



Fig. 0.1 The Paramount Studios logo from *Psycho* (1960; dir. Alfred Hitchcock). The image, unlike the typical contemporary logo, utilises in its foreground the horizontal line motif that appears both in the opening credits and throughout the film.

### **introduction**

**[note to typesetter: ‘introduction’ intentionally decapitalised]**

#### **The Collection Awakes**

Wickham Clayton

Leon Trotsky (1923) once warned of the dangers of formalism. I’d like to think that if he’d seen *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part V*, Trotsky would have changed his mind.

While this may not be the case, I contend that a) Formalism is a valuable methodology that can be utilised to understand a range of phenomena within film studies, and b) within discourse on the slasher subgenre of horror, and most especially the Hollywood slasher film, formalism is conspicuously absent. Although academic work on the slasher film has been present since the 1980s, the focus, and praise has been primarily on the stand-out independent films frequently linked to auteurs, which display the flexibility, non-institutionalised freedom, and often political impetus, to create overtly subversive works that

respond to or reflect the culture and conditions under which they appeared. Where form appears, it is often infused with interpretational significance that may or may not be either intentional or applicable. Furthermore, it is the Hollywood product, the texts created or distributed within the confines of the larger for-profit wings of the industry, overtly developed to capitalise on trends and turn a profit, that either broadly stand as contrasting examples to these 'great' works, that is dissected as emblematic of the sociopolitical, cultural, or psychological status quo, or is roundly ignored altogether.

While I personally know some young academics currently working to fill sections of this gap in scholarly writing, this book aims to simultaneously address all of these elements. The chapters in this book provide examples of the way in which this particular method (formalism) can be used to study these particular films (Hollywood slashers), and ultimately demonstrate that these elements do not have to stand opposite of, or in isolation from, theory, interpretation, or non-Hollywood slashers. Although I speak highly of formalism, there is a (still) ongoing debate, as there was in Trotsky's day, about the utility and moral propriety of formalism, which I will first address to contextualise the position of this book within this debate.

### **The Style and Form...**

Formalism, sometimes called neo-formalism, is taken from the principles of Russian formalism which was created as a form of literary analysis, and remodeled for application to cinema. (Thompson 1988; 5-6) Much groundwork has been laid here, particularly by David Bordwell, Kristen Thompson, Stephen Prince, and Noël Carroll. I was personally taught during my undergraduate degree by Todd Berliner whose book *Hollywood Incoherent: Narration in Seventies Cinema* (2010) opens with a staunch and fairly aggressive defence and call to use of formalism. Berliner's aggressive defence is not unwarranted. Formalism is the

subject of an ongoing methodological debate between those who practice the method, and those who feel it is both practically and morally contrary to modes of cultural analysis. I have more extensively discussed this debate in my PhD thesis (Clayton 2013), but I will here outline the key points of debate.

The major arguments against formalism are:

- 1) Formalism is a method that is too cold, clinical, and dull for an approach to the arts, which are designed to elicit passion and emotion: ‘The effort to set art free from life, to declare it a craft self-sufficient unto itself, devitalizes and kills art.’ (Trotsky 1923; 57);
- 2) By its very nature, formalism cannot engage with questions of value, which is of utmost importance in discussing art: ‘It is of course the case that there are a variety of sociological and formal enquiries, from Moretti’s distant readings to Bordwell and Thomson’s (sic.) statistical analysis of classic Hollywood, which must, by their very methodology, ignore questions of value.’ (McCabe 2011; 9);
- 3) By attempting not to adopt, bare, or communicate an ideology, formalism either works contrary to socio-political/economic positions that are more progressive, or, it upholds dominant ideologies: ‘Although Žižek finds it necessary to address science as “knowledge in the Real” (i.e., Marxism) and therefore criticizes some of the reigning practices in cultural studies, particularly a certain variety of historical relativism, he considers this silent passing over of the tough ideological questions by post-Theorists to be somewhat of a spontaneous ideological attachment to the reigning political power.’ (Flisfeder 2012; 90) [parentheses in original];
- 4) By focusing on microcosmic elements of film form, formalists risk missing, and failing to engage with, the ‘big picture’ or larger ‘meaning’, even to the point where

formalists ignore basic representative indicators (i.e.-this image is a series of patterns, lines and colours, not a mountain at sunset): ‘This focusing on the way of talking, rather than on the reality of what is talked about, is sometimes taken to indicate that we mean by literature a kind of *self-referential* language, a language which talks about itself.’ (Eagleton 2008; 7).<sup>1</sup>

