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NOËL CARROLL

The Nature of Horror

FOR NEARLY A DECADE and a half, perhaps especially in America, horror has flourished as a major source of mass aesthetic stimulation. Horror novels seem available in virtually every supermarket and pharmacy, and new titles appear with unnerving rapidity. One author in this genre, Stephen King, has become a household name, while others, like Peter Straub, though less well known, command large followings. Popular movies, as well, have remained so obsessed with horror since the success of *The Exorcist* that it is difficult to visit your local multiplex theater without meeting at least one monster. Horror and music explicitly join forces in many rock videos, notably *Thriller*, though one must remember that the iconography of horror supplies a pervasive coloration of much MTV. Of course, nonmusic TV itself offers several horror programs, such as *Tales from the Dark Side*, while Broadway was recently terrorized by Gorey's version of *Dracula*. Horror figures even in fine art, not only directly in works by Francis Bacon, H. R. Giger, and Sibylle Ruppert, but also allusionistically in the pastiches of many postmodern artists. In short, horror has become a staple across contemporary artforms, popular and otherwise, spawning vampires, trolls, gremlins, zombies, werewolves, demonically possessed children, space monsters of all sizes, ghosts, and other unnameable concoctions at a pace that has made the last decade or so seem like one long Halloween night. Thus, the time is ripe to initiate an aesthetic inquiry into the nature of horror.¹

The type of horror to be explored in this paper is that associated with reading something like Stoker's *Dracula* or Blackwood's "Ancient Sorceries" or with seeing something like

Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* or Scott's *Alien*. We shall call this art-horror. It is different from the sort of horror one expresses in saying "I am horrified by the prospect of ecological disaster" or "Terrorist acts are horrifying." Call the latter usage of "horror" *natural horror*. It is not the purpose of this essay to analyze natural horror, but only *art-horror*—"horror," that is, as it serves to name a cross-art genre whose existence is already recognized in ordinary language. Indeed, one might regard the first part of this article as an attempt to rationally reconstruct the latent criteria for identifying art-horror that are operative in ordinary language.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is necessary to emphasize that by "art-horror" we are referring narrowly to the effects of a specific genre. Of course, one might be horrified by the events in a nonhorror novel, for example, one might be horrified by the murder in *The Stranger*. Nevertheless, though such horror is generated by art, it is not part of the phenomenon we are calling "art-horror." "Art-horror," by stipulation, is supposed to refer to the product of a genre that crystallized roughly around the time of the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and that has continued, often cyclically, to persist through the novels and plays of the nineteenth century and the literature and films of the twentieth.² Moreover, it must be noted that though our emphasis is on genre, we shall not respect the notion that horror and science fiction are discrete genres. Much science fiction of the bug-eyed monster school, for instance, is really a species of horror, substituting supernatural forces with futuristic technologies. This is not to say that all science fiction is a subcategory of horror, but only that much is. Thus, in our examples, we will move freely between what is called horror

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and science fiction.

It should not be assumed that all genres can be analyzed in the same way. Westerns, for example, are identified primarily in virtue of their setting. Novels, films, plays, paintings, and so on that are grouped under the label of "horror" are identified according to a different sort of criterion. Like suspense novels or mystery novels, novels are denominated horrific in respect of their intended capacity to provoke a certain affective response. Indeed, the genres of suspense, mystery, and horror derive their very names from the affects they are intended to promote—a sense of suspense, a sense of mystery, and a sense of horror. Again, not all genres are identified this way—a musical is not tied to any specific affect. But the genres that are named by the very affect they are designed to provoke suggest a very tantalizing strategy through which to pursue their analysis.

Like suspense, works of horror are designed to elicit a certain kind of affect. We shall presume that this is an emotional state whose emotion we call art-horror. Thus, one can expect to locate the genre of horror, in part, by a specification of art-horror, the emotion that works of this type are designed to engender. Such an analysis, of course, is not a priori; it is an attempt, in the tradition of *The Poetics*, to provide clarificatory generalizations about a body of work that we antecedently accept as constituting a family.

