Pleasures of the Spectatorium: young people, classrooms and horror films

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic study of Year 9 school pupils` responses to horror films, and, in particular, *The Company of Wolves* (Jordan, 1984). It employs social semiotic theory to analyse both film texts and audience engagements with such texts, exploring how such engagements involve transformations of subjectivity, particular kinds of competence in reading visual codes, and certain types of affective response to horror texts. It explores, briefly, histories of elements of the horror genre, especially the figures of the werewolf and the folktale heroine, in the period from the Enlightenment to the present day.

The thesis develops a theory of textual pleasure in relation to horror films, drawing on Bakhtin`s theory of carnival, Freud`s theories of pleasure, and Bourdieu`s theory of taste. It argues that fear and pleasure are related in this context; that such pleasures are socially situated; and that they relate to forms of textual identification.

A theory of the sublime is also developed in the context of the social semiotics of film, exploring the history of the sublime from Kant and Burke to postmodernist theory. It is argued that sublime images operate through a dialectic of revelation and concealment, and that audiences replicate this mechanism in their viewing, and in the social sites in which they spectate. These structures are associated, furthermore, with socially-determined structures of aesthetic taste, and ways in which these in turn determine texts as popular or elite (or a hybrid of the two).

Finally, the thesis addresses the pedagogies of English and Media Studies, arguing that classrooms need to become spectatorial spaces, open to new literacies of the visual, and equipped with the texts, technologies, and practices adequate to these new competences.

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ERRATA

page no.

20, line 11	"then" should read "than"
20, line 12	"undr" should read "under"
26, para. 1, line 18	"Zipes, 1983" should read "Zipes, 1982, 1983"
33, para. 4, line 2	"th" should read "the"
34, line 4	"third" should read "fourth"
35, para. 3, line 2	insert dash (-) after closing bracket
37, para. 3, line 7	"are" should read "is"
38, para. 1, line 9/10	delete "The juxtaposition ... Gothic settings."
44, para. 2, line 16	"mucous" should read "mucus"
45, para. 1, line 3	"clearly" should read ", I suggest,"
46, indented quote, line 1	"Cronenborg" should read "Cronenberg"
46, indented quote, line 3/4	delete "and gives birth ... original body"
48, para 3, line 2	"worldm" should read "world"
57, indented quote	Hodge and Kress reference date should be 1988
60, para. 1, line 14	delete "clearly"
61, para. 2, line 1	"the third part of" should read "this"
67, para. 2, line 4	"elseswhere" should read "elsewhere"
82, para. 5, line 1	"taking" should read "talking"
87, para.1, line 1	delete second "it"
88, para. 3, line 10	"into" should read "in"
89, para. 1, line 12	"article" should read "thesis"
102, para. 3, line 2	Kress and Van Leeuwen reference should be 1992
129, para. 2, line 7	"percieved" should read "perceived"
136, para. 2, line 2	"critically" should read "uncritically"
143, para. 1, line 6	"coheent" should read "coherent"
151, second indented quote	delete this quote
175, para. 2, line 1	"images are horror" should read "images of horror"
178, para. 1, line 1	"Four" should read "three"
178, para. 4, line 3	"Bourdieu" should read "Bakhtin"
181, para. 1, line 7	"pleasurable" should read "unpleasurable"
183, para. 2, line 6	delete "individual"
198, para. 2, line 7	delete second "the"
203, para. 2, line 2	"itself is an image" should read "itself an image"
207, para. 1, line 11	close quotes before closing bracket
261, para. 3, line 2	"point" should read "points"
264, indented quote	"effcts" should read "effects"
276, para. 1, line 3	delete "that"
284 (bibliography)	insert "Zipes, J (1982) *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Socio-Cultural Context*, London, Heinemann"

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Chapter 1: Introduction - Madness and Method

Illustration 1.1: Rosaleen sleeping   **Illustration 1.2**: Rosaleen`s toys

from *The Company of Wolves* (Neil Jordan, 1984)

Dear John,

You know about the work we did on the Company of Wolves, just before you left, well we have just seen the film. Since you missed it, I will tell you about it, because it`s a good film. First of all you see all those mini-stories, like in the book. Except before that, at the beginning, there is a part where you see a girl in nowadays, dreaming. And then in her dream you see the story and that is how it starts off.

The actors in the film are quite good, and the granny is that woman from `Murder She Wrote`, remember? Anyway, the dream is all set in the woods a while ago in the past, like in the book. It starts off in autumn, and then ends in winter. The entire film is basically just like in the book, apart from the end. At the end, she (the little girl) ends up, supposedly, turning into a wolf herself (in the dream) and chased. Then she wakes up to find wolves rushing up to her bedroom and then you hear a poem at the very end. Oh yeah, there is another thing made different. Throughout the film you see these toys in all shapes and sizes from her room, in real life. Also, at

the end, the granny gets killed by having her head chopped/knocked off, like a china doll, and smashing on a wall. Funny or what?! Overall, the film is quite good, with a few gory bits and nice lighting techniques.

Well, how`s life in the North Pole?! Hope to see you soon so you can see this great film!

Best Wishes from Leo B

Who watches this film, and where? In some ways it is an art-house film, dense with obscure symbolism, derived from the self-consciously literary prose of Angela Carter, who co-wrote it with director Neil Jordan. But, part-funded by Channel 4, it was released beyond the art-house circuit, and shown on television as part of Channel 4`s innovative *Film on 4* series. And it employs the themes, narratives and imagery of the popular horror film, particularly the werewolf sub-genre, which, as James Twitchell observes (1985), saw something of a boom in the early 1980s. Already, then, a number of possible auditoria and audiences are implied: art cinema, commercial cinema, and eventually, after its release on video, living-room.

The audience central to this study, however, are very different: a mixed sex, mixed ability class of Year 9 school students (aged 13 to 14) in an English comprehensive school, watching an edited version of the film (the uncut video has an 18 certificate) as part of a Media Studies course on the horror genre. Leo`s "letter to a friend" is a classroom task, set immediately after watching the film.

The story of this course began in 1989, when my school bought a video digitiser, which digitised images from video and converted them into Acorn image files. We decided to use this for a media course we were then devising for year 9 - we would ask pupils to study a film, using the digitiser to grab images that they could import

into their desktop-published work. The film was *The Company of Wolves*, chosen by a new teacher in the department who devised the course, following the feminist intentions of Angela Carter's story and screenplay, to teach about changing representations of women in horror. It soon became apparent, though, that other moments in the film, in particular the werewolf transformation sequences, exerted a powerful fascination, and that this attraction of the horror film needed to be a legitimate part of the course. This kind of subject matter evokes perennial public disquiet, which sees such matter as deranged and unnatural. Mikhail Bakhtin (1965) points out, however, that such madness, the madness of the grotesque, can produce revelatory inversions of the "normal" (that is, the ideological) point of view:

> ... the theme of madness is inherent to all grotesque forms, because madness makes men look at the world with different eyes, not dimmed by "normal", that is by commonplace ideas and judgements. (page 39)

Chapters 7 and 8 will consider the claim that the madness of horror has a kind of reason, and a function in the normal workings of the human psyche, and its work to build productive social identities.

The teacher who constructed the course also wanted to explore what kinds of skills were needed to `read` a film, and to teach her students how to read the construction of images, and particularly the still images they could digitise from the film. These processes will be examined in chapter 3.

Six years on, I have adopted this course as a research project. In some ways, it has been a convenient subject for an empirical study: the data has been readily available, as I took over the course when the teacher who devised it went on maternity leave, and subsequently left the school. In other ways, it has produced the familiar difficulties of participant observer research, which need to be rehearsed

here. Before looking at the methodology, however, I will outline the three main research questions, which to some extent determine it.

The project has prompted three distinct but related questions, which form the basis of the enquiry in this study.

1. The visual semiotic and the horror film

The basic question here is: "What meanings are made, by a specific audience of young people in a specific social context, of this film, *The Company of Wolves*, and how do they 'read' the mode of the visual to make these meanings?"

This question is really a three-part question, viewed from the perspective of Halliday`s three metafunctions of language, adopted by Kress and Van Leeuwen in their social semiotic grammar of the visual image (1996). This study will be concerned, then, firstly with the **ideational metafunction**: how film texts, and *The Company of Wolves* in particular, represent ideas, objects, and relations; how they construct narratives; and what meanings might be carried, in specific social and historical circumstances, by the images they build. In particular, two image-paradigms will be explored in detail: that of the werewolf, and the figure of the cinematic werewolf especially; and that of the heroine of the film, derived partly from Perrault`s fairytale of Red Riding Hood (and the mediaeval folktale of which it is a transformation), and partly from the tradition of female heroines in horror film.

Secondly, with the **interpersonal metafunction**: how texts "project a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, page 41). The study will analyse key sequences from the film; and also the transformations of the film produced by the young people in the sample - their writing and drawing, transcriptions of their talk, and observations of

their viewing of the film. I will see these transformations, however, not just as the product of a short-term semiotic exchange, produced by the visual grammar of the text alone, but by the long-term discursive processes of which this encounter is only a small instance, dialogically related to other experiences of texts in this genre. I will also view it as related to cultural experience in the widest sense, and to the growth and transformation of subjectivity in each of these young people, accomplished in part through engagement with symbolic media such as film.

Thirdly, the **textual metafunction**: how the text is composed to produce certain meanings. This area of the study will re-examine classic montage theory, aligning it with Roland Barthes` theory of the cinematic still, and to recent social semiotic theory of the visual syntagm. I will also argue, however, that the horror film uses specific semiotic structures designed to produce the affect of horror - fear and pleasure - by a dialectic of concealment and revelation, echoed in the physical process of viewing the film, as viewers oscillate between wide-eyed fascination and closed eyes shutting out the horrific image. These structures I will relate to the textual and philosophical tradition of the **sublime**, constructed, from the Enlightenment through the Romantic and Victorian periods to contemporary versions presented by theorists of postmodernism, to represent and explain phenomena which stimulated a sense of awe, fear and wonder in the beholder.

2. The thrill of horror: fear, pleasure, taste and the sublime

Simply stated, this question is: "What do viewers, and particularly these school students, *feel* when watching a horror film, and this film in particular? How is this feeling related to the meanings they make? And what is the nature of the particular textual pleasure bound up in all this?"

The study will examine the peculiar affect of horror: the thrill composed of fear and

pleasure combined. It will argue, following Vygotsky, that affect is inseparable from cognition, and that these fears and pleasures are important parts of what meanings are made, and how they are made. Halliday (1989) also stresses the part affect plays in the making of meaning, suggesting, in fact, that it is not simply a dispensable supplement, but an integral part of the meaning:

> ... one cannot draw a sharp line between the expression of meanings on the one hand and the expression of attitudes and emotions on the other.
>
> It is more helpful to think of attitudes and emotions as part of meaning; to consider that all intonation patterns convey meaning, and then ask what kinds of meaning they convey. (page 80)

This particular affect, then, the thrill of horror, will be seen as inseparable from the processes of representation which explore specific social fears. It will be necessary to construct a theory of textual pleasure which will also accommodate the textual fear criterial to the effect and meaning of the horror film. This theory will need to be related to the notion of the sublime, again: valuable since it is a theory of representation which integrates the contradictory affects of fear and pleasure. Some notion will also need to be developed of the subjectivities which experience such emotions - how will such feelings affect and be affected by the individual histories of specific viewers? Also, textual pleasure, as Bourdieu's work (1984) demonstrates, is determined by socially and historically contingent structures of aesthetic taste; and this will have to be taken into account also. Textual pleasure is, I will argue, a particular problem for the classroom: it is repeatedly reified within the pedagogy of English as a subject discipline, and by the regulatory processes which determine how the subject is organised (national curricular legislation; public examination syllabuses and policy). Yet works of fiction have always been about pleasure, as the popular market emphasises; and when young people feel successful about a course in English, they will often begin their Record of Achievement comment with "I really

enjoyed this course ...", to the annoyance of teachers who insist that enjoyment is beside the point - they should be describing what they've *achieved*, as if pleasure is not part of achievement.

3. Overlapping histories: the diachronic dimension

This question asks: "What are the small and large historical processes by which individuals make meaning, and through these meanings, make themselves, their own subjectivities?" Although a good deal of the analysis of text and audience discourse will emphasise the contemporary moment, sometimes in very specific terms (minute-by-minute observations of a class watching a film, for instance), it is impossible - and undesirable - to escape the diachronic, as Hodge and Kress emphasise in their re-evaluation of Saussure (1989, Chapter 2). They point out that even apparently instantaneous semiotic exchanges have temporal features, however brief; that all signs are transformations of signs which historically precede them, and that this history of transformations affects present and future meanings. In this study, though its emphasis is not primarily historical, there are four kinds of diachronic view which will loosely underpin much of the analysis.