Some of these arguments are accurate, and some either misrepresentative or misunderstanding of the aims of formalism. I cannot claim to speak for the other contributors to this collection, but I shall here speak for myself (evoking some research) to support my position as a proponent of formalism, and hence the purpose of this book, as well as the bulk of my other work.

Regarding the first point, I deem it both accurate and not. Ultimately, the question of formalism’s effect on the reader or the writer of such analysis is highly subjective. I love observing film form, and I find it exciting and fascinating, though I know people that find it tedious and unenjoyable. This, however, is beside the point. As an academic, I find it of utmost importance to understand the medium, how it communicates ideas and concepts, and why we love certain texts, groups of texts, or the medium as a whole. Formalism is central to discovering this and absolutely essential to understanding any medium. Shakespearean critic Stephen Booth responds to the function of criticism, more precisely interpretive criticism, in the humanities, saying:

...academic criticism, which would do well to join the “pure” sciences and revel in having no motive ulterior to the desire to know, is ordinarily all too ambitious of producing practical consequence. It is a criticism that implies, seems indeed to assume, that critical attentions make literary works work better. (1990; 262)

Whether you agree with or even approve of Booth's damning accusations against the state of academic criticism (as I do) or not, his initial claim, that criticism should take a scientific approach is worthy of consideration, and places works of art well within the realm of valid academic observation. However, Trotsky's claim that art has an inherent vitality and life, a specious claim at best, is directly contradicted by Booth, who claims that 'imaginative literature is frivolous. *Deniably* frivolous, however.' (263)<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, this deniability that causes the fundamental rift between formalists and 'theorists'.

In considering McCabe's statement that formalism is unable to discuss questions of value, this indicates, to my mind, a working within a set of valuation criteria that I find imperceptible. Berliner's *Hollywood Incoherent* is fully dedicated to looking at a decade where Hollywood was producing films, such as *The French Connection* (1971; dir. William Friedkin), *The Exorcist* (1973; dir. William Friedkin), *Nashville* (1975; dir. Robert Altman), and *Taxi Driver* (1976; dir. Martin Scorsese), which are still loved by audiences and considered among the greatest films ever produced, and the formal characteristics that would explain their longevity. According to Berliner, in reference to Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), 'if Francis Ford Coppola could take a book by Mario Puzo commonly regarded as pulp (even by Puzo) and, with minimal thematic changes, turn it into what most commentators and filmgoers consider one of the best movies of the decade, then ideology and social relevance cannot be fundamental to artistic value.' (2010; 17) A look at [davidbordwell.net](http://davidbordwell.net) will show a range of blog entries by Bordwell and Thompson, together and individually, not only looking at considerations of form, but how form can be used to create valuations of certain texts. Indeed, establishing value is one of the more significant uses of formalism.

The third point, with regards to upholding dominant ideologies, is somewhat justified to date. However, David Bordwell highlights the limited scope of what Žižek appears to

deem the appropriate ideology: 'For our theorists, politics equals left politics equals the glory years of May 1968 theory. Marx is always invoked, with nods to Eurocommunism, Althusser, and, surprisingly, Mao.' (2005b) Bordwell brings into question the ideological scope of theorists opposed to formalism on ideological grounds. Booth considers theorists with such ideological preconceptions as 'critics who usually end up accusing the past of being the past and [...] triumphantly accusing the culture that produced a work of being the culture we already know it to be.' (265) Counter-attacks aside, Berliner is forthright with his position:

'A colleague once accused me of excluding non-dominant, non normative experiences in my scholarship. I instinctively sought to defend myself against the accusation, until I realized that she was right. I do sometimes exclude non-dominant and non-normative experiences, just as scholars just as (Janet) Staiger sometimes exclude the dominant, normative experiences that I want to illuminate in this book. My specialization here offers a way to understand the means by which a movie stimulates shared experiences for spectators.' (20-21)

Here, Berliner is appropriating a mode of analysis to understand in, as scientifically as possible, common reception experiences. Kristen Thompson, however, fully rebuffs this accusation, saying, 'Before neoformalism is condemned as conservative, however, it should be noted that its view of the purpose of art avoids the traditional concept of aesthetic contemplation as passive. The spectator's relationship to the artwork becomes active.' (10) That said, within this book I provide an outlet for critics, theorists even (including Staiger), to use formalism to support their readings for their dominant, non-dominant, normative, or non-normative positions, and often those contributing, in agreement with Thompson, consider active reception within their analyses.

Finally, regarding Eagleton's statement about the myopic rigidity of formalism, it must be admitted that he refers to specifically to Russian formalism. However, as Kristen Thompson states:

'Though it is frequently assumed that the Russian Formalists advocated an art-for-art's-sake position, this was not at all the case. Rather, they found an alternative to a communications model of art – and avoided a high/low art split as well – by distinguishing between practical, everyday perception and specifically aesthetic, non-practical perception. For neoformalists, then, art is a realm separate from all other types of cultural artifacts because it presents a unique set of perceptual requirements. Art is set apart from the everyday world, in which we use our perception for practical ends.' (1988; 8)<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to point out that, within cognitivism and historical poetics as branches of formalism, contexts are absolutely necessary. Cognitivism engages with the psychological processes of being an active reader of a film, historical poetics with film texts developing within an overarching aesthetic continuum. Considering lines, shapes, colour, sound, etc. without meaning or context is impractical, impossible even, within these branches. And while these arguments may not fully quell the arguments against a study of form, I hope this book at least demonstrates to a certain extent that, if you're not wholly converted to Booth's 'scientific' approach, that you at least see that form and theory are, at the very least, not necessarily mutually exclusive. Furthermore, I hope that this book demonstrates that formalism doesn't necessarily require a high/low art split even within the same medium, as can be seen through the following examples...

**...of the Hollywood Slasher Film**

There are a few key works which already address the slasher, and many of the chapters in this collection respond to and engage with these works. One of the most (if not *the* most significant) work to date on the slasher film is Carol J. Clover's book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992). Clover's book aims to engage with the assumption that the slasher is a voyeuristic source of violent male misogynistic pleasure. Clover, who fully grants that these are far from progressive or feminist texts, argues that these films allow for fluid gender identification, where male viewers willingly identify with female characters, particularly with the 'final girl', the primarily female character who survives until the end and dispatches or escapes the killer. The term 'final girl' still circulates within the common parlance of slasher discourse.

While Clover's is extraordinarily significant, there are other key works on the genre. Robin Wood, in his book *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond* (2003) includes a chapter 'Horror in the 80s' which argues that, unlike the radical liberal commentary provided by 1970s horror cinema, the 1980s (particularly the slashers for which this book takes as its primary subject) depict a politically reactionary, sexually and socially repressive worldview, reflective of mainstream Reaganite culture. I must say, I disagree. In 1984, John McCarty published *Splatter Movies: Breaking the Last Taboo of the Screen*, detailing the historical trend in cinema to show graphic, explicit violence, containing a significant early historical account, and defence, of the slasher film. Vera Dika in her book *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (1990), isolates the structural and generic formula of the 'stalker' film – Dika argues that 'slasher' is a misnomer, as the bulk of the narrative consists of characters being stalked, not slashed – and how these films function individually and can be characterised. Finally, Adam Rockoff, in *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986*, and an anonymously directed documentary eponymously titled, historically details rise and decline of the first stalker cycle,



demonstrating its later influence. While this is not comprehensive, these are the key works that have laid much of the theoretical groundwork on the films this book discusses.

