since 1939, these romantic images of the South have been in decline. As McKee and Barker (2011, pp.5-10) note, the predominant discourse on the degraded South shifts from one that is concerned with the “Southern rape problem” which is ethnically coded as stemming from ethnic minorities as in The Story of Temple Drake (Stephen Roberts, 1933) and The Birth of a Nation (D.W. Griffiths, 1915) to one which reflects controversy around the white lumpen-proletariat during the Great Depression and its resurgence in the social problem films of the 1950s. The coding of the South as filled with dangerous redneck Luddites who live in remote locations in the splatter film might be seen as reflecting these class narratives.

As Sharon Monteith (2011) notes however, while exploitation films such as Two Thousand Maniacs! exploit the tropes of the South, they do so in a way that challenges the stability of images of national unity, highlighting the unease that exists beneath the surface. For Monteith, “the exploitation movie is a culturally suggestive product that should not be ignored for the manner in which it cannibalizes images that represent the real terror and hysteria that surrounded the freedom struggle” (p.196). Citing the example of the rising tensions in Mississippi over the Civil Rights movement (where the Klu Klux Klan led the segregationist movement by firebombing homes, businesses and churches, burning crosses and organizing beatings and murders), Monteith (p.196) contrasts the Exploitation film with other more mainstream cinema. In the latter, she argues the social is embedded into the protagonist, who acts as a narrative actant for the resolution of racial antagonism. However, this is unable to be resolved. Ultimately, Monteith argues it is the film’s attempt at containing this conflict which means that they end up being read as nostalgic by the very audiences that they are aimed at critiquing. In contrast, Monteith argues the exploitation film, through seeking to capitalize on the shock factor of this violence, brings issues of inequality and racial discrimination to the fore. Two Thousand Maniacs! was released at the height of these struggles, and managed to present these issues in a form that was both culturally acceptable to whites and popular (the film was also released in a novel form due to its success at drive-in theatres). As Anthony Szczesiul (2007, pp.135-6) argues, given the political background of
the time, the popularity of *Two Thousand Maniacs!* was a remarkable feat given the way that it positioned whites as constituting a threat from within through their representation as a bunch of murderous rednecks. Szczesiul (pp.138-141) argues that the film achieves this through the way that it simultaneously parodies and praises Southerners – on the one hand they are presented as bloodthirsty rednecks fixated on a revenge based in the politics of the past, but on the other the Northerners are killed for their bad manners and violating notions of Southern hospitality. The incorporation of themes of nationalism then once again reflects one of the central themes of the splatter film that we have seen thus far: while it evokes a sense of radical politics, it never quite resolves it, but there is something in the lack of resolution that renders it as potentially more potent than films which engage in more conclusive strategies of containment and narrative resolution.

![Confederate death traps in Herschell Gordon Lewis' *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964).](image)

*Figure 41. Confederate death traps in Herschell Gordon Lewis' *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964).*
Figure 42. Archival footage as orienting the diegesis of the film in *2001 Maniacs* (Tim Sullivan, 2005): African Americans collecting the bones of fallen soldiers in Cold Harbor, Virginia by John Reckie (April 1865).

Figure 43. A still from the opening sequence of *2001 Maniacs* (Tim Sullivan, 2005).
The notion that expressions of national unity function as a cover for a more violent, less cohesive conception of America is one that is exploited in Tim Sullivan’s 2005 remake of *Two Thousand Maniacs!* called *2001 Maniacs*. Here the notion that the Civil War remains an unresolved underlying structure of the present is brought to the fore even further. The film opens in the convention that many splatter films follow, which is a fast montage of gore together with a dark soundtrack to set the scene for the nihilistic acts of violence that will follow. The first image is of blood splattering onto a black screen, together with the discordant sound of a gunshot, a cello and a blade being drawn. The credits are in a font that suggests barbed wire, with arrows shooting across the screen. What follows is a series of images of actual still photographs and reconstructed footage from the Civil War being splattered with acid and blood as men fire guns. The photos are graphic: there are mass graves and corpses lie on the ground where they fell. Some images within this montage are disturbing for the way that they connote images of lynching but disrupt this through their representation of fallen white soldiers: notably the image of people being hung (the image of the noose standing in as an iconic signifier for lynching), and the inclusion of a still image from April 1865 of African Americans collecting the bones of fallen soldiers in Cold Harbor, Virginia by John Reckie. These images function as a reminder that the present of America is built on a violent past, and one that included the slavery and suppression of Africans. All of a sudden, the celluloid appears to be catching fire, an oblique reference to the ‘Scorched Earth’ policy enacted by General Sherman during his March to the Sea, where he instructed his command to destroy property, infrastructure and confiscate food to undermine the Confederate forces. Image after image of American corpses is shown until it rests on one of the famous images from Gettysburg of men surveying a field of corpses. A link between these historical images and the present day is made when the photograph is then revealed to be from a teacher’s projector in a classroom, and the camera pans out to reveal a room of disinterested students. Professor Ackerman discloses his Southern allegiances through an impassioned speech highlighting that the cost of war is the loss of civilian lives:

*Unprecedented, historical categories. More Americans died in the so-called “Civil War” than in the two World Wars combined. 618,000. Although popular media usually portrays the Civil War as a series of epic battles for honor and glory the reality is far from either. General Sherman’s march through South Carolina alone cost over 8,000 innocent Southerners their lives. Sparing no women or children, Sherman reduced the city of Columbia to ashes overnight. So while you are on Spring Break next week down in Florida, you might*
understand why so many Southerners are still angry at the North and their rampage of death and destruction.

At this point, the film is interrupted by the interjection of images of slides of Spring Break featuring high school student Nelson Elliott, who is controlling the slides. The class erupts into laughter in the lecture, and Ackerman scrambles to see what it is that is entertaining the students. When the slide reel jams, he pulls the three students who are in on the prank aside and tasks them with writing a difficult paper over the Spring Break. Instead of finishing the paper, the boys depart for Florida, an act that allows for their detour into the town of Pleasantville along the way. While the opening sequence functions as a plot device through which to foreshadow the terror that is to come, it also has the effect of bringing the war to the fore, providing a premise for their demise that is based upon their refusal of the past.

This equation of violent death with a refusal to acknowledge the past is highlighted throughout the film as the protagonists struggle to figure out what is wrong with the town. When the group of college students arrives the whole town comes out to greet them, wearing clothing as if they lived in the 1800s, a fact that strikes the group as odd. Shortly after they arrive, an interracial couple arrive on a motorbike - Malcolm, who is African American, and
Leah, who is of Asian descent - and are also greeted as guests of honour for the festival (which the group do not realize consists of them being killed and eaten). Malcolm is shocked when he enters the hotel to see another African American eating watermelon and dressed in dungarees, a reference to the derogatory racial stereotypes of this period. However, this farm worker is revealed to be on the townsfolk’s side, suggesting that the relationship between North and South is more complicated in terms of the personal allegiances that slaves and indentured servants to the families that they resided with was more complex than it is commonly given credit for in some communities and families. When he arrives in his hotel room, he is further shocked to see a portrait of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in the room, to which he exclaims “haven’t y’all folks ever heard of the Civil Rights movement” before drawing devil’s horns on Lee’s face. Throughout the rest of the film, the divide between North and South is entrenched, and while the South is positioned as consisting of murderous hicks, the film also works to reinforce the notion that the Northerners were responsible for perpetuating violence, in the process questioning the teleological narrative of the Civil War as progress.

This undermining of one of the foundational myths of American culture is further entrenched through a sequence that literally shows the South as rotting from within. After the other members of the group of Northerners are dispensed with through violent and horrific deaths, only two remain: Joey and Anderson, who come to in order to find themselves tied up in front of the gigantic fire that they will be roasted on in front of all the townspeople. Due to Anderson’s Southern ties, he is given one last chance to redeem himself before he is slaughtered by killing Joey to prove his Southern allegiance. Anderson takes the knife and proceeds to uncut Joey’s ties, and the Mayor responds by challenging Anderson to a one on one duel (although the Mayor is the only one of the two with access to a sword). Anderson gains the upper hand in the fight, and removes the Mayor’s Confederate themed eye patch, revealing a gaping hole which hundreds of maggots fall out of. The eye patch and maggots here serve as a reminder that the myths of America’s history are unstable and are decaying from within, collapsing the body into the nation. 2001 Maniacs, then, might be seen as drawing from many of the narratives that Hall identifies of the nation, but in the process it threatens to undermine them. The narrative of the nation is no longer unified, the original folk are frighteningly violent, their traditions revolve around bloodletting and brutality, and the timelessness of the nation functions as a trap from which the protagonists cannot escape.
This lack of escape is underscored in the ending of the film, where Joey and Alex, having managed to escape following the securing of the Mayor’s “word of honour”, bring the local Sheriff back to the site to investigate. When they arrive back at the town, they find that it has disappeared and a graveyard marks the location instead. The Sheriff chides them for wasting his time and acting as arrogant Northerners, pointing to the Mayor’s gravestone, which states:

_To the 2001 innocent Confederate citizens of Pleasant Valley laid to waste on this very spot by Confederate Yanks in the war between the states. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Never will they rest until one for one, they are avenged._

The reference here to Matthew 5:38 from the Bible works on several levels. First, it underscores the apocalyptic nature of the film and provides a religious specter that references the influence of the religious right in US politics. Second, it subverts the notions of the reinstitution of justice as a strategy of containment for narrative resolution implying that the foundations of the United States are built on cycles of Manichean perpetual violence. Finally, the reiteration of the claim to the innocence of these citizens works to complicate the notions of who is the perpetrator of violence and who is the victim, providing the moral ambiguity that functions as a key characteristic of the splatter film. The lack of escape or containment from the unraveling of violence occurs through the parodying of the Hollywood ending. Joey and Anderson, traumatized and somewhat confused at the policeman’s hostility, jump back on their motorbike to ride off into the distance. A shot of the pair on the motorbike driving into the sunset connotes both the freedom and heterosexual romance that we associate with other Hollywood films. However, the bike suddenly screeches to a halt and the camera racks focus to a tract of barbed wire positioned across the road that is now dripping with blood. One of the townfolk, Hucklebilly Boone, emerges from the side of the road where he has been waiting for the pair to ride through his trap. The top of Anderson’s head slides off, revealing that he has been decapitated by the wire, and Boone uses his slingshot to displace Joey’s head, revealing that she is also dead. As much as the splatter film might be considered as postmodern for the way it collapses the viewer into the perpetual present, it also might be said that it frequently situates this present within a perpetual past.
The splatter film thus frequently engages with an interrogation and destabilization of the foundational myth of the nation by evoking its imagery and rendering it unstable. The Civil War in popular US mythology is often represented as a continuation of American progress towards a stable democracy. The notion of America’s association with democracy was embedded in early continental philosophers’ popular imaginings of America as the frontier through which monarchy could be dispensed with for a politics that was based on the democratic exercise of the autonomous individual. Free from the intellectual traditions, class constraints and history of England, America represented a horizon through which the politics of the “new world” could be debated. As John Locke famously asserted in his Second Treatise of Civil Government (1689), a document that would later form one of the inspirations for the Declaration of Independence, “in the beginning all the world was America” (2001, p.21). The Civil War, with its narrative of freedom from slavery is often used within US culture as part of a discourse on history as a progressive process. Today, democracy and freedom is cemented in the public discourse, and frequently cited as a rationale for foreign intervention. Yet this claim to democracy is not without controversy, as like other colonial outposts, America’s history has been built on one of conflict with indigenous peoples and the same politics of inclusion and exclusion that categorize and shape the western world today. As Carlos Hiraldo (2003, p.17) highlights, “it is the tension between the nation’s imagined origin as humble, rural, white and democratic, and its current state as an imperial, metropolitan, and multiracial land that leads cultural products to continually reexamine and reaffirm a cultural identity”. Moreover, the Civil War was one of the bloodiest periods in American history, fractionalizing communities for decades to come. The introduction of themes of Southern resistance, communalism and hospitality might be seen as tapping into and parodying the “Lost Cause” ideology that gained traction after the end of the Civil War. This ideology attempted to reassert the moral virtues of the Southern cause, and typically the source for this division is displaced from conflict over slavery to one of disagreement over the South’s secession (Flora et al., 2002, pp.453-4). A poll taken by CNN on April 12, 2011 (150 years after secession) found that one in four Americans identified with the Confederates over the Union, and among white Southerners the figure is four in ten (Schwarz, 2011). By destabilizing this teleological narrative of national unity and democratic progression, the splatter film questions the cultural assumptions that underlie much of US national myth, repositioning democracy as akin to Alexis de Tocqueville’s (2004) notion of the tyranny of rule by the majority and soft despotism, where the illusion of freedom is founded on a society structured by a complex set of rules.
Perhaps unsurprisingly then in a time of crisis in leadership, there are a few splatter films in this wave that deal with Civil War themes, drawing from an destabilization of what Stuart Hall would call the foundational myths of the nation in order to draw parallels with contemporary politics. These films include 2001 Maniacs and its sequel 2001 Maniacs: Field of Screams (Tim Sullivan, 2010), Lynch Mob (Brian Conrad Erwin), Abraham Lincoln versus Zombies (Richard Schenkman, 2012) and Exit Humanity (John Geddes, 2011). These films feature Confederates as villains, or unresolved Civil War crimes as the source of the horror. These films draw from real or imagined events in setting the tableaux. Abraham Lincoln versus Zombies takes place during the battle of Fort Pulaski and ends with his assassination by John Wilkes Booth; Lynch Mob’s prelude sequence is set during Confederate General William Sherman’s 1864 March to the Sea of 64,000 troops which devastated infrastructure through its ‘Scorched Earth’ policy and failed to distinguish between military and civilians in its brutality; and Exit Humanity takes place at the tail end of the Civil War in Tennessee in 1865 and features Confederate villains. If we take Monteith’s (2011) argument that it is precisely the way that these films seek to exploit the violence that lies within that renders them political rather than sanitizing these images through providing narrative strategies of containment, we can see that it in rendering the image of the nation, the splatter film highlights both its violent underpinnings and its fragility in maintaining the dominant order.