Initially, it is tempting to differentiate the horror genre from others by saying that horror novels, stories, films, plays, and so on are marked by the presence of monsters of either a supernatural or sci-fi origin. This distinguishes horror from what are sometimes called tales of terror, such as Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Telltale Heart," or Hitchcock's *Psycho*, which, though effects eerie and scary, achieve their hairraising effects by exploring extreme psychological phenomena that are all too human. Similarly, by using monsters or other supernatural entities as a criterion, one could separate horror stories from Gothic exercises such as Radcliff's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, where suspicions of otherworldly beings are introduced only to be explained away naturalistically. However, even if a case could be made that a monster or a monstrous entity is a necessary condition for horror, such a criterion

would not be a sufficient condition. For monsters inhabit all sorts of stories, such as fairy tales, myths, and odysseys,³ that we are not wont to identify as horror.

What appears to distinguish the horror story from mere stories with monsters, such as fairy tales, is the attitude of characters in the story to the monsters they chance upon. In works of horror, the humans regard the monsters that they encounter as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order. In fairy tales, on the other hand, monsters are part of the everyday furniture of the universe. In "The Three Princesses of Whiteland," for example, the lad is beset by a three-headed troll; however, the writing does not signal that he finds this creature to be any more unusual than the lions he had previously walked past. A creature like Chewbacca in the space opera *Star Wars* is just one of the guys, though a creature made up in the same wolf outfit, in a film like *The Howling*, would be regarded with utter revulsion by the humans in that film. In examples of horror, it would appear that the monster is an extraordinary character in our ordinary world, whereas in fairy tales and the like the monster is an ordinary character in an extraordinary world.

One indicator, then, of that which differentiates works of horror proper from monster stories in general is the affective responses of the characters in the stories to the monsters they meet. Though so far we have only spoken about the emotions of characters in horror stories, the preceding hypothesis is nevertheless useful for getting at the emotional responses that works of horror are designed to elicit from audiences. For horror appears to be one of those genres in which, ideally, the emotive responses of the audience run parallel to the emotions of characters. Indeed, in works of horror the responses of characters often seem to cue the emotional responses of the audience.

In "Jonathan Harker's Journal" in *Dracula*, we read

As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which do what I would, I could not conceal.

This shudder, this recoil at the vampire's touch, this feeling of nausea structures our emotional

reception of the ensuing descriptions of Dracula; for example, when his protruding teeth are mentioned we regard them as shudder-inducing, nauseating, rank, and not something one would either want to touch or be touched by. Similarly, we model our emotional response upon ones like that of the young woman in *Night of the Living Dead* who, when surrounded by zombies, screams and clutches herself in such a way as to avoid contact with the contaminated flesh. The characters of works of horror exemplify for us the way in which to react to the monsters in the fiction. Our emotions are supposed to mirror those of the positive human characters. This is not the case for every genre. If Aristotle is right about catharsis, the emotional state of the audience does not double that of Oedipus at the end of the play. Also, when a comic character takes a pratfall, he hardly feels joyous, though we do. Nevertheless, with horror the emotions of the characters and those of the audience are synchronized, as one can observe easily at a Saturday matinee at one's local cinema.

That the audience's emotional response is modeled on that of characters provides us with a useful methodological advantage in analyzing the emotion of art-horror. It suggests a way in which we can formulate an objective, as opposed to an introspective, picture of the emotion of horror. That is, rather than characterizing art-horror solely on the basis of our own subjective responses, we can ground our conjectures on observations of the way in which characters respond to the monsters in works of horror. That is, if we proceed under the assumption that our emotional responses as audience members are supposed to parallel those of characters, then we can begin to portray art-horror by noting the typical emotional features that authors and directors attribute to characters beleaguered by monsters.

