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Are You Ready for the Country: Cult Cinema and Rural Excess

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List of Papers

INTRODUCTION

From early moonshine movies depicting regional rule breakers, to backwoods survivalist fictions such as *Deliverance* (1972), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *Southern Comfort* (1981), *The Devil's Rejects* (2005) and beyond, the American countryside and its inhabitants have come to evoke humour, horror and morbid fascination as expressed through a range of cult film genres. In so doing, these narratives draw on wider conceptions of the rural poor that sees the regionally dispossessed as tagged through multiple and derogatory labels that frequently become associated with the term 'white trash'. Such is the prominence of these rural conceptions that it is possible to argue to argue that white trash imagery has come to dominate film traditions from the early 20th century onwards. Here, the longstanding myth of the rural American 'hick' has inspired a wide variety of cinematic cycles from sentimental dramas and ribald comedies to action film franchises and race conflict narratives, with a regular flow of titles being produced between the 1930s and 1960s. Arguably, the most prolific era of white trash cinema emerged in the 1970s. Here, images of debased rurality circulated most widely across a wide variety of cult and 'exploitation' film releases. Within this body of work, the rural landscape was recast as a foreboding terrain whose inhabitants exact retribution against the urban 'outsiders' for the wider bonds of social exclusion that have been inflicted on the rural dweller. The influence of these 1970s productions has themselves resulted in the further circulation of degenerate, rural white trash tropes across more contemporary sets of film releases.

Beyond America's fixation with its rural own, Europe has also used cult film imagery to acknowledge regional splits and social divisions. These tensions have fed into a range of representations, myths and stereotypes that extended from eugenic case-study to exploitation cinema.

In addition to these territories, other global cultures also frequently construct the rural space as a site of either erotic fulfilment or foreboding in a range of unsettling and iconic genres that warrant further investigation. In order to explore cult cinema's continued fascination with the rural, this edition of the *Cine-Excess* journal is devoted to global case-studies that explore classic and contemporary representations of the countryside, outback and its inhabitants, whilst also providing direct commentaries from some of the cult filmmakers responsible for these creations.

Our examination begins with an analysis of the unsettling natural elements implicit within the Australian outback, as discussed in the article 'Horror Rises Up: Nature's Revenge in Ozsploitation Cinema'. Here, author Lindsay Hallam considers a range of films released between 1971 and 2008 that all depict the Australian landscape as seeking to overthrow and punish those

settlers deemed as colonial and exploitative. Although these productions figure this revenge of nature through a variety of differing animal species, they all retain an incisive commentary on the historical and abusive treatment of Australian landscape by its white settlers. As a result, Hallam employs the term of Ozploitation as 'eco-horror' to describe a cycle of cult films that focus on the threatening potential of the Australian outback, and can also be distinguished from more dominant American 'revenge of nature' traditions. The nationally specific nature of these outback dramas is then detailed by the author through an analysis of Colin Eggleston's 1978 film *Long Weekend*. Here, nature and the outback enact a slow and systematic campaign of revolt against a bickering couple, whose marital malaise is figured through their wanted destruction of the rural space. Although the film configures its eco-horror revenge through a variety of insects, birds and mammals, it is manmade weaponry and modern machinery that finally lead to the couple's demise. This further underlines Hallam's view that the Ozploitation eco-cycle offers a cutting critique of the white settlers' attempts to master and dominate the Australian landscape, which ultimately signals that a "history of colonisation is actually one of invasion and exploitation".

Although Hallam's article seeks to disentangle the Australian 'revenge of nature' narrative from its American counterpart, Sarah Pogoda's submission actually considers the close connections between Tobe Hooper's American release of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and more recent European renditions of regional debasement that followed. Writing in the article 'Germany is not Texas. Finding Reunified Germany in the Rural: Christoph Schlingensief's *The German Chain Saw Massacre*', Paogoda considers Schlingensief's film in light of wider tensions surrounding region and nationhood, whilst also offering a comparative analysis of the visual elements across both texts. The author begins by considering the production, marketing and academic reception of the *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, noting how the film's release saw it became indelibly linked with both national tensions occurring in the 1970s, as well as regional aberrations relating to its Texan locality. It is a similar national/regional focus that the author finds as underpinning Christoph Schlingensief's release, which can be viewed as a direct response to the country's national reunification in 1990. Indeed, *The German Chain Saw Massacre* even focuses on an ill-fated East German group who are waylaid and killed by a cannibalistic family from the Western region whist they journey across the newly reintegrated nation. By dwelling on a recently aligned culture that exposes the horrors previously concealed within its isolated territories, Schlingensief reveals his cynicism towards the ideological structure of beliefs that underlie such processes of German nationalism. This leads Pogoda to a concluding analysis of the ways in

Schlingensief's film distinguishes its spaces of regional depravity from Tobe Hooper's American template. Specifically, by relocating its horrors from the countryside to Germany's industrial zones, the film implies that the nation's centres of socio-economic productivity are actually sites of oppression, exploitation and insatiable consumption.

While Pagoda's analysis draws attention to the ways in which the white trash monster comes to symbolise wider issues of national unification, it is the pseudo-scientific principles underpinning the construction of this feared figure that concerns Shellie McMurdo's contribution. Writing in the article 'We Are Never Going in the Woods Again: The Horror of the Underclass White Monster in American and British Horror', McMurdo examines cross-cultural constructions of rural aberration against the pervasive influence of the eugenics movement that flourished in both Britain and America. In an incisive opening section, McMurdo outlines how 19th century fears around the unabated growth of the poor and dispossessed fed the development of the movement, whose reach extended into the 20th century to encompass 'progressive' educational and social reform measures around birth control and parenting techniques alongside more direct state interventions that included UK legislation aimed at segmenting the intellectually inferior from its social elite. While these statutory acts aided the development of a white trash typology (defined by distinct physiological traits, kinship values, genetic patterns and moral codes), it also enforced the myth that these marginal groups could be easily segmented from the more mainstream and intellectually developed urban dweller. While these marked socio-economic distinctions remain central to conflicts frequently played out in backwoods American horror titles, McMurdo applies them to a British cult film: *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008). The author contextualises the film's representation of a violent white trash subculture terrorising a middle class couple against wider media panics surrounding feral gangs circulating in the UK at the time of its release. Such press reporting (which traded on the non-human, animalistic tendencies of these wayward youth groups, as well as their defective family/parenting structures) confirms the continuation of eugenics frames of interpretation across more contemporary cultural phenomena. For McMurdo, *Eden Lake* provides "a visual checklist, a pedigree chart similar to those used by the eugenicists." The film not only functions to separate its feral white trash aggressors from their potential middle class victims but also reveals eugenics belief structures as evident across British cult film imagery.

Whereas McMurdo provides new insight in to British variants of the white trash myth, Jon Towlson profiles an American director whose films offer significant representations of this feared figure. Writing in the article

‘Bad S**t, Killer Worms and Deadly Dawns: The Cult Cinema and Rural Excess of Jeff Lieberman’, the author argues that while Lieberman’s output is often dwarfed by horror auteurs such as George A. Romero and Wes Craven, his work retains the subversive use of genre imagery and cutting social commentary often attributed to those other filmmakers. To substantiate this interpretation, Towlson provides a consideration of three of Lieberman’s most iconic titles: *Squirm* (1976)*, Blue Sunshine* (1978) and *Just Before Dawn* (1981), arguing that these titles advance genre constructions of rural communities and seventies subcultures alike. As Lieberman’s first feature film, *Squirm* provided a reboot to the revenge of nature horror cycle popular during the decade, through its focus on earthworms made monstrous by a felled electricity pylon. Despite the film’s visceral reputation, for Towlson it is the aspects of place and location that reveal a more nuanced understanding of its core concerns. By shifting *Squirm* from its original intended New England setting to that of Georgia, the narrative underscores conflicts between rural and urban communities as its key thematic consideration. Here, the outbreak of the earthworms killing spree coincides with the arrival of an urban outsider, keen to exploit antiquities contained within the rural locale. These actions, as well as his participation in a romance that further disrupts the social fabric of the community, establishing a set of city/country conflicts that Lieberman would later explore in *Just Before Dawn.* Often deemed as Lieberman’s lost release due its conflicted production and release history, *Just Before Dawn* eschews the dominant characteristics of the slasher trend to focus more on the stark inequalities between urban and rural communities that the film depicts. While the film’s dispossessed rural killers remain “stereotypically portrayed as impoverished, primitive, inbred and morally degenerate”, they are very much matched by an unappealing group of urban dwellers defined by their obsessions with consumption and materiality, thus reinforcing a set of moral ambiguities that can be seen to pervade the film and Lieberman’s wider output.

To compliment Jon Towlson’s submission, we are also delighted to publish an interview with Jeff Lieberman that was especially prepared for the current edition of the *Cine-Excess* journal. In the article ‘Out of the Blue (Sunshine): An Interview with Director Jeff Lieberman’, the filmmaker responds to the interpretations outlined in Towson’s article, alongside wider critical accounts of his work. Lieberman begins by discussing how his creative talents were influenced by his formative training at film school in New York, as well as considering on how this early work fits with wider trends in 1970s exploitation cinema production. As well as responding to the continued fascination with the rural images that dominate many of his most iconic narratives, Lieberman also considers how these white trash

interpretations can actually obscure the gendered focus that he feels underpins films such as *Just Before Dawn.* Alongside a forthright dialogue surrounding political interpretations of his films, Lieberman concludes the interview by contextualising his first feature film *Squirm* in light of the current vogue for seventies horror remakes.

In our second submission dedicated to representations of the Australian outback, Renee Middlemost considers two 1980s cult releases that reconstitute the landscape from a symbol of national security to a site of terror. Writing in the article 'A Monster of our Very Own: *Razorback*, *The Marsupials* and the Australian Outback', Middlemost notes that despite their central focus on rural space *Razorback* (Russell Mulcahy, 1984) and *Howling III: The Marsupials* (Philippe Mora, 1987) represent two prominent examples that have largely been excluded from critical debates around national cinema. The author links the marginality of these releases to their reliance on the controversial 10BA system of tax subsidies offered to film investors during the 1980s. Although this government fund facilitated a rapid increase in productions throughout the decade, the generic nature of the films it created, as well as their reliance on international casting led to them frequently being dismissed as inauthentic constructions of Australian culture and identity. Despite such critical reservations, Middlemost goes on to provide a convincing analysis of how both films utilize this marginal status to demonstrate a "double transgression" which employs imagery of monstrous untamed animals and the figure of the disruptive outsider to comment upon the settlers' inability to contain and master the Australian lands they colonised. In *Razorback* this double transgression motif fuses the story of a grieving grandfather seeking vengeance against the wild boar that killed a young relative with an American activist seeking to document the inhumane treatment of the nation's animals. Although this disruptive outsider also falls victim to the untamed outback creature, her demise is as a direct result of the persecution and molestation endured at the hands of plant workers responsible for the mistreatment of animals she is seeking to expose. Thus, the double transgression device functions in the narrative to undercut constructions of civility and savagery within an Australian context. This feature is further explored through Middlemost's analysis of *Howling III: The Marsupials*, which even more explicitly links the untamed rural space and the disruptive outsider to longstanding tensions within the Australian condition. Here, white anthropological investigations into lycanthropy coalesce with the plight of a young heroine who seeks refuse from an abusive set of rural bonds through a relationship with an American filmmaker. Events that subsequently unfold not only reveal the true nature of the heroine's untamed powers, but also foreground the power of ritualistic belief structures often ignored by the film's empowered white

protagonists. If these themes confirm how Australian cult film releases utilise the imagery of the untamed outback to provide unsettling commentaries on the nation's past, then these strategies remain central to Middlemost's revaluation of such film titles, which concludes by evaluating the role of contemporary festivals and exhibition platforms as additional circuits through which to review these texts.

While Middlemost concludes her analysis by considering how festivals enhance the cult status of outback horror films, is the rural exhibition practices and viewing patterns that occupy Ekky Imanjaya's submission. Writing in the article 'Entertaining the Villagers: Rural Audiences, Travelling Cinema, and Exploitation Movies in Indonesia', Imanjaya provides a case-study of the travelling cinema (or *layar tancap*) circuit that became popular in Indonesia during the authoritarian 'New Order' era. Here, mobile film screenings for rural based audiences functioned as a direct challenge to the military and political orthodoxy that dominated between 1966 and 1998. The types of production that circulated in these rural contexts alternated between what Imanjaya terms as the "Legend genre" (which recycled popular myths into spectacular action/supernatural narratives) and the *Kumpeni* genre (that offered more historically specific renditions of the colonial conflicts suffered under Dutch rule). The adaptation of real life trauma for populist entertainment is further confirmed by the additional "Japanese Period Genre" that the author identifies as reflecting Indonesia's period of wartime occupation, with more internationally oriented productions (combining horror and sexploitation traits) also being marketed to rural audiences through the *layar tancap* platform. Imanjaya does concede that wider classifications of these Indonesian pulp cinema texts as 'cult' did not begin to circulate until the early 2000s, when a range of film titles were marketed to international audiences on the basis of their 'exotic' mysticism, generic hybridity and balletic scenes of violence. However, despite differences in content and classification, the author offers a convincing consideration of *layar tancap* as an Indonesian rendition of midnight movie phenomenon that helped popularise cult material in other global regions. Indeed, the grindhouse exhibition comparison appears confirmed by official Indonesian definitions of *layar tancap* as a "second class" product that was consumed outside standard cinema venues: "usually the location was an outdoor arena such as a football field." Although there is evidence of *layar tancap* screening sessions being exploited by the military regime for propagandist purposes, Imanjaya concludes that these ideological processes remained negotiated and resisted by rural audiences, who favoured the subversive mixture of uncensored film titles that were consumed in a subcultural viewing environment that this form of mobile cinema afforded. As a result, *layar tancap* and their rural audiences reveal

such Indonesian film viewing patterns as a site of cultural conflict between authoritarian state bodies and Indonesia's resistant regional cinemagoers.

Completing this edition of the journal are reviews of the Tim Burton conference held at the University of Wolverhampton, alongside a dialogue surrounding around the recent Cultographies volume on *I Spit on Your Grave*, conducted between its author David Maguire and Professor Martin Barker. Accompanying the review of Maguire's volume we are delighted to host additional interviews with Jamie Bernadette and Maria Olsen, two lead performers from the 2019 release *I Spit on Your Grave Déjà Vu*. Here, Bernadette and Olsen further reflect on some of the issues raised in David Maguire's book, while both also discuss the continued fascination of the white trash monster to the *I Spit on Your Grave* franchise.

Down Under Rises Up: Nature's Revenge in Ozploitation Cinema

Lindsay Hallam

Abstract

The Australian outback is a place of isolation. Harsh and uninviting, it seems to hold within it the ghosts of past crimes and a will to destroy anyone who dare try to colonise and contain it. Yet, for the past two hundred years many have sought to dominate this land and in Australian horror cinema the land is beginning to take its revenge. 'Ozploitation' films such as *Wake in Fright* (1971), *Long Weekend* (1978), *Roadgames* (1981), *Razorback* (1984), *Fair Game* (1986), and *Dark Age* (1987), as well as post-2000 horror films such as *Black Water* (2007), *Rogue* (2007), and *Dying Breed* (2008), often have characters battling against the unforgiving environment and its inhabitants. In retaliation against the exploitation and abuse perpetrated by these white settlers, these films present nature as a presence that seeks to avenge and punish past wrongs.

Through the analysis of several key films from Ozploitation past and present, this article will investigate how these films subvert many common Australian stereotypes and question Australian's national identity as one that is predominantly white, male and rural, demonstrating that nonhuman animals and landscape play an important role in commenting on, and embodying, national history and identity.

Keywords: Ozploitation, Eco-horror, Nature, Nonhuman, Animals, Australia, Revenge.

Introduction

The Australian outback is a place of isolation. Harsh and uninviting, it seems to hold within it the ghosts of past crimes and a will to destroy anyone who dare try to colonise and contain it. Yet, for the past two hundred years many have sought to dominate this land and in Australian horror cinema the land is beginning to take its revenge. 'Ozploitation' films such as *Wake in Fright* (1971), *Long Weekend* (1978), *Roadgames* (1981), *Razorback* (1984), *Fair Game* (1986), *Dark Age* (1987), and *The Howling III: The Marsupials* (1987), as well as post-2000 horror films such as *Wolf Creek* (2005), *Black Water* (2007), *Rogue* (2007), and *Dying Breed* (2008), often have characters battling against the unforgiving environment and its inhabitants (both human and animal). In retaliation against the exploitation and abuse perpetrated by these white settlers these films present nature as a presence that seeks to avenge and punish past wrongs.

In many of these films nature's revenge is embodied and expressed through an animal, usually a large predator such as the crocodiles in *Dark Age, Rogue* and *Black Water*, or mutated, hybrid creatures such as the giant pig in *Razorback* or the were-thylacines of *The Howling III*. In Colin Eggleston's 1978 film *Long Weekend*, the animals are still agents of vengeance, but they seem to be in service of a larger force, the force of Nature itself: Gaia, or Mother Nature or mother-Earth.

The evocation of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis' Gaia theory suggests that the film presents Earth itself is as a single organism, with humanity therefore portrayed as a primary threat to the organism's survival. Everett de Roche, the screenwriter of the film, confirms this view stating that "(n)ature is supposed to be the hero of the piece",[1] and that the premise of the story "was that Mother Earth has her own auto-immune system, so when humans start behaving like cancer cells, she attacks."[2] Yet, humans are more than a viral force that is just following its own nature, they are villains, evildoers who must be made to pay for their actions. As the tagline on *Long Weekend's* movie poster declares: 'Their crime was against nature… nature found them guilty.' The film then depicts nature meting out its sentence against those who it has found guilty, specifically, a couple from an Australian city, Peter and Marcia, who go camping over the long weekend.

Heroes and villains: Poster for The *Long Weekend* (1978)

Before examining *Long Weekend* in more detail I will first discuss the specific sub-genre of eco-horror, in which concerns and fears about humanity's destruction of the environment are expressed and often embodied by a monstrous animal. The animal's monstrosity is typically the result of human interference, and as such becomes a figure of sympathy even as it wreaks havoc on the human protagonists. Australia has produced many eco-horror films, and I will argue that this prevalence reveals a guilt and shame associated with Australia's colonial history in regards to the resulting destruction of the land and the extinction of animal species. I will explore how the land

itself in these films becomes sentient and aware of human transgressions, whilst the humans themselves remain ignorant. This ignorance is embodied by the gangs of rampaging men that commonly feature in Ozploitation films, who victimise nonhuman animals and women alike. This conflation of femininity and nature is common in eco-horror films, a notion I will examine in relation to films such as *Fair Game* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). A further invasion of sorts will also be considered in regards to the impact of American culture not only on the making of Australian films, but also in terms of how American characters are represented as repeating the sins of the original colonial invaders by continuing to use and exploit the land. Finally, I will return to discussion and analysis of *Long Weekend*, exploring how the film presents nature's revenge as one that is righteous – and inevitable.

Ozploitation as eco-horror

Long Weekend is an early example of what has come to be known as 'Eco-horror', a sub-genre of horror cinema which features nature running amok, often in the form of attacking animals or natural disasters and extreme weather. Films with environmental themes and messages about conservation and protection have become more frequent in the past decade, for example, *The Last Winter* (2006), *The Happening* (2008), and *The Bay* (2012). The beginnings of this trend can be traced back to the 1970s, a time of many environmental crises such as deforestation and species extinction, the problems associated with nuclear waste and radiation (culminating in the tragic accident on Three Mile Island), increasing pollution, and freak events such as occurrences of acid rain. Bernice M. Murphy, in her book *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness*, explores the basic formula of the 1970s American eco-horror film, which is typically set in a small rural town that is terrorised by a rampaging animal created from the results of human folly or hubris. Despite the presence of a sympathetic human protagonist there is also an overriding sense that the animal antagonist is not purely evil, but an agent of nature's vengeance which is fighting back in self-defence.

Within these horror narratives the rampaging animal is thus positioned in the monster role, an embodiment of the liminal state between civilised humanity and instinctual, primal nature. Although the animal threat is usually vanquished and order restored, an underlying sympathy with the monstrous animal exists and often the deaths of 'deserving' humans are presented and enjoyed with a certain glee. In Stacy Alaimo's article 'Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films', it is argued that while many eco-horror monster movies confirm the hierarchy that places human society above nature, demonstrated by a "vertical semiotics"[3] in which the human environment is located above ground while monstrous nature dwells below in

subterranean underground spaces, there is a "corporeal identification" with the monster and a "resistance to the desire to demarcate, discipline and eradicate monstrous natures."[4] I will argue that this resistance exists in Ozploitation eco-horror films wherein the monstrous animal and the national landscape are represented as the righteous hero, while the human is presented as a destructive force that must be judged and sentenced for past transgressions.

Although most eco-horror films have been produced in the US there is also a tradition of such films in Australia, as Murphy explains: "Eco-horror films are most commonly found in the US and Australia, both nations established by the descendants of white settlers who set out to create a "new world" in the midst of a vast, unfamiliar, and often physically treacherous landscape occupied by resentful native inhabitants."[5] Thus, in Australian films of this type we can see an interrogation of Australian history and a confrontation with the wrongs that have been committed against the land and its native inhabitants, both human and nonhuman. The narrative of colonisation is subverted in the eco-horror film, revealing colonisation as invasion and viral contagion. Echoing de Roche's earlier statement in which Mother Nature is positioned as the hero, the land itself becomes embodied and sentient. Even Peter Weir's 1975 film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, an example of a film from the Australian New Wave, which ran in parallel to Ozploitation production, features shots in which the landscape is depicted as possessed of knowledge and of threat. In the titular picnic four young girls appear to be drawn to, nay seduced, by the all-powerful rock; repeated low-angle shots convey its overwhelming size and ancient sovereignty, a low rumbling drone suggesting a subterranean force that is ready to erupt. The land takes the girls as part of a sacrificial rite, a temporary appeasement that sends those left behind into chaos, if only because there is never a clear answer or resolution to the girls' disappearance. Nature cannot be known and it cannot be controlled.

While *Picnic at Hanging Rock* presents nature as an ethereal and mysterious influence (the girls are not taken by force), in Ozploitation films nature becomes vengeful and violent, ready to attack. In her article 'Australian Eco-horror and Gaia's Revenge: Animals, Eco-Nationalism and the "New Nature"', Catherine Simpson explores the notion of trespass in these films, positing that the humans in these films "deserve what they get."[6] For Simpson, there is a "double trespass, both cultural and ecological" as human characters invade land that is already inhabited by those who are indigenous to it, both human and nonhuman.[7] Not only do these invaders disrupt and brutalise the land through the creation of roads, farms, and tourist attractions, there are also transgressions against indigenous cultural practices and sacred sites. Simpson refers to

Greg McLean's 2007 film *Rogue*, in which a giant crocodile attacks a group of tourists on a boat after they trespass onto a waterway on sacred land. As the tour guide Kate (Radha Mitchell) acknowledges, "We're not meant to be here." As they pass through the waterway several wide shots, one from overhead, reveals the expanse of the landscape and the relative smallness and powerlessness of the boat – as well as planting the suggestion of another presence that is observing and beginning to circle in. It is eerily quiet, with only the almost inaudible sound of high-pitched strings, as close-ups of Kate and Pete, an American journalist, portray their unease. As they continue to glide through between two cliffs, one of the tourists, Simon, begins to take pictures of a drawing of a crocodile that is etched onto the rock. As he takes the photos there is the sound of indigenous music and a lone voice singing – there is no one there so the landscape itself seems to be producing the music. Simon drops the camera and looks unsettled; his taking of the photos, of treating sacred land as a tourist attraction, is a further trespass and exploitation of the land. Not only have they committed an ecological trespass by using the waterway and disrupting the area, the music also signals their cultural trespass and the breaking of indigenous laws.

The tourists in *Rogue* are not intentionally ill-willed, being drawn to the area through curiosity and fascination. In contrast, many characters found in other Ozploitation eco-horror films are portrayed as completely unsympathetic, as users and exploiters of the land. In the documentary *Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild, Untold Story of Ozploitation!* (2008), director Quentin Tarantino mentions the prevalence in Australian films of "marauding packs of bullies… [who] roam the highways looking for people to pick on, women to rape, and guys to beat up… they roam the countryside looking for people to fuck with." Certainly, in many Australian horror films these rampaging men commonly feature, and as well as looking for '*people* to fuck with' they just as often take their aggression out on the land and nonhuman animals. These men are the product of colonisation, malevolent invaders armed with guns and mechanised weapons, souped up cars and heavy utility vehicles that crush everything under their weight.

One of the most shocking scenes in any Australian film is the kangaroo hunt that takes place in Ted Kotcheff's 1971 film *Wake in Fright*, which uses actuality footage of a real hunt. The hunt takes place at night after an afternoon of male bonding and heavy drinking. The scene in question sees the film cross over into documentary, an exposé of commonplace practices that many people are unaware of. The hunt is excruciating to watch, a stark representation of human barbarity and brutality perpetrated against a native species that has become an Australian icon used in many tourist advertisements, as well as in the popular

children's television show *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo* which aired from 1968-1970. Andrew McCallum writes that during the filming of the scene "Members of the crew were shocked to find the hunters drinking during the hunt and described the event as an "orgy of killing", eventually staging a power failure to put it to an end."[8] Upon the film's release it was a commercial failure in Australia, with one audience member reportedly shouting out "That's not us!" during a screening. Actor Jack Thompson's retort to the audience member: "Sit down, mate. It is us", demonstrates how the film contains harsh truths that the Australian public were unwilling to confront. This scene reveals the stark contrast between the representations of the kangaroo in advertising and children's television (often broadcast to international audiences), and the day-to-day treatment of the animal in the Australian outback – they are not cute companions but viewed as vermin to be exterminated.

Another 'marauding pack of bullies' also shows up in Mario Andreacchio's 1986 film *Fair Game*, with kangaroos again being subject to slaughter, this time in a sanctuary run by a woman, Jessica, played by Cassandra Delaney. According to Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, in *Fair Game* "masculinity is aligned with machines, while femininity is aligned with nature."[9] Just as the men stalk and hunt the kangaroos, they begin to do the same to Jessica, but with a disturbing sexualised aspect to their attacks: they take photos of her while she sleeps naked, one of the men attempts to rape her, and in one incredibly horrifying scene they strip her and tie her up onto the front of their utility vehicle (the way she is posed is similar to the mounting of kangaroo and other animal 'trophies'). In order to combat these invaders upon her sanctuary Jessica must use their mechanised weapons against them. Heller-Nicholas rightly asserts that: "If the film's symbolic logic is to be understood correctly, the only chance nature (and the feminine) have against machines (and the masculine) is to succumb totally to its dominant order and use its power to fight it."[10] As this comment suggests, a common trope in eco-horror films is the confluence of nature and femininity, which is set in opposition to masculinity and colonialism. Although such a binary opposition is built on essentialist representations of gender, it also brings with it a darker sexual threat as *Fair Game* illustrates. The colonial masculine force does not only destroy, it commits acts of violation and exploitation in its quest for power, which are enacted on the land and on the bodies of women

The recent film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) presents the struggle of women who must flee sexual slavery by taking up arms and fighting back using tools commonly associated with masculine power. As a late instalment of the *Mad Max* franchise, a series which typifies the Ozploitation style of fast cars and extreme violence, *Fury Road* confronts head-on past representations of female victimisation and proceeds to shift

the position of women from that of victim to hero. With her mastery of cars and guns the character of Imperator Furiosa illustrates that these devices no longer belong to the domain of the male and exist in conjunction with the cultivation of the land and in balance with nature, as seen in the community of women that she is a part of. These women join Furiosa, along with Max, in a battle against the dominant masculine power that treats women as sexual slaves and breeding machines (earlier in the film Max himself is also treated similarly, as a 'blood bag' - a human who exists to provide blood for a wounded War Boy). *Mad Max: Fury Road* is thus a contemporary film that harks back to the original Ozploitation period (albeit with a much bigger budget), while also playing with the previous binary opposition that divided nature and machinery along strict gender lines.

In one respect though, *Mad Max: Fury Road* continues the Ozploitation tradition by casting two non-Australian leads, Charlize Theron and Tom Hardy. Richard Franklin's *Roadgames* from 1981 typified this trend toward international casting as its two protagonists, Quid and Hitch, are played respectively by American actors Stacy Keach and Jamie Lee Curtis. Often the casting of non-Australian actors, particularly Americans, was down to commercial interests, an attempt for the film to gain a larger international audience through Hollywood star power. Yet, this kowtowing to commercial interests was often viewed in the Australian media as a form of cultural imperialism, an American invasion of Australian cultural expression that shifts into an extra-textual discourse beyond the representation of American characters in the films themselves. Richard Franklin states that "there was some hostile press about using an American cast in Australian movies",[11] in particular from journalist Bob Ellis, who appears in *Not Quite Hollywood* sardonically exclaiming that "I felt then as now that Americans are scum and should not be let anywhere near our money." There was even an outcry from Actors Equity after the casting of Keach and Curtis, claiming that jobs were being taken away from working Australian actors.[12] Yet, the influence from Hollywood genre cinema on Ozploitation cinema is very apparent – Franklin was marketed as 'the Australian Hitchcock' (in Not Quite Hollywood Franklin describes *Roadgames* as '*Rear Window* set on a truck'), while Russell Mulcahy's *Razorback* exhibited a heightened and stylised MTV aesthetic, cultivated from Mulcahy's previous experience in music video direction.

Nods to American film making and the American market are often made begrudgingly though, with American characters in Australian films frequently represented in a negative light, as sightseers who treat the land and wildlife as mere tourist attractions and entertainments. Simpson states that "the deaths of Americans can be read as more 'invasion

scenarios"… foreign imperialists getting their just desserts from meddling in another nation's business… The foreigners and tourists are unable to know, understand and read the land."[13] While historically Australia has ties to Great Britain, through the course of the twentieth century there was a marked increase in the influence of America on Australian culture. Simpson's assertion that this can be viewed as an 'invasion scenario' is apt, with the taking over of Australian culture by an outside force answered with a harsh response from the land itself.

As Simpson makes clear, human deaths at the hand of animal or nature are presented as somewhat justified. These films are expressions of national guilt and shame at historical mistreatment of the native flora, fauna and human inhabitants. Simpson cites Tim Low's admonition of Australia's terrible record when it comes to animal extinction (it has one of the worst in the world), and even quotes Val Plumwood's use of the term 'animal holocaust' to describe Australia's history of species elimination at the hands of human and industrial development.[14] The thylacine, or Tasmanian tiger as it is also known, is a common example of an extinct species that haunts Australian cinema. In its appearances in films such as *The Howling III: The Marsupials, Dying Breed*, and *The Hunter* (2011) the creature is depicted as non-threatening, its continued survival depending on it remaining hidden from the human population. Sightings of the thylacine, in fictional films and the occasional news story, are examples of wishful thinking, a hope that we are no longer guilty of its extinction – which may be why they are never shown to be avenging their elimination.

