

## Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticising Violence in Modern Cinematic Horror\*

Steven Jay Schneider

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A man who robs would always be an object to be rejected by the poet who wishes to present serious pictures. But suppose this man is at the same time a murderer, he is even more to be condemned than before by the moral law. *But in the aesthetic judgment he is raised one degree higher and made better adapted to figure in a work of art.* Continuing to judge him from an aesthetic point of view, it may be added that he who abased himself by a vile action can to a certain extent be raised by a crime, and can be thus reinstated in our *aesthetic* estimation.

Friedrich Schiller [1]

Violent acts compel an aesthetic response in the beholder of awe, admiration, or bafflement. If an action evokes an aesthetic response, then it is logical to assume that this action-even if it is murder-must have been the work of an artist.

- Joel Black [2]

### I

To the extent that aesthetic metaphors found a place in horror films of the classic era, they served to equate monstrousness with a flawed, degraded or corrupt work of art. As often as not, it was a work of literature that provided the inspiration here, but celluloid would prove a uniquely effective medium for bringing such metaphors to life. In James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), for instance, Victor rejects his unholy creation not because of any real scientific failing-after all, 'It's alive!'-but because of his perceived inability to produce a work of sufficient beauty. In Rupert Julian's *The Phantom Of The Opera* (1925), the prodigious talents of silent film star Lon Chaney, Sr. were exploited to the fullest, as the actor's trademark combination of gruesome makeup and facial contortion resulted in a Phantom so hideous that viewers could not help but contrast him with his ultra-ornate surroundings. Eight years later, director Michael Curtiz would similarly explore/expose disfigurement anxiety in *Mystery Of The Wax Museum*: a gifted sculptor named Ivan Igor (Lionel Atwill), his own face horribly burnt in a fire, goes about murdering attractive young women so as to embalm them in wax. Here, as in *House of Wax* (the 1953 remake starring Vincent Price), the monster kills with his art, but what *makes* him a monster is first and foremost his gruesome visage. In the various film versions of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* (1913, 1916, 1945), the eponymous anti-hero's moral depravity receives embodiment in the physical deterioration of his own self-portrait. And Max Schreck's Count Orlok in *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922) is by any measure a ghastly creature in his physical appearance, what with his gaunt body, bald, pointy head and rat-like features, especially when contrasted with the film's dreamlike cinematography and mise-en-scène. As Angela Dalle Vacche argues, Murnau's picture in its totality can be viewed as 'an Expressionist work of art [that]...stands up to the comparison with Freidrich's Romantic canvases.' [3]

As a major stylistic influence on early (notably German) horror cinema, Expressionism itself warrants further mention here. For one of the defining features of such classics as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and *M* (1931), as well as of many subsequent productions-ranging from Roger Corman's 1960s cycle of Poe adaptations up through Tarsem Singh's neo-Expressionistic serial

killer film *The Cell* (2000)-is a warped reflection of the antagonist's psychological instability in highly artificial and often hyper-aestheticised costumes, set design, atmospherics, even acting styles. [4] Despite the fact that the crazy, compulsive killers in such pictures usually do not suffer from any striking physical abnormalities, the distorted quality of these external elements serves to 'make apparent the internal workings of an anguished self.' [5] And although the monsters of Expressionist horror cinema may not *themselves* be equated with flawed, degraded or corrupt works of art, they still qualify as derivative versions of this metaphor, since the audience's focus tends to be not so much on these creatures' abnormal psychologies as on the remote manifestations of such perverse and dangerous minds.

Simply stated, in each of the above-named films-and in many others of this era-monstrousness is conceived of primarily in *aesthetic*, rather than in moral, spiritual or philosophical terms. What makes Frankenstein, Erik the Phantom, Ivan Igor, Dorian Gray, Count Orlok and Price's aristocrats so disturbing is less a function of their malicious motives or bad behaviour than of their physical or externally-reflected 'ugliness.' This claim is attested to by the fact that these beings are not so much evil (purely or *per se*) as hyperbolically confused, frustrated, compelled, misunderstood or mistaken, as well as by the fact that they always fare miserably when compared, either explicitly (via dialogue, voiceover narration, etc.) or through contextual cues (mostly mise-en-scène and montage editing) with 'legitimate' works of art.

It is tempting to conclude from these initial observations that the classical era's operative aesthetic metaphor-the monster as corrupt or degraded artwork-depends in large part on a culturally-enforced equation between inner and outer beauty and goodness, along with its converse, according to which outer ugliness and wickedness visibly testifies to the state of one's inner life or 'soul.' But such a conclusion would be mistaken. Many of the classic horror film monsters are sympathetic to a greater or lesser, but nearly always conspicuous, degree (besides those listed above, consider, e.g., King Kong, the Wolf Man and the Mummy); this holds especially true in relation to the humans who misunderstand them, hate them and hunt them down out of an often-irrational fear and loathing). Despite being sympathetic figures, however, occasionally even beautiful or virtuous 'on the inside,' the monsters in question are still always and inevitably depicted as *monstrous* within the diegesis. This, I would argue, is due primarily to the widespread cultural influence of a 'legitimate' art that positioned artworks as a matter of beauty rather than hermeneutic difficulty or incongruity. [6]

Though Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) has received most of the glory, Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (released earlier the same year) deserves just as much credit for heralding a new era of cinematic horror. In both of these films the monster is human, all too human, and besides that, all too real. Real in the sense that no obvious or Expressionistically-rendered signifiers of physical deformity-simplistically (and sometimes misleadingly) signifying moral corruption-are made available to the audience/protagonist/victim for the purpose of immediate identification. In fact, as I will seek to show, one distinguishing mark of the modern horror film is a shift in the genre's dominant aesthetic metaphor: what used to be the monster as corrupt or degraded work of art has become (evolved into? we shall see...) the *monster as corrupt or degraded artist*. In the next section, the nature of this shift will be elucidated with a closer look at *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho*. That will pave the way for a rudimentary typology which carves up the monster-as-corrupt-artist trope into more specific thematic categories. After elaborating on the various examples in this typology, the following questions will be addressed: What cultural and socio-historical conditions might

be cited to explain this profound transformation in the horror genre? And just how much should we be concerned with the increasing trend toward cinematically representing murderers as artists, and murder as an art form, considering that such romanticised portrayals can be seen-at least according to one line of thinking about media effects-as giving license to, perhaps even inspiring, real-life (though usually not nearly so creative) acts of violence? [7] With respect to the former question, and in line with what has been said thus far, my contention is that our popular/public understanding of 'art' has culturally mutated, and that this shift has been paralleled and drawn upon in horror cinema's reconfiguration of its dominant aesthetic metaphors.

