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Invasion of the Body Morphers:
Analyzing the Use of Special Effects Makeup in the Representation of
Human Metamorphoses and Manipulated Reality

A Thesis Presented

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis is a discourse on the psychological attraction to visual representations of metamorphoses as made possible by special effects makeup. It also discusses the use of horror-genre archetypes in the work of contemporary artist, Matthew Barney.

I would like to dedicate this thesis
to my parents for their constant and unconditional support
and to Emily for providing me a partner in crime and procrastination.

Special thanks to Gabe Bartalos

and Mathew Halpern

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Brief Introduction

It's not disgust. It's fascination, but it's also a willingness to look at what is really there without flinching, and to say *this* is what we're made of, as strange and as disgusting as it might seem at times.

-David Cronenberg¹

While the art of special-effects make-up now dominates nearly all cinematic exploits from the fantastically endorsed Hollywood epic to modest television day-times, its meager beginnings serve as a true testament of human desire to create a seemingly realistic, yet altered, reality. This fascination with both the art and act of transformation is demonstrated by the experimental and imaginative modes that many early twentieth century directors and artists had employed in order to arrive at the desired conversion. As the distance between the audience and the theatrical stage slowly diminished as a result of inclining technology, with the advent of film and its ability for extreme close-ups, the art of make-up was forcibly pushed into modernity and threatened the established traditions of the theater. No longer would crude pigments and visible seams be at the level at which would fool the viewer into

¹ David Cronenberg, quoted in Anne Billson, "Cronenberg on Cronenberg: a career in stero", *Monthly Film Bulletin* 56: 660 (January 1989): 5.

believing; believing that reality was, for the duration of the spectacle, the manipulated version played out before them.

Furthermore, it was not only the audience's desire to be amusingly tricked by illusionary representation, but on a more methodical level, it was their necessity to counteract social anxieties of the early twentieth century that called for the exploitation of film. By having absolute authority over the events in a movie, the spectators were able to gain a sense of cognitive mastery; one that they felt was unattainable in everyday life because of the overwhelming and unstoppable growth of urbanization. I will also argue that by conceiving of negative imagery, as exemplified by the horror genre, spectators further placed themselves in a seat of power, transgressing their fears by means of control.

The act of metamorphosis and bodily transformation, greatly aided by the nuances of the rising special effects industry, is another key facet when discussing attraction to the horror genre. The scientifically inconceivable mutations that defied the physiological limitations of our own bodies (ie: werewolves, zombies) along with the fictitious narrative justifying them has been argued by scholars and supported by this thesis as being one of the underlying causes for viewer fascination. The depiction of the *unknown* and *unpredictable* as psychological angles of the genre continue to permeate contemporary films in the same way they had when horror movies were in their infantile stages. And although special effects departments are now a prominent feature of any contemporary movie set, the underlying attraction to the cinema, in a psychological sense, is still rooted in the

same desire to view our bodies in a visual, tactile faculty as it was when effects were made from nothing more than glue and cotton.

Additionally, this thesis will discuss the horror genre's archetypes, as defined in the Jungian sense, and their differing abilities to portray elements craved by the viewers throughout the many decades of film and special effects. This process neatly distributes horror film amongst precise archetypal classifications, thereby compartmentalizing the genre into specific psychological formulations. And in the last chapter, I will apply this archetypal usage to Matthew Barney's film, *Cremaster 3*, and consider the contemporary arts' adaptation of horrific imagery by both comparing and contrasting it to the horror genre that so clearly inspired it. Though, at first glance, Barney's work seems to directly mirror the horror movie industry, I will argue that the artist, in fact, transcends this notion thereby creating an entirely fresh, new perspective from which the audience is to view the grotesque imagery.



The Advent of Film and Metamorphosis in Psychological Terms

The late nineteenth century, with its booming industrial revolution, laid the solid foundation that holds steady the world of art as it is known in the Western world even today. City dwellers in the urban populations found themselves flanked by the bustle of automobiles and the smoking stacks of steam trains. Photography, having taken its roots in 1827, was still highly dominated by the academic traditions of painting and sculpture, contemporaneously held as standard by the Salons. Several inventors from France, England, and America, however, distinctively saw the need to experiment with the nuances offered by the advent of the photograph. Luckily for us and a little gold man named “Oscar”, these thinkers, including the likes of Thomas Edison, George Eastman, Louis Le Prince, Auguste Lumiere, William Friese Greene and Thomas Ince conducted their own quirky research in cities spanning from New Jersey to Lyon and Brighton. Their efforts resulted in several trial and error episodes and no one man, alone, could take credit for the invention of cinema entirely.

Even so, the earliest film to reach a paying consumer populous was a short series of documentaries and experimental moving images produced by the Lumiere brothers. Many cinematic scholars and historians believe this collection of excerpts marked the beginning of modern film at its original showing in a small room on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, 1895². But despite being filmed in Western industrial locations and urban centers, early movies were not yet produced by the film industry, as we are familiar with the concept today. Film began as non-narrative moving images, more closely linked with the excitement found in the novelty of viewing movement and action on screen. By the very early years of the twentieth century, however, surrounded by the first airplane flight, Einstein's newly published *Theory of Relativity*, and the sale of the first Model T Ford, film and the rising technological advances of the time served as proof that the twentieth century was moving by trains, planes, and automobiles into a modern era.

As new technologies of the twentieth century began replacing the antiquated traditions of the theater, in its tactile sense, in favor of the cinema's visual nuances, the dominance of popular culture offered a "surfeit of spectacular forms that compensated for the lack of touch" with what has been termed by Scott Bukatman, a

² For a more complete synopsis of the advent of modern cinema, I invite a more thorough look at *The Story of Film* written by Mark Cousins from where I received the most concise and thorough information on this topic. And as cited by Cousins as well, I would also suggest reading an invaluable chronology of the history of film style in Barry Salt's *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*.

“hyperbole of the visible.”³ As he goes on to explain in his discussion of special effects and its relationship to the Sublime, the success of optical sensory stimulation depended on methods of, “trompe l’oeil, a de-emphasis on the frame, an often-overwhelming scale, and a mimesis of the natural.”⁴ As a result, modern film had to reject the previously traditionalized components that served as the basis of its predecessors in order to capture a new kind of audience, the *modern viewer*, who required a more advanced set of optical stimulus. Here, Bukatman’s study of the Sublime (as he goes on to define as a “tamed sublime” rather than awe-inspiring) serves to highlight the fundamental reasoning behind film’s rise to popularity in its infantile stages and strengthens later discussion of the cognitive aspects of spectatorship in relation to the viewer’s loss of such through surrounding urbanization.

In order to examine the psychological attraction to the art of metamorphosis, as this thesis will directly address, understanding the overall impact of viewer perception with its absorption in and acceptance of altered realities is the starting point. Bukatman shares with Tom Gunning and Miriam Hansen, both of which he quotes directly in this chapter, a fascination with reality not as a stagnant truth but

³ As found in Scott Bukatman’s chapter titled, “The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime,” located in his book *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century*, published by Duke University Press in Durham, N.C.

⁴ Ibid. Also, I wish to expound upon the idea of the “natural” in this quote as defined academically throughout the nineteenth century as a strict observation to nature (Ruskinian theory) whereby an artist is able to subject his viewer to the Sublime.

as a transferable entity between viewer and film via optical perception.⁵

Additionally, he draws forth the notion that the science fiction genre, with its unremitting use of special effects, is uniquely affective at bringing narrative to a halt by participating in the “presentational mode through the prevalence of optical effects” which blurs the boundary between the physical space of the theater and virtual space, thus driving a wedge between true and illusionary reality. These special effects then transfer the spectator’s focus to the visual aspect of the cinema, bringing optical stimulation to the front of consciousness and it is in this very transference to optic attraction that fervently drove audiences to the theaters.⁶

As only briefly mentioned earlier, many historians will agree that underlying the mounting appeal of film were anxieties regarding urban growth, technological development, and social change. It is hardly a new study or unknown phenomena that during the early twentieth century many Western societies were plagued with resistance to and apprehension of the new world. These tensions, nevertheless, did not stifle film’s progression. Cinematic spectacles, offering altered variants of reality, were not seen as deceiving viewers with false illusions but as peaking their interest in temporarily suspending established notions of reality for fictitious replacements. According to Hansen, “the frontality and uniformity of viewpoint is

⁵ Gunning, Tom. “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, It’s Spectator, and the Avant-Garde.” *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, edited by Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 57.