In contrast to the portrayals of thylacines as non-violent, the nonhuman species that do enact revenge are ones that commonly known to be dangerous predators, primarily crocodiles who are a species that hark back to the prehistoric and prehuman era. In *Dark Age* the crocodile is protected by the local indigenous people, who believe it to contain their spirit and link to ancient times. The white poachers who hunt the crocodile and make racist remarks about the Aboriginal people of the area are the ones who are attacked, suggesting that the animal is directing its vengeance toward those who are a threat – toward those who really 'deserve' it. The tradition of stories and films involving rampaging animals killing human prey can thus be read as admittances of guilt: we realise our culpability as the agents directly responsible for their destruction, yet also express underlying fears of retaliation – once nature finds us guilty, what sentence will she mete out? Although we may deserve our punishment, we will not be able to overcome our own instincts for survival, as these films illustrate in their climatic battles between human and nonhuman.

"Nature found them guilty": *Long Weekend*

In Colin Eggleston's *Long Weekend* the revenge enacted is a gradual, systematic, and silent one, which suggests that nature is beginning a process of taking back the land and punishing those who have sinned against it. Unlike the rampaging men seen in *Wake in Fright*, *Fair Game* and many other Ozploitation movies, the protagonists of *Long Weekend* are quite different (as is the style of the film, which is not attempting to ape Hollywood but instead goes for something more experimental). Peter and Marcia are a married couple – unhappily married – who live in the city and, like many tourists from other nations, only venture into the bush for a holiday. They are not outback residents, they are modern and urban: Marcia angrily comments that Peter has spent $2000 on camping equipment – the same amount it would cost to get "a five star suite at The Southern Cross". Although the couple are not getting along – it is revealed that Marcia has had an affair and an abortion – they are equals: equally unsympathetic, that is. Not only do they constantly argue and snipe at each other, they also treat their surroundings with the same lack of care and consideration. Even before they arrive at their campsite, a close-up shows that the cigarette Peter thoughtlessly tossed out of the car window has caused the dry grass to be set alight; and due to his tiredness he also runs over a kangaroo (kangaroos really do have a hard time of it in Australian films). Adding insult to injury, the camera stays on the lifeless kangaroo as another car drives by and again runs over the animal.

Soon to be less-than-happy campers: intruders in the Bush

Once at their camp they continue their insensitive treatment of the land: littering, spraying insecticide, aimlessly chopping at a tree and firing guns for no particular reason. However, it soon becomes apparent that the land and its inhabitants are not taking this mistreatment lying down. In fact, Gaia/nature/Mother Earth had been making the couple aware of her unhappiness about their arrival from the beginning, as the couple has trouble finding where to camp, getting lost and seemingly going in circles. Murphy states that in Australian films, "The natural landscape is possessed of an intelligence that may not see white Australians in a particularly welcoming light."[15] Yet once there, they are forbidden to leave – they must face judgement and the subsequent punishment for their crimes. The first shot of the film puts the viewer ill at ease. There is a close-up of a spider climbing up a rock, a seemingly innocuous image (depending on your view of spiders), yet the music provides a menacing atmosphere.

Throughout the film there are a series of close-ups of animals – again, they aren't doing anything particularly threatening, they are just there, watching and judging. These shots reveal that Peter and Marcia are constantly observed, that just as we see them mistreat the land and its inhabitants, so too do the nonhuman animals. The subsequent events are thus the outcome of their judgement.

Unlike the attacking predators in *Razorback*, *Rogue*, and several other films, these animals are not actively attacking and feeding on human prey – the process of punishment is slower, seemingly methodical. In a review from *Cinema Papers* written at the time of the film's release, Scott Murray sees a fundamental problem with this representation of the animals: "Because the animals are shown to be menacing before they have been menaced, they are basically unsympathetic."[16] Murray even goes on to suggest that Eggleston presents a distorted view of the animals: "An inoffensive goanna is photographed to look like a crocodile, while a wombat is asked to take on demonic portents."[17] Screenwriter Everett de Roche also echoes this sentiment, stating that "the bush comes across as a threat too early; it should have emerged as a threat only after the audience had sympathised with the animals. And I don't think the sympathy is there."[18] De Roche mentions the opening shot and the heavy, menacing score as contributing to the representation of the animals as threatening rather than as being victimised.

Furthermore, although Peter and Marcia perpetrate many abuses against the land, they are not extreme ones. In this respect Marcia and Peter are typical campers, completely unaware of their 'crimes' and too wrapped up in their own human drama to realise the consequences of their actions. Restating Simpson's quote from earlier, these characters "are unable to know, understand and read the land."[19] It could be argued that the threats from nature are also repeated chances given to the couple to acknowledge their responsibility and change, yet they are too ignorant to heed these warnings.

All mod cons in the Outback

Another problematic element of the narrative is the issue of Marcia's abortion. Unlike Jessica in *Fair Game* whose femininity is in sync with nature, Marcia is in complete disharmony – she states early on that she is "not the outdoor type" and she is incredibly bored by her surroundings. Exemplifying Marcia's conflict with her location and complete lack of maternal instinct is an incident where she finds an eagle egg. Several shots show her look at it, hold it, and place it on a soft surface. Peter jokes that it should be "made into an

omelette", Marcia does not respond. Soon after this remark Peter is attacked by an eagle. Marcia is convinced that the eagle was the mother and was after her egg, which she then throws against a tree, an extreme close-up showing the egg smash with blood oozing down the bark. Peter admonishes her and says "It's a living thing." Then in a later scene when the two have a very impassioned and vitriolic fight, Peter again brings up the destruction of the egg in the same sentence in which he mentions her abortion: "You knew it wasn't mine and you attacked it, just like you attacked that eagle's egg."

The film is in danger here of taking on a rather moralistic tone – are these two singled out for attack because of Marcia's abortion? Is this act being aligned with their other acts of harm against nature? It is unclear. The representation of motherhood and the instinct to protect one's young is persistent throughout the film. Not only do we have the eagle attack, there is also the dugong that Peter shoots and buries on the ocean shore. Marcia sees the dugong and calls it "ugly" and that it "stinks", while Peter looks at it and says, 'you poor old lady' and buries it (although it doesn't stay buried for long!). Notably, the nonhuman animals seen throughout the film are primarily female – the eagle, the dugong, and Peter's dog Cricket. Peter and Marcia are also plagued by a repeated sound of a mournful cry, which Marcia likens to a baby's cry. This turns out be close to the truth as it is the sound of the dead dugong's pup crying for its mother (although at first Peter claims not to hear the sound, which suggests initially that the sound is in Marcia's head, an expression of guilt).

There is soon a shift in this perception, as it is with the dead dugong that a supernatural presence starts to be felt, with the body of the dugong appearing to move. At the climax of the film, with Peter alone in the bush unable to find his way out, he stumbles across the dugong far away from the beach. Peter comes across another abandoned camp, indicating that Peter and Marcia are not the first victims, that this land is possibly 'haunted' or has become a hunting ground for nature and its agents (the animals) to wreak vengeance on the humans who have for so long been the ones to hunt, control and exploit. Found at the abandoned campsite is a dog who Peter finds inside a tent. The dog bares its teeth and looks poised to attack. While the human campers have seemingly vanished, the dog has been spared and has taken its place in the wilderness. Meanwhile, Peter's dog Cricket remains a loyal companion. Whilst alone at night Peter implores Cricket, 'You wouldn't leave me, would you, girl?'

However, it ends up being Peter who leaves Cricket in the car, as he proceeds to run through the bush desperate to find an escape. Yet, Peter and Marcia are eventually killed at the hands of other humans. After Marcia leaves and fails to find her way back Peter sits in the dark, armed with a spear

gun. He hears several noises and in terror fires the spear. As the sun rises, it is revealed that the noise Peter heard was Marcia and he has killed her. Unlike the situation in *Fair Game,* where the feminine force of nature must take up the symbols of masculine power in order to vanquish its enemy, in *Long Weekend* mechanised masculine power is rendered useless. Cars soon run out of petrol and become bogged down in the mud, weapons are turned against the user as the night sky obscures all targets. Nature need only manipulate the surroundings for a short time, as eventually the human instinct for selfish survival will do the dirty work. Later when Peter reaches a road he is run over by a huge truck. The camera lifts up and in wide shot we see the truck driver walk over to Peter's lifeless body, which he then decides to leave rather than seeking help. Although justice has been served – Peter is now reduced to the status of roadkill, recalling the kangaroo that he ran over earlier in the film – the crane shot also reveals that the truck's cargo is cattle, most likely being transported to a slaughterhouse.

While Peter and Marcia have been dealt with, the cattle in the truck signals the wider injustice that is still being perpetrated. In solidarity with this continuing loss, as the man walks away from Peter's body we hear once again the mournful cry of the dugong.

Just roadkill or just desserts?

In conclusion, through the analysis of several key films from Ozploitation past and present, it is revealed that Australia's history of colonisation is actually one of invasion and exploitation. That this counter view of history is expressed through eco-horror tropes reveals not only the guilt attached to this history, but also the underlying fear of retribution. Incorporating elements from both the European arthouse and the American grindhouse, the foreign influences and characters in these films subvert many common Australian stereotypes and question Australia's national identity as one that is predominantly white, male and rural. Further, these films also question notions of the Other in terms of the human and nonhuman, as animals and landscape play an important role in commenting on, and embodying, national history and identity.

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Germany is Not Texas. Finding Reunified Germany in the Rural: Christoph Schlingensief's *The German Chain Saw Massacre*

Sarah Pogoda

Abstract

The article deals with Christoph Schlingensief's film *The German Chain Saw Massacre* (1990) as an immediate filmic response to the German Reunification of 1989/1990. Decoding the most prominent references to German history and the mythological narrative on the German nation, the article shows how Schlingensief appropriates Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) but at the same time creating an original filmic contribution. Focusing on both, Hooper's and Schlingensief's usage of the rural as a topography that is inscribed by national narratives, the article elaborate on the importance of the Ruhr region which is where *The German Chain Saw Massacre* was shot. By doing so, the article explores the Chain Saw plot as a transnational narrative.

Keywords

Christoph Schlingensief, German Trilogy, German Reunification, Transnationalism, Capitalism and Cannibalism, Chain Saw Massacre, Helmut Kohl.

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre

Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974, *TCSM*) is indisputably a cult classic. Critics have described it as "a key text of the 1970s post-studio period",[1] "among the most effective horror films ever made",[2] a film that stands out for its shrewd aesthetics.[3] Robin Wood, as one of the first critics to express admiration for Hooper's film, concluded his Marxist-Freudian analysis by labelling horror films "the most important of all American film genres" of the 1970s[4] for their ability to express an America in crisis. Now often cited as a seminal text of American cinema, Hooper's film has received a plethora of scholarly attention that has brought forth both the complexity of its cultural references and the ingenuity of the director's filmmaking. Most critical work on the film draws on Wood's early reading of it, and hence focuses on the political climate of the US in the 1970s, particularly such events as the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal or the Cambodia bombing.[5] Some scholars conflate these claims with remarks on Hooper's ground-breaking visual style, which is said to disconcertingly confound viewers' genre expectations. Others relate the political context of the film to its cosmic symbolism, either elaborating on the former's "struggle between good and evil"[6], or viewing its fatal trajectory as a metaphor for life.[7] Avoiding such broad interpretations, Roche explores

how the narrative of the film allegorises industrial capitalism in its late phase.[8]

Roche's reading has much in common with Merritt and Jackson, who focus on the conditions of industrial production and how they replace human labour by mechanical labour.[9] This historical development is indeed represented in the film by its family of unemployed butchers trying to make ends meet by slaughtering people with a chain saw.

TCSM seems to allow a wide range of readings. From the wide range of interpretations available we can infer that the chain saw narrative not only constitutes an apocalyptic vision of the United States in the 1970s,[10] but serves as a transnational imagining of the decline of Western society under late capitalism. I would argue that the transnational implications of the chain saw narrative have received scant attention; similarly, there has thus far been little critical engagement with the influence and legacy of Hooper's film beyond the context of the USA.

Texas in the Chain Saw Massacre

What has been explicitly identified is the specifically Texan location of Hooper's films. The fact that the title of the film was initially to be Leatherface and was later changed – although some crew members strongly protested against the naming of Texas in the title – suggests that the film's geographical specificity is significant. Brown and Rose, for instance, agree with Albright that *TCSM* is a milestone of regional horror.[11] According to Rose, the film's particular regional context is part of its stylistic and thematic coherence. Rose points out that the title of the film evokes verisimilitude. Supported by the documentary style of the first few minutes of the film, the name Texas in the title consolidates the reality of the events that follow.[12] Furthermore, in the context of the early 1970s, Texas recalls traumatic events of the recent past, such as the murder of John F. Kennedy and "the Charles Whitman shooting spree at the University of Texas, alongside notions of small and insular farming communities, rednecks, racism, homophobia, inbreeding, and the constant, intense heat."[13] For her part, Brown outlines the social conditions of 1970s Texas, which gave new life to the hillbilly trope.[14] Many scholars follow Brown in identifying the Sawyer family in *TCSM* as 'hillbillies', while locating these figures firmly in the film's regional landscape.[15] Bell, for instance, analyses how the function of the homegrown American monster is taken up in the film by Texan country folk.[16]

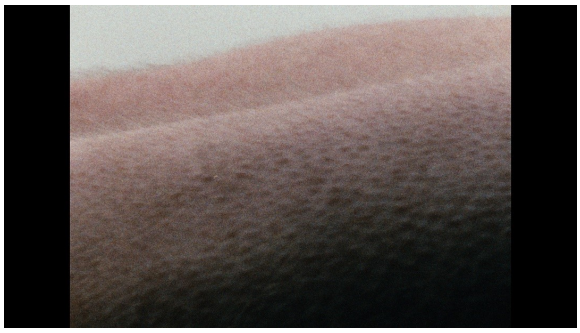
Even so, the epistemic value of the Texas location complements rather than undermines the transnational implications of the chain saw narrative, exemplifying how transnational codes are adapted at national level, and how national and regional specificity can be transliterated into different national contexts. Christoph Schlingensief's *The German Chain Saw Massacre* (1990, GCSM) is an instructive example.

Landscapes in Christoph Schlingensief's Films

Like Hooper's film title invoking Texas, Schlingensief's film explicitly names Germany as the location of its chain saw tale. And like Hooper for the Texas countryside, Schlingensief goes to great lengths to reference images associated with the German landscape. This was probably motivated less by a desire on Schlingensief's part to emulate Hooper than by Schlingensief's own understanding of filmmaking. Schlingensief's style certainly has affinities with Hooper's 'guerrilla' approach to filmmaking. For instance, as Hooper's film crew was behind schedule, they were forced to shoot the film's climax – the evening dinner with the Sawyer family – over 26 long hours. The Texas summer caused almost unbearable conditions. With 95° Fahrenheit plus and animal props, filled with formaldehyde, literally rotting under the lights[17] (Muir, 15), the shooting itself turned into an experience of gore and horror. The make-up artist Dorothy J. Pearl is remembered as having said: "At one point, […] I looked around and thought, we are truly living this thing. We aren't making it any more. We're living it."[18]

Schlingensief, too, worked on a low budget, and most of his films were shot within a few days, under extreme working conditions. In interviews, he confirms that he did indeed aim for a gaining of momentum when shooting and that he therefore chose locations which could trigger uncontrollable and intense situations. With most of his films he sought isolation, opting to shoot in remote locations where crewmembers' social contacts with the 'outside world' were severely reduced. As a result, group dynamics were intensified within this microcosm to the extent that interpersonal relations among the crew became tense and conflictual.

Egomania. Island without Hope: Extreme working conditions: bitterly cold shots of the North Sea island of Langeroog



Egomania. Island without Hope: more extreme working conditions: a shot of the actor Volker Bertzky's body showing how the conditions make it into the film

Schlingensief's films undoubtedly mirror the mood on set. One of the most impressive examples of this approach to filmmaking can be found in Schlingensief's *100 Years of Adolf Hitler. The Last Hour in the Führerbunker* (1988), made over a 16-hour period in an original World War II bunker: the most isolated location possible was found and the experience was intensified by

the practice of shooting until everyone was totally exhausted, irrespective of whether the end of the script had been reached. The performative relevance of the shooting location was particularly important for Schlingensief's early films, such as *Tunguska*. *The Crates Are Here!* (1983), shot in the space of just nine days in the apocalyptic setting of a quarry in Rauen, or the metaphysical melodrama *Egomania – Island without Hope* (1986), shot over 10 bitterly cold days on the North Sea island of Langeroog.

100 years of Adolf Hitler, followed by *GCSM* and *Terror 2000*. *Intensive Care Unit Germany* (1992), comprised Schlingensief's Trilogy of Germany. As the series title suggests, these films about Germany mark a shift in his work towards a more directly politicised engagement with history and place. As I argue below, the location of the films is now where Germany itself is happening, where the Germany of the late 1980s and early 1990s (as seen by Schlingensief) is simultaneously coming to the surface and where it is rooted.

The German Chain Saw Massacre

Written, shot and edited within three weeks in early October 1990, *GCSM* was a very early and immediate response to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the official reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990. Schlingensief once stated that the idea for the film came to him as he watched a TV broadcast about the fall of the Wall and the official celebrations at the Brandenburg Gate, showing women in Trabants (the iconic East German car) and men with bananas yelling "We are the people".[19] But instead of joining the celebrations Schlingensief's mind was full of the dreadful images of Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre I* and *II* (1974 and 1986) that he had seen only a few weeks before.

As a result, Schlingensief sat down and wrote his screenplay. A viewer acquainted with the chain saw formula can predict most of the narrative events. East Germans leaving their former homeland of the GDR for West Germany are caught, slaughtered and minced into sausages by a cannibalistic family of West German butchers – a similar premise to that of *TCSM*. However, whereas the latter opens with images of an excavated corpse, with the black screen only sporadically illuminated by a camera flash, Schlingensief's *GCSM* opens with the TV coverage of the state ceremony for the re-unification of Germany at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. While Hooper's soundtrack for those pre-credit images takes the form of a radio report on recent grave robberies across the country, Schlingensief's soundtrack comes from the TV coverage, consisting of moments from the speech by the then German president, Richard von Weizsäcker, accompanied by the national anthem and people cheering. We might say that death and decay characterise Hooper's introduction, while a new beginning and a

promising future is what concerns Schlingensief's. Yet even as Schlingensief's adaptation of Hooper's original seems to contradict its model, the very contrast implies that Schlingensief's opening is intended to be read as horror. That is to say, Schlingensief blended the positive and triumphalist images of cheerful, rejoicing Germans with the disturbing images from Hooper's films, which were still fresh in his mind, and both have the same terrifying effects. Anthony Coulson argues that Schlingensief's film with its array of hegemonic images of reunification is a kind of critical manifesto about that specific historical moment and what lay behind it:

> Schlingensief targets his onslaught, in drastic hyperbole, on the image-making itself, on the screen drama of national celebration. For him the depravity of these images, and of the society that apparently believes in them, consists in camouflaging the unsavoury realities of unification, realities which, with few inhibitions, his satire then proceeds to expose.[20]

Whereas *TCSM* responds to the pessimism of American youth in the late 1960s and early 1970s,[21] Schlingensief reacts viscerally to the optimism of the Germans in 1989 and 1990. That is, the euphoria around reunification was linked to the idea that the German nation had finally achieved its teleological end after a long and fraught journey. To elaborate on this: in the late 18th century, when there was as yet no political body called Germany, but an emerging longing for a unified Germany was beginning to make itself felt, the two most famous German poets – Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – coined a legendary aphorism: "Deutschland. Aber wo liegt es? Ich weiß das Land nicht zu finden, wo das gelehrte beginnt, hört das politische auf."[22] – "Germany. But where is it? I cannot find this country. Where cultural Germany begins, there the Germany of politics ends." The aphorism expresses a hegemonic discourse about the identity of the German nation that was to emerge in the succeeding two centuries. The idea of Germany as a nation that only finds its identity as a cultural entity (as the land of poets and thinkers) but lacks territorial and political unity became one of the most prominent and influential topoi in the German national narrative – encapsulated in the term "cultural nation" ("Kulturnation"), which the German historian Friedrich Meinecke coined at the end of the 19th century.[23] Almost 200 years after Schiller and Goethe and following two centuries of Germany struggling with its geopolitical frontiers, borders began to blur again, shaping a unified Germany and – as it were finally – successfully completing the national project. Schlingensief, however, is more than a little sceptical about this supposed new reality. In one of the early scenes, a Trabbi rattles along an unsurfaced

road, until it hits a name sign saying GDR. Logically speaking, you have to assume that the car has just entered the GDR, since the sign is passed in the direction of travel. But if you follow the alternative logic of the narrative, then the car has just passed the border into West Germany. The same uncertainty is evoked when the East German heroine, Klara (the film's equivalent of Hooper's Sally) crosses the border into West Germany. Since this takes place at night, only the border crossing-point itself is illuminated; but it is surrounded by intense darkness. Both the GDR, soon to be left behind, and West Germany, which is about to be entered, lack any distinguishing features: the border might be anywhere and nowhere. Every aspect of these shots seems directly to challenge ideas of what and where Germany is, or will be in times to come. Schlingensief subverts the euphoria of German reunification, instead affirming Goethe's and Schiller's topos of an intangible German nation.

When Klara awakens in her car the morning after she has crossed the border, West Germany appears mysteriously out of the fog. Klara's new life, the start of which is implied with her awakening in the new country, begins in a grim and off-putting manner. The lifting of the fog merely unveils an unappealing grey and isolated site dominated by brutal concrete blocks the function of which remains unclear. These blocks not only obstruct Klara's view, but also evoke a claustrophobic mood which contradicts the promise of freedom that former East Germans associated with German reunification. However, we soon discover that Klara is not alone at this site, for it teems with characters, symbols and sounds from both highbrow and lowbrow German mythology, such as Fritz Haarmann (a German equivalent of Ed Gein), or the fact that one of the butcher family members wears a winged helmet (except that the wings are replaced by sausages). The following night, Klara is poisoned with a potion, and dreams a *danse macabre*: among the dancers is Adolf Hitler. This and other references to the German National Socialist past, for instance a torchlight procession by the male members of the family, unsettle any feelings of national pride in German reunification that the spectator might have experienced.

The German Chain Saw Massacre: A member of the butcher family with his winged helmet

A scarcely less ambiguous soundtrack accompanies these visual references. A scratchy gramophone plays various German folk songs. "Die Gedanken sind frei, wer kann sie erraten" ("Thoughts are free, who can guess them")[24], for instance, is the iconic German song about freedom of thought that has served as a political protest

song in the cause of liberation ever since the rise of the German national liberal movement in the early 19th century. Another is *Roter Wedding*[25], a political protest song of the Alliance of Red Front Fighters during the Weimar Republic. The text by Erich Weinert (melody by Hanns Eisler) tells the story of the so-called Bloody May of 1929, when the Berlin police brutally fought back against protesting workers and several protesters were killed. Another folk song is "Hoch auf dem gelben Wagen" ("High on the Yellow Wagon"). This song, originally from the late 19th century and long forgotten, regained popularity in 1973 when the then German Foreign Minister (and later German Federal President) Walter Scheel sang it on a well-known German television charity show. 300,000 copies of the resulting record were sold, and the song entered the music charts and stayed there for 15 weeks. The way these songs fill the scene of the chain saw massacre means the landscape is inscribed with their embedded references to German political history, which appears as a history of perpetual political struggle and warfare. This is suggested, for example, when the family of butchers, as it hunts for victims, intones the famous German nursery rhyme "Maikäfer flieg!" (a version of "Ladybird, Ladybird, Fly Away Home"):

> Maykäfer, flieg!
> Der Vater ist im Krieg.
> Die Mutter ist im Pommerland.
> Und Pommerland ist abgebrandt.[26]
> (Fly Ladybird!
> Father's at war.
> Mother's in Pomerania.
> And Pomerania's burnt down.)

GCSM appears to work quite similarly to *TCSM* in the way it employs elements of national narrative and culture to present a disturbing account of current national sensitivities. When he presents the members of the family of butchers singing German folk songs while they hunt for East Germans, Schlingensief links allegedly innocuous traditions of German romanticism with savagery. Schlingensief reads German history less as an eschatological trajectory than as a history of violence which haunts Germany´s presence and future.

Transposing Texan Rural Spaces into Industrial Germany

Brown reconstructs how the aesthetics of the European Gothic were transposed into the existential conditions of the American people.[27] In her account, the main difference between the latter and the European Gothic is to be found in the Gothic space. Whereas enclosed spaces are the loci of European horror, it is the Frontier with its vast and open spaces that haunts the American Gothic imagination. She further argues that it is not the European haunted house that we find in American horror films, but an abandoned farmhouse. As Hooper's film

demonstrates, Texas is emblematic of the spaces of the American Gothic. Its dry, brown vegetation stretches seemingly infinitely through a flat, open landscape. Hooper captures this vast openness in shots which Bridget Cherry has gone so far as to describe as sublime. The immensity of space dwarfs all the characters, rendering them victims of a hostile, deathly world.[28]

Schlingensief transforms the Texan rural context into a derelict German industrial site in what is apparently a rural area: deserted, muddy, chilly undergrowth some time in a late German autumn. Though this brownfield site with its monumental steel scaffolding and endless concrete walls and blocks has very little in common with the vast open spaces of Texas, it too may be described as sublime. The demiurgic power that once created and mastered this monstrous structure is absent, yet at the same time lingers as an anonymous, forceful power. The gigantic structure's sublime effect recalls the enduring effect of ruins, as famously proposed by Hitler's architect Albert Speer in his "theory of ruin value" ("Ruinenwerttheorie").[29] Resisting any extreme long-distance shots, let alone panning shots of the set, Schlingensief avoids providing an overview, making it harder for the spectator to gain orientation and stability within the depicted space: the spectator feels as lost as the fictional characters.

The German Chain Saw Massacre: Schlingensief's claustrophobic staging of the abandoned industrial site, and a lost Klara looking for help

The industrial site refers to both the East German and the West German national narrative. The progress of industrialisation was an essential part of the East German socialist vision: the image of smoking chimneys, steel ladles and polluted water and soil evoked (whatever immediate unease it also gave rise to) the promise of a better future. Of course, the national bankruptcy of the GDR proved such hopes and efforts to have been baseless, and the derelict industrial site is a portent of the rundown of the GDR – a warning sign of times to come. At the same time, such a redundant site is also iconic for the landscape of the West German Ruhr region, where Schlingensief himself grew up.

In the post-war years, the Ruhr region was the engine and the emblem of the rebuilding of West Germany and later of its economic miracle.[30] The region mainly produced the coal and steel essential for the rapid recovery of West Germany. However, coal mining and steel production fell into decline

again once the industrial reconstruction of the country was accomplished.[31] With the steel crisis of the mid 1970s it became increasingly apparent that the Ruhr region could barely compete in a globalised market. In 1975 the growth period in the steel sector came to an abrupt end.[32] As a result, the number of steel workers dropped from 204,000 to 150,000 between 1979 and 1985. Specifically in the region of Duisburg-Oberhausen, where *GCSM* was filmed, there was an employment cut of 30% in iron production.[33] And with the announcement of further job losses at the end of the 1980s, the unemployment rate reached almost 20% in the Ruhr region – whereas West Germany as a whole saw an economic jump between 1984 and 1986.[34] The industrial action which took place, most prominently in the Krupp-Stahl AG steelworks at Stahlwerk Duisburg-Rheinhausen,[35] was similar in character and public perception to the UK miners' strike of 1984-85. The industrial site is therefore a locus of existential struggle, and of failure. The times when it was associated with the victorious post-war social market economy of West Germany are long past. And, moreover, the Ruhr was the first regional economy that faced the downsides of globalisation and market liberalisation, a process that was particularly encouraged by the German government from 1983 onwards, when Helmut Kohl became Chancellor of a conservative-liberal coalition.[36]

For a German viewer of 1990, the impression of the cold, muddy, derelict site of *GCSM* might invoke a famous promise made by Chancellor Helmut Kohl in a televised speech in July 1990, only three months before the filming of Schlingensief's piece. In his speech, Kohl promised "flourishing pastures for the New Germany" ("blühenden Landschaften"), a Germany where it would be worth living and working. This metaphor, which was intended to show economic growth and social welfare as the guaranteed effects of the western capitalist free market, is, of course, undermined and negated by the industrial ruins of *GCSM*.

Now, in the film's present, the industrial site is home to the cannibalistic and incestuous family of butchers who process East Germans crossing the border to West Germany into sausages. At this point, I would like to interject some remarks on the butchery theme which already works tremendously well in Hooper's narrative, but which works even better in a German context: sausages (German: Wurst) are a cultural good in Germany. More than 1,500 different kinds of sausage are produced in the country, and in 2014 the pro capita German consumption of sausage was 29.5 kilogrammes (compared with 60.3 kilos per capita of total meat consumption).[37] The essentiality of sausage culture has its effect on German idioms, too. If Germans simply say "Wurst" or "Das ist Wurst!", they are expressing complete indifference to something. At the same time, "Jetzt geht es um die Wurst!" (literally: "Now it's about the sausage.") means something like "It's

crunch time!" Referring to those notions, Johnny, a member of our butchering family, sings: "Alles hat ein Ende nur die Wurst hat keins" ("Everything has an end, only the sausage has none.") in the final sequence of *GCSM*, ironically referring to the German idiom and indicating that the massacres will never cease. Yet the film's family of butchers does not just represent a minor, perhaps marginalised group in the German nation, but is the German nation as a whole in the latter's own self-understanding. Thus, sausages take their place in Schlingensief's challenge to the dominant discourse on reunification.

This is Where the Free Market Begins

GCSM reflects the conflicting economic consequences of German reunification, for the western post-war promise of infinite progress and economic growth was arguably fulfilled only in the perverted productivity of self-consumption.[38] In the course of the film, the cannibalistic and incestuous family of butchers allegorises Germany as a production line of insatiable global capitalism. In this setting, capitalism shows its true Janus face. Clearly Schlingensief's and Hooper's chain saw massacres make similar connections between cannibalism and capitalism, and most scholarly work on Hooper's film identifies capitalism as the main source of horror.[39] But Schlingensief's adaptation focuses on unmasking the illusory ideology of progress, which he understands as the constitutive dynamic of capitalism. Schlingensief addresses the social stasis and constriction of the Kohl era, which was especially pronounced in the federal state of North-Rhine Westphalia. It is no accident that this was where Schlingensief grew up and where *GCSM* was shot. Although West Germany faced several economic crises and social challenges at the time, the protective, insulating effect of West Germany's post-war welfare state continued to characterise Germany even after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989: economic stability and welfare and contented self-absorption were dependent on economic growth and technical progress, and both of these therefore become important for post-war German identity. It is because of this that even the challenge of high rates of structural unemployment in the 1980s (ca. 8%) did not affect a fundamental social consensus in West German society, mostly thanks to widespread material prosperity.[40]

Schlingensief stages the industrial site as a prison, perverting the message of protection and security. The manner in which the camerawork reproduces the framing of each scene (see images 3 & 6) creates a kind of on-going liminality. The main effect of these marked borders within the shots is that the landscape appears claustrophobic, in contrast to the agoraphobia-inducing Texan landscape with its wide-open spaces and distant cinematographic horizons. Schlingensief's great industrial structure does not turn out to be the promised land of democracy and freedom, but a huge prison.

