

**MALICE IN WONDERLAND:
THE SOCIAL CONSCIOUS AND THE POLITICAL
UNCONSCIOUS IN AMERICAN HORROR FILMS OF THE 1970S**

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ABSTRACT:

After the “linguistic turn”, the issue of representation became one of the central problems of social sciences. This paradigm shift enabled film to constitute itself as a discourse. Consequently, film was extensively utilized as an interpretative framework. In addition to this, I argue that film possesses one more dimension that is relevant for sociology and anthropology: ability to operate as a theoretical model. And I find that the most suitable films for fulfilling this function are the ones that belong to the horror genre of the 1970s. Drawing primarily on theories of Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida and Frederic Jameson, I argue that only this genre can provide examples which can illustrate the universality of antagonisms in social reality. Furthermore, once constituted as a theoretical model, the horror film can uncover “unconscious” ideology behind everyday life practice.

KEYWORDS: horror film, ideology, antagonisms, cinema of the 1970s, political unconscious

Introduction:

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

In order to understand today's world, we need cinema, literally. It's only in cinema that we get that crucial dimension which we are not yet ready to confront in our reality. If you are looking for what is, in reality, more real than reality itself, look into cinematic fiction.

— Slavoj Žižek

When it comes to interpreting social reality, cinema is no different than any other discourse: it acquires “inspiration” from it, re-creates it by “rephrasing” it into a narrative, and ideologically (through formal and substantial elements of cinematic language) evaluates it. In other words, it “exploits” reality through “surplus value” of representation – *interpretation*. Furthermore, Monaco (2000:262) asserts that “the very fact that the movies amplified certain aspects of [American] culture and attenuated others had a profound effect”. In this way, film has engaged in the major debates, which consequently established *discourse of the film* as a part of larger *discourse(s) of society*. Therefore, film is a reflective analytic text that “follows” social events, and engages *post festum* in a dialogue with them. For that reason, as Jameson (1992, 1995) stated, the only way to think the visual is to understand its relation to the historical context in which it had emerged.

After the infamous “linguistic turn” and the notorious “crisis of representation”, film was established as a “systematically organized discourse” (Stam 2000:186). As a consequence of this (postmodernist) shift of focus from the signified to the signifier, the relevance of cinematic representation became incalculable. For that reason, the famous assertion that “life imitates art” must be rephrased: cinema is postulated as *a* discourse in clearly defined discourses inside the sphere of social sciences, where it is not a simple *commentary* on social reality but an actual *agent* within it. As a result, a binary relation is established: social history

(the major issues) and film history (the representation of those issues) interact in a dialectical relationship. In this way, film is disseminating the meaning of the original social event (Belton 1994).

My thesis is an attempt to uncover one more dimension that the film as a discursive representation of social reality possess: the one of *theoretical model*. I argue that the most suitable films for fulfilling this function are the ones that belong to the horror genre of the 1970s. As stated before, the horror film of that era acquired inspiration from a large number of events that questioned and challenged dominant social, cultural and political norms of that period. Issues like abortion, feminism, migration from rural to urban areas, “body politics”, minority rights, the “secret government”, hippie culture and sexual freedoms were just a few of the many trends that Hollywood efficiently used to measure the pulse of the American society (see Friedman 2007, Keyser 1981). However, as these phenomena were not an exclusive property of American social landscape, I focus on the cinematic representation of these issues as they participated in American culture. Furthermore, I argue that the horror film in the 1970s was an active participant in social, cultural and political events on much deeper level than ever before. This was a consequence of a crucial change in the horror narrative: line that was separating good from evil disappeared, and consequently *normality* was brought into question. In view of that, my claim is that the horror film of the 1970s did not deal with social reality only consciously, but more importantly it provided some of the most significant insights on the “unconscious” level. Consequently, I distinguish the *social conscious* and the *political unconscious* of cinematic discourse. By the former I mean critical representation of sociopolitical phenomena specific for a given period, and by the latter – “unbiased” uncovering of universality of unresolvable antagonisms that are ideologically mystified in that period. The goal is to postulate the horror film as a theoretical model for non-ideological contemplation on ideology.

But what do I mean when I say the “horror film”, and why is this genre so special? Jameson (1989:106) defines genres as “essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact”. This *contract* imposes *conventions* which ensure proper reception of a particular cultural artifact. However, instead of a writer, in cinema the contract is established between the industry and the audience. This contract states that the horror genre is focused on the antagonistic relationship between the Order (man, social groups, society, the system of values) and the Other (represented in the figure of the monster) which cannot have peaceful resolution. Central to the horror genre is the figure of the monster, whose identity transforms according to social and cultural changes (Hutchings 2004, Wells 2000). Therefore, the *figure of the monster* is most commonly used as a unit of analysis. The majority of academic readings view the Monster as an entity that violates and potentially destabilizes a particular way of making sense of the world, which constitutes the status of the Monster itself as transgressive. As Hutchings (2004) explains, horror films can be seen as the reaffirmation of social categories through elimination of the “unnatural” creature; but on the other hand, the very existence of the Monster reveals that these categories can be breached, that they – for all their apparent “naturalness” – are fragile, contingent, vulnerable. In other words, monsters are not only represented as threats to the social order, but also as a potential transformation of the order. Therefore, if the very nature of the Monster is subversive, then its representation functions differently in different contexts (Carroll 1990, Hutchings 2004).

This imposes the question of the *meaning* of the Monster. The main approach is to interpret it as a metaphor for psychologically and socially specific fears and anxieties. For that reason, proliferation of horror films is symptomatic for great sociopolitical and economic crises. For example, the monsters from the 1930s are seen as representations of mass unemployment and accompanying sense of weakness (O’Flinn 1986, Skal 2001). The 1950s

saw the emergence of the modern horror film, the one that made a shift from gothic ambience to urban setting. This was a consequence of Cold War politics, a period in which American society in totality was in danger from an external threat: the monsters have been interpreted as metaphors for the nuclear bomb or as a fear of potential communist invasion (Biskind 1983). As such, these films were deeply xenophobic and were promoting the idea that only the state – through military, scientific and governmental elites – has the power to protect the nation (Tudor 1989). However, Jancovich (1996:2) asserts that “the threats which distinguish 1950s horror do not come from the past or even from the actions of a lone individual, but are associated with the processes of social development and modernisation”. This threat was the “process of rationalisation”: reorganization of the social, economic and cultural life through scientific-technical rationality in then very bureaucratized and conformist United States. Furthermore, Lucanio (1987) connected these films with Jungian psychoanalysis: these films were operating with iconographic images that were in dynamic relationship with collective unconscious, and as such were symbols of transformation to an individuated life. On the other hand, when the threat was of biological nature, the horror film changed its focus immediately: monsters in the 1980s were viewed as metaphors for AIDS (Guerrero 1990).

As Gianetti (1996) notes, every film, no matter what its intentions are, is expressing certain position on social reality through formal elements that are there to reflect reality as much as project it. Since the horror film utilize the figure of the monster as a symbol or a metaphor for social injustice, it is exceptionally conscious of the sociohistorical moment in which it is made. Furthermore, in the 1970s in the United States, these films started to operate as a very lucid critique of many aspects of the dominant order. This discursive quality of the horror film is elaborated in the chapter “Literature Review: Explaining the Social Conscious”. Moreover, in this chapter I discuss the nature of horror genre, key concepts and main theoretical approaches. On the other hand, discussion on the horror film’s *political*

unconscious is divided in two chapters: in the first one, “Toward a New Approach: Mapping the Political Unconscious”, I provide theoretical background for this concept, using primarily theories of Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida and Frederic Jameson; while in the second, “Analysis: All Heads Turn When a Monster Goes By”, I apply this theoretical model to 10 films in order to uncover the *political unconscious* in the horror film of the 1970s. In the conclusion, “The Monster – An Eulogy”, I summarize my findings and show its relevance for social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology.

Therefore, the main question is: *How can the horror film be useful for sociology and anthropology?* In order to explain this, I use discourse analysis. According to Foucault (2002:54), discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”. Therefore, I postulate film as a discourse – a set of communicative practices that constitute the object they relate to. Discourse analysis, as a “primarily a qualitative method of ‘reading’ texts and documents which explores the connections between language, communication, knowledge, power and social practices”, can “reveal how knowledges are organized, carried and reproduced in particular ways and through particular institutional practices” (in Jupp 2006:74). For this reason, discourse analysis “emphasizes the way version of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse” (Potter 1997:146). This method is convenient for my case-studies because it is anti-realist and constructivist. As Potter (1997:158) asserts, discourse analysis is trying “to see things as things that are worked up, attended to and made relevant in interaction rather than being external determinants”. Therefore, this method locates text as a social practice. As such, it explores the representation of external reality that can be accessed through text, without trying to present its interpretation as an objective one. Consequently, discourse analysis can reveal much of the context in which these films were produced. Furthermore, when it comes to the film itself, it can reveal how values, institutions and practices are constructed and represented through particular

configuration of knowledge (Given 2008). Therefore, it reveals social, cultural and political conditions that made the text possible, but can also expose the processes that disqualified individuals or social groups as the Other. In this way, discursive analysis can reveal how text produces and disseminates ways of knowing in a particular culture (Pickering 2008). Discourses as such are always part of their context, but have the ability to speak of what these contexts can potentially turn into. And that is what the analysis of the horror film provides us with: hypothetical situations placed in a real context.

Now let us uncover the *political unconscious* of the horror film and expose that which is present in every society and culture – universality of antagonisms.

Literature Review:

EXPLAINING THE SOCIAL CONSCIOUS

The history of the horror film is essentially a history of anxiety in the twentieth century.

— Paul Wells

For many years, whenever there was a “serious discussion” on cinema’s sociological, anthropological or political relevance or value, one genre was almost never mentioned – horror. Nevertheless, horror films are no different from the “serious ones”: they try to represent social reality in which they were made. Furthermore, they try to actively engage in a dialogue with social phenomenon they follow. In other words, the horror film is not just a *commentary* on social reality, but an *agent* within it. Therefore, if one wants to speak of the horror film not only as a useful *interpretative framework*, but a relevant *analytical tool* and *theoretical model* for social sciences – especially sociology and anthropology – one must identify its structure, major themes and concepts, and specific politics of representation. As a consequence, its *discursive* quality becomes visible. However, in order to postulate the horror film as a form of discursive representation of social reality, one must find the lowest common denominator of numerous theoretical approaches to it. This is not an easy task, since the genre has a fluid nature: horror is not thematically, historically, nor geographically determined, and as such can never be grasped in its *pure* form, since it is always given as a hybrid – merged with other (sub)genres. Therefore, as a genre without any substantial topical or formal boundaries, it can infiltrate into any representation of a *possible* social situation. In addition, its *supernatural* component (which dominates most of horror narratives) enables it to speak of *hypothetical* social reality.