⁶ Bukatman, Steve. “The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime” as found in *Matters of Gravity*.

clearly the mark of a *presentational* –as opposed to a *representational*- conception of space and address.”⁷ Thus gratification from these stimuli undoubtedly derived from responding to these entertainments as if they were real. To achieve the desired outcome, the film industry was forced to expand and elevate its standards to gratify the nearly insatiable audience with the inclusion of a more narrative-based structure that would aid in the transference of emotion and imagination from the spectator to the spectated. Audiences were to draw from the film a satisfaction in waning to these anxieties as enabled by their conforming to this spurious reality. And it is contained within cinema’s ability to enter into a relationship of reciprocity (as defined by Benjamin’s theory of auratic experience) that film theorists like Alexander Kluge weighed the film’s success. Hansen discusses this scale of value in relation to the public sphere in a successful article published in *October* in which she states, “either a film exploits the viewer’s needs, perceptions, and wishes or it encourages their autonomous movement, fine-tuning, and self-reliance.”⁸ Thereby, I agree that it is within this relationship, within the “inner film”, that spectators subconsciously embrace their anxieties through a sense of cognitive mastery that I will now discuss.⁹

⁷ Hansen, Miriam. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 34.

⁸ As noted from “Reinventing the Nickelodeon: Notes on Kluge and Early Cinema” by Miriam Hansen in *October*, Vol. 46 (Autumn, 1988), pages 178-198 by which the author critically analyzes Klugian film theory.

⁹ “Inner film” refers to the differentiation between the film on the screen and the perception of the film in the spectator’s mind as discussed in the article cited above

It can then be reasoned that the resulting displays of science fiction cinema, as produced by advanced optical effects, are a direct result from the need of both a film's creator and spectator to subjugate their own, albeit confined, realm of reality. The perceptual authority granted by these cinematic displays addresses the perceived loss of cognitive command experienced in an increasingly mechanized culture, tying once again to the aforementioned urban anxieties. Cinematic nuances rose in popularity, in part, due to the progression of technology and in acknowledging this modern unease, cinematic triumphs ultimately produced a sense of cognitive mastery through the creation of alternate substitutes. For example, in its most layman and exaggerated form, if a man was unable to keep his job at a factory due to the rise of machines and the diminishing need for man-made power, he was unable to control his own reality because of external sources. Creating or viewing a film relieved one from these outer governing forces and allowed him to create his own enclosed scenario, offering him a satisfied cognitive comfort.

where Hansen asserts that Kluge recognizes the concept of aura as the core of Benjamin's theory of experience.



The Pleasure Principle and the Unknown

Moving towards a microscopic analysis, it is not only the transformation of a general reality that allows the viewer total cerebral control, but in closer examination, I believe it is the ability to visualize metamorphosis that begins to reveal an innermost desire to manipulate the stagnant truths of metaphysics. “If the nineteenth century dreamed of cinema, then the twentieth century was dreaming of morphing ... morphing articulates and condenses an array of philosophical positions and some specific desires and anxieties ... which brought [the] level of imaginary mutability to the body and self.”¹⁰ An artist is able to represent an imperceptible omnipotence that without the use of modern effects would otherwise fail to completely satisfy the psychological attraction that draws the spectator’s gaze to the screen.

It is the act of transforming and decomposing the human figure, defying what is scientifically possible (in opposition to an increasingly scientific world), that is

¹⁰ Found in Steve Bukatman’s chapter titled, “Taking Shape: Morphing and the Performance of Self” from his book, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century*, which discusses the advent of virtual reality and Proust’s theories of immobility.

less geared towards entertainment and more towards the development of natural-defiance, which subsequently allows man the final say over inevitable truths, though in an admittedly limited artistic sphere. According to research conducted by Lawrence Kimmel on metamorphosis and mutation, including discussion of Nietzsche's theory of literary and philosophical transformation, "the poetics of metamorphosis, as an element of inquiry and form of expression, centers in the search for a comprehensive sense in reality in opening imagination to meaning."¹¹ His investigation further describes how metaphoric transformation captures the crucial fact that we are "creatures in process" and the creative arts that explore mutation and metamorphic alterations therefore act as a "primary resource for recapturing and expressing the Being that has come to consciousness in human beings." I would like to apply this theory to the realm of film, specifically the viewing of physical transformations that are made possible with optical tricks and effects.

A natural question to derive from this theory, then, would be to ask why the viewer would not rather enjoy a spectacle of "pleasure" as opposed to one of "unpleasure."¹² Thus far I have made the overarching argument that spectators are merely drawn to unnatural acts of metamorphosis, but I will now qualify these

¹¹ Kimmel, Lawrence. "Everything Flows': The Poetics of Transformation." As found in *Metamorphosis: Creative Imagination in Fine Arts Between Life-Projects and Human Aesthetic Aspirations*, edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka and published under the auspices of *The World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning*, by Kluwer Academic Publishers.

¹² These terms will refer to footnote number twelve.

statements by furthering the understanding, through the use of modern psychoanalysis, why spectators have such a fascination with the representation of “unpleasurable” things. If this were not the case, the multi-million dollar industry of special effects makeup and the horror-movie genre would not be the exorbitant business it is today.

In its original form, Freud’s theory of the *Pleasure Principle* was seen as an inherent drive for pleasurable satisfaction in the human psyche. This narrow translation, however, did not explain man’s need to routinely return to the “unpleasurable”, which by its nature of repetition can be viewed as fulfilling a necessity for gratification. By expanding the viewpoint at which he initially developed his principle, Freud’s amended theory countered Darwinian conjectures that humans’ desire lays solely in its quest for life.¹³ Freud’s theory would now account for the species’ compulsion to repeat and revel in “unpleasurable” sources and thereby its appeal to morbidity. According to Elizabeth Cowie’s article, “The Lived Nightmare: Trauma, Anxiety, and the Ethical Aesthetics of Horror”, Freud’s amendment to his theory resulted from a recorded account of his grandson playing a game of *fort-la* to which the aim was a, “mastery of unpleasure.” By citing either “mama gone” or “mama here” while casting a reel, the child controls his mother’s going or coming through fictitious play and he, “masters his anxiety over her loss

¹³ Cowie, Elizabeth. “The Lived Nightmare: Trauma, Anxiety, and the Ethical Aesthetics of Horror” as located on page 32-33 in a compilation of essays on philosophical reflections of cinematic horror, edited by Steve Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw.

and absence in reality.”¹⁴ From this observation, Freud tackled the idea of finding repeated pleasure in an unpleasurable experience by gaining a cognitive control over the situation thus reinforcing the reversal of anxiety. This revised theory from one of the world’s first and leading psychoanalysts directly reinforces previous claims that a viewer can derive the same gratification from unpleasurable images as that of pleasurable through the reversal and ascendancy of fear.

The attraction to contrived horror, however, is not so easily defined by one principle cause. While personal tastes and the ability to withstand programs beginning with the familiar disclaimer, “viewer discretion advised” may affect the cinematic experience on individual levels, psychologists and philosophers so bold as to speculate on the widening appeal of such feature-films often explore the notion of the *unknown* and *unpredictable* as sources of enjoyment worthy of the financial burden of rising ticket prices. According to Linda Badley, author of *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (a unique development in the exploration of relationships between the horror genre and other discussions of the body and gender), “Horror became a hysterical text or a theater of cruelty specializing in representations of the human anatomy in *extremis*- in disarray of deconstruction, in metamorphosis ...”¹⁵ Furthermore, the popular genre was brilliantly described by Paul M. Jensen in the following passage written as a preface for his book, “The Men Who Made

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Badley, Linda. *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic*. Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1995.

Monsters”, a discourse on several of the leading horror-film directors of the twentieth century:

At their best, monster films rarely convey clear-cut messages, but relate directly to humanity’s inner nature, to the archetypal fears and fascinations shared by everyone: fear of the violence and irrationality that dwell beneath civilizations attempts at order, fear of what we ourselves may be capable of, fear of the distorted and deformed, fear of the unknown. These fears, which have hardly altered over time, make mundane existence magically, nightmarishly unpredictable.¹⁶

It is the discovery and revelation of metamorphosized beings, ie: monsters, and concepts foreign to scientifically possible outcomes that allocate themselves in seemingly plausible environments that attract the attention and imagination of the audience. The plotlines of these films often cross the boundaries of conceptual understanding and lay outside of the realm of conceivable knowledge. It is their subsequent tie to this process of proving and explaining their themes in a rational manner that absorb the viewer’s attention. The resulting narratives are therefore unpredictable in the fact that their result, may it be the morphing of the wolf-man, is already known to be qualified by a false set of hypotheses, but the spurious account

¹⁶ Preface written by Paul M. Jensen from the book, *The Men Who Made the Monsters*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.

enthralls the eager watchers. For monsters and other unattainable scenarios are often subjects of an equally unattainable confirmation.