The notion of the past as destabilizing the future is a common theme within the splatter film, and the films that deal with the Civil War in the post-9/11 wave are notable for the way that they resituate this past firmly within the boundaries of the United States. The theme of the reemergence of past conflicts is present through the figure of the zombie since the 1970s across a number of cultures in films such as the American productions Shock Waves (Kevin Weiderhorn, 1977) and Blood Creek (Joel Schumaker, 2009), the French-Spanish co-productions Le Lac des Mort Vivants/ Zombie Lake (Jean Rollin, 1981) and Oasis of the Zombies (Jesús Franco, 1982, 1981), the British film Outpost (2008), the Norwegian film Dead Snow (Tommy Wirkola, 2009) and the Finnish film War of the Dead (Marko Mäkilaakso, 2011). The Nazi influence is also present in German director Jörg Buttgereit’s films Blutige Exzesse im Führerbunker/ Bloody Excesses in the Führer Bunker (1984), Necromantik (1987) and Necromantik 2 (1991). While the Nazi zombie functions as nod to
the splatter film’s historical lineage within the wave of exploitation films during the 1960s and 1970s and the subgenre of soft porn called Nazisploitation (of which the 1975 Canadian film *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* [Don Edmonds] is a prime example), it can also be seen as reflecting the way that the splatter film draws from a hyperbolic and violent past. History is not sacred within these films – the past is rewritten for maximum gore, as in the opening sequence to *Abraham Lincoln versus Zombies* (2012), where Lincoln promptly dispenses with his own mother via a shotgun after she is infected with the zombie virus. The point of the splatter film is not evoking the past with accuracy; it is exploiting it to highlight its most problematic aspects. While this destabilization of the past is often read as a deviation from historicity, it is also possible to read it through the lens of a provocation, as in Monteith’s (2011) argument that the exploitation of the past and refusal of ideological closure forces a reconsideration of cultural myths.

This exploitation can be seen in the remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006), which positions the actions of America itself as the cause of decline and evokes historical specters in a way that is not present in the original. Both films focus on the pitting of a suburban family who become lost in the South against a mutant hillbilly family with supernatural strength. However, in the remake, the cause of this mutant aberration is situated much more explicitly within the industrial decline of rural America. The film opens on a group of scientists clad in biohazard suits being slaughtered by the hillbillies and dragged behind a car before cutting to an opening credit sequence characteristic of the frenetic montage that often punctuates the opening of the splatter film. This montage sequence begins with a clip from the 1956 Motorama promotional film “Design for Dreaming”, where a woman blows out the candles on a cake she has made with the “kitchen of the future”. The smoke from the candles is dissolved into the mushroom cloud of a nuclear bomb, linking the 1950s vision of the future to the converse image of its demise. An intertitle announces that “between 1945 and 1962 there were 331 nuclear tests that occurred within the US. The Government still denies genetic effects from the fallout”. Images of mutant babies (taken from actual photographs of babies affected by radiation from Chernobyl, Hiroshima and Agent Orange during the Vietnam War) are then interspersed with historical footage of the mushroom clouds created by nuclear explosions. The background music for this introduction is Fifties honky-tonk star Webb Peirce’s “More and More” (1956). This juxtaposition between images of the horror of the age of industrialization and Peirce’s lyrics “more and
more, I’m forgetting the past”, implies that it will be the denial of the past that generates the horror that the film will be drawing from, setting up the syntactical opposition between the country as past and the city as future as firmly oriented within the industrial progress of the US, and thus challenging the narrative that technology has created a better future. The rest of the film foregrounds this undermining of the nation, with the credit sequence cutting to the Carter family arriving at a dilapidated 1950s styled gas station with a prominent American flag on the front of their car. The sound of the whirring windmill is a deliberate reference to Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), a film that functioned as much of the inspiration for the art direction of the nuclear villages that Doug stumbles through in his battle with the hillbillies later on in the plot, giving the impression that the frontier is still here to be fought and the family are regressing into the past. The village is populated with the dummies that the Government left to simulate human civilization during the explosions, and for the most part, they lay as they were watching television and positioned around the dining table. The art direction of *The Hills Have Eyes* then seeks to position America as stuck within a frozen time where the progression of civilization pauses in the 1950s.

*The Hills Have Eyes* further orients this decline into contemporary American politics by establishing the internal politics of the family and pitting this against the industrial decline that has led to the rise of the mutant hillbillies in the area. After visiting the gas station, the family crash the car, an act that was caused by one of the hillbillies hiding spikes in the dirt to pierce their tyres (and eviscerate a lizard in close up to signal the upcoming gore). This leaves the family stranded with the trailer in an event that causes rising tension between the Republican patriarch Big Bob and his Democrat son-in-law Doug, whom he goads for his lack of belief in the right to bear arms. It is this pacifism that positions Doug as the character who will then go through a transformation to be a figure of revenge and power – a transition that is signaled during a later fight scene with the hillbilly Pluto where he dons his broken glasses in a reference to Sam Peckinpah’s 1971 film *Straw Dogs*, which draws on a similar narrative of the American intellectual versus the rural redneck. While the notion that Doug must take up arms in order to survive might be seen as underscoring the need for the Conservative politics that Big Bob promotes, significantly, he is the first to be killed when the siege on the caravan begins. Big Bob is crucified outside the trailer on a burning bush in front of his born again Christian wife, reinforcing the fact that the political leanings and faith of Big Bob and his wife will not be enough to save him. His wife and his daughter are killed.
shortly after, leaving his son Bobby, his daughter Brenda and his son in law Doug to retaliate. Doug chases one of the mutants into the testing area, an eerie place where the original Government buildings and mannequins still stand. In one of the rooms, he discovers a severely disabled hillbilly with an oversized brain sitting in a wheelchair and watching television. Doug asks why the hillbillies are doing this, to which he gets a short retort: “Your people asked our families to leave their town, and you destroyed our homes. We went into the mines, you set off your bombs, and turned everything to ashes. You made us what we’ve become. Boom! Boom! Boom!” *The Hills Have Eyes* is extremely heavy handed with its political overtones, which consist of undermining and challenging elements of US institutions. The film situates terror as consisting with a shift towards Conservative policy which is utilitarian in its consideration of the poor: it is poverty and an attachment to their birthplace that has driven the miners under the ground and the Government’s lack of concern for its own population that has given rise to this need for containment. It is the radiation that has caused the mutations in the hillbillies, creating the superhuman killing machines that now exist before them. To further hammer home this association, later on in this sequence Doug kills Pluto by spiking him through the head with an American flag, while one of the other mutants sings “Star Spangled Banner” in the background. In the hillbilly film, then, notions of nationalism are frequently bound to notions of violence.

![Figure 45. Doug kills Pluto in *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006).](image)
The splatter film thus both simultaneously reinforces and challenges stereotypes of the rural South. The exoticized images of the South that the hillbilly film presents position the region as social problem, but they also simultaneously frequently challenge this through linking this explicitly to economic decline. In this sense, while they are certainly Orientalist in their distortion and creation of the Other from within, they draw attention to how these images are based on unequal development. In representing the deformed hillbilly, they also latently reference how the notion of “white trash” has been traditionally positioned as a contaminant that threatens to destroy America from within. As Gail Sweeney (2009) argues, notions of the problematic lower classes in the South have traditionally been a focus in American policy. This can be seen in the controversy over the Indiana white trash who were called The Tribe of Ishmael, and the Reverend Oscar C. McCullough’s attempt at eugenicist policy to breed out what he viewed as “degenerates” (p.148). This resulted in the 1907 “Sterilization Law of Indiana” aimed at the Ishmaelites, which was adopted by 29 other states and seven foreign nations by 1933, including Nazi Germany. Sweeney argues that the remnants of this law are still present in the marriage certificates of many states, which require the participant to sign and state that they are not “idiots, imbeciles or first cousins” (p.149). This concern with the breeding of the lower classes fed into the establishment of the Eugenics Record Office in 1910 and an emphasis in sociological studies on tracking the development of poor communities. By 1928, there 30,000 sterilized and 376 college courses on eugenics. By the 1930s, “degenerates” were seen in public policy as the greatest issue that the US faced (Wilson, 2002, p.56). Some states continued to sterilize individuals that were seen as having deformities or mental disabilities into the 1970s (Kalber, 2012). The frequent use of prosthetics to create deformities such as the cleft palate and hare lip serve to situate the hillbilly as representing this Other, as such demarcations were frequently considered just cause for sterilization within US culture. As John Hartigan argues

*These works can be linked to the broadcast of a convenient myth of 'white trash' that still informs its uses today. As representations of white decorum, honour and pride, these dramas rely on objectifications of 'white trash' to undermine, threaten and finally restore cultural order. These two works presented views of the South to the nation at large, depicting a decorum-laden world in which social orders were naturalized and enduring (2006, p.222).*
Chapter Five: The Collapse of Empire

Hartigan (p.324) notes that these myths function as strategies of containment through which the bad qualities of whiteness can be projected onto the Other, such as racism, sexism and violence. This strategy allows for the distanciation of middle class whites from these qualities, linking them to the problems of the underclasses. These deformities are frequently linked to the notion of inbreeding. Both *The Hills Have Eyes II* and *Backwoods* (Martin Weiss, 2008) feature hillbillies who abduct women and rape them so that they will produce progeny for the clan, and in *The Hills Have Eyes II* the women are there only for this reason and are killed shortly after birth. In *Backwoods*, a film that is much less of a splatter in terms of its distinct lack of gore but features extended torture sequences reminiscent of *Hostel*, the women are incorporated into a religious cult. However, if the splatter film frequently draws from these stereotypes, it also situates this rural to urban divide as the cause of the demise of the Northerners, threatening America with collapse from within. The Southern Other returns violently to avenge their socio-economic status, making these films fundamentally about class and the battle between the “haves” and the “have-nots” (Clover, 1992, p.232).

c. Vigilantes

The splatter film also might be seen as reworking the myth of the frontier, through the way that it transforms the figure of the vigilante into a series of armed groups who threaten to destabilize America from within. As Richard Maxwell Brown (1975, p.5) surmises, the notion of the violent vigilante has had a key role within US culture from the Revolution onwards. The Civil War entrenched this group violence by pitting community against community, and family against family. Brown (pp.9-10) highlights how the decade following the Civil War was marked by the growth of family blood feuds in the mountains of Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and Texas. The hillbilly violence discussed above might be seen as a continuation of these themes. However, the trope of the vigilante is also common across many splatter films. In the zombie film, society quickly dissolves into a number of competing armed groups. The vigilante trope can also be seen in the *Saw* movies, where Jigsaw and his multiple accomplices form their own armed group that operates outside the rules of society with their own moral code.
This fear of the vigilante group can also be seen in *The Devil’s Rejects*, which begins with a shoot out between the Fireflys and the police led by Sheriff Wydell. These images are reminiscent of the Waco Siege on the Branch Davidian cult from February 28 and April 19, 1993. In this sequence, the outlaw connotations are further embedded through the costuming of Rufus, who wears a full metal suit of armour that covers his face and is identical to the Australian outlaw Ned Kelly. Otis B. Driftwood (Bill Moseley) is modeled on Charles Manson, with his long hair and beard, and Seventies casual clothing. His catchphrase is “I am the Devil and I am here to do the Devil’s work”, in a reference to Manson’s cult’s worship of Satan. Driftwood’s catchphrase comes from the words that Family member Tex Watson said to Voytek Frykowski before murdering him and four others in 1969 (Elder, 2008). This reference is deliberate, and the film features Steve Railsback in a cameo – who played Manson in the film *Helter Skelter* (Tom Gries, 1976). *The Devil’s Rejects* thus draws from fears of the militant group, and also 1960s youth culture.