In order for it to be a genre, horror has to have a set of characteristics which make it recognizable. Then the question is: *What are the conventions that ensure proper reception of*

horror film? The answer: narrative structure and iconography. Tudor (1989:81) identified the model of horror narrative: “a monstrous threat is introduced into a stable situation; the monster rampages in the face of attempts to combat it; the monster is (perhaps) destroyed and order (perhaps) restored”. One can observe that iconography is also described in here – the *figure of the monster*. From this the key variables can be extrapolated: (1) the nature of the Monster, (2) the nature of its victims, and (3) the nature of the setting. In short, even if the horror narratives operate in different contexts, structure of the genre itself is focused on the confrontation between the Order (man, society, the system of values) and the Other (everything that does not fit in), which cannot result in compromise, reconciliation or other peaceful resolution between the agents that form the binary (infra)structure of the genre.

One can notice that horror is more than any other genre *existentially directed*: it does not provide escapism, but confrontation with death, boundary, excess, with which is unfamiliar, uncanny, incomprehensible. As such, it creates a pregnant hermeneutic condition which enables its agents to substantially speak of basic phenomena of human existence through its comparison with phenomena which do not fit within our social order. This *otherness* cannot be systematized inside our logosphere. And precisely it is in this *otherness* and its relation to the *status quo* that I see the significance of the horror film for social sciences. Within the generic structure, Wells (2000:6-7) identified 5 *grand narratives* of the horror film:

- “social alienation”;
- “the collapse of spiritual and moral order”;
- “a deep crisis of evolutionary identity”;
- “the overt articulation of humankind’s inner-most imperatives”;
- “the need to express the implications of human existence in an appropriate aesthetic”.

All of these narratives are essentially anthropological and sociological in nature. However, one other discourse set the foundations for proper academic reception of the (horror) film as a distinctive discourse. It was psychoanalysis.

Some of the most important concepts of the horror film were articulated within psychoanalytical framework. Since this approach is looking for universalistic foundations, it has managed to identify the horror film's unit of analysis: the *figure of the monster*. From this point of view, the Monster is conceptualized as a symbol or a metaphor for something from the real world, whose true significance can be discovered only through analysis. Another significant contribution is logical consequence of the previous: the Monster is not something supernatural, an evil incarnate, but the *Other*. For that reason, the Monster has been associated with anxieties and traumas of adolescence (Twitchell 1985), forces of the id (Tarratt 1995), the anguish of castration (Neale 1980), or queer intrusion into the heterosexual world (Benshoff 1997). Psychoanalysis was a great influence to feminist film theory, another approach that tackled with the horror film in many occasions. Clover (1992:230) stated that the horror film is specific because it is the "marginal genre that appeals to marginal people" which "operates in an allegorical or expressionist or folkloric/mythic mode, whereby characters are understood to concentrize essences; and because, accordingly, that mode allows for the representation of 'feminine masochism' in female form, with no male cover, in ways not suitable to more realistic traditions". Other authors associated the Monster with the transgression of white male's definition of what a "real woman" should be (Creed 1994, Ussher 2006, Tasker 1998).

However, both of these approaches were dismissed as one-dimensional (Crane 1994, Tudor 1989). The condition of confrontation in horror films does help us to better understand the world, but not only on the level of individuals. Therefore, the Monster does not represent only a-historical phenomena, but also the very contextual ones (i.e. social, political and

cultural). This was overcome in the work of Robin Wood, an author who almost singlehandedly changed understanding and reception of the horror film in the academic world. His amalgam of Marxist criticism and Freudian psychoanalysis provided him with apparatus for the sociopolitical interpretation of the horror film that very quickly became the mainstream theory of the horror cinema. He explicitly stated the idea that what happens in the film is a direct effect of what happens in American society and politics. Nowadays Wood's (2003:64) imperative "[t]o write politically about film means, basically, to write from an awareness of how individual films dramatize, as they inevitably must, the conflicts that characterize our culture: conflicts centered on class/wealth, gender, race, sexual orientation" is taken as a self-evident truth in the field of film studies.

Wood's particular interest was the horror film, a genre that can fundamentally speak of oppression (Marist component) and repression (Freudian component), and has the ability to illustrate difference and continuity between them (Wood 2003). In order to link these two phenomena he introduced in the horror film studies the concept of the Other. Drawing on Barthes (1995), he explained the Other as "that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with [...] in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself" (Wood 2003:65). In short, the horror film has the ability to show how autonomy of the Other is never recognized by the existing order. Furthermore, Wood has identified the modes of existence of the Other in the American culture: other people, women, the proletariat, other cultures, ethnic groups within the culture, alternative ideologies or political systems, deviations from sexual norms, and children. In this sense, the horror film is the most socially and politically conscious genre since "central to it is the actual dramatization of the dual concept of the repressed/the Other, in the figure of the Monster". Therefore, "the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization

represses or oppresses, its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression” (Wood 2003:68). This constitutes the basic formula of the horror film: normality – defined as conformity to the dominant social norms – is threatened by the Monster. And this relationship between normality and the Monster constitutes the essential subject of the horror film.

For this reason, the Monster is a representation of the “return of the repressed”, and that is why it has the ability to function as a progressive critique of the dominant order. However, it also possesses a reactionary side in which “the monster becomes [...] simply the instrument of puritan vengeance and repression rather than the embodiment of what puritanism repressed” (Wood 2003:172). In other words, the reactionary wing of the horror cinema is focused on the empowerment of bourgeois patriarchal norms. Wood identified the following characteristics of this faction:

- the Monster is the Evil incarnate, and as such is metaphysical subversive force not to our sociocultural being, but to our very existence – to the humanity itself, so it must be kept repressed;
- the presence of Christianity (as a part of dominant ideology);
- representation of the Monster as non-human, something that cannot be identified with;
- the Monster as a punishment for sexual promiscuity.

The horror film’s potential for a progressive social critique is in much more sophisticated way explained by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner. They assert that analysis of violence against women in the horror film points out “the centrality of a seemingly marginal cultural phenomenon to the normal operations of a social run on principles of aggressivity, competition, domination, and the survival of the fittest” (Ryan and Kellner 1990:168). During times of social and economic crises, these principles become evident to the

point of grotesque. For that reason, the Monster emerges as an embodiment of collective fears generated in a particular turbulent period. Furthermore, Ryan and Kellner assert that these visions of social order in peril can function as an efficient way of questioning the very stability of conservative principles. And this is where they located progressive tactics of the horror film: the Monster is a mechanism of questioning the *status quo*. When it comes to horror as the genre that can fundamentally speak of social issues, they explicitly state that “if the horror metaphor provides a medium for expressing fears the culture cannot deal with directly, it also provides a vehicle for social critiques too radical for mainstream Hollywood production”, where “some of the most radical statements in criticism of American society were to be found in the low-budget monster films” (Ryan and Kellner 1990:169). In short, the horror film has a deconstructivist potential because it is pointing to internal monstrosities of capitalism, which consequently exposes the temporal quality of its values, institutions and practices (that we are used to take for granted as natural and universal).

Ryan and Kellner also point to a fundamental distinction between the classical and the modern horror film. The rupture was made in 1968 with George Romero’s *The Night of the Living Dead*. While in earlier films the destruction of the Monster – through operations of conservative authority figures and/or institutions – represented restoration and empowerment of the existing social order; “[i]n most contemporary monster films no reassuring vision of restored order is affirmed”, since “the monster is often a figure less of an external threat to an essentially good social order than of exaggeration of the most normal features of that very order” (Ryan and Douglas 1990:179). Therefore, for Ryan and Kellner, the horror film is not only functioning as a social commentary, but at the same time as political critique: in conservative films, the Monster is used to demonstrate that there is always an external threat to the Order; while in left-liberal ones, it illustrates the monstrosity of “normality” of the American society and its values and institutions.

The downside of the Marxist reading of the horror film is that it does not make a distinction between social representation and open political critique, rather it unifies them both in a very rigid and simplistic ideological framework: the horror film is adequately representing social reality only when it is criticizing it. However, this is somewhat overcome in the work of Kendall R. Phillips. When analyzing horror cinema, his starting point is Greenblatt's (1990) discussion of literature's relationship to culture, so he asserts that "[r]ather than creating cultural fears or reflecting them (as in allegory)", film "resonate [...] to trends within the broader culture" (Phillips 2005:6). As such, horror *resonates* with fears and anxieties in a given culture. In addition to this, Phillips identified one more important element: *violation*. Therefore, successful and influential horror films not only resonate with their context, but violate expectations of that context. This is achieved through violation of the rules of the game in a given context, by introducing something new and unexpected. Phillips unifies this familiarity and excess (shock) in the concept of *resonant violation*. This violation of narrative expectations forces the audience to think differently about these anxieties and fears. As such, it can show us broader cultural significance of horror cinema. Phillips (2005:8) explains that "[b]y drawing upon our collective anxieties – projecting them, even if indirectly, upon the screen before us – horror films can be said to be vitally interested in the broader cultural politics of their day". In this way, the horror film becomes an effective instrument for reflecting on these anxieties.

One can see that central to these approaches is the figure of the monster. Most of these theories draw from Douglas' (1984) concept of (un)purity and Kristeva's (1982) concept of abjection, where the Monster is viewed as something that violates "normal" categories. For Telotte (1987:115), the horror film is a "genre especially concerned with conjuring up images whose existence we might previously have hardly suspected or perhaps sought to suppress from consciousness". For that reason, the Monster can be anything, because it transgresses

borders and exists *in-between* culturally established categories. Essentially, it is a *categorical violation*: as an uncategorizable phenomenon it threatens to destroy not only mechanisms but the very logic of categorization of the culture (Hutchings 2004). To put it simply, as an *ontologically* transgressive phenomenon, “a thing that should not be”, the Monster can destroy the engines of “ontological” distinctions – culture and society. In other words, it is a threat to our common sense way of understanding the world around us (Hutchings 2004). For Carroll (1990:34-35), monsters are “un-natural relative to a culture’s conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit in the scheme; they violate it. Thus, monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge. [...] For such monsters are in a certain sense challenges to the foundations of a culture’s way of thinking.” In short, geography of horror is “a figurative spatialization or literalization of the notion that what horrifies is that which lies *outside* cultural categories and is, perforce, unknown”. Cohen (1996a:ix) is on the same track, as he sees the Monster as “an extreme version of marginalization, an abjecting epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation [...], a code or a pattern or a presence or an absence that unsettles what has been constructed to be received as natural, as human”.

