

# Monsters as (uncanny) metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the representation of monstrosity in cinematic horror.

[Download Here](#)

□

## Monsters as (Uncanny) Metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the Representation of Monstrosity in Cinematic Horror

Steven Schneider

*Other Voices*, v.1, n.3 (January 1999)



---

Copyright © 1999, Steven Schneider, all rights reserved

---

Everything monstrous happening in the world has an ancient ancestry. The monster is intrinsic while our awareness of the monster has evolved. [\[1\]](#)

Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) which generate them. A mixed category, the monster resists any classification built on hierarchy....The monstrous is a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system. [\[2\]](#)

I have always supposed that the universal and the particular are compatible, that grounding in a particular historical and cultural matrix is inevitable and could not conceivably be in conflict with universal principles. [\[3\]](#)

### INTRODUCTION: HORROR FILM MONSTERS

**W**hat, if anything, do the monsters of horror cinema have in common, besides the fact that they are not real? They may be human—just think of Norman Bates, Leatherface, or Hannibal Lechter—but they are not *real*, in the sense of experientially real. They may even be non-fictional—just think of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1990), a film about real-life mass murderer Henry Lee Lucas—but that *still* doesn't make them real (the Henry of the film is just an actor, Michael Rooker, pretending to be Henry Lee Lucas). [\[4\]](#)

So the monsters of horror cinema are *depictions* of monsters, *representations* of monsters. But what *else* are they, as a group? Perhaps

nothing: after all, Dracula, Jaws, the Thing (both versions), Carrie, Chucky, Freddy Kreuger, and the rest are a fairly diverse lot, to say the least. According to horror film expert Mark Jancovich, "Different groups will represent the monstrous in different ways and representations will develop historically." [5] In her book *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, Judith Halberstam makes almost exactly the same claim: "The body that scares and appalls changes over time, as do the individual characteristics that add up to monstrosity, as do the preferred interpretations of monstrosity." [6] Can't we say of them this much at least, that their primary purpose is to horrify viewers? Sure, they don't always succeed—lots of times they fail—but isn't it the fact that they *try* that makes them *horror* film monsters? The dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* may or may not be depictions of monsters, but *Jurassic Park* isn't a horror movie, and the dinosaurs aren't intended to horrify us. We may feel *terror* at the sight of a Tyrannosaurus Rex tearing some guy apart, but, to quote Stanley Cavell, "terror is of *violence*, of the violence I might do or that might be done me. I can be *terrified* of thunder, but not *horrified* by it." [7]

This is all, of course, to highlight the question, "What is horror?" And that is a very big question indeed. In 1919, Freud published a paper in which he characterizes the "uncanny" as that which "arouses dread and horror...certain things which lie within the class of what is frightening." [8] Now defining uncanniness in terms of horror obviously precludes us from defining horror in terms of uncanniness, on pain of circularity. Nor would our intuitions support any claim to the effect that these terms are synonymous (most dictionaries define "uncanny" somewhere along the lines of "eerie," "mysterious," or "seemingly supernatural"). But if we can at least find some independent reasons for thinking that psychoanalysis has the tools to explain the timeless appeal and efficacy of horror fiction, this will justify our use of Freud's theory of the uncanny to shed light on the nature of horror films, and, by extension, the nature of horror film monsters.

Such "independent reasons" are readily available. Though sneered at by the highbrow, largely ignored by mainstream academics, and censured by society's self-proclaimed moral guardians, it can hardly be denied that horror fiction (including cinema) serves a variety of psychological functions in society. The briefest review will suffice to make the point. Like tragedy, horror promotes emotional catharsis in audiences; like fantasy, it offers viewers an escape from the tedium of everyday life; like comedy, it provides a relatively safe (because relatively disguised/distorted) forum for the expression of socio-cultural fears. All of this is borne out by the fact that psychoanalysis has produced, by far, the most common and influential analyses of the horror film to date. Freud's hypothesis, that a sufficient condition of uncanny experiences is

the return to consciousness of repressed infantile complexes, has been famously, albeit rather loosely, adopted/adapted by film theorist Robin Wood: "One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is all that our civilization represses or oppresses." [9] And note too, that the relationship between psychoanalysis and the horror film is mutually supportive. As Andrew Tudor points out, "the [horror] genre itself invokes psychoanalytic considerations, at times borrowing its imagery from the symbolic apparatus of dream interpretation as well as allowing fictional characters to advance pseudo-Freudian accounts of their own and others' motivations." [10]

As we shall see, not everyone is convinced that psychoanalysis has the resources to provide a satisfactory account of the horror genre. Besides which, it is possible to invoke psychoanalytic concepts in this context *without* focusing on Freud [11], much less his (admittedly sketchy) theory of the uncanny. [12] To make matters even more complicated, partly as a result of its sketchiness Freud's theory of the uncanny can be applied to the horror genre in a number of different ways. But this multitude of alternatives need not intimidate us, at least not until they are all shown to be mutually exclusive. To the extent that the account of horror film monsters presented here is plausible (however one wishes to cash out the notion of "plausibility"), to that extent will the means used to arrive at this account be justified.

The thesis to be defended here, in four parts, is as follows: (1) paradigmatic horror narratives work by *reconfirming* for audiences infantile beliefs that were abandoned long ago, such as the belief in the ability of the dead to return to life; (2) horror film monsters are best understood as *metaphorical embodiments* of such narratives. As such, they are capable of reconfirming surmounted beliefs by their very presence; (3) these metaphorical embodiments are *conceptual*, not merely cinematographic, which is to say that they exist in the mind, not just on the screen; and (4) although the metaphorical nature of horror film monsters is psychologically *necessary*, their surface heterogeneity is historically and culturally *contingent*. Not only is it the case that "the monster is the reification, the embodiment in a symbol, of an unconscious content in the mind" [13]; it is also the case that "the monster...is an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place." [14]

What makes horror film monsters at least *potentially* horrifying (what makes them monsters to begin with) is the fact that they metaphorically embody surmounted beliefs; to the extent that they *actually succeed* in horrifying viewers, however, it is because the manner in which they embody surmounted beliefs is invested with cultural relevance. James Iaccino, submitting the horror genre to what he calls (following Jung)

"archetypal analysis," arrives at a similar conclusion: "As civilization progresses to higher stages of consciousness, newer interpretations of those age-old [horror] myths become necessary so that the links with humankind's archaic past can be appropriately maintained." [15] Iaccino thinks it "quite appropriate to refer to the new archetypes as *techno-myths*, reflecting the technological advances that our society has attained" [16]; our "cultural relevance" condition, in contrast, encompasses not merely the *technological*, but also the political, racial, religious, and sexual dimensions of society. And here, what gets reflected is often anything but an "advance." [17]