This very disclosure of monsters and horrifically altered beings can also be viewed as another cognitive device augmenting the science-fiction genre's appeal. Once the viewer becomes familiar with the presented *unknown*, the pleasure evoked from its rendering and the plot's subsequent aim to create its contrived explanation momentarily deceives the collective's sound reasoning in "ways analogous to genuine" events.¹⁷ Additionally, the more relatable one is to the character and the more believable its rationalization, the more pleasure one is to derive. For example, the original makeup for Dr. Frankenstein's monster was slightly different from the highly recognizable face that has appeared on Hollywood covers for decades. The reasoning for the change was because the first prototype was not as "sympathetic" to the viewer, thereby less emotionally captivating.¹⁸ The ease by which the audience is able to envelope themselves in the storyline is directly related to the amount of pleasure to be extracted.

Therefore, it becomes ostensibly clear that cinematic projects extending across the boundary of complete figure-decomposition would attract the greatest amount of viewer-absorption in both visual and psychological realms. The farther a production is able to cross the border of reality into an alternate, imagined universe where the dead walk among us, the more successful it is. Its success or failure is

¹⁷ Carroll, Noel. "The General Theory of Horrific Appeal" located in *Dark Thoughts*, edited by Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw, pages 1-9.

measured in its ability to captivate viewers and push their previously assumed conceptions to the extent of partaking in a temporary belief of this created spatial existence. Along with this brief disconnect of actual reality is accompanied the topic of the gruesome, the gory, the intentionally horrific as an exploit to further envelope the spectator and purposely lure him into a false sense of perception through the calculated art of fear.

The usage of the word, “calculated” here is quite purposeful for fear, itself, is a very precise measurement of psychological components. Artistic creations that are constructed of a healthy dichotomy of both conceptually valid reality juxtaposed to the hideous effects of mutations and visible gore are able to hold the viewer’s attention in a psychological and physical state of fear as they blur the division between truth and fiction. According to Joseph D. Andriano, who has studied the psychological and evolutionary impact on the human attraction to the *fantastic beast*,

The creature has come to reflect our various emotions, anxieties, ambivalence, about having evolved from other animals. Moreover, the Self/Other dialect in the monster tale allows readers and spectators to imagine beast-monsters with human qualities; modern fiction and film

constantly confronts us with the question: to what extent is being human a function of being *nonanimal*?¹⁹

This direct “confrontation” of the spectator, coagulating on an internalized level, directly relates to the topic of metamorphosis of the human figure and its visual representations in the arts. Again, understanding the psychological effects and fascination with this phenomenon better evoke appreciation for the masterful artistry that would later develop in film as an extension of this drive to externalize these principles of attraction.

Metamorphosis, as defined by Kimmel, is “an elemental change in the form of one thing such that it becomes another. The logic of identity, however, does not allow that one thing can be another thing, which proscribes a change in identity that is a change in being.”²⁰ Even so, what seems so casually confusing in words becomes easily apparent in the field. The familiar paradigm used in this study is that of the caterpillar’s transformation into a butterfly. Many analogues grow out of this natural paradigm into parables of reassurance that have laced themselves into popular culture such as the ugly duckling becomes the beautiful swan. Equally,

¹⁹ It is also important to note that Joseph D. Andriano further emphasizes the relevance of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in coordination with the Freudian notion of the *Self*. These evolutionary and psychoanalytic studies drive the need to explore the human psyche when understanding its attraction to the monsters as an extension of our internalized cognition.

²⁰ Kimmel, Lawrence. “‘Everything Flows’: The Poetics of Transformation” as found in *Metamorphosis: Creative Imagination in Fine Arts Between Life-Projects and Human Aesthetic Aspirations*.

there are the classical reversals in which a man becomes a being of lesser-appraised value, evoking thoughts of the transformation from human to beast in the classic 1981 feature film, “An American Werewolf in London”. The visualized metamorphoses of most interest to the arts are those anchored in the ontogenetic scaling of human life, allowing the observer an opportunity to both revel and find repulsion in the visual mutations of the bodily form.

This subconscious appraisal of life absorbs the spectator’s interest, tying him to a common root of existence even as the projected images of metamorphoses reflect and reconfigure this fascination. Progressive and regressive paradigms of metamorphosis frame understanding from accidental variations in chemistry to mutant transformations in species life. The scope and range of human self-conception flows into every space that yields to imagination. “All our fears add up to one great fear,” Stephen King wrote in the foreword to his short-story collection, *Night Shift*, “of the body under the sheet. It’s *our* body.”²¹

²¹ As found on page XIV in the preface of Steven King’s collection of short stories titled, *Night Shift*, published in New York by Doubleday in 1978.



Introduction to the Foundations of Special Effects Makeup

Having now discussed the theories behind the spectator's psychological attraction to the art of horror, it propels us to the question of how these monsters of fascination were technically created. How does one internally visualize a nightmare and come to represent it externally through the use of rubber prosthetics and theatrical makeup? Moreover, before the advent of technologically modern effects, the optical articulation of these imaginary figments used crude, more inventive outlets. How, then, have the industry's advancements forced the contemporary audience to change their expectations and relate to the new era of a more closely-mirrored reality?

Some cinematic historians believe that Boris Karloff's Frankenstein, created by makeup artist Jack Pierce, was the *original* Hollywood monster, bringing the horror-genre into popular limelight for the first time in film's history with Universal Pictures' release in 1931. Though I find it misleading to narrow down the advent of the modern horror film to one principle character, I do admit the subsequent ripple cast over the industry was far reaching. With the advances of plastic technology and an ever-expanding variety of mechanics, monsters and mutations have traveled

a long way from their humble beginnings, though, as with anything, it is the original foundation that supports the upwards rising of the business.

Perhaps the misty world of spirits and demons offers the greatest scope for the imagination, and make-up artists' conceptions have opened avenues of thought, sometimes heretofore inconceivable in frightening aspects and elements.²²

Cinematic nuances have allowed the film industry to expand upon the conventions of the past in order to broaden the scope and depth of the work being produced contemporaneously. The usage of special effects covers an extensively wide range of techniques and is not limited to the areas of make-up, alone. The department of special effects encompasses lighting, filmic superimposition, musical accompaniment and other related specialized crafts. For the topic of this paper, in spite of this, I will only briefly touch upon other areas and focus primarily on the creation of the monsters that drove the horror epic to extents reaching decades down the line to infuse the dreams of spectators with nightmarish images.

Lon Chaney is among the forerunners of actors and makeup artists in the mid-1920s to experiment in the new realm of the horror genre, appearing, most notably, as the Phantom in *Phantom of the Opera*, released in 1925. Following the

²² Kehoe, Vincent J.R. *Special Make-up Effects*. Boston, London: Focal Press, 1991 (p. 19).

success of the film, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), in which Chaney also played both actor and makeup artist, he was given near-free reign over the aesthetics of the character of the Phantom two years later. The character of Quasimodo was created from a cosmetic kit including not much more than cotton, makeup and grease pencils (commonly used in theatrical productions), moldable wax, modeling tools, colored powders, and a flask of collodion (a mixture of cotton powder, alcohol and ether) which when applied to the skin acted as a temporary adhesive and aided in the creation of scars and wrinkles. For his role in *The Hunchback*, Chaney made himself up using cotton and collodion over his eyebrow ridges, a deformed eye, and a proto-latex hump weighing forty pounds, creating what special effects enthusiast and author, Pascal Pinteau, coined as the “embodiment of the pathetic monster.”²³ Though simplistic in his methods, Chaney’s makeup effects attributed to the movie’s overall success, and though the film was silent in almost all theaters it was shown, but the subsequent impact over its cinematic ancestors was anything but.

According to an interview with Lon Chaney Jr., his father kept his make-up room closed to both cast and crew during the filming of the movie and when repairs or touch-ups needed to be made to the costume or makeup, he would return to his sanctum, emerging only when the visual result stood up to his high standards.²⁴

Because of his highly secretive manner, many of the tricks of the trade as

²³ Pinteau, Pascal. *Special Effects: An Oral History*. Translated from French by Laurel Hirsch. Published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, (page 286).

²⁴ Ibid.

established by Lon Chaney Sr., died along with him. The makeup for the character of the Phantom, however, was fairly simple, employing nose putty for the additive prosthetic, a similar putty for the facial distortion, false teeth, a bald front-wig, and strong painted highlights and shadows. Because of the temporary nature of the facial constructs, the makeup often had to be reworked during the filming process. Though the production of the film may have been slowed as a result of this, in addition to the reported strain between the actors, producers and the director, the silent version of the film pulled in a near million dollars in its opening and the sound-version, yet another million upon its release. These estimated figures proved that not only did the public dote over this new genre of film but also supported the trend with impressive box-office returns.