In most shots, concrete walls, columns, pillars and steel scaffolding or similar structures frame or block the characters. They are entrapped and seldom escape, and, if they do, this is merely in order to fail at another obstacle. Furthermore, most characters end up at exactly the same point at which they set out. Thus, the film performs a narrative loop: the first scene of the industrial site is also the last scene of the film: on a deserted roadway, the camera pans as it follows a pick-up truck controlled by the patriarch of the cannibalistic family. The screaming Klara is shown on the back of the truck, and then a woman who has been cut in two and is singing "Thoughts are free." At the very end of the film, we see the same shot, but it remains rather longer with the singing woman, whom we now know to be a member of the family of butchers who has herself become a victim of the massacre. There is no escape – either for strangers or for family members.

The German Chain Saw Massacre: Horror and the site of no escape

The loop narrative also points us to another main difference between Hooper's and Schlingensief's Chain Saw films. In *TCSM*, as Jackson argues, vehicles play an ambivalent role and refer to the oil crisis of the early 1970s. The shortage of petrol immobilises Sally and her friends, forcing them to stop at the Sawyer property. Their need for gasoline therefore plunges them into the catastrophe. But at the end, Sally escapes thanks to a car and a truck that are passing on the near-deserted road by the Sawyers' house.[41] In *GCSM*, by contrast, cars do not promise escape. Even though there is no shortage of petrol, none of the vehicles will escort anyone to safety. Once again, Schlingensief adapts an iconic prop of the German context, since cars crossing borders – especially Trabbis – are the images that were so frequently to be seen on television and in the newspapers in 1989/90. Of course, these images were meant to be read as a metonym for freedom. Indeed, throughout the film, Schlingensief strikingly incorporates many shots of cars crossing the screen. A closer look at these shots, however, reveals that the cars are framed by the industrial site or blocked by obstacles in it just as much as the camera seldom follows the cars into an open, infinite space. Although the vehicles manage to rupture the framed space (columns, pillars, walls) and to exit the shot, they have to do so over and over again. Thus, none of the breakthroughs or breakouts lead to the promised freedom outside the frame. Every single car shown in this film ends up back in the industrial site; none will ever get out of it again; and the culminating scene preceding the final credits of the film shows a car burning.

The German Chain Saw Massacre: Schlingensief's claustrophobic staging of the abandoned industrial site/ cars do not promise escape – but are entrapped within bordered frames.

All borders crossed in this film are inner borders, only leading deeper into an uncomfortably cocooned and self-consuming Germany. The violent repetition of the border crossings could at the same time be read as Schlingensief's desperate criticism of capitalism in general, offering a transnational approach to his culturally specific transposition of the chain saw narrative. But considering the emphasis on the German context that Schlingensief apparently brings to his more global reading, the continuing crossing of borders is perhaps paradoxically linked to the stasis of the Kohl era. The rapid pace of *GCSM* does not produce any development: the film's narrative circularity negates progress and exposes the speed of development as illusory, even though the actions within the loop are executed at high velocity.

It is on account of the general fast pace of the film and its aggressive soundtrack that one shot stands out for its slowness and its unexpected use of an instrumental version of the German folk song "Thoughts Free."

We see the family of butchers in harmony – as never before or afterwards – as its members Alfred, Brigitte and Margit encircle a scene of slaughter, working on their recent victims and illuminated by the red evening sky.

The German Chain Saw Massacre: A romantic sunset envelops the butchering feast in semi-darkness

This scenery refers of course to the final episode of Hooper's *TCSM*, a scene that Rose calls "the most powerful in the history of horror cinema." As he states:

> Unrestrained and unchecked, Leatherface's dance merges him with the sun, absorbing him into its intense orange glow. There, in this consummation, he is finally aligned with the narrative's prime motif of chaos, with the arcane movements of the solar system defining him as an unfathomable and uncontrollable power, one governed by forces beyond the reaches of Law and Order.[42]

But whereas Hooper's final scene aligns with the apocalyptic motifs of his film to anticipate the coming slaughter, the equivalent scene in Schlingensief's film is prominently set around the midpoint of the film assembling, several encoded references linked in each case to the German national narrative of unity and freedom that had begun to flourish again with German reunification in 1990. Whereas the opening sequence of Schlingensief's film presented the seemingly benign and peaceful German crowd celebrating in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, he counters that documentary footage with the apparently true face of the happily united German family. Once more, Schlingensief undermines the German self-adulation that came with reunification, pointing to the Janus face of Germany – reunited or not. The teleological fulfilment of the German national narrative as suggested by the events of 1990 is affirmed in this scene, but also cynically underpinned by a romantic sunset that covers the butchering feast in semi-darkness, associating it with pagan rituals. Even more ironically, German viewers detect an allusion to a central line of the national anthem of the GDR: "that the sun shines more beautifully than ever before over Germany". Read in the context of the whole film, this scene seems to state the self-fulfilment of the German nation as a history of greed and violence.

In this regard, the setting of the scene also evokes the landscape of the industrial Ruhr region and its polluting steel production, which actually caused such impressive sunsets. The Ruhr with its coal mining and steel working was at the heart of the German economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s, as West Germany's rapid economic growth created heavy demand for the region's products; and this in turn was the basis of West German society's fundamental assent to capitalism, to its constitutive idea of growth and progress and with it to the complacent, narrow-minded bourgeois mentality mentioned earlier.

The film's ironically epiphanous central scene, begun by Alfred and completed by Brigitte and Margit is a reminiscence of that era and its value system: "In einer Zeit, in der alles möglich ist, ist es gleich, ob etwas gut ist oder schlecht" ("At a time when everything is possible, it does not matter if something is good or bad"). The staging of this epiphany incidentally evokes the German fairy tale Rumpelstilzchen (Rumpelstiltskin in English) and its imp or dwarf who hops around his fire, believing himself unobserved, and sings aloud the solution to his secret riddle. But in addition, the slogan "At a time [...], it does not matter [...]" also returns us to sausages, the phrase being a more or less elaborated version of the familiar idiomatic saying "Das ist Wurst" ("It doesn't matter" or "Who cares?"). That cynical family catechism is effectively the film's thematic key.

Indifference is the film's essential diagnosis. The fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification simply complete the indifference of a capitalistic mentality. And when Alfred, the head of the family of butchers, welcomes all East Germans with the words: "This is where the free market begins", before killing and processing them into sausages, the industrial site shows Germany as a battleground where the free market celebrates its victory, which came about with the decline of the GDR and its socialist visions. With capitalism, however (and this is the film's central point), comes a dissolution of moral standards, values and differentiation. Limitless capitalism brings the removal of all boundaries: at a time when everything is possible, it does not matter if it is good or bad. It is here that Schlingensief's film reveals its moral core – and presumably its fear of a reunified Germany that transgressed and continues to transgress any border, be it territorial, ideological or moral.

One can see that Schlingensief's abandoned industrial site within rural Germany appropriated the rural setting of Hooper's *TCSM*. This "terrible place"[43] is the reunified Germany and it would be worth comparing the two films' 'haunted castles', the Sawyer mansion and the German family's mansion, together with the inhabitants of both in order to elaborate on both films' similarities and differences. So far, we have seen that both films share a notion of anti-capitalism and show its Janus face emerging in rural settings. But whereas, in Hooper's case, "the sense that the hopes and aspirations of the American dream had ended […] was pervasive in 1970s America"[44], Schlingensief shot his film at a time when the German dream, its hopes and aspirations, had only just begun. In 1990, Schlingensief is already asserting its end, and envisioning its cannibalistic dynamics.

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‘We are Never Going in the Woods Again’: The Horror of the Underclass White Monster in American And British Horror.

Shellie McMurdo

Abstract

This article uses cultural studies perspectives and refers to the eugenics movements of Britain and America, to explore the poor white character as an embodiment of societal fears and perceived threats in recent horror cinema: a traumatic monster that is feared because of its polluted identity and monstrous poverty. The exaggerated (mis)representations of the poor white character in horror cinema often take the worst depictions of the poor white body detailed by eugenicists, and emphasise them, turning ‘white trash’ or the ‘chav’ into an imposing and monolithic Other. This article compares the polluted cinematic identity of the Southern underclass in American rural horror to the violent ‘chav’ of recent British examples.

Focusing on *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008), I propose that rather than interpreting the characterisation of the chav or ‘hoodie’ character as merely mimetic of the American white trash character, it is possible to read the chav as a specifically British monster which carries its own socially significant weight.

Keywords: Eugenics, White trash, Poor white bodies, Class, *Eden lake.*

Bad Blood and Good Births: The Influence of Eugenics.

The eugenics movement originated in England, and was founded by Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin. Hereditarians such as Galton and his American counterpart Lothrop Stoddard were advocates of the belief that genetics determined intelligence and disposition. Eugenics quickly became an academic discipline in Britain, with a Eugenics Laboratory at the University of London established in 1904, and organisations were formed in an attempt to win public support for eugenic values, such as the British Eugenics Education Society in 1907. Eugenics gained popularity in upper-class circles in Britain, with public supporters of eugenics including women’s rights campaigner Marie Stopes,[1] who advocated sterilisation of those people she believed were unfit for parenthood. To her thinking, this included “the inferior, the depraved, and the feeble-minded… who are thriftless and unmanageable yet appallingly prolific.”[2]

At the heart of the eugenics movement in Britain was a belief that the poor and feeble-minded bred at an alarmingly high rate when compared to the higher classes.

The aim of British eugenics was to redress this imbalance in breeding rates, as it was thought that natural selection, which would have normally slowed reproduction of the lower classes, had been suspended because of sanitary reform, charitable organisations and medical science, allowing the lower classes to grow unchecked. Eugenics in Britain was separated into positive eugenics, which aimed to increase reproduction in the fitter classes and negative eugenics, which sought to discourage reproduction in lower classes. Acts of Parliament such as the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act proposed mass segregation of the feeble-minded from the rest of society and, although sterilisation programmes were never legalised in Britain, those in support of eugenics lobbied for voluntary sterilisation.[3] Here we can see the beginnings of the boundaries that echo in rural horror, most clearly in *Eden Lake*, where literal boundaries by way of fences are to be erected around the executive homes that are being built in a rural area of England, to protect the middle-class inhabitants from the prolific breeding and negative influence of the poor whites in the community.

The primary concern of eugenicists, both British and American, was with what eugenicists perceived as their duty to improve the overall quality of the human race, often with direct comparisons made between lower classes and insects such as maggots.[4] In addition to explicit references to hereditarian concepts, Francis Galton asserted that:

> As it is easy… to obtain by careful selection a permanent breed of dogs or horses… it would be quite practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations.[5]

This demonstrates a clear Us vs. Them mentality that has filtered into both American and British rural horror cinema, as the lower class are coded as poor not just by their clothes, but also by their speech, etiquette and physicality.

This is not to suggest that eugenics solely focused on lower class whites. In British eugenics, there was a strict hierarchy which "encompassed fears of miscegenation and hybridity" with the white European at the top, and the black African at the bottom.[6] As the eugenics movement grew in popularity in America, there was also growing reference to issues of race. Charles B. Davenport, a prominent American eugenicist and biologist, believed for example that the American race was essentially being 'polluted' by immigrants. In addressing what he terms the "negro problem", Davenport notes that "persons with darker skin" should be "kept in happiness but kept from reproducing their kind."[7] Eugenics was used therefore not only as scientific

validation for classism, but also racism. The consequences of this validation can be seen in the class-driven and government-approved sterilisation of the poor, such as that resulting from the Buck v. Bell case of 1927,[8] and the racist Jim Crow Laws of the late 19th century, which enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States.

The idea of being white trash "raised a host of unsettling anxieties about the stability and content of racial identities."[9] People deemed to be white trash were often seen as victims of circumstance to be rescued by well-to-do whites, as shown in John Abbot's call for the liberation of poor whites, specifically "the thousands of poor ignorant, degraded white people among us, who, in this land of plenty, live in comparative nakedness and starvation."[10] Abbot described this situation in explicitly racial terms however, by continuing that the poor whites must work against a system that "drags the whites with the blacks down into the gulf of ignorance and penury."[11] This intersection of race and class is pertinent to the final section of this article, in which I examine hoodie horror. However, it is important to note that I focus on the representations of the poor white character in American and British horror cinema and as such examine only one strand of racial representation in national horror cinemas.

Founded by Charles Davenport,[12] who built upon the basis of eugenics set by Galton, the Eugenics Records Office (ERO) of America was established in 1910 and carried out several studies on underclass families such as *The Nam Family: A Study in Cacogenics* (1912),[13] to try to determine by way of a biometric approach any common family traits that were likely to be inherited by future generations. Continuing the influence of zoological concepts on British eugenicists, pedigree charts akin to those used in dog breeding were produced for the families that were studied by the ERO.[14] These studies were intent on demonstrating and proving the dangers of what they termed 'bad' births. The overarching message of the studies was influenced by cacogenics, meaning the deterioration of genetic stock over time, and warned against sexual relations with degenerates which, to the ERO's way of thinking, included the poor, the criminal and the so-called feeble minded. Eugenicists instead promoted 'good' births, meaning the breeding of physically and mentally fit individuals, and went as far as in 1914 to establish a model for intervention which proposed to sterilise those who were deemed socially inadequate, specifically those who Harry Laughlin noted were supported wholly or in part by public expense.[15]

Ideals conceptualised by the eugenics movement were being used by sterilisation campaigns as recently as the 1970s in America and would eventually be adopted by the German National Socialist Party in pursuit of their 'final solution'. Although Galton himself did not motion towards forced sterilisation, it is clear that he

intended eugenics to be practiced. In a later essay he notes that "eugenics cooperates with the working of nature by securing that humanity shall be represented by the fittest races. What nature does blindly, slowly and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly."[16]

One of the more widely known family studies carried out by the ERO was Henry Goddard's study *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912). This account discerned two lineages stemming from the same man, Martin Kallikak. The first strand is from a sexual liaison with a tavern maid and produces a long and over-populated line of criminals and degenerates. The other line from a marriage to a Quaker woman produces six prosperous, socially mobile and virtuous individuals, what the ERO would have seen as good breeding stock. The connotations of pollution contained in this study are clear: not only do degenerates out-breed the other line at an alarming rate, allowing the possibility of upstanding people becoming endangered or extinct, but whatever made a person a degenerate – or simply poor – was deep in their blood. It was believed that poor people gave birth to poor children, perpetuating a cycle that the eugenicists feared would cause a tidal wave of moral weakness. This idea of polluted blood was further supported by August Weismann's concept of "Germplasm".[17]

Weismann's Germplasm was a substance that is transmitted in the blood, down through generations, holding within it the degenerative genes. Eugenicists disseminated the family studies of the ERO, along with the idea of a tangible Germplasm as evidence that the poor rural white was a contaminating influence, and to quote Lothrop Stoddard, "spreading like cancerous growths […] infecting the blood of whole communities." [18] It is clear that eugenics was based around a fear of pollution, specifically the 'bad blood' of degenerates, and preoccupied with boundaries that could be instated to protect against their contamination and possible transmogrification into the poor white. This ideology of pollution, contaminated identities and class-based fear runs through much rural horror. The Southern rural landscape is presented as an almost alien territory, a dirty, defeated, and entirely Other land. In terms of their filmic representations, Gael Sweeney notes that "Hollywood's depictions of White Trash [is] as either idiot savants extraordinaire or amoral criminals. But always as products of an inherited inferiority."[19] The American South, and by extension the poor rural body, is presented as both geographically and intellectually removed from Northern civility.

'These Freakos got a Utensil for every Pea on the Plate!'[20] The White Trash Monster and Etiquette

Carol Clover states that in rural horror "[a]s with hygiene, so are manners. Country people snort when they breathe, snore when they sleep, talk with their mouths full, drool when they eat."[21] The underlying threat is

that such signs of incivility are symptomatic of a larger degeneration. Films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *Last House on the Left* (Craven, 1972), *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi, 1978) or the later *Wrong Turn films* (2003-2014), show the underclass body as a representation of a community that the protagonists, usually coded as being from a higher class by way of their clothing, speech or etiquette, do not comprehend. Although the two groups look similar, the rules are different in the antagonist's territory. This is seen in the films in terms of both morality - for example the antagonist's willingness to commit incest, to rape, and to steal - and in terms of civility, such as cleanliness and correctly using cutlery. In these films, the protagonists struggle to find the upper hand, and the lack of stability the protagonists suffer is reminiscent of eugenicists' fear of losing status and privilege while the poor white emerged from "hotbeds where human maggots are spawned." [22] The protagonists in rural horror films are often isolated in a strange landscape where civil rules no longer apply, such as the abandoned quarry in *Eden Lake*, where the threatening teenage gang indulge in brutality in a space uninhabited by adults, and have an advantage over Jenn and Steve through their familiarity with the area. It is often only when protagonists eschew civility and engage with the antagonists on their own 'savage' level as primitive counterparts that they are able to defeat them.

Jenn awaits her fate at the hands of the "chav" gang in *Eden Lake*

The construct of civility is often exposed within these narratives as being superficial and flimsy, based around technology and more often than not, around etiquette. The concept of etiquette is mobilised to show the differences between the protagonists and the poor rural body, with their lack of etiquette marking them as *those* people. But, as J.W. Williamson succinctly notes, "we in our suburbs are not so safely immune from our natures… our secret dread is that the dark, drunken hillbilly is no Other, but us."[23] Concepts of dirt and pollution police etiquette and, with this in mind, the work of Mary Douglas can be applied to the poor white body.

Douglas argues that social behaviour hinges on the ability to adopt a scheme of classification. Douglas outlines that once we define what is dirty, we can define what is clean and that our concept of dirt or pollution stands in for "expressing a general view of the social order."[24] It is a system of Othering, inspired by the social Othering of the eugenics movement and ratified by the pollution ideologies outlined by Mary

Douglas, that inform the archetypal themes and tropes of the classed characterisations in rural horror. As Douglas states:

> They may be doing nothing morally wrong, but their status is indefinable… Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state not the next, it is indefinable […] There is a power in the forms and other power in the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries.[25]

Protagonists in these films, perhaps grasping for an alternative boundary line when presented with monsters who are visually similar to themselves, will often situate the white trash body in the primitive past. By doing this, the protagonist codes the white trash character as being a relic of this different way of life, and as such, removed from the 'progressive' qualities of modern living. The white trash monster inhabits the margins of classification and is coded in rural horror as a temporal discrepancy, part of a long forgotten primitive past, where rules of etiquette did not apply. This can be observed in several American rural horror films, for example, the Jupiter family in *The Hills Have Eyes* eat with their fingers, and the Sawyers of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* are slaughterhouse workers made redundant by burgeoning mechanisation.

Annalee Newitz notes that there is a thought process that "in spite of white middle-class education and cultural hegemony, whites are only a few steps away from becoming amoral, rural savages who kill each other with their hands."[26] This underlines the idea of white trash bodies being a realistic threat, and it is this fear of the precariousness of our privileged position and our sameness to the monster that informs both American rural horror and British hoodie horror.

The idea of sameness is another key aspect to understanding the white trash monster. John Hartigan Jr.'s work is of particular relevance here, as it is his idea of 'sameness' that informs ideas of etiquette and boundaries in American rural horror, and that can be discerned in British hoodie horror. Hartigan's concept of sameness also relates back to Douglas's thoughts on ambiguity. Hartigan argues that whites from the American South are a source of anxiety for people from the North when he states that "the whiteness of his kith and kin in the South represented a confusing mix of sameness and difference, making for an unstable cultural figure."[27] The poor white body in American rural horror is therefore both like and unlike the protagonists. It is both in the present and yet representative of a primitive past. It inhabits the margins of classification, displaying its sameness and difference to the protagonists, and as such, is presented as something to fear. An interesting point therefore, is a change present in post-millennial rural horror in

relation to the physical appearance of the rural white monster from visually similar to visually different from the protagonists.[28] For example, the antagonists of *Wrong Turn 4: Bloody Beginnings* (O'Brien, 2011), the Hilliker Brothers, who have brutally self-mutilated their outward appearance, with Three Finger having chewed off his digits, One Eye sticking a fork in his eye and then eating it, and Sawtooth having sharpened his teeth to points. Through this mutilation, the Hilliker Brothers actively mark themselves out as visually different to the other whites in the film and have begun to building their own boundaries, to keep out the middle class and to redefine their territory on their own terms.

Broken Britain and Hoodie Horror

Similar to American rural horror, the chav or hoodie types that reside in British horror takes the worst depictions of the white underclass and emphasises them. I discussed earlier the eugenics movement, their Othering process of lower-class whites, and their understanding of this group as being distinctly different from normative whiteness. The British historian David Starkey echoes this sentiment, arguing that the fault of the London Riots of 2011 could be attributed to the idea that "whites have become black."[29] In this statement, Starkey equates blackness with savagery and again marks those whites out as belonging to a category of whiteness that is not normative or that is less than white in some way. Starkey's comments are reminiscent of the eugenicist's warnings of race pollution by way of multiculturalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that I highlighted earlier.

The reason I have touched upon the London Riots is that the wider concept of 'Broken Britain' has influenced the subgenre of Hoodie Horror made during this period, which is where we see the character of the chav. This phrase became something of a buzzword in contemporary British culture through popular usage in the tabloid press and popular media discourse. The phrase Broken Britain refers in the main to the societal fear that Britain has become overrun with feral youths, teenage pregnancy and Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). Arguably more recently displaced onto debated about immigration and the European Union, there is a lingering anxiety or resentment present in British society. The dread is summed up on *The Guardian* website's comments section on an article about Broken Britain,[30] where a poster named Taxpayer2go writes:

> See the crowds of feral youth bullying elderly people to death… and an ever-growing army of shallow minded single mothers all living on a lifetimes (sic) benefits and retering (sic) on a pension they haven't earned.

This mix of fear and resentment in some British public discourse is reminiscent of the studies carried out by Cynthia Duncan, where a resident of Blackwell, Appalachia states that:

> there's people who don't want to work at all, never have and never will. We call them first of the monthers because they come out of the mountains on the first of the month with about ten kids and don't wash. When I worked at the grocery store, you could smell them coming.[31]

Duncan's interviews found that the local community regarded the poor with a range of negative connotations, from contempt to anger. The most constant theme that emerges in Duncan's work however is that her interviewees saw the poor as responsible for their own poverty through laziness or stupidity. This sentiment can be seen clearly in the way that the lower classes in British society were, and are, often depicted in popular culture, from the character of Vicky Pollard, a chav character on British comedy show *Little Britain* (2003-2007) who is characterised as a grotesque teenager on state benefits, to the more threatening and violent characters in films such as *Kidulthood* (Huda, 2006). Although they are addressing different countries, both Taxpayer2go's comment and the above quote from Cynthia Duncan's interviews refer to the white underclass, with an underlying assumption that these people do not want to work and are perfectly happy living off money given to them by charities and local governments. This recall the type of language Harry Laughlin uses regarding those poor whites in America that are supported by the state.

During the same time-frame, there was also repeated use of the word "feral" in news stories about hoodie gangs and violent youth culture.[32] Films such as *Harry Brown* (Barber, 2009) and *Outlaw* (Love, 2007) featured representations of feral youth, the term itself conjuring up images of werewolf-like children dwelling in underpasses. This is also reflected in *Heartless* (Ridley, 2009) where a witness to a brutal hoodie stabbing states that "these kids were like wild animals." The conflation of the British underclass with animals also mirrors the eugenicists' Othering of the poor in America, which, as Jim Goad notes of the redneck stereotype, "are presumed to be creatures of instinct, swamp animals who bite if you come too close. Another breed entirely."[33] Again, this demonstrates that the rural white is a different species entirely and in the case of David Starkey's comments, a species that is 'contaminated' by multiculturalism. The fact that these terms invoke images of an animalistic, brutal poor make it an apt character-type for the horror genre.

An interesting point of difference between the American rural white and the British chav is that whereas the poor white in

American rural horror is seen as part of a distant and barely remembered past, the underclass in British hoodie horror is seen as representative of a barbaric and unknowable future, with this fear stemming from the belief that Britain's youth are becoming uncontrollable and brutally savage.

'Who you Lookin' at? You Little Rich Boy!'[34] The White Trash Monster in British Horror

In *Eden Lake*, British youth reaches a new level of animalistic sadism, and on the Internet Movie Database, myriad user comments consider the portrayal of the chav antagonists. Acoustic Joe notes that people can "read any paper and see how much power feral scum have in this country" and another comment poster state that "there are enclaves of generations old lower socio-economic classes with the kind of mentality on display here, plenty in Britain… Frightening." Alex Hess, writing for *The Guardian* about the film, reports that

> The obvious way to frame the film is as a *Daily Mail* reader's nightmare incarnate – the onslaught of murderous, feral kids being the logical conclusion of the underclass's dereliction of duty. Broken Britain wielding a shard of broken glass… the instinctive fear provoked by its track-suited executioners.[35]

As these comments show, from when we first see the antagonists in *Eden Lake*, there is almost a visual checklist, a pedigree chart similar to those used by eugenicists: the Rottweiler dog, the loud music, the carrying of knives, and the tracksuits. We are visually informed that we are dealing with the Great British underclass.

Eden Lake follows a young couple, Jenn and Steve, as they arrive at a disused and flooded quarry for a romantic getaway. Jenn and Steve are as clearly visually coded as not being part of the underclass as the youths are coded as emphatically belonging to it. The couple arrive in an expensive 4x4, replete with a customised satellite navigation system, and are listening to radio reports about government prescribed parenting contracts and Antisocial Behaviour Orders.

The construct of etiquette is used in this film in a similar way to American rural horror, with the etiquette, or lack thereof, of white trash being emphasised. When Jenn and Steve stop off at a Bed and Breakfast on the way to the quarry, Jenn is visibly shocked when a mother slaps her child. The couple later laugh inside their room at the revellers outside, and Steve does an impression of their Northern working-class accents, ending only when Jenn calls Steve a "Pikey oaf." This is not the last time that language and its connection to etiquette, education and social standing is highlighted. For example, when Steve accidentally kills the

dog of the gang's leader, Brett, Brett repeatedly says "She's fucking die" instead of "She's fucking dead."

Whenever the audience meet a character from the gang or the surrounding small rural town, we are reminded both visually and audibly that they are different from Jenn and Steve. The gang spit into the quarry, stomp on another boy's caterpillar, torture animals, and carry knives. Their lack of social etiquette is made clear for example when Jenn, at one point, is ushered into a bathroom where a couple are having sex at a family party. Brett, his family, and his friends are repeatedly coded as those whites much in the same way as the poor underclass in rural American horror.

Just as the Hilliker brothers of the *Wrong Turn* films began to redefine the boundary lines originally placed to prevent infection from the underclass, *Eden Lake* similarly

Steve suffers after Cooper, a member of the chav gang, is forced by the ringleader Brett to attack Steve's mouth with a box-cutting knife

presents the rural underclass as being as ferociously protective of the boundaries as the eugenicists once were, marking their territory against intruders. As Jenn and Steve arrive at the entrance to the quarry, they read a large sign proclaiming the construction of fifty executive homes being built within a gated community. Jenn scoffs at this, asking "Gated community? What are they so afraid of?" As the couple drive on, the audience are privy to something the couple are not, the crudely spray-painted warning on the back of the sign, reading "Fuck off, yuppie cunts."

Greg Philo of Glasgow University traces the contemporary fear of the chav back to a middle-class fear of "those who might undermine their security,"[36] and this claustrophobic fear of infection from the underclass is writ large in *Eden Lake*, from the grabbing hands closing in on Jenn and Steve's car to the murky woods muffling the war cries of the group of hoodies pursuing Jenn. The comparisons that eugenicists made between the underclass and animals and the idea of 'feral youth' are also apparent with moments like the pack-like pursuit of the couple and Brett telling his gang that all they have to do is "follow the blood" to find Steve.

As was true of poor rural whites singled out for persecution from the Eugenics Records Office, it is clear in these films that an older generation is at fault, a generation who have birthed and moulded the attitudes of the young chavs who have degenerated into animals. There is a tendency for the mothers in these films to absolve their children from any blame. When Steve asks a waitress in a local café if she knows the youths who slashed his tyres, her entire demeanour

changes as she coldly replies, “no, not my kids.” This absolving of responsibility and of criminality being kept within the family is never clearer than in the closing scene of the film. Jenn, thinking she has found salvation in a house, realises that she is in the home of one of the teenagers, and his family will now kill her to protect him. The characterisation of the chav family echoes the eugenicists’ concept of hereditary criminality, a sub-human class of animalistic beings, pre-destined to immoral and criminal behaviour.

Jenny is held captive by the families of the chav gang, highlighting the assumed hereditary degradation that eugenicists claimed of the lower classes.

In both American rural horror and *Eden Lake*, it is only when the protagonists put aside or lose their civilised trappings and become more rural and savage that they are able to defeat their tormentors. Jenn and Steve have only to lose their mobile phones, satellite navigation, and car to become completely isolated and immersed in this community and landscape that is alien to them. It is only when Jenn puts aside her etiquette as a teacher, becomes as savage as the youths, and begins hurting and killing children that she gains a brief upper hand. The families of the teenagers eventually murder Jenn, partly for revenge because Jenn killed one of the gang and partly to protect the group because as in the parting line of the film, Brett’s father tells his friends “we look after our own round here.”

Conclusion: And the Road Leads to Nowhere?

The cinematic white trash body is a figure that is mutable, albeit always with an underlying theme of pollution. I have based my reading of the white trash monster in rural horror around the fear that the poor white bodies’ polluted identity is contagious, which stems from the unfounded beliefs of the eugenics movement.This article has examined the ways in which etiquette-based boundaries feature in both American and British rural horror, noting the ways in which these boundaries have begun to shift in post-millennial horror, no longer the sole preserve of the upper classes, the lower-class whites have now begun to value their boundary lines too. It is in the poor white rural character’s move transnationally into the figure of the chav, however, that we begin to see how ferociously protective of their territory the poor white monster has become.