Cohen (1996b) provided the most comprehensive definition of the figure of the monster through seven theses which I will summarize here. For him, the Monster embodies anxieties, fears, desires and fantasies of a particular culture. As such, the Monster’s body is essentially a cultural body. On the other hand, since the Monster embodies particular historical moment, it constantly “escapes” – it always changes, can never be fully destroyed, because it emerges as different all the time. In other words, it escapes because it refuses permanent categorization. Furthermore, as an ontologically liminal phenomenon, the Monster is dangerous to the distinctions established in one particular culture in a particular historical period: it represents a crisis to binary mode of thinking, and consequently is re-thinking boundary and normality.

For this reason, the Monster is difference, and difference is always social, cultural, political, economic, ideological, racial and sexual. As such, it is not a threat to individuality, but to cultural apparatus that forms individuality. This destructiveness that the Monster possesses is actually *deconstructiveness*: the difference is in the representation of the “fact”, rather in the “fact”, where every representation that is repressed returns through the Monster. Finally, the Monster also represents forbidden thoughts and practices, and therefore it is at the same time object of desire. As such, body of the Monster is our experience of the Other. In short, it is an abjected element that facilitates formation of identities.

The lowest common denominator for Cohen’s theses on the nature of the Monster is that the Monster is a metaphor, a projection of that which does not fit in a particular culture, and thus is articulated through anxieties and fears (Maddrey 2004, Wells 2000). For this reason, the major theme of horror films is a way in which individuals and/or social groups/society try to preserve and control that which the Monster is threatening to destroy. In other words, through the attempt of trying to protect what we have, we give purpose to the established order and make life meaningful. In this way, the Monster is a threat to the social values, norms, institutions and practices that have been “normalized”.

However, the main problem with the approaches that view the Monster as a violation is that they see it as something that is always “out there”, as something that comes, creates havoc and leaves. In other words, the Monster is a thing of non-identity, because it exists only to question the *status quo* or to be a threat to the identity. It does not have positive meaning, but rather always negative value. Some other approaches have tried to fill this gap. For Dadoun (1989) and Wells (2000), the Monster is not a violation, but a fetishization. The Monster is contextualized through fetishization: the object is admired for itself. Therefore, if the fetish is a signifier of totality, then

figures like Dracula, Michael Myers, and Freddie Krueger may be configured in this respect: the illusory autonomy of the monster and its context often re-determines or ignores the contingencies of

the social world. It is therefore not surprising that the horror film has flourished in periods of difficulty or collapse because it offers the wholeness, the enigma of its meaning, and a dissociated context to engage with. (Wells 2000:22)

This means that the Monster is “a textual figure that can simultaneously expose and occlude what is culturally too horrible to be viewed directly” (Nixon 1998:233). This function is the most evident for post-1968 horror cinema when it became constructive support for many liberation movements (Wood 2004). For this reason, these films were not feminist as some authors claimed (Haskell 1987), but a reaction to same social processes that led to feminism (Cherry 2009).

Therefore, ethical ambivalence of the Monster was not the only indicator for the emergence of modern horror film, but also how the woman was represented in it. In films of the 1970s, woman’s “survival is no longer dependent on the intervention of an authority figure, but on her own capabilities” (Cherry 2009:174). Furthermore, Cherry points to one of the most important characteristics of the modern horror film: the absence of narrative closure. She asserts that “[r]egardless of the ideology encoded in these films, they all centre on a monster or form of monstrosity that is represented within the text in opposition to the dominant ideological stance”, so the history of horror “is thus the history of the way other people and groups exhibiting markers of difference have been regarded and depicted by their society” (Cherry 2009:175-176). Therefore, the central question which the horror film raises is the formation of identity, which is articulated through our confrontation with the Other. However, this can be only understood by analyzing a particular film in its context. Wells (2000:3) is also explicit: horror has, more than any other genre, “interrogated the deep-seated effects of change and responded to the newly determined grand narratives of social, scientific and philosophical thought”. This is articulated through “*the* fundamental theme of the horror film – in which the ‘monster’ [...] represents the archetypal struggle, not merely between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, but for the presence of an ‘order’ which seeks to evidence and maintain the

idea that there is someone or something to believe in which justifies material existence” (Wells 2000:6). And I find this struggle very important for my argument.

While all of these approaches focus on the figure of the monster as a proper unit of analysis, I argue that they omit one important fact: the confrontation with the Monster that can never reach peaceful resolution. And I see this antagonistic relationship as the key feature of the horror film’s relevance for sociology and anthropology. The subversive potential of the Monster is important, especially its status of the Other. Furthermore, it can be a violation and a fetish. However, if we conceive it as one of these ideas, we do not get an answer why the antagonistic relationship can never reach nonviolent closure. And I claim that this antagonism should be postulated as a theoretical model, because only then we can see not only the social conscious of the horror film, but also the *political unconscious*.

Toward a New Theoretical Model:
MAPPING THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS

Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch.

— Friedrich Hölderlin

One can see from the previous chapter that the horror film primarily deals with supernatural disturbance of the real world. In this way, ontological foundation of reality are destabilized and have outcome in a hypothetical reality, a kind of *off-shot* representations of reality itself. In other words, the particular sociohistorical reality – social institutions, political values or cultural phenomena – is *expanded* both semantically and analytically. As such, the horror film is a ready-made (discursive) analysis that is openly positioning itself as a subjective representation. For that reason, it deals primarily with values, institutions and practices in a given culture. In other words, the narrative structure and iconography of the horror film provide the genre with an opportunity for thinking “outside the box” of social theory: it is a “sneak peak” into every “possible world” of our (social) reality.

While in previous chapters I have presented the horror film as an interpretative framework, in the following pages I postulate it both as *analytical tool* and *theoretical model* for better understanding of the world in which we live in.

Why Fiction?: Film as a Useful Tool for Sociology and Anthropology

Reality is constituted as a text, and consequently film can be constituted as a text. This means that all the structures, or “possible referents” that constitute our social reality – economic, political, historical, cultural, social, and even cinematic – are of textual nature. Therefore, *there is nothing outside the text*. This infamous statement does not mean “that all

referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed”, but “that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this ‘real’ except in an interpretative experience”, where “[t]he latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring” (Derrida 1988:148). This implies *impossibility* of *authentic* representation of reality that is on the same ontological level as the object which it is representing. In other words, cinematic representation operates on the same level of discursive representation like historiography, sociology or anthropology.

Drawing on Derrida, deconstructivist historians (Jenkins 1991, LaCapra 1985, White 1978) demonstrated how the legitimized, authoritarian representation of reality, which is historiography, is nothing more than a *fictional* reconstruction of fragments of the past. Therefore, when one juxtaposes film with the metanarrative of historiographical representation, one can see that they are very similar: there is an *ontological* distinction between the *past* (meaningless network of events) and the *history* (how we put fragments of this network into a linear narrative and fill it out with meaning). In other words, while the former is the Real, meaningless externality, never approachable outside symbolic order, and thus always mediated by our subjectivity, the latter is a discursive construct of the previous and as such is “never for itself” but “always for someone” (Jenkins 1991:17). Furthermore, Jenkins (2003:29) explains a distinction between social reality – which in its totality exist only in the past – and its representation by saying that

[t]he past contains nothing of the intrinsic value, nothing we *have* to be loyal to, no facts we *have* to find, no truths we *have* to respect, no problems we *have* to solve, no projects we *have* to complete; it is we who decide these things *knowing* – and if we know anything we know this – that there are no grounds on which we can ever get such decisions right. [...] We can never know the exact status (truth) of that part of the whole we inherit, for we do not know the whole, the totality of history.

This means that we can represent only a limited number of reality-fragments, since it is impossible to reduce totality to rhetoric figures. Given that it is not possible to think of totality – because we do not have sufficient symbolic capacity that would represent it – it can never

achieve closure in language/writing, since the words are always in endless relations to other signifiers (Derrida 1997). Therefore, every signifier needs to be supplemented by another in order to achieve its meaning. In other words, context is not only outside the text, but very much in it – it relates to every word, every possible relation between them. It provides them with meaning, no matter how temporal it is.

Since some forms of representation are legitimized as scientific, the meaning they produce is constituted as the truth. In this way they achieve closure, not internally but externally – through power relations (Foucault 1979). Therefore, a particular representation of social reality achieves its closure through dominant system of power and knowledge, which constitutes dominant ideology as an instrument of maintaining of the *status quo*. This implies that the value of meaning is outside the fact itself: it is in its conformance with the dominant power/knowledge system. As White (1978:60) asserts “the historian must draw upon a fund of culturally provided *mythoi* in order to constitute the facts as figuring a story of a particular kind, just as he must appeal to that same fund of *mythoi* in the minds of his readers to endow his account of the past with the odor of meaning or significance”. This does not only relate to historians, but all social scientists. These accounts are always for someone, and as such are defined by *intentionality*, which is legitimized through power relations.

The logical result is that the fact can never be isolated, since it is in ready-made relation to a particular interpretation, which as such derives from another one. It is a vicious circle. Therefore, once isolated, a sociohistorical fact is a void without intrinsic meaning, and sociohistorical event is something that does not exist without *post festum* narrativization. In other words, a historical fact is a symptom of impossibility of objective representation – the Real (the past) and reality (representation of the past) are *ontologically* different. This leads to conclusion that any representation is a narrative prose discourse, whose content is also

determined by its form. In short, just like the film, sociohistorical account is fabricated, polished, figured out – an aesthetic product (Jenkins 2003).

Between *Différance* and *Sinthome*: Where Every Monster Resides

Here I am going to move away from the dominant approach which views the figure of the monster as the unit of analysis, where it is perceived as a metaphor or a symbol. The Monster, however, has to be postulated as a *sinthome*...

Žižek (1992b:126) states that the recurring motifs in the film must be conceived as *sinthoms*, “as a signifier’s constellation (formula) which fixes a certain core of enjoyment, like mannerisms in painting – characteristic details which persist and repeat themselves without implying a common meaning”. As such, these repeated motifs designate “the *limit of interpretation*: they are what resist interpretation, the inscription into the texture of a specific visual enjoyment”. He sees this as a crucial factor that enables us to find connections where they seemingly do not exist. This is because every object acquires identity through its signifier, and as such compose discursive representation: creation of an object through a signifier. In other words, the object gains meaning only when it is positioned in the symbolic order – in which signifier receives meaning.

Lacan (1988) viewed symptom as a “trace” that receives meaning in the latter stage of analysis. Žižek’s (1989:55-56) explanation for this is that the “[s]ymptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively – the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning.” In other words, symptom is the “return of the repressed”, but “from the future”, a place in which *the effect precedes its cause* (Žižek 1989). For this reason, what we receive initially from the past is a contingent trauma,

the non-symbolized Real, which through repetition is realized in the symbolic order with “proper” meaning. This means that the Other is never actually the Other, rather that which is new in the symbolic Order or that which was on the margins of it, but is now fully constituted in the centre – to give support to the dominant *ideology*. However, before I go to Žižek’s definition of ideology, let us see how the horror film can expose ideology at work.