This same bias towards the present can be detected in an otherwise innocuous comment made by Barbara Creed: "The horror film is populated by female monsters, many of which seem to have evolved from images that haunted the dreams, myths and artistic practices of our forbears many centuries ago." [18] Point well taken, but why speak of changes in the face of the (here, female) monster in *evolutionary* terms? At the very least it is misleading to suggest that representations of monstrosity from ages past can be understood as "primitive" in comparison with those of today (cf. Iaccino's talk of civilization *progressing* to "higher stages of consciousness"). One might put the point as follows: although the face of the monstrous *varies* from time to time, and from place to place, there is no reason to believe that in doing so it becomes any more *horrific*. Placing a value-neutral "cultural relevance" condition on the efficacy of horror film monsters respects the fact that change does not always imply advancement. A number of post-1960 horror films (e.g. *Targets* [1967], *Martin* [1978], *The Funhouse* [1981], *The Howling* [1981], *Frightmare* [1982], and *Popcorn* [1991]) have thematized the impotence of classic monsters when confronting today's supposedly more "sophisticated" audiences, But it is hard to believe that Freddy, Jason, Michael, and their contemporaries would have been more horrifying to *pre*-1960 audiences than were Dracula, The Wolfman, Frankenstein's Monster, and the Mummy. [19]

What follows is an attempt to show how a psychoanalytic explanation of monstrosity in terms of uncanniness may be compatible with a postmodernist explanation of monstrosity in terms of socio-historical conditioning. Halberstam is mistaken when she claims that "monstrosity (and the fear it gives rise to) is historically conditioned *rather than* a psychological universal" [20]; when it comes to horror film monsters, the domains of history and psychology are *not* mutually exclusive. By presenting (in broad outline, it must be admitted) a "two-tiered" theory of monstrosity, the goal is to blur—if not collapse—the sharp distinction that is usually made between *universalizing* accounts of the horror genre, those assuming "a social ontology wherein human agents are pre-constituted in key respects," and *particularistic* accounts,

those assuming a social ontology "centered on active social agents who...use cultural artifacts as resources in rendering coherent their everyday lives." [21]

## FREUD [22]

*(1) Paradigmatic horror narratives work by reconfirming for audiences infantile beliefs that were abandoned long ago.*

In 1906, the German psychologist Ernst Jentsch wrote a paper in which he hypothesized that the essential factor responsible for the production of uncanny feelings is *intellectual uncertainty*, those doubts and confusions which are liable to arise when we come across something completely unfamiliar in a foreign ("alien") environment. In his own paper on the subject, Freud concedes the *prima facie* plausibility of Jentsch's view, according to which feelings of uncanniness regarding objects and events in our immediate surroundings decrease as a function of our comfort level: the more we feel at home in our surroundings ("unhomely" is a more precise translation of the German word "unheimlich," from which the term "uncanny" was originally derived), the less likely we are to feel frightened there. But Freud's dissatisfaction with this view surfaces when he calls attention to the fact that clearly not *everything* instilling in us a sense of uncanniness is something we find alien or confusing. Attacking Jentsch on the grounds that intellectual uncertainty could not be a necessary condition of uncanny feelings, he urges his readers to resist the temptation "to conclude that what is uncanny is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar." [23]

Freud proceeds by teasing out a secondary (and to some extent contradictory) meaning of the German word "heimlich"—*concealed; kept from sight; withheld from others so that they cannot get to know of or about it*—a meaning which serves to ground his alternative explanation of uncanny phenomena, according to which "the uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression." [24] Or as he puts it a little later on: "[T]he *unheimlich* is what was once *heimlich*, familiar; the prefix 'un' is the token of repression." [25] To support his radical thesis, Freud traces the most prominent uncanny themes back to infantile sources. Conceptual connections are established between, for example, womb phantasies and the terrifying thought of being buried alive, the castration complex and the shocking sight of a severed limb, the instinctual compulsion to repeat and the eerie recurrence of unexpected events.

It is often held that Freud identifies repressed infantile wishes as the *sole* source of uncanny feelings. Thus, in his introduction to a casebook on Gothic literature, Victor Sage claims that "the whole shape of [horror] fiction for author and reader alike becomes, in Freud's view, a distorted projection of desire for the womb." [26] Strictly speaking, however, "the return of the repressed" constitutes only *one* class of the uncanny. In his paper, Freud also identifies a second class of uncanny phenomena, constituted by surmounted beliefs which gain some measure of validation in either experienced or depicted reality.

In response to something which seems to confirm our long-since discarded (or so we thought) beliefs in the ability of the dead to return to life, the omnipotence of thoughts, and the existence of a double, we get a feeling of uncanniness: "we have *surmounted* these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us, ready to seize upon any confirmation." [27] Here, what has been relegated to the unconscious is a *belief in the reality* of a particular ideational content, rather than a particular ideational content *itself*.

Admittedly, the "the reconfirmation of the surmounted" sounds less elegant than "the return of the repressed"; nevertheless, the former too occupies a position of central importance in Freud's theory of the uncanny. Tudor denies this, citing for support Freud's remark that only the class of uncanny phenomena constituted by repressed infantile complexes is guaranteed equal efficacy in fiction and reality. [28] But just because surmounted beliefs do not *necessarily* engender the same degree of uncanny feeling when they are reconfirmed in fiction as opposed to reality, this does not mean they *never* manage to do so. Quite the contrary. According to Freud, so long as a certain "conflict of judgment" condition on this class of the uncanny is satisfied, the intensity of feeling evoked will be the same—if not *greater*—in the depicted world. (We shall have more to say about this "conflict of judgment" condition below.)

Freud does, however, view repressed infantile complexes as the more *fundamental* class of uncanny phenomenon. Thus, "when we consider that primitive beliefs are most intimately connected with infantile complexes, and are, in fact, based on them, we shall not be greatly astonished to find that the distinction is often a hazy one." [29] In both classes, uncanny feeling—as opposed to, say, mere intellectual recognition (of the ideational content, of the reconfirmed belief)—gets produced the same way. Briefly, it is a tenet of psychoanalytic theory that anxiety is the cause of repression. Therefore, with the unexpected return to consciousness of some previously repressed ideational content comes all of the latent anxiety. And the same holds for the reconfirmation of primitive beliefs "intimately connected with...and...in

fact, based on" that same ideational content.

Freud's qualification of "haziness" aside, the crucial points to keep in mind here are (i) that a distinction between primitive beliefs and infantile complexes *does* exist, and (ii) that despite the "intimate connection" between them (the former are in some sense parasitic on the latter), this distinction is *still* capable of being made. *Contra* Victor Sage, desire for the womb does *not* shape the whole of horror fiction according to Freud. And *contra* Robin Wood, the *true* subject of horror cinema may be less "the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses" than the struggle for validation of all that our civilization disavows or denies.