In closing, it is important to note that whereas the films I have examined present the rural or underclass character in an antagonistic role, there has been subsequent movement towards reclaiming both the rural white and the chav character. In *Attack the Block* (Cornish, 2011) for example, a group of chavs are first presented as the antagonists of the narrative, as they mug a

young woman at knifepoint. Their dialogue, clothing and attitude firmly places them in the same characterisation as the feral youth of *Eden Lake*. However, when aliens attack their estate, they become the heroes of the film. Similarly, the premise of horror-comedy *Tucker and Dale vs. Evil* (Craig, 2010) centres on a group of college students, who have assumed that Tucker and Dale are murdering hillbillies because of their appearance and domicile. The comedic quality of the white trash figure is tempered somewhat however by other contemporary white trash horror narratives that involve a more serious and dramatic treatment of the figure. Rob Zombie's films, including *House of a 1000 Corpses* (2003), *The Devil's Rejects* (2005), *Halloween* (2007), and *Halloween 2* (2009) for example, all use characters coded as white trash antagonists.

It is the white trash body's simultaneous sameness to and difference from the normative white protagonists that holds the key to their threat and longevity in the horror genre, a monster that is similar to, but different from, the heroes. The idea of a polluted poor white identity, with poisoned blood that will infect future generations, has been carried from the Eugenics Records Office through to a British counterpart in the chav. This has resulted in the characterisation of a polluted body that needs to be kept separate from the populace by way of exclusion from executive homes in gated communities, for fear of contamination by monstrous poverty.

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Bad S**t, Killer Worms and Deadly Dawns: The Cult Cinema and Rural Excess of Jeff Lieberman

Jon Towlson

Abstract

The films of Jeff Lieberman are celebrated for their quirky originality and allegorical themes that critique dominant ideologies. This article investigates his films, *Just Before Dawn* and *Blue Sunshine* as cult texts. *Squirm* is examined in relation to the 'revenge of nature' cycle of the 1970s; whilst *Just Before Dawn* is considered primarily in terms of its feminist subversion of rural horror tropes. *Blue Sunshine* is interrogated as an intertextual blending of 50s invasion-metamorphosis science fiction narrative, 60s psychedelic drug movie and 70s conspiracy thriller. It is argued that Lieberman's films have extended and enriched sub-genres within horror cinema and can be seen as crucial contributions to '*The American Nightmare'* cycle of the 1970s/80s apocalyptic horror film originally identified by Robin Wood. The article considers the ways in which increased access to his work, especially to lesser-known titles (such as *Remote Control*), active on-line presence, and personal appearances at events such as Cine Excess have helped to raise Lieberman's cult status as horror auteur in the digital age.

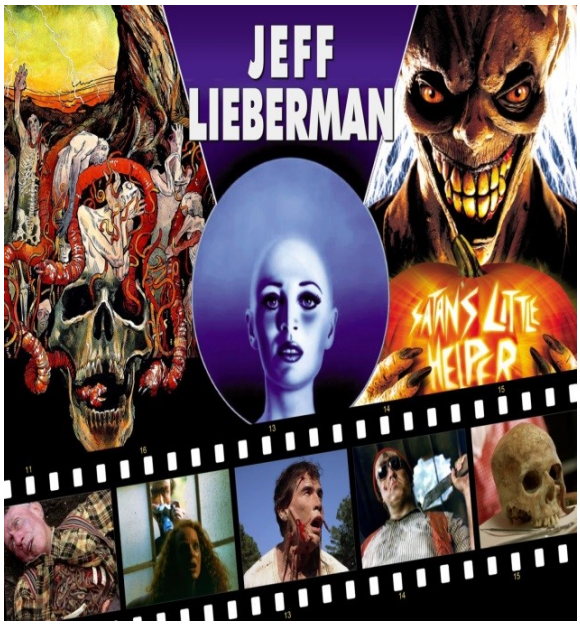
Keywords: cult film; rural horror; 'The American Nightmare'; Jeff Lieberman; *Blue Sunshine*; *Squirm*; *Just Before Dawn.*

Introduction

Discussing the recent discovery in a Seattle warehouse of the lost negative of his 1978 film, *Blue Sunshine*, writer-director Jeff Lieberman commented: "Of the five features I've made, *Sunshine* is definitely the most certified 'cult' movie, by critics and cinema writers anyway." The reason Lieberman cites for this: "It's the one most 'time-stamped' to represent a very specific time in American culture."[1] With respect to Lieberman, we might nonetheless attribute the term 'cult' to at least two more of his films, *Squirm* (1976) and *Just Before Dawn* (1981). It is those films that I will focus on initially here, with consideration given afterwards to *Blue Sunshine*. Lieberman was Guest of Honour at 2014's *Cine Excess VIII*; I conclude this essay with a reflection on Lieberman's festival Q&A, and his participation in the industry panel, *Cult Crowdfunders: New Audiences*, *New Funders and the Cult Indie Scene*. Before that, however, by way of introduction to Lieberman's work, a brief consideration of Lieberman's cult status may indeed serve useful. A broader discussion of what constitutes cult cinema is beyond the scope of this piece, so my analysis will necessarily rely on some common definitions.

Jeff Lieberman as Cult Auteur

Although not as widely recognised as, say, Romero, Craven or Cronenberg, Lieberman's films have extended and enriched sub-genres within horror cinema. *Squirm* is considered one of the best of the 70s cycle of ecological horror films derived from Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963); *Blue Sunshine* spans the zombie-satire gap between Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) and Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978); *Just Before Dawn* (1981) develops and subverts the tropes of Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977); in its depiction of videotape as modern folk devil, *Remote Control* (1988) invites comparisons with Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983); and *Satan's Little Helper* (2003) riffs intriguingly on Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978). Lieberman has the ability to crystallise the essence of a horror sub-genre in a single striking iconographic image:



Striking up a cult image: the cinema of Jeff Lieberman

In *Blue Sunshine* we have the murderous baby sitter stalking her young charges with a large knife; her invasion-metamorphosis is signified by her bizarrely bald head, her 'possession' by the visual reference to *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). In *Just Before Dawn*, Lieberman's heroine fends off her backwoods attacker by thrusting her fist down his throat – a gender subversion of the rape/violation imagery redolent of the urbanoia film (most notably the gun-in the-woman's-mouth scene in *The Hills Have Eyes* [1977]). In *Squirm*, we have three such iconic moments, neatly encapsulating the three stages of narrative progression in the apocalyptic horror film as identified by Charles Derry in *Dark Dreams 2.0: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film*[2]: *proliferation* – the scene where worms infest the face of the antagonist, Roger; *besiegement* – where the worms threaten to erupt from a showerhead on to the heroine (also, a sly nod to *Psycho* [1960] – linking via *The Birds* to Hitchcock); and *annihilation* – when the worms invade the house and finally engulf Roger, who sinks into them like a man disappearing into quicksand.

The limited availability of his films in the UK in the days before home video and DVD conversely helped cement Lieberman's cult status in this country in the 70s/80s. While *Squirm* was a hit (one particular cinema in London's Piccadilly Circus played it for an entire year), *Blue Sunshine* and *Just Before*

Dawn both suffered distribution problems in Britain on first release. The Rank Organisation kept *Just Before Dawn* sitting on the shelf for over a year before burying it in a double-bill with Tyburn's *The Ghoul* (1975). *Blue Sunshine* was never shown in UK cinemas, or on VHS PAL video or, as of yet, on UK-region DVD/Blu-ray (Warner Brothers own the domestic rights). Meanwhile, Lieberman was championed by the likes of Alan Jones and Kim Newman, House of Hammer, *Starburst* and *Fangoria*; and film tie-in novelisations of *Squirm* and *Blue Sunshine* proved popular with horror fans even while access to the films themselves remained limited. However, Lieberman's films now enjoy repertory screenings in cultural hubs such as London's ICA and the New Beverly Cinema (owned and programmed by Quentin Tarantino) in Santa Monica; and Lieberman himself is a regular guest of honour at horror film festivals internationally, participating in Q&As in person or via Skype, helping to expose more fans of the genre to his films through his personal appearances at such events. We can thus see Lieberman's currency as a cult auteur continuing into the digital age, with his films considerably less 'rare' but still 'specialist'.

Lieberman's work is often celebrated for its quirky originality and allegorical themes that critique dominant ideologies. This may be why the director himself attributes *Blue Sunshine* as his "most certified 'cult' movie". By contrast, both *Squirm* and *Just Before Dawn*, in their depictions of backwood rural communities, are more precariously balanced between mocking and reinforcing cultural prejudices. "I am a baby boomer," Lieberman stated in an interview with Rue Morgue magazine in 2011:

> I was in the drug culture of the '60s and I saw everything first hand. I was at Woodstock. I did acid. Marched against the war in Vietnam. Saw Easy Rider. I was immersed in all that in New York. I was at the right place at the right time, at the vanguard of all that stuff. However, I have an innate cynicism so I don't ever really buy into anything.[3]

Lieberman's films are markedly intertextual. They invite comparisons with other films in the genre, consciously play with and subvert genre tropes and reference and/or invoke cultural myths (*Blue Sunshine*, for example, satirises 1970s anti-drug hysteria; *Remote Control* sends up the 1980s video revolution.) As commented in 1977 by Edgar Lansbury and Joseph Beruh, the producers of *Squirm* and *Blue Sunshine*: "Lieberman has a good grasp of the genre and *great respect for it."*[4] *Whereas Just Before Dawn offers a spin on the survivalist tropes of Deliverance* (1972), *Squirm* and

Blue Sunshine belong firmly in the canon of seventies apocalyptic horror identified by Robin Wood in his seminal 1979 essay, 'The American Nightmare'.[5] Wood considers the American horror films to have entered its apocalyptic phase after 1968, reflecting the ideological crisis and destabilisation that beset America during the time of the Vietnam War and leading to Nixon's resignation following the Watergate scandal in 1974. According to Wood, the revenge of nature film (of which *Squirm* is a distinguished example) forms a tangential subgenre within apocalyptic horror. It speaks of anxieties concerning the rape of the environment by corporate-capitalism, and its generic roots can be found in the cold war monsters-caused-by-radiation of 1950s science fiction.

Radiation Movies

Lieberman's films, including *Squirm*, are heavily influenced by 50s sci-fi. "As a kid, I thought I was shrinking", he has recalled of seeing Jack Arnold's classic *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), "because government was instilling this fear of radiation – you can't imagine how they frightened my generation with this radiation".[6] Lieberman's project can be identified as subverting the ideology of the 1950s sci-fi movie as defined by its outward projection of fears instilled by governments. In his lecture, 'Radiation Movies', given at the *Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies* in 2011, Lieberman outlined his modus operandi, stating that the atomic age anxieties of the 1950s gave way to government-induced fears of the effects of LSD in the early 1970s and then later the effects of environmental pollution. Throughout the years he has continued to employ the basic story telling formulae of the early sci-fi 'radiation movies', whilst simultaneously challenging the messages of those movies and adapting them to the changing times.

Squirm

The fear of ecological disaster underpins *Squirm* - albeit in a satirical way. In the film, an electricity pylon collapses and 'electrifies' a harvest of carnivorous bloodworms which go on to crawl amok through a backwoods Southern town, feasting on the various inhabitants. Lieberman wrote the script in a frenzied six weeks, after putting it off for two years due to family commitments. He sold the script immediately to producers Lansbury and Beruh, who, on the strength of the script, allowed him to direct. Lieberman considers *Squirm* to be his 'on the job training' in directing, and learned to make *Squirm*, as he said, "one shot at a time".[7] It became his crash course in the exigencies of low budget film-making. *Squirm* cost $420,000 to make and was shot in 25 days.

Earth worms meets eugenics in *Squirm*

Many reviewers rightly identify *Squirm* as character-led, that the revenge of nature plot motif is secondary to a portrait of small-town tensions. Reminiscent of the Melanie-Mitch subplot in *The Birds*, events in *Squirm* are kicked off by the arrival of a stranger in Fly Creek who arouses the suspicion of the locals. Played by Don Scardino, Mick is a nerdish city-slicker, visiting his girlfriend Geri who lives on the outskirts of town. When bodies of worm victims are found, distrust falls – implausibly - on Mick. He and Geri are forced to investigate the killings themselves and then try to save the disbelieving townsfolk from the marauding polychaetes. Finally it is the small-mindedness of the townsfolk, as much as the threat from the worms, which brings about the demise of the town.

With its Georgia setting and its broad Southern accents, there is more than a little ersatz-Tennessee Williams in *Squirm*. (Intriguingly, the film was originally set in New England, which perhaps explains the film's rather Lovecraftian US poster; Lieberman changed the locale at the behest of the producers.) The repression within Geri's family, characterised by her neurotic mother, and in the townsfolk generally, evokes the Southern Gothic of Williams, but also: the worms themselves represent the eruption of that all-consuming repression, which is brought to a head by Mick's arrival. A crucial moment in the film concerns Roger, the 'hick' who is secretly smitten by Geri and therefore resentful and jealous of Mick. After a scuffle on board a boat where he tries to kiss Geri, Roger falls into a box of bait worms which burrow into his face. Later, Roger is literally consumed by the worms when they infest the house. In the same scene, Geri's mother is shown to have been consumed also, with only the shell of her body left. Repressing the writing of *Squirm* for two years due to family commitments may well be one of the things that helped to give the film its queasy power: *Squirm* feels very much like an outpouring of the young director's own stifled creativity.

Critics have commented on the film's often sardonic representation of class, social mobility and North/South difference. Mick, an antiques dealer, is also in Fly Creek to buy up the townsfolk's family heirlooms, invoking the resentment of the locals who

are loath to see their riches go into the pockets of a city boy outsider. In the words of reviewer, Frank Collins, Mick is a "capitalist Yankee ransacking the remains of the South".[8] Naturally the young people - Mick, Geri and her liberal pot-smoking sister, Alma - face antagonism from the local right-wing sheriff as they attempt to solve the mystery in *Scooby-Doo* fashion. Lieberman both plays up to and undercuts these stereotypes. Roger is a pathetic figure as he tries to win Geri's affection through misguided displays of his white, working class masculinity, which is starkly contrasted by Mick's middle-class preppy-ness. *Squirm's* representation of Southern small-town folk is complicated by the fact that Lieberman switched the locale of the story before filming commenced, necessitating a quick script rewrite, leading perhaps, to its heightened sense of pastiche. Lieberman's characters are written, and played, as broad. This may, of course, also be part of the film's cult attraction. *Squirm* certainly does not fall into the 'so bad it's good' category of cult cinema – on the whole the film is competently made and acted – however, there are sufficient elements of 'badness' in it to help position it as cult viewing. R. A. Dow's performance as Roger, for example, like that of Zalman King as Jerry Zipkin in *Blue Sunshine*, is excessive. Of course, it is important to note that Lieberman deliberately approaches *Squirm* as a comedy. Its tongue is firmly in cheek, and this suggests that, as a representation of the South, it should not, in the final analysis, be taken too seriously.

Squirm was a huge financial success thanks to the distributor, American International Pictures, promoting it as a creature feature. Although not the first of the 70s 'nature attacks' films – *Frogs* (1972), *Night of the Lepus* (1972), *Phase IV* (1974) and *Bug* (1975), among others, preceded it – *Squirm's* primacy revived this flagging cycle in the mid-70s and inspired numerous imitators – *The Savage Bees* (1976) , *Day of the Animals* (1977), *Empire of the Ants* (1977), *Kingdom of the Spiders* (1977). Although he described the revenge of nature films as generally less interesting and productive than other types of apocalyptic horror, Robin Wood praised *Squirm* for its underlying familial and sexual tensions à la *The Birds*, and Lieberman freely acknowledges his debt to Hitchcock in this respect.

Just Before Dawn

Just Before Dawn came into being when, in 1980, Lieberman received a phone call from Czech producer, Doro Vlado Hreljanovic, offering him a script called *The Last Ritual*. Lieberman agreed to direct on the proviso that he be allowed to completely rewrite the screenplay (under the pseudonym Gregg Irving), retaining only the names of the characters and the basic 'kids in the woods with a murderer' premise. *Just Before Dawn*, then, can be seen as an attempt to work within, and to some extent subvert, the conventions of the 70s urbanoia film, and Lieberman brings his customary intelligence and genre savvy to its run-of-the-mill

premise. In the film, campers in the wild are terrorised by a family of machete-wielding killers; only one of them survives, by drawing on her own animal instincts.

Lieberman's film highlights the survivalist aspects of the story, emphasising the conversion from passive victim to savage survivor of the female character. In his foreword to my book, *Subversive Horror Cinema*, Lieberman discusses *Just Before Dawn's* gender subversion in the following terms:

> It was my homage to *Deliverance* (1972), which had a similar impact on me as *Lord of The Flies* (1963), and dealt with very similar socio-political issues. I set out to make the Jon Voight character from *Deliverance* a woman, 'Connie,' who would make the same character arc from helpless milquetoast to animalistic survivor. So my political statement if you will was a radically feminist one, to show that when humans are reduced to their animalistic genetic baseline, there was little difference between male or female. Connie became the ultimate 'final girl,' long before that term was coined.[9]

Just Before Dawn is often compared to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes* as an urbanoia text, but in many ways can be seen as a riposte to the rape/violation imagery of those films. In *Chain Saw* Pam and Sally are symbolically penetrated by meat hook and chainsaw; in *The Hills Have Eyes* Brenda is forced to her knees and orally violated with a handgun. *Just Before Dawn* both references and subverts this type of iconography in Connie's final fatal oral fisting of her backwoods attacker. Lieberman presents the action from the point of view of the male onlooker – played by Greg Henry – whose gaze mirrors that of the film's audience witnessing the audacious gender reversal. The sequence stuns the contemporary viewer because the usual trope of male violator/violated female found in 70s urbanoia is turned on its head. Despite its radical sexual politics, however, the film's representation of the hillbillies is ambivalent, generally lacking the tongue-in-cheek factors that characterised *Squirm*.

Just Before Dawn **and** ***Urbanoia***

James Rose usefully defines the urbanoia film in *Beyond Hammer: British Horror Cinema Since 1970*.[10] Urbanoia, according to Rose, deals explicitly with the conflict between present and past, rural and urban. The arrival of a group or family of white middle class characters into the wilderness sets off a collision between cultures.

This culture clash instigates the events that follow as the group or family are hunted down and killed one by one by their backwoods antagonists as they plunge deeper into the unfamiliar wilderness. As the number of survivors from the urban group diminishes, it is the seemingly weakest group member who finds him or herself galvanised into violent action, drawing on inner resources and animal cunning to outwit and finally hunt down the hunters.

In *Just Before Dawn* the backwoods clan is stereotypically portrayed as impoverished, primitive, inbred and morally degenerate. Incest has resulted in many instances of congenital freakishness, including the killer hillbillies who are revealed in the film as identical twins. A group of white middle class campers intrude on the wilderness family's domain, here to visit land inherited from their parents. Rose further defines the conflict between the wilderness clan and the urban group in urbanoia texts as agrarian versus capitalist; the hillbilly figure in these films is presented both as a savage aggressor against the white middle class urban intruders and victim of the economic inequality that exists between city and countryside. The rural 'have-nots', in urbanoia tales, are eventually exterminated by the urban 'haves' for daring to rise up against the privileged class.

Country conflicts: *Just Before Dawn*

The campers in *Just Before Dawn* trail their urban sensibilities into the wilderness: they travel in an expensive Winnebago that allows them their material comforts, Blondie's *Heart of Glass* blaring on the radio; all the trappings of modernity. One of the characters aims his camera at twin girls who play in the wreck of a car at the side of the road. Dressed in rags, these are, by contrast, children of the historically dispossessed, evoking Dorothea Lange's famous portraits of rural poverty in the Great Depression. Immediately the group hit a deer, and this foreshadows the events to come; their intrusion into the wilderness constitutes, in the words of George Kennedy in the film, a "shock to nature's delicate

balance". To underline this theme, Lieberman cuts to a close up of a frightened horse seemingly unsettled by the unwelcome presence of the campers. Kennedy's forest ranger is a familiar figure in urbanoia, a harbinger and intermediary between civilisation and the wilderness. His warnings to the youngsters, of course, go unheeded.

An urbanoia film, according to Rose, "usually ends with the death of the wilderness patriarch, leaving the sole survivor of modernity to stumble back to the city, bloody and traumatised."[11] In *Just Before Dawn*, Connie bears the signs of traumatic rebirth despite her new found empowerment, and through her abjection she ultimately becomes at the end of the film both warrior and matriarch. The final symbolic image of *Just Before Dawn* takes place at sunrise: Connie stands triumphant over the body of the hillbilly she has defeated, while her terrified boyfriend clings to her like a weeping child.

Lieberman uses the Oregon locations masterfully to build suspense and create atmosphere. The landscape exterior is an essential part of the urbanoia film, as Rose points out: its narrative function to "place the protagonists within a space that initially offers them an escape from their daily experience but eventually isolates them from any sense of modern society in the face of mounting terror".[12] Lieberman imbues *Just Before Dawn* with the sheer beauty of nature in the lush, verdant forests and glistening waterfalls of the Oregon mountains, but we are all too aware of the horrors that lurk beneath the canopy of the woods and under the surface of Silver Creek. Lieberman's final message seems to be that Mother Nature, despite her beauty, is cold, brutal and primordial, and those who seek her solace must be willing to locate the primal within themselves.

Blue Sunshine

Blue Sunshine takes its title from the fictitious strain of LSD which, in the film, turns its users into bald-headed psychotic zombie killers a decade after it is taken. A further example of Lieberman's 'radiation cinema', *Blue Sunshine* draws on the same government-instilled anti-drug hysteria of the early 1970s that prompted *The Ringer*, Lieberman's public information film sponsored by the Coca Cola company in 1972.

Blue Sunshine is first and foremost socio-political satire playing on the paranoia of post-Watergate America. It amalgamates elements of 70s conspiracy thriller (*Executive Action* [1973], *The Parallax View* [1974], *Three Days of the Condor* [1975]), 60s-type psychedelic drug movie à la Corman's *The Trip* (1967), and the invasion-metamorphosis narratives of 50s science fiction (the seminal text here being *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1956]). In *Blue Sunshine* the protagonist, Jerry Zipkin, goes on the lam after becoming the prime suspect in a murder committed by a friend

suffering the psychotic effects of the drug. Investigating the crime himself with the help of his girlfriend Alicia, Zipkin discovers that old college associate Ed Flemming, now a politician, is trying to cover up his past as the drug dealer who sold his friends the experimental '*Blue Sunshine*'. The film builds to a confrontation between Zipkin and Flemming's bald and berserk henchman, Mulligan, in a discotheque and shopping mall, symbolising the new age of rampant consumerism that the baby-boomers - having compromised the ideals of the 1960s for their own gain – have helped to usher in.

Acid rage: Jeff Lieberman's *Blue Sunshine*

Lieberman had originally set the film in New York, with elaborate flashback sequences showing the characters' college days; however, for budgetary reasons he ended up cutting those scenes and transposing the story to Los Angeles. In many ways that transposition helps the film. In *Shivers* and *Rabid* (1976) Cronenberg emphasises the brutalist architecture of Montreal as a dehumanising influence on the characters; in *Blue Sunshine* Lieberman uses the sterile modernity of Los Angeles, with its endless shopping centres and boutique malls, to similar effect, providing an ironic backdrop to the drug burn-out narrative. Indeed the intertexuality of the Cronenberg films and Blue Sunshine is underlined by the similarity of several key scenes in the work of both directors: in *Blue Sunshine*, Jerry anxiously watches his friend, Dr Blume - whom he thinks might be LSD-'infected' – perform surgery on a woman with cancer. The suspense is partly generated by Lieberman's playing on the audience's genre expectations: a similar scene appears in *Rabid*, in which a surgeon succumbs to the rabies virus while working on a patient and turns homicidal in the operating theatre.

Blue Sunshine's central suspense sequence with the murderous babysitter, references *Shivers*: the apartment complex setting is strikingly similar to Starliner Towers, even down to the residents, including the geriatric couple who ride the elevators. By the same token, *Blue Sunshine* anticipates Romero's

Dawn of the Dead in striking ways: there is a gun store scene very similar to that of *Dawn of the Dead*, in which Zipkin arms himself in defence against Mulligan; and their final showdown takes place in a shopping mall, in which the bald-headed showroom dummies are easily mistaken for zombies (indeed Lieberman's film ends with a zombie-Mulligan being gunned down in a shopping mall).

The key apocalyptic horror films of the 70s represent a sustained and developing enquiry into the breakdown of American society, locating its pathology in the very 'frontier spirit' that underlies the American Way. The interplay between genre and authorship can be seen in the remarkable intertextuality of these films: a direct result of the cultural interaction and exchange between horror directors in their richest period of achievement. Further example would be the continuity of theme in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Just Before Dawn*. This can be partly attributed to the genre savvy of the film-makers but also to their continuing sense of shared enquiry into the dark heart of the American pioneer myth, with each film building upon theme successively. One gets the sense of a baton being passed back and forth within 1970s horror – from Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*) to Craven (*Last House on the Left*) to Hooper (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) to Cronenberg (*Shivers*) to Lieberman (*Blue Sunshine*) and back to Romero (*Dawn of the Dead*) – a working through of the issues collectively - as each delves deeper into the nature of the 'apocalypse' facing the society of its time.

But whereas the early films of Hooper and Craven were unwilling to move beyond the apocalyptic, the work of Cronenberg, Lieberman and Romero in the 70s moved towards the possibility of a new order. *Shivers* offered a vision of sexual revolution based on the writings of Freudian psychologist, Norman O. Brown that was deeply ambivalent. In its portrayal of the 1970s as a consumerist dystopia whose revolutionary ideals have been replaced by mass psychosis (zombie-ism), *Blue Sunshine* bridges the ideological gap between *Shivers* and *Dawn of the Dead*. All three films critique the consumer-capitalist impasse of the 1970s but *Blue Sunshine* provides the crucial transition between the ambivalent sexual politics of *Shivers* and *Dawn of the Dead's* tacit observation of alternative ideologies and countercultural values. In this respect Lieberman's films - *Blue Sunshine*, especially - are important but often overlooked contributions to The American Nightmare cycle that began with *Night of the Living Dead*.

Blue Sunshine places itself, then, firmly alongside *Shivers* and *Dawn of the Dead* in the 'invasion-metamorphosis' sci-fi/horror subgenre as described by critic Andrew Tudor: "collectively, we have become potential victims, to be transformed into

zombies, gibbering maniacs or diseased wrecks," writes Tudor in *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie:*

> (y)et however vast its scale, the heart of this narrative lies in the emphatically internal quality of its threat. It is not simply that we may be destroyed, as we might have been by a score of traditional movie monsters. It is also that we will be fundamentally altered in the process; that our humanity itself is at risk.[13]

Intriguingly, the invasion-metamorphosis narrative that Tudor describes, perhaps because of its emphasis on human transformation as allegory of social and political change, seems to form the basis of the more optimistic horror films of the 1970s. Whereas the savagery/civilisation contradiction of *Last House on the Left*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes* (derived largely from the American revisionist western) seems impassable – it is presented as essentially two sides of the same coin – the living/dead dichotomy of *Blue Sunshin*e and *Dawn of the Dead* is surpassable, although, admittedly, it requires a fundamental shift in the values of society – which the films suggest nothing short of a countercultural revolution can bring about.

Accordingly, *Blue Sunshine's* protagonist, Jerry Zipkin, is defined as a counterculture figure, an 'un-reconstituted hippie'. Early in the story, it is revealed that, in the words of the detective following the case, Jerry is "erratic as hell". He graduated from Cornell but now, ten years later, "hasn't got a pot to piss in". He has gone through a number of jobs. "He quit his last one", we are told, "because the firm wouldn't hire enough women". Zipkin, because of his integrity, his adherence to the progressive values of his youth, his refusal to sell out, has become labelled a social misfit. Hence, he is fingered as the immediate suspect in the murder investigation. Jerry seems immune to the psychosis spreading through the erstwhile peace and love generation (which is itself a metaphor for their selling out to materialistic values); although at times Lieberman asks us to question this immunity, as Jerry's own behaviour becomes increasingly erratic (Lieberman attempts to play on our paranoia in a number of scenes, making us think that Jerry might be starting to suffer the effects of the drug, however Zalman King's idiosyncratic performance makes this work less effectively than it might otherwise have).

Zipkin's nemesis is Ed Flemming, the dealer turned politician. "We have lost a trust," Flemming announces in his campaign speech, "a trust in ourselves, a trust in our fellow Americans and a trust in the leadership of our government". Flemming is depicted as a hypocrite and self-serving

parasite, part of the corruption that besmirched 60s counterculture. Fittingly, his election campaign rally is held at Shopper's World, a large mall, which also houses a discotheque, thus closely aligning his values with those of consumerism. Disco, in *Blue Sunshine*, is seen as part of the ideological superstructure of 1970s consumerism, further evidence of the kind of commodified sexual freedom/ Marcusean repressive desublimation exemplified by the Starliner Towers complex in Cronenberg's *Shivers*. Incidentally, Lieberman attributes *Blue Sunshine's* popularity among the late 70s American punk music scene (where the film was regularly screened as background visuals in New York's music clubs) to its discotheque sequences which, according to Lieberman, "shit over disco".[14]

The conclusion of *Blue Sunshine* remains optimistic: ultimately, Zipkin (who has retained his basic integrity from his college days and not sold out like his contemporaries) prevails and he is vindicated. His defeat of Mulligan in the shopping mall is the triumph of integrity over corruption, of 1960s counterculture values prevailing in the age of consumerism; perhaps even the start of a backlash against the capitalist 'reality' of the 1970s in favour of a return to flower-power idealism. Lieberman invites us to consider these possibilities as the camera tracks away from Jerry and the unconscious Mulligan, to retreat through the aisle of consumer goods, past televisions blaring out Flemming's campaign: "it's time to make America good again!" We need more people like Zipkin, the film seems to be saying in its sardonic way, people who are immune to the lure of consumerism. Lieberman cannot resist a final irony, however, informing us in a title card that "two hundred and fifty-five doses of '*Blue Sunshine*' still remain unaccounted for". The immediate threat may have been fended off, but the wider crisis remains.

The On-Going Auteur: Jeff Lieberman at *Cine Excess VIII*

Lieberman's appearance as Guest of Honour at 2014's *Cine Excess VIII* speaks to the continuous market value of his films, and his lasting presence as a cult filmmaker. His reputation has continued to grow in recent years as a result of his active on-line presence; his use of social media and dedicated website to maintain contact with fans; an increasing awareness of his work on fan sites and cult movie forums; regular repertory screenings of his films; and the steady reissue since 2002 of Lieberman's back catalogue on DVD, Blu-ray and streaming media, as well as the release, in 2003, of his most recent film, *Satan's Little Helper*.

Jeff Lierberman directing *Satan's Little Helper*

In conversation, and during his participation in the industry panel on crowdfunding and the horror film, Lieberman reflected on being a cult director in the digital age. He has responded to horror fandom in a number of interesting ways.