In the 1930s makeup departments were becoming more apparent in film studios and the presence of makeup artists flooded the soundstages during the production process. At this juncture of filmmaking, nevertheless, makeup artists were still primarily thought of to beautify the actors, rather than to represent horrific facial and bodily distortions. This was until Jack Pierce of Universal Studios, as previously mentioned, came onto the scene in 1931 creating the world's most infamous Hollywood monster in the cult-classic, *Frankenstein*. It was this particular film that coined the popular phrase, "fantasy-horror" that carried through the industry to its modern successors and drove its popularity to new heights in the early twentieth century.

James Whale, the director and creator of the filmed version for *Frankenstein*, when questioned as to his decision to begin working on the story written by Mary Shelley (1830), had said, “it was the strongest meat and gave me a chance to dabble in the macabre,” he added, it would be “amusing” to work with a subject that, “everybody knows to be a physical impossibility.”²⁵ Thereby adding depth to the discussion of the *unknown* as a point of interest in the film genre. From this quote one can speculate, as I have earlier in this paper, that it was the idea of visually representing the unbelievable and impossible that captivated the director’s interest and lead to the production and completion of the horrific tale.

During the production of the film, Whale mentioned drawing Boris Karloff’s features and personally contributing to the resulting makeup design. While the director had often provided technicians with sketches to guide their work, the Monster’s basic appearance likely existed before Whale had become involved. According to several members of the crew, Jack Pierce’s test makeup for the monster was similar to that eventually used for Karloff.²⁶ One page of a writer’s notes, however, held a notation that Pierce should add bolts to the neck. It appears as if Whale may have mellowed the monster’s appearance to increase audience sympathy during the early stages of makeup tests, for a photo exists of Karloff in an unused version of the makeup, one with forehead clamps and a distortion of the

²⁵ Jensen, Paul. *The Men Who Made the Monsters*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996 (p. 11).

²⁶ Robert Florey and Paul Ivano mentioned particularly by name.

lower lip, that make him seem more vicious and fearsome than he does in the actual film. The prosthetic attachment for his headpiece, however, remained the same in both versions created from cloth, cotton batting, spirit gum, and collodion (a glue-based adhesive), giving the monster his flat-topped, immediately recognizable head.

From its very beginning, *Frankenstein* was a tremendous success. At its Los Angeles premiere, lines formed for the 10 A.M. showing and remained until midnight. The theater dropped the usual shorts and newsreel to fit in more showings. In New York, *Frankenstein* drew crowds on a rainy, opening night and became Broadway's biggest hit. Extra showings were scheduled, with the Mayfair Theater selling tickets as late as 2 A.M. The film's first week set a house-record of \$53,800, a dramatic contrast to the \$19,000 pulled in the week before from a previous film. In total the film grossed just under \$12,000,000.²⁷

It seemed, at this point in time, that the nuances of special effects makeup and the promotion of the horror genre had become widely recognized in the up and coming business. As variations of monstrous characters echoed through the theaters around the country in the faces of *Dracula*, *The Wolf Man*, and *The Mummy*, each new artist brought to the business new techniques employing old materials in order to arrive at fresh, cutting-edge results that worked to push the envelope further with every film. In the year following the successful release of *Frankenstein*, the Pierce-Karloff team paired up again, working together to create another famous monster

²⁷ Jensen, Paul. *The Men Who Made the Monsters*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996 (p. 23).

prototype: the *Mummy*. Taking long strips of cut-cloth, Pierce placed the fabric into a conventional oven in order to arrive at an old, brittle texture for the mummy's exterior wrapping. He swathed Karloff's body, crisscrossing in three separate layers that were then covered in a fourth layer of glue-reinforced clay. A mixture of collodion was used to soak cloth strips and place over the actor's face to which the artist asked Karloff to stretch his skin while the collodion dried in order to both account for the shrinkage in cloth and to create deep wrinkles around his mouth, as if his skin was mummified. The actor's hair was pasted down using a mixture of clay and loam (a natural soil mixture composed of silt, sand, and clay). The brittle nature of the cloth and the drying clay created a subtle but impacting effect as the mummy emerges from his sarcophagus, where the camera captures the cloth cracking and turning to dust before the lens.

Pierce's final creation of the 1940s was his work with Lon Chaney on *The Wolf Man*, which not only used special makeup effects, but also paired the magic of artistry with filming techniques to bring the complete metamorphosis of man to canine to the big screen for audiences across America. Because the actor needed to remain in one set position for each shot, a critical detail for the final result, Chaney was immobilized almost completely; his hands were encircled by dozens of small nails to contour his fingers and keep his arms steady in one fluid position. Additionally, his head was held by a hidden support system, stealthily concealed from the camera's view. Pierce began the arduous process by applying extensive werewolf makeup to the actor in several of the first frames, but then replaced it with

a toned-down version that consisted of a less prominent muzzle and fewer hairpieces. This process of reduction was repeated twenty-one times, each makeup version taking nearly an hour to complete as the final rendition was filmed twenty-two hours later. “With reverse projections and scenes linked by fade-ins and fade-outs, this transformation of a man into werewolf astounded audiences.”²⁸

²⁸ Pinteau, Pascal. *Special Effects: An Oral History* (p. 287-288).



Special Effects Makeup from the 1950s to an American Werewolf

Directly spawning from the 1920s and 30s prototypes, the American horror movie scene of the 1950s exploded into mass culture and provided an interesting decade for study. According to author, Mark Jancovich, who has analyzed and published works specifically on the 50s horror scene, “while most studies of horror ignore any detailed analysis of the 1950s in favor of other, more legitimate periods ... 1950s horror is central as a way of legitimizing these other periods.”²⁹ While Janovich’s approach to archotyping horror film according to societal constructs is an incredibly useful and interesting read which provides, like he has set forth, a way of legitimizing past and future offspring of the genre, I would add to this discussion the aspect of the cinematic remake. Remaking films rose in popularity specifically during this decade and it seems clear that with the advent of new technical effects,

²⁹ Jacovich, Mark. *Rational Fears: American horror in the 1950s*. Manchester, New York: Machester University Press, 1996 (preface).

The author asserts this position, defending his work against Robin Wood’s stance in his book, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

directors and artists alike would revel in the daunting task of taking the roots of horror and reinventing them using modern advancements.

Because of the surplus of new developments discovered in the industry during the early years of the decade, including the production of latex prosthetics, several directors took on the task of remaking classic horror films in light of makeup's progress. The archetypes of monsters were being reborn, using modern technology, to re-present them in a mold more suited to the contemporary viewers and their rising expectations. No longer did the elementary modes by which makeup artists had been working for nearly three decades satisfy the audience's changing needs. By the end of the 1950s, color television sets were found in nearly all living-rooms of working-class families across America. No longer did spectators need to leave their homes in order to view a motion picture, nor did they need to pay a ticket-price to enter. Hollywood rose to this new challenge, in tandem with society's move into modernity, and brought with it a modern set of monsters in the remakes of *Horror of Dracula* (1958) and *The Mummy* (1959), and a sequel to *Frankenstein*, that would later become a series of movies, titled, *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1958), drawing a new generation of viewers to the big screen.³⁰

Although earlier horror makeup was done laboriously with old-time materials, these later re-creations employed latex pieces that were far easier on the performer and could be pre-prepared for use. For example, *The Mummy* (original)

³⁰ It should be noted that *The Curse of Frankenstein* is a British-made film, by Hammer Film Productions, not stemming directly from the U.S.-based Hollywood.

makeup had a complicated cloth wrapping on the body covered with a glue and dusted with Fuller's Earth (a non plastic clay) to simulate a decaying body, while the same effect was later created with a grayed latex base paint covering a pre-made costume.³¹ The newer release of *Dracula* employed the recently developed invention of colored contacts to differentiate the vampire in his separate states from human to vampiric. This practice is leaps and bounds ahead of the crude, yet admittedly creative use by Cecil Holland who created the makeup for a blind man in *The Love Light* of 1921. He did so by removing the white skin adhering to the inside of the shell of a hard boiled egg and cut it to form two disks, each three-quarters of an inch, in diameter. He placed them on the actor, Raymond Bloomer's, eyes, giving them the appearance of having turned white from disease.³² In addition to the ocular differences, the more contemporaneous of the two films used fake blood at the corner's of the vampire's mouth to further illustrate his lust for his human beverage. Nearly, if not, all of the horror films of the 1930s lack the visualization of blood due to the conservative audiences they entertained at the time. This was a sharp contrast to the employment of corn syrup for many feature films of the 50s.

The Curse of Frankenstein, sadly, received much critical scrutiny in the year it was released, as noted by Dilys Powell of the *Sunday Times* who regretted the

³¹ Kehoe, Vincent J-R. *Special Make-up Effects*, Boston, London: Focal Press, 1991.