The slasher film, as a subgenre of horror, has formal, aesthetic, and generic roots dating almost as far back as history itself. From early experiments in literal first person camerawork to German expressionism's development of an abstract and all-encompassing approach to rendering mood, emotion and perspective – which is notably most often associated with early horror cinema – the overall general format of the slasher is the result of a cumulative effect of aesthetic development.<sup>4</sup> However, three key films released between 1959 and 1960 are attributed as significant forbears to the slasher: Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (*Les Yeux Sans Visage*; 1960), Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960).<sup>5</sup> These films contained many significant narrative elements (multiple sequences dedicated solely to the depiction of specified modes of murder, victims being stalked, sympathetic killers, attempts to display visceral bodily mutilation) and thematic elements (strong focus on voyeurism and either suggested or explicit consideration of psychoanalysis to understand transgressive behaviour) which still proliferate within the various current iterations of the slasher film.

While certain films like *The Honeymoon Killers* (1969; dir. Leonard Kastle), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974; dir. Tobe Hooper), *Black Christmas* (1974; dir. Bob Clark), and even *Jaws* (1975; dir. Steven Spielberg) and *Carrie* (1976; dir. Brian De Palma) can be seen as early prototypes of the slasher, as well as the individual auteurist styles of Alfred Hitchcock and Italian *giallo* filmmakers Mario Bava and Dario Argento, it was John Carpenter's 1978 Hitchcock-inspired film *Halloween* that is considered the first slasher *proper*. (Rockoff 2002; 61) Carpenter's film, produced and distributed independently on a \$300,000 budget (Rockoff; 50) acted as a template to films that would later be categorised as 'slashers'.<sup>6</sup> *Halloween* proved an unexpected and unprecedented success, making \$50 million

(Rockoff; 50) at the box office. Hollywood, seeing profitable potential in a narrative and stylistic formula, began developing and purchasing for distribution, films that adhered to this template. This is where *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film* begins, and I will here outline a loose working chronology (perhaps not widely agreed upon, but which will be used for the purposes of this book) of the slasher subgenre as it appears in this book and how the chapters within address this chronology.

## **Contents**

The slasher, according to Richard Nowell in his book *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Film Cycle*, contains a story structure characterised ‘a shadowy blade-wielding killer responding to an event by stalking and murdering the members of a youth group before the threat s/he poses is neutralised’ (2011; 20). Similarly, Clover describes the slasher as ‘the immensely generative story of a psychokiller who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who survives’ (21). While Dika does not contest such summaries, she feels that the focus is overtly misplaced. Dika writes:

Although many of the films identified in this way have been called “slasher” films (thus placing the defining characteristic on the central narrative action) the term “stalker” film (which will be used here) alludes instead to the act of *looking* and especially to the distinctive set of point-of-view shots employed by these films. (14)

Ultimately, there is still a clear idea of the general narrative template for the slasher, which it will be called here, and this book is dedicated to showing how this narrative model is rendered in different texts, and what film style can tell us about these movies.

Nowell makes the claim that while *Halloween* may have been influential, the scale of its influence has been overestimated and the first film of the first slasher film cycle is definitively Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980) (9). Cunningham, overtly influenced by both *Halloween* and Mario Bava (Grove 2005; 11-12) created a film explicitly intended to capitalise on the success of *Halloween*.<sup>7</sup> While *Friday the 13th* stands as a significant text for the subgenre, particularly due to its successful recombination of *Halloween*'s elements (Dika; 64) as evinced through financial profits, it is by no means the first film to have that idea. Indeed, too many films modelling *Halloween*'s form were released within months of *Friday the 13th*, both before and after (i.e. Paul Lynch's *Prom Night* [1980] which was released two months after *Friday the 13th*), for it to be determined the first film to capitalise on *Halloween*'s success, though to Nowell's credit, the success of *Friday the 13th* was unseen by its immediate contemporaries.