How do characters respond to monsters in horror stories? Well, of course, they're frightened. After all, monsters are dangerous. But there is more to it than this. In Shelley's famous novel, Victor Frankenstein recounts his reaction to the first movements of his creation: "now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished and *disgust* filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, unable to compose my

mind to sleep." Shortly after this, the monster, with an outstretched hand, awakens Victor, who flees from its touch. In "The Sea-Raiders," H. G. Wells, using the third person, narrates Mr. Frison's reaction to some unsavory, glistening, tentacled creatures: "he was horrified, of course, and intensely excited and indignant at such *revolting* creatures preying on human skin." In Muir's "The Reptile," MacAndrew's first response to what he takes to be a largish, deadly snake is described as "the paralyzing grip of *repulsion* and surprise." And for a more contemporary illustration, consider the dream portent Jack Sawyer encounters in *The Talisman*, by King and Straub:

some terrible creature had been coming for his mother—a dwarfish monstrosity with misplaced eyes and rotting, cheesy skin. "Your mother's almost dead, Jack, can you say hallelujah?" This monstrosity had croaked, and Jack knew—the way you knew things in dreams—that it was radioactive, and that if it touched him he would die.

What examples like this (which can be multiplied endlessly) indicate is that the character's affective reaction to the monstrous in horror stories is not merely a matter of fear, i.e., of being frightened by something that threatens danger. Rather, threat is compounded by revulsion, nausea, and disgust. The monster is so unwholesome that its very touch causes shudders. And this corresponds as well with the tendency in horror novels and stories to describe monsters in terms of, and associate them with, filth, decay, deterioration, slime, and so on.

The reports of characters' internal reactions to monsters—whether from a first person, second person (e.g., Fuentes's *Aura*) or authorial point of view—in horror stories correspond to the more behavioral reactions one can observe in theater and cinema. Just before the monster is visualized to the audience, we often see the character shudder in disbelief, responding to this violation of nature. Their faces contort. They freeze in a moment of recoil, transfixed, sometimes paralyzed. They start. Their hands are drawn toward their bodies in an act of protection but also of revulsion and disgust. Along with the fear of severe physical harm, there is an evident aversion to making physical contact with the monster. Both fear and disgust

are etched on the characters' features. Within the context of the horror narrative, the monsters are identified as impure and unclean. They are putrid or mouldering things, or they hail from oozing places, or they are made of dead or rotting flesh, or chemical waste, or are associated with vermin, disease, or crawling things. They are not only lethal but they make one's skin creep. Characters regard them not only with fear but also with loathing, with a combination of terror and disgust.

But before we attempt to work these observations into a theory of art-horror, a few comments should be made about the structure of emotions.⁴ We are presupposing that art-horror is an emotion, one reflected in the emotional responses of characters to the monsters in works of horror. Furthermore, we are presuming that art-horror is an occurrent emotional state, as is a flash of anger, rather than a dispositional emotional state, such as undying envy. An occurrent emotional state has both physical and cognitive dimensions. Broadly speaking, the physical dimension is a matter of felt agitations. In respect to art-horror some of the generally relevant types of physical agitations are muscular contractions, tension, cringing, shuddering, recoiling, tingling, frozenness, momentary arrests, paralysis, trembling, perhaps involuntary screaming, and so on.⁵ In order to be in an emotional state, one must undergo some concomitant physical agitation; one could not be said to be angry unless your negative evaluation of the man standing on your foot were accompanied by some physical state, like being "hot under the collar."

However, though in order to qualify as an emotional state, a state must correlate with *some* physical agitation; the specific emotional state one is in is not determined by the kinds of physical agitations one is suffering. That is, no specific physical state represents a necessary or sufficient condition for a given emotional state. When I am angry, my blood runs cold, whereas when you are angry, your blood boils. In order to be in an emotional state some physical agitation must obtain, though an emotional state will not be identified by being associated with a unique physical state or even a unique assortment of physical states.