![Figure 46. Otis B. Driftwood in *The Devil's Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005).](image-url)
d. Race

In aligning the current order with collapse, the splatter film often features white villains. While the splatter film does not offer any explicit narrative resolution to the collapse into violence, it does often hint at this through the characters that survive, who are frequently women and ethnic minorities. As Robin Wood (1986, p.107) notes, George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) both feature prominent Black characters. In *Night of the Living Dead*, Romero reverses Sixties racial politics by positioning Ben as hiding out in the farmhouse basement from white monsters in the form of zombies. The film makes a potent analogy to the terrors of lynching when Ben, the character who we are encouraged to align with, exits the basement upon hearing the police arrive, and is shot immediately on sight due to being mistaken for a zombie. Ben’s body is carried off on hooks to be burnt at the end of the film. *Dawn of the Dead* is more optimistic: the two characters who survive are a woman and an ethnic minority: Fran and Peter. The two fly away together on a helicopter. For Wood, these aspects of Romero’s work means it represents “the most progressive potentialities of the horror film, the possibility of breaking the monster/normality relationship developed out of the Gothic horror tradition” (p.108). Similarly, in *Day of the Dead* John, an African American is one of the few survivors.

The post-9/11 splatter film picks up on this trope, most notably in *Land of the Dead* (2005), where a Black service station attendant called ‘Big Daddy’ is the first zombie in the film to learn and to lead the zombie uprising against the gated community of Fiddler’s Green. In the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* African American Police Sergeant Kenneth Hall is one of the only protagonists to survive to the end of the film. However, the most prominent ethnic minority hero in a splatter film in the post-9/11 wave is Quentin Tarantino’s slavery inspired drama, *Django: Unchained* (2012), which was controversial for the way that it stylized history and for its Exploitation styled mode of address.

The splatter film might be seen as engaging with and complicating images of nationalism. The American splatter film works to render images of the US unstable, challenging other images that work to naturalize this dominance, such as the other films produced by
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Hollywood cinema. The same structures of collapse that are present in its focus on violence as spectacle, its oppositional viewing practices, its assault on the unitary structure of the body and its assault on bourgeois capitalism are incorporated into its representation of the nation. In the splatter film, images of American nationalism are hyperbolized, presenting paracinematic images of the nation that gain power through their opposition to the dominant culture.

III. Americans abroad

In Eli Roth’s 2005 film Hostel, two American frat boys and an Icelander are let loose on an archane and sexually licentious Europe. Lured to a hostel in Bratislava, Slovakia by the prospect of nymphomaniac women who just “love Americans”, the trio slowly discover they have booked themselves in as victims for a torture chamber where the wealthy live out their sadistic fantasies by creatively murdering innocent tourists. Hostel presents dark images of the flip side of capitalism; a world where the fall of communism has led not to the fruits of capitalist labour but instead plunged Eastern Europe into a terrifying trade where life is easily bought and sold. Hostel’s play upon anti-American sentiment abroad was met with a storm of controversy, generating national debate in the United States and discussion by a number of governments internationally. This maelstrom largely centered on the representation of nationalism in the film, with the domestic response centering on a rejection of the film’s images of US nationalism and internationally its affirmation of stereotypes Americans held of Eastern Europe.

The controversy over the release of Hostel was founded in the way it juxtaposed images of American nationalism with the global, in the process undermining the stability of these constructions. The ensuing debate after its release (which was still reaching its height a full two years after it hit the theatres due to the upcoming publicity for its sequel Hostel II)

48 The second part of this chapter has been adapted with permission from an article I have previously published, “Fucking Americans: Postmodern nationalisms in the post/9/11 splatter film” (Fletcher 2009).
centered around the film’s ability to function as a micropolitical sphere around which the boundaries of nationalism could be organized, while maintaining the sense of division and antagonism around the competing discourses in these imagined communities. Domestically, critics were initially divided as to whether the film could be seen as a satire of the politics of torture in the Global War on Terror or whether it satiated the voyeuristic desires of youth who were that way inclined. Internationally, *Hostel*’s response was no less controversial. In Slovakia, the film became the centre of debate over fears that its representation of their culture might kill of tourism in the same way the 1978 release of prison film *Midnight Express* sustained a significant impact on Turkey’s tourism. SDKÚ MP Tomáš Galbavý declared “all Slovaks should feel offended. This monstrosity that does not at all reflect reality ... [Hostel] damage[s] the good reputation of Slovakia” (2006). Responding to these criticisms, Roth appeared on Slovak television to argue that the film was not intended to offend Slovaksians, rather it was a critique of the way Americans view Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism (“only 12% of Americans have passports”, he surmised) (Epstein). Roth’s public appeal went some way to quell unrest over the film, with former Slovak Minister of Culture Milan Knazko appearing as one of the heavies for Elite Hunting (the organization behind the murders) in *Hostel II*.

Much of *Hostel*’s divisiveness in its reception is derived from its denial of a stable subject position within the text. Although *Hostel* is littered with metonymic markers that encourage us to interrogate elements of contemporary culture, the text effaces the assertion of the primacy of a preferred reading on how this should be interpreted. That is, while the images of hooded victims in *Hostel* clearly hold symbolic reverence for the news images emerging of torture and abuse at US military prisons abroad, the text avoids any resolution on how these images should be read. Violence is positioned as a mobius strip within splatter films such as *Hostel* – following its inception there is no hope of its resolution; it provides both the point of destruction and the only way out. This denial of a preferred ideological stance leaves the politics of the film as ambiguous – deprived of their social context, it is unclear whether these images of torture are satirical or are there for the audience’s voyeuristic enjoyment. This is reinforced at the level of the narrative through the establishment of the characters as anti-heroes in the first third of the film’s exposition, where our American protagonists Josh and

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49 See for example Edelstein (2006); Lee (2006).
Paxton are positioned as misogynist, homophobic and ignorant of local custom in a series of interactions in brothels, nightclubs and a marijuana café. At this point the power dynamics of the film reverse and our consumers become the consumed. The hostel in Bratislava they are lured to functions as a front for the Elite Hunting organization, who recruit unwitting tourists to be sold on to consumers for torture and slaughter, the price on their heads determined on the basis of their nationality and gender. This reversal obfuscates subjective identification, as the audience is presented with characters that are far worse than the unlikeable protagonists and we witness the brutal torture inflicted on them. This complication of subjective enjoyment is further confused by Hostel’s generic allegiance to the splatter film, where emphasis shifts from the psychological suspense and delay of violence that characterizes much of contemporary horror to its anticipation. Violence in the splatter is an aesthetic style, with the frequent sequences of dismemberment, disembowelment and decapitation that punctuate these films the culmination of the triumph of special effects. Hostel was promoted precisely on this promise of onscreen graphic violence, with posters featuring a man having his tooth drilled and a woman’s severed head. Like the cinematic predecessors in the 1960s that give rise to its treatment of violence, Hostel impedes a simple reading of its text and thus can be considered an example of a postmodern text. Reviews were split between those who argued Hostel epitomized the moral decline of youth within contemporary society, and those who felt that the film was a criticism of the Bush administration’s approach to foreign policy (Hollyfield, 2009, Burris, 2010, Lee, 2006).

A large part of Hostel’s success and controversy was generated by the way it departed from the formula of the other splatter films, and it is this departure that led to a shift in the interpretation of these films. While the other splatters in the wave all followed the narrative trajectory of an apocalyptic collapse from within American culture, Hostel reterritorialized this fear of a collapse from within to show a world where to be American is to live under constant threat. The relationship between America and the world is positioned as hostile, a theme underlined in the first turning point of the film when the boys return from a brothel to find themselves locked out of a Dutch hostel. Calling out to the owner to be let in, the trio wake those in the neighbouring apartments, who respond with hostility to their presence. In a hail of bottles and abuse, one neighbour yells loudly “fucking Americans”, drawing attention to Josh and Paxton’s alien status in a foreign land. Saved from this abuse by a fellow Slovakian backpacker called Alex who lets them into the hostel via a fire escape, Alex greets
Josh, Paxton and their Icelandic companion Oli with the phrase, “don’t worry, not everyone wants to kill Americans”. Alex tells them of a hostel in Bratislava filled with beautiful local women who just “love Americans”. “They just hear your accent and want to fuck you”, Alex explains, showing the boys images on his mobile phone of naked women draped all over him. As these are the images that eventually lead to our protagonists’ tragic demise, the subtext of Hostel from this turning point is that everyone does indeed want to kill Americans.

This analogy between American economic superiority, sex and colonization is continued throughout Hostel as the power relationships reverse and our consumers become the consumed. Josh’s hesitant wander down the hallway in the brothel where the doorways reveal silhouetted figures in various sexual positions is mirrored in a pivotal sequence where Paxton discovers the torture chamber. Having pressured the girls who function as his honey trap to reveal the location of Josh, Natalya leads him to a seemingly deserted factory under the guise that it is an art gallery. As he charges down the empty hallway, Elite Hunting heavies emerge and drag him down the hallway to reveal open doors with people being tortured. Cursing Natalya for her betrayal, Paxton yells “You fucking bitch” at her. Natalya smiles. “I got a lot of money for you”, she purrs, “That makes you my bitch”. The parallels between these sequences in both mise-en-scène and cinematography encourage the associative link between American capitalism and human trafficking. This rejection of US culture is reinforced through the way that Paxton’s escape is only facilitated by the denial of his American citizenship – he tells his torturer he is not American in fluent German buying time for him to fight back. In the paranoid world of Hostel, it is Americans who hold the highest price on their head at US$25,000 per kill. The “fucking American” then becomes a metaphor for the relationship between sex and economic imperialism, but also for a violent rejection of US nationalism from other cultures.

However, if Hostel draws from a critique of US economic imperialism, then this critique is one that comes at the cost of the introduction of stereotypes of Eastern Europe in the text. Slovakia is positioned as a failed state after the fall of Communism, frequented by human traffickers, prostitutes, murderous children and complicit locals. Slovakia is constructed through its allegiance to binary oppositions that juxtapose the safety of American civilization with the violence of the developing world. Shot in the Czech Republic as a substitute for
filming in Slovakia, the film presents the latter state as stripped of modernity, automobiles and televisions are replaced with models from the 1950s and 60s to convey the notion of a region frozen in time. This is reinforced by a constant misrecognition of local knowledge within the film; the locals speak Czech or Russian rather than Slovak, and the tourist who lures them to their death tells them that there is so much “pussy [in Slovakia] since the War”, in the process conflating Slovakia with other states in the region, such as Bosnia.