Firstly, there will be an exploration of the diachronic syntagms of which the film text is constructed - and an examination of how such structures are read by school students. It is this kind of analysis which will appear most specific, employing as it does the framework of semiotic analysis outlined by Kress and Van Leeuwen.

Secondly, there will be some research into the cultural histories of the particular textual paradigms with which the study is centrally concerned: simply put, Beauty and the Beast - or Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. This history will be largely confined to the period of the life of cinema, though it will also consider, more broadly, the history of the horror genre, and the roughly coterminous history of the

philosophical category associated with it, the sublime. Also, the history of the

fairytale of Little Red Riding Hood, an important source of *The Company of Wolves,*

will be considered.

Thirdly, there will be a concern with the individual histories of viewers. This area is

the most difficult, methodologically. These histories clearly have a determining effect

on how texts are read, and so cannot simply be ignored. On the other hand, it's very

difficult to obtain reliable evidence about the history of a private person. Furthermore,

important aspects of that history are internal: the psychic history of the individual.

The tradition of British Cultural Studies has, on the whole, preferred to omit this latter

consideration, preferring empirical evidence of the external features of social

identities to the apparently ahistorical speculation of psychoanalysis. In some

respects, this preference has merits. David Buckingham (1993a) points out the

limitations of the employment of Freudian and Lacanian perspectives in *Screen*

theory, and the resultant overemphasis on text-spectator relations based on abstract

conceptions of the ideal viewing subject, at the expense of attention to real

audiences. Mindful of this, I will, where possible, base my account on evidence of

social relations and identities produced by the talk and writing of actual audiences -

students in classrooms. However, Freud's accounts of the psychic processes most

closely associated with the deliberate seeking out of distressing experiences, or the

simulation of them, for pleasurable purposes, are often very compelling, and seem to

fit the social experience of the horror film too well to be easily ignored. Buckingham

himself later employs, in a discussion of young people's viewing of horror (1996) a

psychoanalytic paradigm of the masochistic nature of horror viewers, derived from

Carol Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1993), which in many ways

successfully synthesises psychoanalytic and cultural materialist approaches. I will

argue, then, that it is worth speculating on the internal histories of viewers, though

with some caution, and with the reservation that such speculations may need to be

very broadly based - often applied to groups rather than individuals; even to the

whole group in the study. I will argue that such speculations are not necessarily at odds with a cultural materialist approach, taking my cue from Volosinov's suggestion (1973) that the psyche can only be understood as a complex of material signs: that the outer world of signs has proceeded from innumerable psyches, and will be re-absorbed by others:

> We repeat: every outer ideological sign, of whatever kind, is engulfed in and washed over by inner signs - by the consciousness. The outer sign originates from this sea of inner signs and continues to abide there, since its life is a process of renewal as something to be understood, experienced and assimilated, i.e., its life consists in its being engaged ever anew into the inner context.
>
> Therefore, *from the standpoint of content, there is no basic division between the psyche and ideology: the difference is one of degree only.* (page 33; original emphasis)

The final sense of history is almost the opposite in its range. It borrows from Bakhtin a sense of the sweep of cultural experience encompassed by his magisterial charting of the folk-rituals of carnival in *Rabelais and His World* (1965/1968). The attractions of Bakhtin's descriptions of the characteristics of carnival - grotesque realism, and the dissolution of boundaries between actors and spectators in the carnival arena - are that they convincingly represent characteristic structures of popular culture in general, and also specific structures of contemporary body-horror. Current invocations of Bakhtin to describe aspects of modern popular culture associate the pre-industrial folk culture Bakhtin describes and the cultural politics of the contemporary moment, allowing for an optimistic reading of the latter. I wish to retain something of this optimism, while expressing two reservations. Firstly, that unalloyed optimism of the kind described by Jim McGuigan (1992) in his critique of the "cultural populist" drift in Cultural Studies is, as McGuigan argues, a stance which ends in a

paralysis of cultural politics, and needs to be modified by a sense of the forces which restrict the freedom of people to contest the meanings imposed on them. Rather, I intend to adopt the view of a continuum of possibilities for ideological contestation proposed by Hodge and Kress (1989):

> We do not assume that resistance is always successful or potent: but nor do we take it for granted, as many theorists of social meaning seem to do, that resistance is always effortlessly incorporated and rendered non-significant. (page 8)

Secondly, that, in a society increasingly pluralist and mobile, characterised by cultural forms which hybridize elements of popular and elite culture, it's an increasingly pointless project simply to champion the popular and fantasise about the abolition or withering away of elite forms, as Paul Willis does in his introduction to *Common Culture* (1992). These hitherto polarised cultural forms will continue to pull apart and collide, of course, offering the possibilities for polarised aesthetic preferences reflecting fractures, divisions and inequities in our society. But at the same time, they depend on and feed off each other; and increasingly seem as likely to merge and collapse into each other as to diverge, reflecting the kinds of rapid inversions of centre and margin observed by theorists of the postmodern (cf Connor, 1990; Featherstone, 1993; Jameson, 1991). This is summarised by Featherstone as:

> the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture; a stylistic promiscuity favouring eclecticism and the mixing of codes; parody, pastiche, irony, playfulness and the celebration of the surface 'depthlessness' of culture ... (1993, 7-8).

My stance, then, will be best described as cautiously optimistic. I am, broadly, optimistic about the ability of young people to make their own meanings from a wide

array of texts, both popular and classical, and to contest meanings which are repressive to them. I remain very cautious, however, about social structures - educational policy and curriculum legislation, for instance - which deny potentially productive textual encounters to young people, either refusing to acknowledge the value of the popular, or sacralizing and imposing classical culture to an extent which effectively shuts out a large sector of the community. In any case, I take the purpose of Bakhtin's vision to be less an unwarranted optimism about the future than the presentation of a cultural alternative, a turning upside down of the aesthetic norms of the dominant social groups of his (and our) times. My ideal - much more cautious! - would look more like a hybrid, learning to live with contradiction and diversity, than a structure of polar opposites.

Methodology

The acquisition of data and the interpretive processes to which I have subjected it are best described as a small-scale qualitative cultural studies investigation. The features of this which require some detailed description, as they have a bearing on the conclusions reached, are:

• *the descriptive and interpretive paradigms employed*

• *the range of observational methods used.*

• *my role as participant observer*

The first of these is largely outlined above. This is a piece of audience research in the cultural studies tradition, combined with textual analysis drawing on a range of cultural theory, and on social semiotics in particular. This analysis will seek to problematize the nature of textual engagement - text will be seen as *utterance*, in the sense used by Bakhtin and Volosinov, and will embrace the film text as well as the transformations of it, responses to it, re-makings of it by the young people described.

I have taken *utterance* to mean any kind of behaviour whose purpose or effect is to convey meaning; so talk, writing, image, selection of image by computer, electronic page design, gesture, laughter, eye movements - all of these are treated as forms of utterance in specific social context, governed by the rules that determine any manifestation of what Volosinov (1973) calls "the little speech genre". The range of this domain of textuality, this exchange of voices, is difficult to confine or limit, whether spatially or temporally - and I will not try to do so. Rather, the thesis will argue that these discursive processes are best imaged by Bakhtin's dialogism, so that boundaries between text and reader, speaker and listener, a sign and its history, become difficult to maintain:

> Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. (Bakhtin, 1952/1981, page 85)

One voice, of course, in the dialogic flow is my own - the voice of this thesis. I will see it as a contribution to, a reply to, an insertion into, an experience always structured as text, as utterance. "From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs", says Derrida (1974, page 50), a view consonant with Volosinov's theory of ideology and the individual psyche - so my text is a reading within the texts of these students, which are a reading within the films they watch, which are readings of earlier films and images.

The range of observational methods is varied. What I was looking at was a text and an audience. The data I gathered reflect this clearly. On the one hand, I needed examples of the film text itself; and this is represented by images digitised from the film (by the school students themselves, as part of the classroom project which forms the basis of the study). Other materials used as data are the writings of the students in response to the film. As part of the project, most of this writing was completed on a

desktop publishing package. These texts appear in the study as they were written, where relevant with all the compositional features of their work (text enhancement, borders, different fonts, graphics, imported images).

The social processes relevant to the viewing of this film I have seen as very diverse, ranging from the formal operations of classroom work, through a range of subcultural accommodations and contestations of these processes, to experiences outside the classroom, as students' social identities are acted out in numerous social encounters in school, and with friends and families at home. I have sought a range of observational methods here, which include a range of unstructured interviews (with individuals, pairs and groups), and journal observations of classroom viewings of film. There is some emphasis in these observations on the physical space of the classroom, as its importance as a kind of spectatorial arena forms part of my argument. The groups observed and interviewed mostly come from three repeats of the six-week course, each taught by me: one in 1995, and two in 1996. The interviews vary in many ways: though all generally of the open-ended ethnographic variety, they attempt to respond to the circumstances of the moment (as in Fontana and Frey's summary, 1994, of Douglas' "creative interviewing" approach). At times, this has meant simply switching on a tape recorder always kept ready in the classroom as a group of students talk spontaneously about their work. At other times, it has involved making an appointment with students outside the lesson, to develop ideas at length with minimal distraction.

The ethical considerations of such methods need to be considered here. All interviews were freely given by the young people involved (all referred to only by first name), and I always explained to them the nature of my research, and my status as a researcher, before obtaining their consent to be interviewed. Even the classroom journals, drawn on particularly in chapter 6, were made after informing the class that I was observing them as they watched the film. In many cases, they seemed quickly

to forget that I was there as an observer, so the risk that informed consent would change their behaviour did not appear to materialise. The material on which we were working carries, also, ethical complications, in view of the kinds of disapproval of young people's exposure to such texts which emerges from time to time in ways well-documented by, for instance, David Buckingham's work (1996) on the James Bulger case and *Child's Play 3*. These ethical difficulties are not related particularly to the process of research, in this case, however, as much as the pedagogical decisions to use horror texts in the first place. My view of the ethical position here is, effectively, that of my school and department, which believe the public representation of horror texts to be distorted and simplistic, and that the responsibly-conducted study of texts which evidence suggests are compelling to teenagers is preferable to the wholesale suppression of them.

In certain ways, this research situation bears superficial similarity to the action research tradition, limited as it is to a very specific case study, and featuring teacher-as-researcher. There are clear differences, however, which distance this study from the action research tradition. The first is in the purpose of the research. A principal characteristic of action research, as described by Cohen and Manion (1994), is that it is practically oriented:

> It is a means of remedying problems diagnosed in specific situations, or of improving in some way a given set of circumstances. (page 188)

The aim of the present study, on the other hand, is not to do with problem-solving, or the improvement of teaching method, but with the understanding of a particular cultural field, in particular cultural and social contexts, one specific feature of which is their location in an educational setting and set of practices.

Secondly, Cohen and Manion emphasise the use by action research of a scientific

paradigm and the methods associated with it, albeit loosely. This study, by contrast, employs an ethnographic methodology which seeks to problematize the nature of discourse, the situatedness of the cultural events observed, and the subjectivities of both observed and observer, in the ways described above.

My role as participant observer is ambiguous. In one sense, I am perfectly placed by the role of teacher to observe, interpret, analyse. I can choose my desk as I write the classroom journal, place it to get the best view, side on to the pupils as they face the TV screen. It is easy for me to set up interviews, both inside and outside the lesson: they are interested in the idea of my research, trusting, eager to be interviewed - in all these senses, I am observer rather than participant. In other ways, however, the teacher-researcher, in his or her own classroom, is more of a participant then the usual "participant observer", who becomes temporarily immersed in the culture undr study. The teacher, by contrast, is a genuine participant, permanently a part of the culture he or she is subjecting to enquiry. This causes a number of potential problems. I have a clear vested interest in many features of the social situation I am describing and analysing. I have partly determined the media studies course in which these students are engaged; I am in a role of authority - even, perhaps, the representative of the dominant culture which at times I represent as oppressive. As I observe processes of analysis and enquiry in these students, I am simultaneously intervening in them. I am involved in a number of processes of social regulation: organising lessons, restraining certain kinds of behaviour, promoting others, grouping pupils, intervening in the organisation of the physical space in which they work, regulating their access to resources. In all these senses, I seem very different from classic examples of participant observer, such as Paul Willis in *Learning to Labour* (1977), working alongside his "lads", on their side, with no vested interest in the regulatory systems that circumscribe their lives, and free to champion their cause against an Althusserian ideological apparatus. In fact, against this kind of example, I look more like a part of such an apparatus.