## II

In *Peeping Tom*, an otherwise unremarkable young man by the name of Mark Lewis (Karlheinz Böhm) murders young women with a retractable spike attached to a movie camera. Also affixed to the camera is a small mirror which enables him to record the terrified expressions on his victim's faces as they watch themselves getting killed. [8] Mark's psychotic tendencies are inextricably tied up with a perverse aesthetic sensibility, and to the extent that we as viewers find ourselves interested in his homemade snuff films, to that extent are we implicated in the murders he commits to obtain them. If one compares this picture with *Mystery Of The Wax Museum*, it becomes apparent that, although in both the murderer is a kind of artist who (so to speak) kills with the tools of his trade, it is only in *Peeping Tom* that the murderer is primarily coded as monstrous *not* because of some physical or mental deformity (despite his deep-rooted insanity, Mark happens to be a pretty nice, pretty normal-looking bloke), but because he puts his artistic talent to such malevolent use. It is true that Mark, via his social isolation coupled with his ostensible normality, fits to the tee the burgeoning stereotype of the 'invisible/average killer' or the 'killer among us.' And although this stereotypical, even prototypical, characterisation can itself be understood as a coding of monstrosity, one that to some extent prefigures and predicts Mark's pathology, it seems more accurate to hold that, absent the killer's eventual manifestation as a corrupt and murderous artist figure, such a coding instead supports the overly-rational view that 'realistic' sociopaths are a species wholly distinct from the fantastic monsters of lore.

*Psycho*'s Norman Bates may not be as creative a killer as Mark Lewis, but he is just as nondescript, just as sweet (when he's not dressed up as his mother) and just as artistic- that is, if one considers taxidermy an art. William Rothman goes so far as to connect Norman/Mother's murder of Marion Crane with her aesthetic disinterest in the young man's collection of stuffed birds: 'Marion...is totally unable to appreciate Norman's creations. His disdain for her, at one level, is that of an artist for a contemptible critic.' [9] Later in the same chapter, Rothman argues that 'Norman Bates stands in for every artist whose life is circumscribed by acts singularly composed of murder and creation,' where the murderous component in question is to be understood as a product of every artist's desire 'to avenge himself on those who, beholding his creations, draw sustenance from them.' [10] But one need not subscribe to such an extreme view of artistic creativity, nor to such a loose interpretation of Norman's character. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that in going to such dramatic lengths to keep his mother 'alive'-by maintaining her corpse, but more importantly by dressing like her, by mimicking her voice, by identifying with her so completely-Norman provides ample evidence of not only a psychotic but also an artistic temperament. Whereas Ivan embalms, and Mark shoots film, Norman effectively *method acts* in order to fulfil what André Bazin calls 'the primordial function of statuary, namely, the preservation of life by a representation of life.' [11] Of course, the only lives any of these artist-murderers are interested in preserving after death are those they have taken themselves.

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If, in the modern horror film-by which I have in mind here less a genre-specific modification of particular formal and stylistic conventions than a large-scale, cross-media transition to a period where the meaning of 'art' became open to cultural challenge and reconfiguration-monsters are predominantly typed as depraved or corrupt artists rather than as flawed, degraded or corrupt works of arts, how are we to understand the murders these monsters commit in pursuit of their aesthetic calling? An admittedly selective survey of the genre, with some attention paid to international examples as well as to those from the US and Britain, reveals two major trends in the artistic (re-)presentation of murder: on the one hand are those horror films which showcase murder as an artistic *product*, and on the other are those which showcase it as an artistic *performance*. With respect to the former trend, what matters most from an aesthetic point of view is the scene of the crime and/or whatever remains of the victim(s), rather than the motive, the *modus operandi* or even the presence of the murderer. With respect to the latter trend, what matters most aesthetically is precisely the contrary of this, namely the way in which the murderer goes about committing his crime. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these two trends are by no means mutually exclusive; many horror films play around with both of them, often in interesting and complementary ways. I will now turn to some examples so as to fill in the picture sketched here.

#### A. Murder as Artistic Product

In one group of films employing this theme, dead bodies are literally reused for practical purposes. Examples here include *Motel Hell* (1980), in which an organic farmer earns a huge profit by turning his victims into human jerky (tagline: 'It takes all kind of critters to make Farmer Vincent's fritters!'), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986), in which a family of ex-slaughterhouse workers wins the Texas-Oklahoma Chilli Contest two years running because of their 'prime meat' and the infamous Hong Kong 'Category 3' horror film, *The Untold Story* (1993), in which sadistic murderer Wong Chi-hang (Anthony Wong) feeds the remains of his victims to the police investigating his case by disguising them as pork buns. [12] In each of these pictures, it is the recognition and admiration accorded the respective killer-chefs by a satiated, albeit ignorant, public-a public that is exposed as hypocritical (and at a deeper level, culturally repressed) for its simultaneous repudiation of and taste for cannibalism-which codes them as artists. What makes them *monsters*, of course, is the horrifying nature of their 'art.'

Though neither the mask of human skin worn by Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen) nor the various pieces of bone furniture which appear in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) are ever subject to aesthetic appraisal from people *within* the film, these objects are made with enough care and exhibit a sufficient degree of craftsmanship to elicit a reaction more complex than mere shock from most viewers. The very fact that this reaction characteristically involves a measure of disgust or revulsion on the part of both victim and viewer lends support to the distinctly modern notion that art need not command admiration to 'count' as art (a point to which I shall return below), as well as to Noël Carroll's identification of disgust as one of the two essential evaluative criteria of fictional horror (the other being perceived threat). [13] A more recent example along these lines occurs in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence Of The Lambs* (1991), in which the ironically cultured cannibal Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) escapes captivity by wearing the sliced-off facial epidermis of a dead prison guard over his own, and in which an on-the-loose serial killer (Ted Levine) skins his female victims only to sew

together their hides like some demonic dressmaker in order to fashion himself a new sexual identity. That we should find thematic overlap between this film and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is not surprising, considering that both were partially inspired by the real-life story of Wisconsin serial killer Ed Gein (as was the novel upon which *Psycho* is based). Of course, no monster recycles human body parts more proficiently than Frankenstein, who could hardly exist without them. But the fact that it is *Victor* who puts these parts together, who somehow brings them back to life, means that his monstrous progeny is at best a work of art (though its creator would disagree), not an artist in his own right. And since most film versions of Mary Shelley's novel downplay the reality of Victor's *own* monstrousness, the monster-as-corrupt-artist metaphor has been left for others to explore.