In Edward Said’s influential work *Orientalism* (1995) he argues these kinds of racialised representations are a result of colonizing processes. Drawing from a litany of texts on Arab cultures, Said traces how anthropological, literary and cinematic images reflect the ideological motivations of the period of European expansionism, a time where Europe or European-derived powers grew to control 85% of the globe by 1914 (Said, 1995, p.123). Prompted by a colonizing worldview that saw Europe as superior due to its scientific Enlightenment, representations of the Orient were distorted through the lens of the Occident and constructed through their allegiance to binary oppositions of “civilized Europe”. The East thus becomes exoticized and embedded with the anxieties of the West, with the images revealing little about the peoples under the microscope. The sexual hierarchies of Victorian England were opposed to the licentious sexuality of the colonized, the civilized to the savage, the human to the animal and so on. In this way, the image of the Orient holds little relevance to the actual conditions of these countries, rather functioning to displace repressed elements of western culture onto the East in a process that he refers to as “Othering”.

Said’s (1995) work was both influential and controversial; like Jameson, his insistence on dialectics in articulating the global politics of power was received by many as totalizing and therefore glossing over the specificities that form the basis of assertions of local difference. In recognizing these limitations, it is useful to juxtapose these critiques with the influence that Said’s framework of Self versus Other has had on the discussions of nationalism. The positioning of localized knowledge against the entrenched horizon of western thought has formed a key backbone and dialectic that underwrites much of indigenous studies today. In this sense, Said’s methodological framework is not limited in its application to works from this particular historical perspective and is fruitful to the way that processes of cultural imperialism work in many societies, highlighting the influence that western epistemologies
have had on the way we construct and discuss nationalisms. For Said (1997, pp.29-35), the repetition of ideas in the first Gulf War that Arabs are in dire need of modernization and democratization is evidence of the way that America draws upon modes of Orientalism to legitimize its aggressive foreign policy. In Said’s work, economic and cultural imperialism are positioned as yet another colonizing process.

*Hostel*’s incorporation of Orientalist discourses in the text is complex, functioning to both affirm and deny dominant constructs of American nationalism. The release of *Hostel* during a time that saw the resurgence of Orientalist discourses as part of the Global War on Terror is one of the reasons for the film’s success and controversy. The film works to challenge the notion of the “American dream” by positioning the US’ wealth as the result of aggressive global geopolitics rather than the oft-repeated myth of the nation as a frontier with an egalitarian approach to rights. Affluence in *Hostel* is aligned with exploitation rather than morality or working hard, challenging some of the fundamental moral tenets that Hollywood articulates repetitively. As Thom Anderson notes, while many contemporary films challenge the notion of the American Dream through an interrogation of the conclusions of such a vision (*American Beauty* [Sam Mendes, 1999], *Requiem for a Dream* [Darren Aronofsky, 2000], *The Truman Show* [Peter Weir, 1998]), very few films introduce the notion of class struggle into this examination (Krutnik et al., 2007, pp.258-260). When the notion of class has been introduced, it has often been met with resistance by the state itself – think for example of the prosecution of filmmakers who were perceived to have communist leanings by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the 1940s and 1950s. *Hostel*’s controversy lies in the way it foregrounds discourses on class and the construction of US nationalism in a much more explicit way than any of the other films in the post-9/11 splatter cycle. This ambiguous discourse in *Hostel* is founded in the way that it takes Orientalist binaries of America’s place in the world and collapses them until there is only the Other.

This difference in the construction of *Hostel* and other films in the post-2003 splatter wave can be explained through its distinction in terms of its generic allegiance and form. *Hostel* draws much of its influence from an even smaller hybrid of the splatter subgenre: the Cannibal film. Even more marginalized than the splatter film, the Cannibal film emerges as a generic form in the 1970s and 1980s. Italian or Italian-American co-productions, these films
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were accompanied by a cycle of Zombie films set abroad and were generally targeted at American audiences. Set in locations exotic to American audiences, such as the Sahara Desert in the case of Jesus Franco’s *Oasis of the Zombies* (1981), Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in *Mountain of the Cannibal Gods* (Sergio Martino, 1978), and Matool, Southern India for Lucio Fulci’s *Zombi II* (1979) these films draw on the tension between First and Third worlds. In the Italian Cannibal and Zombie films, the collapse of society is catalyzed through the refusal to recognise indigenous knowledge and is positioned as the direct result of occupying indigenous space. Perhaps the most infamous and certainly the most controversial film of this wave, Ruggero Deodato’s *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), provides a major influence in the construction of *Hostel*, so much so that Deodato appears as an Elite Hunting customer dissecting a body in the sequel. As these films set much of the generic precedents for the treatment of Orientalist binaries, I will trace some of the key characteristics and tropes of *Cannibal Holocaust* before returning to *Hostel*.

Like *Hostel*, *Cannibal Holocaust* is a complex film because it invokes what it critiques. *Cannibal Holocaust* follows the plight of a New York University Anthropology Professor Harald Monroe who takes a film crew over to the Amazonian rainforest to trace the whereabouts of a group of filmmakers who have not returned since leaving to make a documentary on a tribe of cannibals. Deep in the jungle, the group finally encounters the Yanomamo tribe they have been searching for, witnessing a brutal ceremony where a woman is raped with a stone and beaten to death over the head with it. After gaining the trust of the tribe, they discover the bones of the original film crew on display and manage to smuggle the rolls of film out of their belongings. Returning to New York, producers for the Pan American Broadcasting Company bar the Professor from accessing the footage. It is revealed that this concealment is deemed necessary because the dead filmmakers have based their career on staging fake battles between indigenous peoples around the world. As the rushes are revealed, we learn that the blood is not fake in these battles: the filmmakers had forced the villagers to perform denigrating sexual and genocidal acts on their own people at gunpoint. The Professor and the Pan American Broadcasting Company recoil in shock as they watch rushes of the gang rape and murder of a local girl while the only female filmmaker, Faye, pleads for them to stop. The male filmmakers then impale her on a stick and shift tense from sadists to anthropologists, filming the scene as if they just stumbled across a local custom so that they can edit out the footage later. When the Yanomamo tribe avenges the death of one of their
own by killing Faye in a similar fashion, the men in the crew film it, and the rushes finish with the men being slaughtered as the film reel runs out. Professor Monroe and the executives of the Pan American Broadcasting Company are then drawn into a conversation on the relationship between violence, imperialism and voyeurism, before the executives vow to burn the film.

What makes *Hostel* and *Cannibal Holocaust* such controversial films is that this invocation is achieved through a sense of hyperrealism in terms of their cinematography. Part of *Cannibal Holocaust*’s punch in terms of its colonial critique is in the deployment of what Sergio Leone called a “hyperreal” style of violence.\(^{50}\) Deodato incorporates cinéma vérité techniques in order to heighten the tension of the film, in the process obfuscating the boundaries between reality and fiction, a technique he learned in his training under neo-realist Roberto Rossellini (Balun, 2003, p.59). Like other cinéma vérité films such as *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966), the film blends elements of actual politics with their reconstruction. The competing tribes in *Cannibal Holocaust*, the Yanomamo and the Shamatari are actual tribes played by indigenous actors and the film is shot in the relatively inaccessible Leticia in Bogota, giving an element of realism to the film’s location. In reality these tribes have little conflict, and it is only the Yanomamo who practice cannibalism as a post-death rite.\(^{51}\) The documentary style in *Cannibal Holocaust*, later poached for films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) and *Diary of the Dead* (George Romero, 2007), positions the viewer in the subjective viewpoint of the character behind the camera, promoting suture that conflicts against the otherwise difficult material. The film also begins with a news segment that parodies the United States as the land of progress, highlighting the way that these Italian produced Zombie and Cannibal films also functioned to circulate a distinctly national based critique of US dominance at the same time as orienting their representations towards the American market.

*Cannibal Holocaust*’s controversial realism is achieved partially through combining real violence with very realistic special effects: six animals are slaughtered or dissected in the

\(^{50}\) Leone expressed this in a letter to Deodato after *Cannibal Holocaust*’s release (see Slater, 2002, p.108).

\(^{51}\) It is worth noting that the themes of violence and sex dealt with in the film are ones that are prevalent in Yanomamo cosmology, which positions the tribe as the descendents of the First People, who through cannibalism, rape and revenge give birth to the Fierce People that now live today (see Tweedle, 2010).
course of the film. It is this blurring of the boundaries between the real and the represented that nearly destroyed Deodato’s career. While the film made over US$2 million upon its premiere in Italy and was initially received with critical acclaim, the film was withdrawn on the orders of the Italian Government on the tenth day of release and Deodato was put on trial for murdering his actors (Tweedle, 2010). Eventually the charges were dropped when Deodato was able to prove that the actors were alive. However, the Government continued prosecution and Deodato served a short jail sentence for animal cruelty (Balun, 2003, p. 59). This response from the state is undoubtedly related to the way that the film positions a challenge to stable images of western hubris. The only character who consistently is positioned as sympathetic to the exploitation of the indigenous peoples is the anthropologist Professor Monroe, who provides a figure of identification in a film otherwise populated with antagonistic protagonists. However, the authority of Monroe is ultimately undermined in *Cannibal Holocaust* through processes of casting – our only image of stable western identification is played by Richard Kerman, who at the time was infamous as a porn star, appearing in over 100 X-rated films in the 1970s and 80s (his most notable role was in *Debbie Does Dallas* [David Buckley, 1978]). Aimed at a more mainstream audience, *Hostel* draws from *Cannibal Holocaust* in terms of the way it draws upon Orientalist discourses, but rather than utilizing cinémathèque techniques it draws from mainstream film conventions in its construction.

*Hostel* opens with all the cinematic cues of a teen film, contrasting with the dark glimpses of bloody instruments and a furnace being stoked in the opening sequence (images that we later learn are from the torture chamber). Blaring rock music, bright lighting and lambent colours introduce Josh and Paxton and the upbeat atmosphere of their holiday through Europe. The sequence in the brothel is positioned as pure fantasy: blue lighting shows Josh wandering through a hallway that functions as a catalogue of contorted coitus, the bodies of people engaged in the act silhouetted through rice paper doors. In shifting from an atmosphere of hedonistic celebration in the first part of the film to the punishment in the second part of the film, *Hostel* plays on fans’ expectations of the transgression of social boundaries. As discussed in Chapter Two, fans of B films, which includes violent cinema such as these films, position themselves in knowledge and opposition to Hollywood conventions. The juxtaposition of metonymic markers of contemporary politics (as in the torture chair) with the hyperreal images of mainstream American cinema works within the text as a broader
commentary on the way that hegemonic culture works to gloss over inequality, positioning difference in class status as the result of an individual choice rather than social positioning. This self-reflexivity is emphasised in the film through a series of cameos that highlight the role of popular culture in creating our perception of violence: Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* (1994) plays on the television at the hostel, Japanese yakuza film director Takashi Miike (whose film *Audition* [1999] can also be seen as an influence on *Hostel*) emerges as a happy customer from the torture chamber, and Roth chokes on his bong and laughs back at the camera in the marijuana café while Paxton remarks, “aren’t there any fucking Dutch people in Amsterdam”. Despite these elements of reflexivity within the text, *Hostel* – like *Cannibal Holocaust* – plays its subversion so straight that many reviewers dismissed Roth’s deliberate confusion of geography, linguistics and invocation of a misogynist narrative as a result of ignorance. However, both films display such careful construction in the introduction of these elements that they cannot be dismissed as unintentional. Like Perseus needing to stare into his own reflective shield to slaughter the monster Medusa, *Hostel* and *Cannibal Holocaust* ask us to gaze through the looking glass at our relationship to other cultures before coming to conclusions.

As Middle Eastern studies scholar Ella Shohat (1997) argues, notions of Orientalism are intimately bound up with constructions of sexuality. Imperialist narratives embed what she calls the trope of “rescue” which “forms the crucial site of the battle over representation” (p.39). The domination and expansion of the West in Orientalist texts is justified by narratives that position western liberation as an aspirational ideal. Thus Shohat argues “the figure of the Arab assassin/rapist, like that of the African cannibal, helps produce the narrative and ideological role of the Western liberator as integral to the colonial rescue fantasy... provid[ing] an indirect apologia for domination” (p.39). For Shohat, who draws from feminist apparatus theory, this “colonising gaze” is instituted at both the level of the camera and the construction of subjectivity within the text. The disavowal of the rescue trope in the Cannibal film is key to understanding the way that these films, while circulating Orientalist discourses, promote a violent affront to the stability of economic imperialism. At the end of *Cannibal Holocaust* and *Hostel*, the Other is unable to be colonised and western culture is positioned as a site of instability. Hence Monroe is unable to understand or to rescue the Yanomamo in *Cannibal Holocaust*. Indeed, the film hints that the brutal practices of rape and murder we witness upon Monroe’s arrival are a reenactment of the western film
crew’s behavior or attempt at appeasing the Gods for their intrusion. In *Hostel*, the complicity of the locals in disposing of foreigners is positioned as the direct result of an unequal economy where life is cheap. This is highlighted in the film through the absence of industry or progress, the deserted factory that doubles as a torture chamber functioning as a synecdoche for the unequal division of wealth that aids Josh and Paxton for the first part of the film.