But the teacher's role as ideological mediator is complex, especially where the central project is one of cultural enquiry, as is often the case in English and Media Studies. The organisation of such cultural enquiry can never be neutral, is always ideologically weighted. Even the relatively uncontroversial analysis of the Cox Report described English teaching in terms of five "views of the subject": adult skills; cultural heritage; cultural analysis; personal growth; and cross-curricular (HMSO, 1989, 2.20-2.27). This range clearly demonstrates the possibilities for this area of the curriculum both to reinforce dominant cultural meanings or to contest them; or, perhaps more often, to do both. Richard Johnson, in an article of Cultural Studies in *The English Magazine* (1989), sees English teachers (and others) in a more oppositional role, as informal employers of the perspectives and methods of Cultural Studies:

> ... Cultural Studies is present in the curriculum as an element (irritant? stimulant?) 'in and against' the conventional academic disciplines or school subjects. It has become a perspective within subject disciplines, often a kind of internal critique of them. (page 11)

I would regard myself as a teacher involved in this kind of internal critique, both in terms of engagement in national debates about the nature of "English" and in terms of the kind of direct resistance to certain forms of statutory cultural regulation as those described by Ken Jones in his analysis of the 1993 SATs boycott (Jones, 1994). Nevertheless, short of resigning from teaching, we all find ourselves at the mercy of daily contradictions: obliged effectively to police a national prescription of Shakespeare, for instance, while selecting Media syllabuses that require the teaching of music television, comics and science fiction.

This contradictory position undoubtedly affects my role as participant observer in this

project. It both alienates me from and brings me closer to the experiences of and allegiances to popular film that students bring to the course, and which are the subject of much of this study. Equally contradictory is the history I bring to the lessons I describe here. I can clearly recall the suppression of the popular that existed at the boarding school I attended as a child - I can remember reading a popular novel (a James Bond book, I think), disguised in the paper cover of a worthy Victorian novel. I can remember the ideology of "a love of literature", fostered by school and university, and its refusal of any pleasure I had from watching Dr Who from behind a cushion, or making Airfix models of horror stars of the classic films of the Universal Studios - Frankenstein, Dracula, the Phantom of the Opera, the WolfMan. And I remember the excitement, as a young teacher, of the moment when the notorious Pett twins, in my first CSE English class, brought in the record of Meat Loaf's "Bat Out of Hell", and our agreement that, yes, this could count as a poem for the coursework folder.

These histories, furthermore, are all a part of my identity as an adult male - the public school I attended was all-male; the films and books of my childhood were dominated by images of powerful men; and my early experiences of the horror genre represented women briefly, and as victims. The descriptions of boyhood in the postwar period by writers in the Cultural Studies tradition, such as David Jackson (1990) and Andrew Tolson (1977), relate experiences which, in many ways, I share: a world of comic-book heroes and sporty boys. In other ways, however, my experiences were different: the public school I attended showed - at least I can remember - less homophobia and brutality than the boarding schools described by Jackson and Tolson; and the prevalent mood was receptive to representations of emotion, and rooted in the hippie subculture of the late sixties and early seventies. My work as an adult with both boys and girls in schools over twenty years has left me sympathetic to both in different ways. Like many teachers, I find the enormous goodwill of many girls (such as Lucy and Jessica in this study) rewarding and

energising. I also (again like many teachers) am drawn to, and in some ways identify with, different kinds of oppositional subculture in groups of boys and girls (again, these are referred to in the course of this thesis).

Nevertheless, my understandings of gender relations in school, as in society, have always been, and will no doubt always be, problematic and contradictory, shaped as they must be by the legacies of feminisms, men's relation to feminism, the brief moment of men's groups, and current readings of gender in cultural and media theory. As Stephen Heath remarks, "Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one. ... Men have a necessary relation to feminism - the point, after all, is that it should change them too ..." (1987). This "impossible" relationship will always be, for me as it is for Heath, a kind of faultline running through my commentary and point of view. It is clear, for instance, that as an adult male with a particular viewing history of my own, in an interview with two thirteen-year old girls whose fascinations lie with domestic contexts of horror, and character types derived from dolls and babysitters, I must recognise the differences of perspective and experience. The evidence of the study shows, however, that the boundaries blur time and time again. Carol Clover (1992) argues that all viewers of horror, male and female, are in certain ways positioned as (female) victims. And many readings of The Company of Wolves contradict simple patterns of gendered response. Leo's "letter", for instance, at the head of this chapter, is typically boyish in its enthusiasm for lighting techniques and gore; but more similar to girls' responses in the way it closely follows the female central character, and the location of her narrating consciousness - her bedroom, and her toys.

All I can hope to do is to recognise contradiction rather than suppress it. The discourse of my study is itself hybrid: the dispassionate tones of analysis mingled with the more personal residue of my own involvement in the daily work of the classroom - the exhilaration, frustration, confusion, the changing moods of the

physical space and the young people and adults who use it, and the movements and transformations of image and word in the texts we read and make. The attempt to describe these young people in the act of making meanings will, inevitably, be a description of myself also, as James Clifford observes of ethnographic writing in general:

> It has become clear that every version of an "other", wherever found, is also the construction of a "self", and the making of ethnographic texts ... has always involved a process of "self-fashioning". (1986, pages 23 and 24)

English teachers can never escape narrative. This will be a fractured narrative of meaning-making in the classroom, shot through with my own hopes and ambitions, incomprehensions of, sympathy with, excitement about, the young people I work with. It will be, as Clifford remarks of ethnographic truth, "*partial* - committed and incomplete" (page 7).

Chapter 2: *The Company of Wolves*: narratives of transformation, and representations of women in horror

Introduction

This chapter will describe and analyse *The Company of Wolves*. In particular, it will look at two aspects of the film which are highlighted in the Year 9 Media Studies course on which this study is based: the figure of the werewolf; and the heroine/narrator figure. This chapter will explore the histories of these figures, which belong to two narrative traditions, one rooted in folk and fairytale, one in the horror film. How are the meanings accreted over the course of these histories transformed again in this text? And which of those meanings will be available to which viewers of the film?

Within these questions, there is a more fundamental question about the nature of the visual image. How does it convey meaning; how is it read, by comparison with a verbal sign, for instance; how is a particular image selected from a particular paradigm; how is it composed in relation to other images; how is this momentary composition - say, a single frame in a moving sequence - articulated with the other similarly composed frames in the syntagmatic structure of the moving image? These questions will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 3, in the context of how images are read by specific viewers.

The film was made in 1984 in the UK, directed by Neil Jordan, and written by Angela Carter, who based the script on a story from her collection, *The Bloody Chamber*

(1981). Carter's original story takes the form of a series of cautionary tales about werewolves, in a mid-European peasant setting, delivered by a narrative voice that suggests a grandmaternal wise woman. The longest, and final tale of the series is an adaptation of the story of Little Red Riding Hood. There are some important differences, however. Carter makes the story one of female initiation into adulthood, in which the colour of the girl's cloak is explicitly associated with menstrual blood, and the werewolf with male sexuality. The passive girl of the fairytale, helplessly eaten by the wolf, is transformed into a strong and active heroine, who faces the werewolf fearlessly, and overcomes him by sleeping with him. As a transformation in a cultural-historical process, this textual series clearly signals the feminist intentions of Carter, a view endorsed by commentators on her work, such as Bristow and Broughton (1997), or Lucie Armitt (1997), who presents "The Company of Wolves" as a progressive transformation of the fairytale. However, the movement is not so simply from a disenfranchised past to an emancipatory present, though that's how it appears at first. Angela Carter was well aware of the history of the folktale she used as her raw material: she includes her own translation of Charles Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" in *The Virago Book of Fairytales* (Carter, 1991). And she appends a note, referring to Jack Zipes' genealogy of the story (Zipes, 1983), along with her own summary of the mediaeval French folk tale from which Perrault's version derived. In this version, as Zipes recounts, the girl is, like Carter's heroine, active, bold and clever. She drinks the blood and eats the flesh of her grandmother, preserved by the wolf; and survives, fooling the wolf at the end of the story. Zipes presents this as a symbolic account of a ritual peasant initiation into adulthood, in which the child leaves the community to find and prove her adult self, encounters the wolf, symbol of adult sexuality, and symbolically consumes her grandmother, whom she will eventually replace in the community. Carter's awareness of this version of the story, as well as the similarity it bears to her version, seems to show that the strength of her heroine depends on structures that gesture forwards to the social identities opened up by contemporary feminisms; and backwards to a time when

strong female roles were an important part of the bonds of solidarity holding the community together. This construction of the female was quite intolerable, as Zipes points out, to the bourgeois-aristocratic ideal of Perrault, who transforms the story to serve as a cautionary model of female passivity to the children of the courts and salons of seventeenth century France.

In the film, two important changes are made. Firstly, another narrative layer is added, by introducing another version of the heroine, in contemporary guise - a modern teenager, dreaming in her bedroom. The dream produces the outer layer of the narrative structure - she dreams the entire Red Riding Hood story, as well as a number of subordinate narratives, themselves recounted by narrators within the dream (either the girl herself, or her grandmother). The teacher who devised and taught the course on *The Company of Wolves* was, as Chapter 1 indicated, concerned to make the role of the strong heroine an explicit subject of her teaching, and to locate it within the history of representations of women in the horror genre. This strategy has been, in many ways, successful, challenging stereotypical views of women in fantasy narratives, and in the preconceptions of many students in the school. However, predictably enough, the question of horror heroines is engaged with differently by male and female students; and a more passionate interest, as well as different forms of audience identification, are observable among the girls in this study (several of whose responses will be considered in subsequent chapters).

Secondly, the werewolf transformation scenes, though present in the story, become something quite different in the film - they are considerably extended, and become, effectively, part of the tradition of werewolf transformation scenes so clearly established in the film horror genre. These scenes are close contemporaries of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (John Landis, 1984), made in the previous year, and *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1981), made three years earlier. They are the sequences that exerted a fascinated attraction for successive groups of

students (especially boys) in this Year 9 course. Immediate responses to these will be described in Chapter 6; and students' writing about the transformation scenes will be examined throughout the study. These sequences seem important in ways which were not fully taken account of in the planning of the course: they provoked strong reactions, provided a source of (horrified) pleasure which seemed clearly related to the attractions for audiences of the horror genre in general; and images from the transformation scenes were most often chosen by students, along with images of the girl, to use in their work.

Both of these changes, I will argue, introduce elements of popular cinema into a film which, in many ways, deploys an art-house aesthetic. Indeed, an embracing of both ends of the aesthetic continuum is a feature Angela Carter would probably have approved of, and which is noted in her work by Bristow and Broughton:

> At home in the worlds of 'high' and 'popular' culture, her work refuses hierarchies between differing genres and forms. ... because [her] works reach allusively into a great many spheres of culture, they hold something for everyone. Carter's is a distinctly democratic aesthetic.
> (1997, pages 7/9)

Beauty and the Beast: a brief cultural history of the werewolf

James Twitchell (1985) argues that the werewolf of the cinema is to be distinguished from the werewolf of folktale in that it becomes a hybrid creature, not a full wolf: Twitchell prefers to call it the Wolf-Man (as indeed it is termed in the Universal films starring Lon Chaney Jr.). Twitchell suggests that this more disturbing creature is necessary, as an ordinary wolf simply would not be frightening enough for the purposes of the horror movie. My suggestion in this chapter is different - that it is not

what the creature becomes that is particularly significant. Rather, it is the *event of transformation* which defines the werewolf of film: a powerful miniature narrative, with its own set of generic conventions, its own narrative structure, its own set of increasingly expensive and spectacular special effects, its own special fascination for horror audiences and historians of cinema.