What then individuates emotional states? Their cognitive elements. Emotions involve not

only physical perturbations but beliefs, beliefs about the properties of objects and situations. Moreover, these beliefs are not just factual—e.g., there is a large truck coming at me—but evaluative—that large truck is dangerous to me. Now when I am in a state of fear with regard to this truck, I am in some physical state—perhaps my muscles go limp—and this physical state has been *caused* by my cognitive state, by my beliefs that the truck is headed toward me and that it is dangerous. My muscles going limp could be associated with many emotional states; what makes my emotional state fear in this case are my beliefs. That is, cognitive states differentiate one emotion from another though for a state to be an emotional one there must also be some kind of physical agitation that has been engendered by the presiding cognitive state.

We can summarize this view of the emotions by saying that an occurrent emotional state is one in which some physically abnormal state of agitation has been caused by the subject's cognitive construal and evaluation of his or her situation. This is the core of an emotional state, though some emotions may involve wants and desires as well as construals and evaluations.

Using this account of the emotions, we are now in a position to organize our observations about the emotion of horror or art-horror. Assuming that "I-as-audience-member" am in an analogous emotional state to that which characters are described to be in, then "I am occurrently art-horrified by Dracula if and only if (1) I am in some state of abnormal physical agitation (shuddering, tingling, screaming, etc.) which (2) has been *caused* by (a) my thought: that Dracula is a possible being, and my evaluative beliefs that (b) said Dracula has the property of being physically (and perhaps morally) threatening in the ways portrayed in the fiction, and that (c) said Dracula has the property of being impure, where (3) such beliefs are accompanied by the desire to avoid the touch of things like Dracula. Of course, "Dracula" here is merely a heuristic device. Any old monster X can be plugged into the formula.

One thing to note about the preceding definition is that it is the evaluative beliefs that primarily serve to individuate art-horror. And, moreover, it is crucial that two evaluative beliefs come into play: that the monster is

regarded as threatening *and* impure. If the monster were only evaluated as potentially threatening, the emotion would be fear; if only potentially impure, the emotion would be disgust. Art-horror requires evaluation both in terms of threat and disgust. It might also be mentioned that though the third criterion about the desire to avoid physical contact seems accurate, it might have to be dropped in favor of saying that it is a frequent but not necessary ingredient of art-horror.⁶

Undoubtedly, the use of "impure" in our definition will strike some as too vague. But perhaps we can relieve some of those anxieties concerning vagueness by saying something about the kinds of objects that standardly give rise to, or cause, reactions of impurity. This, moreover, will enable us to expand our theory of art-horror from the realm of definition to that of explanation, from an analysis of the application of the concept of art-horror to an analysis of its causation.

In her classic study *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas correlates reactions of impurity with the transgression or violation of schemes of cultural categorization.⁷ In her interpretation of the abominations of *Leviticus*, for example, she hypothesizes that the reason crawling things from the sea, like lobsters, are regarded as impure is that crawling was a defining feature of earthbound creatures, not of creatures of the sea. A lobster, in other words, is a kind of category mistake and, hence, impure. Similarly, all winged insects with four legs are abominated because though four legs is a feature of land animals, these things fly, i.e., they inhabit the air. Things that are interstitial, that cross the boundaries of the deep categories of a culture's conceptual scheme, are impure, according to Douglas. Feces, insofar as they figure ambiguously in terms of categorical oppositions such as me/not me, inside/outside, and living/dead, serve as ready candidates for abhorrence as impure, as do spittle, blood, tears, sweat, hair clippings, nail clippings, pieces of flesh, and so on. Douglas notes that among the Lele people, flying squirrels are avoided since they cannot be categorized unambiguously as either birds or animals. Also, objects can raise categorical misgivings in virtue of being incomplete representatives of their class, such as rotting and disintegrating things,

as well as in virtue of being formless, like dirt, for example.

Following Douglas, then, we initially speculate that an *object* or *being* is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, categorically incomplete, or formless.⁸ This list may not be exhaustive, nor is it clear that its terms are mutually exclusive. But it is certainly useful for analyzing the monsters of the horror genre. For they are beings or creatures which specialize in formlessness, incompleteness, categorical interstitiality and categorical contradictoriness. Let a brief inventory carry this point.