Demand for his work led him to set up a distribution website for *Remote Control*, so that the film can be sent direct to fans on limited edition DVD and Blu-ray. Although *Remote Control* receives TV airings outside the US by Studio Canal, in the United States and the UK it had remained unseen since its VHS release in 1988. The domestic rights were owned by Carolco whose bankruptcy had tied up the film (and other titles) since 1995. Eventually Lieberman received the green light from former Carolco executive Andrew Vajna to release the film himself after spending a year trying to buy back the rights. He personally oversaw the 2K HD transfer from a good quality print that he found in Paris and had shipped over to the States. More recently, the discovery of the lost negative to *Blue Sunshine* in 2015 has enabled Lieberman to similarly re-master that title in 4K for screenings at cinemas committed to cult programming, such as the *Silent Movie Theater* in Los Angeles and the *Alamo Drafthouse Yonkers*, and for eventual Blu-ray release and streaming in America. Lieberman thus remains very much a part of the cult film community through events such as Cine Excess, regularly attending screenings of his films and making them available to new audiences in upgraded digital formats.

Reflexive cult commentary in *Remote Control*

A number of films by Lieberman's horror contemporaries have, of course, been remade (eg. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* [2003], *Dawn of the Dead* [2004]), *The Hills Have Eyes* [2006]), and the reactions of critics and fans to these remakes have been generally negative. Nevertheless, Lieberman remains open to his own films being 'reimagined'. When asked about the proposed remake of *Squirm*, Lieberman expressed enthusiasm for the possibilities of CGI in delivering what he believes could be an improved version of the original.

Although venerated by fans for its special make up effects by Rick Baker, Lieberman regards the shortcomings of *Squirm* in terms of its budgetary limitations: "to get that one worm going up the side of the face was such a big deal and a budget breaker. It took half a day to achieve that one make-up effect".[15] Lieberman necessarily scaled back the effects sequences of *Squirm* in order to meet the tight budget. CGI would enable him to achieve a film that he feels would therefore be closer to his original scripted vision, giving the film more of the 'yukkie-stuff' (the film's title, of course, signals the film's intended bodily affect). Similarly, Lieberman contends that the mooted remake of *Blue Sunshine* (currently in development with Vincent Newman as producer and Peter Webber directing), in terms of its theme of "decisions we made in our youth coming back to haunt us in horrific ways as adults", would "resonate well with Millennials".[16] In this way Lieberman challenges those fans and critics predisposed against the remaking of sacred horror film texts; while there is a tendency for cult movie fans to canonise directors for their past achievements, it is important to acknowledge Lieberman's authorship in terms of a career and 'oeuvre' that is on-going and evolving.

On the subject of crowdfunding for feature films, Lieberman has mixed feelings. He admits that it is difficult for independent filmmakers to secure funding, and remains open to the possibilities for a production on a low budget (*Satan's Little Helper* was shot on HD with a small cast and crew). Generally, however, he disagrees with the sense of entitlement that crowdfunding can embody for first time filmmakers: "You're basically asking the public for money just because you want to make a film."[17] Gatekeepers may be a necessary evil, ensuring a certain level of quality. Making reference to *Squirm*, he comments: "I wrote a script that was good enough for two producers to want to make." Having said this, Lieberman admits that his own cult status means that crowdfunding may become a viable option for him if a project is "inherently cheap so that it can be made on a low budget". The prospect, for cult film fans, is certainly intriguing. As Lieberman quipped during the panel discussion, "If the fans really want it that badly, and they're willing to put money into it, who am I to blow against the wind."

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Out of the Blue (Sunshine): An Interview With Director Jeff Lieberman

Conducted by Xavier Mendik

Cult indie director Jeff Lieberman

Jeff Lieberman remains one of the most important American indie directors to emerge from the 1970s, and his work consistently been interpreted as combining shock value with social commentary. Initially hailing from the New York film school scene, Jeff Lieberman's interests spanned both fiction and documentary film practice, with his 1972 short film *The Ringer* (1972) demonstrating an early ability to fuse multiple lines of quasi realist narrative action around a single act of criminality. Other formative entries included screenwriting duties on the early serial killer thriller *Blade* (1973), which provided the springboard for Lieberman's feature length directorial debut: *Squirm* (1976).

This film (which is discussed by Jon Towlson in his contribution to this edition of the Cine-Excess journal), is often classified as part of the so-called 'revolt of nature' cycle popular during the 1970s, *Squirm* uses the theme of earthworms running amok in rural Georgia to cleverly knit together longstanding phobias surrounding the American rural space with more contemporary ecological fears surrounding the monstrous disruption of the animal kingdom. Featuring early SFX from Rick Baker, *Squirm* remained decidedly 'old school' in the treatment of its unsettling subject matter.

Devoid of any CGI to create the monstrous assault of the creatures, Lieberman instead relied on thousands of live earthworms, which adds an additional element of grisly realism to some of the film's most disquieting scenes. While the emphasis is clearly on stomach churning shocks, *Squirm* also featured Jeff Lieberman's eye for incisive social commentary, which the director would later go on to explore in other celebrated cult productions. In particular, by divesting the film's attention between earthworms and the rural dispossessed, *Squirm* remains as much a

eugenic study as it does an exploitation exposé

It was a critique of 'radicalism' rather than the rural that dominated Lieberman's next production: *Blue Sunshine* (1978). Widely regarded as the director's most political production to date, Blue Sunshine casts a critical eye over the declining counterculture in the new corporate friendly culture of late 1970s America. The film focuses on the plight of Gerry 'Zippy' Zipkin, (Zalman King), a drop out finding it hard to adjust to the changing social values and social scene facing former radicals in the post-hippy era. Zipkin discovers that a random and violent killing spree is being committed by former hipsters who consumed a batch of bad acid during the summer of love. Ten years after taking the drug, all of its consumers suffer from violent headaches, a sudden and dramatic loss of hair and homicidal outbursts.

As the bodies begin to pile up, Zipkin discover a crucial link between the murders and Edward Flemming (Mark Goddard), a former dope dealer turned politician, who is running for congress on a morality ticket. By combining pulp politics with on-screen carnage, Blue Sunshine remains a closely observed critique of the changing cult and cultural trends of the 1970s. By naming his disenchanted male lead as 'Zippy', Lieberman signals the character's connection to 1960s counterculture and the fate that befell groups such as the hippies and zippies in the corporate culture of 1970s. As we also discover in the movie, Zippy has been sacked from his job after questioning his employer's attitude to female employees, and this highlights the extent to which fractured gender relations also haunt the film and Jeff Lieberman's wider cinema. Indeed, One of the more interesting, but less discussed aspects of the film remains the markedly de-sexualised relationship between Zipkin and the central female lead Alicia Sweeney (Deborah Winters), which also points to an interest in conflicted heterosexual bonds that runs through many of the director's works.

This theme was particularly marked in *Just Before Dawn*, Lieberman's rural horror entry from 1981. Released during at the height of the home video boom, the film offers an indie redux of *Deliverance* (1972), while also providing a much needed feminist corrective to the stalk and slash craze popular during the period. *Just Before Dawn* deals with a group of young city dwellers stalked and dispatched by hideously deformed mountain dwellers before the surviving heroine Constance (Deborah Benson) enacts her own form of primitive retribution in the film's startling finale. Although now seen as a seminal backwoods horror entry Just Before Dawn suffered from uneven distribution, often circulating in alternate versions, which added to its cult status.

Although Jeff Lieberman's genre output since the early 1980s has been less frequent, titles such as *Remote Control* (1988) and *Satan's Little Helper* (2004) saw the director taking self-reflexive swipes at both the US domestic video scene and moral panics surrounding video game violence. As well as being the noted screenwriter for the 1994 franchise entry Never Ending Story III, he also won an EMMY award for his 1995 documentary *Sonny Liston: The Mysterious Life and Death of a Champion* (HBO), and most recently brought his own distinctive and satirical stance to '*Til Death Do Us Part*: a TV series about murderous spouses (2006-2007).

In the following interview Jeff Lieberman discusses his key film entries, as well as the theme of rural excess relevant to the wider theme of the current journal issue. In his own unique style, he also dissects the rights and wrongs of interpreting the cinema of Jeff Lieberman.

Xavier Mendik: Your route into filmmaking came through the New York Film School, with its emphasis on film experimentation and cinema as a political tool. What were your memories of those formative years of film training at the tail end of the 1960s?

Jeff Lieberman: *The whole idea of film schools was just coming into its own at that time, with NYU leading the way in New York and UCLA and SC the leaders in Los Angeles. I attended The School of Visual Arts which was foremost an art school and the film department was only two years old when I signed on. There was no particular emphasis on anything, just teaching us the nuts and bolts of the craft. But being in NYC at that time certainly exposed us to the notorious filmmakers of that time.*

Xavier Mendik: As a genre filmmaker, we do associate you with that classic era of 1970s horror cinema, and some of your most notable productions were made in this era. What are your memories of working in this decade?

Jeff Lieberman: *The 70s seem to be a big focus right now – I guess they ran out of clichés in the endless glamorizing of the 60s! I didn't have any relationships with fellow filmmakers of that time in NY and only got to meet them way later when our films were known to each other, so as far as my story goes, there was no NY 'scene' as it were. Funny how to this day I have yet to make a movie that's set in NY!* ***Blue Sunshine*** *was supposed to take place in NY but was moved to LA for budgetary reasons.*

Xavier Mendik: Many people talk about the 'exploitation' element of your 1970s movies, other people have commented on their thematic and stylistic excess. One aspect that often does not get discussed is the economics of your films from the 1970S. How were they funded, who invested in

them and how did this kind of finance affect the types of production that were created?

Jeff Lieberman: *My first two movies were financed by the same producers, Edgar Lansbury and Joe Beruh. They were big broadway producers at the time and were able to tap into their financing resources from the theatre. There were no 'min-majors' back then so anything not financed by a studio had to be done with private money. Once the movie was completed, the hope was to attract major studio distribution, which is what happened with* ***Squirm*** *and AIP who snapped up all world rights and put the producers into profit immediately.*

Xavier Mendik: To what extent do you think your films from that era reflected the wider tensions in 1970s American society?

Jeff Lieberman: *I don't think they reflected their times any more than in any other era. Far as tensions goes, there was a hell of lot more going on than that in the 70s.* ***The Godfather*** *(1972),* ***Star Wars*** *(1977)* ***Jaws*** *(1974) all definitive movies of the era had nothing at all to do with any particular tensions of the 70s. Unless you count the fear of sharks! But even that wasn't particular to the 70s.*

Xavier Mendik: OK, well one film that could be seen as embodying the tensions of the culture that has created it is *Squirm*, which embodies all of the features of rural excess that are covered in this edition of the *Cine-Excess* journal. Why you feel the theme of debased rural development remains such a potent theme to American horror?

Jeff Lieberman: *I can only speak for myself, but I think first and foremost it is the sense of isolation that you can't get in even a small city. An unspoken sense of whatever happens, you're on your own out here. "In Squirm was actually set in a New England seaport town with a slant toward a Lovecraft feel. But by the time the financing was put together we'd have to shoot in the winter months and wanted wall to wall greenery to give the movie not only that sense of isolation but to hide whatever could be lurking right behind those bushes or trees.*

Xavier Mendik: What are your memories of the production of *Squirm*?

Jeff Lieberman: *Being my first feature I sure didn't allow myself to have any fun that's for sure. Four weeks of actors and one week of worms! And the worm effects were by and large hit and miss right there on the location, just trying out techniques and if they seemed to work, bam, they went on the shot list schedule. Everyone working on the movie seemed to feel it would be successful, but they had an entirely different point of view than I did which was just to somehow get it all in the can and hope that I was right way more than I was wrong when it's all cut together. Guess I was.*

Xavier Mendik: *Squirm* proved a big hit on the 1970s cinema circuit, both in the US and the UK. Why do you feel the film was so successful?

Jeff Lieberman: *Well, by definition it's an 'evergreen' in that the fear of snakes and worms is pretty universal and there's nothing in the movie that really dates it. I think there's only one car in the whole movie. And nobody's talking on those old phones because all the power is out. But I think much of the success comes from the characters interactions with each other and their ability to make such an absurd story seem real. Then of course there are the special FX which have become iconic over the years, mainly because they're referred to as 'practical FX' as opposed to CGI.*

Xavier Mendik: The film is often viewed as part of the 1970s revenge of nature cycle, and I wonder if you see *Squirm* as somehow distinct from this cinematic trend?

Jeff Lieberman: *When I made the movie in the fall of '75, there was no 'nature runs amuck' trend. Jaws was certainly a stand-alone horror thriller book, not intended to cash in on any trend when written. My inspiration was* ***The Birds*** *(1963), which again, wasn't part of any trend. Certainly a trend did develop after* ***Jaws****, with writers asking which other of God's creatures can we turn against mankind?* ***Grizzly*** *(1976),* ***Willard*** *(1971),* ***Slugs*** *(1988),* ***Cujo*** *(1983) and on and on. But when I got the idea for* ***Squirm****, it never occurred to me that it'd be part of some bigger category. Funny how all those categories emerged at the beginning of the 80s – 'slashers' 'kids in the woods' and in music 'heavy metal' 'punk' etc. I like shit much better when there were no labels. Each thing stood on its own merits – even if it was trying to cash in on someone else's hit.*

Xavier Mendik: You followed *Squirm*, with the 1978 release *Blue Sunshine*, which you have stated represented very specific issues in American society. What were the key elements you were seeking to discuss here?

LSD traumas in *Blue Sunshine*

Jeff Lieberman: *My inspiration for the movie came from my youth in the 1950s. Specifically, the government's fear campaign against 'The Russians' and the inevitable atomic war with them. I was inundated with propaganda fear campaigns of what atomic radiation did to the survivors of Hiroshima and what's it going to do to us. This was all bullshit to unite my country against the dreaded 'red' Russia and in turn justify more billions to make more of our own mutant forming bombs. Hollywood realized*

the govt. was spending millions scaring the crap out our youth so why not cash in on that fear? ***The Incredible Shrinking Man*** *(1957),* ***Day the World Ended*** *(1955),* ***The Amazing Colossal Man, Them*** *(1954) and on and on – we went to see those movies already sold on the horror of nuclear war and scared shitless about it and actually believed the stories could happen. After all, our govt. wouldn't lie to us, would they? So in the 60s and into the 70s, the govt did the same thing with a huge drug fear campaign. And top of the list was LSD, which they portrayed as the demon of all drugs. And just like with radiation they made incredible claims about DNA mutations without any proof at all. So I figured, why not do what the Hollywood people did back in the 50s with radiation, make a movie that will tap into that fear the govt is selling, even though I meant it as a satirical statement.*

Xavier Mendik: Blue Sunshine seems to offer a very melancholic assessment of the death of the so-called 1960s radical movement. Was this your intention?

Jeff Lieberman: *My intention was to illustrate what the 'baby boomer' generation had become, the very 'straight' members of society they rallied against when they didn't have to face the realities of the real world. Once they did, they conformed pretty much in the same way as generations before them. They not only joined the 'establishment' but strongly supported it. The entrenched big government, special interest money, big labour and pharma where hallmarks of the Obama years and Hillary Clinton promised to carry that same mantle if elected. To me, one of the biggest overlooked ironies of the '16 election is that the majority of Trump supporters echoed the very same frustrations of the disenfranchised baby boomers of the 1960s and 70s! They felt left out, that government was there only to take their money and serve a status quo they weren't a part of. So of course they embraced an outsider who voiced their frustrations. And boy did the establishment hate getting their boat rocked. And it's still rockin.'*

Xavier Mendik: By ranging lead character 'Zippy' Zipkin against this corrupt new right wing class, you seem to be explicitly proclaiming yourself as a political horror director. Was this your intension?

Jeff Lieberman: *The Ed Flemming character was a long haired hippie freak back in college and sold drugs to help pay his way just like so many others of his (my) generation. The fact that he went 'straight' like the others and in his case chose politics doesn't in any way make him any more 'right wing' than the other characters in the movie who joined the straight world, like Dr. Blum played by Robert Walden. Bill Clinton was a draft dodger against the Vietnam war, smoked pot in college but then when he ran for office he claimed he never inhaled it. To me that makes him just another bullshit politician but not 'right*

wing' in any way. This is a prime example of how all these labels have been rendered meaningless – Flemming was the 'bad guy' so therefore he must be 'right wing.' The speeches Mark Goddard makes as Flemming in the movie were lifted from Kennedy and Eisenhower. His rallying line 'It's time to make America great again' was pure Kennedy of decades ago, not Trump's. Zipkin's character's ago, not Trump's.

Zipkin's character's back story of standing up for feminist causes made him more sympathetic but those values were never attacked by Flemming, it only confirmed he was a 'trouble maker.' So the only thing Flemming had that against Zipkin was that he might expose Flemming's past and kill his chances of getting elected. Flemming is just trying to save his political ass just like Bill Clinton did when he declared he 'did not have sex with that woman.' So if illustrating how a politician can lie to cover up his or her past for political gain makes me a political horror director, then so be it. But I'll target left wing and right wing equally as it fits the narrative of the movie.

Xavier Mendik: Zippy Zipkin as we know was wonderfully underplayed by actor/ director Zalman King, who later went on to become one of America's most acclaimed erotic film creators. What were your memories of working with him?

Jeff Lieberman: *He was very difficult to work with because he really wasn't a trained actor, although he believed he was better than some very famous trained ones. So it was a battle all the way.*

Xavier Mendik: One of the most interesting aspects of *Blue Sunshine* is its gender politics, and all of your films do seem to promote atypical and strong female characters, and I wonder what attracts you to this theme?

Jeff Lieberman: *I'm a feminist at heart. I totally relate to women and what they have to endure from asshole men, me being one of them of course. I had great empathy for the 'Wendy' character who was dumped by her husband and left with two young children so he could pursue his ego trip in politics. And if that wasn't bad enough, he left her the gift that keeps on giving, genetic damage from his special brand of LSD!*

Just before filming: Jess Lieberman onset with Deborah Benson and Chris Lemmon

Xavier Mendik: One of your most strident heroines came with the figure of Constance (Deborah Benson), in the 1981 film *Just Before Dawn*, and I wander what your memories are of this film?

Jeff Lieberman: *Film critic Walter Chow introduced the movie as 'the first feminist horror movie' back when I was there for a screening at Alamo Denver a few years ago. And when I heard those words I had to agree with him. Connie is a 'final girl' – she's not a victim. Tapping into her primal female nature, the root of the feminine self, she transforms into a dangerous wild animal who can fell a beast three times her size with her bare hands. Well… her fist!*

Xavier Mendik: *Just Before Dawn* seemed to circulate with differing cuts and ended up being a very different movie that the producers had intended. In what ways was this a troubled production?

Jeff Lieberman: *Actually, the production itself was not troubled at all. But while I was making the movie* ***Friday The 13th*** *(1980) came out and did huge business. So the producers wanted to transform the movie into that – which is what would later be called a 'slasher.' Of course that was not the movie I shot so they took the original cut and paired it down to focus less on character and more on the violence, also adding some silly sound effects to goose it up. My original cut was shown in theatres by Rank in the UK. And that's the cut I recommend of course.*

Jeff Lieberman directing Arthur Kennedy in *Just Before Dawn*

Xavier Mendik: The film did indeed come out at the height of the so-called slasher boom, but seemed to be more of a backwoods survival horror movie. What do you feel the true source of the inspiration was for the film?

Jeff Lieberman: ***Deliverance*** *(1972), plain and simple, with a bit of* ***Lord of the Flies*** *thrown in for good measure. There was no other movie that inspired me at all, slasher boom or no.*

Xavier Mendik: How do you see the film as an evolution of the trope rural horror as represented by other rural themed horror releases such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974)?

Jeff Lieberman: *I've stated many times that although* ***Deliverance*** *was my key inspiration, to this day I've never even seen* ***Texas Chain Saw Massacre****. Nor* ***The Hills Have Eyes*** *(1977). But that hasn't stopped countless critics and fans of the genre from assuming I was doing some version of those movies. Where it fits in in that evolution I have no idea. I only relate it to* ***Deliverance*** *and a gender flip on its main theme.*

Xavier Mendik: The production of *Just Before Dawn* began in the late 1970s, but was released in 1981, by which time American society and its film industry appeared to be adopting a more conservative stance than in the previous decade. Did you feel any shift to the right in that 1980s decade, and did you in anyway feel inhibited by it?

Jeff Lieberman: *Just because a Republican – Ronald Reagan – was elected president, didn't mean that anything in entertainment had changed at all. In fact, Reagan used to be president of the screen actors guild at the height of the McCarthy era, and was labelled a communist himself for it. He was very pro Hollywood and friend of the creative community. Hollywood was run by liberals in the 80s just like in the 70s and the movies of the 80s still by and large had the same overall left wing slants focusing on racism, bigotry, the have nots portrayed as the good guys against the evil rich.*

Xavier Mendik: Contemporary horror cinema remains dominated by remakes of 1970s horror classics, and you have often spoken of an ambition to remake *Squirm*. What would your ideal reimagining of this production involve?

Jeff Lieberman: *I do have a very unique spin on it, but if I tell you I have to kill you. Along with anyone reading this!*

A Monster of our Very Own: *Razorback*, *Howling III: The Marsupials* and the Australian Outback

Renee Middlemost

Abstract

Images of the Outback permeate Australian cinema as a visual representation of national identity. Filmic representations of Australia routinely portray the land in terms of its bucolic splendour, but also as an empty, sinister space; this in turn spawns rural excess as well as monsters, both man and beast. This article examines two films highlighted as part of the so-called 'Ozploitation' movement –*Razorback* (1984) and *Howling III: The Marsupials* (1987) - and will argue that their depictions of Australian 'monsters' reflect anxieties about national character and the local film industry. Despite their commercial entertainment impetus, Ozploitation films have been able to critique aspects of the national character that official film bodies ignore, through the metaphor of the horrific outback and the monsters that dwell within. By examining *Razorback* and *Howling III: The Marsupials* in terms of their unexpected rebranding as Ozploitation films, I suggest that the omission of genre film from the 'official' history of Australian film, and the continuing lack of financial support is indicative of the angst surrounding the local industry regarding quality, nationalism and cultural cringe.

Key Words: Ozploitation; Australian film; Australian outback; National identity; *Razorback*; *Howling III: The Marsupials.*

"Australia. What fresh hell is this?" ***(The Proposition, 2005)***

Images of the Outback permeate Australian cinema as a visual representation of national identity. Despite operating to connote 'Australianness', the rural landscape has often been depicted as one of extreme contrasts: either an idyll or a place of horror.[1] Replicating the 1970s trend of horror classics that highlight the consequences of unrestrained rural idyll, filmic depictions of Australia routinely portray the land as an empty, sinister space; this in turn spawns rural excess as well as monsters, both man and beast. This article examines two films highlighted as part of the so-called Ozploitation movement – *Razorback* (1984) and *Howling III: The Marsupials* (1987) - and will argue that the portrayal of Australian 'monsters' are a reflection of anxieties about national character and the local film industry. The filmic portrayal of the Outback as a place of horror has often been described as 'Australian Gothic'[2] but despite the association of 'monster movies' with the cannon of

exploitation or cult film, Australian films are rarely described as such.

Following the success of the documentary *Not Quite Hollywood* (Hartley, 2008), 'Ozploitation' has entered the common lexicon as a label for Australian genre films produced during the 1970s-80s. However, Ozploitation films do not share the traits attributed to classical exploitation film such as the emphasis on poor production values, and use of stock footage.[3] Further consideration suggests that *Razorback* and *Howling III: The Marsupials* do not merely share a nod to camp horror tropes, and a knowing humour, but they also endured harsh criticism centring on the legitimacy of tax concessions for filmmakers, and conflicting discourses of how to render a cohesive national identity on screen.[4] Whilst the spectacle of the monstrous drives these narratives, the problematic national identity at the heart of earlier Australian Gothic films remains. 'Ozploitation' has gained traction in the popular press and the academy as an umbrella term for Australian genre films, and yet, as a distinct type, genre films have been omitted from discussions regarding the Australian film industry at large. This absence is indicative of the angst about the performance of the Australian film industry relative to financial investment, particularly in terms of quality, nationalism and cultural cringe. By examining these films in the context of their production and their unexpected revival as Ozploitation films, a deeper cognisance of the intricacy of the Australian film industry and its relationship to national identity can be achieved.

The Outback and 'Australian Gothic'

The Outback is a ubiquitous presence in Australian film; indeed, Gibson's research shows that the majority of Australian features have been about landscape.[5] He discusses how funding policy during the 1970s and 80s required filmmakers to articulate a cohesive national character on screen, and the simplest route to typify this elusive character was the use of the Australian landscape. By utilising the landscape as a signifier of Australianness, the image of the Outback becomes intrinsic to the designation of Australian identity. For Gibson, "in such national myths, the landscape becomes the projective screen for a persistent national neurosis deriving from the fear and fascination of the … continent"[6]. By projecting the landscape as a character in its own right, national anxieties regarding a cohesive Australian identity are in turn enacted through the 'character' of the land. This anxiety is amplified in both *Razorback* and *The Howling III*, via a double transgression. By activating the generic tropes of horror, coupled with the 'projective screen' of the landscape, the monsters that dwell within personify anxieties about national character that are then unleashed on unsuspecting intruders.

Turner has noted that images of the Australian Outback have evoked the dual

nature of the bush legend in which "…the outback is a land of beauty and freedom as well as danger, exile, and hardship".[7] The bush legend operates alongside the problematic concept of a cohesive 'Australian identity' focused on representations of white, Anglo-Saxon men, to the exclusion of all others. In their discussion of *Wolf Creek* (2005), Scott and Biron take the concept of duality a step further, observing that the Australian rural landscape more recently has been represented as either a place of idyll, or a place of horror.[8] During the 1970s, the unrestrained rural idyll was a recurring theme exemplified by horror staples such as *Straw Dogs* (1971), *The Wicker Man* (1973) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). Mimicking this trend, filmic depictions of the Australian Outback during this period portrayed the land as an empty, sinister space, which spawns rural excess (such as the racism, sexism and troubling masculinity found in *Wake in Fright* (1971).

In his discussion of Australian Gothic, Rayner establishes *Wake in Fright* as the parent of the genre, with its "… relentless gaze centring on the debasement of the population of an isolated town, whose decline into barbarism is viewed and paralleled by an outsider".[9] Whilst his account discusses numerous Australian productions, as he states:

> The nature of the rural community's secret depravity alters subtly from film to film, but its otherness is a given. For the unsuspecting outsiders who venture by chance or accident into its confines, the insularity of the backwater town is a cause rather than a symptom of fatal difference. The perversity of rural townships and their residents forms the basis of gothic texts.[10]

Wake in Fright offers a more robust critique of Australian national character than is typically sanctioned by industry or critics. In spite of its depiction of rural Australian life revolving around excessive drinking and gambling, casual racism, sexual assault, exclusion of women, random acts of violence, this film is now lauded as one of the great triumphs of Australian cinema. At the time of its release, critical and international reception of the film was positive, yet the domestic box office was poor. Screenwriter Evan Jones believes the Australian audience misinterpreted *Wake in Fright* as a "… gratuitous attack on Australia".[11] Jones' reflection corresponds with reports that during an early screening of the film:

> One audience member stood up and yelled 'That's not us!'; The response of Jack Thompson (Dick the kangaroo hunter in the film) was blunt: 'Sit down, mate. It is us' [In fact, director

> Ted Kotcheff has always] been keen to stress that the 'us' the film examines is man in general, without the definition of geographical borders.[12]

The steadfast refusal to accept critical portrayals of national character continues in recent Australian films such as *Down Under* (2016) and *Australia Day* (2017), both of which addressed systematic racism, and have only been screened in limited release.

It seems that the aesthetic framing of *Wake in Fright* as 'quality' or 'art house' in opposition to the camp aesthetics of Ozploitation films allows for the exposition of national character, despite its strident critique. After thirty years as a lost film, and four years of digital restoration, *Wake in Fright* was released on DVD in 2009, and enjoyed: "a rapturous cinematic run at the Sydney Film Festival" (Scott, 2009, 1). It appears that the DVD release has rehabilitated its image to the mainstream audience, and wider availability has elevated *Wake in Fright* to its rightful position of one of Australia's finest films.

The same problematic features of national character that are highlighted in *Wake in Fright* feature in *Razorback*, and to a lesser extend *Howling III*. All three films criticise national identity and stereotypes, but according to B.K. Grant "what these movies more precisely have in common, what essentially makes these movies cultish, is their ability to be at once transgressive and recuperative, in other words, to reclaim what they seem to violate".[13] In line with my assertion regarding the aesthetic 'quality' of *Wake in Fright*, the subject matter of *Razorback* and *Howling III* only becomes problematic, when paired with the tropes of genre film. By operating in this mode, both films perform a double transgression, which cannot be recuperated. *Razorback* and the *Howling III* both use the camp spectacle of the monstrous to embody their critique of national character– and yet, the same feature that counters the severity of their appraisal is that which garnered negative reviews centred on the films' perceived lack of quality, and taste.

Whilst the spectacle of the monstrous remains at the forefront of these narratives, the underlying issue of rural excess at the heart of earlier Australian gothic films such as *Wake in Fright* and *Long Weekend* remains. For Laseur analysing the "… competing discourses [that pit] the commercial prospects of a product [against] its claims to cultural value" is an essential step towards a diverse and flourishing Australian film culture."[14] The case study of Ozploitation films provides a valuable reminder of how "… a simple genre definition [remains] the site of cultural struggles regarding value".[15]

By existing on the fringe of generic acceptability, Ozploitation films can remark upon the preoccupation with Australian

identity, by playing with traditional stereotypes and fears about the Outback. Australian monsters such as the killer boar, and psychotic brothers in *Razorback*, or the human/marsupial hybrids in *Howling III*: The Marsupials operate as a metaphor for fears about national character, cultural cringe, and status of the local film industry. Retrospective examination of the reception of these films can tell us much about current debates in the Australian film industry regarding funding, and the insistence of government policy that films contain "Significant Australian Content"[16]

***Razorback* and funding considerations**

Razorback (1984) opens with Jake Cullen (Bill Kerr) babysitting his grandson at his home, 'somewhere' in the Australian outback. This image of rural idyll is soon disrupted by the frenzied attack of a giant razorback boar, who destroys his home, and eats his grandson alive. Jake is then tried for murder, and despite his tale about the razorback, he is believed to be guilty, yet acquitted for lack of evidence. Jake is consumed with the idea of avenging his grandson's death, and vows to kill the razorback. Several years later, American journalist and animal rights enthusiast, Beth Winters (Judy Morris), travels to Australia to report on kangaroo extinction. Upon arrival, she attempts to interview some of the locals and receives a hostile response, emphasising her outsider status. Beth then receives a tip that the local pet food-processing factory is involved in hunting wildlife for inclusion in their product. Following the tip, Beth drives to the factory alone hoping for an expose; when she trespasses on the property she encounters two of the plant workers, psychotic brothers, Benny (Chris Haywood) and Dicko (David Argue). Beth manages to escape their lecherous threats at the factory, however her return to town is thwarted when she is ambushed and run off the road by the brothers, who then rape her. The assault is interrupted by the arrival of the giant boar; Benny and Dicko escape and leave Beth for dead, and the razorback then kills her. After Beth's disappearance, her husband Carl (Gregory Harrison) arrives to search for his wife, as he has been informed only that she is missing. As local authorities have not located her body, only the wreckage of her car, Beth is assumed to have accidently fallen down a mineshaft. Carl meets Jake in town, and after hearing about the death of his grandson, suspects that Beth may have befallen the same fate. The rest of the film is occupied with Carl's search for the truth about his wife, and revenge against the murderous brothers, and the wild pig.