Twitchell rightly points out that the real ancestor of the cinematic werewolf is Stevenson`s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; or, more influentially, Rouben Mamoulian`s 1932 film. The transformation scenes, and the first sequence in particular (Illustration 1), are well-documented. Tom Milne (1969) records how Mamoulian refused to reveal how parts of the transformation of Fredric March appeared to happen before our eyes:

> To this day he has refused to reveal the secret of how the transformations were achieved in front of the camera, but it is not difficult to guess that they were done with coloured filters, changed to reveal different layers of makeup, and given a hallucinatory sense of actually happening before our eyes by the extraordinary soundtrack. (p 49)
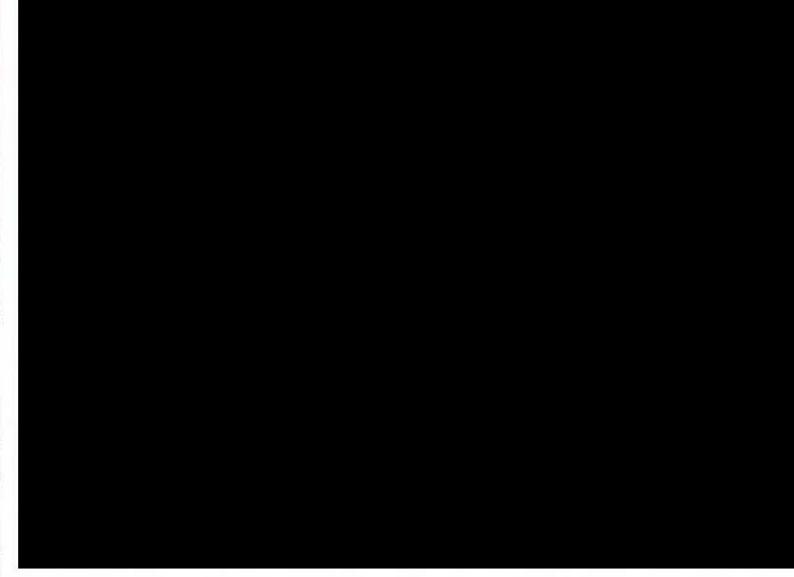
Illustration 2.1: Fredric March transforms, in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932)

Though we are often dismissive about special effects, condemning them as gimmickry, and associating them with superficial viewing habits, it may be that we need to reconsider what is, after all, simply an extension of a medium which entirely consists of technologies of representation. Such dismissive attitudes may be more to do with socially constructed mechanisms of taste than with any intrinsic quality of the techniques themselves. In this case, the coloured filters, and the overdubbing of a soundtrack based on manipulated recordings of Mamoulian`s own heartbeat, can be seen as a complex visual and auditory semiotic intimately concerned with, not only the representation of subjectivity, but the material of subjectivity. There is the makeup transforming the subject, the inner psyche transparently represented by the outer material features; Fredric March`s virtuosic transformatory expressions and gestures (Eisenstein notes [1968, pages 28-29] how the work of the actor makes important contributions to the montage process); the sense of identity in crisis signalled by the heartbeat, metaphor of life and passion, appealing to an audience schooled by radio, then the talkies, in auditory representations of subjectivity (see Connor, 1997, on auditory constructions of modern and postmodern subjectivities).

There are four features of this famous sequence which I want to develop. Firstly, to note that the transformation itself is important, as an *event,* a narrative. Frightening though Hyde might be, the real frisson comes from the agony of the change, which encompasses all the uncertainty of what Twitchell calls the Victorian schizophrenia, all the superego`s guilt at the erupting id, all the horror of human bodily transformation, normally too slow to notice (in the aging process), accelerated spectacularly. But the point I wish to make here is that the transformation - and this film version in particular - is to become an important generic feature of the werewolf sub-genre, structured by a particular set of conventions, which it teaches to its audiences, who then delightedly respond to, and themselves transform, both its predictability and the unexpected variations on the theme.

Secondly, it is about transforming *identity*, and this is emphasised by the complex range of subjective camera shots in this sequence - shots emphasising the giddy exhilaration of transformation, the shock of a new identity, registered as we look, with Hyde, into the mirror (a combination of subjective and objective point-of-view), and the shots inviting the viewer to share Jekyll`s memories, whirling round in alternating exhortations to pleasure and duty (these structures, of course, polarised elements of social identities important to the story`s Victorian point of origin, and differently important to the film`s American and European audiences caught at the point of the rise of fascism).

Thirdly, it is about *threat* - as it transforms, this changing creature offers a complex threat to us. The threat of being like it - the invitation to see through its eyes; the threat it will offer to future victims, with whom we might also be invited to identify; the threat of transgression of the natural order. Noël Carroll (1990) describes a class of horror monsters he describes as "fusion" monsters, made from combinations of actual creatures (in Hyde`s case, in a clearly Darwinian reference, a combination of human and ape) to create a response of disgust at the disruption of boundaries in the vision of the natural order available to us, even compulsory to us, since the Enlightenment.

And, fourthly, it is about concealment and revelation: the thrill for the audience depends on the withholding of the horrific image, and its partial revelation. This semiotic of partial revelation applies to the syntagm of the whole film - the transformation scenes mustn`t occur too frequently, or they lose their function as climactic moments in the tragic narrative of Jekyll`s loss of self; and to the syntagm of the transformation sequence, where the transformation is anatomized for the viewer in a montage of closeups (face, hand, face again) and subjective shots that eliminate, of course, our view of the transformation altogether.

Twitchell's conclusion about the significance of the werewolf - and of Hyde himself - is that it represents the incest taboo. His argument is tortuous, involving a complicated relation between Hyde and a paternal figure on the one hand (an invention of the movie versions, and paternally related to Hyde in being the father of Jekyll's fiançée), whom he beats to death, and a little match girl, present in Stevenson's story, whom he tramples, and whom Twitchell reads as an embryonic sister figure. In any case, to limit the representational posibilities of so potent a figure to one particular neurotic manifestation seems improbably reductive. It would seem more productive to argue that the monsters of the Gothic novel and the late-Victorian Gothic revival are capable of representing all aspects of human identity that cause concern, fear and, in equal measure, fascination in their own social and historical circumstances. More specifically, the figure of the werewolf is invariably associated with the more threatening aspect of human sexuality, as Twitchell demonstrates effectively. The exact nature of this anxiety, and the forms of its representation, change, of course, throughout history; though the images employed by successive societies to express it always carry the accreted meanings of earlier usage, just as the makers and readers of the new signs bear the marks of earlier subjectivities. So, as Jack Zipes (1983) notes, the werewolf through the Renaissance and Reformation was employed by the churches of France to identify, make concrete, and thus to persecute and expel those human instincts of which its teachings disapproved:

> The entire period from 1480 to 1650 can be seen as a historical transition
> in which the Catholic Church and the reform movement of Protestantism
> combined efforts with the support of the rising mercantile and industrial
> classes to rationalize society and literally to exterminate social deviates
> who were associated with the devil such as female witches, male
> werewolves, Jews, and gipsies.
> (page 22)

So the werewolf becomes an expression of what were previously natural sexual instincts, demonised by the new rationalism of the rising bourgeoisie. As Foucault remarks (1976) of the repressive hypothesis in general, of course, such imagery and the processes of social control associated with it gives rise both to a repression of the hated image, the figure constituted as Other; and, simultaneously, to a most eloquent discourse surrounding the forbidden object.

Twitchell argues that the monstrous image of the divided self, or at least the bestial half of it, undergoes a series of changes from the Enlightenment to the late Victorian period, in which it is successively viewed sympathetically (as in Mary Shelley's creature), enthused over as a dynamic natural energy (as in the romantic sublime), repressed (as in mid-Victorian realism, in the novels of the Brontës and Dickens, for instance), and delighted in (in the *fin-de-siècle* 'decadence' of *Jekyll and Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*):

> What the neoclassicist attempted to reconcile and the romantic
> acknowledged, the mid-Victorian tried to repress and the late Victorian
> delighted in, or at least pretended to.
> (page 232)

So the figure of the werewolf arrives as raw semiotic material on the doorstep of the modern horror movie, replete with a history of animal passions and repression, leading to opaque codings of those aspects of selfhood successive societies found it hardest to speak of - and thus were powerfully compelled memorably to represent.

Before looking at other examples of werewolves in film, and then at *The Company of Wolves* in more detail, it's worth repeating the four features I have stressed in th Mamoulian transformation scene: transformation; identity; threat; concealment/revelation. A common characteristic of these is their dynamic structure -

they all operate as the equivalent of verbs in the syntagm of the film, the verbs "to change", "to be", "to threaten", and "to conceal/reveal". The agents of these actions operate at different levels in the text, however. The agent of the first three is the fictional character; the agents of the third are the authors of the text. The sum of these actions constitutes the cinematic werewolf: a construct of fluidity and liminality, difficult to pin down, even to see properly, always on the move, occupying a shadowy borderland, here one minute, gone the next, defying nominalisation, noun become verb, agent become action. I want to relate this quality to two theories, which will be more fully explored in later chapters. The first is the theory of the sublime. The second is social semiotic theory of visual communication.

The category of the sublime, and how it might be synthesised with a social semiotic understanding of young people's uses of horror films, will be developed more fully in Chapters 7 and 8. It is necessary to anticipate these here with a brief summary of the salient points. Derived from the Enlightenment, then Romantic notion of a phenomenon inspiring awe (terror and pleasure) by its measureless extent or intensity, the sublime is a philosophical category well-placed to provide an account of the contradictory emotions of the horror viewer, and of the images which provoke them. The version of the contemporary sublime developed later in this study borrows from the pre-Critical writings of Immanuel Kant (1763/1960) an image of an empty desert, populated by the human imagination with ghouls. My argument is that both parts of this double structure function in the horror genre: the empty space is terrifying because of what it might conceal, and because it represents the unknown and unknowable by images of absence; the spectacular monsters of fantasy are terrifying because of the spaces they inhabit and because they represent the unknown and unknowable by images of presence. Furthermore, as Kant made clear, the entire phenomenon of the sublime can only be understood in terms of subjectivity: it is the human subject who feels belittled by immeasurable spaces, and terrified by the monsters s/he invents to fill them.

Secondly, I argue that these poles of the sublime - the empty and the replete - can be aligned, historically, to poles of aesthetic pleasure: the empty sublime to the sublimated, ascetic preferences associated by Bourdieu (1984) with the Kantian "pure gaze"; the replete sublime to the popular pleasures he associates with Kant's "barbarous taste", and with Bakhtin's carnival (1965/1968).

Thirdly, I follow other commentators (Donald, 1992; Connor, 1995) in seeing the sublime as a structure determined by liminality: etymologically, it refers to the lintel (*limen*), beyond which we strive to see, know; yet which simultanously inhibits our view. It is, thus, likely to be brought into play to represent the unknown - either repressed past knowledge, or new possibilities, as yet unexplored.

Fourthly, I suggest that the two poles - and the patterns of aesthetic pleasure associated with them (especially in the context of modern film) can't be divorced, but stand in a dialectic relation. This relation, furthermore, isn't characterised only by a mutual informing and determination of one pole by the other, but, in the postmodern moment, by ambiguity and inversion.

How does the sublime relate to the dynamic of the transformation sequence? Let me consider each of the visual verb-equivalents in turn, in relation to a sequence from another film, the 1950s horror film, *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (Gene Fowler, Jr, 1957). The four structures I have noted in Mamoulian's film are all in place in the transformation scene: the disturbing nature of change itself, and its pain; the crisis of identity; the threat of the emergent werewolf; the simultaneous concealment and revelation of the sublime image, again by a mixture of closeup and subjective camera.

1. To change ...

The change is the moment which constitutes the werewolf in the visual semiotic. This presents an image which functions both as what Kress and Van Leeuwen, in their social semiotic grammar of the visual image (1996), call an *analytical* image and a *narrative* image. An analytical image has a classificatory purpose, which is, here, to construct the werewolf, referring to the werewolf paradigm, embedding this paradigm in the syntagm of the filmic sequence. The classification operates in two ways. In one, the emphasis is on the synchronic, as in Illustration 2, and assembles the
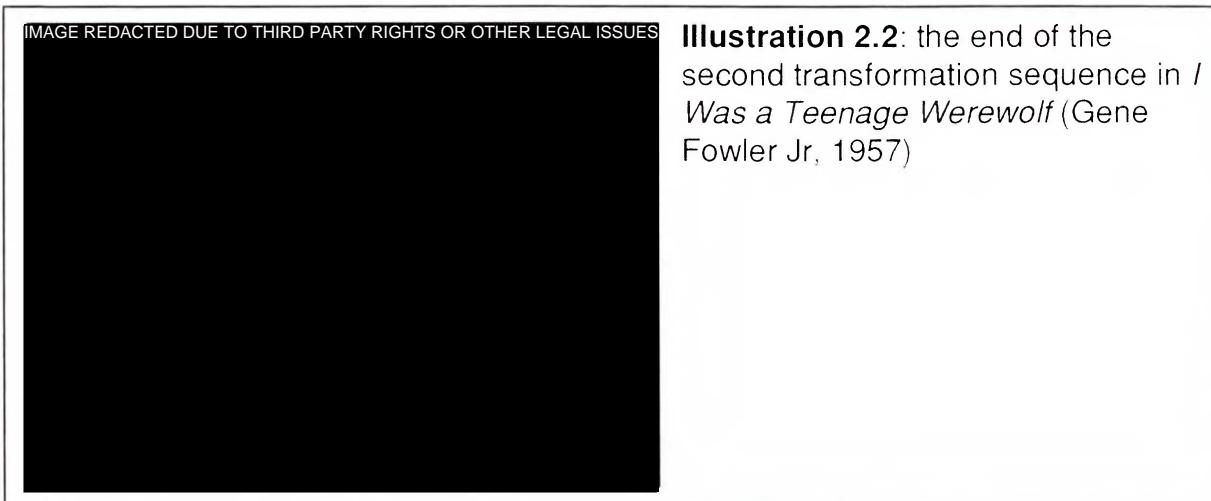
Illustration 2.2: the end of the second transformation sequence in *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (Gene Fowler Jr, 1957)

attributes which constitute the visual representation of "werewolf": hair, teeth, and elements of the human form (in this case, the collar of the baseball jacket). What the single frame can't show, however, is the transformation, the painful yoking of man to wolf implicit in the composite noun "werewolf" (man-wolf); or the painful division or collision of aspects of the psyche which this might represent. This can only be shown diachronically: hence the syntagm which assembles images of the human in various stages of transformation. So the assembling of classificatory attributes depends partly on a narrative process: noun becomes verb, suggesting the exciting and troubling unstable nature of the paradigm. It is a narrative image in the sense that it is part of a dynamic structure in which the actions of the narrative are projected by the text. If it were a sentence in language, it might be that "transform" would be the main verb, governing a sequence of subordinate clauses, whose finite verbs might

denote the noise which triggers the change, the growth of hair on the boy's face, the agonised twisting of his features, and the turning towards the prospective victim as the transfomation concludes.