This overturning of the rescue trope is further emphasised in *Hostel* during Paxton’s bungled rescue attempt. After escaping by donning the uniform of the rich patrons who torture, Paxton hears the screams of Yuki, a Japanese woman at the hostel who bonds with Paxton and Josh when her friend is reported to have run away with Oli. Responding, Paxton rushes in and kills her assassin, who he interrupts in the process of blow torching Yuki’s eye, which now forms a lengthy protrusion from her face. Unsure what to do to ease her excruciating pain, Paxton picks up the scissors on the torturer’s table to cut off the abject eye, causing her immense pain and pus to pour out of the wound. The pair then escape to the train station, where Yuki catches her reflection and then promptly commits suicide by throwing herself in front of a train. Paxton’s attempt at rescue, then, is positioned within the text as inept. Despite killing Yuki’s torturer, he becomes yet another purveyor of torture by completing the bizarre action of amputating her eyeball. Our surviving protagonist Paxton is positioned as insignificant in the face of broader economic imperatives – merely another American (a status that is underlined when he is promptly beheaded within the first 15 minutes of the sequel). This refusal of assimilation occurs at the price of the reinforcement of ethnic stereotypes, a movement that ultimately renders these texts complex. In the Cannibal film’s nihilistic abandonment of the restoration or improvement of social order that characterizes the climax of much of Classical Hollywood Cinema, they institute a critique of Western imperialism that refuses to take a single ideological position, leaving the text in flux as the trauma is left unresolved. If the violence in the world is positioned as a result of western imperialism, it is a problem that is unable to be resolved through western hubris. This is emphasized in the Cannibal film through western violence being positioned as exercised indiscriminately whereas the violence of the local peoples is meted in response to colonization. Thus the violence of the Yanomamo in *Cannibal Holocaust* is situated as stemming from the invasion of the film crew, driven by the profit motives of commercial television, or on another level, from western presence itself. In *Hostel* this is linked to American economic imperialism and
the unfettered commodification of aspects of human life as another form of capital that can then circulate on the market.

*Hostel*, then, is a film that has a complicated relationship to the gaze. Subjective identification as well as notions of stable nationalisms are constantly undermined within the text. This can be seen in the way that the traditional alignment of the camera’s gaze with the lead protagonist is frustrated within the text. Significantly, the camera aligns with Josh during the fantasy sex sequence, the only one of the trio who is positioned as impotent through his inability to pick up women or have sex with a prostitute. Josh wanders the corridor awkwardly as his friends participate in sexual orgies. Rejected by local women at the club and emasculated for wearing an unfashionable “fanny pack” (a wallet around the waist used by tourists to protect their money from theft), Josh is further ostracised through his non-participation in this sequence and therefore his inability to assimilate with the masculine world. Clearly uncomfortable, Josh is positioned as naive when he hears a slapping sound and cries, only to open the door to find a bondage and discipline chamber. When peer-pressured into a room with a prostitute by his friends, the camera notably departs from Josh. A long shot shows his would-be lover offering herself to him in lingerie and a feather boa. As she turns away from him to remove her brassiere, the camera’s identification shifts from Josh to the prostitute, and we are shown a point-of-view shot from her perspective of the empty hallway, signifying that Josh has fled. This notion that it is the audience who are equally voyeuristic as the camera mimics the gaze of our anti-hero protagonists, glancing down at the administrator’s breasts as they check into the hostel in Bratislava. Identification is constantly complicated in subjective alignment – Roth performs what he refers to as a Hitchcock-styled *Psycho* (1960) switch when lead protagonist Josh, who has been positioned as the most sympathetic character out of the trio, is dispensed with only a third of the way through the film, forcing audiences to attempt to switch identification to Paxton. In a further complication of this identification, Paxton only manages to buy time to escape from the torture chamber by speaking in German and claiming that he is not an American (a claim that due to actor Jay Hernandez’ status as a Mexican-American further complicates notions of stable nationalism within the text by challenging the notions of stable borders). If *Hostel* is

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52 See the DVD commentary with Eli Roth on *Hostel* (2005).
about audiences looking at torture, the gaze in this film is continually complicated; a frustration that occurs at the level of nationalism.

Similarly, John Stockwell’s *Turistas* (2006) draws from the formula of First World/Third World friction. Dr. Zamora dissects his conscious, bare-breasted victim while passionately recounting the effects of US imperialism on Third World economies. “What does a gringo do if he gets sick?” Zamora lectures, “does he go on a donor list? Or does he come to a Third World country like ours and buy the organs of one of our children?” In both *Turistas* and *Hostel*, Americans are positioned as both the cause and end horizon of global inequality, positioning the increasing divide between First and Third World economies under late capitalism as interchangeable with US nationalism.

Read through this lens, the immense popularity of *Hostel* as a text can be seen as founded in the way its constant reversals tap into wider discourses on America’s place in the world. The constant undermining of nationalism within the text positions *Hostel* can be considered as an example of postmodern nationalism, in that constructions of America are always superseded by notions of the global within the text. It is precisely this decentering of the subject that provokes controversy and allows for the text to function as a micropolitical sphere where debates over the limits of nationalism can be played out. The timing of *Hostel’s* release coincided with a broader ideological crisis in America’s positioning, that of the emergence of a counterbalance to the US’ role as global superpower through the imposition of a new threat of terrorism which could crumble the very symbolic structures that represent this dominance.

**IV. Conclusion**

Nationalism, like genre, works to entrench myths about the state. In the splatter film, these myths of nationalism are drawn upon and subverted in order to position the US as teetering on the brink of implosion from within. The vigilante becomes the serial killer, the South teeming with revenge driven Confederates, and urban spaces are constantly at risk of being
overridden by armed groups. This sense of violence teeming beneath the surface is propagated by the way its outburst frequently occurs in pockets that are impenetrable by forces of law and order, who remain oblivious to it, or are dispensed with as soon as they discover it. The hillbilly film iconicizes this decline from within, by representing a South that remains frozen in time and refuses to be assimilated into the mainstream culture and its myths. As I have demonstrated, this split between North and South is still a dividing line within the United States. It is perhaps then of little surprise that during a time of a crisis in leadership, myths of the South and the Civil War emerge so prominently within the splatter film. As Szczesiul (2007) highlights, although these films might be seen as stereotyping Southerners, they frequently engage in themes of Southern hospitality and communalism that render their texts as having some appeal within this region. In this sense, the splatter film like other postmodern texts is characteristically ambiguous in its politics, and is capable of being read polysemously by different groups. However, as Monteith (2011) notes, there is perhaps something more radical in Exploitation cinema than other mainstream texts due to the way that they refuse closure (and hence ideological strategies of containment). This brings the antagonism to the fore and forces the audience to engage in fantasies of their own resolution or fantasies of decline of the current order. The splatter film is explicit in the way it represents this atrophy as a result of social problems, as in the poverty and lack of assimilation of Southern rural communities, or in the images of the decline of peak industrialism (as represented by rusting automobiles and dying cities). The splatter film, then, extends the oppositionality that is within its fan practices and narrative to myths of American nationalism.

This subversion of tropes of American nationalism is extended and brought into circulation on an international market. This interrogation of national myths has been a key part of the subgenre since its emergence in the 1960s. Due to its transnationalization as a form from this period onwards (as discussed in Chapter Two), the splatter film has always had the US as a key market, and as such, has frequently commented on American nationalism. The post-9/11 texts have an awareness of these historical images, and present a globe where being an American is terrifying. While on the one hand this might be seen as affirming myths of American exceptionalism and militarism, the death of the protagonists in these films is frequently linked to their lack of awareness of the US role within the globe. In doing so, it taps into a broader structure of feeling that was occurring at the time in US culture where
many Americans were genuinely confused about why the attacks of 9/11 were directed at them (think, for example, of the episode of *Oprah* on September 17, 2001 which asked “Why Do They Hate Us?”). As Monteith (2011) argues, while the splatter film does not provide any answers, its exploitative nature means that it highlights these antagonisms so that they can be explored in a way that is not present in mainstream culture.
Conclusion

In his essay ‘The Future City’, Fredric Jameson (2003b) notes, “someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world”. The post-9/11 splatter film presents a nightmarish version of the apocalypse that is structured around this imagining of capitalism. The collapse of the old order is not refreshed for the new but instead permanently remains suspended in a state of continuous breakdown. In this nightmarish world, Americans torture Americans, collapsing notions of “just” violence into a Hobbesian war of all of against all. Institutions representing the stability of society are undermined and implicated in the creation of chaos, complicating Manichean divisions between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Capitalism is corrupted and stands in as a signifier for atrophy. The shiny spaces of consumer culture are subverted into their hellish opposite, with the machines that once promised the salvation of humanity now representing its entrapment. Images of American nationalism and its global dominance are turned on their head, and now represent the shattered remnants of an empire that is now in decline. If we take Jameson’s notion that imagining the end of the world allows us to access the spatiality of capitalism, then surely the splatter film must function as one of the most terrifying versions of its iteration. After all, as Jameson surmises, “this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, death and terror” (1991, p.5). The splatter film, while postmodern in its inclusion of political imagery as pastiche, might therefore be thought of as constituting a ‘cultural text’ for the way it brings the mythical constructs that enshrine this dominance into contestation.

53 That “someone”, is of course Slavoj Žižek, although there is debate surrounding who out of the pair said the phrase first.
I. Oppositional structure in the post-9/11 splatter film

The post-9/11 splatter film is littered with signifiers of the Global War on Terror and torture, blending spectacular violence with B-movie culture and a radical disdain for authority. If, as Slavoj Žižek (2002) and Jean Baudrillard (2002) have noted, the images of 9/11 were powerful for the way that they coupled the imagery of Hollywood movies with the counter-image of its destruction, then the splatter film might be seen as creating similar images that use the creation of these myths to imagine their dystopian inversion. The inversion of images of the dominant ideology to conceptualize their destruction is not surprising – as Jameson notes, in attempting to theorize an ‘outside’ of capitalism, we are limited by the symbolic domain that we already have (1994, pp.75-6). Such an approach in many ways is entirely logical: at a semiotic level, the destruction of order in the film’s diegesis must be based on the presentation or implied structuring absence of its opposite signifier; or in other words, in order to represent destruction, you must also include some kind of representation of the dominant order. Thus while the splatter film is often accused of lacking a clear political project due to its nihilistic underpinnings, as Friedrich Nietzsche has taught us, nihilism has its own politics too (Jameson, 1981, p.117, Buchanan, 2006, p.75). Through its radical opposition to the current order, the splatter film might be thought of as providing the textual conditions to be read as a ‘cultural text’ capable of expressing the antagonism and struggle over representations of ‘just’ violence after 9/11.

The splatter film’s suitability as a ‘cultural text’ is founded in its historical development as a subgenre organized around oppositional viewing practices. The splatter film emerges in the 1960s out of innovations in the use of prosthetics for special effects as part of a broader movement of counter-cinema in Exploitation cinema. During this period, the subgenre undergoes substantial internationalization, with markets forming in a number of countries that allow for a transnational discourse between cult directors. At the same time, the exploration of violence as cinematic spectacle, together with its frequent claims of collapsing “real” and “reel” means that the splatter film is forced underground in its distribution. Although this moved to limit the circulation of these texts, the development of new media technologies such as the VCR and the DVD ensured that it established a market significant enough to be of interest to distributors and continue its production. Here the capitalist imperative of profit
intervened with attempts from the dominant culture to block its production. These attempts at censorship then were incorporated into the reception practices of the splatter subgenre, as viewing violent cinema became a way of differentiating the consumer from mainstream culture. As Jeffrey Sconce (2010) argues in his notion of ‘paracinema’, this positioned the splatter film as open to ‘textual raiding’ from the consumer, who could repurpose the viewing of these films as an act of resistance to the dominant culture. This resistance is based on the audience’s familiarity of the way that these films work to violate the moral, cultural and textual norms of mainstream cinema. As discussed in Chapter One, the notion that violence might be read as resistive is not easily explainable through our current paradigms for the reception of violence, which tend to focus on how it empties the text of meaning (as in ultraviolence), or collapses the space between the viewer and the text into a feedback loop of bodily sensation (as in psychoanalysis). It is this renegade status of violence within these texts that allows for it to function as an avatar for debates over the “political unconscious” of ideologies dictating the proper use of violence in society itself.