In order to do that, we have to picture the Monster as a symptom. Žižek (1989:75) explains “ontological status of symptom” by asserting that a

symptom, conceived as *sinthome*, is literally our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject. In other words, symptom is the way we – the subjects – “avoid madness”, the way we “choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of symbolic universe)” through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world.

This means that the alternative to a symptom is nothing, the meaningless Real. If we have in mind that a symptom is “a formation whose very consistency implies a certain non-knowledge on the part of the subject, and this subject can ‘enjoy his symptom’ only in so far as its logic escapes him – the measure of the success of its interpretation is precisely its dissolution” (Žižek, 1989:21), it is easy to see why the horror cinema can provide us with theoretical model of the interpreted symptom. In other words, the Monster is the interpreted *sinthome*: trauma of the Real which exposes ideology at work.

The Monster opens the door into the unconscious – “a form of thought whose ontological status is not that of thought” (Žižek, 1989:19). This is what is behind *sinthome* – something which is nothing in reality. What horror films are showing is how it would look like if we were witnesses to the horror of thought that is previous and external to the symbolic order (Žižek 1989). Interpretation of *sinthome* faces us with the ultimate horror of the Real: when the signifier is removed, we are left with emptiness of the thing that cannot be positioned in (diegetic) symbolic order – at the same time it is everything and nothing.

However, once a man is confronted with the Other, a binary opposition is constituted: what we *are* and what we *are not*.

Horror films show us how we would look if we lived outside reality – in the Real: we would be an incomprehensible entity, everything that we are *not* in the reality. The Real of the symptom is “the only support for [our] being” (Žižek 1989:75). In this sense, the Real is ontological, while reality is an ontic phenomenon. Their relation is perfectly explained by Laclau (2005:226): “ontological function can be present *only* when it is attached to an ontic content”, where “the latter becomes the horizon of all there is – the point at which the ontic and the ontological fuse into a contingent but indivisible unity.” As such, a *sinthome* cannot be included in “the circuit of discourse, of social bond network, but is at the same time a positive condition of it” (Žižek 1989:75). And the Monster is precisely this – a part of the Real that must be positioned in the symbolic order in order to become the Other, and consequently to give positive support for that order which it is trying to subvert. In other words, it exposes ideology in the unconscious of everyday practice.

But why is the Real so terrifying? Because it is “a hard kernel resisting symbolization, dialecticization, persisting in its place, always returning to it”, and as such does not exist in reality, but “has a series of properties – it exercises a certain structural causality, it can produce a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects”. The Monster is precisely the intrusion of the Real in reality, of that which does not exist – “which is present only in series of effects, but always in a distorted, displaced way” (Žižek 1989:161, 163). And these intrusions appear in reality in the form of *antagonisms*: contextualized oppositions that I will discuss in the next chapter. It is a property of the Real, a void that receives its content in reality. Žižek (1992a) sees it as that which is *nothing* that is constituted retroactively, from what it produces. In a word, it prevents closure of social field. Therefore, the “class struggle”

is the “return of the repressed”, since it is presented as the effect of antagonism, where any attempt to totalize social reality fails (Žižek 1989). And this is where ideology fills the void.

After the initial shock of “experiencing” the Real – in the form of the Monster – either a new ideology is established or the old one dissolved. The Real is once again “repressed” into the *unconscious* of reality: the Other – that is as a trauma completely meaningless – is incorporated in the symbolic order, and consequently into the ideological field. Therefore, in order to avoid madness, we still choose ideology – a signifying, symbolic formation that has been constituted after the initial shock, and through which binary opposition are articulated. In Žižek’s terms, a new *sinthome* has been formed: it forms ideological field and provides it with an identity. And the (diegetic) reality is being reproduced through ideology. For Žižek, reality *is* embedded in ideology. Once men start overlooking *sinthome*, reality is once again “functional”.

Desire – as a phenomenon of eternal reproduction of itself – is the engine of practice, and this is precisely where ideology is located. If desire is a relation to a lack, it sets in motion ideology, which endlessly provides objects that can never satisfy desire. However, contextualized, articulated modes of desire – demands – can. In this reality of demanding (doing) ideology serves as the way of fulfilling these demands. As Žižek (1982, 1992c) states, it is *in the practice* that we continue to reproduce ideology: once the Monster gains its position in the symbolic order, it is viewed as the threat to dominant (constitutive) ideology. This means that the Monster is only subversive force in reality, but not in the Real since everything is part of the Real. And “subversive element” is an ideological construction *par excellence*. Protagonists of horror films do not know if the Monster’s agenda is positive or negative, but *in their activity* they do: they act as if it is a threat to human species itself. And this is precisely how their activity is ideological. Maybe the Monster is “sent” to “save the planet” by obliterating human species, but ideological activity of men/women is obvious: they

act from the position of their ideological unconscious, by preserving existing (symbolic, social, etc.) order. This *is* ideology: *things we do not know that we know*. As such it is precisely a “black box” that operates on the unconscious level. As Callon and Latour (1981:285) have noticed, it contains “that which no longer needs to be reconsidered, those things whose contents have become matter of indifference.” However, it is not “hidden” in the knowledge, but in the *unconscious* of individual’s practice. In short, the Monster exposes ideology hidden in the unconscious.

In the previous chapter, I spoke of the Monster as a *categorical violation*, as the force that operates *in-between* binary oppositions, that cannot be fully included in the symbolic order. In other words, this figure shows us that the antagonism must remain constant, since it is the part of the Real. As a ready-made subversive force, it cannot be ideologically mystified. It can never attain positive value. As such – the same in all possible universes – it is the antagonism itself. Positive support for our (ideological) being is generated in the Monster’s *negativity*: it cannot be comprehended, and consequently we “overlook” our ideological relationship with it. In other words, the meaningless of the Monster is repressed into the unconscious, which exposes the universality of antagonisms in social practice. However, it also exposes the temporality of social formations. Žižek (1994:25) identifies the possibility of non-ideological contemplation on ideology precisely in the Real of antagonisms: “the ultimate support of the critique of ideology – the extra-ideological point of reference that authorizes us to denounce the content of our immediate experience as ‘ideological’ – is not ‘reality’ but the ‘repressed’ real of antagonism.” In short, the Monster *is* a (interpreted) *sinthome* of this antagonism.

Just like Lacan who sees *sinthome* as a trace, Derrida views *différance*. Its origin is it that what “*must not* and cannot be approached”, that which “must not be presented, represented or above all penetrated”, for it is “the law of the law” (quoted in Beardsworth

1996:35). Therefore, we cannot understand or grasp the essence of *différance*. It cannot be exposed, because it a mechanism that “makes possible the presentation of the being-present”. In this sense, it a property of the Real, since it “does not exist, in a present being (*on*) in any form [...], it has neither existence nor essence”, but it is producing space for existence (Derrida 1982:6). However, it operates as a *sinthome* – a positive support for our being. Derrida (1982:21-22) is most explicit when he asserts that *différance*

is not a present being, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. Not only there is no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of kingdom.

It is precisely the “trace” that receives its meaning in the latter stage of analysis – it is the matter of symbolic order. *Différance* produces the series of effects in symbolic reality. For this reason, *différance* can be only thought of in the last analysis, “from the place and the time in which ‘we’ are” (Derrida 1982:7). It does not have any intrinsic meaning. Consequently, the figure of the Monster cannot be a unit of analysis, because then it operates as a sign – that is put in the place of the thing itself. In Derrida’s terms, it is presence in absence. However, the Monster is not that, the Monster is a *trace*: it “is no more an effect than it has a cause, but which in and of itself, outside its text, is not sufficient to operate the necessary transgression” (Derrida 1982:12). Therefore, the Monster has to be related to something other than itself. *Différance* is then “displaced and equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other” (Derrida 1982:17).

Now, these effects can be only detected in a linguistic system – we can recognize presence of *différance*, but we can never grasp what it is. For Derrida (1997), a linguistic system is a contingent system that is “inspired” by reality, but does not relate to it, since it relates to its own rules. Those rules cannot be accessed, since *différance* is its *sinthome*. And when this relation between words is hidden, deconstruction is made possible – that relation is

an empty void. Thus, every reading is essentially a misreading, because the relations between terms are limitless. This is because everything is constructed in language – because there is no possibility to give meaning outside of it. This void appears in reality through *différance*. Norris (1991:32) sees it as a “disturbance at the level of the signifier”, where structuralist concept of fixed structures of binary oppositions dissolve into thin air. Here *differ* goes into *defer*, which “involves the idea that meaning is always deferred, perhaps to the point of an endless supplementary, by the play of signification”. In short, it implies impossibility of semantic closure. Word is not a part of the Real, but creates reality through its network of relations with other words; and it refers to it, but differs from it. This is precisely the void between the Real and reality. In this way, the Monster is not the Other – the one that relates to Self – but *différance*: it is excess, never permanently positioned in one binary opposition, neither unity nor difference. As such it not an adequate unit of analysis. The Monster is that which gives consistency to our position in antagonisms of the Real, but which we can never fully grasp.

In short, the Monster is both *différance* and *sinthome*. It is that which can only be represented in a series of contextualized phenomena. It is that which does not mean anything outside of reality. It is that which lurks in the shadows of “common sense” of understanding reality. It is that which can be found in the *political unconscious* – ideology that is embedded in the structure of the narrative. Therefore, we must explain not just “the other in *différance*”, but the “*différance* of the other” (Derrida 1982:18).

Mapping the Political Unconscious: The Lair of the Monster

If the Monster is both *sinthome* and *différance*, it must be viewed as a “trace”. However, how should it be interpreted?

Jameson (1989:17) sees political reading as “the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation”, where the political is not only an effect, but a precondition of interpretation. In other words, “everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political” (Jameson 1989:20). Therefore, even works of “pure” entertainment are politically unconscious, which means that every cultural artifact is a socially symbolic act. But what does this mean exactly? Every cultural object inherently includes social order within which it was produced, and thus it is no longer simply an individual “text”, but is a ready-made collective discourse. Precisely in this cultural artifacts Jameson identifies object of study – *ideologeme*, which is the “smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes”. This ideologeme constitutes *political unconscious* of a given cultural objects, and the very form of the object that is articulated in this unconscious. He identifies this as an *ideology of form*, that is the “symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production” (Jameson 1989:76). In this sense, “ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions” (Jameson 1989:79). And as such, cultural object enables the fundamental mediation of the Real, in which not only that objective reality is projected, but essentially is the “vehicle for our experience of the real” (Jameson 1989:48). And this narrativization of the Real – which is accessible only through textual form – is precisely generated in the *political unconscious*. In other words, the unit of analysis should

not be the figure of the monster, but the *relationship* between the Order and the Other which is essentially antagonistic. It is in this “void” of antagonism through which dominant social order reproduces itself. As Jameson (1989:81, 82) asserts, in order to postulate individual work of art means to transform traditional *explication de texte*, which view subtext “in not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality, [...] but rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact. The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real” where it must “draw the Real into its own texture”, and in that way cultural objects “brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction”.