³² Pinteau, Pascal. *Special Effects: An Oral History*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers.

film left her “unable to defend the cinema against the charge that it debases.”³³ The new version of *Frankenstein* was clearly devoid of the sympathetic characteristics that had evoked the emotional response of the viewers several decades earlier as conceived by Jack Pierce. The 1958 adaptation of the monster had a wider ranging use of prosthetics and facial enhancements, employing latex and skin-friendly adhesives, resulting in greater face mutation. In the same vein, *Dracula*, directed by the same production crew, Hammer Film Productions, used the nuance of colored contacts to create the look of improperly functioning sight. Because of the aesthetic choices made in both motion pictures, it would prove unsatisfactory to argue that the directors had the same personas in mind when creating their monsters. The physical appearances of the monsters varied so greatly that it did, in fact, affect the viewer’s final judgment.

The *Frankenstein* monster of the newer film evoked a sense of superficial, irrational fear with its gruesome use of overt deformity and prosthetic teeth, whereas the earlier production (surrounded by much higher acclaim) gave the monster an implication of visual humanism. This aesthetic impact was achieved by using an overemphasized sloping brow and half-mast eyes, optically reminiscent of inward regression and internal contemplation to which the audience could empathetically relate and which was described by Jensen as, “strangely sad.”³⁴ This earlier inclusion of relatability between the monster and spectator gave the film a

³³ Sinclair McKay. *A Thing of Unspeakable Horror: The History of Hammer Films*. London: Aurum Press, 2007.

³⁴ Photo caption on page 18 of *The Men Who Made Monsters* by Paul M. Jensen.

successful combination of a conceived reality juxtaposed to the appraisal of human life in the setting of fictitious rationalization. The first of the two films more closely adheres to the film-spectator relationship of individual perception that Kluge held to standard.

Though these three remade films hardly represent the entirety of the horror genre in the 1950s, the decade having released just fewer than fifty films in America alone, they do clearly illustrate some of the differences and nuances that the remakes had to offer the original films. As advancements in prosthetics and skin-adhesive additives flooded the market, films were able to visually represent a scarier, more grotesque kind of monster, for better or for worse. Deformities and mutations became the genre's keynote, creating a viewer-lust for special effects in near equal interest to the plot, itself. The trailers for horror movies of the 50s highlighted the bold usage of makeup to capture the interest of the perspective audience by featuring the made-up actors at the peak of their visual performance, the lighting often emphasizing the bold contours of the deformed faces.³⁵ The monsters, themselves, were what enticed the audiences to the theaters and the makeup on the actors is what created the monsters; therefore, it was the sole purpose of the makeup artist to continually remold society's fears into wearable prosthetic enhancements.

³⁵ For the use of this paper, all trailers courtesy of the Internet Movie Database.



Zombies, Ourselves

By the turn of the decade, the archetypal monsters of the 1920s and their successive remakes were reborn with yet another modern face. Contemporary feature-films continued using characters like Dracula, Frankenstein, the Werewolf, and the Mummy in their sequels and offshoots of the original story lines.³⁶

Directors like Terence Fisher, working throughout the length of the decade, made his career using the classic monster models in his Hammer Films productions. The 1960s, however, in addition to carrying on the legacy of horror film before it, can be credited for adding to this classic monster repertoire with the first appearance of the *Zombie* prototype in the cult-classic, *Night of the Living Dead*.³⁷ This 1968

³⁶ Movies to be noted: *Brides of Dracula* (directed by Terence Fisher, 1960), *The Curse of the Werewolf* (directed by Terence Fisher, 1961), *Phantom of the Opera* (directed by Terence Fisher, 1962), *The Evil of Frankenstein* (directed by Freddie Francis, 1964), *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (directed by Ishiro Honda, 1965), *Billy the Kid Vs. Dracula* (directed by William Beaudine, 1966), *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (directed by Terence Fisher, 1966), *The Mummy's Shroud* (directed by John Gilling, 1967), *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (directed by Freddie Francis, 1968), *Hour of the Wolf* (directed by Ingmar Bergman, 1968), *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (directed by Peter Sasdy, 1969).

³⁷ It is to be noted that *Carnival of Souls*, directed by Herk Harvey and released in 1962 was the precursor to Romero's movie and coined as the first official zombie movie, though the low-budget film received little recognition. It has been speculated by several film scholars that Romero directly borrowed ideas and scenes from Harvey for his own film released six years later.

American film, directed by George Romero, unleashed a new fervor for the horror genre with a transformation of bodily disfigurement that spectators both related to and found repulsive: the undead.

Jungian scholar, James Iaccino, neatly distributes horror film amongst precise archetypal classifications, thereby compartmentalizing the genre into specific psychological formulations, including an examination of the *Zombie* paradigm. Breaking down nearly a century of horror films into determined categories and subcategories, he applies the Jungian principle of the *collective unconscious* (the “common psychic substrate” for the entire human race), which is referred to as *archetypes*, to the film industry’s growing horror market. The film, *Night of the Living Dead*, played a particularly pertinent role in the “Irrational/Avenging Shadow” archetype.

George Romero’s flesh-eating zombies ... are a good example of these irrational nonpersons (or shadows) that mysteriously come out of nowhere to prey on the human race. Though Romero has provided a good social commentary on where we are headed as a society in each of his three *Living Dead* films, the driving force behind his works is the strange and often unexpected appearance of the zombies themselves ... The irrational behavior of the zombies cannot be explained logically ... [Romero] uses their irrationality as a vehicle to show the audience what the dark shadow really is: something truly terrible and revolting from

another dimension that defies the rational, scientific analysis of this reality.³⁸

Iaccino's work qualifies the zombie paradigm by explaining its appeal to the irrational (the *unknown*) and its physical impossibility in our own reality, and thus falls in line with the scholarship of Noel Carroll and Mary Douglas, both of whom have written on the theory of cinematic appeal and have asserted, "that the audience is naturally inquisitive about that which is unknown meshes with plotting that is concerned to render the unknown known by process of discovery, explanation, proof, hypothesis, confirmation, and so on." Carroll goes on to explicate his agreement with Douglas in that, "... that horrific beings are predictably objects of loathing is a function of the ways that they violate our classificatory scheme."³⁹ Though I find these theories both relevant and essential to the discussion of monsters as templates for psychological attraction, I would like to add to this discourse the function of aesthetics insofar as to account for the spectator's fascination with the visual representation of physical decomposition and mutation.

Whereas Dracula was of a fictitious vampiric species, Frankenstein's monster was completely fabricated from pre-made parts, and the Wolf Man morphed into a canine-hybrid, the zombie offered a distinctly new kind of appeal in its ability to transform and yet remain completely reminiscent of its human origins. By

³⁸ Iaccino, James F. *Psychological Reflections on Cinematic Terror: Jungian Archetypes in Horror Films*. Connecticut, London: Praeger Inc., 1994 (p. 8-10).

³⁹ As found in Noel Carroll's article, "The General Theory of Horrific Appeal" in the introductory chapter of *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*.

nature, the zombie is nothing more than the scientific oddity of a semi-operative being with remaining cognitive function, albeit limited, after its body ceased regenerating postmortem. The zombie does, nevertheless, operate on the Darwinian principle of survival, functioning solely in its quest for cannibalistic nourishment. The viewer's repulsion and, conversely, fascination stem from the understanding that the optical decomposition of the body is, in essence, real. Operating on the previous assumption that for a spectator to derive cognitive pleasure from a film they must temporarily suspend reality in order to engross themselves in the fictional substitute, it seems plausible that movies with the ability to produce a fully-human monster, creating a primal fear of self, would be successful in its attempt at emulating life closely enough to suspend the boundaries of the two realities. Though the walking dead is a scientific impossibility, the monster is no longer unrecognizable, but a mutation of ourselves, closely paralleling the actual process of decomposition.

Preoccupation with bodily function and morbidity is hardly rooted in our own century, as its genesis is impossible to link to a firm starting point, leaving traces of its impression on artists throughout history. Medieval prints, alone, were littered with the subject of torture and corporeal mutation, innumerable artistic endeavors exploring human innards and the physical result of birth defects and disease. As the Renaissance sprung into life, the pursuit of science fueled artists like Leonardo da Vinci to scour through the remainders of cadavers, artistically recording, with precise detail, his visual findings. This trend in art lost no steam as the Realism movement of the nineteenth century took root with paintings like that of

Thomas Eakins' *The Gross Clinic* of 1875, illustrating the perpetuity of human's need to study themselves through the scope of their biological functions.