Many monsters of the horror genre are interstitial and/or contradictory in terms of being both living and dead: ghosts, zombies, vampires, mummies, the Frankenstein monster, Melmoth, and so on. Near relatives to these are monstrous entities that conflate the animate and the inanimate: haunted houses with malevolent wills of their own, robots, and the car in King's *Christine*. Also, many monsters confound different species: dragons, werewolves, humanoid insects, and humanoid reptiles.⁹ The creature in Howard Hawks's classic *The Thing* is an intelligent, two-legged, blood-sucking carrot. Indeed, the frequent reference to monsters by means of pronouns like "it" and "them" suggests that these creatures are not classifiable according to our standard categories.

Demonically possessed characters typically involve the mixture of at least two categorically distinct individuals, the possessee and the possessor, the latter usually a demon, who, in turn, is often thought of as a categorically transgressive figure (e.g., a goat-god). Stevenson's most famous monster is two men, Jekyll and Hyde, whereas the Frankenstein monster is a composite of many different men.¹⁰

Categorical incompleteness is also a standard feature of the monsters of horror: ghosts and zombies frequently come without eyes, arms, legs, or skin, or are in some advanced state of disintegration. And, in a related vein, detached body parts are quite serviceable monsters, as in the cases of severed heads and especially severed hands; for example, DeMaupassant's "The Hand" and "The Withered Hand," LeFanu's "The Narrative of a Ghost of a Hand," Golding's "The Call of the Hand," Conan Doyle's "The Brown Hand," Nerval's

“The Enchanted Hand,” Dreiser’s “The Hand,” Harvey’s “The Beast With Five Fingers,” and so on. The rate of recurrence with which the biologies of monsters are vaporous or gelatinous attests to the notion of the formlessness of horrific impurity, while the writing style of certain horror authors, such as Lovecraft and Straub, through their vague, suggestive, and at times inchoate description of the monsters, leaves an impression of formlessness.¹¹ And of course, some monsters, like the scorpion big enough to eat Mexico City, are magnifications of creatures and crawling things already judged impure and interstitial in the foldways of the culture.

Douglas’s observations, then, may help dispell some of the fuzziness of the impurity clause of our definition of art-horror. They can be used to supply paradigmatic examples for our application of the impurity clause as well as a rough guiding principle for isolating impurity, viz., that of categorical transgression. Furthermore, Douglas’s theory of impurity can be used by scholars of horror to identify some of the pertinent features of the monsters in the stories they study. That is, given a monster, the scholar can ask in what ways it is categorically interstitial, contradictory (in Douglas’s sense), incomplete, and/or formless. These features, moreover, afford a crucial part of the causal background of the reaction of impurity that operates in the raising of the emotion of art-horror. They are part of what triggers it. This is not to say that we realize that Dracula is, among other things, categorically interstitial and that we then react, accordingly, with art-horror. Rather, monster X’s being categorically interstitial causes a sense of impurity in us without our awareness of what causes that sense. In addition, the emphasis Douglas places on categorical schemes in the analysis of impurity indicates a way in which we can account for the recurrent description of our impure monsters as “unnatural.” They are unnatural relative to a culture’s conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it. Thus, monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge.¹²

One question that inevitably arises when examining a phenomenon like art-horror is: how can people be horrified by a fiction? One

way of answering this is by means of an Illusion Theory: When people see Dracula onscreen, they literally believe he is before them attacking virgins or turning into a bat. But this seems to be an improbable hypothesis, since audiences do not behave as though they believed that Dracula was present in the movie theater or anywhere nearby. If they did, they’d head for the hills or at least reach for their rosary beads.