Policy developments in the Australian film industry provide a valuable context for the reception of, in particular, genre films. *Razorback* was released during the peak of the 10BA tax laws to promote investment in Australian film. Under this scheme, screen producers were able to claim a tax deduction for eligible film production – a production subsidy. The initial deduction

rate was set at 150 per cent in June 1981, before being reduced to 133% in 1983, and finally remaining set at 100% for the rest of its duration between 1987- 2007.[17] The 10BA rebates were successful in sparking a boom in film production (334 features were made during the 1980s) – but they also provoked a debate about the quality of many of the films produced. Some commentators believed too many films were rushed into production to meet financial deadlines, and imported actors were being cast over Australian performers in order to meet marketing requirements.[18] However, most of the debate centred on preferential taste cultures and the admission of key policy makers that: "… many of us were very snobby about genre films, there's no question about that. We didn't approve of them".[19] For Jacka, alongside the obvious problem of defining quality Australian cinema:

> … it gradually became clear that the 10BA film concessions did not necessarily give an outcome that was desirable in cultural or aesthetic terms … there was no mechanism intended to ensure that projects funded were 'quality' projects.[20]

For policy makers, the release of *Howling III: The Marsupials* embodied fears regarding the quality of the Australian film industry, in its satirical rendering of the monstrous and the Outback. The 10BA tax concessions provided the conditions for genre films to flourish, along with their subtle questioning of the rigid parameters enforced by policy makers in terms of taste, quality, and representations of 'Australianness'.

Howling III: Outback Intrusion

Howling III shares several key features with *Razorback*, most notably the intrusion of outsiders into rural communities. The film follows Harry Beckmeyer (Barry Otto), an anthropologist continuing his late father's research on werewolves, believing the death is somehow linked to his work. The intersecting story follows Jerboa (Imogen Annesley) who flees from the rural town of Flow ('wolf' spelled backwards) to escape the physical and sexual abuse of her stepfather, Thylo (Max Fairchild), who wishes to marry her. Jerboa is a young female marsupial werewolf; later in the narrative we are told this hybrid resulted from breeding between a human, and the phantom spirit of the Tasmanian wolf (Tasmanian tiger, or Thylacine – a marsupial carnivore).

Jerboa escapes to Sydney, where she quickly meets, falls in love with, and is impregnated by Donny (Lee Biolos), an American working on the set of a horror film. The director quickly hires Jerboa to play the starring role, but at the party for the film's completion she begins to change into a werewolf after exposure to strobe lights. In her haste to leave the party, she is hit by a car and taken to hospital. Whilst unconscious the hospital staff discover

Jerboa's unusual metabolism, as well as her marsupial pouch. They also deduce that she is pregnant. Professor Beckmeyer is summoned to the hospital but arrives too late; Jerboa's sisters have tracked her to the hospital and force her to return to Flow. Unsure of where to search, Beckmeyer and his associate Professor Sharp (Ralph Cotterill) attend the rehearsal of a visiting Russian ballet troupe, where the lead dancer, Olga (Dagmar Blahova), changes into a werewolf onstage. Olga is obsessed with the idea of meeting, and mating with Thylo, Jerboa's stepfather, but she is captured by the professors, and taken to their lab. Olga escapes and makes her way to Flow to find Thylo, who accepts her as his mate. Meanwhile Jerboa has her baby, and soon after Donny arrives in Flow to meet his child. Beckmeyer and Sharp track Olga to Flow, and meet Kendi (Burnham Burnham), an Indigenous elder who is a mentor to Jerboa and the pack. Alerted by Sharp, armed soldiers arrive at the camp; Jerboa, Donny, and baby escape to the bush, while Beckmeyer manages to convince Olga and Thylo to accompany him to his lab so he can observe them.

During experiments with flashing lights that hypnotise Olga and Thylo, Beckmeyer learns the origin of the marsupial species from Thylo; he also learns of the government plans to exterminate all werewolves as they pose a threat to society. Beckmeyer's growing infatuation with Olga leads him to aid their escape back to Flow, which is now surrounded by police. They find Jerboa, Donny and their baby seeking refuge in the bush; Kendi says he will protect them by summoning the spirit of the great phantom wolf. A rival pack of Indigenous trackers is following the group with the intent to capture them; Kendi, in grease-painted werewolf form, ambushes the trackers, and is fatally wounded. Jerboa and Donny find Kendi and attempt to give him a traditional funeral ceremony; however, the smoke from his cremation alerts the hunters to their location. That evening, Thylo dons traditional grease-paint and also performs the ceremony to invoke the great wolf; he too is killed by the hunters, allowing Beckmeyer and Olga to pursue a relationship. Sharp returns to America to inform the President that Beckmeyer and Olga, along with Jerboa and Donny and their child, have chosen seek refuge in the bush, and live in peace. After several years, Jerboa and Donny leave Flow with their child and move back to the city, pursuing their careers in show business under assumed names. Many years later, Beckmeyer and Olga are informed by Sharp that they have been granted leave to return to the city as well, with no danger of capture. The final scenes show Beckmeyer lecturing at university, where he encounters a familiar young man. It is Jerboa and Donny's son, Zack. He tells Beckmeyer that his mother is nominated for a prestigious acting award that evening. The film ends with Jerboa on stage accepting her Best Actress award, when the flashing of cameras

forces her change into a werewolf on live television.

Howling III is not explicitly about the monstrous nature of the human characters, yet it does touch upon some of the themes present within many outback horror films, particularly the idea of intrusion. The consequence of trespass on Indigenous land is a recurring theme in Australian rural horror. For Simpson Australian 'eco horror' films are concerned with the ownership of the land, and she notes that the death of tourists and outsiders in the Outback: "… enables the Australian locals to … claim a greater sense of belonging, if only through 'knowing' about the dangers in the landscape".[21] In the examples cited by Simpson, the Australian locals who espouse expert knowledge are all of white European origin, exposing another deep cultural anxiety around the invasion and dispossession of Indigenous land, and declaration of 'terra nullius' (or 'land belonging to no one'). While the threatened werewolf marsupials of Flow are seemingly all of white European origin, the trespass and attempted capture of the werewolves by police comes to 'stand in' for the trespass of white Australians upon Indigenous lands. The intrusion upon Indigenous land is mentioned parenthetically, through the sacred relationship between Kendi, and spirit of the Thylacine in the film's climax, which references Indigenous storytelling and legends of the Dreamtime. *Howling III: The Marsupials* manages to simultaneously operate within the generic framework of eco horror; represent the sacred rituals and relationship between Australian Indigenous people, animals and the land; and allude to the continued impasse of how Indigenous customs might be reconciled with contemporary Australian culture.

Rural or natural eco horror films featuring monstrous creatures are typical within the canon of cult film, but remarkably, the films discussed here have not routinely been described as Australian 'cult'. This omission is curious for a number of reasons, however it is closely linked to ongoing policy discussions regarding the purpose of the Australian film industry, government funding, quality and taste. Laseur has observed that the pleasure of *Howling III*: "…may well be precisely situated in the recognition of its satirical parody of a pompous high cultural (bourgeois) set of aesthetic proclamations. The notion of intentional B-gradeness is often overlooked by critics and reviewers".[22] So whilst audiences seemed to be 'critical insiders' [23] for whom the film's parody and 'intentional badness' increases the enjoyment, Australian funding bodies ignored these factors and interpreted genre films as exploitative for the generous tax concessions they received. As a result of industry backlash against the lack of 'quality' films being produced, by the end of the 1980s the 10BA tax scheme began to be wound back. As Ryan notes, the finance ceiling resulting from the Australian government again becoming the principal

source of funding for film prohibited the production of more expensive genres such as action, fantasy, and science fiction.[24] The reversal of the 10BA tax concessions meant that Australia fell back into what I term 'safe default mode' – funding a small range of films intended to be what Dermody and Jacka[25] labelled the cultural flagships of the nation, rather than taking a chance on unknown new directors or popular entertainment genres. This has been the story of the Australian film industry since the 1970's, and as such has resulted in an industry that exists in a perpetual state of boom or bust.[26]

'Quality', genre, and Ozploitation

Arguments regarding the 'quality' of Australian genre films produced in this era are the key concern of Hartley's documentary, *Not Quite Hollywood*. Until the documentary's release many Australians were unaware of the nation's tradition of genre film making, and the documentary "… has become a phenomenon, reviving, or perhaps creating, worldwide interest in a largely forgotten and unacknowledged filmmaking culture."[27] This documentary received extensive publicity for featuring interviews with Quentin Tarantino proclaiming his love for Australian film, as he had also done during the promotional tour for *Kill Bill* (2003). On that tour, Tarantino named Brian Trenchard-Smith as one of his favourite directors: "… before being surprised to learn he is not exactly a household name here".[28] He also named *Patrick* (1978) director Richard Franklin as a favourite, and admitted that the spitting scene in *Kill Bill* was a direct reference to the film. This anecdote, illustrating Australians' lack of appreciation for their own films (until praised by a Hollywood director) speaks to the level of 'cultural cringe' still apparent towards Australian films. Arthur Angel Phillips first coined the term 'cultural cringe' in the 1950 essay of the same name. The essay described 'cultural cringe' as "… the tendency of Australians to be embarrassed by their own artistic endeavours, and to feel that any work by Americans and the British is automatically superior to anything we can do".[29] As cult films also attract a 'cringe' of sorts, an unexpected link can be made between Australian films and examples of cult film. Thus, cultural cringe connects the hostile reception towards Ozploitation films (including *Razorback* and *The Howling*) for their apparent lack of quality, with ongoing anxieties about Australian films being viewed as inferior, monstrous, or 'Other'.

Based on the assumptions raised in *Not Quite Hollywood* regarding Ozploitation, and my own qualitative research,[30] I believe there is an opportunity to rearticulate Australian genre films as 'cult' for both their aesthetic qualities, and limited following amongst enthusiasts. Interviews with organisers of cult events in Australia reveal unexpected insights about how genre films fit into the national tradition. Cult film organisers suggested that since the release

of *Not Quite Hollywood* enabled increased audience awareness, and access (due to the re-release of many of the featured films on DVD), Australian genre films such as *Turkey Shoot* (1981) and *Dead End Drive* In (1986) could be elevated to the level of 'cult film'. They also highlighted the fact that even so-called 'mainstream' Australian films often have B-grade scripts and production values, despite the preoccupation of policy makers with 'quality'. *Not Quite Hollywood* demonstrates the strong similarity between Australian genre films made during the 1970s – 1980s and the aesthetic qualities often attributed to cult films. The re- release of the films featured in *Not Quite Hollywood* offers Australian genre films the opportunity to gain the audience following essential to creating a cult film.

By reading Australian films as cult texts, the official history of Australian cinema and its deliberate exclusion of genre films can be scrutinised. Reflecting upon the poor record of Australian films at domestic cinemas in 2008, President of the Screen Producers Association (and key figure in the Ozploitation movement) Antony Ginnane, stated that "Australian filmmakers don't deserve government funding while they continue to churn out movies no one wants to see".[31] Ginnane's opinion is clearly informed by his stated commitment to genre cinema as entertainment, as he observes:

> This rewriting of history completely disregarded the significant financial success of films like *Patrick*, *Harlequin* (1980) and *Turkey Shoot* in the international and US markets, let alone the roller coaster mega achievements of the *Mad Max* trilogy.[32]

Qualitative research carried out with Australian audiences proves that their relationship with national cinema is more complicated than policy makers, or the press attest. Whilst audiences wish to support Australian cinema, they often feel a strong sense of cultural cringe when it comes to mainstream Australian films, and the constant reproduction of national stereotypes. They suggest establishing a tradition of regularly screening Australian genre films as midnight movies in order to build a following, but more importantly, a sense of affection for Australian films. It is apparent that a major restructuring of film funding in Australia, to support several distinct types of film is necessary for the diversification and growth of multiple forms of filmic expression. This is a view supported by academics such as Verhoeven who states that "… it is not just anecdotal evidence that suggests Australian cinema has a 'brand' problem"[33]; therefore, the way that policy makers consider the function of national cinema in relation to the projects they fund, requires reconsideration if it is to meet its stated aims of representing the nation on screen.

More recently, the reception of *Wolf Creek* in the Australian press illustrates our ongoing discomfort when facing monsters residing in the dark heart of the Outback. The backlash from the media was swift. Conservative commentators made strong renunciations of the portrayal of graphic violence and disturbing themes, with claims that the film would reduce tourist numbers because of its frightening and realistic content; proclamations such as "(t)he film does for the area what *Jaws* did for the water - you'll never want to get into it again" were common.[34] The moral panic over the fictionalisation of some of the most horrific disappearances and murders in Australian history was refuted by Ryan and Blackwood[35], as well as local tourist operators who commented on the increase in visitors to the *Wolfe Creek Crater* in the lead up to the release of *Wolf Creek 2* (2014). Blackwood (2014) believes this increase is because films with a 'negative' storyline often attract young people out of a sense of adventure and fun; particularly those who, in this case would be likely to go backpacking to central Australia.

Ryan states that "Australian cinema has experienced a mini genre renaissance in recent years" with substantial growth in genre films, particularly horror titles being produced during the period of his research (2000- 2008).[36] It is clear that there is a niche market interest in genre (particularly horror) films in Australia, but the primary consumers of these films are abroad – where cultural cringe is not a barrier to possible success. An examination of Australian horror film *The Babadook* (2014) supports the hypothesis that a lack of support for genre films not only by funding bodies, but also by the unwillingness of large cinema chains to take a risk, severely impedes the likelihood of domestic box office success. *The Babadook* was initially screened at the Sundance film festival in 2014 where it received an enthusiastic reception. However, the release strategy in Australia accentuates the inadequacy of funding for effective marketing campaigns, but more significantly the idea of cultural cringe for Australian made genre films. In Australia the film was released to only 13 screens nationwide, as local multiplexes decided the film was too 'art house' for the big screen; in comparison, it was released on 147 screens across the UK, and earned the same amount on its opening weekend as its entire Australian theatrical run. The film has also made more money in Thailand and France than at home and due to word of mouth spread, an increasing 'cult' following can be observed online.[37] The film's cult following has flourished in the online space, with the emergence of the Babadook character as an icon of the LGBTI community at Pride parades across the United States in 2017. Ongoing film inspired 'Babadiscourse' on Tumblr about the character's sexuality, and the appearance of the film in the 'LGBT interest' category on US Netflix[38] has been attributed with the creation of a second life for the iconic character. Films such as *The*

Babadook are turning away from traditional strategies centring on a theatrical release and maximising their potential reach by accessing Video on Demand as an alternative mode of distribution. It is clear that talent exists within Australia for creating genre films (particularly horror) with commercial appeal –by mobilising appropriate financial resources, supporting genre films provides a pathway for the Australian film industry to increase audience appeal in both the domestic and international market.

Conclusion

While horror films like *Razorback* and *Howling III: The Marsupials* are typical within the canon of exploitation or cult film, Australian films are rarely described in these terms. Although the spectacle of the monstrous remains at the forefront of these narratives, the underlying issues of rural excess at the heart of earlier Australian Gothic films remains. Despite the emergence of the term Ozploitation to describe Australian genre films of the 1970s and 1980s, the term 'Australian cult film' is invisible from discussions of the industry at large. Ozploitation, and more recent genre films such as *Wolf Creek* force audiences to confront unsavoury aspects of the national character through the metaphor of outback monsters, both human and animal – that official film bodies would rather remain invisible. Thus the absence of the term 'Australian cult film' from the discourse on Australian cinema is indicative of the anxiety surrounding the film industry regarding quality, nationalism and cultural cringe. In conclusion, I propose a multi-pronged approach in order to restructure the Australian film industry and foster diversity amongst productions; firstly, the reclamation of these films as a source of pride rather than shame. Thomas has spoken of how Ozploitation has been mobilised as a marketing term to promote a wide range of genre films from the 10BA era.[39] Cinematic pride could be encouraged with regular public screenings of Australian genre films to build a cult following, a trend which occurred to a limited extent following the DVD re-release of films featured in *Not Quite Hollywood*. Secondly, funding films via differing steams is essential in order to build a robust film culture; instead of funding films only with 'significant Australian content' we must support diverse styles of film, particularly genre films with commercial appeal. Further research with both international and Australian (cult) audiences is essential in order to understand the reception of Australian genre films, so support for future films can be better assessed and mobilised. A deeper understanding of the appeal of genre films for audience could assist in reconfiguring financial distribution away from a fear-based policy of protectionism towards so called 'Australian values'. The revision of funding policy in tune with audience trends, and the popularity of genre films worldwide could increase the visibility of our own monsters and in turn, our own cult films.

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Entertaining the Villagers: Rural Audiences, Traveling Cinema and Exploitation Movies in Indonesia

Ekky Imanjaya

Abstract

During the dictatorship of Indonesia's New Order regime (1966-1998), local exploitation films, *layar tancap* (traveling cinema) and its spectators were marginalised by legitimate culture. For example, *layar tancap* shows were framed to only operate in rural and suburban areas and were policed with several strict policies. Nonetheless, in this paper, I will demonstrate that *layar tancap* shows and their rural audiences are signs of cultural resistance which challenges legitimate culture, and that exploitation movies were a significant part of the process. By observing the New Order's film policies as well as general and trade magazines, I will investigate why and how this kind of cinema operated as displays of classic Indonesian exploitation movies - the films the New Order was actually trying to eliminate - and how they generated a unique subculture of rural spectatorship. Here, I also want to highlight how various kinds of politics of taste - from the government to the rural spectators and the *layar tancap* entrepreneurs - interplayed in relation with local exploitation films, its rural audiences, and its culture of exhibition.

Keywords: travelling cinema, Indonesian cinema, exploitation films, politics of tastes, rural spectatorship, New Order, distribution culture, exhibition culture.

Layar tancap atmosphere: the annual Purbalingga Film Festival organised by CLC Purbalingga

Introduction

The discourses of exploitation movies, rural spectatorship and *layar tancap* (traveling cinema) as a form of distribution/exhibition culture in Indonesia's New Order era (1966-1998) were, and still are, marginalised both nationally and globally. It is important to note that, despite official attempts to regulate this kind of touring cinema within Indonesia, the three elements interplayed and developed their own characteristics as the opposite of official taste. *Layar tancap* became the outlets of local exploitation films and led them to rural and suburban audiences who tended to reject state-approved products in favour of these disreputable forms.

In Indonesia, it is acknowledged that almost no discussion of the relationship between popular genre films and rural spectatorship should omit mention of the terms *layar tancap* or *bioskop keliling*. *Layar tancap* literally means 'screens stuck on the ground', whereas *bioskop keliling* can be translated as 'travelling/mobile cinema show'. The two terms are interchangeable. Commonly, as a business unit, this kind of touring cinema consists of a screen (*layar*), a projector, and a few 16mm films, brought by a vehicle from a village to another remote area for exhibition. The journalist JB Kristanto writes that these kinds of traveling cinemas play low quality exploitation films in response to the spectators' demands.[1]

Layar tancap shows were in their golden era in the New Order period, notorious for its emphasis on security, development, stability, and state-control. In the film industry, the government applied stringent censorship and attempted to control all aspects of the film industry,[2] including *layar tancap* shows, exploitation films, and their rural audience.[3]

This article will demonstrate that *layar tancap* shows and their rural audiences are signs of counterculture which challenge legitimate culture. By observing the New Order's film policies as well as general and trade magazines, I will investigate why and how this kind of cinema displayed Indonesian exploitation films, and how they generated a particular subculture of rural spectatorship. I also want to emphasise how various kinds of taste politics—from the government to the rural spectators and the *layar tancap* entrepreneurs - negotiate each other.

The New Order's Politics of Taste

According to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, tastes are socially and culturally constructed.[4] Moreover, Bourdieu underlines that "… whereas the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education…"[5] Bourdieu highlights that since taste categorises people and makes people distinguish themselves by their distinctions[6], taste must be defined in terms of class difference. As Henry Jenkins puts it:

> The boundaries of "good taste" … must constantly be policed; proper tastes must be separated from improper tastes; those who possess the wrong tastes must be distinguished from those whose tastes conform more closely to our own expectations.[7]

Thus, the Indonesian government and cultural elites framed *film nasional* (national film) as a representation of the 'true' Indonesian cultures. In this context, films should be *kultural edukatif* (containing educational and cultural purposes) or represent the search for the "Indonesian face on screen."[8] Thomas Barker highlights that the concept of *film nasional* can be

considered as a form of legitimate culture:

> *Film nasional* as a national cinema defined the parameters of nation and national culture and whose proponents established a group of auteur directors as exemplary Artists whose works are canonized into film history.[9]

Distributors also play important roles in taste contestation. Lobato writes that acts of distribution "… shape public taste as well as reflect it, creating a feedback loop between distribution and demand".[10] Lobato's arguments can be applied to *layar tancap's* companies. This phenomenon is in line with Heider's claim on the situation of Indonesia in the 1980s:

> The forces of the marketplace have an effect on shaping films as well. But at least in the case of scenes of sexuality and violence, the audience's demands pull filmmakers in the opposite direction from the censorship board.[11]

However, spectators have their own politics of taste. Fans as John Fiske puts it, fans "discriminate fiercely"[12] by choosing to celebrate particular tastes and exclude others. In this context, I argue that the New Order's rural audience acted as discriminating fans in Fiske's sense.

Exploitation Films in the New Order Era

Global fans in the 2000s and beyond recognise the New Order's exploitation films as 'Crazy Indonesia' for their elements of weirdness and exoticism. International distributors labelled them as 'cult movies'.[13] The films include *Primitif* (1978), *Jaka Sembung (The Warrior*, 1981), and *Lady Terminator* (1989).

Nonetheless, in Indonesia, most of industry players, spectators, fans, critics and film academics were not familiar with the term 'cult movies' and 'exploitation cinema' until the early 2000s, when the films being analysed were recirculated overseas and gained global fans' attention. However, related to theories on exploitation films, the idea of "…ethically dubious, industrially marginal, and aesthetically bankrupt"[14], "often dealt with forbidden topics, such as sex, vice, drugs, nudity, and anything considered to be in 'bad taste' and commonly low-budget films"[15], and "a film practice 'in which the elements of plot and acting are subordinate to elements that can be promoted"[16] are suitable with the context of New Order trashy films. Related to the exhibition culture and spectators' celebration, there is no strong tradition of Midnight Movies or Drive-in cinemas in Indonesia. This is the main reason why I have decided to discuss *layar tancap* as the outlet of this kind of film which, despite few things being in common with midnight screenings, is different from the tradition of cult cinema practices in the West. I argue that *layar*

tancap is the Indonesian version of midnight movies, since the screenings commonly start from evening to midnight or even dawn.

In the local context, in their original country and time of production, Indonesian exploitation films were not considered 'official' representations of Indonesian films and culture[17], as the films are simply the opposite of the concept of film nasional. Most of the films are very famous and recognised by the famous movie stars, such as Barry Prima and Suzanna, yet remained 'industrially marginal' as the films were discriminated against by the Government and cultural elites. Related to film reception, most film critics, journalists, and scholars overlooked most exploitation films from this era. The government also tried to eradicate the films as they contained sexual and sadistic scenes and, therefore, against the concept of *film nasional*.

As the films are nationally famous, they became, as Barry Grant puts it, "Mass Cult" for local fans[18]. This is to say that they were very popular in their era in their own original country, and that they also had cult followers nationwide until recently. In other words, the "Mass Cult" status of the films shows that those films--although shunned and overlooked by the government, cultural elites and film critics at that time--were not marginalised by Indonesian mainstream audiences as the films were considered as mainstream films and some of them became box office hits. The films were also screened widely and publicly, including in *layar tancap* shows.

What is the difference between Indonesian exploitation movies and other exploitation films? Here, I will modify Karl Heider's terms on genres and types of Indonesian movies, into which most Indonesian films will fit comfortably.[19] I argue that there are two basic subgenres of Indonesian trashy films: first, 'Indonesian genres' (Legend and *Kumpeni*), and second, Americanised exploitation genres (womensploitation, mockbusters, and women-in-prison films, etc.).

First, the Legend genre, is based on traditional mythologies or folklore wherein the heroes possess mystical powers used in fighting, transformations, and flying. This includes costume dramas, historical legends, or legendary history, all tell stories which are famous throughout Indonesia but rarely get much critical consideration.[20]

Kumpeni genre films are set in the time when Kumpeni (Indonesian slang word for colonial Dutch's United East India Company/VOC) occupied the archipelago. These films tell of struggles between Dutch and Indonesian superheroes, who again, usually have mystical knowledge (*ilmu*) taught by an Islamic Guru to defend the village dwellers. In some cases, the colonial soldiers hire a local *dukun* (black magician) to do battle with them. Sadistic sexuality is common in these works.

Another genre is Horror. In this context, similar with Legend genre, horror movies deal with mystical powers and are mostly about the invention of supernatural monsters who endanger human beings. The stories have a direct connection to traditional folktales and are mostly set in rural areas. Heider underlines that this genre has "gruesome special effects" and presents "crudely sadistic sexuality".[21]

Other genres also have many similarities with subgenres of Western exploitation cinema. One example is the Japanese Period Genre which is set during the Japanese occupation era (1942-1945). Films of this type concern an Indonesian woman being kidnapped and incarcerated by Japanese soldiers; typically, a noble Japanese officer falls in love with her and tries to save her. These kinds of film have more sexual sadism scenes as well as female nakedness[22], and are closely related to Western women-in-prison films.

The subgenres that I have elaborated upon above, particularly those first discussed, contain some key elements that formulate the global definition of classic Indonesian exploitation films: mystical powers, supernatural heroes, local folklores. The distinct nature of the films relies upon the exoticism (otherness, weirdness) of the subgenres, as elaborated by Karl Heider.

A mobile cinema: The annual Purbalingga Film Festival organised by CLC Purbalingga

A Brief History of *Layar Tancap*

Layar tancap is older than indoor and permanent-building movie theatres. When, for the first time, a film was screened in a fixed building at Tanahabang, Kebonjae, Jakarta (Batavia) on 5th December 1900, excited audiences compared it with a *layar tancap* cinema called Talbot (named after the owner), in Gambir Market Field, in front of Kota Station, and Lokasari (Manggabesar).[23]

The owners of *Bioskop Keliling* founded a union called Perbiki or *Persatuan Pengusaha Bioskop Keliling* (Union of Operators of Mobile Movie Theatres) in April 1978. One of their missions was to distribute domestic films throughout Indonesia, specifically to the remote areas[24], the blank spots[25], where there was little access to television, regular cinema or print media.[26] Chairperson Perbiki, Major General (Retired) Acup Zainal[27] underlines that one of the purposes of the body was to develop the appreciation of domestic films within rural villager communities.[28]

In order to gain official acknowledgement, Perbiki changed its name, since the word "*bioskop*" (cinema) in "*bioskop Keliling*" refers to one specific style of cinema, and there was already an organisation that dealt with "bioskop", namely GPBSI (Gabungan Pengusaha Bioskop Seluruh Indonesia, the Indonesian Association of Movie Entrepreneurs). Therefore, on the 2nd of October 1991[29], Perfiki (*Persatuan Perusahaan Pertunjukan Film Keliling Indonesia*, Association of Indonesian Mobile Cinema Screening) was founded. Finally, the Minister of Education issued Ministerial Decree no. 130/1993 to legitimise Perfiki, as a film body that could now enjoy equality with other existing film organisations.[30]

The official recognition of the institution is significant. Katinka Van Heeren underlines that, since that 1993, the New Order started to control *layar tancap*, whereas previously the government did not pay attention to either the audiences or this mode of exhibition. She writes:

> The original mobile cinema organization was founded in 1974 (sic) and before 1993, when it was granted official recognition as one of the New Order professional film organizations, *it was mostly disregarded by the state*…. The fact that mobile cinema was seen as *lower-class and rural entertainment* may be one of the reasons why it had been mostly disregarded by the New Order state. Before 1993, there had been *no specific government policy* for mobile cinema, nor was it ever included in the National Film Development Programme.[31]

According to van Heeren, no explicit official policies were applied and no data was collected by The Indonesian Statistical Bureau for this open-air cinema.[32] The Indonesian Statistical Bureau (PBS, *Pusat Biro Statistik*) only complied numbers from ordinary cinemas in the big cities.[33] In contrast to van Heeren's claims I will argue that Suharto's government tried to control *layar tancap* long before the establishment of Perfiki in 1993, precisely because the villagers (being the majority of the total Indonesian population) represented an important asset.

Layar tancap shows commonly operate in rural and suburban areas. In Perbiki's first congress, in 1983, an agreement was made between Perbiki and GBPSI, called *radius aksi* (action radius), which regulated the distribution of these films.[34] At that time, mobile cinema companies were accused of stealing regular cinema's audience and disturbing the distribution and exhibition circulation by screening new movies. In order to avoid this kind of 'cannibalism', there were some decisions made by and for

Perbiki, including radius aksi, which decreed that mobile cinema shows should be 5 km away from the nearest movie theatre. This means Perbiki was now forced to run their business in countryside or, at least, suburbs.

The government also used *layar tancap* as vehicles of propaganda and, in 1993, termed their unique distribution of domestic films as a *pagar budaya* (cultural fence), to filter the villagers from the negative influence of global films. In February 1993, few months before their official acknowledgement, the New Order regime formulated a concept called 'Cultural Fence' (*Pagar Budaya*)[35], based on the new film law, UU no. 8/1992.[36] Van Heeren states that the purpose of 'cultural fence' concept is aimed to 'diminish the danger of contagion by the spread of information technologies caused by globalization'. The New Order government believed that the villagers were not educated enough to resist the bad negative influence of foreign cultures represented on the screen. Therefore, the purpose of this concept was to protect the villagers from the values and behaviours embedded in global movies.[37] This policy is in line with the concept of *film nasional* where Indonesian films should represent 'the real of Indonesian culture' and *kultural edukatif*.

On Rural Audiences

Layar tancap spectators were considered second-class citizens who consequently received 'second class' entertainment. They did not enjoy new films in a decent regular cinema - usually, the location was an outdoor area such as a football field - or immediately after the films were released. Instead, they watched movies in *layar tancap*, two years after the films' theatrical releases due to the restrictions for the shows to only screen re-censored outdated Indonesian films in 16mm, in order to avoid the cannibalisation of regular movie-theatres.[38]

As mentioned by van Heeren, *layar tancap*'s spectators came from lower or working-class communities. The shows were generally free, because the host would incur the costs for private purposes, or even political campaigns. But sometimes the audience would contribute. Commonly, the villagers would invite the *bioskop keliling* companies for weddings, circumcisions or any event that garnered familial pride, for which the host would and pay all the expenses and to which the whole village would be invited[39], and as a result the *layar tancap* business grew rapidly.[40] It was estimated that around 80% of villages were visited by *layar tancap* shows in the late 1970s.[41]

Related to viewing experiences, prominent director and Perfiki's Vice Chairperson Slamet Djarot writes of people coming in droves to watch *layar tancap* because of 'the instinct of togetherness' (*dorongan naluri kebersamaan*) whereby the meaning of *layar tancap* is extended to become a 'joint ritual' (*upacara bersama*).[42] This

argument echoes Mark Jancovich[43] and Bruce Kawin's[44] concepts of the cult screening as a 'temple' or 'space of rituals' for celebration.