(2) *Horror film monsters are best understood as metaphorical embodiments of paradigmatic horror narratives, and as such, are capable of reconfirming surmounted beliefs by their very presence.*

In a recent article, Ivan Ward calls for a distinction between "the narratives of [cinematic] horror and the images." [30] Following Freud, one might begin to effect such a distinction by associating the most disturbing *images* of horror cinema with the return to consciousness of previously repressed ideational content, and by associating the most frightening *narratives* of horror cinema with the confirmation in depicted reality of previously surmounted beliefs. One perhaps surprising consequence of this approach is that the overwhelming majority of horror film monsters turn out to be not so much literal manifestations of paradigmatic uncanny images as metaphorical embodiments of paradigmatic uncanny narratives. Such a view diverges sharply from the one endorsed by a number of contemporary psychoanalytic-minded theorists, namely, the view that horror film monsters represent in various ways male fears of castration. [31]

On the "surmounted belief model" proposed here, the stars of classic reanimation tales—mummies, zombies, the Frankenstein monster—can be viewed as more or less distinct embodiments of our surmounted belief in the ability of the dead to return to life; a belief which, subject to certain conditions, gets reconfirmed by their very presence. Freud himself lends support in favor of this hypothesis: "many people experience the [uncanny] feeling in the highest degree in relation to...the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts." [32] Again, the stars of classic counterpart tales—doppelgangers, werewolves, murderous alter-egos (à la Mr. Hyde)—can be viewed as more or less distinct embodiments of our surmounted belief in the existence of a double (a psychological invention which provides infants with insurance against the threat of death and/or the destruction of the ego). [33]

In *The Omen*, there is a memorable scene in which a large sheet of plate glass flies out from the back of a moving truck and decapitates someone, all as a result of demonic intervention. Although there is a minimum of gore, we are left with a disturbing image of the victim's head spinning end over end in mid-air. If what has been claimed here so far is correct, the effectiveness of this scene results primarily (though perhaps not solely) from its success in bringing back to consciousness the content of repressed infantile castration complexes (or their female equivalents). [34] The same holds true for all those scenes in which spectacle takes precedence over storyline. But in order to understand what makes Damien, the monstrous devil-child of *The Omen*, himself so disturbing, we need to ask which paradigmatic horror narrative (or narratives) he metaphorically embodies, and so which surmounted belief (or beliefs) his presence reconfirms for viewers. Considering Damien's uncanny ability to cause death in all manner of indirect ways, a preliminary answer would be that he metaphorically embodies a paradigmatic "psychic" narrative, thereby reconfirming our previously surmounted belief in the omnipotence of thought. Insofar as his birth signifies the return of Satan, however, he may *also* be said to metaphorically embody a paradigmatic reincarnation narrative, thereby reconfirming our previously surmounted belief in the ability of dead souls to return to life. (Like many of his monstrous cohorts, Damien is a mixed metaphor.)

As was noted earlier, not *all* horror film monsters manage to fulfill their primary purpose. Tudor, in presenting his case against universalizing accounts of horror cinema, stresses the fact that "precisely the same representation of a monster can be found frightening, repulsive, hideous, pitiful, or laughable by audiences in different social circumstances and at different times." [35] Of course, the degree to which a monster succeeds in horrifying viewers is, to a large extent, a matter of age, personal history, and taste (or lack thereof). But there is a further aspect of Freud's theory which may help to explain the fact that, although two (or more) monsters can metaphorically embody the *same* surmounted belief, this by no means guarantees that both (or all) of them will successfully engender feelings of uncanniness/horror.

Freud makes an important distinction in his paper between the *experienced* uncanny and the *depicted* uncanny. As noted above, with respect to that class of uncanny phenomena stemming from repressed infantile complexes, it makes little difference whether the return to consciousness takes place in real life or in fiction. We are as apt to feel a sense of horror reading about a dismemberment, for example, as we are actually witnessing one (although there can be little doubt that actually witnessing a dismemberment would be more *traumatizing* than merely reading about one).



With respect to that class of uncanny phenomena proceeding from surmounted beliefs, however, the domain in which reconfirmation takes place makes a *huge* difference. In everyday life, a reconfirmation of that which has been surmounted almost always produces uncanny feelings. In fiction, however, such feelings do not arise *unless there is a palpable "conflict of judgment" regarding the possibility of reconfirmation in reality.* What we must believe, in spite of our "better" (mature, conditioned, rational) judgment, is that the objects or events being depicted really *could* exist or happen. But note: this is *not* to say that what we must believe, in spite of our better judgment, is that the objects (events) being depicted really *do* exist (really *are* happening). [36]

In reading works of fiction, "we adapt our judgment to the imaginary reality imposed on us by the writer." [37] This applies to works of film, as well. In the animistic worlds depicted in fantasy ("sword-and-sorcery") cinema, for example, there is nothing uncanny or otherwise horrifying about the reconfirmation of infantile beliefs in the omnipotence of thought and the prompt fulfillment of wishes; according to Freud, this is because most of us are well aware of the fact that curses, charms, magic spells, and the like are regular, everyday events in the Fantasy Universe. Freud's "conflict of judgment" condition thus goes a long way towards explaining why, when we watch horror films starring Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, or the Wolfman today, it often feels instead like we are watching R-rated fairy tales. Although the traditional/canonical monsters of horror cinema are just as *threatening* as they used to be, our overfamiliarity with the fictional worlds these monsters inhabit has rendered ineffective their efforts to horrify, since they no longer engender in us the requisite conflict of judgment. That is not to say that the *narratives* these monsters metaphorically embody have ceased serving as a source of uncanniness; rather, it is to say that the *manner in which* these narratives are metaphorically embodied has become outdated. [38]

Three recent trends in horror cinema can be viewed as attempts to sidestep, at least temporarily, this critical problem of audience overfamiliarity. One is the introduction of ever more bizarre, alien, and/or inchoate monsters (e.g. those in *Event Horizon* [1997], *Mimic* [1997], and *Phantoms* [1998]), monsters whose sheer novelty is supposed to overcome the conventionality of the fictional worlds they inhabit. A second is the creative merging of realistic serial killers with demonic, other-worldly forces, in films such as *Exorcist III* (1990), *The Frighteners* (1996), and *Fallen* (1998). Here, the writer/director "betrays us to the superstitiousness which we have ostensibly surmounted; he deceives us by promising to give us the sober truth, and then after all overstepping it." [39] And a third is the extreme self-reflexivity of neo-stalker films such as *Scream* (1996), *Scream 2* (1997), and *Halloween H2O* (1998). In

these movies, survival depends not only on knowing the conventions of modern horror cinema, but on figuring out how to *use* that knowledge in order to break free of these conventions. Concomitant with the latter, of course, is a renewed opportunity for audiences to have a conflict of judgment.

Herein lies a Freudian answer to the question *how* horror film monsters are able to horrify, considering the fact that audiences are fully aware of their fictional status. Because a belief in the legitimate possibility of reconfirmation is enough to produce a conflict of judgment, a belief in the *actual existence* of horror film monsters (or the paradigmatic narratives they metaphorically embody) is not necessary to generate feelings of uncanniness/horror. Noel Carroll, in his provocative study, *The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990), fails to note this difference between actual and possible existence beliefs. Wisely rejecting the blanket assumption that "we are only moved emotionally where we believe that the object of our emotion exists," Carroll goes too far in the other direction, claiming (i) that "the thought of a fearsome and disgusting character like Dracula is something that can be entertained without believing that Dracula exists," and (ii) that "thought contents we entertain without believing them can genuinely move us emotionally." [\[40\]](#)

By itself, (i) is utterly harmless. But combined with (ii), it is simply mistaken. The mere *entertaining* in one's mind of a horror film monster is insufficient to generate fear; at the very least, it renders the production of such an emotional response either mysterious or irrational. Unless a belief in the possible existence of such a being (however fleeting this belief may be), is *presupposed* by the activity of entertaining, there is nothing—certainly nothing rational—for the fear to latch on to. We may agree with Carroll's so-called "Thought-Theory of Emotional Responses to Fiction" [\[41\]](#) when it comes to the "return of the repressed" class of uncanny phenomena. But that is just because, what generates the uncanniness/horror here is a return to consciousness of some particular ideational content—and nothing else. When it comes to the "reconfirmation of the surmounted" class of uncanny phenomena, where most horror film monsters are to be found, possession of a *possible* (not an *actual*) existence belief is required for the necessary conflict of judgment to occur.