In the second group of films to employ the theme in question, dead bodies are carefully positioned and manipulated, symbolically arranged so as to make more or less comprehensible 'statements.' Alternatively, though these are by no means mutually exclusive options, the blood of victims is literally used as paint by struggling artists who (in campier productions, such as Herschell Gordon Lewis' exploitation gorefest *Color Me Blood Red* [1965]) are in desperate need of a brighter, more 'vibrant' shade of red, or else who (in more pretentious fare, such as William Gove's *The Apostate* [aka *Michael Angel*, 1998] and Hideshi Hino's *Guinea Pig 4: Mermaid in the Manhole* [Japan, 1991]) seek inspiration and greater 'authenticity' in their macabre works of art. As in the 'consumer cannibalism' films discussed above, special fun is poked at members of the unsuspecting public, who here get exposed as dilettantish and hypocritical insofar as the high esteem-measured primarily in terms of monetary value-they confer upon the artworks in question depends precisely upon their *not knowing* what 'raw materials' were used to create them. This holds especially true for *Color Me Blood Red* and *A Bucket of Blood*, Roger Corman's 1959 horror-comedy in which a would-be sculptor (Dick Miller) uses the corpses of those he kills, or parts thereof, as the underlying substance of his supposedly clay statues. [14]

Similarly, in Curtis Harrington's *Games* (1967), Paul Montgomery (James Caan) plasters over the corpse of a young man he and his wife have accidentally killed, keeping it in the house right next to the statue of a human form made by a well-known artist. Not only does Harrington play off the fact that the expensive, aesthetically-pleasing statue and the grotesque, hastily-disguised corpse are equally regarded as works of art within the diegesis; he doubly confuses the matter by revealing in the end that the latter was just a trick on Montgomery's part to drive his rich wife insane: *sandbags*, and not a corpse, were used to give the makeshift statue 'more body.' Thus, the film's viewers-encouraged by earlier events to feel secure in the knowledge that they, at least, can tell the difference between a work of 'real art' and one of 'mere murder'-are shown (up) to be equally incapable of making such a distinction on the basis of surface appearance. Interestingly, *The Apostate* turns this joke/critique on its head by having a potential buyer admire the killer's (Dennis Hopper) paintings precisely *because* they are rumoured to have been made with human blood. In this respect, Gove's film offers an interesting twist on a real-life and somewhat disturbing trend in American consumer culture: the serious collecting, for posterity or financial gain, of artwork-sketches, drawings, wood carvings and the like-made by serial killers, often while they are behind bars serving life-sentences for their crimes. [15]

When it comes to films which feature the symbolic positioning of dead bodies, there is an abundance of examples to choose from. Here I will restrict myself to just a few. In each case, great emphasis is placed upon control and composition of the *mise-en-scène*, responsibility for which effectively shifts from the director (as behind-the-scenes narrator) to the murderer (as diegetic set designer). At

times, and as Linda Badley's recent work endeavours to theorise, these authorial positions threaten to collapse into one another, the boundary between auteur horror director and fictional murderer-*artiste* blurring to the point where the latter appears to be nothing less than a sublimated alter-ego of the former. [16]

*Halloween* (1979):

After killing off a number of her chums, superhuman psychopath Michael Myers plans a distinctly unpleasant surprise for Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis). Upon entering the upstairs bedroom of her friend Annie's (Nancy Kyes) house, Laurie is confronted by the following scene: next to a lit Jack-o-lantern, Annie's corpse lies face-up on a bed with her arms spread wide. Directly in back of her head is a tombstone, upon which is engraved the name of Michael's dead sister Judith. Besides all of the questions it raises-why the tombstone? what is the connection between Annie and Judith? why is Laurie the intended audience?-this horrifying tableau practically cries out for aesthetic acknowledgement; were the meticulously arranged display not sufficient to make this point, director John Carpenter's camera subtly reframes and slowly zooms-in, approximating Laurie's point-of-view as she edges closer to the bed. Instead of running away immediately, she obviously wants another, closer look. And even if Laurie-who despite her fascination is simultaneously and understandably beside herself with fright-is incapable of giving due credit to the artist responsible for this *mise-en-scène* of death, viewers of *Halloween* are in a far less precarious position than she, and so are far more likely to respond to Michael's/Carpenter's handiwork with a terror tinged with pleasure. It seems that here, and in numerous other examples [see below], we encounter a situation which runs counter to Carroll's observation that (as Marguerite LaCaze summarises his position) 'horror appears to be one of those genres in which the emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the emotions of characters.' [17] Precisely because of our safe vantage point-the 'aesthetic distance' we are given to contemplate the killer in question's creative crime scenes, and, conversely, our imagined closeness to the camera/director's gaze-our feelings as spectators are systematically distinct from the feelings of the protagonist.

Similar moments occur in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, when Sally (Marilyn Burns) suddenly finds herself in a room littered-but excessively, self-consciously so-with the feathers and bones of dozens, possibly hundreds, of animals, and in which human skeletal remains dangle precariously from the ceiling on thin bits of string; and in Brett Leonard's *Hideaway* (1995), where a back-from-the-grave serial killer artistically arranges his victims' corpses within a massive skull-like structure, to the horror of a teenage girl temporarily trapped inside it. (An obvious question to ask here, albeit one I am unable to pursue in the present essay, is why so often it is a young *woman* who is first confronted with these spectacles of death within the diegesis? Is it because femininity is traditionally assumed to respond 'better,' at least more viscerally, to works of art/murder?)

*Manhunter* (1986):

Five minutes into the film, we find ourselves alone in a house with former F.B.I. agent Will Graham (William Petersen), who is trying to make some sense of the horrible crime scene before him. It seems that an unknown intruder, after murdering a couple in their bedroom and splattering the walls with their blood, placed shards of mirror in their eyes. Detective Graham speaks into a tape recorder: he describes the room down to the smallest detail, then enters into a mock dialogue with the killer. He praises him as 'skilful,' asks him questions, wants to know why he acted *this* way rather than some other. All of which serves to highlight the comparisons effected in this picture between detective and art critic, serial killer and artist. Graham's conclusion, which he reaches only near the end of the film, is telling: 'You rearranged the family into an audience so they

could watch what you do.' What we have here is a paradigmatic case of the 'murder as artistic product' theme dovetailing with that of 'murder as artistic performance.' Badley usefully elaborates on the sense in which *Manhunter's* monster, Francis Dollarhyde (Tom Noonan), can be understood as a sort of serial killing performance artist:

Dollarhyde turns killing into a theatrical, cinematic performance whose purpose is to (literally) transform himself into the Red Dragon, which is in his mind a composite of Blake the visionary artist (who believed that the imagination could change reality) and the Red Dragon. This becomes obvious in the complementary ritual by which he works out in front of a full-length mirror, literally reconstructing his body into a semblance of Blake's Michelangesque figures. Dollarhyde is attempting to remake reality/himself through his performance of murder. **[18]**

As will become apparent in the following section, Dollarhyde's narcissism-manifest in the fixation he exhibits with his own mirror image-is less a feature of the performance art murders of other cinematic serial killers than is their concern with putting on a good show, with giving both victims and viewers their money's worth (quite literally, in the case of the films' paying audiences).