It has been reported by many newspapers and magazines that layar tancap shows—both the entrepreneurs and the audiences - have developed their own dynamics: screening uncensored films and exhibiting 'immoral behavior' such as gang fights. Not only this, but the midnight screenings also created noise pollution.[45]

Framing *Layar Tancap*

From the early years of the New Order, *layar tancap* was directed in many ways, toward a political and economic means of regulating the mode of exhibition, and thus many rules such as three-layer censors and 16mm policies were forced upon these works. First, *bioskop keliling* shows became one of the political means of circulating the New Order programs to remote villages. For example, campaign programs by BKKBN (*Badan Kordinasi Keluarga Berencana Nasional*, National Family Planning Coordinating Board) starting in the 1970s[46], or even as part of political campaign of the ruling political party, namely *Golongan Karya* (*Golkar*, The Functional Group) during general elections.

In fact, since the first year of Perbiki, 1983, Vice President Adam Malik gave the green light to the 'Cinemas goes to the Villages' plan, wherein the government asked *layar tancap* companies to collaborate with the Department of Education and Culture as well as Department of Agriculture in order to disseminate short propaganda and educational films related to development issues such as birth control, transmigration, cooperatives, public health, and the Five-Year Development Programme.[47] Therefore, screening events co-organised by Perbiki members and the Ministries were held. Another significant collaboration with the government also happened in March 1986, when the Department of Information, particularly *Direktorat Bina Film dan Rekaman Video* (Directorate of Film and Video Recordings), gave *layar tancap* entrepreneurs eleven documentaries with a promise of 400 similar films to come in the next two years, produced by The Department of Transmigration, The Department of Agriculture, and The Department of Health. It is reported that at the inauguration day of this collaboration between the Department of Information and Perfiki, there was a series of screenings, and a transmigration-themed short movie, *Membangun Hari Esok* (*To Build Tomorrow*) was shown as the opening film for cult icon Rhoma Irama's *Satria Bergitar* (*Guitar Warrior*) at Pasekan District, Pacet, West Java. The 2,500 spectators responded positively to the event.[48]

It is reported that in 1982 Perbiki officially supported Golkar, Suharto's ruling political vehicle to keep him in power, and became a mouthpiece of the campaign in remote

places.[49] That is to say that Perbiki had already become a means of disseminating Suharto's politics since 1977, and second, that the rural audience, as representing the majority of Indonesian citizens, were also part of the political targets for the New Order during general election events.

In December 1983, in their first national congress, Perbiki determined to make themselves the channel of the New Order's propaganda.[50] Perbiki's members were consequently prohibited from screening foreign movies and were required to only present films suitable for audiences of 12 years old and above. If an unsuitable film was presented, it would be re-censored.[51] One of the most assertive pre-Perfiki policies on *layar tancap* is ministerial decree no. 120/1989 issued by Minister of Information. This regulation firmly stated that, for the purpose of mobile cinema screenings, all films should be re-censored at three levels: the film should not be screened until two years after the first time they passed censorship for theatrical releases, the films must be thematically suitable for the villagers, and finally, the films should receive a *Surat Tanda Lulus Sensor* (Sensor Graduate Certificate) from the Censorship Board - meaning that it should be re-censored for *layar tancap* purposes. This policy had a direct relationship to the rural audiences. The government needed not only to police the villagers, indoctrinating them into national culture, but also to protect them from the supposed bad influence of foreign movies.

In this context, Acup Zainal, the chairperson of Perbiki, was displeased with the regulation and made a strong statement: "Why do you consider the villagers as second-class citizens?"[52] Zainal interpreted the ruling as an injustice because it discriminated against rural audiences, considering them to be ignorant and uneducated.[53]

By applying the 'cultural fence' concept, *layar tancap* shows were expected to become the spearhead (*ujung tombak*) of national cinema by way of strengthening the distribution and exhibition network of domestic films to the sub-districts (*kecamatan*). Additionally, by clearing the way for domestic movies, it was hoped that *layar tancap* would strengthen national film audiences and thereby stimulate the emergence in small areas of 500 permanent cinema halls specialising in Indonesian films.[54] Thus, the policies of propaganda, censorship, Indonesian-films-only, and radius aksi show that the New Order considered *layar tancap* ripe for their political purposes and in need of discipline.

Layar Tancap as Counterculture?

Crucially, however, these official measures were partial failures. First, instead of screening Indonesian films that upheld national culture in accordance with the 'cultural fence' notion, the movies they showed were mostly exploitation fare,

which often imitated Western forms. Second, the mobile companies screened uncensored versions of the films to audiences of all ages.[55] And in many cases, they were reported to screen new local and global films instead of becoming a bastion of the officially sanctioned national distribution network, including 'no new movies' policy.[56] For example, as reported in Batara Weekly in 1989, some illegal *layar tancap* shows screened European, Mandarin, and Indian films freely, including *Iron Eagle II* (1988) starring Tom Cruise in the villages of Gandul, Sawangan, and Bogor to Krukut and Limo of West Java. They also screened new films that were still playing at regular movie theatres such as *Tarzan Raja Rimba* (*Tarzan the Jungle King*, 1989) and *Si Gobang Misteri Manusia Bertopeng* (*Gobang, The Mystery of a Masked Man*, 1988)[57]. It is also reported that, although they did try to screen dramas or films full of propaganda, most of the films were exploitation movies, the favourites being action films starring cult icons Barry Prima and Advent Bangun[58], and "mystical horrors".[59] *Barata Weekly* underlines that illegal mobile cinemas screened 'uneducated films' such as *Rimba Panas* (globally known as *Jungle Heat*, 1988), *Harga Sebuah Kejujuran* (*Forceful Impact*, 1987), and *Jaringan Terlarang* (*Java Burn*, 1987) in some places "…in which the villagers are not ready to accept such kind of films".[60]

Third, many of the *layar tancap* owners, both members and non-members of Perfiki, still screened the 35mm format instead of 16mm. Indeed, some *layar tancap* companies argued that it was more expensive to make 16mm copies rather than 35mm ones[61], their ultimate aim being to discount 16mm versions which, having been heavily censored for all-age audiences, had only a few sexual and sadistic scenes. No action was taken by security officers, police, prosecutors, or village officials for violation of the rules. The official censorship institution established by the regents, TP2FV (*Tim Pengawas Peredaran Film Video*, or Supervisory Team of Film Distribution and Video), also did not function and take action properly due to the violation of the regulation.[62] Indeed, *Pelita Daily* reported that there was no attempt from officials to control the quality of the films, because they only needed a local permit from the local district, and in many cases, the owners deceived the officials and society, stating that the films were for all-ages (as required by the law), but in reality, were soft-core pornography or dealt with sadistic images.[63]

Fourthly, instead of becoming the required 'cultural fence', the shows were considered to result in an increasing amount of crime and disorderly behavior among the audience. In the 1970s and the 1980s, some newspapers reported cases of drunkenness, gambling, fights between villages, sexual misconduct and excessive noise.[64]

For example, in early 1977, *Waspada Daily*, a local newspaper, wrote an analysis titled 'The Influence of Traveling Cinema Shows towards Young Generation in Asahan', concluded that *layar tancap* shows in Asahan Districts (North Sumatera) significantly increased the number of inter-village gang fights and general unruliness among youngsters, as well as disturbing the peace since the screenings were held in the middle of the night in the centre of the district where the mosques and public housing were located.[65] Moreover, official policies disadvantaged the *layar tancap* owners, with the result that many spectators protested the shows, even in some instances uprooting the screen in revolt.[66] Thus, it can be argued that *layar tancap* generated its own sub-culture among the rural spectatorship, and exploitation movies were a significant part of it. These kinds of attitude were the opposite of the official purpose of *layar tancap* as the 'cultural fence' of national culture.

The *Layar Tancap* Audience and the Politics of Taste

All the four elements discussed above have a direct relation with the rural audience's resistant tastes. In order to survive, *layar tancap* owners needed to feed the rural audiences' demands and wants. In order to attract the villagers, but in defiance of state policy, the shows screened films depicting sexuality, violence and "rough romance".[67] The parliament member Djati Kusumo wrote that villagers did not need big-budget or complicated films: they just needed to be entertained with simple and easy-to-digest movies.[68]

I thus conclude that these cinematic violations expressed the rural audience's tastes and needs. The villagers had their own attitudes due to the format changing and re-censoring process. As mentioned earlier, in some cases, related to the villagers' tastes of exploitation films as well as the needs for watching new films, many spectators asked for 35mm. However, at that time, it was more expensive and rare to find 35mm copies which were still screened in regular cinemas. On the other hand, even if the *layar tancap* screened 35mm, but if the films did not meet the spectators' requirements (sexual and sadistic scenes), they will run amok, uproot the poles and pelt stones at the projectors.[69]

Despite the strict regulations, why did some *layar tancap* still display films containing violence and sexually graphic scenes? There are at least two reasons. First, the official Perfiki claimed that the phenomenon was caused by non-members or, in other words, illegal practices run by independent entrepreneurs who were not part of the Perfiki regulations. Additionally, in many cases, the owners of illegal *layar tancap* used false names in order to avoid "problems in the field".[70] Second, some media outlets suggested that irresponsible

bureaucrats ("*oknum*") from the Department of Information had access to 35mm projectors and indulged in a side business as 35mm projector sellers.[71]

Conclusion

As indicated by Bourdieu and Jenkins, governments and cultural elites attempt to socially construct and police the tastes of their people. In this case, the New Order regime freighted the *layar tancap* with many regulations in order to make it a 'cultural fence' of Indonesia. However, rural spectators and film distributors (in this case: *layar tancap* owners) have their own politics of tastes, with the result that the attempts of the New Order cultural policies often failed. The traveling cinema companies, both the legal and illegal ones, frequently violated the rules by screening exploitation movies as well as new foreign films. In short, *layar tancap* screened trashy films because audiences wanted them to: *layar tancap* shows therefore became arenas for taste battles between opposed interest groups. Here, as is so often the case, exploitation films find themselves at the centre of a struggle.

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[60]'*Layar tancap* Merusak Pengedaran Film Bioskop'

[61]Pikiran Rakyat, 1993. 'Perfiki, Hidup Enggan Mati Ta Mau'. *Pikiran Rakyat*, 5 September.

[62]'*Layar tancap* Merusak Pengedaran Film Bioskop'.

[63]' Bioskop Keliling di Jabar'.

[64]Pelita, 1977. 'Bioskop Keliling di Jabar Merusak'. *Pelita*. 13 August; Berita Buana 1976, 'Bioskop Keliling untuk Menjangkau Pedesaan', *Berita Buana*. 15 December.

[65]Waspada Medan, 1977. 'Pengaruh Bioskop Keliling thd Generasi Muda Asahan'. *Waspada Medan*, 25 January.

[66]'Menanggap *Layar tancap* Murah Meriah'; 'Persaingan *Layar tancap* Makin Tak Sehat'

[67]'Pengaruh Bioskop Keliling thd Generasi Muda Asahan'.

[68]Humas Kongres III Perfiki 1993, 19.

[69]'Menanggap *Layar tancap* Murah Meriah'

[70]'Persaingan *Layar tancap* Makin Tak Sehat'

[71]'Persaingan *Layar tancap* Makin Tak Sehat'

Tim Burton's Curious Bodies (The First International Conference on Twenty-First Century Film Directors)

Carl Sweeney

The inaugural International Conference on Twenty-First Century Film Directors, organised by The University of Wolverhampton in conjunction with Redeemer University College, Ontario, focused on Tim Burton. The choice of Burton as subject was an appealing one, as his lengthy career has been varied, including such eclectic works as *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Ed Wood* (1994) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005). Though his films have attracted attract large audiences (particularly 2010's *Alice in Wonderland*, which grossed over a billion dollars at the worldwide box-office), Burton's productions invariably display the hallmarks of his idiosyncratic sensibilities. His oeuvre can be analysed through any number of prisms, but this event specifically explored the theme of 'curious bodies' in his films, many of which are fantasy horrors featuring unusual beings including ghosts, vampires and zombies. Held at Light House Media Centre in Wolverhampton in February 2018, this one-day gathering brought together contributors from around the world in stimulating discussion that built on existing scholarship about Burton and challenged some existing notions.

Dr Frances Pheasant-Kelly (University of Wolverhampton) introduced proceedings, talking briefly about the origins of the event, before Dr Samantha Moore (University of Wolverhampton) delivered the day's first keynote address. She discussed the various functions of metamorphosis in animation, defined as the fluid transformation of one body into another. Moore situated metamorphosis historically as a subversive tool that serves to disrupt narrative structure and causal logic. Correspondingly, she suggested that its use in animation is widely regarded with scepticism, noting that the technique does not feature in the '12 Basic Principles of Animation' developed by the so-called 'old men' of Walt Disney Studios. Nonetheless, she observed that Burton, who had a fraught time working for Disney in the 1980s, exhibits a clear affinity for the spontaneity and chaos engendered by transformation. With reference to a range of films including *Alice in Wonderland*, Moore claimed that metamorphic spatialities in Burton's films are presented as far more appealing locations than real-world ones, whilst his transformative characters, including the eponymous figure in *Corpse Bride* (2005), are particularly empathetic

ones within his canon. Moore's presentation proved a compelling start to the day and, fittingly, metamorphosis would emerge as a reoccurring theme of the conference. Furthermore, Burton's animated work would be examined in a number of subsequent presentations.

Indeed, the day's first panel concentrated on animated bodies within Burton's films. Dr Christopher Holliday (King's College, London) considered the issue of 'unruliness', a cultural label associated with transgression. Specifically, he applied Kathleen Rowe's conception of the term to the body of the titular protagonist in *Corpse Bride*. More broadly, he remarked that Burton himself appears to be an unruly figure, whose visual style, characterised by expressionist tendencies, runs counter to most mainstream filmmaking. Finally, Holliday wondered, with reference to the opening sequence of *Frankenweenie* (2012), whether stop-motion itself, a visibly labouring form characterised by staccato and stuttering movements, constitutes a fundamentally unruly type of animation. This was a thought-provoking note on which to finish, and Holloway's incisive paper was one of the highlights of the day. He was followed by Emily Mantell (University of Wolverhampton), who worked as a crew member on *Corpse Bride*. She offered a fascinating insight into the film's production, a process that began without a completed script. She suggested that the personnel of the storyboard department were pivotal in getting the film's plot 'whipped into shape', reflecting that Burton is primarily a visual filmmaker rather than a story-driven one. Mantell discussed the daily rituals of the artists working on the film, such as physical embodiment, positing a key relationship between bodily creative processes and cognitive ones. With reference to exciting visual aids such as storyboards, she engagingly explicated the unseen influences that affected the film's script.

Fragmented bodies were discussed in the second panel, which began with Elsa Colombani (University of Paris-Nanterre) scrutinising the influence of *Frankenstein* (both Mary Shelley's 1818 book and James Whale's 1931 film adaptation) on Burton. By analysing a range of films, Colombani contended that Burton sometimes inverts aspects of Shelley's story, one example being the elderly inventor played by Vincent Price in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), who contrasts with the youthful figure of Victor Frankenstein. However, as in Shelley's book, Burton's creatures also bear the mark of their manufactured nature. She identified repeated visual motifs that bolstered her case, such as Burton's use of sutures and of broken mirrors, which expose fractures in his characters' psyches. Recurrent themes were also considered, including the themes

of disintegration and rebirth that pervades Burton's productions. Dr Rob Geal (University of Wolverhampton) also drew on Shelley's *Frankenstein* in his presentation. Noting that contemporary adaptation studies suggests that texts mutate to reflect the cultures in which they are rewritten, he argued that Burton celebrates the monstrous in his films, thus displacing Shelley's proto-feminist critique of male creation in a manner that is reductive. In Burton films including *Frankenweenie* (2012), Geal claimed, male creation is presented as benevolent, unlike its female equivalent, which Burton appears to associate with banality. Visual synecdoches in Burton's work provided the focus for a paper by Dr Helena Bassil-Morozow (Glasgow Caledonian University), who paid particular attention to the symbolism in films including *Edward Scissorhands* and *Big Eyes* (2014). For instance, she suggested that Edward's damaged hands represent creativity in the former film, as does the depiction of exaggerated eyes in the latter. She also applied the attributes of the Jungian archetype of the child to Burton's work, identifying a range of 'child' figures in his films, including monsters and superheroes. Bassil-Morozow noted that characters with pertinent childlike traits in these films never become the hero, even those that adopt ostensibly heroic guises, such as Batman. The Caped Crusader was also relevant to the panel's final paper, in which Peter Piatkowski (Independent Scholar) reflected on Michelle Pfeiffer's role as Catwoman in *Batman Returns* (1992). After highlighting the overlap between Southern Gothic literature and Burton's films, namely the shared celebration of the grotesque, Piatkowski observed the ways in which Burton manipulates Pfeiffer's attractive star image to convey Catwoman's breakdown, as her physicality fragments in conjunction with her mental collapse. He also reflected on the contemporary resonance of the film, situating Max Shreck (Christopher Walken) as a Donald Trump analogue, and finding the narrative to be a vivid illustration of the destructive powers of misogyny and unchecked privilege. Overall, Piatkowski's paper added to the fascinating ways in which representations of corporeal disintegration were considered in this panel.

Monstrosity and embodiment were the focal points of the first afternoon session in which Ana Rita Martins and José Duarte (University of Lisbon) again located Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a key antecedent of Burton's films. However, they suggested that for contemporary audiences physical disfigurement may no longer constitute a necessary aspect of monstrous figures, citing the eponymous characters of the successful television series *Dexter* (2006-2013) and *Hannibal* (2013-2015) as examples. Therefore, they posited that contemporary scholars should think about monsters through the effect of their actions, offering a persuasive reading of *Frankenweenie* to make their case. They argued that the film

may represent Burton's most personal work, as it reflects many of his aesthetic and thematic obsessions, in addition to depicting a range of different bodily forms. Ultimately, its narrative implies that true monstrosity lies within as opposed to being primarily a set of physical characteristics, Martins and Duarte suggesting that this may be Burton's salient contribution to the ongoing discussion about what it means to be monstrous. Cath Davies (Cardiff Metropolitan University) noted that previous papers had touched upon the visual motif of stitching, before delivering her accessible and engaging disquisition about the relationship between embodiment and clothing in Burton's films. She referred to the self-fashioning figure of Jack Skellington in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) to demonstrate that fabric is related to subjectivity and acts as a conduit for character, supporting this claim with examples from *Corpse Bride*. She contended that dissolution and deterioration are the key conceptual factors that shape this aspect of Burton's work, and the identification of fabric's mediating effect on somatic instability inspired lively exchanges in the question and answer session that immediately followed the panel.

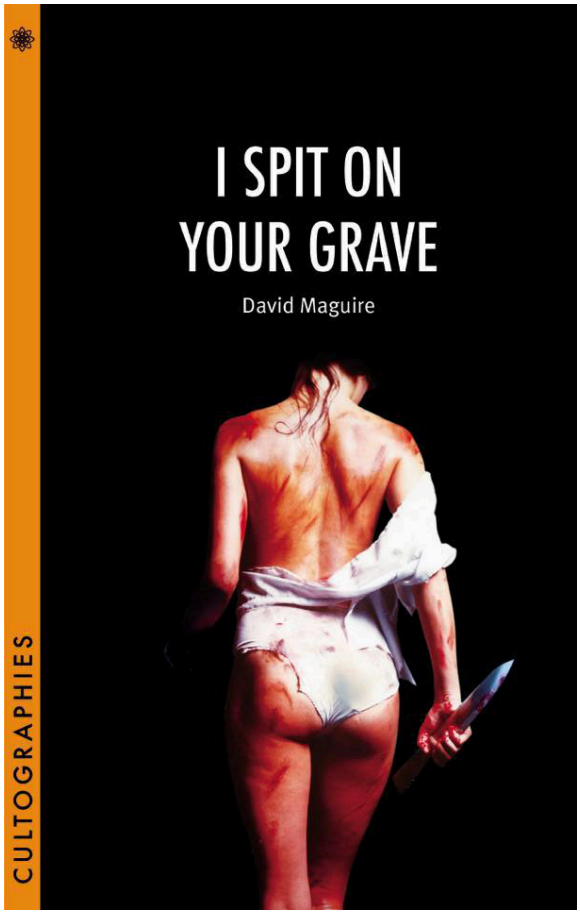
The final session of the event showcased two papers that were related in their consideration of gender and sexuality. Firstly, Dr Antonio Sanna (Independent Scholar) talked about the history of 'Catwoman', referring to the differing incarnations of the character in comics, television and film since 1940. He favourably compared Michelle Pfeiffer's portrayal to other notable onscreen personifications, including those of Eartha Kitt, Julie Newmar and Halle Berry. Though Sanna noted that the villainess typically embodies certain characteristics including ambition, dynamism and capriciousness, he claimed that the popularity of Burton's Catwoman can be attributed to persuasive feminist readings of the character, which he deftly contextualised. He also remarked on Catwoman's apparent supernatural powers, a trait almost exclusive to Burton's personification of Batman's feline foe. In the next presentation, Alexandra Hackett (Sheffield Hallam University) observed that sexuality and social anxiety are attributes not often associated with key Burton characters, arguing that their misunderstood ways of communicating who they are is more important to making them 'peculiar' than their physical appearances. To support this case, she utilised the prism of Freud's stages of psychosexual development to posit Edward Scissorhands as an asexual figure, offering a detailed reading of the constituent parts of Johnny Depp's performance, especially in relation to figure movement. Hackett subsequently examined Edward's sense of self through Lacan's notion of the mirror stage, her paper situating one of Burton's most iconic characters in a stimulating way. She also considered Barnabas Collins, the protagonist in *Dark*

Shadows (2012), also played by Depp, finding that he exhibits similar behaviour to Scissorhands.

References to *Batman* (1989) occurred regularly throughout the day, so it was appropriate that the second keynote address also focused on the Dark Knight. Dr Adam Barkman (Redeemer University College) surveyed Burton's contribution to the identity of Batman, his analysis acknowledging that the various iterations of the character present inconsistencies that are impossible to fully unite. He remarked on areas in which Burton was relatively unsuccessful in embodying Bob Kane's character, one example being the director's unconvincing depiction of Bruce Wayne (played by Michael Keaton in both *Batman* and *Batman Returns)* as a socialite. Barkman reflected more positively on the psychological complexity Keaton brings to the character, and on Burton's emphasis on villains. He argued that The Joker (Jack Nicholson) plays a crucial role in illuminating Batman's darkness, praising Burton's decision to tighten the duality between the two characters. Ultimately, Barkman concluded that the filmmaker's considerable contribution to the character's mythology paved the way for Christopher Nolan's subsequent trilogy. This reference to Burton's influence on subsequent directors rounded off the lecture, and was followed suitably by the launch of *A Critical Companion to Tim Burton* (2017). The book was edited by Barkman and fellow conference contributor Antonio Sanna, and is intended to be the first in a series focusing on auteur filmmakers. *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2016) was screened in the venue's main cinema, the family adventure being an apt choice, as its quirky mystery story about youngsters with special powers encapsulates many of the ideas that had previously been discussed.

Finally, a conference dinner brought a close to the day, which had been a success. The variety of topics, issues and themes touched upon made for invigorating listening, and served as a reminder of the diverse scholarship required to properly appraise Burton's work. The standard of presentations was high, and the question and answer sessions generally elicited lively conversation. Also welcome was the inclusion of a number of speakers with filmmaking experience, as this helped ensure that a wide range of perspectives were represented. Therefore, the first International Conference on Twenty-First Century Film Directors promised significant potential for future iterations of the conference, with the 2019 event scheduled to focus on the films of Kathryn Bigelow.

I Spit on Your Grave: Dialogue and Book Review by Martin Barker and David Maguire



For a journal issue devoted to cult cinema's representations of debased rurality, it seems more than appropriate to include the following critical dialogue and book review dedicated to Meir Zarchi's 1978 film *I Spit on Your Grave* (AKA *Day of the Woman*). The film was released during a decade-long cinematic obsession with America's dispossessed rural poor that not only encompassed horror, drama and comedic formats, but even spawned sexploitation cycles devoted to the licentious drives of countryside inhabitants. With its theme of a sophisticated urban female writer who exacts her revenge against the all-male rural gang who abused her, *I Spit on Your Grave* not only reflected these wider 'hicksploitation' trends but also provided a formative rape and revenge template that provoked more than two decades of controversy from cultural critics and state censors alike. While the film's unflinching scenes of sexual violence led to it being banned or heavily cut in many territories, its construction of the brutalised but powerful lone survivor Jennifer Hills (played by Camille Keaton) remains one of the text's most memorable features. This female character not only inspired indirect renditions and rip-offs, but also provided the template for an unofficial sequel *Savage Vengeance* (Donald Farmer, 1993), in which Keaton also appeared.

While this straight to video release was deemed ill-judged and incoherent, it was the 2010 remake of *I Spit on Your Grave* by Steven R. Monroe that generated new audience awareness of the original film and its controversial legacy. In his remake, Monroe offers a near-faithful update of Zarchi's foundational premise, which again ranges the character of Jennifer Hills (played here by Sarah Butler) against a gang of rural misfits who invade her isolated writing retreat with disturbing consequences. While most of the character types from the 2010 redux closely resemble those established by Meir Zarchi, the introduction of the new figure of sheriff

Storch (Andrew Howard) functions to manipulate prior audience awareness of the 1978 release in order to generate further commentary on debased modes of rural masculinity. With the later 2013 sequel *I Spit on Your Grave* 2, Monroe shifted from rural to urban settings in a hard-hitting narrative that uses the abduction of an aspiring model (Jemma Dallender) to consider contemporary issues of female tracking and sexual violation within an Eastern European context.

While the 2015 release of *I Spit on Your Grave: Vengeance is Mine* (directed by R. D. Braunstein) reintroduced the original character of Jennifer Hills (again played by Butler) as a damaged survivor continuing her vengeance quest whilst in therapy, this entry was largely seen as failing to provide the symmetry and closure expected from a remake trilogy. Subsequently, it was left to originator Meir Zarchi to provide a more definitive further entry to the franchise through his 2019 release of *I Spit on Your Grave: Déjà Vu.* With this title, Zarchi elides the narrative drive of the Monroe sequels to return to the original premise he devised for the original release. Marketed as 'the only direct sequel to the 1978 movie', *Déjà Vu* recasts original actress Camille Keaton as Jennifer Hills and contemporises her struggles with the survivors of the rural gang that menaced her in the initial release. In an interesting gender twist, the also film ranges Hills' daughter (played by Jamie Bernadette) against Becky (Maria Olsen), the vengeful wife of a murdered gang member, allowing the sequel retain its rural focus whilst also progressing along familial and female-led lines.

In the following dialogue and book review, author David Maguire reflects upon the recent release of his Cultographies volume on *I Spit on Your Grave*[1], which deals with Zarchi's original and the subsequent remakes. In the opening section of the following review, Maguire recounts the motivation behind the research, development and production of his book. This is then followed by a more sustained review of the volume undertaken by Professor Martin Barker, to which the author then responds. We are delighted to conclude the review by including interviews with *I Spit on Your Grave: Déjà Vu* lead performers Jamie Bernadette and Maria Olsen, who further contextualise issues raised in David Maguire's volume, as well as assessing why cult cinema remains fixated on the figure of Jennifer Hills.

***I Spit On Your Grave*: The Motivation (David Maguire)**

The desire to write this book was stoked by the research I did into *I Spit On Your Grave* for my MA dissertation, followed by a number of papers I did on the film/the rape-revenge genre at conferences across the UK. I was fascinated by how, 40 years on, it was still able to strongly divide public opinion. While quite a lot of the notorious/low budget/'exploitation'/

'video nasty' films of the '70s/80s have been (and quite rightly I believe) consigned to the trashcan of time, Meir Zarchi's film has found itself mythologised and revered by the countless rape-revenge films that have followed in its wake. Despite being pretty much universally condemned by critics, women's groups, politicians etc. when it was released and heavily cut or banned around the world it has managed to spawn official and unofficial franchises, countless imitators – and even, bizarrely, a spoof.

I was equally surprised that no one had attempted to write a book about the film before. As it was approaching its 40th anniversary and I knew that Meir Zarchi had a direct sequel in the works, and his son Terry had a documentary on the film also on its way, now felt like the perfect time to re-evaluate the film. And it couldn't have been more timely. As we were finalising the book, the #metoo campaign exploded onto the scene. This campaign has established a monumental shift towards listening to victims of rape and sexual harassment, with the tables being turned on the perpetrators. When you consider the protagonist in Zarchi's film, Jennifer Hills is effectively harassed for the sole reason that she is a young, beautiful, independent, intelligent career woman—and for this "crime" she is subjected to the most appalling degradation and destruction of her psychical and mental self by men who feel threatened by her. In successfully enacting revenge on those of who have wronged her, it is not entirely surprising that the film has such a strong female following, as it allows a woman, on screen, to redress the balance, albeit using violence. While it is correct that *ISOYG* and the rape-revenge genre have been responsible for putting images of sexual violence and intimidation towards women up on celluloid, they have also conversely provided an opportunity for identification with a fantasy of strong female empowerment.

***I Spit On Your Grave*: The Review (Professor Martin Barker)**

This is unquestionably a book that needed to be written. *I Spit On Your Grave* (1978, henceforth, *ISOYG*) has come to occupy a unique position as possibly the most long-term reviled film of modern times. Subject to more debate than almost any other, it is capable of producing spitting rage in opponents, and (in the main) slightly apologetic defences by those who try to rescue it. To mention it is to summon up and reactivate that angry debate. Given this state of affairs, any review of this book which is more than just a 'notice' is always going to be more than a review – it is quite likely to become part of the still ongoing debate around this film. I'm happy to accept that risk.