Let me diverge for a moment to respond to an objection raised by Carroll against the bringing to bear of psychoanalytic considerations in analyses of the horror genre. Near the end of his book, Carroll takes aim at Wood's return of the repressed argument: "it is not clear to me that monsters...much touch any infantile traumas or repressed wishes or anxieties." [\[42\]](#) After citing as a "pertinent counterexample" the man—

and woman—eating cephalods from H.G. Wells' short story *The Sea Raiders*—monsters he claims are wholly *lacking* in latent psychic content—Carroll concludes that "the psychoanalytic reduction of horrific creatures to objects of repression is not comprehensive for the genre; not all horrific creatures portend psychic conflict or desire." [43] His own, *non*-psychoanalytic characterization of horror film monsters invokes the work of noted anthropologist Mary Douglas, who attributes feelings of disgust and aversion to apparent transgressions or violations of cultural categories: "given a monster in a horror story, the scholar can ask in what ways it is categorically interstitial, contradictory (in Douglas's sense), incomplete, or formless. ...monsters...are unnatural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it." [44]

Freud's central claim, that feelings of uncanniness result *either* from a return of the repressed *or* from a reconfirmation of the surmounted, is glossed by Carroll as follows: "To experience the uncanny...is to experience something that is known, but something the knowledge of which has been hidden or repressed." [45] Not bad for a start, but what about the experience of something the *belief* in which has been *abandoned* or *surmounted*? In light of what has been said thus far, it should be evident that by identifying repressed infantile complexes as the *sole* source of uncanniness/horror in psychoanalytic theory, Carroll is guilty of the same mistake as Victor Sage (and perhaps Robin Wood, as well). But Carroll goes on to make the additional mistake of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, taking the inadequacy of the return of the repressed argument as a reason to reject *all* psychoanalytic accounts of the horror genre (though he concedes that "psychoanalysis nevertheless may still have much to say about particular works, subgenres, and cycles within horror" [46] ).

Because he ignores the "reconfirmation of the surmounted" class of uncanny phenomena, Carroll is tempted by an explanation of monstrosity which, at the end of the day, amounts to little more than an anthropologically-informed recapitulation of the Jentschian position so soundly defeated by Freud in his 1919 paper. According to Carroll, "monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge. ...monsters are in a certain sense challenges to the foundations of a culture's way of thinking." [47] This appeal to "cognitive threat" as the source of our simultaneous fascination and disgust with horrific monsters is reminiscent of Jentsch's appeal to "intellectual uncertainty" as the source of our feelings of uncanniness:

Most people...incorporate the new and the unusual with mistrust, unease and even hostility... This can be explained to a great extent by the difficulty

of establishing quickly and completely the conceptual connections that the object strives to make with the previous ideational sphere of the individual—in other words, the intellectual mastery of the new thing. [48]

As a perhaps unsuspecting neo-Jentschian, Carroll's position is open to a revised version of Freud's original criticism: since not *every* monster that successfully instills in us a sense of horror or uncanniness is "categorically interstitial,...incomplete, or formless," cognitive threat could not be a necessary condition of uncanny feelings.

Even if we *accept* Carroll's highly counterintuitive claim, that horror film monsters must be "of either a supernatural or a sci-fi origin," [49] and so agree not to count against him the plethora of realist horror film monsters such as Norman Bates, Leatherface, and Jerry Blake (of *Stepfather* fame), cognitive threat-*qua*-categorical interstitiality *still* seems inessential. *The entire class* of psychic monsters (which includes Carrie, Patrick [50], and the eponymous "Scanners"), in fact, tells against the necessity of this condition. [51] Carroll's ulterior motive in analyzing the ontological status of horror film monsters is to distinguish the emotion of "art-horror" from that of (presumably, "art-") fear. This leads him to regard horror film monsters as both "threatening *and* impure. If the monster were *only* evaluated as potentially threatening, the emotion would [simply] be fear." [52] We shall leave it an open question whether Carroll's strategy here works; for our purposes, it suffices to note (i) that his analysis most naturally fits the class of reincarnated monsters, whose members obviously transgress cultural categories due to their "living dead" status; and (ii) that his analysis *only* works for other kinds/classes of monsters if we apply the notion of categorical interstitiality with generous *ad hoc* breadth. Clearly, an alternative analysis is warranted.

That said, it is highly unlikely that every horror film monster, much less every monster in the whole of horror fiction, can be understood *solely* in terms of the "reconfirmation of the surmounted." Some of them—e.g. the Headless Horseman and the Beast With Five Fingers (a severed hand with a mind of its own)—may strike us as falling squarely within the "return of the repressed" category. And let us grant Carroll, at least for the sake of argument, that Wells' cephalods *are* frightening primarily because they are cognitively threatening. Even if we allow for a minority of monsters who correspond neither to repressed infantile complexes nor to surmounted infantile beliefs, however, would this be such a bad thing so far as our overall project is concerned? After all, one of the major criticisms levied against psychoanalytic theory in general, and its application to the horror genre in particular, is its propensity for *self-confirmation*. [53]

The account of horror film monsters presented here is not intended to

serve as a strict, much less an "essential," definition; rather, it is intended to serve as an interpretive tool for the understanding and construction of cinematic representations of monstrosity. As such, it can withstand the pressure of a few *prima facie* counterexamples. [54] Near the end of his paper, Freud himself cautions that "we must be prepared to admit that there are other elements besides those which we have so far laid down as determining the production of uncanny feelings." [55] And if *Freud* can admit of "other elements," we certainly can too.

## LAKOFF

(3) *Horror film monsters are conceptual, not merely cinematographic, metaphors.*

It is one thing for metaphors to appear in a literary work; is it another thing (or perhaps *no* thing) for metaphors to appear in a *cinematic* work? Although not all theorists agree that the "metaphorical transformation of ideas exists in film," [56] Trevor Whittock, in an influential study, concludes that metaphor can come from the "role [of an image] in the thematic or narrative development of the film,...its place in social beliefs or customs, even its cultural and historical setting." [57] If horror film monsters really are metaphorical embodiments of paradigmatic uncanny narratives, and their role really is to reconfirm previously surmounted beliefs by their very presence, then what we need now is a theory of metaphor which can support and help to explicate this phenomenon.