Translated in terminology of the horror film studies, while the analysis of the figure of monster provides us with social conscious – that is, the ethical (ideological) evaluation of particular elements, the analysis of (antagonistic) structural relationship between the Order and the Other exposes the *political unconscious*: on the level of totality, there can never be tolerance for the Other. Therefore, the Monster must be understood as a symbolic vehicle, “in terms of its essentially polysemous function rather than any particular content attributable to it by this or that spectator”, where “precisely this polysemousness [...] is profoundly ideological, insofar as it allows essentially social and historical anxieties to be folded back into apparently ‘natural’ ones, both to express and to be recontained in what looks like a conflict with other forms of biological existence” (Jameson 1992:26-27). In this way, the crucial problem is one of a structural kind – of the existence of *structural antagonisms*.

Now, let us try contextualize this in a domain of the horror film. When Jameson talks about distinction between good and evil, he says that “[n]ot metaphysics but ethics is the informing ideology of the binary opposition” (Jameson 1989:114). This way, it is easy to see how a particular social context evaluates these two antinomies. Evil is then whatever is radically different from what is considered in that context to be “us” – evil is the Other.

However, Jameson (1989:115) is clear that the Other is not evil *per se*, “rather he is evil *because* he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar”. Now, to escape ethics – in a sense of analyzing the figure of the monster – we must “grasp the ideologeme itself as a form of social praxis, that is, as a symbolic resolution to a concrete historical situation” (Jameson 1989:117). In other words, ideologeme always reveals the reality of contradictions that must be filled with ideological meaning and therefore ethically evaluated. Therefore, genre is “essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms, that form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right” (Jameson 1989:141).

All things considered, one can see that the Monster represents the “interpreted *sinthome*”, but simultaneously constitutes a new one. It points to dissolution of certain ideology, by bringing to surface temporality of social values, institutions, norms and practices that were “normalized” through repression into the unconscious. Therefore, the Monster can never be fully interpreted, because it operates like *différance* – its *in-betweenness* is destabilizing simple binary oppositions. As such, the figure of the Monster is not a proper unit of analysis, because it is never constituted within one binary opposition. However, once conceived as a “trace”, the Monster can expose antagonistic relationship between these oppositions. It can show how we are constituted through a vast network of binary oppositions which are essentially in the antagonistic relationship. For this reason, this *structural antagonism* should be a unit of analysis. And this is where the *political unconscious* is located: tolerance for the Other can never be achieved, since it is the hostility toward the Other that gives consistency to our being.

Analysis:

ALL HEADS TURN WHEN A MONSTER GOES BY

This is no dream. This is really happening!

— Rosemary Woodhouse

In this chapter I am going to apply the theoretical model I discussed in the previous one. However, in order to do that, I must point to specifics of the films that are going to be analyzed. All of these films belong to the “golden era” of the horror film – the 1970s, a period in which films in general expressed a serious interest for social, political, cultural and economic issues of their time. The year 1968 was pivotal in constitution of the modern horror film and its narrative, which I find as the crucial element for the relevance of horror film for social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology.

With George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*, Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby*, and Peter Bogdanovich’s *Targets* the modern horror was born. These films eliminated the line that was separating good and evil. It was very difficult to ethically distinguish black from white. Furthermore, in many occasions it was evil that prevailed, so what was considered as “normal” was brought into question. These films set the trend and re-constituted horror narrative: monstrous was not always what we thought it to be, so ending was usually ambivalent. In Romero’s film, the “hero” fails to save anyone; in Polanski’s film, the “heroine” joins the forces of evil; and in Bogdanovich’s film, anyone can become the Monster.

Here I will discuss 10 horror films from the 1970s. In the first subchapter: *Shivers* (1975), *Rabid* (1977) and *The Brood* (1979); in the second: *It’s Alive* (1974), *The Omen* (1976) and *The Exorcist* (1973); in the third: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977); and in the final: *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* (1978) and *Dawn of*

the Dead (1978). Like many other authors, I find these films exceptionally representative for the horror cinema of the 1970s.

A World Without “False Consciousness”: *Shivers*, *Rabid* and *The Brood*

In this subchapter I am going to discuss the concept of ideology, and how it works on the unconscious level, through 3 early films of David Cronenberg. I argue that his first phase was not a simplistic reaction to sexual revolution (Wood 2003, 2004), but a complex anthropological inquiry in the “nature” of this phenomenon. In other words, by postulating the ultimately free body – the one that has liberated itself from the dictatorship of the mind (ideology) – as the Monster, Cronenberg exposes the true nature of the ideology: every consciousness is “false consciousness”, since we (and our everyday life) are constituted through ideology that works on the unconscious level. However, Cronenberg goes even further – he is not just exposing ideology at work, but showing us how the desired world of the social movements of the 1970s is actually their ultimate nightmare: a world without differences is a world without... humans. And, for Cronenberg, “human” is an ideological product *par excellence*.

The fact that these social differences are an ideological product does not mean that they are negative. On the contrary, they are, in Žižek’s (1989) terms, a signifying formation that provides us with identity. Without these differences that must be in antagonistic relationship, we would not have meaningful reality. For this reason, Cronenberg views true sexual freedom as one where all sexual differences are eliminated. But why is this freedom represented as monstrous in his films? Because the movements that cried for sexual revolution are essentially part of the same ideology they were opposing, and that is why they never completely succeeded. And this is where Cronenberg’s philosophy lies: everything

sexual is constructed, and it is never “natural” but always *political*. However, if we want to preserve social reality, these antagonisms can (and must) never reach peaceful resolution. In addition, Cronenberg shows us how it would look like if we were truly sexually free, stripped from political construction of our sexuality.

What is a sexual freedom then? Is it a freedom from political construction of sexual identity and sexuality? No, for Cronenberg, it is the freedom of the body to mutate and transform itself in order to attain desired configuration. However, body as such is traumatic, because it is a property of the Real. In other words, it is disturbing and repulsive because it is escaping our definition of what the human body is (or should be). Consequently, it became that which it is *not* – the Other. And this is where the *political unconscious* of Cronenberg’s films lies: while it is evident that this is the natural state of the human body, it is viewed as something that is not. Therefore, human body is what we think it is (because it is obvious that it is in its nature to change), it is what we *recognize* as its qualities: human body is not a property of biology, but of politics. This is why bourgeois patriarchal norms are essentially oppressive: no “deviations” are tolerated. However, oppositions to patriarchal norms are also ideological: they have their definitions of what human body is (not) supposed to be. And Cronenberg exposes this by going one step too far: he presents us with a truly free body, that is nobody’s body in term of its “proper” definition. For this body does not have ideological base, since its only goal is pleasure, and that is the monstrosity of it. In Lacanian terms, it has returned into the Real, where only desire rules.

In this sense, Cronenberg’s monster is precisely the interpreted *sinthome*: once we strip all the differences, we are left with nothing – a world without order or sense. And the monster as such is not evil, but rather traumatic. Those who have not become the Other articulate the world from the point of already existing ideology: they (re)position these “things” in the symbolic order. Thus a new antagonistic relationship is established – the one

in which they realize they are not the Other. Therefore, we cannot escape the ideological, because we think political on the unconscious level: our every relation in reality is of political nature. This is why Cronenberg presents the search for bodily identity as the ultimate transgression: it can only end up in malign transformations (mutations) which consume the mind (ideology), and bring us back into the Real. In other words, identity can never be constructed outside symbolic order – it always must be dictated “from above”: it is internalized structure on the unconscious level. This means that it is always constructed, not naturally but in the political powerfield of binary oppositions. Thus, the rise of the “new flesh” is a return to the *old* state – the natural one. To put it simply, as an “ontologically” transgressive phenomenon, the liberated body can destroy the engines of “ontological” distinctions – culture and society.

Since liberation from ideology is a liberation from symbolic order, Cronenberg’s conclusion is clear: ideology is not false consciousness, but the only consciousness that provides us with identity. In *Shivers*, two scientists create a benign parasite that can replace the function of specific organs, but what they do not know is that the parasite functions as a combination of aphrodisiac and venereal disease that spreads like an epidemic. Eventually, it transforms humans into beings of pure instinct with no regard to social conventions. With this simple move, Cronenberg dismantles Laura Mulvey’s (1989) concept of the male gaze, because he takes woman out of “normal” symbolic order, by presenting her as something different. In this film, women are presented as erotic, full of sexual energy, but *somehow* they cannot be objectified. That is because they are *abjectified*: for audience, they are not a sexual objects, but are in the state of the Otherness – the living dead, a pure body without aesthetic (political) quality. Cronenberg’s second feature, *Rabid*, upgrades his “body metaphysics”. An injured woman goes through experimental skin tissue transplantation, because of which her new skin under armpits mutates into the “new flesh”. While parasites in *Shivers* look like

falusoid feces, the new organ in *Rabid* looks like a vagina with a hidden penis inside. This is a disease, and to Cronenberg every disease “indicates the presence of some other life form”, a potential to become something new (Cronenberg in Grünberg 2005:167). And this “something new” is a return into the Real – the ultimate transgression to our social reality, a state of being non-human. However, for those who constitute reality, metamorphosis is not the end of human kind, but the birth of the Other.

As such, the Monster is a “trace” of structural antagonisms that can expose ideology at work in a particular context. In patriarchal society, the Other is a liberated woman. This is why in both films the epidemic starts with a woman – as a victim of “unnatural” male “intervention” on her body – and everybody she engages in sex with is transformed into a beast driven by its instincts. This is why our very own biology liberated from social restraints and political oppression is the ultimate Other. Cronenberg shows us that if biology overcomes ideology, we are simply losing the “ontological” foundations of the humanity. Now it becomes clear that the feminist attacks on Cronenberg for his “reactionary” views and “escapism” into metaphysics are shortsighted (Freeland 1996). It seems they cannot see that metaphysics is *the* way for Cronenberg to speak on the fundamental social issues. In other words, his “body metaphysics” is our “body anthropology”. And this is how he exposes the oppressive nature of division of gender roles.