The first section of this book, *The Birth, Death, and Revenge of the Hollywood Slasher* begins with this period of significant dissemination of slasher texts. In the first chapter, 'Instability of Point of View in *When a Stranger Calls* and *Eyes of a Stranger*', David Roche looks at these two films, the former (1979; dir. Fred Walton) released before *Friday the 13th*, the latter (1981; dir. Ken Wiederhorn) released after, to critically examine cognitive conceptions of point-of-view within what he calls the 'slasher-thriller hybrid'. Roche argues that the destabilised point of view, a key trope of the slasher film, illuminates the difference between the slasher and the thriller, both of which are founded on a similar narrative premise.

These films represent the period from 1979-1981, when the slasher was extremely prolific. *Friday the 13th Part 2* (1981; dir. Steve Miner), *Halloween II* (1981; dir. Rick Rosenthal) *Happy Birthday to Me* (1981; dir. J. Lee Thompson), *Terror Train* (1980; dir. Roger Spottiswoode), *The Burning* (1981; dir. Tony Maylam), *My Bloody Valentine* (1981;

dir. George Mihalka), *Maniac* (1980; dir. William Lustig), *The Funhouse* (1981; dir. Tobe Hooper) and *The Driller Killer* (1979; dir. Abel Ferrara) is but a shortlist of the more significant titles made independently, by minor studios, and by major studios in the genre during those three years. Slashers were still a subgenre that met with significant success in 1982 – the year that *Friday the 13th Part III 3-D* (dir. Steve Miner) was released, which introduced Jason's iconographic hockey mask. During this period, a tendency for sequelisation emerged, as can be seen through the annual release between 1980 and 1982 of a *Friday the 13th* film, as well as a sequel to *Halloween* in 1981, and even a second sequel, *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (dir. Tommy Lee Wallace) in 1982 which retained the franchise link without any narrative connection to the previous two. 1983 was another successful year for the slasher, with a notable diminishment in 1984 of both the number of slashers made and their box office takings. This was the year that the *Friday the 13th* franchise tried, for the first time, to complete the film series with *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* (dir. Joseph Zito). The following year saw the attempt to continue the series: *Friday the 13th: A New Beginning* (dir. Danny Steinmann). It is this film that is of concern to myself in chapter 2.

‘Undermining the Moneygrubbers, or: How I learned to stop worrying and love *Friday the 13th Part V*’, apart from providing a requisite Kubrick reference, is a defence of this oft ignored and derided (though increasingly becoming a cult favourite) film. Though the profitable, but disappointing, performance at the box office, as well as recent online fan reviews, are partially indicative of dislike of this entry in the *Friday the 13th* series, *A New Beginning*, I argue, is a bold piece of subversive filmmaking that has rarely been equalled either in the slasher or in other genres, based on an analysis of generic and narrative development, characterisation and aesthetics. *A New Beginning* failed to significantly influence or help revive the slasher film; the previous year provided a text that did.

In 1984, Wes Craven released *A Nightmare on Elm Street* – a slasher film infusing overt supernatural elements, through the mini-major studio New Line Cinema, which led to tremendous box office success, and the strengthening of the studio leading it towards eventual ‘major’ status (Rockoff; 156), and a revitalisation of the slasher film. The film has spawned five sequels between 1985 and 1991, a self-referential follow-up in 1994, a remake in 2010, and a franchise crossover with the *Friday the 13th* franchise in 2003. Karra Shimabukuro turns her attention to the original film and its first five sequels in chapter three, ‘I Framed Freddy: Functional Aesthetics in the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* Series’. Taking Bordwell’s outline of the properties of modernist filmmaking, Shimabukuro demonstrates how these films adhere to these qualities, while simultaneously demonstrating how the franchise itself dictates a form of authorship, with stylistic qualities being anchored to the need for narrative consistency and continuity between films.