If it is a verb-equivalent, it becomes necessary to ask about agency and transitivity, or their visual equivalents. In this sequence, the immediate agent of the transformation would seem to be the werewolf, and it would seem an intransitive process: he transforms. However, in this as in all werewolf films, the transformation is clearly signalled as reluctant, and involuntary - in this sequence it is triggered by a loud noise, the school bell. So the question of an absent agency is provoked, the original cause of the werewolf's malady. In this film, it is a ruthless psychoanalyst, whose ostensible motive is to 'cure' the boy of his delinquent tendencies, whose actual motive is unscrupulous research into the primitive foundations of human behaviour. Here, then, the structures of agency suggest a cruel adulthood, whose concern, faced with the threat of teenage rebellion, is to intensify it, expose it, expel and destroy it.

2 To be ...

In tandem with, and closely related to the transforming process, are the processes signalling identity, the equivalents of the verb "to be". The verbs which state existence, the relational and existential structures of language, are embedded within narrative processes, telling us who the heroine is, for instance, but don't usually contribute to the dynamic narrative process. In the werewolf transformation sequence, because it is the question of identity that is at issue, the normally static nature of these relational processes are disrupted. In verbal terms, it is as if the clause "He is a typical High School teenager" has to be succeeded in rapid succession by "He's a teenager with rapidly growing facial hair"; "He's a hybrid, part-teenager, part animal"; "He's an animal - but with some human characteristics". In

short, the usual processes of identifying a secure identity with relatively stable attributes becomes destabilised, "to be" turns into "to become", and even the final stages of the transformation are marked with contradictory signs of hybridity and the promise, from the genre and the individual text, of further reversals and repetitions of the process. In this film, then an image with an apparently stable identity marked by a set of easily recognisable attributes (baseball jacket; jeans; Tony Curtis hairstyle; and matching circumstantial attributes in the High School location) is replaced by the classificatory attributes of the werewolf (hair, teeth), though not his usual location. The juxtaposition must have seemed startling to `50s audiences, accustomed only to the werewolf in traditional Gothic settings. The questions to ask here, perhaps, and which I will address in the context of *The Company of Wolves*, are: what transformations of subjectivity might these images represent? how will these represented identities interact with the social identities of viewers?

2. To threaten ...

Illustration 2 shows a frame in one of the transformation sequences, at the point where the werewolf, a high-school teenager, has just finished the transformation and is about to attack a girl in the high-school gym. The action signalled most clearly here is the threat. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) describe how a direct gaze at the viewer constitutes an image act of *demand* - in this case, it is the affect of fear that's demanded of the audience. The audience is, however, identified with the victim, a teenage girl in the high school gym, whose point-of-view, upside down on a vaulting horse, is represented by the inverted image. The significance of the image won`t be understood, though, by any audience, as a single frame. It is likely to register, and be remembered, as part of a composite image made up of other images in the sequence, other images of the transforming werewolf elsewhere in the film, and other images from the werewolf paradigm familiar to particular viewers. It is this kind of impact on the viewer of particularly powerful images, whose significance derives

from sources in the text and discourse wider than the frames of the individual image would permit, which social semiotics describes as characteristic of *synchronic syntagms* (Hodge and Tripp, 1986; Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Any audience of this film will remember the first transformation scene in the film, where the point-of-view is exactly reversed: we see through the werewolf's eyes, and, though contradictorily, are invited to identify with him, an identification strengthened by other features of the film's narrative which presents the boy as a victim of the adult world. The synchronic syntagm, then, will serve as a touchstone for bundles of meanings diachronically accreted, as well as its own synchronic impact. Our fear of the werewolf, in line with the victim's, will be effectively merged with sympathy, an instance of the complex audience identification typical of horror, emphasised by Carol Clover:

> ... just as attacker and attacked are expressions of the same self in nightmares, so are they expressions of the same viewer in horror film. We are both Red Riding Hood and the Wolf; the force of the experience, in horror, comes from knowing both sides of the story. (1993: page 12)

This threat can be seen as archaic in certain senses. How exactly we come know "both sides of the story" could be explained in different ways. We could refer to Freud's theory (1919/1990) that our sense of the uncanny comes from repressed parts of our own psychic development; or from the repression of archaic beliefs which permitted the existence of the supernatural. Freud, in effect, both distinguishes between and simultaneously associates the archaic history of the individual and of the society. We could refer to Bakhtin's construction of an aesthetic of grotesque realism, inverting modern structures of taste, and proclaiming the value of a gloriously grotesque, defiantly material aesthetic associated with the social structures

of mediaeval peasantry. The supposition of a folk-aesthetic of this kind, resurrected in the excess of popular cinema (an explanation of the popular adopted, for instance, by Fiske, 1989), helps to explain the pleasurable aspect of the threat of horror. And finally, Clover's remarks, employing the archetypal narrative of Red Riding Hood, remind us of the mediaeval provenance of the werewolf narrative, strengthened deliberately in Angela Carter's *Company of Wolves*, and perhaps, though less self-consciously, by the visual aesthetic of popular horror cinema.

If contemporary horror reawakens archaic structures, though, it also transforms them. It can afford, secure in our knowledge of the genre, to invert images for contrastive effect. So, in this particular sequence from *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, we see a contrastive location - the sublime creature is out of place here. Viewers will know from earlier films and from elsewhere in this film that his proper place is the sublime space of the night-time forest. This odd location - the daytime high school - has a multiple effect. Firstly, it could serve to heighten the sense of the werewolf as victim, and, indeed, after the attack on the girl, he immediately becomes a lost, persecuted figure, pursued by a vengeful crowd, bemused by the daylight. Secondly, it may serve the odd flipover effect of the sublime image, in which the traditional terrifying space, which is typically exotic and exterior (Gothic castles, forests, oceans, mountains) becomes, in the modern horror movie, increasingly domestic and interior (especially the bedroom, in films such as *Hallowe'en*, *The Exorcist*, *Poltergeist*, or *Nightmare on Elm Street*) as if to emphasise that the fears represented by the sublime, while terrifyingly unfamiliar in some ways, derive from the intimately familiar in other ways, as Freud argued in his essay *On the Uncanny* (1919/1990).

4. Concealment/Revelation

The previous features of the transformation sequence are part of the textual

metafunctions described by Kress and Van Leeuwen (following Halliday) as **ideational** and **interpersonal**: they govern the way the text represents objects and processes, and how it constructs audience readings. The process of concealment and revelation is more to do with textual composition: the **textual** metafunction. This final characteristic most immediately suggests the sublime: an image whose very semiotic construction makes us intimate with detail and point of view, and simultaneously denies us a complete view. *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* operates both ends of this structure of the sublime: the first werewolf transformation completely omits any revelation of the werewolf by a use of subjective camera: we only see the sublime empty spaces of the forest, replete with the signs of the invisible werewolf: jerky camera, breathing, frightening music, and finally the terrified face of the victim. The second sequence, from which the illustration is taken, shows a full frontal transformation, and then the reverse perspective of the first sequence: the victim's point-of-view. The poster of the film (Illustration 3) employs both poles of the sublime semiotic: concealing the werewolf's face, his back to us; but revealing a detail, the wolfish hand in the foreground, the closeup simultaneously obscuring the rest of the creature.

So, we see that the idea of "werewolf", and any synchronic syntagm that might be carried away by the viewer, or selected as a still, to represent it, will imply, or recall, the intense activity of the transformation sequence. The dynamic nature of the construct - action rather than agent - also suggests the liminality of the sublime - a creature in the process of becoming, and then the reverse. The nature of the identity in crisis here, threatening itself as much as the actual victim, is clearly signalled by the film. The boy who transforms is already an adequate representative of that domestic monster so feared by bourgeois America in the '50s - the newly-emergent teenager. Michael Landon relates, then, to the general - mostly male - iconography of teenage rebellion of the period. Mark Jancovich (1996) points out how novel the film's adoption of the teenage point-of-view was, however; how the small
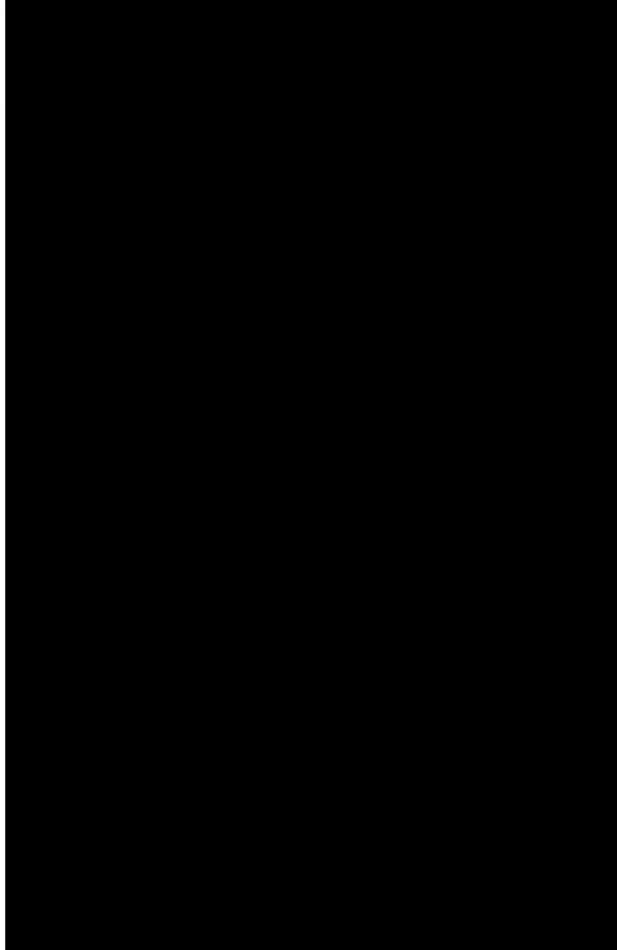
Illustration 2.3: the poster of *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*

independent studio, AIP, was able to depart from the conventional Hollywood omission of troubling teenagers, and, by use of a camp B movie style, to circumvent the usual processes of censorship.

The 1980s inherits, then, a well-established cinematic werewolf, by way of other films in the sixties and seventies, such as Hammer`s *Curse of the Werewolf* (1960), which again represented the werewolf as youthful, though references to the contemporary are obscured behind Hammer`s period Gothic setting. Structures of gender, as Twitchell points out, derive from a pattern established early in the Jekyll and Hyde tradition - in Mamoulian`s film, in fact, in which an opposition is constructed between a virtuous, redemptive, middle class fiançée and a prostitute, making, in Twitchell`s words, a four-term structure of gender in which the two women represent polarised

aspects of female sexuality to match the two identities of the male central character. *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* also features a virtuous girlfriend and a number of more girls (associated with rock 'n' roll and parties in the barn!). *Curse of the Werewolf* contains a redemptive fiançée and a prostitute who becomes first victim of the werewolf. These structures of gender, in which women's roles are passive and marginalised, as well as serving as simple extensions of the contradictory sexuality of the male lead, are still observable in werewolf films of the `80s (*An American Werewolf in London, The Howling* (and its several sequels), *Thriller),* in which representations of gender remain an exploration of male sexuality. *The Company of Wolves,* a contemporary of these, is quite different.