*White Of The Eye* (1988):

A door opens to reveal the living room of a trashed flat. Amidst all the chaos, a goldfish bowl and one high-heeled shoe have been placed carefully atop a white blouse which is resting on a smashed microwave, itself sitting on a table in the middle of the room. This collection of items looks rather like a piece of cinematic sculpture or pop-art; as such, it forces Detective Mendoza (Art Evans) into the role of art interpreter and critic. In much the same fashion as *The Apostate*, *Manhunter* and *Se7en* (1995), the detective/viewer is forced to determine the meaning of, or message in, the murder scene; to share aesthetic sensibilities with the killer and thereby distance himself from the moral repugnance of the crime. Next we cut to a point-of-view shot of Detective Mendoza's hands reaching down to pull a plastic covering off of something quite strange: a pot with something unidentifiable in it (an internal organ?) is surrounded by four kitchen knives, their blades turned outwards. The pot is sitting on a white table that acts as a virtual canvas, and what appears to be the victim's blood is smeared off to the left. It is in reference to this bizarre constellation of objects that Mendoza remarks to his partner, in all seriousness, 'I know a goddamn work of art when I see one.' 'Picasso, my ass' is the cynical, naïve reply. But Mendoza is not to be deterred: 'We're talking post-Cubist Picasso...or maybe even later.' Some viewers may be inclined to laugh at this exchange, thinking it pretentious at best, totally inappropriate at worst. But in defense of *White of the Eye's* director and co-writer, Donald Cammell, it is clear that he is here less interested in comparing the work of serial killer Paul White (David Keith) with that of post-Cubist Picasso at the level of technical skill than of visceral impact. (Along these lines, it may be worth calling to mind *Guernica*, Picasso's 1937 testimony to the horrors of the Spanish Civil War- a painting of terrible beauty filled with symbolic archetypes and encoded meaning. In terms of the shifting meanings of 'art' and 'aesthetics' invoked by the film, it can hardly be an accident that Picasso is invoked here.)

**[19]**

*Se7en*:

Probably the most ambitious (certainly the most transparent) murder-as-artistic-statement film since *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971), in which a revenge seeking scientist/organist/religious scholar played by Vincent Price murders the doctors who failed to save his beloved, using the ten Biblical plagues as inspiration. Here, a nameless serial killer (Kevin Spacey) justifies his crimes as absolution for the world's ignorance of the Seven Deadly Sins. **[20]** The film

takes us from the tortured remains of one murder victim to the next as the sociopathic John Doe 'sermonises' to Detectives Somerset (Morgan Freeman) and Mills (Brad Pitt). Among the most creative and disturbing crime scenes are those thematising Gluttony, where we view the remains of an obese man, his hands and feet bound together, who was apparently forced to eat himself to death, and Sloth, where we see a severely emaciated young man who was tied to a bed, starved and kept barely alive for over a year. At one point, John Doe explains himself as follows: 'Wanting people to listen, you can't just tap them on the shoulder anymore. You have to hit them with a sledgehammer, and then you'll notice you've got their strict attention.' Similar words have been spoken by many a modern artist. As Stephen Mulhall elegantly writes, 'Doe's murderous activity can be mistaken for the work of a performance artist because human culture as such embodies the results of the labours of the best thinkers and artists of the race to build significance into and out of the most savage, brutal and base aspects of human existence, to make the meaningless meaningful.' [21] I would only wish to qualify Mulhall's assertion that Doe qualifies as a 'performance artist' rather than as an artist in the traditional sense, since what seems to matter most to him is not the activity of committing murder but the reception and interpretation of his crime scenes.

Along the same lines, it is crucial to note that in each of the scenes described above violent death is presented *not* as a hyperkinetic spectacle, but instead as a gruesome tableau. Jeffrey Sconce rightly points out (with specific reference to John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* [1990]) that it is in virtue of their self-conscious constructedness that such tableaux 'ask to be read as an artistic decision in the representation of violence.' [22] The weakness of Sconce's analysis is that he fails to distinguish between those horror films in which we can safely attribute the artistry in question to the murderer (again, as 'diegetic set designer'), and those in which we must reserve our aesthetic praise for those working behind the crime scenes. The former attribution can be made 'safely' because of the emphasis the films in question place on the in/ability of particular characters (detectives, 'final girls,' future victims, etc.) to fully appreciate and grasp the meaning of the killer's disturbing artworks. Attributions of the latter sort, meanwhile, are inevitably less secure—at least upon first viewings—given that a seemingly senseless and indiscriminate murderer can always be provided an artistic agenda in the end (consider, e.g., *Jeepers Creepers* [2001]).

Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) provides a case in point here. The final series of gruesome, bloody tableaux in the double-murder scene that opens the film, resembling as they do 'nothing more than an expressionist painter's messy, colourful pallet,' [23] convey in full force the director's disturbed imagination rather than that of the ephemeral supernatural killer whose primary role is to carry out his master's murderous plans. (Although I have intentionally left it ambiguous here as to whether the killer's 'master' is Helene Marcos, the film's 'Black Queen' of witchcraft, or Argento himself, the answer is obviously 'both.' The crucial point is that neither of these masters/artists are coextensive with the diegetic murderer.) *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* presents a quite different but equally suitable example. In the film's opening scene, we are treated to a montage revealing the corpses of some of Henry's (Michael Rooker) victims before they were discovered by the police. This montage is as visually expressive—one might even say as poetic—as it is emotionally distressing. Scenes such as this one are what lead Sconce to label *Henry* 'a film with an artistic agenda.' [24] He is right, of course. But he never qualifies this claim by pointing out that the artistic agenda in question is McNaughton's, and McNaughton's alone; by all indications it doesn't belong to Henry, who kills pretty much at random and makes little if any effort to aestheticise his murderous acts. As Matt Hills points out, nothing less than the horror genre's perceived or attributed cultural value is

at issue here: 'the diegetic killer stands in for a critically valued type of social realism: he isn't "arty," pretentious or "unreal" in any conventional or contrived sense, but the director's vision works transformatively to aestheticise the film's "real" killing... *Henry* thus combines a certain traditional notion of the auteur with a valued sense of sober realism rather than a sensationalist generic tat.' [25] Even the homemade snuff movie *Henry* makes with his partner-in-crime Otis (Tom Towles)-the pair videotape themselves sexually assaulting a suburban housewife and slaughtering her family-arguably strikes viewers less as a work of art than a work of trash (cinema); as Cynthia Freeland notes, 'the amateur camera[work]...makes the murders seem more real: things happen unexpectedly, everything seems unplanned and awkward. The viewpoint is not standard, and the murders are not cleanly centered for our observation.' [26] Bottom line: cinematic murder can be presented artistically to a greater or less degree depending on the talents and inclination of the director, but this fact alone does not give us sufficient reason to view the monster-murderer portrayed in the film as an artist in his own right.