Transformation of woman’s body transforms not only her sexuality but also her role in society. In *Shivers*, women that were passive as social actors immediately become active once they are “liberated”. Yacowar (2007:294) notices very well that the film “works against the romantic conventions of the genre and against the liberated sensuality of its day, by making the sexual connection between people the horror, not the cure. The parasite is spread by figures representative of the current sexual liberation: a precocious nymphet, an adulterer, the old swinger with his megavitamin virility, the Swedish couple, the bachelor swingers, hetero

and gay.” Everybody has an active sexual role, thus everyone becomes equal in this micro-society of the Other. However, Cronenberg’s modes of representation are not reactionary: horror in *Shivers* is not situated in the “degeneration” of sexual liberties, but in the trauma of exposing everything as political. In this sense, there is no *normality* in society. For this reason, he uses this trauma to expose the oppressed position of woman in the American society of the 1970s. For example, in *Rabid* a woman “empowered” with a penis creates havoc in society. Therefore, woman as a sexual penetrator is a socio-cultural perpetrator – the non-human. For Cronenberg, only woman can bring radical change, because the liberated woman is the essential Other in patriarchal society.

This new *fleshware* is capable of nulling and voiding “all our current sexual identities – male, female, hetero, homo, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and queer. It is, in other words, a figure of the independence of sexuality from gender” (de Lauretis 2008:106-107). Nevertheless, our society celebrates female body, thus our mind unconsciously and indirectly recognizes the power of the body. This is in, Žižek’s terms, how we enjoy our *sinthome*. Woman becomes a symbol of that power, an instrument through which the body can liberate itself. Therefore, only through a woman can the body regain its power, and thus eradicate male dominated society and establish the new order. Once the body overtakes male and female, all the distinctions among genders are neutralized: everybody is active in their ultimate and only role – the sexual one. And this is precisely the role that mind has “devaluated” as a basic instinct, simply because it is the only threat to its domination.

Cronenberg even further developed his philosophy with *The Brood* (1979). What functions as a “bridge” between Cartesian dichotomies – which essentially are the Real and reality – is a revolutionary treatment called psychoplasm, a grotesque amalgam of psychoanalysis and hormonal therapy. When a patient is under this treatment, he/she can manipulate his/her body consciously and subconsciously, re-articulating fears and anxieties

from mind to the body. The anti-heroine of this film is “re-articulating” her child traumas and present mental instabilities through creation of a new form of flesh – an external womb. Monstrous, sexless children born in this “immaculate conception” are the instruments of the mother’s mind: their sole purpose is to eradicate causes of her frustrations. With this film Cronenberg concludes his body metaphysics. In previous works, he showed that the ultimate cognitive horror is the one not associated with psychology, but the visceral one. What frightens us, what terrifies our mind is not what lurks in the dark, but what we cannot comprehend and where we are trapped – our body without political restraints.

Cronenberg views our current configuration of body as a contextual phenomenon. He wants to expose the *political unconscious*: to see how the needs of the body transcend the simple gender divisions, how new organs formulate categorial violations. In an interview Cronenberg was explicit about this: “We’re free to develop different kinds of organs that would give pleasure, and that have nothing to do with sex. The distinction between male and female would diminish” (in Rodley 1997:82). While gender studies are the product of society, a part of the politics of mind that wants to define and thus constrain and control the body, Cronenberg’s “body metaphysics” is based in biology, a form of politics that cannot be contextualized or historicized – the universal “politics”. Therefore, Cronenberg is interested in the human condition and not in any form of political liberation. Human condition is the fear of losing control over of what we are – our body and mind. That is why we need ideology – to regain that control, because our body always wants to bring us back into the Real. Yacowar (2007:294) notices very well that “Cronenberg dramatizes the depersonalization of ‘liberated’ sexuality. It is unsettling to find that the zombies are the characters fulfilling our fondest fantasies – sex unlimited by law or capacity.” However, this does not mean that there is “nihilistic content” in Cronenberg’s works as Medved (1992:28) argues. Rodley’s (1997:XVII) summary of *Rabid* can be very well used for all of Cronenberg’s films:

“Cronenberg's concern [is] for the breakdown of social order through the eruption of sexuality and disease.” Sexuality and disease are used as indicators for the liberation of the body, when it acts *not* according to our wishes or commands – when it is not repressed into the *political unconscious*. In this case, it cannot be ideologically mystified.

Therefore, even if some of the feminist readings of Cronenberg's work speak of his politics positively (e.g. Hayles 1993), they still interpret it in psychoanalytical key and in consequence are off the track. Cronenberg's body metaphysics is not confined in any kind of ideology or theory, simply because he is not trying to *understand* our body. He is focused on showing the (unlimited) *possibilities* for our body. In other words, our mind – and its ways of categorization – is simply a temporary part of a bodily structure.

While Stanley (2000:174) noticed that “David Cronenberg has always had an obsession for things that look like sexual parts but really aren't, and acts that resemble sexual encounters but really aren't”, he did not explain why this is so. Sexual parts and sexual encounters are the only elements of our selfhood that can sometimes escape the tyranny of the mind. In this way, the body can become “aware” of itself: it can simply enjoy (in) the world of flesh. It can return us into the Real. In other words, it is the only thing that possess the potential to escape ideological mystification. For this reason, free body is dangerous to the Order, because reality is embedded in ideology (Žižek 1989, 1992c), and the free body escapes it.

Ideology Always Triumphs: *It's Alive*, *The Omen* and *The Exorcist*

In the previous subchapter I discussed how ideology works on the unconscious level. If these horror films helped us to expose both ideology at work (“universalization” of certain social formations through repression) and its necessity for a meaningful social order, now it is

necessary to expose what this ideology was in the 1970s (and still is). Horror film tackled with it through “monstrous children” subgenre. Proliferation of these films in the 1970s was a trend that was mostly regarded as reactionary, but I will show how it was progressive at the same time. Therefore, I discuss those films that were viewed as progressive (*It's Alive*) and reactionary (*The Omen*, *The Exorcist*) in order to show they actually send the same message: the Monster represents a new idea, a potential for new ideology to overcome and expose the temporal character of the previous one. However, in the eyes of the dominant order all those radical ideas look irrational and infantile to the point of monstrous.

These films questioned the fundamental element of liberalism, its “operative system” – rationality, exposing it as a mere ideological product. As Gray (1997:64) noted, liberalism is “a system of principles which function as universal norms for the critical appraisal of human institutions, [...] principles having the attribute of universality in that they apply ideally to all human beings”. Therefore, it is an ideology that requires *rational individual*, capable of putting himself/herself into other people’s position and extrapolate rational reciprocation for all involved. This implies the balance of viewpoints (rational) and extermination of all extremes (irrational). This is why these films dealt primarily with children and adolescents as monsters, since they are prime examples of “legitimized” irrational behavior. However, this irrationality must remain property of young age, it must not develop in ideology in its own right. In this way these films managed to expose the oppressive apparatus of liberalism – repression of anything that can trigger another ideology or, at least, question the fundamentals of dominant one. For the authors of these films, this way of thinking is not “natural” or universal, but *practical*, and thus local. Therefore, rational calculation is ideological construct *par excellence*, and all the “heroes” in these films think in this manner. Rationality as such derives from Kantian logic which does not see humans as very diverse entities, but it provides “an abstract conception of the person that has been voided of any definite cultural identity or

specific historical inheritance” (Gray 1997:2). And the formation of this trans-historical human is the *telos* of liberalism: it is a universal “unconscious” agreement on basic principles as building blocks for the global monolithic civilization. It does not seem oppressive, but these films told us different story.

Larry Cohen’s *It’s Alive* postulates an innocent new-born baby as the Monster. As soon as it is born, it goes on a killing spree. The reaction of society to this menace is that it must not be only stopped, but killed. Throughout the film nobody refers to it as human being, but: “it”, “animal”, “evil”, “monster”. There is no empathy with the baby – it is simply the Other, a thing no one can identify with. Its own family is ashamed of it, and at one point the father distances himself from the child by saying it is not his offspring, not his own flesh and blood, not in any relation to him. If one would take the Monster as a unit of analysis, one must end up in viewing it terms of ideological viewpoint. That is why Clover (1992) saw the infant as the product of failed or unwelcoming family that has considered abortion; Wood (2003:92, 96) viewed it both as “the product of the tensions within the modern nuclear family” and “the logical product of the capitalist system”; while Maddrey (2004) and Hutchings (2004) identified evil with the institutions in the film: law, family and medicine. However, if one views the Monster as a “trace” of the *political unconscious*, a different conclusions can be reached.

It is interesting that only those who see the infant are the ones it killed. Everybody else asks: “Have you seen it?” This is how Cohen constructs the Other: it is never something that we know, but always that which we do not understand. As Žižek’s (1989) states, ideology is a signifying formation through which binary oppositions become meaningful, and as such is repressed in the unconscious, and operates on the level of practice of everyday life. Furthermore, Žižek (1992c) states that we tend to look at the children as angels, as the embodiment of innocence, but no child thinks of itself in those terms but quite opposite.

Therefore, that child is a *sinthome* of our ideological practice to undermine its irrationality and view it as something “cute”. Cohen interprets the *sinthome* and exposes the fear of a danger this irrationality can bring once it is so explicitly visible in the hands of the Other. Now we have a baby which interprets its *sinthome*, and consequently is exempted from the symbolic order. Therefore, it is constituted as the Other, because ethics do not apply to a newborn baby. As Jameson (1989) noticed, something is evil *because* it is the Other. Therefore, through its antagonistic relations to the dominant order it is “legitimized” as the Other. In common terms, this new idea is a threat to the life as we know it. For this reason, it must be destroyed at its birth, for it is a monstrous infant, a dangerous thing without identity that can grow up to be any possible appearance of the Other. In this sense, these are precisely those social anxieties of the 1970s that were viewed as an attack to “natural”, “normal” order. However, Cohen exposes that only differences are natural, but that they attain positive or negative value only from the position of dominant order: they must receive legitimization from the dominant power/knowledge system (Foucault 1979). Furthermore, the only non-ideological field in which these differences can interact is the void of antagonisms.