An alternative approach is the Pretend Theory. This approach grants that people know that Dracula does not exist—that he is fictional—and goes on to explain our emotional response in terms of pretense. We are not really horrified, for we know Dracula is nonexistent, but we pretend to be horrified.¹³ The problem with this line of approach, however, is that though ingenious, it does not seem descriptively accurate. When I am art-horrified by Dracula I am in a genuine emotional state, not a pretend state.

One needs something between the Illusion Theory and the Pretend Theory, something that does not commit the audience to a belief in Dracula but also leaves the audience in a state of genuine emotion. An alternative might be the Thought Theory. That is, saying we are art-horrified by Dracula means we are horrified by the thought of Dracula where the thought of such a possible being does not commit us to a belief in his existence. Here, the thought of Dracula, the thing that art-horrifies me, is not the event of my thinking of Dracula but the content of the thought, viz., that Dracula, a threatening and impure being of such and such dimensions, might exist and do these terrible things. Nor need it be assumed that I am reflexively aware of the content of my thought. Dracula is presented onscreen and I am art-horrified by the prospect that there could be such a being perpetrating such deeds. Since it is only the thought or the prospect of Dracula that frightens me, I don’t run from the theater, nor am I as anxious as I would be if I believed that a real vampire was only ten rows away. It appears to be an incontrovertible fact that we may be frightened by the thought of a state of affairs that does not correspond to the world. One may be frightened by the prospect or the thought of U.S. troops invading Central America. The commitment to thoughts here may raise fundamental philosophical quandaries for some; however, in the question of art-horror,

our dependence on thoughts appears more palatable than the postulation of pretend emotions or audience beliefs in vampires.

The theory of art-horror advanced above has not been derived from a set of deeper principles. The way to confirm it is to take the definition and the partial typology of the structures that gives rise to the sense of impurity and to see if they apply to the reactions we find to the monsters indigenous to works of horror. In my own research, though admittedly casual, these hypotheses, so far, have proved rewarding. Moreover, these hypotheses seem worthwhile candidates for more rigorous attempts at corroboration than I have the training to pursue.

I have also found collateral support for this theory of art-horror insofar as it has enabled me to frame interesting answers to further questions about horror and paved the way for speculation in unexpected directions. That is, the theory affords the basis for a continuing, highly coherent research program. Thus, before concluding, I will mention some of the explanatory “fringe benefits” of the theory in the hopes that these will enhance its attractiveness.

(1) It is a remarkable fact about the creatures of horror that very often they do not seem to be of sufficient strength to make a grown man cower. A tettering zombie or a severed hand would appear incapable of mustering enough force to overpower a coordinated six-year-old. Nevertheless, they are presented as unstoppable, and this seems psychologically acceptable to audiences. This might be explained by noting Douglas’s claim that culturally impure objects are generally taken to be invested with magical powers and as a result are often employed in rituals. Monsters, by extension then, may be similarly imbued with awesome powers in virtue of their impurity.

(2) Horror stories are predominantly concerned with knowledge as a theme. The two most frequent plot structures in horror narratives are the Discovery Plot and the Overreacher Plot.¹⁴ In the Discovery Plot, the monster arrives, unbeknownst to anyone, and sets about its gruesome work. Gradually the protagonist or a group of protagonists discover that a monster is responsible for all those unexplained deaths. However, when the protagonists approach the authorities with this information, the authorities dismiss the very possibility of the

monster. The energies of the narrative are then devoted to *proving* the monster’s existence. Such a plot celebrates the existence of things beyond the boundaries of common knowledge.

The Overreacher Plot, of which *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are leading examples, proposes a central figure embarked on the pursuit of hidden, unholy, or forbidden knowledge. Once the scientist, alchemist, priest, etc., acts on this forbidden knowledge—e.g., brings a corpse to life—inevitably, maleficent power is released and the consequent destruction is the stuff of the story. Whereas the protagonists in the Discovery Plot must go beyond the bounds of common knowledge, overreachers are warned not to exceed them. But both the major plots of the horror genre take the compass of common knowledge as their basic *donnée* and explore it, albeit for different thematic effects. This, of course, fits very nicely with a theory that regards cognitive threat as a major factor in the generation of art-horror.