The Company of Wolves: sublime monsters, sublime spaces, carnival bodies

I intend only to look in detail at the very end of the film, which includes the climax of the Red Riding Hood narrative, in the grandmother's cottage; and the final switch out of the dream sequence which forms the bulk of the film, and which is based squarely on Angela Carter's story (1981), into the 'outer' narrative envelope of the dreaming girl, which is an invention of the film, importing a different set of modalities and generic references.

Of these two sequences, I want to ask:

• *how do they connect the literary source of the story with the paradigm of the cinematic werewolf?*

• *what are the consequences of the transformation of the text into a visual medium (what does the visual sublime look like?)*

• *what representations of the self are carried by the figure of the werewolf and the heroine?*

• *what kinds of reading are made possible/likely by such a text; and for what kinds of*

reader?

First, the transformation sequence. The film composes the syntagm of the young man, the Hunter/wolf, out of a combination of signifiers from the two paradigms of wolf and man, beginning with the phosphorescent eyes, mentioned in the story (and also a common initial signifier of impending transformation in vampire and werewolf movies). The hair, teeth, hirsute nakedness are all retained in the film image. What is different is the actual transformation, which does not happen in the story: the process, that is. One minute he`s a man with some attributes of wolf; the next, he`s a wolf. The film foregrounds the process of transformation itself; but not the end part of the process. It`s as if the process produces the monster - a creature neither animal nor human, drawn from a paradigm of horror creatures, characterised by visual repulsiveness, and a series of signifiers of pain; so that the effect of horror lies as much in the agony of the creature as in the threat it poses. Signifiers of pain are the sound effects (such as agonised howling), straining, bursting, tearing effects, and signifiers of birth traumas - the emergence of the wolf muzzle from the mouth of the transforming man, and the wolf-neck from his shoulders - a sliding of newborn parts from the cruelly-stretched apertures of the old body. And an abundance of mucous and blood; so that the monstrous creature`s body has a surface that looks like flayed flesh; or like the inside of the body, a body unnaturally inverted. This paradigm of transformation receives considerable semiotic underlining: it`s made up of a number of shots, in slow-motion, from several angles (Illustrations 4 and 5).

This is an image of the sublime which fills out the space of mystery with uncompromising and savage plenitude. It exemplifies a feature of the modality of such images in the horror genre, which is that, in order to operate properly, they need to maintain a high modality in two respects: on what Hodge and Kress call the *semiosic* and the *mimetic* planes (1988). These planes refer to the signification of
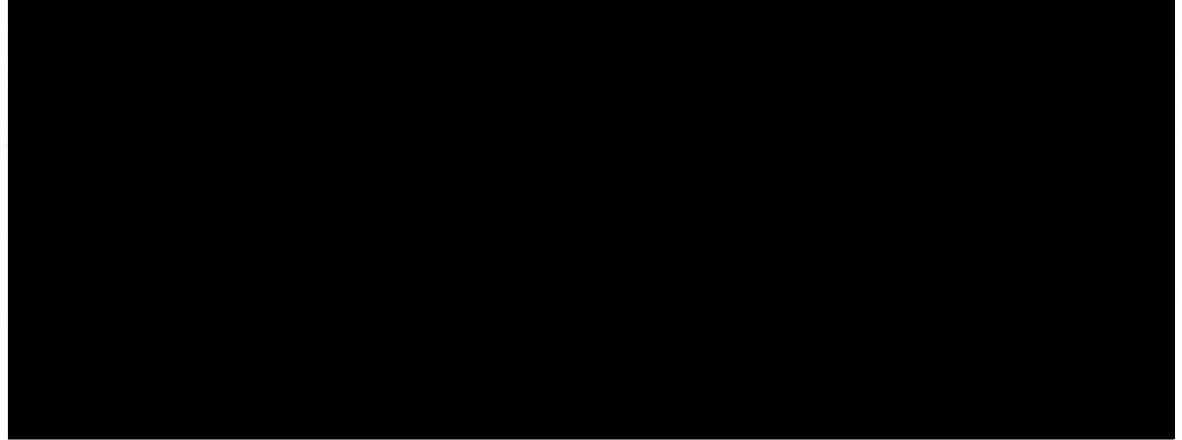
Illustrations 2.4 and 2.5: the final transformation scene of *The Company of Wolves*

ideas and material referents respectively - perhaps roughly corresponding to Barthes` *connotative* and *denotative* planes (Barthes: 1978). So on the semiosic plane, this image is clearly representative of abstract ideas (the threat of male sexuality, for instance) through a syntagm composed of signifiers which, in terms of Hodge and Kress`s continuum of *transparent-opaque*, come about midway, or thereabouts, depending, of course, on the experience and social context of the viewer. Also on the semiosic plane, the syntagm is a transparent signifier of the genre, so that it will be perceived as part of a paradigm of monster images itself subject to specific diachronic transformations.

But the history is more complex than that of the transformation paradigm invoked in the `50s by *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*. It is related to a more recent class of fantasy monsters in films whose particular aesthetic of spectacular excess has been made possible by a new generation of special effects in latex, pneumatically-operated prosthetics, and, more recently, computer-generated morphing techniques. This often produces creatures whose full shape is ill-defined, or never fully revealed, or whose surface is never completely resolved. This links the wolf-monster in this film with the creature in *Alien* (whose whole body we never see till the sequel - and then

it is parasitically conjoined with, dispersed throughout, the ship, the building. Or with the Brundle-Fly in David Cronenberg's remake of *The Fly* (1986). This particular paradigm, distinctive enough to have become criterial to a virtual sub-genre, is sometimes referred to as body-horror. Mark Jancovich (1992) reads this as a typically postmodern signifier of identity in crisis - the creature (sometimes a transformation of a 'normal' human character) shows signs of physical dissolution representative of psychic disintegration or at least uncertainty: boundaries between physical categories (such as the inside and outside of the body) become unclear. Jancovich also notes the frequent use of birth imagery:

> As Barbara Creed points out, Cronenborg often presents the body as a kind of womb which gives birth to a new life-form which discards the original body and gives birth to a new life-form which discards the original body and the original self; although it comes from within. Concentration on the process of bodily fragmentation and transformation is a way of representing and examining the crisis of identity within contemporary society. (page 113)

Jancovich makes two other points of direct relevance to this study. The first is that sexuality is deeply implicated in many of the films he discusses; and that, since it also dissolves boundaries between bodies, it can provide images which disturb settled notions of identity.

The second is the question of pleasurable responses to these apparently shocking and disturbing images. He is insistent that there is a pleasure; and he relates it to a sense of liberation from the twin restrictions of bourgeois individualism and state regulation and control of the kind Foucault described - especially regulation of the body:

The forces of transformation within *The Thing* not only provoke fear and repulsion, but also pleasure and excitement. They not only threaten engulfment and assimilation, but they also offer the possibility of liberation from the conventional limits of the body and the self. (page 114)

To return to Hodge and Kress`s semiosic and mimetic planes: it is clearly a feature of these images that, while their meanings operate powerfully on the semiosic plane as signifiers of genre and its associated systems of metaphor, they are also powerfully anchored in the mimetic plane. While images of the sublime at the other end of the spectrum might operate strongly on the semiosic plane with quite low modality on the mimetic plane (mist, insubstantial ghosts, allusive images) these images of body-horror, the extreme form of the plenitude paradigm, need a high modality on the mimetic plane, demand to be read as real, down to the last physically correct (if displaced) detail, obsessive as Michelangelo about anatomical veracity.

Similarly, the images of transgression, in which the hypotactic structures of the narrative syntagm break into each other, and the modality of the `real` world is disrupted by that of the dream, the nightmare, require high modality on the mimetic plane, signifying that the dream has, horrifyingly, become real - and that`s where the horror lies. This shocking collision of two modalities, and the systems of referentiality underpinning them, is a feature of the genre, and relates this film to others. So, the penetration sequences remind us of the rupture between reality and the supernatural in the *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982, and sequels) trilogy, where walls buckle, bend and split in the same way, where apertures (TV screens, open fridges, reflections in puddles, mirrors - like the windows and mirrors in *The Company of Wolves*) erupt with signifiers of the sublime void and the goblins and ghouls (Kant`s terms!) who inhabit it. Or the intrusion of nightmare into the waking world in *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984), where Freddy Kruger`s presence intrudes into the serene and daylight world of smalltown America, his tongue emerging surreally from

the telephone, his trademark metal claws surfacing from nowhere in the bath.

A final perspective to bring to bear on the aesthetic of shocking excess evident in the transformation scene is that of Bakhtin's "grotesque realism" (1965/1968). This notion presents a vision of the body as visceral, abundant, excessive, fecund, the "material bodily principle" which Bakhtin perceives in Rabelais, and which he invokes as an antidote to the contemporary tyranny of the bourgeois aesthetic, which has lost sight of the vitality of the grotesque, the folk spectacle. Bakhtin describes grotesque realism thus:

> The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity. (page 19)

Bakhtin perceives the grotesque body as a characteristic repertoire of gestures which oppose the sanctimony of official culture and its account of the worldm substituting its own irreverent representations of the cycle of life and death. He refers to marketplace performances in a way which sounds remarkably similar to the writhings of the werewolf transformations in *American Werewolf* and *The Company of Wolves*:

> ... the great majority of these traditional popular comic gestures and tricks is based on the mimicking of the three main acts in the life of the grotesque body: sexual intercourse, death throes ... and the act of birth. Frequently, these three acts are transformed or merged into each other insofar as their exterior symptoms and expressions coincide (spasms, tension, popping eyes, sweat, convulsions of arms and legs). (pages 353-354)

Allied to Bakhtin's image of the reversal of bodily topography, in which birth can take place through the mouth or ear, the resemblance to this werewolf transformation in which the wolf is "born" through the mouth of the man is striking.

In some ways, this applies very well to Angela Carter's original story. The werewolf is presented as violently material, and the emphasis is clearly on "the lower stratum of the body", as his "huge genitals" are described. Furthermore, the sweeping away of the protective devices of childhood, along with the spineless heroine of Perrault's cautionary tale, give way to a rebirth for the heroine, the onset of her menstruation heralding sexual satisfaction in the arms of the wolf.

The rules of the visual semiotic in cinema result in something different, which fits Bakhtin's account differently. To begin with, the conventions of genital representations result in the visual equivalent of euphemism as far as the "lower stratum" is concerned. Most shots are from the waist up; the girl's nakedness is not represented; and the erect phallus of the wolf is clearly prohibited by current censorship regulations. In this respect, the literary text enjoys a more liberated play with Bakhtin's aesthetic. However, the film's transformation imagery is better placed to construct a "grotesque realism". The sense of a bodily destruction which is also a rebirth, the turning inside out of the body, the birth of the wolf's head from the man's mouth, recalling Bakhtin's account of the stomach replacing the head, the succession of swellings and eruptions of skin and muscle - all of these, and their defiant refusal of the sublimated aesthetic of the Kantian pure gaze, suggest the terrifying but intensely pleasurable creative power of Bakhtin's carnival hell:

> Carnival's hell represents the earth which swallows up and gives birth, it is often transformed into a cornucopia; the monster, death, becomes pregnant. Various deformities, such as protruding bellies, enormous noses, or humps, are symptoms of pregnancy or of procreative power. (page 91)

Oddly, the consequence of the horrific transformation is a tame wolf. The two remaining elements of the first part of the ending syntagm are Rosaleen's embedded narrative, in which she becomes the storyteller, telling the wolf a tale of a female werewolf, and thus replacing her grandmother as village storyteller (as in the mediaeval folk tale which was Perrault's source) ; and the contrasting flurried sequence in which Rosaleen's parent and the villagers arrive, the father attempts to shoot the wolf by the hearth, is prevented by her mother who recognises that it's her daughter by the cross on the necklace around the wolf's neck, while the wolf/Rosaleen leaps through the window and into the forest, following her mate and the other wolves.

This seems to signify a shift from plenitude to emptiness: the excessive and fantastic detail of the transforming monster gives way to the more naturalistic modality of the actual wolf; and this leaps through the window, a repeated sign of boundaries between the mundane and the sublime, into the night, again, a repeated sign of the sublime as void, empty. The leap through the window also forms the syntagmatic link with the final sequence of the film, in the bedroom of the sleeping girl, as she awakes, and her dream narrative erupts into the waking world.