During this time, there were not only more *A Nightmare on Elm Street* films, but three more *Friday the 13th* films, two more *Halloween* films, two sequels to *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982; dir. Amy Jones), and two sequels to *Sleepaway Camp* (1983; dir. Robert Hiltzik) among others. During the early 1990s, there were some interesting, if not always successful experiments with the slasher format. The aforementioned self-referential follow-up to the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* sequels, *New Nightmare*, saw the return of Craven as director, creating a film about the actors from the original film – Heather Langenkamp, Johnny Depp, and even Craven playing fictionalised versions of themselves – dealing with the ‘actual’ dream monster that inspired the first film. In 1993, the *Friday the 13th* series was picked up by New Line with the second attempt to end the series, *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday* (dir. Adam Marcus) featuring a Jason that is a body-travelling demon worm. *Halloween 666: The Curse of Michael Myers* (1995; dir. Joe Chappelle) explained that Michael Myers was in fact being controlled by a pagan cult all along. However, amongst

these films which had varying levels of success, one film appeared that is still acknowledged as a significant film of the genre (Worland 2007; 107) and is one of Stacey Abbott's two case studies in chapter four. In 'Candyman and Saw: Reimagining the Slasher Film Through Urban Gothic', Abbott looks both at this period, and ahead twelve years, analysing stylistic elements of *Candyman* (1992; dir. Bernard Rose) and James Wan's 2004 film *Saw* to demonstrate how these films, each linked to the slasher subgenre, utilise qualities of urban gothic.

While the slasher seemed to have waned in the early 1990s, in 1996, Wes Craven continued his experiments in self-referentiality with the successful film *Scream*, a slasher film where the killer is highly and explicitly aware of the tropes of the slasher, and the potential victims must be aware of these tropes in order to survive. Valerie Wee has dubbed this tendency of the slasher 'hyperpostmodernism', and has noted the *Scream* series' import in this tendency. (2005) This period marks the beginning of Section 2 of this book: *Older, Darker, and Self-Aware*. *Scream* resulted in three sequels, and in its immediate wake through the rest of the decade, slasher films were released that either emulated *Scream*'s tendency to metanarration such as *Urban Legend* (1998; dir. Jamie Blanks), or took the film as a cue for revised interest in the original slasher template such as *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997; dir. Jim Gillespie).<sup>8</sup> Additionally, some of the original series were revived in this period, and featured the production and delayed release of the tenth *Friday the 13th* film, *Jason X* (2001; dir. James Isaac).

Another instalment of an long-running film series is *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (1998; dir. Steve Miner), the case study at the centre of chapter five. Andrew Patrick Nelson, in 'Franchise Legacy and Neo-Slasher Conventions in *Halloween H20*' argues that the seventh *Halloween* film doesn't fully satisfy the tendency toward self-referentiality in slasher films in the years following *Scream*. In Nelson's words, 'Rather than a

straightforward example of the late-1990s slasher, it is more accurate to describe *H20* as an attempt to mediate between the competing influences of the *Halloween* franchise and the self-conscious neo-slasher cycle of horror films exemplified by *Scream*.’ (Page Number)

While *Halloween H20* entertains both metanarrative and merely referential considerations in its construction, chapter six, ‘Roses are Red, Violence is Too: Exploring Stylistic Excess in *Valentine*’, provides an analysis of a film that utilises slasher tropes, but includes an inventive approach towards style. Mark Richard Adams looks at Jamie Blanks’s 2001 film *Valentine*, arguing that, whereas slashers tend to utilise a stark stylistic form, this film adopts an excess of style contrary to its generic forbears. Adams argues that this unique approach to slasher aesthetic makes *Valentine* a film worthy of academic consideration.

From this period until the present, it can be argued that the slasher has generated some individual tendencies within the subgenre, and even strongly influencing closely related subgenres of horror. In 2003, director Marcus Nispel, through Michael Bay’s production company Platinum Dunes created the remake *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* which was distributed by New Line Cinemas. This film’s profitability spurred a still ongoing tendency to remake earlier horror, slasher, and slasher-related properties, many through Platinum Dunes, which will be addressed in later chapters. In 2004, another significant tendency within the slasher appears: Torture Horror, marked through the release of *Saw* which will be addressed again later.<sup>9, 10</sup> Furthermore, in the early 2010s, there is an apparent attempt at the revitalisation of the 1990s postmodern slasher boom, which establishes a further self-referentiality of even metanarrational texts, sometimes dubbed (within this collection at least) ‘Neo-postmodernism’. It is some of these movements that the final chapters in this section address, and in chapter seven, Ian Conrich discusses a slasher tendency that touches upon all of these movements.