(3) The geography of horror stories often situates the origin of monsters in such places as lost continents and outer space. Or the creature comes from under the sea or under the earth. That is, monsters are native to places outside of and/or unknown to the human world. Or, the creatures come from marginal, hidden, or abandoned sites: graveyards, sewers, or old houses. That is, they belong to environs outside of and unknown to ordinary social life. Given the theory of horror expounded above, it is tempting to interpret the geography of horror as a figurative spatialization of the notion that what horrifies is that which lies *outside* cultural categories and is, perforce, unknown.

(4) Finally, we began by noting that we are in the midst of a period in which art-horror is one of the major avenues of mass aesthetic stimulation. Thus, it would be interesting if our theory of art-horror could contribute to our understanding of why at present the fascination with horror is so unquenchable.

Adopting the role of armchair sociologist, one notes that the present art-horror cycle is approximately coincident with a moment that many have chosen to call postmodernism. Proponents of postmodernism hail it as a period marked by the philosophical triumph of antiessentialism and by the purported recogni-

tion that our concepts cannot be tethered by criteria.¹⁵ Deconstruction is the watchword.

Now many may, as I do, question the philosophical pretensions of the postmoderns. But in their disavowal of criteria they may have captured the spirit of the times. As social expression, rather than as persuasive philosophy, postmodern rhetoric may reflect the recent experience of the collapse of the conceptual fixities, or more aptly, the presuppositions of Pax Americana. In this respect, the current ascendancy of the genre of horror may be the mass popular expression of the same anxiety concerning criteria that preoccupies the more esoteric forms of postmodernism. For as our theory suggests, art-horror is an entertainment predicated on the dislocation of cultural criteria through categorical interstitiality, contradictoriness, and so on. That is, our theory puts us in a position to interpret the current horror cycle as an exoteric variant of the postmodernist sense that at present our conceptual frameworks are, putatively, precariously unstable.

¹ I have already attempted a theory of horror cinema in my "Nightmare and the Horror Film: The Symbolic Biology of Fantastic Beings," *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1981). An expanded version of this essay was reprinted in *The Anxious Subject*, Moshe Lazar, ed. (Belmont, CA, 1983). The present essay is meant to supersede the earlier one. My emphasis now is on a more cognitively oriented approach to horror than in the previous essay, which was heavily dependent on psychoanalysis. This change in direction, I think, provides a more comprehensive account of the "repelling" aspects of horror than do my psychoanalytic hypotheses. This theoretical shift, however, is not meant to preclude psychoanalytic interpretations of given works of horror. I would still defend most of the psychoanalytic interpretations of individual works propounded in "Nightmare and the Horror Film," as well as most of the structural accounts of horror imagery and narration.

In the earlier essay, it was noted that an adequate theory of horror would have to account for the way that horror both attracts and repels its devotees. In this respect, the present essay is not a full theory. It only explores the negative or repelling component of horror. A revised account of the attractiveness of the horror genre remains to be made. For material on the seductive fascination of horror, see Philip Hallie, *The Paradox of Cruelty* (Wesleyan University Press, 1969), pp. 63-84.

² Of course, horrific imagery can be found across the ages, including, in Petronius's tale of the werewolf (*Satyricon*), Apuleius's story of Aristomenes and Socrates (*The Golden Ass*), and in the medieval *danses macabres* and characterizations of Hell such as *Vision of St. Paul*, *Vision of Tundale* and, most famously, Dante's *Inferno*. However, the genre of horror only begins to coalesce between the last half of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the

nineteenth as a variation on the Gothic form in England (and in related developments in Germany). For an overview of this tradition, see Elizabeth MacAndrew, *The Gothic Tradition* (Columbia University Press, 1979). I am at pains to stress the historicity of the phenomena in question to avoid the fashionable charge of ahistoricism so frequently leveled at philosophers of art nowadays. I am not offering a transhistorical account of horror, but a theory of a historical genre and its affects.