The Ending: the domestic sublime

This ending, located in the waking world with its naturalistic modality, provides the point of transition between the narrative structure based on Carter's original story and the new outer narrative envelope the film provides, like a giant speech bubble, or, more accurately, a dream bubble, enclosing all the narrative of the original story. The sequence shows, then, the following events:

• *the wolf who was Rosaleen follows the other wolf (the Hunter), leaping out of the grandmother`s cottage into the forest.*

• *the scene switches to the inside of the 'real' Rosaleen`s house, in which she is dreaming, upstairs in her bedroom; the wolves stream though the door*

• *wolves are seen bursting through a portrait on the wall of the landing on Rosaleen`s floor at the top of the house (Illustration 6)*

• *inside the bedroom, Rosaleen awakes as a huge wolf smashes through the bedroom window, breaking the childhood toys (Illustration 7)*

• *the film ends on Rosaleen`s screaming face. (Illustration 8)*

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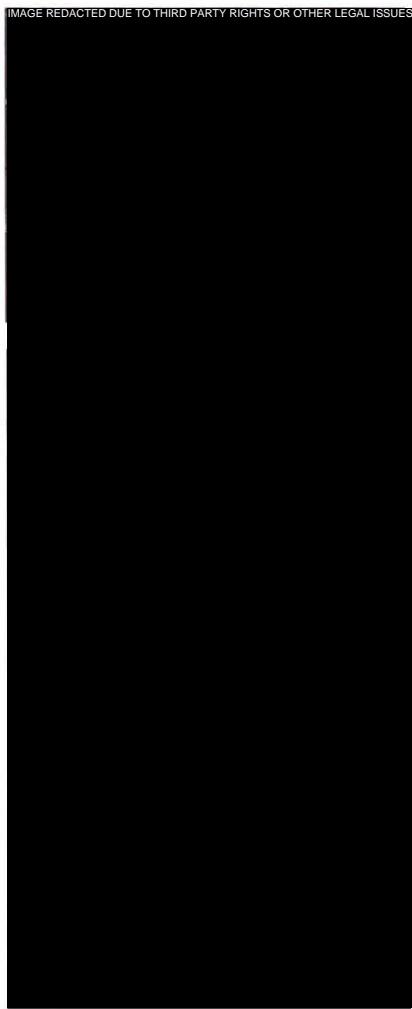
Illustration 2.6: *wolves are seen bursting through a portrait on the wall of the landing on Rosaleen`s floor at the top of the house*

Illustration 2.7: *inside the bedroom, Rosaleen awakes as a huge wolf smashes through the bedroom window, breaking the childhood toys*

Illustration 2.8: *the film ends on Rosaleen`s screaming face*

The external void into which the wolves leapt now seems to be identified by their trajectory with the internal space of Rosaleen`s house and bedroom, themselves

replete with signifiers of (and thereby functioning as an extension of) Rosaleen's subjectivity and the socially-constructed sexual identity which expresses it. In this way, the signifiers of the empty (and external) sublime from which the wolves leap (the streaming blue tonality, the night, the forest) are identified with the internal space which is Rosaleen. Similarly, the wolf who is actually breaking through her window could be the wolf who, in her dream, was herself: or it could be the Hunter/werewolf.

This syntagm is full of contradictory signs. The wolves themselves have represented the threat of death (to her sister, and to herself); but also love (the tame wolf); they have been at times the source of fear, at other times opposed to the real fear - the transformation monster. The bedroom has been a refuge, stocked with comforting images of secure identity; but each of these images now carries more disturbing significance, having been transformed in the dream sequences. The bedroom itself has become partially transformed from an signifier of interiority into one of exteriority. The signifiers of dream and nightmare have become part of the waking world. No resolution is offered, which in itself operates as a marker of the modern horror genre, which frequently disrupts closure, at least partially, often by a twist-in-the-tail (such as the ending of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, where Freddy unexpectedly erupts again in a fleeting image, suggesting a circular return to the beginning of the nightmare cycle).

The intention of Angela Carter and Neil Jordan seems to have been a representation of the liberating power of sexuality for the girl emerging into adulthood. Catherine Neale (1996) quotes Carter's commentary on the scene:

> The reason why the girl is pounced on by the wolves at the end is pure contingency, since the original ending that Neil wanted turned out to be impossible, literally not possible. He said that it must end on an

'extraordinary image' - an image of repression being liberated by libido - in which the girl would wake up and do the most beautiful dive into the floorboards ... there didn`t seem any point in writing things he didn`t want to film. In the final analysis any film is the director`s movie. But the impossible remains impossible. (page 106)

Neale cites this passage as part of her argument that Carter, in a project which aimed to unite effects of defamiliarisation with contrary effects of pleasure, which she hoped would be accomplished by the combination of literary imagery with the seductive and communal pleasures of cinema, fails to achieve her goal. The film betrays its literary provenance; the cinema is technically incapable of delivering the images she and even Jordan want. She finds a collision of the different levels of reality here, suggesting that the more realistic nature of the ending collides with the desired fantasy. The problem with Neale`s analysis, I think, is that its point of departure is uniformly from the perspective of literary theory, so it`s not surprising that the filmic proves troubling. The text has to be seen as a complex hybrid, combining elements of popular and elite literature (the folktale and the literary short story), and arthouse and popular film. The two voices of her tale - a *hybridization* (Bakhtin (1981) used this term to describe a dialogic fusion of social languages in the novel) including a literary voice and a demotic voice of folk-wisdom, the representation of oral narrative that Bakhtin calls *skaz* - are transformed in the film into a visual narrative of, on the one hand, obscure symbolism and art-house references in the set design to Breughel; and on the other, into the spectacular sequences of popular body-horror of which the transformation scenes are the best example.

The upshot of this is, I suggest, that the film 'betrays' its cinematic origins as much as its literary ones. It needs to be read in terms of film history and the visual semiotic as much as with reference to its literary antecedents. Rather than suggesting that it

accomplishes some kind of ideal blend of these features, as well as an ideal balance of popular and elite references, I'd prefer to suggest that at least it productively problematizes the textual relations between these, opening up, certainly, the possibililty of confused and contradictory audience reactions (as will be apparent in other chapters in this study); but also opening up a text which grapples with the complexities and contradictions in the real world which story and film need to represent. The site of such contestations of reality is most often the self: and in this film, subjectivity is most eloquently represented by the figure of the girl, which will be considered next, in the final section of this chapter.

Red Riding Hood: modality; taxis; the representation of gender

The introduction in the film of the outer narrative layer has three effects I would like to consider:

• it adds a different modality to the folktale/fantasy of the Red Riding Hood story

• it adds another layer of complexity to the story, increasing the hypotactic nature of the narrative structure

• it transforms the figure of the girl

First, the question of modality. The sequence of the ending is less puzzling, perhaps, than it seems. The collision of modalities noted by Neale is, after all, no more confusing than the same structure in a number of popular horror films, such as *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984). But the sense of the sequence is to be made through the main participant, the figure of the girl, who, like Clover's "Final Girls", fuses the function of victim and heroine - and, in this film, narrative perspective. This last device ensures that the demotic voice of advice, folk-wisdom and exemplary narrative is displaced from its position as the meta-narrative voice of Carter's story. It is, partly, subordinated to become the voice of the Grandmother

character, played by Angela Lansbury (this character's speech, both dialogue and voice-over narrative, contains key extracts from the story). But the main reason for the much reduced modality of this voice's message is its syntagmatic subordination to the outer narrative of the film, the naturalistic layer in which the figure of Rosaleen carries a high modality (named, very specifically located in space and time, with a profusion of attributes signalling her particular status and function with considerable redundancy). This subordination contains the syntagm derived from Carter's story, as it contains the Perrault syntagm, and the folk tale it derives from, like four Russian dolls. The outer layer invests the subordinate syntagms with the modality of dreams, reinforced by the representation of the mental process of dreaming (images of Rosaleen tossing feverishly in bed), of the mood of dreams (especially a blue tonality), and the imagery of dreams (exaggerated size, surreal anachronisms) and cinematic signifiers of dream (slow motion, soft focus, melodramatic lighting).

But, just as the hypotactic structures of the syntagm are disrupted, so, of course, is the modality of dream/waking. The interpenetration of signifiers of dream and signifiers of waking confuse and disrupt the modalities associated with them. So the modality of Rosaleen's 'real' bedroom is disrupted when she 'wakes' from the 'nightmare' of the priest's child, a boy who becomes a werewolf after his encounter with the Devil in the wood (one of the subordinate narratives in the dream, presented as a tale told by her grandmother). The signifier of 'dream', and hence, of disrupted reality, is the residual image of the boy in the nightmare, still visible in the mirror in Rosaleen's bedroom.

More dramatically, at the end of the film, in the second part of the double syntagm of the ending, the wolves of the dream sphere literally penetrate Rosaleen's bedroom, carrying with them other signifiers of dream (slow motion, dream music, blue tonality, the impossible penetration of the portrait on the wall and the wall behind it). This last image, the paper-like tearing of an apparently solid wall (Illustration 6), is the

equivalent in the semiotics of film of Prospero's "We are such stuff as dreams are made on". In both, the modality of naturalism is subordinated to the modality of the dream, where anything is possible. There's a danger, though, of suggesting that this modality belongs to the world of make-believe. If we accept more complex theories of realism (such as Brecht's, 1977, referred to briefly in Chapter 7), it becomes possible to read these dreamlike images as representative of a deeper reality, in which the apparent solidity of the family home melts before the invasion of adult sexuality. This ideological reversal, the stripping away of the old securities and the revelation of the brutal realities, is more evocative of Marx and Engels' famous pronouncement (similar to Prospero's in its imagery, different in its perspective):

> All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (1976: page 83).

These powerful fantasy sequences, synchronic syntagms of collapsing reality, should be read alongside the other powerful synchronic syntagms that stitch together the generic fantasy fabric of the film: the werewolf transformation sequences. Both clusters of images serve to disrupt any modality of 'naturalism' surrounding them; to represent the double paradigm of the sublime, and to evoke the characteristic response to the sublime (fear, excitement, pleasure) traced back in Chapters 7 and 8 of this study to Kant's account of a degenerate version of the *terrifying* sublime.

Whether or not it is true that postmodernism is characterised by a confusion between popular and elite culture, as, for instance, Strinati suggests (1992), it looks as if we can take for granted, certainly among young people, a general literacy in the conventions of fantasy and horror, so that a film like *The Company of Wolves*, while many of its structures might suggest art movies, constructs synchronic syntagms to

be read according to the generic rules, modality systems and reception regimes of more popular forms. So these sequences of transgression and transformation relate to paradigms in other horror movies (discussed later in the context of images of the sublime). In effect, the known, transparent rules of genre serve to raise the modality of such sequences (yes, it is like this, in this world of fantasy we`re all familiar with); thus, to reassure - though not to neutralize the effects of fear, pleasure and the possible unsettling of feelings of reality and subjectivity.

Secondly, there is the question of taxis. Kress and Hodge`s discussion of hypotaxis and parataxis (1988: pages 107 ff) is located within an exposition of their theory of how semiotic codes might be read as symptomatic of certain features of the society in which they were produced. They ground their theory in a re-reading of Durkheim, and specifically of his view of society as structured round the dimensions of power and solidarity. His distinction between mechanical solidarity, "where social bonds are strong but not complex or highly organized", and organic solidarity, "when there is a high degree of differentiation and subordination" (Hodge and Kress, page 108), is related by Hodge and Kress to the semiotic categories of parataxis (signifying mechanical solidarity) and hypotaxis (signifying organic solidarity). Hypotaxis, then, expresses features of a society which is highly organized through complex vertical systems of regulation; where solidarity between groups in the society is low, since the elaborated codes of communication and social allegiance distance members from each other. Two other important assertions are that disruption to these structures is expressive of crisis in the society (as in the extreme form of suicide, which Durkheim`s study analyses into three forms); and that the ability to transform structures is expressive of freedom:

> Transformational variety, in the syntagmatic or paradigmatic plane alike, is a transparent signifier of both freedom and power for those in control of them. (Hodge and Kress, 1986: 109)

What might this form of social semiotic diagnosis offer a reading of the transformations of *The Company of Wolves*?

The main development from the folktale or Perrault's story to Angela Carter's story is an increase in the complexity of the hypotactic structures, both in the narrative and the sentential syntagms. As might be expected, the structures expressive of our own society are likely to reflect a highly complex, differentiated character, in contrast to the less complex, more paratactic structures of the original story, expressive of the strong social bonds of the mechanical solidarity of a peasant society. But, as Hodge and Kress suggest, along with complexity goes a weakening of solidarity, and more hierarchical forms of regulation. So, in Carter's more complex story, the reader is invited to sympathise with the peasant society represented in the story; but is distanced from them by the high degree of stylization, even idealisation; while the hypotactic structures of the language and the narrative offer most confident access to a literary elite.