Going in the other direction, Amy Taubin, in a 1996 *Sight and Sound* review of *Se7en*, writes that 'There's almost no violence enacted on the screen. All we see is [*sic*] the end products of violence- butchered bodies, rotting flesh. Its director is an aesthete of rot and entropy.' [27] Here, Taubin is guilty of an oversight opposite to that of Sconce: instead of failing to distinguish, at the level of artistic intention, between the director of the film and the killer, she makes too *firm* a distinction, labelling director David Fincher an 'aesthete'-albeit one of a perverse sort-while ignoring the crucial fact that John Doe *himself* is given full credit for the artistic mise-en-murder-scènes within *Se7en's* narrative.

## B. Murder as Artistic Performance

If murder in the modern horror film is frequently coded as an artistic product of one kind or another, it is nearly as often coded as a kind of artistic performance. In one group of movies featuring this representational strategy-mainly consisting of entries in the so-called 'slasher' subgenre and its Italian cousin, the *giallo*-the surprisingly resourceful killer dispatches his victims in ever-more-creative, and ever-more-bloody, fashion. In *Friday The 13th* (1980), Mrs. Voorhees (Betsy Palmer) hides under a bed and kills a young man with a spear that pierces the mattress and goes straight through his throat. In *Halloween 2* (1981), a Nurse gets a hypodermic needle in the neck; the blood is then drained from her body via a transfusion tube. More recently, in *Urban Legend* (1998), a revenge-seeking psychopath turns to society's grislier folktales (e.g., The Backseat Axe Murderer, The Fraternity House Massacre, The Microwaved Pet) for murderous inspiration. In each of these cases, and in dozens of other ones that could be cited, what makes the acts of violence *artistic* in nature is not so much the creative use or display of the victims' bodies as the sheer ingenuity and showmanship exhibited by the murderers in committing their crimes- an ingenuity and showmanship which elicits a complex and at least partially aesthetic response from viewers. Beyond this, and especially for fans of body horror, gore and 'splatter' movies (who discuss scenes such as those cited above as instances of profilmic special-effects wizardry), the auteurist position discussed above is occupied not so much by the director-linked-to-the-camera's-gaze as by the celebrated make-up artists and f/x designers and technicians-Tom Savini, Rick Baker, Rob Bottin, Bob Keen and others-who continually devise and employ new tools in order 'to picture grievous physical wounds and mutilations in greater, more lurid and convincing detail than ever before.' [28]

It is worth noting that in a number of slasher films (though less so in the *gialli* [29]), the spectacle of violent death crosses over from 'serious' artistic

performance into the realm of satire or black comedy. In *Friday The 13th, Part V: A New Beginning* (1985), Freddy dispatches one of his teenage victims by stuffing a lit flare into his mouth. In the sixth instalment of *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, misleadingly titled *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (1991), a videogame addict becomes a character in one of his own games; Freddy, joystick in hand, beats the 'high score' by killing him. Five years later, in Wes Craven's slasher send-up *Scream*, the killer plays a game of 'horror movie trivia' with one of his female victims, disembowelling her boyfriend when she fails to answer a particularly tricky question. This satirical spin on the murder-as-artistic-performance trope is in a sense characteristic of the postmodern treatment of cinematic horror generally, whereby audience overfamiliarity with character types and narrative conventions is offset (in theory, if not always in practice) by the knowing laughter generated from self-referential dialogue and plot devices. [30]

In the neo-slasher film in particular, the largely interchangeable bad guys and gals-along with their directors-seem to be engaged in some sort of intertextual killing competition, in which top prize goes to the most creative or well-conceived murder and the results are determined by comparing box-office take and the total number of sequels generated. Whether the artistic performance in question is serious or satirical, however, the rule of thumb here is that it is never enough *just* to kill- that is way too easy, and apparently way too boring.

Perhaps the most interesting take on the monster-as-corrupt-artist metaphor is to be found in the other group of films analogizing murder with artistic performance. For here, the act of murder takes on the aura of a performance-art piece. *Peeping Tom* and *Manhunter* belong in this group, if one considers the *manner* in which Mark Lewis and Francis Dollarhyde kill as interesting and self-consciously stylised as the actual recordings they make of those killings. Three additional and diverse examples appear below:

*A Clockwork Orange* (1971):

Though Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of the 1962 Anthony Burgess novel may occupy a position on the fringes of the horror genre, the scene in which Alex DeLarge (Michael McDowell) stomps on the body of a helpless old man while performing 'Singin' in the Rain'- complete with cane and phallic-nosed face mask- is as disturbing and perversely/sadistically enjoyable as anything to be found in a hard-core slasher. By combining the conventions of the musical (a song-and-dance number) with those of the horror movie (a home invasion and the protracted beating of a defenseless victim), uniting the jubilant lyrics of a familiar song with images of brutality and ultra-violence, this scene effectively challenges the idea that traditional aesthetic opposites such as culture and nature, civility and wildness need occupy wholly different experiential spheres.

*Theatre Of Blood* (1973):

Well-known thespian Edward Lionheart (Vincent Price) fakes his own death after being snubbed by a group of London theatre critics for the Actor-of-the-Year award. Some years later, he embarks on a bloody mission of revenge. With the help of his devoted daughter and a group of social outcasts, Lionheart stages performances of a number of Shakespeare's plays, using the unsuspecting critics as real-life victims in the Bard's dramatic murder scenes. Just as critics have the power to 'kill' with their unsympathetic reviews, *Theatre Of Blood* argues that actors can kill (quite literally) through their art. And so we watch Lionheart cut the head off of one critic and place it in his own wife's bed, as per *Cymbeline*. In another scene, taken from *Richard III*, Lionheart's cast drowns a critic in a drum of wine. Despite its campy, ironic sensibility, Douglas Hickox's film deserves ample credit for returning Shakespeare to his low-art roots and exposing him as one of our greatest horror playwrights.