Consequently, the film industry pursued the same impetus that earlier forms of visual arts had opened avenues to.⁴⁰ Thus, the innate yearning for humans to study themselves in various stages of life, including both pre and postmortem, proves a vital aspect of analysis when examining the pleasure principle derived from zombie films. Films like *Night of the Living Dead* and its two sequels play with the notion of death and life interchangeably, thereby both satisfying our need for the *unknown* and *unpredictable* through the fictitious storyline, as well as allowing us to indulge in our primal nature by viewing the body through channels of scientific anomaly and record.

Now while most of the films discussed in this paper, thus far, deal with stagnant forms of metamorphosis, in the decades following the 1960s with the advent of new cinematic technologies by way of animatronics and computer graphics, the visualization of metamorphosis had broken through to new levels entirely in the film industry. It was now possible to represent a time-elapsed transformation on the silver screen. Though *The Wolf Man* of 1941, as previously explored, had used frame-by-frame shots to portray the transformative properties of the full moon, John Landis' classic horror film, *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), forty years its junior, employed Rick Baker's system of mechanical

⁴⁰ I would like to note an excellent source of research in the avenue of artistic studies of the body with concentrations in "Pain", "Cut Flesh", "Membranes", and "Metamorphosis" is *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis*, written by James Elkins and published in California by Stanford University Press, 1999.

prosthetics and robotic devices that went beyond the physiological function of the human body to change a man to wolf.

With Baker's series of "Change-O's", as he called them, the special effects artist used one-of-a-kind computerized apparatuses to create the spectacular illusion of a morphing human body. The first visual effect of the movie's transformation sequence required two stages of a Change-O-Hand made from Smooth-On PMC-724 with artificial hair imbedded in the forearm.⁴¹ Extending from the rubber-molded hand was a metal rod that controlled wrist action as well as a device that created individual finger movements. Several external tubes were connected to the pneumatic arms that administered air pressure to extend the hand area during the required sequence. The palm unit was fluctuated with several bladders that were inflated using plastic tubing and a syringe to create the expanding effect of the limb. All of the hair was added as the filming progressed, similar to the subtractive method used on Chaney in 1941, and was laid on the actor's arm, hand, and chest.⁴²

The Change-O-Heads used for the facial distortion were also made of the same PMC-724 laid over a mechanically controlled skull section, created from fiberglass and dental acrylics, that was operated by several technicians using the same air-controlled system of wires and bladders. In order to create the illusion of continued action, the production crew filmed cutaway sequences and later pieced

⁴¹ Smooth-On PMC 724 is a time-tested rubber used to cast a range of materials including wax, harder plasters, concrete and resins. It is known in the business as being by far the most versatile, flexible mold compound available. It mixes and pours easily, curing to a durable rubber with negligible shrinkage. This information was courtesy of the Smooth-On-Products website: <http://www.techno-industrial.com/smooth/liqura.html>

⁴² Effects related information provided by Vincent J-R. Kehoe's *Special Make-up Effects*. Boston, London: Focal Press, 1991.

the frames together in a continuous graduation. For this particular sequence, the actor was filmed for reaction shots that were intercut with the Change-O effects. Within the framework of these cooperative illusionary visuals, the audience connects each shot optically and perceives them in a pattern of thought that travels fluidly (aided, of course, by film editing and framing tricks), thus allowing them to piece together a successive time-elapsd metamorphic scene nearly unparalleled in the film industry thus far.

While preparing a discourse on Ovidian literature, American Medieval scholar, Caroline Walker Bynum, published an article in *Speculum* examining an aspect of metamorphosis I would like to incorporate in my own discussion, directly relating to the aforementioned physical transformation of man to wolf. According to Bynum,

Recent scholarship has tended to see the tamed werewolf as a warping or *repression* of the idea of metamorphosis. And it is certainly true that these stories stress the werewolf as a rational soul trapped in an animal body ... The author of *Arthur and Gorlagon* underlies the full humanity of the werewolf by explaining that there was a mistake at the moment of magical transformation; the formula used erroneously was ‘be a wolf, have the reason of a man.’ The stress on the rationality and civility of the wolf ... attenuates the horror of metamorphosis ... ⁴³

⁴³ Bynum, Caroline Walker. “Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf.” *Speculum*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (Oct., 1998) pp. 1001. I shall also quote her cited footnote for this scholarship, “See, for example, Harf-Lancer, “Metamorphose illusoire.” Thus

Using the transformative example of lycanthropy, her research delves into the concept of metamorphosis as a combination of physical transformation in addition to one of the inner being, metempsychosis. Moreover, she alludes to the notion that without the complete cognitive submission to animal-like quality, it is merely a diluted substrate of transubstantiation. Bynum's argument then considers the fact that the protagonists in *Bisclavret*, *Melion*, and *Guillaume de Palerne* needed to reverse their metamorphosis in order to comment on anxieties and the true horror of shape-shifting, thus rooting the essence of the change to psychological affectations. There seems to be a great divide, however, between the artistic realm of literature and that of the optical sensory stimulation provided by motion pictures.

I, conversely, would argue that the wider appeal, in the scope of film (at least), retracts from the metempsychosis and channels, instead, into the physical transformation. While cognitive clarity does have some effect on the understanding of and relation to the converted being, it is in the physiological impossibility and its reach far exceeding our rational hypotheses that entice inquisition and spectatorship. Furthermore, it is through visual avenues that participants relate to a subject. The speculative "horror", of which Bynum states is "attenuated" by the lack of complete cerebral submission, I would argue, bears no less impact when constricting discussion to the metamorphosis itself. The tactile action of changing is the pregnant moment of metamorphosis, not the subsequent re-action. Thus, when

conceptualized, the werewolf becomes an example of what Ovid commentator Arnulf of Orleans sees as the second general category of change – i.e., magical change, "change of body not of soul"; see Arnulf, *accessus* or *Vita Ovidii* in Fausto Ghisalberti, *Arnolfo d'Orleans*, p. 181."

Picasso took on the lengthy process of illustrating Ovid's *Metamorphoses* throughout the 1930s, returning to his classicizing mode, his focus was on the physical rendering of the transformations.⁴⁴ The artist's expansive set of over thirty etchings had not featured the already-converted forms, but the human figure in the process of moving, changing, twisting, and contorting, thereby visually illustrating the mythological anecdotes through the medium of physicality, lacking emphasis on the psychological variance of its characters post transfiguration.

Circling back to the horror genre of the 1980s, including the box-office successes of *An American Werewolf in London* (having grossed \$31,973,249 in the United States, \$3,786,512 of which was earned in its opening weekend), *Evil Dead*, and the first in the series of *The Nightmare on Elm Street*, the decade offered audiences unparalleled demonstrations of visual metamorphosis, thrusting budgetary funds towards special effects departments on film sets internationally. New technological capabilities allowed production teams to create works of art that had previously been beyond ability, not for lack of imagination but from deficiency in mechanical equipment. As Karina Wilson, screenwriter and Los Angeles story consultant, notes,

Films of the 1980s existed at the glorious watershed when special visual effects finally caught up with the gory imaginings of horror fans and movie creators. Advances in the field of animatronics and liquid and foam latex meant that the human frame could be distorted to an entirely new dimension,

⁴⁴ Doschka, Roland, ed. *Pablo Picasso: Metamorphoses of the Human Form. (Graphic Works 1895-1972)*. New York: Prestel, 2000.

onscreen, in realistic close up. Everything that had lurked in the shadows of horror films in the 1950s could now be brought into the light of day.⁴⁵

This cinematic trend continued its fervor well beyond the decade and still permeates both the silver and small screens of the modern film industry. The visual movement has, however, changed dramatically over the last several years with the exploits of computer graphics and virtual simulations that have forcefully pushed the realm of optical effects to what would have once been considered impossible. And although the horror genre has morphed into the mask of a new face yet again and adapted to meet rising viewer expectations (accepting nothing less than pushing the boundaries of the visually conceivable), the principle formulation for the equal dichotomy of fear and intrigue, nevertheless, remains in tact. The archetypal flesh-eating zombie, the human/animal hybrid, the scientifically engineered mutant, and the hideously deformed body continue to provide the foundation of the genre through its modern adaptations. In fact, these prototypes of human metamorphosis have surpassed their ancestral legacy and have crossed into other artistic avenues beyond literature and the motion picture, infiltrating the contemporary art market.

⁴⁵ As found at *horrorfilmhistory.com*, an excellent source of information discussing popular film trends as divided into decades of the horror genre. The collective information was originally published as part of *Mediaknowall*, a webguide for media students also published by Karina Wilson, 2000-2005.