This oppositional status is incorporated into the narratological and formal principles of the text itself. Chapter Two examined how the splatter film draws heavily on the audience’s knowledge of Hollywood cinema as a cluster of signs that portrays particular notions of selfhood, which rather than conforming to notions of realism, express myths that enshrine the dominance and perseverance of the individual over all odds. This triumph of the goal-oriented protagonist (and indeed, heterosexual romance) is widely enshrined across the hundreds of films that Hollywood produces, where the protagonist is capable of surviving apocalyptic events such as nuclear disasters, climate change flooding, wars, ruthless international criminal gangs, and so on, and at the climax of the film functions as a key agent in re-establishing order and stability. As Jameson (1981, p.52) argues, the reinstitution of this order within Hollywood cinema functions to provide “strategies of containment”, where the ‘Hollywood ending’ can be read as representative of an idealized resolution to the antagonisms and conflict represented within the text. The splatter film openly mocks these conventions through tropes such as the establishment and then undermining of the Hollywood ending, and final shots that focus on the rupturing of the Fourth Wall by implicating the audience in the gaze. Moreover, the splatter film questions the state’s ability to rationalize or recuperate all forms of violence by questioning authority itself, positioning the institutions that preside over its implementation as either failing to control the violence or being
implicated in its spread. Instead of the reinstitution of social order, the state is positioned as a thin veneer that struggles to contain the Hobbesian anarchy that its citizens are engaged in. In order to survive the violence that is unleashed, the protagonist must take on the qualities of the monster, a conflation that is mirrored through the way that the camera oscillates between the tortured and the torturer.

Chapters Three and Four demonstrated how this refutation of “strategies of containment”, is further complicated by the way that the splatter film positions individual subjectivity itself as precarious. The skin becomes a metaphor for this fragility, and is capable of being repurposed to serve as other objects or ends. The close up is used as a filmic device to signal the ever-present threat of this bodily disunification by dividing up the space of the protagonist’s body into smaller parts. Off-screen space is used to generate the sense that violence can emerge from anywhere at any time, and is much more representative of the natural order of the diegesis than any semblance of institutional stability. The camera also frequently breaks away from subjective alignment with the torturer and the tortured to provide a third position of viewing. While this third position seems subjectively aligned through the camera’s unusual placement on the set and its break with the eye level shots that characterize much of Hollywood cinema, it is revealed to be a non-existent observer and deanchored camera. This siege on normativity is further reinforced through the use of experimental film techniques, such as frenetic montage, fast-motion and asynchronous and disjunctive sound. Violence itself is anarchic, and capable of being enacted in ways that stretch the imagination of the norms surrounding death itself and its ritualization within society. This convention is partially an extension of the desire from producers and marketers to profile the death that they introduce in their film as unique and distinct from other films within the oeuvre, but it also reinforces at a structural level the disregard that the splatter film has for cultural norms around morality. While in other horror films, such as the slasher, individual morality or social status is tied to the protagonist’s ability to evade death, in the splatter film this counts for little. Doctors, pregnant women, children and virgins are all dispensed with – a move that further undercuts the ability for restoration of the moral order.

As I have illustrated, one of the central ideologemes underlying this syntactical opposition between order and anarchy is that of the spatiality of capitalism itself. The splatter film’s
mise-en-scène is littered with iconic signifiers of American progress stalled or in decline - as in the degraded factory, the fields of rusting 1950s automobiles in the hillbilly film, or the urban decay of the Rust Belt in Romero’s zombie films. Icons such as the factory, the meat hook, the pig and the torture machine function as allegorical devices for highlighting the status of humans under this system, who are now subject to commodification. Technology is fundamentally integrated into the spatiality of the text itself, and the gaze is frequently interrupted by surveillance or military gaze incursions into the film. The splatter film links industry and capitalism in its critique of the current social order, and in this sense, despite the bleakness of its postmodern destabilization of the subject, could be considered to be echoing modernist themes of the fear of the loss of humanity under capitalism. Nevertheless, as Jameson (1991, p.387) notes, the fascination with technology breaking down is equally one of the tropes of postmodern texts and functions as a celebration of its abstraction and dominance. In this regard, the splatter film is not unlike other dystopian science fiction literature or cinema that envisions technology as leading to a decline in human conditions. However, where the splatter film distinguishes itself from other science fiction films is the way that this ‘bad capitalism’ is extended to an inescapable horizon in the text from which there is no escape or resolve. It is perhaps not surprising then that these representations of crisis in the system occur in the post-9/11 period where the system is viewed as failing or corrupted on multiple levels – fears about the internal surveillance of domestic citizens, the increasing militarization of US culture, the accumulation of wealth under capitalism and its devastating effects on those who are lower in the system, and the rise of a technology based society.

Finally, Chapter Five covered how the post-9/11 splatter film challenges the notions of American exceptionalism by undermining its foundational myths. Myths of egalitarianism are contested through the representation of an America that is fundamentally divided within, as in the poverty that drives the conflict between the Appalachian hillbillies and the rich city folk in the hillbilly film, or the division between North and South that underlies the conflict in films which reference the Civil War. In the former trope, myths of class equality are undermined through the situation of the conflict as occurring in rural areas that subject to industrial decline, such as the former mines in The Hills Have Eyes (Alexandre Aja, 2006) or the abattoir in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Marcus Nispel, 2003). In the latter trope of the Civil War, the splatter film highlights the brutal conflict that followed the US’ emergence as
a Republican nation – a war that took more American lives than any other war the nation has engaged with to date. On the one hand, the representation of Southerners in these films might be seen as conforming to the “Lost Cause” trope – which positions the Civil War as about secession rather than slavery and emerges as a way of commemorating the losses in the South from the 1860s onwards. On the other, Southerners are positioned as stagnated in cycles of vengeance. Northerners do not escape this interrogation unscathed – they are positioned in the splatter film as the source of the conflict. The notion that the Civil War was a necessary progression to a more ‘just’ society that is inclusive of the rights of African-Americans is subverted through the way that the splatter film highlights the atrocities of inter-familial and inter-communal conflict that lie beneath this conflict. American democracy is also parodied in films such as Homecoming (Joe Dante, 2005) and Zombie Strippers (Jay Lee, 2008) which revisit the allegations of vote rigging generated from the 2000 Florida vote recount. Similarly, the myth of strident individualism necessary to keep state power in check (as immortalized in the vigilante figure of the Western and the thriller movie) is challenged through the anarchy that unravels when armed families, communities or groups seek to assert their dominance. Finally, this ‘Othering’ from within is reflected in the way that the post-9/11 splatter film challenges the US’ soft imperial power through presenting Americans abroad as arrogant antiheroes works to undermine the authority of the Orientalist gaze, positioning Americans as at risk of death due to their lack of knowledge of other cultures and obliviousness to the power relationships that contribute to their economic dominance. This positioning of US authority as destabilized from trouble at home and abroad works to differentiate the splatter film from much of Hollywood cinema, which might challenge this authority but ultimately seeks to reinstate it by the film’s closure.

II. The splatter film as a “cultural text”

The splatter film is postmodern then in the way that it offers simulations of the War on Terror. As Jameson (2002) and Slavoj Žižek (2002) have both highlighted, 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror are elevated in collective consciousness not by virtue of their extraordinary death tolls, but by their narrativization as events in the global media. The terror
attacks of 9/11 resulted in only 2,996 deaths, but the estimated 191,000 Iraqi deaths resulting from the 2003 occupation have received considerably less attention. As Jameson (2000a) notes, the amount of attention that crises garner in the largely US dominated international media tends to reflect the policies of selective intervention – the war in the Congo, for example, dwarves all of the figures above with a peer-reviewed April 2007 report by the International Rescue Committee estimating the death toll since 1998 as 5.4 million (2008b). These people, as Žižek (2002, p.33) notes, exist in the “desert of the Real”, the realm of developing countries that do not receive the same amount of coverage as western concerns. The splatter film does not actively deal with these inequalities. True to its postmodern form, when other cultures are introduced who are subject to US economic imperialism, they are frequently caricatured. It is difficult to argue that the image of Slovaks as frozen in the Cold War is progressive in Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005), as it is futile to assert that Taliban zombies in Osombie (John Lyde, 2012) might introduce a serious attempt to reference history into the text. However, what the splatter film does do is mobilize an oppositional structure, which in the absence of other popular texts that fulfill this function, provides an avatar for working through notions of ‘just’ violence.

As Francis Pheasant-Kelly (2013, p.3) notes, many of the films that addressed the Iraq War directly failed at the box office (with the exception of The Hurt Locker [Katherine Bigelow, 2008]), meaning that fantasy films and other genres provided avenues for working through this anxiety. The same can be said for films that addressed torture. The audiences for documentaries that investigated the US use of torture, such as Taxi to the Dark Side (Alex Gibney, 2007), Standard Operating Procedure (Errol Morris, 2008) and The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib (Rory Kennedy, 2007) was relatively marginal. Instead representations of torture were articulated through television, and films such as the splatter subgenre. That the audience for these films grew considerably in the post-9/11 period could be seen as reflective of a desire to work through these issues, or at the very least to see what violence is like. On this latter point, while effects theory critics and theories of enculturation position US cinema as increasingly violent, very few films go into the same level of violent detail as the splatter film, with most Hollywood cinema utilizing clever editing that implies the act and then cuts away so as not to turn away potential audiences. In the mainstream media, representations of

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54 Figure taken from the Iraq Body Count, which keeps a running total of deaths since war began in 2003 (see https://www.iraqbodycount.org/).
war violence were similarly restrained under the Bush Presidency. It was illegal, for example, to show even the coffins of fallen US soldiers returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan until February 26, 2009, when President Obama overturned Bush’s previous ruling. This hermeneutic seal over violence is particularly evident when compared to other national or regional media from non-western nations, where extraordinarily graphic images of conflict are shown on the screen and circulated in newspaper photos as an unfortunate fact of quotidian existence. My key point here is that the decision not to bear witness to violence is in some senses a western luxury, and in many places where US intervention has taken place, the decision to turn away from it is simply not possible. To label the viewing of violence as morally corrupt is reductive and based on false equivalencies. As Žižek (2002, p.36) notes, such an assumption is based on an “ethical illusion” which overlooks our participation in global structures of inequality.

The splatter film, then, is a simulacra in that it presents violence that is “not real”, but it bears more verisimilitude to the conditions unleashed by war than the highly mediated news images that Baudrillard (2005) argues resembles computer games in the first Gulf War, or the highly controlled embedded reporting of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This verisimilitude, however convoluted, is important when contrasted with the US emphasis on media in shaping the war. This could be seen, for example, in the US reality show Profiles From the Front Line (2003). Following the stories of young soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, the show featured Jerry Bruckheimer as Executive Producer (known in Hollywood for his work on major action blockbusters) and was given unparalleled access via an endorsement by US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. While some audiences may gain pleasure from watching images of violence (such as the cult audience that the splatter film has maintained since the 1960s), the sudden rise in the desire to see this violence could be related to a desire for audiences to see violence that is realistic but does not engage the same moral dilemmas as watching Youtube videos of real deaths. Although less than 1% of the US population have been actively deployed in the military in the last decade as America’s defense strategy has shifted towards less active troops on the ground, 73% of those who have served have done so in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a 2011 Pew Poll found that even among 18-29 years old, one-third have an immediate family member who has served in the military at some point (Tavernise, 2011). The wars, then, and the threat of violence that they present, would have likely been influential for many Americans during this time. In this sense, the splatter film’s sudden rise in
popularity might be seen as not a resistive strategy for these audiences, but a way of thinking through the challenges that war presents.