### *The Silence Of The Lambs:*

Lecter's escape from prison two-thirds of the way through this film stands as the high-water mark of performance art murder. After putting on a cassette tape of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, Lecter manages to escape from the handcuffs his guards place upon him when they enter his cell during dinner. Just as the diegetic music reaches a crescendo, he jumps up, cuffs one of the guards to the door and tears a chunk of flesh from the other's cheek. He then begins hitting the first guard in the head over and over again with a police club, looking every bit like a conductor directing his orchestra on stage (all we see at this point is Lecter swinging the baton, a look of rapture on his face). Finally, with fresh blood on his mouth and two inert bodies behind him, Lecter stands in front of the tape player and waves his hand to the music. Freeland calls Lecter a 'great master of spectacle,' one who 'operates with a Nietzschean aesthetic all his own.' [31] And the solemn grandeur of this scene provides ample support for Joel Black's thesis that 'if any human act evokes the aesthetic experience of the sublime, certainly it is the act of murder. ...[I]f murder can be experienced aesthetically, the murderer can in turn be regarded as a kind of artist-a performance artist or anti-artist who's speciality is not creation but destruction.' [32]

### III

What lies behind this profound shift in the horror genre's dominant aesthetic metaphor? And what, if anything, are we justified in asserting about the impact or influence of the monster-as-corrupt-artist metaphor on the genre's young and impressionable fan base? It is apparent that the previous era's naive, misguided and politically incorrect equation of monstrosity with artistic failure has been largely outmoded (though one suspects it will never be eliminated). The question remains, however, as to whether modern horror cinema's fascination with portraying monsters as artists, murder as an art form, is a change in sensibility for the better, socially speaking. Here the preceding discussion dovetails with larger ongoing, often acrimonious debates concerning the aestheticisation of violence in contemporary filmmaking practice, spanning a number of different genres (e.g., action, comedy, war) and national traditions (e.g., Hollywood, Hong Kong, Latin America). [33]

In 1948, W.H. Auden wrote that 'murder is the act of disruption by which innocence is lost' and 'the aesthetic and the ethical are put in opposition.' [34] We have here an insight which can be traced as far back as Friedrich Schiller in the early nineteenth century, and which receives its most eloquent defence in the writings of Thomas De Quincey. In his 1827 essay, 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts,' De Quincey argues that 'everything in this world has two handles. Murder, for instance, may be laid hold of by its moral handle..., and *that*, I confess, is its weak side; or it may also be treated *aesthetically*, as the Germans call it-that is, in relation to good taste.' [35] Since that time, authors and poets as historically and culturally diverse as André Gide, Oscar Wilde, Jack Abbott, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Yukio Mishima, Marcel Schwob and Gregor von Rezzori have sought to follow De Quincey's advice. And when the human-like monsters populating such recent films as *Halloween*, *Manhunter*, *Se7en*, *Theatre Of Blood*, *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Silence Of The Lambs* (to name just a few) turn murder into an artistic product, an artistic performance or some bizarre combination of the two, consumers of these fictions are once again encouraged, occasionally forced, to acknowledge a side of themselves they normally keep hidden, even from themselves- a side that enjoys, appreciates and admires the display of creative killings.

It is crucial to note that the transformation which took place within the horror genre around the time of *Psycho's* and *Peeping Tom's* release in 1960 was only one small event in a much broader social, cultural and artistic movement. To

return to the scene in *White Of The Eye* discussed above: What makes Detective Mendoza so sure that what he is looking at is a work of art? After all, it is certainly not something most of us would be inclined to call beautiful. Mendoza's likely response to such a question would be, first, to point out that beauty is in the eye of the beholder-monsters and serial killers may well possess an aesthetic 'sense' even when they lack any semblance of a moral code-and second, that an artwork need not be 'beautiful' according to any traditional understanding of the word to *be* art. Aesthetic experience comes in a wide variety of forms, after all, and some are a great deal less pleasurable than others. The work of such modern and postmodern artists as Jackson Pollock, Willem De Kooning and Andy Warhol, and more recently, of Douglas Gordon, Zoe Leonard and Cindy Sherman testify in various ways and degrees to this claim. (It is worth mentioning here that Sherman's 1997 film *Office Killer* centres on a female serial killer who keeps the corpses of her victims in her basement, where she manipulates them, positions them and plays with them as if they were human dolls. [36] Rarely in horror cinema are women depicted as artistic murderers rather than as diegetic audiences for murder-as-art exhibits put on by men; more typically, female killers in the genre are portrayed as hysterical, messy and out-of-control in their violent activity. [37]) The radical shift we have traced in the horror genre's dominant aesthetic metaphor could thus be held to stem not merely from sociohistorical conditions, but from virtual revolutions in the cultural discourses and meanings of 'art' corresponding with the rise and popularisation of modern and avant-garde artistic practice. Largely as a result of these practices, 'art' itself became more open to and associated with notions of 'shock,' transgression and offensiveness, with the violation of standing cultural and conceptual categories (notably, such violations are at the heart of Carroll's theory of 'art-horror' as an emotional effect generated by fictional horror narratives) and with incongruity-just think of Duchamp's 'ready-mades,' e.g., the urinal in the art gallery-rather than with traditional notions of aesthetic technique, form and beauty. [38]

As for whether or not the monster-as-corrupt-artist metaphor is particularly liable to 'corrupt' those youthful audience members most likely to consume horror fictions, this is a question which can only even be responsibly *asked* after a great deal more theoretical work has been performed, and empirical data collected and analysed. Theoretically- and methodologically-speaking, the relative aestheticisation of violence in modern horror cinema raises (perhaps begs) important questions concerning how we define, isolate and study media violence. [39] And when it comes to empirical research, Stephen Prince has observed that 'most studies on the viewing of media violence show an aggression-inducing, rather than a cathartic, effect' on young viewers. [40] But Prince is quick to add that a number of specific 'content characteristics' have an impact on these findings. Studies suggest that post-film aggressiveness is noticeably heightened only when 1) the aggression-evoking characteristics of film victims match those of available targets in real life; 2) when aggressive behaviour within a film is rewarded; 3) when a film presents aggression as a justifiable response to some perceived insult; or 4) when little or no visible or audible signs of a victim's suffering are made available to viewers. [41] Judging from these very preliminary results, it seems reasonable to assert that what parents, politicians and other concerned citizens should focus their attention on is not the horror genre *per se*, but those films (of *whatever* genre) which manifest specific content characteristics. The prevalence of the monster-as-corrupt-artist metaphor in modern horror cinema may signify the final break of the aesthetic from the ethical, but one must look to the specific narrative and formal context in which this metaphor appears in order to justify claims concerning its impact on young viewers.