Archetypal Use of the Zombie in Matthew Barney's Cremaster 3

Art and movie critics alike, working in recent decades, have come to acknowledge the radical transformations taking place in the visualization of the body and its processes. A new anxiety concerning bodily invasion and metamorphosis in part resulted from the rising degree of explicitness in the depiction of these transformations. Additionally, a new breed of fascination with images of mutations and plague, alongside openness about the intersection of horror and sexuality directly spawned from the earlier archetype of pleasure v. pain. These themes both exploited and encouraged significant advancements in special effects and makeup technologies to mutate the human body beyond recognition. These shifts altered our conception of what makes us human and by doing so, enabled new conceptualizations and visualizations of the monstrous.⁴⁶

Now while these explicit themes had been explored on a surface level throughout the evolution of the horror genre, their breakthrough into the high-arts category was somewhat delayed when referring directly to the modern use of special effects and its untapped abilities to articulate these themes. As new-age horror films

⁴⁶ This discourse is further argued in Henry Jenkins' article, "Monstrous Beauty and Mutant Aesthetics: Rethinking Matthew Barney's Relationship to the Horror Genre" as found at <http://web.mit.edu> in association with Amazon.com.

offered fleeting glimpses of bodily mutations, shots cutting abruptly to and from grotesque images of deformed human features, American artist, Matthew Barney, prolonged our exposure to these elements, attacking the confrontation of the unfamiliar directly. And though each of the films in his *Cremaster Cycle* series deserve explicit study, for the purposes of this discussion I will be solely focusing on what has been described as the culminating piece and Barney's most impressive and straightforward display of bodily mutation through the infusion of horror archetypes, his *Cremaster 3*. It then seems natural to compare Barney's relationship to the previously discussed developments in the horror genre and special effects industry that have similarly sought to explore bodily limits and the transformation of human identity, working within popular culture to reshape our aesthetic sensibility and revitalize our perceptual norms.

It is hard to call his cinematography static when there is so much movement both within the frame and of the camera itself and yet one comes away from watching his films with a sense of stillness. We scrutinize his images; actions are performed over and over; all of the shock wears away and what we are left with is the beauty, the erotic fascination, the sense of transformation and enchantment.⁴⁷

Using the word "influence" to describe horror film's complete immersion in *Cremaster 3* would be less than an adequate description of its exploitation. From

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the overtly accessible to the softened subtleties, the gruesome genre folded itself into the foundations of each of Barney's sequences, most immediately recognizable in the film's opening, taking place deep in the New York Chrysler Building's subterranean vaults. Here the audience is first introduced to one of the most striking creatures of the lengthy production as her small, frail hand breaks through the gritty terrain and she begins to emerge from the soil to reveal a realistically repulsive, yet oddly eroticized rotting corpse, rich in its lubricated textures and fragile nudity. Her disjointed movements appear both anxiously precarious and in the same moment, graceful, as she moves out into the sunlight where she collapses to the ground once more. Her thinning red hair, tucked formally behind her skull, and her sickly decayed flesh tinted blue from blood's malnutrition, juxtaposed to her apparent semi-cognitive movements are immediately recognized as the prototype of the zombie. And despite her disinterest in devouring living human flesh to sustain her survival, she does adhere to the horror archetype quite fixedly and in doing so, the spectator's interest lays in both her defiance of scientific structure and in the fascination of death's ability to reconstruct the human figure as it collapses in upon itself in decomposition. The only trivial distinction behind the occurrence of fascination over unabated repulsion is in the viewer's knowledge that the depicted image is not real.

Though I have argued that cognitive thoughts must weaken and conform to the conscious efforts of the film to replace reality with a fabricated exchange, Barney's artistry, as it is not meant to function as a Hollywood blockbuster, advances to a new stage of visualization, one rooted in the undiluted imbuelement of

imagery. This difference stems from the absence of an overarching narrative in Barney's work, that as previously mentioned, allows the movie-audience to revel in the justification of such creatures by formulating a storyline fixed with creative hypotheses. When subtracting this element, however, the audience is no longer enticed to remove their gaze from the image and focus on the plotline, but now has no choice other than to fixate on the saturated moving and still images provided by the artistic film. This missing component in Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* series, specifically number 3, creates an entirely new approach to viewing bodily mutation. Though his filming techniques are highly reminiscent of Hollywood horror productions with his use of dramatic close-ups and slow pan-outs (and his opening zombie scene has been commented to mirror the film-artistry of directors like Mario Bava), the undeniable and immediately noticeable disconnect from narrative bestows upon the image a much greater sense of value. *Cremaster 3*, though not completely static like painting, functions in a similar way by its provision of singular sequences to be viewed independently and understood in the realm of itself. And though Barney has expressed his admiration of the genre, specifically citing David Lynch and David Cronenberg, he has also voiced his frustration with the limitations of the medium as well. His attraction to horror movies stems from his similar interest in creating visual landscapes ripe with the possibility of metamorphosis and transformation. Yet, he has spoken about their inability to sustain that level of abstraction for very long before returning emphasis on moral evaluation and more typical modes of thoughts. The artist, therefore, seeks through the avant-garde the evasion of narrative and denotation that marks popular cinema.

His work straddles the boundary between horror film and more traditional versions of stationary imagery, whereby the viewer wants to understand the film in the same sphere as the horror genre, but is unable to cross the line completely into contemplating it as such. Thus, the visual examination of *Cremaster 3* is like the zombie's first steps: precarious and uncertain.

Barney's camera lens takes on the act of the human gaze as it focuses on a single aspect at a time, moving its oculus backwards and forwards over the zombie's moistened, sunken flesh in paced intervals, rather than cutting to other areas of narrative like one would find in a feature film. This optical process places even greater emphasis on the importance of special effects artistry as the success of the image's stimulation now relies solely on its visual impact. In order to generate a similar envelopment of the viewer's attraction by creating an altered but believable state of metamorphosis and decomposition, special effects makeup is keynote in this effort. And for these brilliantly realized effects throughout the series, Matthew Barney employed the expertise of special effects artist, Gabriel Bartalos, who I was so fortunate enough to conduct an interview with, shedding vast light on the techniques of creating the Cremaster creatures.

Further bridging the gap between mainstream horror film and his own artistic endeavors, Barney's work with Bartalos, an artist having already established a credible resume working on horror films and slasher flicks since the mid 1980s (including sequels to the classics in the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Friday the 13th* series), illuminated the striking similarities in the technical challenges and triumphs of working with the paradigmatic zombie model. Barney explained in

email correspondence with author, Henry Jenkins, that the "dryness" of the classic Zombie figure had always "repulsed" him, where-as "the creatures that attract me are wet, sensual, and more unseen" than the undead on view in most contemporary horror films.⁴⁸ Barney's creation, a mixture of both his insight and Bartalos' technical innovation and creative input, emphasized the tactile quality of the zombie girl, highlighting the body's vast array of liquids, mucus, puss, and excretions through intricate surface treatment.

Bartalos commented on his visions of the zombie, citing a quick reference to previous models used in film, "as much as I love Romero's films and his zombies, I would want to do someone who's staggering and see-through, with ribcage, which is also how we came upon the idea for the horses."⁴⁹ He went on to explain that because special effects makeup is an additive process of building up prosthetics and layers of latex and makeup, it was important to find a thin female model so that the additions would not appear to be extra pieces, but as close to melding with the actual body as could be visualized. Once Nesrin Karanouh was chosen to represent Gary Gilmore, the zombie, full body casts were made in order for Bartalos to create and fit vacuform bones, muscle tissue, and transparent silicone prosthetics that optically enhanced both his and Matthew's attention to anatomical detail, and as he put it, "the idea was that I was actually recreating the anatomy of a face." The effects-artist then noted, "these subtle pieces did not seem like additions- you still

⁴⁸ As mentioned in Henry Jenkins' article, "Monstrous Beauty and Mutant Aesthetics: Rethinking Matthew Barney's Relationship to the Horror Genre".

⁴⁹ As taken from my interview with Gabriel Bartalos on March 3rd, 2009.

marveled at the thinness and frailty of this person though items were added on,” further adding, “[detail] that subtle or subliminal reacts and resonates with people.”⁵⁰

This rigid attention to detail and underlying bodily structure, so precise and subtle in its intricacies, is undoubtedly important in rising to meet the expectation of the fixated gaze. Each tenuous layer, so carefully placed on the girl’s small frame, helped place Barney’s work in a separate, more image-based category than mainstream films, setting it entirely apart in a high-arts class. This is not to say, however, that Hollywood zombies fail in comparison, as they too bear visual impact, but to the extent of which Bartalos and Barney collaborated on this particular character, able to withstand hideously realistic film-stills, is by and large epically superior in all optic modes. The model’s transformation from living to undead is a conquest of modern special effects and the realism they can achieve under the properly skilled hand. And only with such intense realism can Barney begin to successfully draw forth a horrific unease from each viewer, forcing them to confront the decomposition and morbidity of their own corpulent bodies.

