***Dark Forces at Work: Essays on Social Dynamics and Cinematic Horrors*, ed. by Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper**
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It has become a truism in the study of horror films that horror is (at least to a large extent) culturally determined, and that the particular horror films produced by a culture can offer deep insights into the anxieties circulating in that specific time and location. Robin Wood's work is usually cited as foundational support for this idea, and particularly his conception of the monster as representing 'the return of the repressed'.[1] The connection between horror films and the socio-political environments from which they emerged has been elaborated upon in such seminal work as Adam Lowenstein's *Shocking Representations* and Linnie Blake's *The Wounds of Nations*.[2]

Miller and Van Riper's edited volume, *Dark Forces at Work: Essays on Social Dynamics and Cinematic Horrors*, offers further discussions on this general principle. This densely packed volume, consisting of nineteen essays ranging over a broad span of topics and approaches, attempts to demonstrate how the connection between works of horror and their cultural locations functions in practice. This is achieved through close readings of a number of horror films and television series, paying close attention to the sociological background that gave birth to them. Most of the essays explore well-known films, though many are likely to be less familiar to readers, such as the Austrian film *In 3 Tagen bist du tot* (dir. by Andreas Prochaska, 2006), the Korean adaptation of *Ringu* (*The Ring Virus*; dir. by Kim Dong-bin, 1999), or the 1980s British home-invasion film *Scream for Help* (dir. by Michael Winner, 1984). While the essays are disparate enough that individual readers are certain to find some more interesting than others, taken as a whole, the volume represents a useful (if somewhat uneven) contribution to our understanding of how horror is connected to its sociological context.

The volume is divided into five parts, with three or four essays in each. The first part, 'National Identity: Haunting the Homeland', is the only one containing essays that discuss non-English language films. The section begins with Rea Amit's essay on various versions of *Ringu*, with a particular focus on *The Ring Virus* and the 'version' *One Missed Call* (dir. by

[1] Robin Wood, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film,' in *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Wayne State University Press, 2018), pp. 73-110. Intriguingly, this essay has also proved foundational to psychoanalytic criticism of horror films, which is frequently less concerned with the specificities of culture.
[2] Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (Columbia University Press, 2005); and Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma, and National Identity* (Manchester University Press, 2008).

Miike Takashi, 2003). The essay focuses on the relationship between South Korea and Japan as a background for these films and their reception. In the conclusion, Amit suggests that the issue of the Korean 'comfort women' is still 'looming over' relationships between the two nations (p. 27); however, the essay does not attempt to offer a full exploration of how these films might be read with this history in mind. Michael Fuchs similarly explores issues of national identity in his essay on the German conception of *Heimat* – loosely translated as homeland, but with more 'ideological baggage' (p. 33). Fuchs reads three Austrian films, *In 3 Tagen bist du tot*, *Angriff der Lederhosenzombies* (dir. Dominik Hartl, 2016), and *Blutgletscher* (dir. by Marvin Kren, 2013) in conjunction with the genres they participate in (the slasher, zombie, and ecological horror film, respectively), to argue that each critiques the idea of *Heimat*, 'if not dismantling it altogether' (p. 46). Luisa Hyojin Koo explores *The Wailing* (dir. by Na Hong-jin, 2016) through the lens of national trauma and masculine identity, arguing that the film creates a 'countermemory', which offers 'a more multileveled image of the nation while interrogating the single privileged myth' (p. 61). The section concludes with Allyson Marino's essay on the monstrous bodies of *Penny Dreadful* (2014-16) and how these (usually female) bodies express 'colonial anxiety' (p. 65). The essays pay particular attention to the 'resisting bodies, rebelling bodies', which 'refuse to be disciplined by every institution that has tried to do so' (p. 75). The institutions are all revealed as oppressive and failing.

Part II is entitled 'Market Forces and Their Monsters', consisting of four essays tied together by their focus on economic anxieties. Lindsey Michael Banco's essay offers a fresh exploration of the well-established connection between haunted-house narratives and economics, lifting up numerous examples of responses to the 'economic stagnation' (p. 82) of the 1970s, and the 'predatory Wall Street financiers' (p. 84) of the 2000s and 2010s. Banco builds off classic texts, such as Dale Bailey's *American Nightmare*,[3] but demonstrates how more contemporary films have adapted to the contours of newer economic crises. Banco offers the sharp insight that these newer films and works of literature respond to the 'bewildering nature of twenty-first-century speculative finance' by presenting a 'crisis at the level of knowledge itself' (p. 91). Erika Tiburcio Moreno's essay on rural horror in the 1970s also explores well-trod ground, but without the benefit of demonstrating the trope's development in

[3] Dale Bailey, *American Nightmare: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Culture* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999); examples of scholarship exploring how this formula has been updated for the twenty-first century Great Recession include Elena Oliete-Aldea, 'The Great Recession and Transnational Horror: Sajit Warrier's Crossover Film *Fired* (2010)', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 49.5 (2016), pp. 1163-83; and Emanuelle Wessels, 'A Lesson Concerning Technology: The Affective Economies of Post-Economic Crisis Haunted House Horror in *The Conjuring* and *Insidious*', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 32.6 (2015), pp. 511-26.