In 'Puzzles, Contraptions, and the Highly Elaborate Moment: The Inevitability of Death in the Grand Slasher Narratives of the *Final Destination* and *Saw* Series of Films', Conrich discusses two series in what he calls the 'Grand Slasher', wherein 'death appears all-pervasive and generally cannot be escaped or defeated.' (Page number) Conrich traces the evolution of the slasher film, from various developing slasher cycles up to the 'Grand Slasher' which begins with the *Final Destination* films starting in 2000 through to films released as recently as 2012, and argues for the consideration of this particular tendency as a significant presence within the development of the slasher.

Following this, we have studies of two of the previously discussed tendencies in the slasher. Matthew Freeman, in chapter eight, 'The Killer Who Never Was: Complex Storytelling, the *Saw* Series, and the Shifting Moral Alignment of Puzzle Film Horror', considers the torture horror series *Saw*, arguing that, despite critical dismissiveness and the comparative narrational simplicity of its slasher predecessors, these films involve highly complex narratives pointing towards significant moral considerations. Freeman argues that these films do not only retain intricate puzzle narratives within the individual texts, but there is a complex overarching serial narrative as well which stands apart from the slasher's previous long-running series. And in chapter nine, 'Resurrecting *Carrie*', Gary Bettinson addresses the trend of remaking slasher films, analysing both Brian De Palma's 1976 film *Carrie* and Kimberly Peirce's 2013 remake. Bettinson's argument is twofold: first, that *Carrie* (1976), while not strictly within the canonical slasher timeline in the wake of *Halloween*, stands as a significant generic predecessor, which pioneered narrative tropes that were later adopted widely by slashers; and second, that the 2013 remake subsumes these common tropes as well as tropes from other film genres while establishing its own innovations, ultimately arguing that both films 'are integral to the slasher genre's inception and evolution.' (Page number).



Section three of this book, *Form vs. Theory*, contains chapters which demonstrate that formal considerations and theoretical analysis are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I hope to show, through these final chapters, that a close study and observation can inform and positively strengthen theoretical arguments and methodologies, to show how these perspectives can be considered unique to the cinematic form.

In chapter ten, 'Parody, Pastiche and Intertextuality in *Scream*: Formal and Theoretical Approaches to the Postmodern Slasher' Fran Pheasant-Kelly engages with theories of postmodernism and inter-textuality alongside analyses of form in the *Scream* series. This is done to understand critical claims to the series's postmodernity and its ultimate significance for, and influence on, the slasher film. Following this, Jessica Balanzategui considers late 1990s/early 2000s supernatural slasher films *Fallen* (1998; dir. Gregory Hobblit), *In Dreams* (1999; dir. Neil Jordan), and *Frailty* (2001; dir. Bill Paxton). In chapter eleven, 'Crises of Identification in the Supernatural Slasher: The Resurrection of the Supernatural Slasher Villain', Balazantegui argues that while these films retain overt traces of the narrative template of the slasher, the hero(ine)/killer identificatory binary becomes destabilised, where there are not necessarily two separate individuals, but ambiguities and fusions of consciousness.

The following two chapters then focus on theoretical concepts in relation to specific aesthetic approaches. Darren Elliott-Smith utilises queer theory for analysis in chapter twelve, "'Come on Boy, Bring It!": Embracing Queer Erotic Aesthetics in Marcus Nispel's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'. Elliott-Smith argues that Nispel's remake clearly aesthetises the suffering, yet idealised, male body contrary to theoretical assertions of the eroticisation of the suffering female in the slasher film. Furthermore, Elliott-Smith closely analyses the style of key sequences which frame murder and torture in a similar way to cinematic romance. Following this, in chapter thirteen, 'Beyond Surveillance: Questions of

the Real in the Neopostmodern Horror Film' Dana Och observes a range of 'neo-postmodern' slasher films, both Hollywood and independent, to show how aesthetics of surveillance challenge conceptions of 'reality' within a self-referential format. Och argues that surveillance's clear identification of the visual apparatus contributes to a reading of self-referentiality, while capitalising upon the fear of socio-political and cultural norms and allowing the viewer to question their own psychophilic desires.