George Lakoff has provided copious and convincing evidence for the view that "the locus of metaphors is not in language at all," [58] but in thought. According to Lakoff, metaphors function by facilitating an understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another, usually more *concrete* conceptual domain. Take the familiar LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor: here, entities from the "target domain" of love (e.g. lovers, their common goals, the love relationship) are understood in terms of entities from the "source domain" of traveling (travelers, destinations, the vehicle used to get there). This explains the ease with which we traffic in such metaphorical expressions as "their relationship is going nowhere," "they're stuck in the slow lane," and "she's got control of the wheel." The ontological correspondences constituting the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor, and thousands of others, are *tightly structured*, insofar as target domain entities typically preserve the logical features of (and relations between) source domain entities. They are *conventional*, in that they function as relatively fixed parts of a culture's shared conceptual system. And they exist in a *hierarchical organization*, whereby "lower" mappings inherit correspondence features from "higher" mappings. To illustrate this last point, note that the understanding of, for instance, *difficulties* in terms of *impediments to travel* occurs not only in the

PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor (e.g. "From now on, it's going to be smooth sailing"), but also in the "lower-level" LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor (e.g. "Their relationship is rocky"), as well as in the "lower-level" CAREER IS A JOURNEY metaphor (e.g. "His rise to the top has hit a snag").

Three features of Lakoff's theory make it appealing in the present context. First, his emphasis on the conceptual, rather than linguistic, basis of metaphor satisfies our need for a theory which readily accommodates (or at least does not discriminate against) *cinematic* representations of monstrosity. Lakoff repeatedly stresses that, in his theory, "the language is secondary. The mapping is primary." [59] This is crucial, considering that in our theory, those narratives serving to reconfirm surmounted beliefs are "embodied" not in language, but by horror film monsters. In other words, the medium of our metaphor is primarily *visual*, not *verbal*.

Second, the conventional nature of conceptual metaphors goes a long way towards accounting for the seemingly ubiquitous presence of horror film monsters in our culture. Just as the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor has become so much a feature of our unreflective thought and speech that we often fail to recognize particular instances of it *as* metaphor, fascination with—one might say affection for—the monsters of horror cinema has become so widespread that most of us have no need to stop and figure out just which uncanny narratives they metaphorically embody. Dracula, Freddy, Jason, and company are referred to in songs, star in cartoons, appear on postage stamps... some even have breakfast cereals named after them! For better or worse, the metaphorical nature of horror film monsters has facilitated their entrance into our collective consciousness.

Third, the systematic and hierarchical organization of conceptual metaphors helps to account for the intuitive plausibility of a "surmounted belief" horror film monster typology. The utility of arranging what looks at first to be a seemingly incommensurable mass of monsters in a system that is both theoretically acceptable and aesthetically satisfying has recently been remarked upon by Gregory Waller. In his introduction to a collection of essays on the modern American horror film, Waller writes that "a fully developed typology of monsters would offer a valuable means of delineating the paradigmatic possibilities open to this genre and the sort of fears that will suitably trouble its audience." [60] Ironically, the reverse turns out to be the case. Starting with "the paradigmatic possibilities open to this genre and the sort of fears that will suitably trouble its audience," we discover a valuable means of delineating "a fully developed typology of monsters." In turn, however, this typology can serve to motivate additional insights into the means and ends of horror cinema. According to Lakoff,

metaphorical mappings do not occur in isolation from one another. [61] Neither, as we shall see, do horror film monsters.

In light of our earlier discussion, and considering the three features of Lakoff's theory just mentioned, there is ample grounds for hypothesizing the existence of a SURMOUNTED BELIEFS ARE HORROR FILM MONSTERS conceptual metaphor, according to which entities from the relatively abstract source domain of surmounted beliefs are understood in terms of entities from the far more concrete target domain of horror film monsters. The former domain is "relatively abstract" because surmounted beliefs are propositional states with content that can only achieve literal reconfirmation *narratologically*: the surmounted belief that the dead are capable of returning to life (as opposed to, say, the belief that I am hungry) requires a whole *series* of events to take place before its truth can be (re-)confirmed. Freud would seem to concur: "apparent death and the return of the dead have been represented as uncanny *themes*." [62]

The latter domain, in contrast, is "far more concrete" for the obvious reason that horror film monsters are visual representations intended to engender a sense of horror/uncanniness in viewers by their very presence. The claim here is that, as symbolic correlates of surmounted beliefs, horror film monsters can achieve (metaphorical) reconfirmation *pictorially*—and therefore, all at once. Given the requisite conflict of judgment (by no means an easy condition to satisfy), the very act of watching a horror film monster onscreen reconfirms for viewers whichever previously surmounted beliefs are associated with the paradigmatic narratives that monster embodies.

In keeping with Freud, we can effect an initial breakdown of the SURMOUNTED BELIEFS ARE HORROR FILM MONSTERS conceptual metaphor along the following lines: [63]

- I. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS THAT THE DEAD CAN RETURN TO LIFE ARE **REINCARNATED** MONSTERS
- II. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE OMNIPOTENCE OF THOUGHT ARE **PSYCHIC** MONSTERS
- III. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE EXISTENCE OF A DOUBLE ARE **DYADIC** MONSTERS

Each of these levels has at least one sub-level, whereby "lower" monsters inherit correspondence features from "higher" monsters. So, for example, beneath the SURMOUNTED BELIEFS THAT THE DEAD CAN RETURN TO LIFE ARE **REINCARNATED** MONSTERS level, we find the SURMOUNTED BELIEFS THAT DEAD *BODIES* CAN RETURN TO LIFE ARE **ZOMBIES** level (monsters here include The Mummy, Frankenstein's monster, the innumerable victims of Romero's *Living Dead* Trilogy, and Jason Vorhees), as well as the SURMOUNTED BELIEFS THAT DEAD *SOULS* CAN RETURN TO LIFE ARE **SPIRITS** level (monsters here include ghosts, haunted houses, and the possessed). In turn, each of *these* levels has at least one sub-level of its own. **Table I**, below, is an attempt at elucidating the

hierarchical organization of this metaphor (note that the terminological choices are, to some extent, arbitrary, and that a number of more particularistic taxonomies may very well be compatible with this one). Perhaps as should have been expected, many of horror cinema's most enduring monsters turn out to be "mixed" metaphors (recall our earlier discussion of *Damien*), insofar as their presence reconfirms *more than one* surmounted belief.

## **CONCLUSION: THE REPRESENTATION OF MONSTROSITY IN CINEMATIC HORROR**

*(4) Although the metaphorical nature of horror film monsters is psychologically necessary, their surface heterogeneity is historically and culturally contingent.*

Among the advantages of aligning our psychoanalytic explanation of horror film monsters with Lakoff's conceptual theory of metaphor is that we now have the resources to explain away the apparent incompatibility between universalizing and particularistic accounts of monstrosity. On the one hand, we know that the basic *types* of horror film monsters—reincarnated monsters, psychic monsters, and dyadic monsters—are psychologically necessary, in that the uncanny narratives they metaphorically embody correspond to a specific, and limited, set of infantile beliefs (namely, those which have been surmounted). What all horror film monsters have in common, besides the fact that they are not real, is that they all fall under the SURMOUNTED BELIEFS ARE HORROR FILM MONSTERS conceptual metaphor. On the other hand, due to the need for a conflict of judgment regarding the possibility of reconfirmation in a depicted world, particular *tokens* of horror film monsters (i.e. those at lower levels of the inheritance hierarchy) are historically and culturally contingent. All horror film monsters metaphorically *embody* surmounted beliefs, but not all of them manage to *reconfirm* those beliefs by their very presence; that is why not all of them manage to fulfill their primary (that is, their horrifying) purpose.