However, it is important to note that the splatter film’s crossover into the mainstream coincides with a broader shift in US culture towards an environment that was more critical of the Bush administration’s approach to the War on Terror, and it is therefore likely that the oppositional themes inherent in these films were read as such. In 2004 Michael Moore’s film *Fahrenheit 9/11* became the highest grossing documentary ever made, and featured a critical diatribe on the Republicans’ rise to power and their involvement in the War on Terror. *Fahrenheit 9/11* grossed $23,920,637 in its opening weekend, and went on to earn $119,194,771 in the US and $222,446,882 worldwide. In a media environment that was overwhelmingly supportive of the US war effort, Moore’s film could be considered an anomaly. During this period, much of the critical voices in the public sphere shifted to what Jeffrey P. Jones (2010, p.15) terms as “New Political Television” – television that blurs the boundaries between what was previously considered a separate political sphere of ‘serious’ television and entertainment (15). New political television included shows such as *The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, The West Wing* and *Saturday Night Live*, all of which functioned as important avatars for debate in the lead up to the 2004 election. Many of these shows regularly feature guest politicians, and despite an initial resistance to their content, politicians have incorporated scheduled appearances on these shows into their media planning (p.12). This combination of comedy with more serious themes, such as torture, terrorism and the US occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan could also be seen in films such as *Harold and Kumar Escape From Guantanamo Bay* (John Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg, 2008) and *Four Lions* (Christopher Morris, 2010). In this sense, comedy provides a way of not only accessing broader audiences, but also circumventing restrictions on freedom of speech that limited the First Amendment following the PATRIOT Act. The splatter film’s rise in popularity, then, can be read alongside a broader shift towards ‘reading’ politics into entertainment, signaling that audiences were adept at reading subtext and allegory within the text. Seen through this context, the claims that from splatter horror directors attempting to challenge audience’s perceptions on the War on Terror seems considerably less radical.
As Baudrillard (2005) notes, the images of torture that emerged from Abu Ghraib were equally as dangerous as those of 9/11. While the images of the Twin Towers’ destruction shows a superpower under symbolic attack, the images of Abu Ghraib showed it as morally corrupt from within. These singular images were powerful in and of themselves, and their incorporation into the post-9/11 splatter film as pastiche allowed for these texts, during this moment, to be read “against the grain”. In its representation of Americans attacking Americans, the splatter film encourages audiences to question the moral authority of ‘just war’ – a question that is made all the more prescient through the way the viewer is positioned as that who is ‘unrepresentable’. The collapse of identity that these films present and the constant incursion of the surveillance gaze is reminiscent of the plight of many citizens who have been caught in the collateral of the War on Terror. Just like Josh’s sweating, pleading and disbelief as he sits chained into his torture chair in the Factory in Hostel (Eli Roth, 2005), the post-9/11 world is peppered with zones of indeterminacy where normative legal structures no longer apply. The legislative powers accorded to the US Executive in The Torture Memos of 2002 functioned to provide legal justification for the redefinition of prisoners of war as ‘enemy combatants’, who were no longer subject to the Geneva Convention. This effectively allowed the US to establish ‘wild zones’ with absolute sovereignty over the individual (at least under US law – when viewed through the lens of international law these actions are illegal). The use of extraordinary renditions, where suspected terrorists are kidnapped through the cooperation of US allies and whisked away for torture became common-place, as did the extrajudicial killings of drone strikes. In US prisons abroad, the human rights conditions of suspects has significantly eroded. In Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, 779 prisoners have been held and tortured for extended periods. Of these 600 were released, and only seven have been prosecuted through a military tribunal (removing their right to public prosecution through the courts). As Giorgio Agamben (2005) notes, these movements following 9/11 demonstrate the fragility of ‘just violence’. In a Weberian move, Agamben argues that the sovereign body in a society is determined by its ability to declare that the rules no longer apply. The erosion of civil liberties both internally in the US, and internationally through its exercise of power over global citizens has seen the ‘state of exception’ become the normal mode of operation following 9/11. As Agamben argues:

*The state of exception today has reached its maximum worldwide deployment. The normative aspect of law can thus be obliterated and contradicted with impunity by a governmental
violence that – while ignoring international law externally and producing a permanent state of exception internally – nevertheless still claims to be applying the law (p.87).

The state of exception works to erode the rights of the citizen, who becomes homini sacri, he who can be killed but not sacrificed. Agamben uses the example of those stuck in migrant camps as citizens who are stripped of all but the right to ‘bare life’ and exist outside of the confines of the law in that they have no legal recourse to address their situation, but are still ultimately subject to the sovereign power. As Žižek (2008, p.79) highlights, the notion of homini sacri embodies the plight of the tortured after 9/11.

The splatter film’s total collapse of order can thus be read less as nihilistic than corresponding to a broader social totality present through debates over torture that are occurring within US culture at the time. Part of its sudden popularity at this time, then, might be seen as founded in the way that at a formal level it provides an avatar for exploring the fierce debate that the leaked images from Abu Ghraib provoked. In the splatter film, the viewer is able to experience a milieu where the ‘rules’ no longer apply, shifting subject positioning between torture and torturer to explore their views on the subject. By representing the brutality that underpins all acts of violence, the splatter film works to question the logic of its introduction. The coupling of this exploration of torture with a questioning of notions of US nationalism means that the splatter film might be seen as corresponding to a broader ‘structure of feeling’ in representing the moral crisis that the ‘new normal’ of post-9/11 presented for ordinary Americans. (The ‘new normal’ is effectively the ‘old normal’, but for most Americans the events of 9/11 brought a new sense of exposure to the US’ place in the world). The refusal to provide ‘strategies of containment’ in the splatter film for resolving these ideological quandaries might be one reason that these texts were particularly suited to this cultural moment in time. Like the Hegelian notion of the “negation of the negation”, it is this refusal of closure that opens up the possibility for new meanings or readings to be created (Jameson, 1972b, p.160.).
III. The decline of the splatter film as a cultural text

The notion of the ‘cultural text’ is inherently bound to a temporal moment where it becomes representative of broader antagonisms in society. This is also the case with the splatter film, which as Marc Bernard notes experiences its high point in box office earnings in 2007 and then begins to decline as other forms of horror cinema rise in its place (such as the supernatural horror of *Paranormal Activity* [Oren Peli, 2007]). Significantly, this transition corresponds with the build up to the 2008 election where the Democrat Barack Obama was elected as President on the premise of bringing “change” to US policy. Although the War on Terror has continued under Obama, his administration has placed significant public relations efforts into rebranding the Manichean discourses of “good” and “evil” that underpinned Bush’s presidency. Obama made multiple statements promising to close Guantanamo Bay prison and revoke some of the restrictions on civil liberties made under the PATRIOT Act – however, both promises have ultimately not come to fruition. In March 2009, President Obama released executive orders to rename the Global War on Terror as the considerably more innocuous ‘Overseas Contingency Operations’, and while the number of troops in foreign countries has increased under his oversight significantly, this shift in rhetorical discourse has seen concerns over the legality of torture and foreign occupations decline in their representation in mainstream media. Although many accounts of violence in media position its visibility as part of a broader shift towards more violent texts, it is worth noting that even within this general movement there are peaks and troughs in its representation. Just as the Sixties moment was remarkable for its visibility of violence, the period from 2001 to 2007 might be viewed as representative of one of these peaks. The fact that the rise in representations of torture could be viewed across a broad variety of texts, including television, signals that ‘torture porn’ is better thought of as a movement rather than a subgenre in itself. Within this movement, the splatter film was particularly suitable in its form to expressing the anxieties that emerged around torture.

This is not to say the splatter film will disappear. The period following 9/11 saw a reinvigoration of production in other national cinemas that will continue to circulate on DVD and via technologies such as internet streaming. The brief crossover into mainstream taste of these films has also ensured that the splatter film has been exposed to new audiences,
expanding its potential market and cultural base. The predilection of these films towards the representation of oppositional themes will likely ensure that the splatter subgenre continues to adapt to changing societal conditions and structure. Although the splatter film is often marginalized in its distribution, repugnant to many for its brutality, and frequently fingered as the source of moral decline and outbreaks of disorder in society, it remains an important subgenre of the horror film as it has much to teach us about how violence is received within texts.

IV. Summary

This thesis has applied a textual analysis approach to the splatter film in order to reveal and trace some of the formal and narratological characteristics that might be seen as contributing to its popularity following 9/11. As such, it is particularly interested in how the social totality might be mapped back onto these films, and privileges this approach over other movements that might be seen at work in the text. The goal is not to suggest that this is the only approach, or that this is the only way of receiving these films. As the recent field of affect studies is beginning to uncover, the viewing of violence is incredibly complex in the way that the text is experienced in the body. Moreover, there are likely a variety of uses and gratifications that people take from these texts. For example, it is highly likely that there is a proportion of viewers that enjoy these films for the violence that they inflict on others. However, like the soldiers stationed in Iraq and watching Hostel and using it as part of a cathartic process, there are a broader range of ways in which violence can be read, and some of these are undoubtedly social. In the absence of the ability to access focus groups and conduct ethnographic research, or neurological data to trace the mapping of affect back onto the body, I believe that a textual analysis supported by its mapping back onto critical discourses within US society is sufficient to demonstrate that violence’s engagement with ritual and myth means that it always contains a social element.
If, as Fredric Jameson argues “the best utopias are the ones that fail most comprehensively” (2005, p.xiii), then the splatter film represents this failure on multiple levels. It is precisely through the splatter film’s diegesis of antagonism and opposition that it is able to represent this malaise. Perhaps, as Jameson remarks, it “is only by means of a violent formal and narrative dislocation could a narrative apparatus come into being capable of restoring life and feeling to this only intermittently functioning organ that is our ability to organize and live time historically” (Jameson, 1991, p.284). In the absence of other outlets, the splatter film became a way of thinking through our relationship to the state and, indeed, the world. In examining how its structure as a text interacts with spectacle, I have demonstrated that postmodern texts are not necessarily devoid of politics. Rather, as Baudrillard argues, oppositional politics under postmodernism occur through popular culture. While these images are only weakly linked to what Jameson would term a “referent”, they still have the ability to reflect our shock when History intervenes.
Filmography

2001 Maniacs (2005), Tim Sullivan, USA.

2001 Maniacs: Field of Screams (2010), Tim Sullivan, USA.

24 (2001-2010), Various directors.


A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971), UK.

A Fistful of Dollars (1964), Sergio Leone, Italy/ Spain/ West Germany.

A Good Day to Die Hard (2013), John Moore, USA.

À l’intérieur (Julian Maury and Alexandre Bustillo, 2007), France.

À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma - Esta Noite Encarnarei no Teu Cadáver/ This Night I Will Possess Your Corpse (1967), José Mojica Marins, Brazil.

À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma/ At Midnight I Will Take Your Soul (1963), José Mojica Marins, Brazil.

A Taste of Blood (1967), Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA.

Abraham Lincoln versus Zombies (2012), Richard Schenkman, USA.

Além, Muito Além do Além (Beyond, Much Beyond the Beyond), 1967-1988, TV Series.

American Beauty (1999), Sam Mendes, USA.

American Graffiti (1973), George Lucas, USA.


Audition (1999), Takashi Miike, Japan.

Backwoods (2008), Marty Weiss, USA.
Filmography


*Blood Creek* (2009), Joel Schumacher, USA.

*Bloody Feast* (1963), Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA.


*Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), Arthur Penn, USA.

*Boy Eats Girls* (2005), Stephen Bradley, Ireland.

*Bride of Re-Animator* (1989), Brian Yuzna, USA.

*Brigadoon* (1954), Vincente Minelli, USA.

*Buffy* (1997-2003), USA.

*Cabin Fever* (2002), Eli Roth, USA.


*Cannibal Ferox/ Make Them Die Slowly* (1981), Umberto Lenzi, Italy.

*Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), Ruggero Deodato, Italy.

*Captivity* (2007), Roland Joffé, USA/ Russia.

*Carver* (2008), Franklin Guerrero Jnr., Allumination Filmworks, USA.