Concluding this volume, chapter fourteen, 'The Slasher, the Final Girl, and the Anti-Denouement' sees theorist Janet Staiger return to the work established by Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*. Staiger reconsiders several core tenets of Clover's analysis of the slasher subgenre, and approaches Clover's arguments using formal and statistical analysis of some of the key films of the slasher subgenre. Ultimately, Staiger analyses gendered assumptions of slasher reception and considers the pleasures the subgenre provides.

**(Note to typesetter : space here intentional)**

This collection aims to help redress the balance of scholarly work on the slasher, and especially the Hollywood slasher film. Some of these chapters argue for a reconsideration of texts that have been largely ignored academically, some provide new analyses of films that have been subjected to previous, and in some cases less favourable, criticism, some forge purely formalist analyses of films in a genre that rarely receives such treatment, and finally, some chapters closely observe the form of the slasher film to support theoretical arguments. My aim and intent in compiling this collection is to help fill an existing gap in film analysis, and unfortunately, a single book is not sufficient to do so. However, my hope is that this will go some way to demonstrating new ways to look at and think about some of these films, and hopefully provide some new ground for future analysis of the slasher film, a subgenre highly disreputable, culturally significant, and often financially profitable.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This list comes from my own PhD thesis: *Bearing Witness to a Whole Bunch of Murders: The Aesthetics of Perspective in the Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Films* (Clayton 2013; 214-215)

<sup>2</sup> I would argue that, while Booth is making a very good point of the high canonical significance we apply to writers like Shakespeare, this type of discourse occurs throughout the humanities – it is standard practice to imbue art works in one’s chosen medium of analysis with importance and meaning beyond entertainment.

<sup>3</sup> This is something that will be particularly useful with regards to this book.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 2 of my thesis (23-73) takes great pains to carefully trace this aesthetic development.

<sup>5</sup> An early shorter cut of the film was released in the USA under the title *The Horror Chamber of Doctor Faustus*.

<sup>6</sup> Or 'Stalker films' (Dika 1990) or 'Splatter films' (McCarty1984).

<sup>7</sup> “Around early 1979, I was living in Stratford. Sean and I were going to each other’s houses probably two, three or four days a week just working on thigs. We were coming up with projects that we thought would be great for Clint Eastwood and other stuff that, of course, never got made. Then one day he called me up and said, ‘*Halloween* is making a lot of money at the box office. Why don’t we rip it off?’” – Victor Miller, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* screenwriter (quoted in Bracke 2006; 17)

8 Some in this collection, including Andrew Patrick Nelson and Dana Och situate *I Know What You Did Last Summer* within this self-reflexive tendency.

9 In a personal correspondence with Janet Staiger, she strongly disagrees with categorising Torture Horror alongside the slasher: ‘My primary distinction is that the torture p\*\*n films work on an aesthetics of **gore** (gross-out) and investigation of body pain (where the "p\*\*n" term came from, obviously); slashers operate on shock: a sudden (heart-stopping) attack from somewhere, with the actual body mutilation often occurring off-screen and/or only a quick shot to the outcome for the body. While revenge motivates both subgenres' action, the killer in torture p\*\*n is methodical and complex (see an "ur-text" of *Seven* [1995 ; dir. David Fincher]). In slashers, the action is usually fortuitous...who is handy to be quickly killed (although a sub-theme of displacements might also be there). I will say that the *Nightmare* series is different from the *Halloween* and *Friday* series in its reveling in visual extravagance and narrative layers (dream/not dream/maybe dream).’ (personal correspondence, 17/09/2014 – emphasis in original)

10 Steve Jones contests and clearly finds evidence of the fallacious appropriation of the popular term ‘Torture Porn’ (2013); I prefer to use the term coined by Jeremy Morris (2010), Torture Horror.