We were dealing with an understood anatomy ... we also looked at some pathology books and examples of human cadavers that were telling us the same kind of thing that we were interested in—a level of decay that started to bring green into the red. I don't know if you can see this, but this was a really good example of the type of color that I wanted to work with—where

⁵⁰ Ibid.

you have a memory of red, but it's being replaced by green and gray. There's a level of moisture that Gabe was able to achieve up at Saratoga with a lot of the gels that he uses.⁵¹



Interview with Gabriel Bartalos: one man's rotted flesh is another man's treasure

The undead equine filmed on the racetrack at Saratoga Springs, though differing in viewer-engagement by detaching the sense of personal relation to the subject directly, is no less a masterful feat of special effects ingenuity and, even more to the point, no less a technical marvel in the depiction of metamorphosis. And despite the undead creatures of this sequence being non-human in origin, their rotting zombie corpses represent something of a, “Dorian Gray moment: while the Master class remains the picture of desirable wealth and influence, the spectacle that represents them is literally corruption made flesh. Spectators of the film will not soon forget the image of decaying horses pulling silk-clad jockeys in the misty

⁵¹ Taken from an interview conducted with Matthew Barney by “Artists of the twenty-first century”, as broadcasted by PBS and accessed February 2009 at <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/barney/clip2.html>.

morning of upstate New York.”⁵² Thus Barney uses the visualization of the decomposing flesh to represent the act of greed and demoralization within our own species. And once again, mirroring the consistency of realism in the anatomically faithful depiction of the Gary Gilmore zombie, Barney and Bartalos worked together to create another optically riveting episode hinging the borders of life and figurative (or as the case may be, moralistic) death.

The fantastically rendered zombie horses were created using full-body suits for each animal. “When we came to the zombie suits, instead of gluing them like pieces to an actor, I realized that wasn’t going to work here. We actually should make a body-suit type fitting.”⁵³ Bartalos then described, in detail, the manufacturing process of such a large undertaking and the specialized departments that were necessary in bringing such a production to fruition.

[It requires] very specialized thinking about the stresses that go into creature suits or any specialty walk-around suit ... So we put together our heads on using something called super-spandex. It’s like a dance skin but it’s so strong and it goes in all directions. From that, I handled all the

⁵² As described in a web-article written by Todd R. Ramlow, PopMatters Associate Film Editor. His article further discussing the Master class can be found at <http://www.popmatters.com/film/reviews/c/cremaster3.shtml>.

⁵³ As taken from my interview with Gabriel Bartalos on March 3rd, 2009. It is important to note another insightful interview with Bartalos can be found at <http://www.unitshifter.com/gabebartalos.html> as conducted by “Amanda by Night”, discussing several of his special effects characters and, in particular, his directorial debut of *Skinned Deep*, which made its official US premier at San Francisco's Another Hole in the Head Film Festival, and a full theatrical release in the Summer of 2004.

cosmetics as I normally would, (sculpting, molding, painting) but instead of gluing the skin, we glued back and sewed them to the super spandex and then the seamstress people made patterns off of a fiberglass horse we had. And not only their sewing machine skills but their knowledge of tensions ... was something great to exploit there, very specialized work.⁵⁴

The early stages of the prototype suit were, bar far, the most important in creating a structurally sound cosmetic additive. With each new addition, Bartalos used a friend's horse near his studio in Los Angeles to experiment with the architectural integrity as to how many pieces should comprise the suit and how far the artist was able to push the cosmetic enhancements. "Once I was happy with one that seemed to be the responsible way to go, we then began the group production. The idea was that I didn't mass-produce an error and that cautionary approach worked out really great, it was wildly successful," though, "for safety reasons ... when we built [them], to be completely cautious we built two duplicate sets in case the worst scenarios happened and the camera needed to continue rolling ... Horses are such monstrously athletic animals and as they're running, the damage could be crippling and it's not like a makeup you glue back down an edge, it could rip these suits to pieces, we thought. But they didn't, they held up like champs." The resulting

⁵⁴ As taken from my interview with Gabriel Bartalos on March 3rd, 2009.

costumes, “ended up being an architectural marvel,” as Bartalos accurately described.⁵⁵

Equally as paramount to the discussion of Matthew Barney’s zombies, with their capacious role of presenting associative mortality and deformity, is the appreciation of how these creature-models culminate. Noting that both Barney and Bartalos are exceedingly talented artists in their own specialties, I was curious as to the joint process of creation when interviewing Bartalos, who spoke excitedly about the artists’ collaborative efforts. “What I think is neat is actually Matthew is a very good illustrator and can push clay ... and when we happen to be in the same room, if we’re actually doing the rough design, I’ll encourage him to take the ball of clay.” The special effects artist then used the zombie horses as an example of how the process happens, “When he described them to me ... I quickly did a painting of what I would make a zombie horse as; I had ribs hanging out, the jawbone showing, rotted meat, [to which Barney said], ‘That’s totally great, that’s what I’m thinking.’” Bartalos further added, “I was still cautionary, so I did what’s called a *mock-ette*, a 1/6th scale sculpture, and really then noodled in the damage that I would envision in the rot and three weeks later presented that.” The artists then described the overall collaborative process between the two, “he may not have known it, but he needed my visual realization to get it to that level ... it ends up being, in a sense, a hands on design I do but it’s really guided by [Matthew’s] imagination.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

And though I am guilty of partially categorizing Barney's *Cremaster 3* in the avant-garde horror genre because of its heavy reliance on their archetypal modes of thought, I do agree with Richard Flood in that, "trying to prioritize entries in Barney's syllabus is seductive but not particularly productive, as hierarchies keep mutating like the alien virus in a sci-fi movie."⁵⁷ Although it is an easier task to make the sweeping statement that Barney's work is "like a horror movie", it is more importantly noted what makes his films different from them. For it is within these differentiations that his discovery of a new interpretation for metamorphosis and figural transformation takes root. I would argue the overall attraction to these optical representations remains the same for the viewer, entrenched in their desire to visualize the unfamiliar and the impossible to master their own realm of cognition, but Barney exploits a much richer avenue of imagery, relying on complete visual absorption without the filter of anecdotal justification. In summation, although we can compare Matthew Barney (through his similar exploits of special effects and metamorphic transitions) to horror movie directors like David Cronenberg, it proves a more successful interpretation of his *Cremaster Cycle* to branch out and understand his films not as borrowing from earlier movies but as reinventing the way in which we psychologically relate to their imagery.

⁵⁷ Flood, Richard. *The Land of Everlasting Hills*, *Cremaster 2* artists book.



Brief Conclusion

Here is a list of fearful things:

The jaws of sharks, a vulture's wings,
The rabid bite of the dog's of war,
The voice of one who went before.
But most of all the mirror's gaze,
which counts us out our numbered days.

-Clive Barker⁵⁸

The art of metamorphosis and bodily distortion has, itself, transformed vastly over the last century, moving away from the static art of the past and matriculating to higher levels of visual interpretation with the use of modern techniques and mechanical developments in the art industry. For centuries, artists from both professional and nonprofessional realms have explored their own human body in visual terms, expanding the boundaries of physical limitations to outwardly defy scientific principles. Additionally, as Georges Bataille and Annette Michelson have ascertained, “the obsession with metamorphosis can be defined as a violent

⁵⁸ A poem by Clive Barker, as found on his official website, at <http://www.clivebarker.info/yaabarat2ex.html>.

need – identically, furthermore, with all our animal needs – that suddenly impels us to cast of the gestures and attitudes requisite to human nature.”⁵⁹ And it comes as no surprise that this obsession, so fully embraced by our own body dysmorphic culture, would have the large following, successful market, and mainstream attention it does contemporaneously. Moreover, although the silver screen has undergone many renovations through the roaring 20s, the hippie 60s, the sweatband 80s, and so on, the primal need to experiment with altered realities remained virtually the same despite its changing façade. As my thesis has explored, the desire to view our own bodies in a realm specifically created as a pleasure inducing experience, has remained the driving force behind the technological advancements in the business. As the expectations of the audience expanded with the thriving market, as did the aspirations of the directors and special effects artists to meet them, which lead to the overwhelming realism of Hollywood effects today.

Having the ability to gratify our need to overcome our declining sense of cognition in a society of current economical strain and stress-pollution, also continues to be, as I argue, a driving force behind the Hollywood industry. The exigency to detach oneself from his own actuality to imbue one mastered by the skill of hand, as subconscious as this desire may be, will abide in its pursuit to blur the lines beyond recognition between reality and virtual reality. And it is at this sensory intersection that you will always find a line wrapping around the corner on opening night at the box-office.

⁵⁹ Georges Bataille and Annette Michelson, “Metamorphosis”. *October*, Vol. 36 (Spring, 1986), pp. 22-23



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