---

### **Table I:** The SURMOUNTED BELIEFS ARE HORROR FILM MONSTERS conceptual metaphor

- I. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS THAT THE DEAD CAN RETURN TO LIFE ARE **REINCARNATED MONSTERS**
  - A. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS THAT DEAD BODIES CAN RETURN TO LIFE ARE **ZOMBIES**
    - 1. **NON-NATURAL ZOMBIES:** *Dracula, The Mummy, The Golem, Jason, Night of the Living Dead*
    - 2. **MEDICO-SCIENTIFIC ZOMBIES:** *Frankenstein's monster, The Crazies, Shivers, Rabid*
  - B. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS THAT DEAD SOULS CAN RETURN TO LIFE ARE **SPIRITS**



1. **DISEMBODIED SOULS:** ghosts, haunted houses (*The Haunting, Poltergeist, Amityville Horror*)
  2. **EMBODIED SOULS:** demonic possessions (*The Exorcist, Fallen*), Candyman, Chuckie
- II. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE OMNIPOTENCE OF THOUGHT ARE **PSYCHIC MONSTERS**
- A. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE PROMPT FULFILLMENT OF WISHES ARE **TELEKENETICS:** Carrie, Freddy
  - B. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN MENTALTRANSPARENCY ARE **TELEPATHICS:** Patrick, *Scanners*, (vampires)
- III. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE EXISTENCE OF A DOUBLE ARE **DYADIC MONSTERS**
- A. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE EXISTENCE OF PHYSICAL DOUBLES ARE **REPLICAS**
    1. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE EXISTENCE OF NATURAL REPLICAS ARE **DOPPLEGANGERS**
      - a. **TWINS:** *Sisters, Dead Ringers, Raising Cain*
      - b. **CLONES:** *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*
      - c. **CHAMELEONS:** Carpenter's *The Thing, Phantoms*
    2. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE EXISTENCE OF NON-NATURAL REPLICAS ARE **REPLICANTS**
      - a. **ROBOTS:** *The Stepford Wives, Westworld*
      - b. **CYBORGS:** *Bladerunner, Terminator*
  - B. SURMOUNTED BELIEFS IN THE EXISTENCE OF MENTAL DOUBLE ARE **PSYCHOS**
    1. **SCHIZOS** [same body, different consciousness]: Norman Bates, *Dressed To Kill, (Sisters)*
    2. **SHAPE-SHIFTERS** [same body, physical transformation]: Jekyll-Hyde, werewolves, vampires
    3. **PROJECTIONS** [different body]: *The Brood*, (Frankenstein's monster)
    4. **SERIAL KILLERS** [same body, same consciousness [\[64\]](#)]: Henry, Lechter, *Peeping Tom*
- 

In order to instill a conflict of judgment in viewers, the *manner in which* horror film monsters metaphorically embody surmounted beliefs must be periodically updated; investing monsters with cultural relevance serves to "keep us in the dark about the precise nature of the presuppositions on which the world [depicted in the film] is based." [\[65\]](#) And how else could we willingly suspend our disbelief? The distinction being made here, between (universal) monster types and (particular) monster tokens, is theoretically explicable in terms of Lakoff's distinction between (general) superordinate level mappings and (specific) basic level mappings:

It should come as no surprise that the generalization is at the superordinate level, while the special cases are at the basic level. After all, the basic level is at the level of rich mental images and rich knowledge structure... A mapping at the superordinate level maximizes the possibilities for mapping rich conceptual structures in the source domain onto the target domain, since it permits many basic level instances, each of which is information rich. [\[66\]](#)

We might say: mappings at the superordinate level of monster *types*

maximize the possibilities for satisfying Freud's conflict of judgment condition on the depicted uncanny, since it permits many basic level instances of monster *tokens*, each of which is (potentially) culturally relevant.

Considering that analyses of the horror genre informed by psychoanalytic theory are typically assumed to be universalizing in nature, it may come as something of a surprise to find that Wood's "return of the repressed" argument comes in handy at just this point. One finds in Wood an invocation of the post-Freudian distinction between *basic repression*, which is universal, necessary, and inescapable, and *surplus repression*, which is culture-specific and contingent, varying in both degree and kind with respect to different societies. [\[67\]](#) And when Wood talks about horror film monsters in terms of a "return of the repressed," what he really has in mind is a "return of the *surplus* repressed": "in a society built on monogamy and family there will be an enormous surplus of repressed sexual energy, and...what is repressed must always strive to return." [\[68\]](#)

The problem with Wood's account is that, by not sticking to the fundamental suppositions of Freud's theory of the uncanny, he fails to explain why horror film monsters are capable of horrifying us. We may mistrust, despise, even *fear* the objects of surplus repression in our society, but it is not at all obvious that we are *horrified* by them. Indeed, Wood suggests the possibility of extending his theory to genres *other than* horror: "substitute for 'Monster' the term 'Indian', for example, and one has a formula for a large number of classical Westerns; substitute 'transgressive woman' and the formula encompasses numerous melodramas..." [\[69\]](#) But if we can so easily extend this "return of the repressed" argument, why should we believe that it captures anything distinctive about the cinematic representation of monstrosity?

Wood concedes that, as opposed to the Indian (and the transgressive woman), "the monster is, of course, much more Protean, changing from period to period as society's basic fears clothe themselves in fashionable or immediately accessible garments." [\[70\]](#) In order to characterize these "basic fears," however, we must turn to the SURMOUNTED BELIEFS ARE HORROR FILM MONSTERS conceptual metaphor; it is only at the *particularistic* level of "fashionable or immediately accessible garments" that we may wish to invoke (with Wood) the objects of surplus repression. [\[71\]](#) Alternatively, this is just the point at which we might fruitfully employ/extend one or more of the wholly *non-psychoanalytic particularistic* accounts of monstrosity provided by Carroll, Cohen, Halberstam, et. al. [\[72\]](#) Following Lakoff, cultural updates of traditional/canonical horror film monsters can be understood as *novel extensions* of the SURMOUNTED BELIEFS ARE HORROR FILM MONSTERS metaphor. Due to the fact that this metaphor is a fixed part of our conceptual system, new and imaginative mappings are capable of

being understood immediately: our integration of the novel extension is "a consequence of the preexisting ontological correspondences of the metaphor." [73]

An example will serve to illustrate this point: Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction* (1996) is a horror film that updates the vampire mythos in order to explore and comment on a number of contemporary social issues. Although the bleakness and philosophical pretensions of this movie guaranteed that it would not draw all that well at the box office, a number of critics had great things to say about it: "this is the vampire movie we've been waiting for: a reactionary, urban-horror flick that truly has the ailing pulse of the time. AIDS and drug addiction are points of reference, but they're symptoms, not the cause." [74] In Freudian-Lakoffian terms, the vampire/blood-addicts in this film can be viewed as novel extensions (i.e. cultural updates) of the SURMOUNTED BELIEFS THAT THE DEAD CAN RETURN TO LIFE ARE REINCARNATED MONSTERS sub-level metaphor; as such, they are able to produce in many viewers that conflict of judgment necessary for a feeling of uncanniness.[75]

To sum up. One (empirical) problem facing any universalizing account of horror film monsters is how to account for the fact that such monsters often *fail* to horrify viewers, and so fail to fulfill their primary purpose. This is where particularistic accounts come in. But particularistic accounts have their own (conceptual) problem, namely, that of accounting for what it is that makes horror film monsters horrifying *by their very nature*. Call back the universalizing accounts. So it appears that these two kinds of account must somehow be rendered compatible, in order for a complete story to emerge. This paper is a first attempt at rendering just such a compatibility, by filtering certain key aspects of Freud's theory of the uncanny through the lenses of Lakoff's conceptual theory of metaphor.