**Steven Jay Schneider** is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at Harvard University and in Cinema Studies at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. He is co-editor of *Underground USA: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon* (Wallflower Press, 2002) and *Understanding Film Genres* (McGraw-Hill); editor of *Psychoanalysis and the Horror Film: Freud's Worst Nightmares* (Cambridge University Press) and *New Hollywood Violence* (Manchester University Press); and author of *Designing Fear: An Aesthetics of Cinematic Horror* (Routledge), all forthcoming.

#### Notes:

[1] Friedrich Schiller, 'Reflections on the Use of the Vulgar and the Lowly in Works of Art' (1802), in *Aesthetical and Philosophical Essays*, vol. 1, ed. N.H. Dole (Boston: Aldine, 1910), 265: emphasis added. [back](#)

[2] Joel Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 39. [back](#)

[3] Angela Dalle Vacche, 'F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*: Romantic Painting as Horror and Desire in Expressionist Cinema,' in *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 161-96; 196. It is an interesting and difficult question precisely where vampire films as a whole fit into this classic paradigm. As Linda Schulte-Sasse remarks, following *Nosferatu*, vampires in cinema 'quickly...start having sex appeal and moving in high-class circles unrecognised. Already the Bela Lugosi film was released on Valentine's Day [1931] and highlighted an erotic appeal' (e-mail correspondence with the author: May 30, 2002).

An informal survey of the vampire subgenre seems to indicate that Schreck's Orlok is atypical (though certainly not alone) in his hideousness. As for Lugosi's *Dracula* and his kin, it is not at all clear whether their eroticised qualities (the vampire-as-suave-seducer: really a Romantic/Gothic/Byronic trope) can be unproblematically aligned with what I call the 'monster as corrupt artist' metaphor. Linda Badley points out to me that 'the Byronic vampire (as opposed to the revenant) has always been associated with Byron's reputed theatricalism, excess, womanizing, and artistic sensibility. ...This reaches its most extroverted manifestation in the rock performer as vampire (Alice Cooper, Ozzie Osbourne, David Bowie as star of *The Hunger* [1983], and Gothic rock in general), and the vampire as rock performer in Anne Rice's *Lestat*' (e-mail correspondence with author: June 2, 2002), and she cites Ken Gelder's study, *Reading the Vampire* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994) as useful in this regard. But in what sense-except for a quite extended one-can the vampire-in-general be seen as creating art through his murderous acts?

It seems more promising to explore the ways in which the outer/superficial beauty of the Gothicised vampire actually serve to mask a repulsive inner self; if anything, this leads us back to the monster as corrupt work of art. Along these lines, and for an essay which might be taken to indicate where the classic paradigm discussed above manifests itself in present-day horror cinema, see Steffen Hantke, 'Monstrosity Without a Body: Representational Strategies in the Popular Serial Killer Film,' *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, Special Issue, 'Realist Horror Cinema, Pt. II: Serial Killers' (forthcoming Fall 2002). [back](#)

[4] It is worth noting that *The Cell* was often reviewed as the work of a director coming out of the advertising/promo and music video industry; Tarsem's uniquely expressive and dynamic visual style resulted in his being given near complete artistic control over his debut film by New Line Cinema. [back](#)

[5] Dalle Vacche, 167. [back](#)

[6] I owe this formulation to Matt Hills. On sympathetic monsters, see Angela Curran, 'Aristotelian Reflections on Horror and Tragedy in *An American Werewolf in London*,' (this volume); and Murray Smith, '(A)moral Monstrosity,' in *The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg*, ed. Michael Grant (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 69-83. [back](#)

[7] As Matt Hills notes, according to another, more 'literalist' line of thinking about media effects, it is the realist force of certain representations that is held to be particularly problematic. This leads one to wonder whether the diegetic and directorial 'staging' of murder in recent horror films, which serves precisely to mark it out as a stylised art object rather than a realist representation, thereby makes it *less* rather than *more* likely that such acts of violence would/could be considered as emulatable by audiences. Although I do not explore or speculate on the validity of this argument in what follows, I believe it can be taken as indirect support for my own conclusions below. [back](#)

[8] Subsequent variations on this theme can be found in Donald Cammell's *White Of The Eye* (1988), Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995), and Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *La Cité Des Enfants Perdus* (*The City of Lost Children*, 1995). [back](#)

[9] William Rothman, *Hitchcock-The Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 335. [back](#)

[10] Rothman, 340. [back](#)

[11] André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image,' (1945) in *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 9-10. [back](#)

[12] A variation on this theme (again courtesy of Anthony Wong) occurs in *The Ebola Syndrome* (1996). For more on Hong Kong 'Category 3' horror, and these two films in particular, see Michael Hoover and Lisa Stokes, 'Enfant Terrible: The Terrifying, Wonderful World of Anthony Wong,' in *Fear Without Frontiers: Horror Cinema Across the Globe*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Guildford: FAB Press, forthcoming 2002), and Tony Williams, 'Hong Kong Social Horror: Tragedy and Farce in Category 3,' *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, Special Issue, 'Realist Horror Cinema, Part I: Dimensions of the Real' (forthcoming Summer 2002). [back](#)

[13] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 28. [back](#)

[14] Two other films which employ this theme are *Latin Quarter* (1946) and *Il Mostro di Venezia* (aka *The Embalmer*, 1966). It is also worth comparing/contrasting *A Bucket of Blood*-remade by Corman's production company in 1995 as *The Death Artist*-with *Génesis* (1998), a Spanish horror short by Nacho Cerdà. In this latter film (not at all a comedy), an artist attempts to work through the pain surrounding his wife's death in a car accident by creating a sculpture in her image. Slowly but surely, the sculpture begins to bleed through cracks in the clay, while the artist's own flesh mutates and crumbles into pieces. [back](#)

[15] The documentary *Collectors* (2000), by Julian Hobbs, examines this trend in great detail. See Maitland McDonagh's interview with Hobbs in the October 26-November 2, 2000 edition of *Time Out* (New York): 109. [back](#)