This film uncovered the deepest fears of liberalism: irrationality is the fundamental threat to bourgeois patriarchal norms. And irrationality can be everything dominant ideology views as irrational: from “free love” to welfare state. And once the baby with bloodlust toward these norms is born, one can see that only the difference is the actual normality. However, this difference cannot exist without its ideologization, and every ideologization must be in antagonistic relationship toward the Other. Thus our “democratic” and “tolerant” society is everything but that: any sign of otherness is viewed as a threat to the established order. This is a sad thing, but it is the only possible way in which we can have meaningful social reality – we exist insofar we are in antagonistic relationship to something, to that which provides us with identity. The existence of the Other is not simply providing us with

consistency, but also justifying our relationship towards it. What is born as the Other cannot be human, because in the eyes of the Order a human is born, not constituted. And this is what “tolerant” liberalism is all about. At the end of the film a radio-announcer says that “another one was born in Seattle”, which implies that this can happen to anyone, that these “deviations” always exist. However, analyzing the *political unconscious* provides us with a rather pessimistic conclusion: in order to be meaningful, society must impose normative identities. This is how difference – a thing of fluid identity – must be constrained, for identity that is free must be subversive (monstrous).

Richard Donner’s *The Omen* can be read as a theoretical upgrade of Cohen’s film. The premise is pretty simple. After the death of his new-born baby, an American ambassador adopts a baby, Damien, who turns out to be the Antichrist. After a series of murders, the ambassador realizes who he is raising and decides to kill the boy. Just like the previous film, this one was also viewed as very conservative by some (Wood 2003), and as a very intelligent critique by others (Ryan and Kellner 1990). However, the film attains a whole new dimension if we look at the *political unconscious* of it: the Monster is a “trace” of unseen social forces – of the antagonism between old and new ideas. The young boy is actually an abstract idea, a new radical idea that would change the world. Everybody refers to him, some even kill in his name, but we do not see that he is committing any crime. In this sense, he is non-existent, he is a “trace” of thing to come – global change. The most conservative institution, the Church, views him as “the end of the world of men”. He is the necessary change to the dominant order, he is the change that will disrupt rigid patriarchal structure of the Western culture.

If we use the Monster as a unit of analysis, we would end up in a fairly rigid ideological position – either it is bad or good. However, once we conceive it as a “trace”, we go beyond it – exposing the necessity of this antagonisms. And the boy as such is the embodiment of all those radical ideas that came to be in the 1970s. Furthermore, Damien is a

“trace” of an abstract (radical) idea, a “trace” that, as Žižek explained (1989), receives its meaning in the latter stage of analysis. This is where this film upgrades Cohen’s theory: the baby is born, but it is not evil – it gains its negativity afterwards, after it produces a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects. Those that kill in the name of the boy are no different than those who fight for the “good side”: both sides will do anything in order to protect the ideology. And this is precisely what the *political unconscious* is: the repressed violence emerges not as the intrinsic value of one particular social structure, but as the mechanism that sets in motion all the structures – the one that creates antagonism as the fundamental element of social structure. The idea creates the configuration of the social structure, and in this way there cannot be tolerance between the opposite ideas, because – as Cronenberg showed us – it would bring us into the Real. Thus the boy in *The Omen* is a “trace” of things that must come – changes within the Order. As such, it is saved by authority and brought into the center of political life (in the end, Damien is adopted by the president of the United States). Whether it is a good or a bad thing, we do not get an answer, but it is a necessary thing – the Real of antagonism that becomes the constitutive element of the reality of our existence as social beings. In other words, the dominant order changes insofar as it can maintain its ideology.

But how does it manages to incorporate the Other and not subvert itself?

An answer to this is given in William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist*. We have seen that the Other is essentially an interpreted *sinthome*, a trauma which appears in the form of the Monster. In this sense, the Other is that which disrupts ideological field, which endangers its identity. However, this points to the important fact: the Other cannot be destroyed only through its physical elimination, it has to be excluded from the symbolic reality in order to be incorporated into the dominant ideology. In other words, the Monster is included in the symbolic order as the Other, but if the “normal life” is to continue – the Other must be

repressed, it has to be included in the ideology. In *The Exorcist* the possessed girl, Regan, expresses the typical behavior of a sociopath – a person whose ideology is not in accordance with the dominant one. This film indicated a subtle change: those that are raised in social institutions which violate patriarchal norms are the potential embodiment of change. And Regan is raised only by her mother. However, her mother is practicing the dominant ideology without consciously knowing it, and that is why she introduces the “father”, a priest, to “exorcise” all the subversiveness from her daughter. And once the symbolic father is introduced and his intolerance for “misbehavior” expressed, the order is re-established, and the Monster repressed. In the end, we see that Regan does not remember anything, that she is fully “enjoying her *sinthome*” now. Institution that is, according to Gray (1997), at the core of dominant ideology won: it preserved the Order.

These films talked about new ideas, a potentially subversive ideas to dominant ideology that had to be repressed for Order to be re-established. And this was evident in the 1970s: what was not destroyed, was repressed – incorporated in the dominant ideology. It became a part of it. However, what is repressed always comes back, and I will discuss this in the next subchapter.

The Return of the Repressed: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes*

The films that are going to be discussed in this subchapter represent the “return of the repressed” by using the metaphor of distinction between rural and urban. These films are pivotal examples of the *rural gothic* subgenre: Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and Wes Craven’s *The Hills Have Eyes*. In the center of both films is the figure of family, shown in its rural and urban “editions”. However, what is constituted as the Monster in these two films is a family that lives *in-between* rural and urban dimensions, a kind of *rurban*

family whose spatial and temporal dimensions are not in harmony, but in “hostile” discord. Precisely this quality of being a “by-product of modernity” is at the core of this sub-genre – *othering* of rural which is focused on the intensification of fear generated on sociocultural disproportions in a society. And these monstrous families represent the left-overs of “democratic” changes in family hierarchy, all that was manifestly oppressive in the family becomes repressed through process of “emancipation” of the patriarchal family. And the antagonistic relationship between these and “modern” families expose the *political unconscious* of the most liberal patriarchal families.

In Hooper’s film a group of hippies go to countryside for a vacation, but encounter a cannibalistic family that starts to kill them one by one. Craven even more explicitly juxtaposes the “normal” with the “monstrous” family: an extended family of the Carters becomes stranded in the Californian desert and is hunted by the family of cannibals. The interesting fact is that both films are loosely based on historical events: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* on the infamous case of serial-killer Ed Gein, the “Wisconsin ghoul”, who lived with mummified body of his mother and body parts of the women he had killed; *The Hills Have Eyes* on the savagery of Sawney Beane, a head of 48-member clan in the 15th and 16th centuries who killed and ate over 1,000 people. The use of tropes “empowered” Hooper and Craven to move away from Gein’s and Beane’s “crime scenes”, and to speak of the “return of the repressed” through metaphors of rural landscape.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre still stands as one of the most analyzed horror films. Phillips (2005:114) asserts that the “psychotic family is destitute after losing their jobs at the local slaughterhouse as a result of mechanization”, thus “[t]hey have fallen through the cracks in the broad network of social security systems and become twisted version of the underlying logic of modern capitalism – the exploitation of others for profit”, which essentially means that “humans are literally turned into products to be sold and consumed”. What is interesting

is that there are no female members of the family alive. The only one we can see is a mummified woman. For Wood (2003:82), the “absence of Woman (conceived of as a civilizing, humanizing influence) deprives the family of its social sense and social meaning while leaving its strength of primitive loyalties largely untouched”. Ryan and Kellner (1990:182) read it as a parody of “normal” capitalism and “normal” family relations, in which the horrific behavior of the family is a “consequence of economic immiseration and the displacement of labor by mechanization”. In short, here we can see the “destructive psychological effects of forced unemployment”. Wood (2003:82-83) was on the same frequency: cannibalism is the “ultimate possessiveness”, and as such is the “logical end of human relations under capitalism”.

The feral family of *The Hills Have Eyes* is also viewed as a product of modernity – a result of radiation. Clover (1992:129) asserts that “the country folk are the direct victim of urban interests”. Furthermore, she claims that the distinction has been established on the grounds of wealth and social class. Derry (1987:168) noticed very well that the values of the “normal” American family in the film are disturbing: “the father is a racist, clear and simple; the mother, a simpering housewife with virtually no personality whose death is mourned by the family much less emotionally and extensively than the death of the family dog”. When compared to the feral family, there seems to be no difference in the structures of families juxtaposed. This is why the Carters so easily except the “ideology of violence”, which is “an essential, if repressed, component in the figuration of the bourgeois family” (Rodowick 2004:347).

I believe that this juxtaposition of “monstrous” and “normal” family functions on the *politically unconscious* level: in order to preserve what they are, “normals” have to become more vicious than the Other. In this way they acknowledge the Other, they accept it because

this Other is nothing more but their unconscious turned into conscious. This way the Other gives them consistency, but exposes the repressed violent urges of patriarchy.

We can see that rural is represented as a wasteland – a place where everything stays the same. Unlike (for)ever moving and developing urban, rural is trapped in a time-loop of the *status quo*. It is endless repetition: there is some movement, but always spatial and never temporal. However, even that movement happens only in a local context which is itself frozen both spatially and temporarily. In essence, what “ontologically” sets rural apart from ever expanding and (self)improving urban is its (ontological) status of *a-thing-of-the-past*. It is a period in American history that had passed, a historical moment that (should) had been finished, but somehow is still there. In short, it is the “world beyond time” trapped in a modern society. This is precisely a “trace” of the Real of antagonism: in the collision of binary oppositions, the Other never disappears, but is always repressed – in order to expose the repressed Other, one must interpret its *sinthome*. Therefore, the only thing that disrupts the tranquility of non-active – thus non-developing – rural is the intrusion of urban: both *esthetically* and *ideologically*. It interprets its *sinthome*.

In both films, once the protagonists encounter the Other, they cannot understand it. Accordingly to the ambiance, the first significant rural characters that we see are the Other: their presence is grotesque, behavior is irrational, motives incomprehensible, actions dangerous to modern men. Even though they look and talk like us, they are more animals than human beings. In other words, they are human, but on a very rudimentary level. They are one with wilderness. The first houses that we see are also one with nature. It is not represented as something distinct from wilderness; it is quite the opposite – a fundamental part of it. The house does not appear as man-made, but as a natural phenomenon. Even if it was once used to provide man a shelter, its function has changed – it is also a part of hostile environment. The only intruder in this wilderness is a trace of the Order.

However, this is not the wilderness that is in the process of cultivation; this is a wilderness that just excepted human species with all their endeavors to improve their life. In other words, it is an *off-shot* of modernity full of horrific visuals that cannot be placed in the dominant ideology. Not only people, but the whole place is the Other – a place of the Real. This is why these monstrous families are *rurban*: they look like “normal” ones, but they are not. They are everything that family is not supposed to be – violent. However, these two film discover, frame by frame, that there is no substantial difference between these families (in *The Hills Have Eyes*), and that once we confront this “non-family” what actually frighten us is how familiar it is (in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). These films offer the interpreted *sinthome* of family: we “overlook” its oppressiveness in everyday life, but when it is represented as the Monster – we can see what is truly is.