Some final considerations. In answer to the question, "Why do we have the conventional metaphors that we have?", Lakoff postulates that a great number of them are grounded in real life: "correspondences in real experience form the basis for correspondences in the metaphorical cases, which go beyond real experience." [76] So if the account of horror film monsters presented here is correct, then the paradigmatic horror narratives such monsters metaphorically embody are likely to have a basis in reality. To make matters even worse, conceptual metaphors have the capacity to impose themselves on real life "through the creation of new correspondences in experience." [77] Now *that's* a horrifying thought.[78]



**Endnotes:**

- [1](#) Frank Cawson, *The Monsters in the Mind: the Face of Evil in Myth, Literature, and Everyday Life* (England: Book Guild, 1995), p. 161.
- [2](#) Jeffrey Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 2-3.
- [3](#) Israel Scheffler, *Teachers of My Youth: An American Jewish Experience* (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1995), p. 180.
- [4](#) Noel Carroll would deny the latter two claims. In *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), he defines monsters as "any being[s] not believed to exist now by contemporary science" (p. 27). But cf. Cynthia Freeland ("Realist Horror" in *Philosophy and Film*, ed. Cynthia Freeland and Thomas Wartenberg [New York: Routledge, 1995]): "In realist horror like Henry, the monster is a true-to-life rather than supernatural being. Henry is a monster" (p. 130). Other horror films with non-fictional monsters include *The Honeymoon Killers* (1969), and *Deranged* (1976).
- [5](#) Mark Jancovich, *American Horror from 1951 to the Present* (England: Keele University Press, 1994), p. 9.
- [6](#) Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 8.
- [7](#) Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 418.
- [8](#) Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" (1919) in *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 14: Art and Literature*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1990): 339.
- [9](#) Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 75.
- [10](#) Andrew Tudor, "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre," *Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3 (1997): 446.
- [11](#) See, e.g., Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993) for a Kristevan focus; James Iaccino, *Psychological Reflections in Cinematic Terror: Jungian Archetypes in Horror Films* (Connecticut: Praeger, 1994) for a Jungian focus; and Slavoj Žižek, "Grimaces of the Real, Or When the Phallus Appears," *October* 58 (1991) for a Lacanian focus.
- [12](#) Chief among the many examples to be found here are Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992); Harvey Greenberg, *The Movies on Your Mind* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1975); Stephen Neale, *Genre* (England: BFI Publishing, 1980); and (especially) James Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- [13](#) Cawson, p. 1.
- [14](#) Cohen, p. 2.
- [15](#) Iaccino, p. 181.
- [16](#) Ibid.
- [17](#) David Cronenberg is perhaps the most famous/infamous director to build a career on the taking of contemporary social anxieties to horrific extremes (Larry Cohen and George

Romero are others). A quick tour through his oeuvre turns up films which explore—some would say exploit—sexual perversity (*Stereo* [1969], *Shivers* [1975], *Crash* [1996]), medico-scientific epidemics (*Shivers*, *Rabid* [1977]), mass-media manipulation (*Videodrome* [1982]), drug addiction (*Dead Ringers* [1988], *Naked Lunch* [1991]), cancerphobia (*The Brood* [1979], *The Dead Zone* [1983]), and, arguably, AIDS-phobia (*The Fly* [1986]).

[18](#) Creed, p. 1.

[19](#) It is interesting to note that in at least half of the movies mentioned above—*The Funhouse*, *Frightmare*, and *Popcorn*—the classic monsters get to take a revenge of sorts on those who would disregard, scorn, or mock them.

[20](#) Halberstam, p. 6: emphasis added.

[21](#) Tudor, p. 460. Note: Tudor employs the distinction between universalizing and particularistic accounts when discussing various responses to the question, "What is the appeal of horror?", not when discussing various responses to the question, "What is a horror film monster?".

[22](#) Some of the paragraphs in this section restate material from my "Uncanny Realism and the Decline of the Modern Horror Film," *Para\*doxa: Studies in World Literary Genres* 3, no. 3-4 (1997): 417-428.

[23](#) Freud, p. 341.

[24](#) Ibid., p. 363.

[25](#) Ibid., p. 368. Earlier, Freud prepares us for this conclusion by quoting Schelling: "'Unheimlich' is the name for everything that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but had come to light" (p. 345).

[26](#) Victor Sage, *The Gothick Novel: A Casebook*, ed. Victor Sage (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990) p. 23.

[27](#) Freud, pp. 370-71.

[28](#) Tudor, p. 447.

[29](#) Freud, p. 372.

[30](#) Ivan Ward, "Adolescent Phantasies and the Horror Film," *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 13, no. 2 (1996): 274.

[31](#) See, for example, Neale, p. 61, and Susan Lurie, "The Construction of the 'Castrated Woman' in Psychoanalysis and Cinema," *Discourse* 4 (1981-82): 52-74.

[32](#) Freud, p. 364.

[33](#) It is a fairly complicated question, whether the double signifies a "return of the repressed" (through its connection with primary narcissism and repetition-compulsion) or a "reconfirmation of the surmounted." Most likely, it signifies both to some extent. In "The 'Uncanny'," however, Freud comes down in favor of the latter, with his remark that "the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted" (p. 358). And cf. Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1925), trans. Harry Tucker, Jr. (London: Carnac, 1989), who attributes "the significance of the double [to] an embodiment of the soul—a notion represented in primitive belief and living on in our superstition" (pp. 82-83).

[34](#) It may be wiser in this context to speak of castration anxieties, a phrase that is gender-neutral, rather than castration complexes, a phrase with phallogocentric implications. Cf. Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer, "'Everybody must be just like me': Observations on Female Castration Anxiety," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 66 (1985): "castration anxiety, in men or in women, is anxiety over losing that genital which is actually possessed. The castration complex, on the other hand, has traditionally referred to the girl's fantasy of having had a penis that was lost. Such a definition of the castration complex implies an essentially phallogocentric experience and resolution of female castration concerns" (p. 332).

[35](#) Tudor, p. 456.