recent decades. However, she does choose two lesser-known films for her examples, focusing primarily on *Deranged: Confessions of a Necrophile* (dir. by Jeff Gillen and Alan Ormsby, 1974) and *Mother's Day* (dir. by Charles Kaufman, 1980) as her parade examples, with only passing references to stock examples of this subgenre such as *Deliverance* (dir. by John Boorman, 1972) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (dir. by Tobe Hooper, 1974). A. Bowdoin Van Riper's contribution places the first three *Purge* films (2013-16) into conversation with questions of economic anxiety, concluding that the films argue that the 'exploitation, abuse, and even outright murder of the poor and vulnerable by the rich and powerful never *stopped* being part of American life' (p. 127; emphasis in original). The section concludes with Russell Meeuf and Benjamin James's essay on *It Follows* (dir. by David Robert Mitchell, 2014) and *Don't Breathe* (dir. by Fede Álvarez, 2016) as 'Motor City Gothic,' noting that both films centre on the 'spectacle of Detroit's crumbling neighborhoods to tell stories about young, white women who must confront the terrors festering in the dilapidated ruins of the old middle class' (pp. 131-32). The exploration encourages a reading of these films as 'not simply stark visions of economic collapse but a deeply nostalgic musing on the perceived fall of the white middle class' (p. 142). The authors' focus on nostalgia offers a richer reading of these films than has become standard, where the emphasis is only on ruin and decay.

Part III consists of three chapters centred around questions of ideology, including neoliberalism, the oppressive Hollywood system, and religious beliefs. The contribution from Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns, Juan Juvé, and Emiliano Aguilar reads the 1980s British films *Hellraiser* (dir. by Clive Barker, 1987), *Scream for Help* and *Dream Demon* (dir. by Harley Cokliss, 1988) in the context of the Thatcher years, arguing that these three films expose the 'cracks appearing through the neat surface' of British society (p. 159). Brandon Niezgoda provides an overview of the 'Mumblegore' movement, as represented by filmmakers such as Ti West and Adam Wingard. In this movement, Niezgoda sees a repudiation of the Hollywood system, both in its rejection of 'industry norms' and the industry's 'record of abuse' (p. 166), as well as in its privileging of 'incidental, leisurely, and quotidian scenes' over fast-paced action (p. 169). The section's concluding essay, by María Gil Poisa, looks at the role of faith in *The Others* (dir. by Alejandro Amenábar, 2004), arguing that the characters are trapped in their house in the same way that Grace is trapped by her oppressive religious beliefs. While these three essays are interesting on their own, they seem rather loosely affiliated to comprise a section, as they deal with very different themes and filmic traditions.

The four essays that make up the fourth part are all focused on history and memory, drawing from a disparate set of films to explore how horror has continued to wrestle with these

questions. Cynthia J. Miller contributes an essay on the 1992 version of *Candyman* (dir. by Bernard Rose), reading the film as a challenge to the limits of our ability to understand the world. As the film begins, the privileged viewpoint is the 'academic worldview' (p. 206), a world associated with certainty. But this certainty breaks down throughout the film, instead suggesting 'larger systems of knowledge and social identity in tension' (p. 207). Thomas Prasch looks at questions of foreknowledge in *Don't Look Now* (dir. Nicholas Roeg, 1973), and connects these epistemological questions to Roeg's montage techniques. This essay demonstrates neatly how the film's themes, including time, memory, and grief, are represented in the 'dual time' of the montages, where 'one moment [is] purely present and another anticipatory and future-directed' (p. 220). James J. Ward reads Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934) as a meditation on memories of 'the long centuries of war, invasion, and conquest that shaped the historical consciousness' of the population of Eastern Europe, including a young Ulmer (p. 229). The essay covers a good deal of ground through close readings of the film's architectural style and production history, then returns to this historical connection in its conclusion. The section concludes with Michael C. Reiff's contribution to the rapidly growing literature on *Get Out* (dir. by Jordan Peele, 2017). While many of the observations have become commonplace in the critical scholarship surrounding the film, Reiff adds something new to the discussion with the attention he pays to the suburban location of the prologue as evoking 'the centuries of dehumanization African-Americans have experienced throughout United States history' (p. 260). He positions the attacked character as representing 'the black men and women who were driven from exclusively white suburbs in the 1950s' (p. 259), lifting up an under-noticed aspect of the film.

This essay leads nicely into the final section, as the volume concludes with the four essays gathered together as 'The Horrors of Place'. Jacqueline Morrill looks at the spaces of Rob Zombie's films as continuing the 'nightmarish parody of an idealized 1950s nuclear family' first critiqued in such films as *Psycho* (dir. by Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, and the original *Halloween* (dir. by John Carpenter, 1978). Personally, I find Zombie's oeuvre to be unsubtle enough that Morrill's conclusions are rather unsurprising. Alissa Burger explores how the fictional locations Derry and Castle Rock serve as grounds for 'the contested process of returning and remembering' that characterises so much of Stephen King's work (p. 289). Katherine Lizza returns to *It Follows* for another exploration of how the Detroit suburban locations 'blur the line between affluence and poverty' (p. 293). In a subtle shift in emphasis from Meeuf and James's earlier essay, Lizza focuses not on mourning, but on the 'ambiguous' future of both the characters in the film and the city of Detroit as a whole.

Kevin Thomas McKenna bravely attempts to find something new to say about *Psycho*, but largely recycles previous scholarship on the film. Few readers will be surprised at the conclusion that *Psycho* critiques 'suburbanization's alienating violence', while also demonstrating the suburban dream's 'inability to offer protection and stability in privacy' (p. 317).

While I might have preferred a slightly streamlined volume, Miller and van Riper have gathered together an admirable array of essays. All of the essays begin from the foundational observation – made by previous scholars such as Wood, Lowenstein, Blake, and numerous others – that horror is frequently a reflection of (and commentary on) the sociological conditions that produced it. The strength of the volume lies in these essays' determination to demonstrate how this works not as a theoretical construct, but in the concrete examples of the films under discussion. In this goal, the volume succeeds as a useful resource for scholars researching these particular films, as well as scholars looking more generally at the broader sociological questions that horror frequently explores.

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