*Child’s Play 3* (1991), Jack Bender, USA/ UK.

*Color Me Blood Red* (1965), Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA.

*Dance of the Dead* (2008), Gregg Bishop, USA.

*Dawn of the Dead* (1978), George Romero, USA.

*Dawn of the Dead* (2004), Zack Snyder, USA.

*Day of the Dead* (1985), George A. Romero, USA.

*Dead Snow* (2009), Tommy Wirkola, Norway.
Deadtime Stories (2009), Various directors, USA.

Deadtime Stories 2 (2011), Various directors, USA.

Debbie Does Dallas (1978), David Buckley, USA.

Deliverance (1972), John Boorman, USA.

Diary of the Dead (2007), George A. Romero, USA.

Die Hard (1988) John McTiernan, USA.

Die Hard 2 (1990), Renny Harland, USA.

Die Hard With a Vengeance (1995), John McTiernan, USA.

Django: Unchained (2012), Quentin Tarantino, USA.

Don’t Let Him In (2011), Kelly Smith, UK.


Evil Dead (2013), Fede Alvarez, USA.

Evil Dead II (1987), Sam Raimi, USA.

Exit Humanity (2011), John Geddes, Canada.

Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004), Michael Moore, USA.

Fido (2006), Andrew Currie, Canada.

Final Destination (2000), James Wong, USA.

Final Destination 2 (2003), David R. Ellis, USA.

Final Destination 3 (2006), James Wong, USA.

Final Destination 5 (2011), Eric Heisserer, USA.
Filmography

Flesh, TX (2009), Guy Crawford, USA.


Friday the 13th (1980), Sean S. Cunningham, USA.

From Dusk Till Dawn (1996), Robert Rodriguez, USA.

Frontier (Xavier Gens, 2007), France

Gone With the Wind (1939), Victor Fleming, USA

Grindhouse (2007) Robert Rodriguez, Eli Roth, Quentin Tarantino, Edgar Wright, Rob Zombie, USA.

Guinea Pig: Flowers of Flesh and Blood (1985), Hideshi Hino, Japan.

Halloween (1978), John Carpenter, USA.

Hannibal, 2001, Ridley Scott, USA.


Hatchet (2006), Adam Green, USA.

Haute Tension/ High Tension (2003), Alexandre Aja, USA/France.

Header (2006), Archibald Flancranstin, USA.

Helter Skelter (1976), Tom Gries, USA.

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (1986), John McNaughton, USA.

Homecoming (2005), Masters of Horror, Season 1, Episode 6, 2. December 2005, Joe Dante (USA). TV.

Hostel (2005) Eli Roth, USA.

Hostel II (2007) Eli Roth, USA

Hostel: Part III (2011), Scott Spiegel, USA

House of 1000 Corpses (2003) Rob Zombie, USA
Filmography

*House of 9* (2005), Steven R. Monroe, UK/ Romania

*House of the Dead* (2003), Uwe Boll, USA/ Germany/ Canada.


*I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), Jacques Tourneur, USA.

*Ils* (David Moreau and Xavier Palud, 2006), France.

*Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS* (Don Edmonds, 1975), USA.

*In the Mouth of Madness* (1994), John Carpenter, USA.

*Inbred* (2011), Alex Chandon, UK.

*Independence Day* (1996) Roland Emmerich USA

*Into the Dark: Exploring the Horror Film*, Johanna Wartio McEvoy (in production), UK.


*Isolation* (2005), Billy O’Brien, UK/ USA.

*It’s Alive* (1974), Larry Cohen, USA.

*Jeepers Creepers* (2001), Victor Salva, USA.

*Jeepers Creepers II* (2003), Victor Salva, USA.

*Juan of the Dead* (Alejandro Brugués, 2011), Cuba.

*Kairo* (2001), Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Japan.

*Kill Bill: Volume I* (2003), Quentin Tarantino, USA.

*Kill Bill: Volume II* (2004), Quentin Tarantino, USA.

*King Kong* (2005), Peter Jackson, USA/ New Zealand/ Germany.


*La Bestia in Calore/The Beast in Heat/SS Hell Camp* (1977), Paolo Solvay, Italy.
Lady Snowblood (1973), Toshiya Fujita, Japan.

Land of the Dead (2005) George A. Romero, USA


Les Yeux Sans Visage/ The Eyes Without a Face (1959), Georges Franju, France.

Live Free or Die Hard (2007), Len Wiseman, USA.

Lost (2004-2010) USA, TV Series.

Love Camp 7 (Lee Frost, 1969), USA.

Lynch Mob (2009), Byron Conrad Erwin, USA.

Martyrs (2008), Pascal Laugier, France/ Canada.

Missing in Action (1984), Joseph Zito, USA.

Mountain of the Cannibal Gods (1978), Sergio Martino, Italy.

Mutant Girl’s Squad (2010), Noboru Iguchi, Yoshihiro Nishimura and Tak Sakaguchi, Japan.

My Little Eye (2002), Marc Evans, UK.

Necromantik (1987), Jörg Buttgereit, Germany.

Necromantik 2 (1991), Jörg Buttgereit, Germany.

Night of the Living Dead (1968), George A. Romero, USA.

Night of the Living Dorks (2004), Mathias Dinter, Germany.

Nightmare on Elm Street (1984), Wes Craven, US.

O Estranho Mundo de José Mojica Marins/ The Strange World of José Mojica Marins. TV series, currently showing.

Offspring (2009), Andrew van den Houten, USA.

Oldboy (2003), Park Chan-Wook, South Korea.

Once Upon a Time in the West (1968), Sergio Leonne, USA/Italy/Spain.
Filmography

*One for the Fire: The Legacy of the Night of the Living Dead* (2008), Robert Lucas, Chris Roe, USA.


*Peeping Tom* (1960) Michael Powell, Britain.

*Pieces* (1982), Juan Piquer Simón, Spain/ USA/ Puerto Rico/ Italy.

*Pighunt* (2008), James Isaac, USA.

*Primal* (2010), Josh Reid, Australia.

*Proie/ Prey* (2009), Antoine Blossier, France.

*Psycho* (1960), Alfred Hitchcock, USA.

*Pulp Fiction* (1994). Quentin Tarantino, USA.

*Quarantine* (2008), John Erick Dowdle, USA.


*Rammbock: Berlin Undead* (2010), Marvin Kren, USA.


*Requiem for a Dream* (2000), Darren Aronofsky, USA.

*Reservoir Dogs* (1992), USA.

*Resident Evil* (2002), Paul W.S. Anderson, USA.

*Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010), Paul W.S. Anderson, USA.

*Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004), Alexander Witt, USA.

*Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007), Russell Mulcahy, USA.

*Resident Evil: Retribution* (2012), Paul W.S. Anderson, USA.

*Sanjuro* (1962), Akira Kurosawa, Japan.
Filmography


*Saving Private Ryan* (1998), Steven Spielberg, USA.

*Saw* (2004), James Wan, Australia.


*Saw II* (2005), Darren Lynn Bousman, USA/ Canada.


*Saw IV* (2007), Darren Lynn Bousman, USA/ Canada.

*Saw V* (2008), David Hackl, USA/ Canada.

*Saw VI* (2009), Kevin Greutert, USA/ Canada.

*School of Rock* (2003) Richard Linklater, USA.

*Scream* (1996), Wes Craven, USA.

*Shaun of the Dead* (2004), Edgar Wright, UK.

*Shock Waves* (Ken Wiederhorn, 1977), USA.

*Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), USA, TV Series.

*Slaughter* (2009), Stuart Hopewell, USA.

*Slither* (2006), James Gunn, USA.

*Smalltown Folk* (2007), Peter Stanley Ward, UK.

*Snuff* (1976), Michael Findlay, Horacio Fredriksson and Simon Nuchtern, USA/ Argentina.

*Speed* (John de Bont, 1994), USA.

*Squeal* (2008) (Tony Swansey, 2008), USA.

*SS Experiment Camp* (1976), Sergio Garrone, Italy.


*Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), USA.

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Filmography

*State of Emergency* (2011), Turner Clay, USA.

*Straw Dogs*, Sam Peckinpah 1971, USA.

*Survival of the Dead* (2009), George A. Romero, USA.

*Syriana* (2005), Stephen Gaghan, USA.


*Taxi Driver* (1976), Martin Scorsese, USA.

*Taxi to the Dark Side* (Alex Gibney, 2007), USA.


*Texas Chainsaw 3D* (2013) John Luessenhop, USA.


*The Ax Fight* (1975), Napoleon Chagnon and Tim Asch, USA.

*The Battle of Algiers* (1996), Gillo Pontecorvo, Italy/ Algeria.

*The Birth of a Nation* (1915), D.W. Griffiths, USA.

*The Blair Witch Project* (1999), Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, USA.

*The Body Shop* (1973), J.G. Patterson Jr., USA.

*The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (2005), Andrew Adamson, USA/ UK.

*The Cottage* (2008), Paul Andrew Williams, UK.

*The Crazies* (2010), Breck Eisner, USA.

*The Deer Hunter* (1978), Michael Cimino, USA.

*The Devil’s Rejects* (2005) Rob Zombie, USA.

*The Exorcist*, 1973 (William Friedken), USA.
Filmography

*The Final Destination* (2009), David R. Ellis, USA.

*The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007), Rory Kennedy, USA.

*The Gore Gore Girls* (1972), Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA.

*The Gruesome Twosome* (1967), Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA.

*The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), Wes Craven, USA.

*The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), Alexandre Aja, USA

*The Hills Have Eyes II* (1984), Wes Craven, USA.

*The Hills Have Eyes II* (2007), Martin Weisz, USA.

*The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (2010), Tom Six, Netherlands.

*The Intruder* (1963), Roger Corman, USA.

*The Last House on the Left* (1972), Wes Craven, USA.


*The Midnight Meat Train* (2008), Ryûhei Kitamura, USA.

*The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Mel Gibson, USA.

*The Return of the Living Dead* (1985), Dan O'Bannon, USA.

*The Shield* (2002-2008) USA, TV Series.

*The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Jonathan Demme, USA.

*The Story of Temple Drake* (1933) Stephen Roberts, USA.

*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), Tobe Hooper, USA.

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), Marcus Nispel, USA.

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986), Tobe Hooper.

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3D* (2013), John Luessenhop, USA.

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (2006), Jonathan Liebesman, USA.
Filmography

*The Texas Vibrator Massacre* (2008), Rob Rotten, USA.

*The Trap* (2007), Adam Curtis, UK.

*The Truman Show* (1998), Peter Weir, 1998, USA.


*The Wizard of Gore* (1970), Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA.

*Three Kings* (1999), David O. Russell, USA.

*Three on a Meathook* (1973), William Girdner.

*Tokyo Gore Police* (2008), Yoshihiro Nishimura, Japan.

*Tucker and Dale Vs. Evil* (2010), Eli Craig, Canada/ USA.


*Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964), Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA.

*Undead* (2003), Michael Spierig, Peter Spierig, Australia.

*Undead or Alive* (2007), Glasgow Phillips, USA.

*Under Siege* (1992) Andrew Davis USA.


*Vacancy* (2007), Nimród Antal, USA.

*Video Nasties: Moral Panic, Censorship and Video Tape* (2010), Jake West, UK.

*War of the Dead* (2011), Marko Mäkilaakso, USA/ Lithuania/ Italy.

*Warm Bodies* (2013), Jonathan Levine, USA.

*White Zombie* (1932), Victor Halperin, USA.


*World War Z* (2013), Marc Forster, USA/ Malta.

*Wrong Turn* (2003) Rob Schmidt, USA.
Filmography

Wrong Turn 2: Dead End (2007) Joe Lynch, USA.

Wrong Turn 3: Left for Dead (2009), Declan O’Brien, USA.

Wrong Turn 4: Bloody Beginnings (2011), Declan O’Brien, USA.

Wrong Turn 5: Bloodlines (2012), Declan O’Brien, USA.

Zombi 2 (1979), Lucio Fulci, Italy.

Zombi II (1979), Lucio Fulci, Italy.

Zombie Strippers (2008), Jay Lee, UK.

Zombieland (2009), Ruben Fleischer, USA.

Zombies of Mass Destruction (2009), Kevin Hamedani, France.

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