Thou Shall Enjoy Your Sinthome: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Dawn of the Dead*

In order to show how ideology functions on the unconscious level, Philip Kaufman’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a good starting point. The plot can be summarized in a sentence: citizens of San Francisco start to change – to completely loose emotions – as a consequence of “silent” invasion of extraterrestrials, and only few people that are aware of this are trying to fight this process of “othering”. Now, using Lefebvre’s (1991:137) imperative that “genuine reality” can be found in the “unmysterious depths of everyday life”, I am going to use this subchapter as a kind of theoretical conclusion to this analysis.

In order to give a full explanation, I will borrow de Certeau’s concepts of strategy and tactics, in order to show how ideology functions of the level of unconscious, of everyday life. Let us start with de Certeau’s “dichotomy” of strategy and tactics. He defines *strategy* as the

calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. (1984:35-36)

In other words, strategy is a way in which structures provide *places* of operations for individuals. It is a macro phenomenon that creates place in which micro phenomena can operate. On the other hand, tactics is a “calculated action determined by the absence of proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of the tactic is the space of the other” (de Certeau, 1984:37). In short, it is the space which individuals create inside ready-made field of operations constituted through strategies. It is now clear that these two concepts are not in antagonistic relationship. On the contrary, tactics is a domain of strategy and is determined by it.

Relations between these two techniques create social reality: strategy as technique of place and tactics as a technique of space. With this in mind, the usefulness of Kaufman’s metaphor becomes clearer. What we have here is a radical shift in the structures of power: once the aliens have replaced those in the (governmental) institutions – those that are capable of strategic interventions – they are constituted as new “strategists” inside the subjects that already had “will and power”. In de Certeau’s terms, these subjects, as impersonal strategists, had already been isolated – the power to impose strategies was always there, just “strategists” have been replaced.

This is precisely what we have in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: the nature of the strategies has changed – the field of operation has been shrunk. Place provided for tactics has become dangerously small. Society of “replicas” is the one without emotions, a society in which the structure is fully transpositioned inside the agency. In a word, they are programmed automatons. Everybody looks different, but everybody speaks and acts the same. In this way, we have a complete obliteration of the agency. This is most evident in the disappearance of

what we call everyday life. Once we do not have that, we are out of tactics, which consequently exposes ideology. On the other hand, those who have not been “replaced” by their alien counterparts are left only with tactics: ideologization of the Other. In other words, what we have here is an illustration of how the *political unconscious* would look like if it became conscious: if all social antagonisms were resolved, there would be no differences between humans, but literally – to the point where everybody would completely behave the same, which would lead to dissolution of everyday life.

Nevertheless, once we have a fully “structuralized” agency (whose practice only serves as a way of further “structuralization”), strategy and tactics become essentially the same, because the space of tactics is not the “space of the other” anymore – it is now a space of *oneness*, where a “proper locus” is not absent anymore, but fully present. This is not because tactics have changed, but because tactics became a way to make strategies more efficient. As a consequence, human’s tactics – which are by definition without a “proper locus” – are now identified as a violation: the Other. At this point we can see the connection between strategies and tactics, and how they are mutually interdependent: strategy *determines* the nature, the range and the number of tactics. “Normal” characters engage tactics that were legitimate in a previous social order, but in the eyes of the new one are viewed as a subversion. And this is precisely ideology at work.

With the radical change of strategy (and eradication of tactics), even the configuration of the city has been changed: it cannot be exited through tactics (individuals cannot do it), but only through strategy (it is available only to the army of “new citizens”). This is how space is produced to make system everlasting. Inability of our heroes to escape speaks of the fundamental fact: even space is produced (in order) to serve the System. This “trace” of antagonism between micro and macro level exposes the monstrosity of resolution: a “secret” government is the one that is internalized in the subjects.

Now, let us try to translate this in Žižek's terms and expose the flaws of de Certeau's theory, and expose ideology: tactics *are* strategies operating *unconsciously* on a micro level. Where is the Monster located in this film, and consequently in my analysis? Precisely in the removal of distinction(s) between tactics and strategy, everyday life and the system, micro and macro, non-enjoyment of *sinthome*. Strategy (as a technique of place) is limiting field of operation, and consequently options for alternative – from systemic to anti-systemic changes. On the other hand, tactics (as a technique of space) is a practice of everyday life, the only practice that is not brought under control by strategy. In other words, the very existence of this practice proves that strategy is not all-powerful: essentially it is not subversive, but can be(ome). What we have in Kaufman's film is an example of elimination of relationship between place and space. Once place is "compressed" to an extent that every possibility of creation of space is reduced to the only one possible – the one that "fits" the place – we have the Monster. Therefore, tactics are reduced to a *tactic*, and when that happens, *tactic is reproducing strategy on the level of everyday life*. And the Monster is precisely this *gap* in de Certeau's theory: strategy reproduces itself through tactics on the level of unconscious. And this is mediated through ideology.

In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, once institutions are "infected" with new knowledge – the alien one, this emotionless, programmed "everyday life" becomes legitimized. Kaufman's metaphor of "society of replicas" functions on two levels: individual does not only get a new body, but a mind also. "Original" body is dissolved and a new one created, perfected to reproduce power relations without ever questioning them. A typical ideological behavior. Here, power loses its positive element: mind is only reproduced in the domain of memories, thus knowledge is fully external. In other words, *place* provided for emotions is eradicated, and as a result only a *space* for contemplation about emotions is preserved – but only in negative terms: we now *know* emotions are bad. This is how a new

ideology is internalized. In other words, resistance in Kaufman's film is constituted in relation to previous power structures (strategy), in which its tactics – leftovers of once everyday life – were legitimized by these power structures. Therefore, strategy does not only provide “environment” for tactics, but both positively and negatively shapes it and legitimizes certain forms of it. Conceived like this, the “gap” between strategy and tactics is ideology that works on the unconscious level.

This is rather pessimistic conclusion, but it is the only possible social reality – the one in which we are governed by unconscious ideology. I conclude with the example of George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. Wood (2003) sees the premise of this film as the impossibility to restore social order, where the logical end of capitalism – consuming people – is brought into play. In this film four people find a mall as a safe haven from the outside world overpopulated with zombies. As such, it is the first film to suggest “the possibility of moving beyond apocalypse” (Wood 2003:107). In this sense, Romero's film is constructive support to Kaufman's: it provides us with the interpreted *sinthome*. We can actually see how we behave once our ideological field is exposed. And this is what we are once we are liberated from “false consciousness” – zombies. In other words, every consciousness is a “false” one, because there cannot be consciousness without ideology. These films most fundamentally speak of how much we need the Other in order to make sense of our world – and we do it through ideology, through unconscious acknowledgement of structural antagonisms. In these two films we can literally see the world without differences. We can see the Monster. What is tragic is that we become the Monster once we reach the ultimate freedom.

Conclusion:

THE MONSTER – AN EULOGY

I know I'm human. And if you were all these things, then you'd just attack me right now, so some of you are still human. This thing doesn't want to show itself, it wants to hide inside an imitation. It'll fight if it has to, but it's vulnerable out in the open. If it takes us over, then it has no more enemies, nobody left to kill it. And then it's won.

— R.J. MacReady

My attempt was to show relevance of the horror film for social sciences. What the (discourse) analysis of this genre can provide for sociology and anthropology are endless illustrations of ideology at work: how we create meaningful social life through our relationship with the Other. This is done through illustrations of our relationship with the Monster (as an embodiment of the universal Other), a thing which cannot be included in the “normal” social order, but which is at the same time a positive condition of it. Therefore, the Monster is a *sinthome*, a “trace” of repressed ideology: once it is positioned in a relation to the Order, it uncovers the “unconscious” ideology of the Order. In this sense, ideology is located in the unconscious of our everyday life: things we take for granted, the way in which we relate to the “real world” and “natural” state of things; and at the same time our relationship to that which does not fit in, which is at margins, that is an “exception that proves the rule”. In other words, ideology is located in practice (unconscious) and not in knowledge (conscious).

The Monster – an embodiment of subversive force that is in ready-made antagonistic relationship with normality – cannot be ideologically mystified, it cannot attain positive value, because in our *activity* we “know” that is a threat. An this “meaningless threat” exposes ideology: our relationship toward the Monster must be ideologized, since we unconsciously “know” which values we are protecting from it. In this way, that which was taken for granted is exposed as an ideological construct: those ideas and practices that can be questioned, even

eliminated, are not “natural”. Furthermore, I argue that the horror film can expose one fundamental truth: the model of *structural antagonism* in which the Order and the Other violently confront each other, but simultaneously provide each other with identity. This uncovers the only universality we can talk of – antagonism. This antagonism is a void, a form that receives its content in social reality – from gender divisions to class struggle.

In this sense, the conclusion of my thesis is rather pessimistic: differences among people, and their intrinsic antagonistic relationships, cannot be overcome, for it is the Other that defines us, that makes us different, that constitutes us as an individual. However, the existence of the Other makes us reconsider everything that has been “normalized” or become matter of indifference. In this way, our relationship with the Monster provides us with a useful *analytical tool* and *theoretical model*: the body of the Monster can be comprised of literally anything, and can represent it as monstrous and threatening. For this reason, we are forced to reconsider how that which seems so “natural” and “normal” can become at one point so terrifying. This is why the structural antagonisms can never reach a peaceful resolution: *everything* has a potential to become a threat to the Order.

I used Cronenberg’s films to show how horrific is the picture of the world without this “false consciousness” through which we justify or criticize these antagonisms. Here the Monster represents a possibility of non-ideological contemplation on ideology: since it cannot be ideologically mystified, it always functions as an empty signifier pointing to an ideological practice. In addition, I used films representing child-as-the-Monster to expose how one particular ideology – liberalism – has managed to constitute rationality not only as the “natural quality” of a human being, but also its ultimate goal that is achieved through *othering* of irrationality. On the other hand, I used the key films from *rural gothic* subgenre to expose how that which we perceive as the Other is actually that which is repressed in ourselves, and how it always comes back. Finally, the last two films I used as a hypothetical model of

“monstrous ideologization”, which can provides us with a close look at the process of ideologization. And these examples have exposed the relevance of the horror film for sociology and anthropology.

My argument is that the horror film is not useful only to expose *social conscious*, by which I mean political critique based on ethical evaluation of sociopolitical issues in a specific context; but also as *the* way of exposing *political unconscious*: the antagonistic structure of horror narrative exposes ideology at work without taking ethical stance toward it. This *political unconscious* of horror narrative exposes the universality of antagonisms. My findings show that only through this genre we can non-ideologically contemplate on the concept of social antagonisms. This means that the ideas of the world without differences will never come to be, because these ideas as such are also corrupted by the Real of antagonism, which means that there is Malice in every Wonderland.

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