³ Todorov would classify these stories under the heading of "the marvelous." Though I have been influenced by Todorov in this essay, I have not taken advantage of his categories because I want to draw a distinction within the category of supernatural tales between those which indulge art-horror and those that don't. See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic* (Cornell University Press, 1970).

⁴ This essay closely follows the account of the emotions outlined in William Lyons, *The Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁵ This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it supposed that an exhaustive list is possible.

⁶ Our account obviously depends on a cognitive-evaluative theory of the emotions. Such theories, of course, have been confronted by counterexamples. For instance, it is said that we are in emotional states while dancing and that that is a matter of rhythm and physiology rather than of cognition and evaluation. I am disposed to think that if we are in an emotional state when dancing, then that has to do with our evaluation of the situation, our evaluation, for example, of what the dance stands for or celebrates, or our evaluation of our bond with our partner or the larger community of dancers or our audience or our relation to accompanying musicians. Or the evaluation might have to do with ourselves, with the joy that comes from judging that we dance well, or from appreciating being coordinated and active. That is, if we are in an emotional state while dancing, it seems attributable to many sorts of evaluative beliefs. Simply being in a rhythmically induced, trancelike state, directed at no object, does not seem to be an emotional state. However, even if I am wrong here, it does not seem that such counterexamples show that there are no cognitive-evaluative emotional states. And, of course, I would hold that horror is one of them.

This move, though, invites the response that, like the putative dance emotions, shock is a rhythmically induced, nonevaluative emotion, and that horror and art-horror really belong to the genus of shock. I would not want to deny that shock is often involved in tandem with art-horror, especially in theater and cinema. Just before the monster appears, the music shoots up, or there is a startling noise, or we see an unexpected, fast movement start out from "nowhere." We jump in our seats, and perhaps some scream. When we then recognize the monster, that scream of shock gets extended and applied as a scream of horror. This is a well-known scare tactic. However, horror is not reducible to this sort of shock. For this technique is also found in mysteries and thrillers, where we don't feel horror at the gunman who suddenly steps out of the dark. This variety of shock does not seem to me to be an emotion at all, but rather a reflex, though, of course, it is a reflex that is often linked with the provocation of art-horror by the artisans of monster spectacles. And, anyway, it must also be stressed that one can feel art-horror without being

shocked in the reflex sense of the term.

⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966).

⁸ "Object" and "entity" are stressed here in order to block certain counterexamples. Category errors and logical paradoxes, though they may horrify philosophers, are not normally regarded as impure. But neither do they belong to the domain of "objects and entities." For the purpose of analyzing art-horror, the domain of objects that are to be assessed in terms of impurity are *beings*.

⁹ Sibylle Ruppert mixes different species in her horrific charcoal drawings, such as *The Third Sex*. Also see Lucas Samaras's *Photo-transformation*. H. R. Giger's work not only compounds the categorical opposites of the organic and the mechanical, but also those of inside and outside.

¹⁰ A typology of the combinatory structure of horror imagery—stated in terms of the notions of fusion and fission—is available in Carroll, "Nightmare and the Horror Film."

¹¹ Though not strictly horror images in the terms of our theory, Bacon's paintings probably often evoke descriptions

as horrifying because they suggest virtually *formless* mounds of human flesh. See his *Lying Figure with a Hypodermic Syringe*.

¹² Considering the opening distinctions in this essay, a question arises at this point concerning the reason why the monsters of fairy tales do not raise horror responses in either the human characters they meet or in their readers. Surely these monsters are categorical violations. My provisional answer to this relies on noting the way in which fairy tales characteristically begin with formulas like "Once upon a time." Perhaps this functions to remove them from the rules of *prevailing* categorical schemes.

¹³ See Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *Journal Of Philosophy* 75 (1978).

¹⁴ These plots are described at greater length in my "Nightmare and the Horror Film."

¹⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming* (University of Minnesota Press, 1985).