I have to come clean about my own history of involvement with *ISOYG*. In 1983 I published a lead article in the then-magazine *New Society* about the British controversy over the 'video nasties'[2] – of which *ISOYG* became for many people the prime

exemplar. The starting point for my interest and involvement was that I had just published my book about the British 'horror comics' campaign of the 1950s, where I had uncovered an untold story about the nature of the campaign against the comics – and identified a strand of almost deliberate misreading of the comics themselves, in order to mount a case that they were 'dangerous to children'. The campaign received its main intellectual justification from a book by Fredric Wertham, entitled *Seduction of the Innocent*. Then in 1983, an article appeared in *The Observer* newspaper (by literary scholar David Holbrook) with that exact title. Holbrook made the connection between the two campaigns, evidently without knowing the real situation about the 1950s campaign. I had to respond. But *New Society* (rightly) insisted that I had to say something specific about at least one of the so-called 'nasties'. After a hunt (and it wasn't easy, despite all the rhetorics about easy access from the campaigners) I managed to get my hands on a third-generation video copy of *ISOYG*, and watched its grainy, grimy narrative. And saw that same process of misleading description writ large. British newspapers called it a 'glorification' of rape, in which the 'woman ends up enjoying it'. Bollocks. Total bollocks. But, oh boy, effective.

This was the start of my involvement, which continued with further close examinations of it in my (edited) collection *The Video Nasties*. Following the whole video nasties controversy, I became more generally involved in ongoing research and debate over the visual depiction of rape/sexual violence, first in some opportunistic research on *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Straw Dogs*, then in an ESRC-funded project on the highly controversial *Crash*, finally in some substantial commissioned research for the British Board of Film Classification in 2006 (research which they conveniently failed to mention in their official response to Issue 1 of the *Cine-Excess* Journal … how strange …). In amongst all these, I had an opportunity to meet and talk with (I can't really call it an interview) Meir Zarchi during a trip to the USA.

So, I don't come innocent to this review. I am definitely an 'interested party' in this continuing debate. And this will show in this response to David Maguire's very interesting and useful book. Maguire comes from a very different background to me, being currently a programmer for the *Leeds International Film Festival*'s *Fanomenon* strand. His book does several main things. It explores the film itself, of course: (some of) the story of how the film came to be made, the decisions and strategies that inform it as a piece of film-making, and the various, sometimes dodgy marketing strategies used to circulate and sell it. It walks us through the intense debates which have accompanied the film since then, including of course the intense academic debates (especially but not only in feminist film circles) about the rape-revenge film

genre. And it explores the many ways in which *ISOYG* has become a self-conscious, if oddly distributed, 'franchise', spawning multiple remakes, borrows, homages, and rip-offs. All are carefully, thoroughly and thoughtfully done. But to my eye it does some of these better than others, and the reasons are interesting, I believe.

ISOYG and its 'franchise' first. Maguire summarises the histories of many of the predecessors of Zarchi's film, not just for the sake of proving that 'nothing is entirely new', but to ask an important question: how does it work that, while not entirely new, one film comes to stand as 'ground zero' for an entire sub-genre? It becomes an inevitable reference point, needing to be acknowledged, referenced, 'quoted' from. Maguire cites Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) as another example of the same process – a film which, despite having plenty of precursors, established itself for many as the 'first modern horror film'. Alongside this, via an interview with Zarchi, as well as using published sources, he tells the story of the making of the film: the motives, the problems, the challenges, and so on. He then assiduously tracks down and recounts (with passing judgements on each) the many follow-up versions. Some of these are downright obscure, and it is appropriate that a contribution to the Cultographies series should show such devotion to locating and logging the details of such recherché materials (though not to have mentioned that there are French and German novels using the same title – but with entirely different narrative impulses – is a small gap in its search for totality). It's right that we should hear about Thomas Koba's (2000) *I'll Kill You ... I'll Bury You ... And I'll Spit On Your Grave*, and Chris Seaver's (2008) *I Spit Chew On Your Grave* – even if we are hardly likely ever to see the films themselves. Maguire is surely right to suggest that the sheer range is significant, because of the confirmation of the iconic status of *ISOYG* – although we might add that the sheer obscurity of some of these is also indicative (because a number of the films almost look like garage productions). On the more obvious side, it is notable that there have already been one licensed remake, and two sequels.

Maguire does ask (but does not really attempt to answer) an interesting question about this franchising. Given that none of the follow-up films, as far as can be ascertained, made money – indeed most of them seem to have lost it in large quantities – what is it that drives the repeated re-referencing and remaking of this 'story'? I sense that his answer lies within the compass of the term 'exploitation', but that is a bit paradoxical. Standard definitions of 'exploitation cinema' all emphasise that it is cheaply-made, fast-buck attempts to coin a profit, by deploying sensationalist themes. If they show no signs of making money, why persist? This is a problem I faced myself, when researching the cycle of films that followed the invasion of Iraq: 23 in all.

Each one heralded before release as doomed to fail, they still kept on coming. This requires a better explanation than just bad financial judgement.

The third task this book sets itself is to weave a course among the many debates and critiques (and also defences) of *ISOYG*. This is a pretty monumental task, and without doubt Maguire reaches out very widely, across reviews, reconsiderations, academic critiques, and the like. He visits a lot of cult websites for their takes on the film (and its remakes). Some of the things he turns up I had missed – I didn't know for instance that radical feminist Julie Bindel, who had damned *ISOYG* mightily when it first appeared, had recanted on her critique of the film in recent years[3] – although, visiting that to read it carefully revealed a complexity which isn't caught in the book – more on this shortly.

But what bothers me about his coverage of these debates is not his reach, rather, it is the implied position from which it works. Overall a sense of unease about taking a position for or against recurs, caught (among other places) when he writes: 'although *ISOYG* is exploitation, it does at least attempt to tackle rape in an unflinchingly honest manner' (p. 70). Maguire can't quite make up his mind about the film. He acknowledges all the ways in which the film makes absolutely clear the degrading and horrible nature of rape, and its care not to create a camera eye on Jennifer's body as she is repeatedly assaulted. He shows well the ways in which the film undercuts what have been seen as various 'rape myths' (eg, that men get carried away and can't help themselves, or that women secretly enjoy it). But then he cites without comment people still arguing that it's all a kind of pretence, and therefore still dangerous. He quotes people putting forward frankly stupid arguments, and doesn't comment at all. My 'favourite' is his quotation from Luke Thompson: 'defenders of the film have argued that it is actually pro-woman, due to the fact that the woman-lead wins in the end … is sort of like saying that cockfights are pro-rooster because there's always one left standing' (RottenTomatoes review, cited p.37). That is a singularly stupid analogy, and should have been called out as such. Instead, it hovers ambivalently, like the author.

And this is where I return to Julie Bindel. Her 'mea culpa' is, when you read it, a very strange one. She admits she has changed her mind. The film is not dangerous in the way she used to think – but then almost immediately she follows this by saying that she nonetheless doesn't regret having picketed 'video nasties' of the period. How can this be? Which other ones has she not re-viewed and recanted on? Not a word. This is a cop-out – getting renewed present-day virtue without admitting anything in the past. An apologia, rather than an apology. I believe it is really important to say that critics at the time lied about the film, or (if I

am being generous) didn't care that they crudely misrepresented it and other such films. And their misrepresentations mattered. As the book does mention, some others even lost their jobs for trying to ask alternative questions about it. But we're not supposed to say things of that kind, are we?

Of course, Maguire may respond that he is simply capturing an ambivalence in the film, in particular between its narrative and cinematic organisation and the ('exploitative') way it was marketed. The term 'exploitation' does a lot of work in the book – sometimes rather oddly. Much is made of the film's title-change from *Day of the Woman* to *ISOYG*, when its distributor changed. And much is also made of its main (iconic) poster, of the bruised and bloodied Jennifer walking away from us, her clothes torn half-revealingly and holding a knife. Clearly there are questions about the semiotics of this poster, and what may have made it so iconic – though it seems odd to complain (as Maguire does, more than once) that the image does not appear in the film – think how many absolutely mainstream films construct posters that bear no direct relation to any scene within them.

But I sense that there is something more – a feeling that the film is up against a criterion which means it simply can't win. This is to be a measure of its 'feminist leanings' (this wording p.36, but happening throughout the book). Apparently, because the film has been such a fraught subject for feminists, and in particular for 'feminist film theorists', this is the ultimate criterion against which it must be measured. Is the film pro- or anti-feminist? I find this weird. Of course the feminist debates are very important. But does that mean that no one other than feminists can be appalled at rape, and allowed to take a view on the way the film represents it? 'Feminism' is a site of huge and evolving debates – including continuous recourse to the worryingly ahistorical category 'patriarchy' – but that is not the only problem. What is it about this which makes this different from, say, someone asserting that the only tradition to be cited in relation to, say, homosexuality is the Christian/biblical tradition? Again, a major history of evolving debates – but it is surely very unlikely, except for those already operating within that faith tradition, that this would be seen as the sole measure or criterion, the ultimate determinant of possible attitudes. It says a lot about the current position of feminism within radical debates that it is so hard to put forward other ways of condemning sexual violence towards women (or anyone else, for that matter).

Feminism looms large within the book, as something to be very careful about. He spends a long time exploring how 'feminist film theory' has interacted with it over the years' (p.40). The trouble is that this squashes work of incredibly different kinds under this one umbrella term. The grandiose theorising of Laura Mulvey gets set on the same plane as the close textual

investigations of Isabel Pinedo, and the (rare, but for that reason incredibly important) work on women as horror audiences by such as Brigid Cherry. It is all 'feminist film theorising', just arriving at different judgements. This allows it to remain the privileged domain and the source of all the measures we can have for evaluating the film. So, the fact that 'feminist film theory' has to a considerable extent debated the pros and cons of *ISOYG* in terms of its tendencies to provoke or deny 'identification' with Jennifer or her assailants sets the terms of his investigation. The fact that there are some – and yes, I am of course one of them – who find the whole concept of 'identification' unclear, incoherent and unhelpful simply isn't noticed.

Perhaps inevitably I have focused on the points where I am unhappy with the direction and tenor of this book. It would be wrong to close on this. This is in so many ways a valuable contribution. Clear and thorough, it maps the territory of debates around this strange and persistent film in ways that have not been done before. It does raise a lot of important questions about *ISOYG*'s filmic construction. And without getting lost in the debates about 'cult', it clearly enunciates the ways in which the film has set a close template for repeated revisitings of this difficult topic of rape and revenge. The book closes by pointing to the ways the story is not finished yet. At some point later this year, a new sequel, this time with Zarchi's own imprimatur, is due to be released: *ISOYG: Déjà Vu*. Rumours, pre-reviews, guesses, forewarnings have been circulating about what the film might be like, and Zarchi's 'motives' for supporting it. It will for sure be another small chapter in the ongoing history of this most misread and mis-cited film.

I Spit On Your Grave: The Response (David Maguire)

First off, I'd like to thank Martin for his very thorough and frank review of my book. As he says in his review, Martin has a vested personal interest in this film – its reception 40 years ago, the sustained controversy etc.; I was aware of this and so I won't pretend to say I wasn't a tad apprehensive when I knew he was reviewing my book. If anyone knows this film inside out – it's Martin!

As Martin points out I've tried to encapsulate as much as I could – in the limited amount of space available in the Wallflower Press Cultographies series (which follow a set size/word count) – about the film, its production history, the climate it was released in, the (global) response to it, its antecedents, its imitators and the franchises (both official and unofficial) that it has spawned. Not an easy thing to do in such a small book – and with new sequel coming out this year (alongside the documentary), there is scope for this chapter on the film continuing well into the 21st century.
The main point I'd like to answer in relation to Martin's review is when he states that he

feels there is an overall sense of unease – on my part - about taking a position for or against the film. This is a very valid observation which I'll try to answer. I have tried, as best I could, to give a balanced response to the two polarising views of the film – those who view it as misogynistic exploitation filth which pretends to be pro-feminist, and those who argue that it is an empowering, bold, piece of filmmaking which many see as a key feminist text. Personally, I'm not sure which side of this fence I actually sit on. While I see a lot of the former arguments in the film, I see just as equally as many of the latter. I do not think it is a great film; I do not think that it is a particularly likeable film – and my defence of that would be, should a film about such a controversial subject matter, which portrays the rape of a woman in such graphic unflinching unrelenting reality, be considered a likeable film? That said, I do come across countless female viewers of the film who categorically state that they absolutely love this movie. So while it is correct that *I Spit On Your Grave* and the rape-revenge genre have been responsible for putting images of sexual violence and intimidation towards women up on screen, they have also conversely provided an opportunity for identification with a fantasy of strong female empowerment. And if the film is as demeaning to women as many of its (initial) critics have complained, then this is complicated by the number of female viewers who champion the film – and equally the fact that it has now been re-evaluated academically as a powerful feminist text. So, going back to Martin's review – and the fact that the lack of a position from me gives him cause for concern – I would argue that I can't argue steadfastly for or against the film. I was asked at a conference recently where I was giving a paper on the film why I liked the film – and the question, albeit being a singularly simple one, truly stumped. I had to answer that I honestly wasn't sure if I did like the film – because of all the reasons I've given above (and in the book hopefully). However, I cannot deny the fact that I think it is a very powerful film, with very powerful things to say, and some of the techniques Meir Zarchi uses to get those points across are truly compelling. For that reason, regardless of people's final views on the film, I truly believe that this is a film that needs to be explored and re-evaluated in great detail.

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[1]Maguire, D., 2018. *I Spit On Your Grave*. New York: Wallflower P.

[2]Barker, M., *How nasty are the videonasties?*, New Society, November 1983, pp. 231-233.

[3]Bindel, J., *I was wrong about I Spit On Your Grave*, Guardian, 19 January 2011 (available online).

Cult Film and Controversy: From Day of the Woman to Déjà vu

An Interview with Jamie Bernadette and Maria Olsen
Conducted by Xavier Mendik

Jamie Bernadette as Christy Hills in *I Spit on Your Grave Déjà Vu* (still courtesy of Déjà Vu, LLC)

To close this review section on *I Spit on Your Grave*, we are delighted to host interviews with Jamie Bernadette and Maria Olsen, two of the lead performers from the recent Meir Zarchi sequel *I Spit on Your Grave Déjà Vu*. Here, both actresses reflect on some of the key issues raised by David Maguire's book as well as considering the contested legacy of the *I Spit on Your Grave* franchise.

Xavier Mendik: Why do you think *I Spit on Your Grave* remains such an influential but divisive film?

Maria Olsen: *Firstly, I think **ISOYG** remains in the public consciousness because no one who sees it can forget it. The visuals of the rapes that Jennifer Hills is forced to endure - as well as those of the revenge she takes - are just too graphic and disturbing to ever be forgotten. Those who do not understand the film's specific origins, or who choose to concentrate on the violence instead of on the narrative of a woman trying to free herself, will glory in its carnage, thus ensuring its position as one of the most notorious horror films of all time.*

Actress Jamie Bernadette

Jamie Bernadette: *I think that any work of art that causes such ambivalent feelings tends to have an enduring impact on the society for the simple fact that people try to prove the side that they are on and understand the other. People by nature love a good debate.*

Xavier Mendik: According to David Maguire's 2018 book on the subject, *I Spit on Your Grave* is frequently associated with a wave of 1970s rape and revenge thrillers that were seen as reflecting male fears around the emergence of the feminist movement. Do you see any historical connection to the film and wider social currents of the period?

Jamie Bernadette: *I do not believe that Meir Zarchi intentionally made the film to represent the feminist movement. He told me himself how the idea came to him. He said that he saw a woman come out of the woods in New York naked and beaten after she had been raped by two men. He picked her up and drove her to the police station and later he imagined her getting revenge on the men. Thus, the story was born. It just so happens that the film was made during the time of the feminist movement. That is a coincidence I believe. Perhaps Meir later, after thinking of the story, thought about how it coincided with the feminist movement and in writing the script, perhaps he incorporated feminist ideas at that stage.*

Maria Olsen: *The backstory to the creation of the film is covered elsewhere in much more detail, but suffice to say that Meir, while running a family errand, came across a naked and disoriented woman who had just suffered an appalling attack. Although he took her to the nearest police station, she was not given immediate relief, and he watched while her incredible discomfort was prolonged by police treatment that can only be described as incredibly lacking in compassion and empathy. In order to try and deal with this experience, which impacted him greatly, Meir created* ***Day of the Woman****, where his heroine, Jennifer Hills, emerges triumphant from her ordeal.*

Xavier Mendik: Film theorists such as Martin Barker have discussed the ways in which the original distributor of *I Spit on Your Grave* not only changed the the title of the film, but also used exploitative advertising to highlight the film's scenes of sexual violence. Do think the film's 'exploitation' tag altered the way in which press and critics reviewed the film?

Jamie Bernadette: *No. I think they would've viewed the film the same way after they saw it because back then, the nudity, sex, and violence were quite shocking. In today's current age, we see it more often so we are more desensitized to it. Audiences back then saw it as morally debased I believe, so it was very easy to attach the term "exploitation" to it.*

Maria Olsen: ***ISOYG*** *is often seen as an exploitation film and, personally, I think this is too simple a way to categorise it. Its overall aim is NOT to exploit woman, but rather to show how one woman transcends what was done to her and takes power back into her own hands. To my mind, the film does not exploit women, it empowers them, but I will grant that, to the casual viewer,*

this distinction may be lost. Is the on-screen violence necessary to get the film's point across? Does the film empower or exploit women? Is it a sincere attempt to showcase a problem within society or is it just a way to cash in on others' misery? These are all questions asked about the film, and they give an idea of why this piece of art - because that's what, ultimately, it is - is so influential and divisive.

Xavier Mendik: Given its strong focus on regional perversity, it seems appropriate that the review of David Maguire's book on *I Spit on Your Grave* is being published in a *Cine-Excess* e-journal edition devoted to the theme of rural horror. How important do you think the theme of rural male violence is to the film and American horror in general?

Maria Olsen: *From **Deliverance** and **The Hills Have Eyes** to **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** and **The House of 1,000 Corpses**, rural male violence has always had a place in American horror. One interpretation of why this trope has become so important is that the unrestrained rural male could represent everyman's attraction to, and simultaneous fear of, living an unrestrained life, a life where people - men particularly - just take what they want. In any modern and civilized society, it is, obviously, an impossibility to live like that, and, generally, people are brought up to abhor even the thought of such a lifestyle. On the other hand, who doesn't secretly want to be able to do anything they want to do whenever they want to do it? It could be that this mingled fascination and repulsion is one of the factors that make the rural-male-run-amok scenario so very attractive.*

Jamie Bernadette: *I know exactly what you are talking about when you ask this question, since I grew up in the country myself and the kind of agreement you see between the rural men to rape this woman in the film I have seen agreements like this between country boys to enact their perversions on children. What is it about growing up in a rural setting that can lead to boys and men behaving this way? Or is it just that in the city people are more separated so it doesn't seem as prevalent but it actually is but it is just hidden? In rural areas, perhaps boys hang together in packs more often than in cities so you see sex crimes more often executed in groups?*

*I think it's extremely important to make films like this to bring awareness to this issue. It's a real problem in our society. So many children are molested and women are raped. I'm from a family of nine and we were raised by our mother without a father. There were five girls in the family and we ran around the little country town that we were raised in without any male figure to scare anyone away. And the perverts were plentiful. So, knowing this first-hand, I understand the extreme importance to making films like **I Spit on Your Grave.***

Xavier Mendik: The film's controversial images of rape split the critics, with reviewers claiming that these scenes either glorified violence against women or actually exposed male fears an emergent feminine power. What are your thoughts on these scenes and how they work within the narrative?

Maria Olsen: *I think that if these scenes had been shown any differently in the film - and for "differently" read "not as graphic or violent" - it wouldn't have been taken quite so seriously. The viewer is shocked and appalled by what happens to Jennifer Hills specifically because we see everything, and specifically because we see it over and over again. If these scenes had been glossed over, or romanticized in any way whatsoever, they would have lost their impact, and the full horror of what happens to her, and what fuels her desire for revenge, would have been lost.*

Jamie Bernadette: *I do not believe at all that the scenes are glorifying violence against women. They are traumatizing to watch. I never thought when I first saw the film that they were exposing male fears of an emergent feminine power, but I can see how that could be. I felt like the scenes were exposing perverted men and the horrors that they are able to inflict on women in such a way as to produce change in the society by the sheer rawness with which the scenes are executed. People see this and want to do something about what was done to them. Weak women feel empowered and want to stand up to their attackers. This film can have these types of profound effects on women and I also want to point out—men as well. Men can be victims of sexual violence also.*

Xavier Mendik: While much of the coverage of the film has focused around its controversial images, one of the more interesting aspects of *I Spit on Your Grave* remains the realist mechanisms Zarchi used to frame Jennifer's plight. I wonder if you have any views on the stylistic aspects of the film?

Actress Maria Olsen (second right), with Jonathan Peacy, Camille Keaton, Jamie Bernadette and Jeremy Ferdman on the set of *I Spit on Your Grave Déjà Vu*

Maria Olsen: *One of my favourite aspects of the film is actually the gritty realism of how it's been shot. At some points it even plays more like a home movie than a commercial film, and this all goes towards planting it firmly in the real world where it cannot be mistaken for anything but what it is: an actual slice of life and not a romantic Hollywood story. Personally, I believe that this is as much a product of the level of filmmaking available to Meir at the time of shooting and that now, 40 years later, the*

*advances in shooting techniques will make **ISOYG Déjà** Vu a very different movie.*

*Another aspect that I simply love - and this will be repeated in **Déjà Vu** - is the absence of a score. I firmly believe that random atmospheric music would have detracted from **ISOYG**'s realism, and this absence went extremely well with the aforementioned gritty shooting style. Whether its repeat in **Déjà Vu** will fare as well remains to be seen, as, while **Deja Vu** will obviously benefit from the 40-year technological upgrade, a more glossier film might not pair up as well with the lack of a score.*

Xavier Mendik: Central to the impact of the film is Camille Keaton's compelling performance as Jennifer Hills. What qualities do you think she brought to Zarchi's original film?

Maria Olsen: *I think that Camille's Jennifer Hills brought incredible bravery and heroism to the original film. It is, however, Camille herself who should be commended for taking on the role of Hills, which has got to rank as one of the most arduous in film or television history. Acting is not easy under any circumstances, and the physical and mental strain that she must have worked under to bring Hills to life must not be underestimated. With her performance, which is absolutely unforgettable, she claims her place as one of the most impactful actresses ever on the stage or the screen.*

Xavier Mendik: Stephen R. Monroe managed to reboot the original in 2010 with his remake to *I Spit on Your Grave* and the later 2013 sequel. What are your views on the recent franchise of remakes?

Jamie Bernadette: *There is a lot to admire about those films, for example, the cinematography in the 2010 remake is gorgeous. But, overall, I feel the original was more powerful because of the believability of the rapes. They were raw and real and so difficult to watch. I believe that is the best way to depict a rape: not glamorized in any way.*

Xavier Mendik: Were you aware of the original film and its reputation when Zarchi approached you to star in the sequel *I Spit on Your Grave Déjà Vu?*

Maria Olsen: *I was definitely aware of the film - I had watched it for the first time a few years before I auditioned for **Déjà Vu** - but, at that time, I was not aware of the full impact that it had had on the film community and the general population. I was aware that it was considered one of the cult horror films from the '70s, and it was that very fact that caused me to seek it out to watch it, but I was not aware that, for instance, it had been labelled as a "video nasty" or that it had been banned in several countries.*

Jamie Bernadette: *Yes, I had seen the 1978 film before I ever auditioned so I definitely knew it. I thought it was brilliant. I did not know of the controversial reviews that it had upon its release nor did I know that it had been banned and I didn't know it was called a "video nasty".*

Xavier Mendik: Jamie, how does the sequel expand upon the thematic focus of the original?

Jamie Bernadette: *The film has an older style to it like the original and the story is told how Meir wants to tell it, without heed to the short attention span that so many tend to have nowadays compared to people of yesteryear when there weren't cell phones, video games, and the internet. So what you are going to see is a similar theme told with patience and depth that delves into real character development and meticulously crafted scenes.*

Xavier Mendik: Maria, your character of Becky adds an interesting new angle to the concept of vendetta and revenge. How did you approach this performance?

Maria Olsen: *As I do with the great majority of the characters that I create, I made Becky's main motivator love - love for her husband and for her children. Every day, one hears about great deeds committed for love, and Becky is just a woman who is driven to do certain things to try and assuage her feelings of abandonment, loss and immense sadness over the fact that her husband was taken from her and her children's' father taken from them. Johnny and the others are driven by factors just as complex but diametrically opposed to what Becky is experiencing. With approaching the character this way, I'm not trying to say that what Becky does is right - although SHE believes that it is because she believes that Johnny and the others are innocent - I'm just trying to find a point of connection between Becky and the film's audience, which is something that the villains of the original film just could not do given their choices and their behavior. If just ONE person watches what Becky does and thinks that "under those circumstances I might have done the same thing", then I've done my job as an actor.*

Xavier Mendik: As well as being a noted horror performer, you are also adding a distinctive production voice to the genre through your company MOnsterworks66. What can you tell us about the project?

Maria Olsen: *Although MOnsterworks66 is not operating at present - I've taken the decision to concentrate on my acting career at the moment - the company did co-produce several wonderful films that have gone on to win awards on the festival circuit and obtain distribution. Chief among these features are Brandon Scullion's* ***Consumption****, which won both Best Grindhouse Feature and Best Actress (Arielle Brachfeld) at the RIP Horror Film Festival several years ago,*

*Randal Kamradt's **Faraway**, which has screened at several US and international festivals, and Eric Michael Kochmer's **Way Down in Chinatown**, which is available to order on Amazon and other platforms. I hope to produce again in future, but I'm not sure exactly when that will be.*

Xavier Mendik: To conclude, *Déjà Vu*'s recent release coincides with a recent wave of female oriented vendetta films including Coralie Fargeat's *Revenge* (2017). Why do you think there is this renewed interest in rape and revenge cinema by a new wave of female cinema creatives?

Jamie Bernadette: *I think because of the Me Too movement that is happening right now and I also think there's a monetary vested interest. These films sell well.*

Maria Olsen: *I think the movement is more illustrative of the feminine stepping up and reclaiming its rightful place in society than it is of a surge of interest in the rape-n-revenge sub-genre of horror. I haven't yet seen **Revenge**, but **The Woman**, starring the brilliant Pollyanna McIntosh, and the Soska sisters' **American Mary**, most definitely come to mind as examples of where the feminine finally decides it's had enough of the masculine and brutally reclaims its freedom. With these types of films, horror is, as usual, on the cutting edge of societal change, and the genre is one of the major areas where we can show pending societal disruptions in their most extreme incarnations. Horror is a metaphor for life, for facing the unknown, for coming to terms with our fears and for naming our demons, and the **I Spit on Your Grave** franchise, and all its spawn, does so with chilling clarity.*

With thanks to Jamie Bernadette and Maria Olsen for their participation in this review section.

Notes on Contributors

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Carl Sweeney completed an MA in Film & Screen at the University of Wolverhampton. During the course, he has written about the Post-Western subgenre, spirituality in *The X-Files*, representations of terrorism in *24* and the portrayal of cinema-going in the films of Woody Allen.

Kristina Pia Hofer is a post-doc researcher with the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) supported project *A Matter of Historicity – Material Practices in Audiovisual Art*, based at the Department of Art History at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria. Her research interests are in film sound, gender/queer theory, and theories of audio/visuality. She has published on amateur pornography, exploitation/trash film and new (feminist) materialisms in *Porn Studies*, *Sexualities*, *Transatlantica – Revue d'études américaines*, and other journals and edited volumes. Together with Marietta Kesting, she has edited the *FKW Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur* special issue *Dated Formats Now: Material Practices in Audiovisual Art* (nr. 61 / 2017). As Ana Threat/The Boiler, she records and performs lo-fi hypno pop music.

Joan Hawkins is an Associate Professor in Cinema and Media Studiesat Indiana University Bloomington. She is the author of *Cutting Edge: Art Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde* and has written extensively on horror cinema and the avant-garde. Her most recent book is a co-edited (with Alex Wermer-Colan) anthology *William S. Burroughs Cutting Up the Century* (Indiana University Press,2019). She is currently editing an anthology on 1968 and writing a monograph on Independent Horror.

Lindsay Hallam is a Senior Lecturer in Film at the University of East London. She is author of the books *Screening the Marquis de Sade: Pleasure Pain and the Transgressive Body in Film* (McFarland, 2012) and a Devil's Advocates edition on *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (Auteur Press, 2018). She has contributed to the collections *Trauma, Media, Art: New*

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Xavier Mendik is Professor of Cult Cinema Studies at Birmingham City University, where he also runs the *Cine-Excess* International Film Festival (www.cine-excess.co.uk). He is the author/editor/co-editor of nine volumes on cult cinema traditions, including *Bodies of Desire and Bodies in Distress: The Golden Age of Italian Cult Cinema* (2015), *Peep Shows: Cult Film and the Cine-Erotic* (2012) and *The Cult Film Reader* (2008). He has also

completed a number of documentaries on cult film traditions, most recently *The Quiet Revolution: State, Society and the Canadian Horror Film* (2019).

Renee Middlemost is an early career researcher and Lecturer in Communication and Media at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Her PhD Thesis entitled "Amongst Friends: The Australian Cult Film Experience", examined the audience participation practices of cult film fans in Australia. Her forthcoming publications reflect her diverse research interests; these include a chapter on cult film and nostalgia for *The Routledge Guide to Cult Cinema* (2019); a chapter on the star persona of Jason Statham; and a co-authored chapter on the finale of *Dexter*.
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'Deutschland in den Sand setzen – The Transformative Metaphorology of Searching for Germany' in: Art of Wagnis : *Christoph Schlingensief's Crossing of Wagner and Africa*, ed. by Nadine Siegert, Fabian Lehmann, Ulf Vierke, Vienna: Verlag für Moderne Kunst (2017). 'Christoph Schlingensiefs Grenzüberschreitungen. Die Wiener Aktion Bitte liebt Österreich. Erste österreichische Koalitionswoche und Elfriede Jelineks Kasperlestück Ich liebe Österreich' (with Lore Knapp) in: *Germanistische Mitteilungen. Zeitschrift für deutsche Sprache, Literatur und Kultur* 41.1(2015), 75-89.
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American Cinema (1995), *Perverse Spectators* (2000), *Authorship and Film* (2002, co-ed.), *Media Reception Studies* (2005), and *Political Emotions* (2010, co-ed.).

Jon Towlson is a journalist & film critic. He is author of *Candyman* (Auteur/ Columbia University Press, 2018), *The Turn to Gruesomeness in American Horror films*, 1931-1936 (McFarland, 2016*), Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Auteur/ Columbia University Press, 2016) and *Subversive Horror Cinema: Countercultural Messages of Films from Frankenstein to the Present* (McFarland, 2014).

Glenn Ward is Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities at the University of Brighton. He has published extensively on cult cinema traditions, with particular reference to the films of the Spanish director Jesus Franco. He has had chapters published in *The Films of Jess Franco* (2018), *Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street, and Beyond* (2016), *The Transnational Fantasies of Guilermo del Toro* (2014) and *Latsploitation, Latin America and Exploitation cinemas.* Beyond these publications Glenn Ward has also acted as Co-Director of the *Cine-Excess* International Film Festival and Conference between 2014 and 2016.

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