[16] According to Badley, 'in exploring the relations between horror and auteurism,' recent films about horror directors and the making of their signature movies-including Elias Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000, about F.W. Murnau), Bill Condon's *Gods and Monsters* (1998, about James Whale), Tim Burton's *Ed Wood* (1994) and Chris Smith's *American Movie* (1999, about Mark Borschardt)-'expose the deep structure of the auteur theory, literalizing a view of the auteur as overreaching scientist (Murnau), artist (Whale), would-be or anti-artist (Wood, Borschardt) and the making of a signature film as a transgressive act with a pathological origin and subtext.' Badley, 'The Darker Side of Genius: The (Horror) Auteur Meets Freud's Theory,' in *Freud's Worst Nightmares: Psychoanalysis and the Horror Film*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2003). [back](#)

[17] Marguerite LaCaze, 'The Mourning of Loss in *The Sixth Sense*,' *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, Special Issue, 'Realist Horror Cinema, Pt. I: Dimensions of the Real' (forthcoming Summer 2002). The quote refers to Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 17. [back](#)

[18] Linda Badley, e-mail correspondence with author: June 2, 2002. Note: in Thomas Harris's 1981 novel *Red Dragon*, from which Michael Mann's film was adapted, 'Dollarhyde' is spelled 'Dolarhyde.' I have kept the film spelling for the sake of consistency. [back](#)

[19] This paragraph is excerpted in slightly revised form from my essay 'Killing in Style: The Aestheticization of Violence in Donald Cammell's *White of the Eye*,' *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*, May 2001: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/articles/killing-in-style.htm> [back](#)

[20] For an extended take on the relations between these two films, see David Kalat, 'Seven vs. *Dr. Phibes*,' *Midnight Marquee Monsters* 61 (Fall 1999): 36-42. Also see Rick Worland, 'Faces Behind the Mask: Vincent Price, *Dr. Phibes*, and the Horror Genre in Transition,' *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, Special Issue, 'Realist Horror Cinema, Part II: Serial Killers' (forthcoming Fall 2002). [back](#)

[21] Stephen Mulhall, *On Film* (London: Routledge, 2002), 114. For extended analysis of *Se7en*, see Richard Dyer's BFI Modern Classic devoted to the film (London: BFI Publishing, 1999). [back](#)

[22] Jeffrey Sconce, 'Spectacles of Death: Identification, Reflexivity, and Contemporary Horror,' in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 116. [back](#)

[23] Linda Schulte-Sasse, 'The "mother" of all horror movies: Dario Argento's *Suspiria*,' *Kinoeye: A Fortnightly Journal of Film in the New Europe* 2.11 (June 10, 2002): <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/schultesasse11.html>. [back](#)

[24] Sconce, 116. [back](#)

[25] Correspondence with the author, July 19, 2002. [back](#)

[26] Cynthia Freeland, 'Realist Horror,' in *Philosophy and Film*, ed. Cynthia Freeland and Thomas Wartenberg (New York: Routledge, 1995). [back](#)

[27] Amy Taubin, 'The Allure of Decay,' *Sight and Sound* (January 1996); reprinted in *Action/Spectacle Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. Jose Arroyo (London: BFI, 2000; 150-53), 152. It would be well worth comparing/contrasting *Henry* and *Se7en* with the Hong Kong Category 3 horror film *Dr. Lamb* (1992). Here, unlike *Henry* but like *Se7en*, the artistic agenda in question can be attributed both to the director (in some highly-stylised murder sequences) and to the film's serial killing taxi driver (who takes glossy photographs of his female victims, whose bodies he carefully arranges after death; and who videotapes himself engaging in necrophilic sex acts). For more on *Dr. Lamb*, see Tony Williams, 'Hong Kong Social Horror: Tragedy and Farce in Category 3,' *op. cit.* [back](#)

[28] Stephen Prince, 'Violence and Psychophysiology in Horror Cinema,' in *Freud's Worst Nightmares*, *op. cit.* [back](#)

[29] For a useful discussion of the *giallo* tradition, see Gary Needham, 'Playing with genre: an introduction to the Italian *giallo*,' *Kinoeye: A Fortnightly Journal of Film in the New Europe* 2.11 (June 10, 2002): <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.html> [back](#)

[30] For more on *Scream* and its ilk, see Steven Jay Schneider, 'Kevin Williamson and the Rise of the Neo-Stalker,' *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities* 19.2 (Winter/Spring 2000): 73-87. [back](#)

[31] Freeland, 'Realist Horror,' 132. [back](#)

[32] Black, 14. [back](#)

[33] The literature here is enormous, and continues to grow. See, e.g., Martin Barker and Kate Brooks, *Judge Dredd: Its Friends, Fans and Foes* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998); *III Effects: The Media/Violence Debate*, ed. Martin Barker and Julian Petley (London: Routledge, 1997); Stephen Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); and *New Hollywood Violence*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2003). [back](#)

[34] W.H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage,' in *The Dyer's Hand, and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 150-53. Originally published in 1948. [back](#)

[35] Thomas De Quincey, 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1827), in *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey, Volume XIII* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1890), 13. [back](#)

[36] Grotesque and uncanny doll imagery is also a major theme of Sherman's photography and sculpture. [back](#)

[37] See Steven Jay Schneider, 'Barbara, Julia, Myra, Carol, and Nell: Diagnosing Female Madness in British Horror Cinema,' in *British Horror Cinema*, ed. Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley (London: Routledge, 2002), 117-30; and Schneider, 'The Madwomen in our Movies: Female Psycho-Killers in US Horror Cinema,' in *Killing Women*, ed. Annette Burfoot and Susan Lord (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, forthcoming 2003). Interestingly, this conventional and unequal representation of gender does not seem to hold for other genres. As Susan Felleman argues in a forthcoming essay, many Hollywood films of the 1980s—including Martin Scorsese's *After Hours* (1985), Ivan Reitman's *Legal Eagles* (1986) and Dennis Hopper's *Backtrack* (1989)—effectively 'conflate

representations of women and contemporary art, and of women artists particularly, with danger: ranging from explosive passion, to kidnapping, fire, sadomasochistic acts of aggression, stalking, paralysis, murder and annihilation. In all instances, the themes of art, femininity and danger are imbricated and co-implicated.' Susan Felleman, 'Playing with fire: women, art and danger in American movies of the 1980s,' in *New Hollywood Violence, op. cit.* [back](#)

[38] Thanks once again to Matt Hills for his assistance articulating this point. [back](#)

[39] See especially the work of Martin Barker here, e.g., his essay 'Violence Redux,' in *New Hollywood Violence, op. cit.*, and his co-edited (with Julian Petley) collection, *III Effects: the Media-Violence Debate* (London: Routledge, 1997). [back](#)

[40] Prince, 113. [back](#)

[41] *Ibid.*, 114-15. [back](#)