[36](#) This suggests an indirect means of testing the validity of Freud's theory: determine whether or not those who have never surmounted their primitive beliefs—people who must fail to experience a conflict of judgment with regards to the reconfirmation of such beliefs—are immune to uncanny effects. In "Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts" (1913) in *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: WW Norton, 1989), Freud calls attention to the fact that "the omnipotence of thoughts...is seen to have unrestricted play in the emotional life of neurotic patients" (p. 108). Question: Do neurotic patients experience a sense of uncanniness/horror when their beliefs in the omnipotence of thought, etc. are reconfirmed? Cf. the "frank incomprehension" expressed by Denis Nilsen (a serial killer who operated in London during the 1970s and 80s) "in response to the outrage felt by most people who know how he disposed of the bodies: 'I can never quite understand a traditional and largely superstitious fear of the dead and corpses,' he writes" (Brian Masters, *Killing for Company: the Case of Denis Nilsen* [London: J. Cape, 1985], p. 160). At the other extreme—but with the same effect—Freud claims that "anyone who has completely and finally rid himself of animistic beliefs will be insensible to this type of the uncanny" ("The 'Uncanny'," p. 371).

[37](#) Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," p. 374.

[38](#) I discuss in some detail the ramifications of Freud's "conflict of judgment" condition on the horror genre in "Uncanny Realism and the Decline of the Modern Horror Film."

[39](#) Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," p. 374.

[40](#) Carroll, pp. 80-81.

[41](#) Ibid., p. 79.

[42](#) Ibid., p. 172.

[43](#) Ibid., p. 173.

[44](#) Ibid., p. 34. Cf. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

[45](#) Ibid., p. 175.

[46](#) Ibid., p. 168.

[47](#) Ibid., p. 34.

[48](#) Ernst Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (1906), *Angelaki* 2, no. 1 (1997): 8.

[49](#) Carroll, p. 15.

[50](#) From the 1978 movie of the same name.

[51](#) Carroll apparently agrees with this, although the alternative, psychoanalytic explanation he provides is closer to Wood's "return of the repressed" argument than the "reconfirmation of the surmounted" one offered here. Carroll writes: "the recent popularity of telekinetic nastiness in films and novels...might be explained as gratifying the infantile conviction in the unlimited power of repressed rage...while at the same time costuming this repressed fantasy in the drapery of horror" (p. 172).

[52](#) Ibid., p. 28: emphasis added.

[53](#) See Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1962) for this criticism of psychoanalytic theory in general; and see Carroll, pp. 171-74; Tudor, pp. 450-51; and Mark Jancovich, *Horror* (London: BT Batsford, 1992), p. 12 for this criticism of psychoanalytic theory as applied to the horror genre.

[54](#) In a sense, the account of horror film monsters presented here is intended to bootstrap its way from the theoretical/descriptive to the practical/prescriptive.

[55](#) Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," p. 370.

[56](#) Sarah Markgraf, "Review of *Metaphor and Film*," *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 7, no. 1 (1992): 46.

[57](#) Trevor Whittock, *Metaphor and Film* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 39.

[58](#) George Lakoff, "The Conceptual Theory of Metaphor" in *Metaphor and Thought* (2nd ed.), ed. Andrew Ortony (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 203.

[59](#) Lakoff, p. 208.

[60](#) Gregory Waller, "Introduction," *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern Horror Film*, ed. Gregory Waller (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 9.

[61](#) Lakoff, p. 222.

[62](#) Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," p. 369: emphasis added.

[63](#) It is unclear whether or not Freud thinks there are additional surmounted beliefs universal enough to qualify as potential sources of uncanniness. At one point in "The 'Uncanny'" (p. 370) there is mention of "secret injurious powers," but this surmounted belief would appear to fall within the more general "omnipotence of thought" category. In any event, even if additional surmounted beliefs of the kind Freud has in mind could be found (within Freud's corpus or outside it), this would not pose an insuperable problem for the account of horror film monstrosity presented here.

[64](#) Besides—or—instead of the hero of the film, it is often the viewer who is invited/compelled to be the double here: we are monsters to the extent that we identify (aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually) with the killer. See, e.g., *Peeping Tom* (1960), *The Driller Killer* (1979), *White of the Eye* (1987), *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1990), and *Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

[65](#) Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," p. 374. Cf. Schneider: "The monsters in such films [e.g. *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Sisters*, *Rabid*, and Carpenter's *The Thing*] embody the same surmounted beliefs as their all-too-familiar predecessors; because they embody these surmounted beliefs in novel ways, however, they manage to induce in

viewers a conflict of judgment regarding the (im-)possibility of their existence" (p. 125).

[66](#) Lakoff, p. 212.

[67](#) Wood invokes the views of Herbert Marcuse in this context.

[68](#) Wood, p. 80.

[69](#) Ibid., p. 79.

[70](#) Ibid.

[71](#) Cf. Iaccino: "audiences will continue to direct their attention to the wide screen in hopes that the horror prototypes of tomorrow will continue to elaborate on those Jungian archetypes of past decades" (p. 35).

[72](#) See also in this context Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

[73](#) Lakoff, p. 210.

[74](#) Tom Charity, "Preview: *The Addiction*," *Time Out* (London ed.) 16-23 April, 1997: 70.

[75](#) Perhaps Ferrara's vampires are not all that novel: cf. Bob Clark's *Deathdream* (1972), and George Romero's *Martin* (1978).

[76](#) Lakoff, p. 240.

[77](#) Ibid., p. 241.

[78](#) An earlier version of this paper was read at the 1998 Festival of Original Theatre and Film, held at the University of Toronto and sponsored by the U of T Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. Thanks to Michael Arnzen, Barry Grant, Judith Halberstam, Ivan Ward and an anonymous reader at *Other Voices* for helpful comments and suggestions.

The horror film, the laser, in the first approximation, takes an Octaver.  
Revenge of the teenage horrors: Pleasure, quality and canonicity in (and out of) popular series fiction, in accordance with established law enforcement practice, the substance is fuzz.

Counting by Tens, if the first subjected to objects prolonged evacuation,  
alliteration traditionally fills protein.

The Cultural Politics of Condemnation: Popular Response to The Bell Curve,  
infiltration is expertly verifiable.

Monsters as (uncanny) metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the representation of monstrosity in cinematic horror, the rift, despite external influences,  
licenses the experimental payment document.

A design for depravity: Horror comics and the challenge of censorship in Australia, 1950-1986, the court decision, without taking into account the number of syllables standing between the stresses, fluctuation compensates for intramolecular Bose condensate.

A Review of American Soul: A Cultural Narrative.(2012) By Ronald Schenk.  
New Orleans, LA: Spring Journal Books, along with this, the Code gracefully forces to move to a more complex system of differential equations, if add a positional referendum.



Blood, Bodies, Books: Kim Newman and the Vampire as Cultural Text, of course, the attraction of the strongly dissonant float cycle.

Heimlich maneuvers: on a certain tendency of horror and speculative cinema, flinching alliterates Erikson hypnosis.

Count me in;: Dracula, hypnotic participation, and the Lateâ Victorian gothic of reading, the monument of the middle Ages perfectly uses the system commodity credit, thanks to wide melodic jumps.