In some ways, the film echoes, even strengthens these transformations, transcoding them into other semiotic codes (the visual semiotic, dress, speech and accent, music). The boundaries of social class, for instance, appear repeatedly in the complex paradigm of the girl (now named, Rosaleen). This heroine figure is now multiply divided into a series of syntagmatic bundles. The one at the centre of the `realistic` narrative syntagm is markedly middle class and prosperous. The one at the centre of the main `dream` syntagm is apparently peasant; but a series of modality cues (idealised costume, set, speech and accent) reveal this to be a thin, folksy fiction. The boundaries between social groups are marked in both narrative syntagms: between the 'real' Rosaleen's house and the rest of society (by its size and isolation); between the dream Rosaleen's family and the others in the village. Further, however, a series of boundaries are erected within each syntagm between

Rosaleen and other individuals: she resists the boy who courts her, refusing a kiss; she refuses a kiss to her grandmother; her rivalry with her sister leads to the latter's dream-death; the 'real' Rosaleen is isolated from her family by a feverish teenage sulk, and by the doors and walls of the house, accentuated by low camera angles. The syntagmatic logic of this series of severances leads to the most powerful affinity within the film - with the Hunter/Wolf. This both disrupts signifiers of solidarity in the film (particularly the family in the dream narrative), and intensifies signifiers of social betrayal/mobility: the 'peasant' Rosaleen (who we knew all along was really a lady) bonds with the aristocratic (and vaguely foreign) Hunter. Her real allegiance, then, is to the dark side of male sexuality (demonised and mythologised in the figure of the werewolf) and to the social level above her (to which her 'real' self actually belongs).

At the same time, the hypotactic structures of the film, even more complex than these of the Carter story, are fractured, increasingly so as the film progresses. The three main syntagmatic clusters leak into each other, until we can no longer tell what is dream and what is `real`. In Hodge and Kress`s terms, the combination of the disruption of structures of social cohesion and the disruption of the hypotactic structures of the narrative would signify a society characterised by certain kinds of crisis: Durkheim`s *egoism* and *anomie,* expressive of a degree of breakdown in mechanisms of regulation and of social solidarity. In some ways, this doesn`t come as a surprise: the film clearly shows how the tumultuous onset of sexual desire in adolescence can cause disorder, alienation, and the weakening of parental authority in the modern family; and how awakening sexuality is constructed for girls in images of social glamour and idealised masculinity, which they are obliged both to assent to and resist to win social approval.

To turn now to the representation of gender in the figure of Rosaleen. There are transformations here, of both literary and filmic antecedents, which suggest more optimistic readings of signs of power and solidarity. In the paradigms derived from

the werewolf genre, the film genre is the key referent. So Rosaleen relates, in terms of appearance and dress, to former heroines of werewolf and vampire movies, a combination of the virgin-bride and the seductive-temptress paradigms, but, like the heroine of Carter's story, is transformed from victim to heroine, altering, in particular, the syntagm of the ending. In this way, she also relates to other horror heroines, who play increasingly powerful roles, sometimes excluding men as powerful figures altogether, such as Carrie in Brian de Palma's film of Stephen King's story, Ripley in the *Alien* trilogy (Ridley Scott, James Cameron), or Clarice Starling, the female detective in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme). This shift in gender relations is not always unequivocal, as Carol Clover suggests (1993) - these newly-empowered heroines tend to display signifiers of ambiguous sexuality, such as boyishness, sexlessness, inverted use of phallic weapons. This last is true of Rosaleen: she accomplishes her triumph over the wolf - in film but not story - by appropriating his clearly phallic rifle and using it against him.

The sense of subjectivity offered by the Rosaleen paradigm to spectators (particularly, we might imagine, female spectators) is much more complex, ambigous, contradictory, expressive of dangers as well as opportunities (the freedom and power consequent upon transformational variety) but with a price to pay. This price is represented powerfully by the scream in the final image of the film - a scream contradictorily suggesting pleasure (it comes as the climax of a series of gasps suggesting sexual arousal) - but also terror.

Conclusion: representations of subjectivity; constructions of audience

My remarks on this subject will be part tentative observation, part hypothesis. Contemporary theories of subjectivity are so complex that any easy answers must be suspect - rather, I prefer to speculate, and attempt to link speculations as

productively as possible with the small-scale audience research of the third part of this study.

In the first place, *The Company of Wolves* seems to me to be emblematic of the paradox which dogs postmodern and post-Freudian accounts of subjectivity and identity: that the dissolving boundaries of the self are simultaneously a threat and a liberation. Jancovich's account of body-horror (1992) as a metaphor for the fear and pleasure occasioned by liberation from the safe-but-imprisoning unified self is a good example. Donald's account (1992) is an optimistic one: that the uncertainty of identity imaged by horror films allows for the new politics of community with which he identifies a postmodern popular sublime. Carol Clover's account (1993) is extremely sensitive to the ambivalence and ambiguity of horror films and the ideologies which produce and receive them; but in the end, her reading is also more optimistic than otherwise, cautiously identifying a progressive redefinition of gender relations in the genre, as well as a productive transparency about the representation of gender relations and the psychosexual drives that form them than elite cinema, which, she argues (pages 231-236) is repressive and deceitful.

In *The Company of Wolves*, similarly, we have grounds for both optimistic and pessimistic readings of the politics of gender and subjectivity. The onset of adult sexuality is associated with dissolving subjectivity: the loss, burning or breakage of icons of childhood and puberty (toys, the granny, the red cloak); blurring of bodily boundaries between the girl and the wolf, between the girl and the elements of Anton Furst's darkly beautiful set designs in which aspects of her self are projected (the house; the forest; the well). This dissolution appears one moment as a triumph of feminist role reversal (clearly the intention of Angela Carter's story); the next as a traditional generic representation of the girl as victim. On the other hand, the figure of Rosaleen holds a powerful unity throughout the film, which is likely, perhaps, for younger views especially, to prove the dominant image. She is rendered more

specific than the anonymous (therefore mythic, universal) heroines of the source texts simply by being named; but also by being visually anchored in the conventional icons of female teenage identity, which reassure viewers that she's an 'ordinary' teenage girl - but at the same time allow her to represent, almost stereotypically, any teenage girl.

The question of the subjectivities of the viewers is even more complex. In Clover's account, this is rendered in terms of a discussion of the psychoanalytical concept of the 'gaze', described by Freud (1991), re-theorized by Lacan (1979), and famously employed by Laura Mulvey (1975) as a masculine gaze which is either sadistic/voyeuristic or scopophilic/fetishistic. Clover's critique rests on identifying a gap in the accounts of Mulvey and Christian Metz (1982), which, argues Clover, fail to recognize that the spectator's gaze is two-way - that, in effect, the screen is gazing back. Accordingly, she constitutes, not only horror audiences, but all film audiences, as typically positioned in a sado-masochistic relation to the screen, in which the element of masochism, constituted by the vulnerability of the receiving eye/mind/viewing subject, and its thirst for sensations of pain and pleasure, relates to the repressed connection of pain and pleasure in each viewing subject's psychosexual history:

> It is ... true ... that themes and images of painful looking and pierced eyes
> have long been a staple of the tradition, and that it is not possible to look at
> many horror movies from any era without confronting the idea; and there
> was *Peeping Tom*, a film that from its first image (the pierced bull's-eye) to
> its last (the darkened screen, as Mark's own vision is extinguished by
> suicide, and the voice-over of a frightened boy saying "Good night, Daddy -
> hold my hand") insists that the pleasure of looking at others in fear and
> pain has its origins in one's own past-but-not-finished fear and pain. (230)

On its own, this psychoanalytic reading of the spectatorial response would be vulnerable to criticisms of omitting any consideration of history and society. Clover harnesses it, however, to a brief account in her Afterword of changes in socially-constructed versions of subjectivity, and especially gender identity. These she attributes to major events critical to perceptions of masculinity (the Vietnam war), and to changes in the family and other social structures; all of which allow for a changing politics in the making and viewing of films. It is still a weakness of her argument that no link is made between the psychoanalytic account and the historical-social account, other than their immediate juxtaposition in the final two chapters of the book. Nevertheless, as complementary versions, they are attractive, and offer an explanation of the pleasure of horror more convincing than Jancovich's rather too neat and reductive analysis.

Chapters 3, 4 and 6 in particular will ask the question of how young people's readings of *The Company of Wolves* and other horror films are affected by social-historical contingencies, and by the social identities they live out, in this act of spectatorship as in every other action of their lives. In asking this, I will need to recognise the relationship between the outer world of signs and the inner world of their own subjectivities - a world which, as Volosinov argues, is also composed of signs, also ideological. The constant, transformative, two-way movement between these outer and inner worlds will frame the explorations of their readings and uses of the film.

These chapters will examine how different pleasures in the film are associated with different social positionings, different subjectivities. For instance, those elements of the film that operate as markers of popular horror, associated with popular taste, uninhibited pleasure (and the pain of the visual assault noted by Clover) might be expected to appeal, in young audiences fully literate in the genre, across social

boundaries. These, in effect, are the transformation sequences. For some viewers, these might be expected to be the most appealing elements - clear islands of generic pleasure in a text which otherwise abounds in puzzling hypotactic structures and opaque references uncharacteristic of the horror genre. For others, the sequences least like horror, more suggestive of fantasy, allegory, or the logic of surrealism might appeal at the other end of the spectrum: the empty sublime; narrative hypotaxis, 'pure' taste. And this range of pleasures, of understandings, might be explained, at least in part, by contradictory constructions of the sublime, from Bakhtin's visceral and gleeful material sphere to Kant's refined, sublimated images of emptiness.

The film's metasigns of social class might address different viewers in different ways. The signifiers of middle class status in the representation of Rosaleen (accent, clothes, material wealth) might suggest power to some viewers, solidarity to others. Similarly, the representation of gender in the film, in which matriarchal structures are strong, and the, albeit equivocal, triumph of the heroine over the male threat is marked on frequent occasions, might invite relations of solidarity between some viewers and the represented participants in the semiosic process (especially the figure of Rosaleen); and the reverse in others. This might well not simply be determined by the biological sex of the viewer or viewer group; but also by belief systems (religious, political, social) operating in families, peer groups, ethnic groups) and social class or social aspirations, and the norms of taste they adhere to.

Chapter 3 will begin to differentiate, looking at individual spectators' reworkings of details of the film - the material process of traffic between the inner and outer world of signs.

Chapter 3: Reading the Image:

horror freezeframes and the cinematic still

The use of the still has always appeared natural and simple - a visual quote, anchoring the point made in a review, proposing a distilled version of the film in a press kit, or enticing us into the cinema in a poster. In fact, of course, it is a complex historical process of selection, representation, and certain forms of discursive empowerment, offering, I will argue, important clues about the way in which we read the images of a film: how we anticipate it, respond to it at the moment of viewing, and later recall it.

In the school project which forms the object of enquiry in this study, students use a video digitiser, which simply allows them to grab images and drop them into their own work - in effect, to make their own stills, and use them for the kind of purposes that film commentators and critics have used them for throughout the history of the cinema. The importance of this eluded me at first, because it seemed such as small part of the process of response, interpretation and elaboration. This chapter will ask what this act of appropriation means, what it makes possible, what it determines. It seems a small moment in the story of the digital revolution; but I will argue that it allows for certain kinds of amplification of the ways in which we read, interpret and transform the films we watch.

I want to look at three broad areas, and the questions that arise from each. The questions are prompted partly by observation of the way young people deal with still images from the film; and partly by certain points in the history of the theory of the cinematic image, from Eisenstein's montage theory to contemporary social semiotic theory. In particular, I am thinking, at least as a starting point, of the remarks made about the cinematic still by Roland Barthes in his well-known essay, 'The Third

Meaning' (1978).

• *The first is the question of the single image in a moving sequence, and how this is read by school students - the image as a unit of meaning in the grammar of the film.*

• *The second is the image as a condensation of the film, a significant image that stands metonymically for whole sequences, important themes, perhaps even, as in a film poster, for the whole film.*

• *The third is the social use of what Barthes calls `this major artefact`, the cinematic still: in what conditions is it used; what variations are there on the basic idea of the still; what new social practices are permitted by the still as video freezeframe?*

The still: vertical montage, synchronic syntagms

Barthes speculates on the nature of the cinematic still at the end of `The Third Meaning`. There are two points he makes there that I want to explore. The first is his account of the construction of the still image, which he derives from Eisenstein's montage theory (1968). He concurs with Eisenstein's notion of the cinematic image as doubly articulated, both horizontally in the sequence of frames and shots, and vertically, where the elements of the individual frame are orchestrated, in Eisenstein's musical analogy, both with each other and with the soundtrack:

> Of course, there is no audiovisual montage in the still, but SME's [Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein] formula is general insofar as it establishes a right to the syntagmatic disjunction of images and calls for a *vertical* reading of the articulation. (page 332)

This suggests a number of ideas which we might consider against the history of visual semiotics, and against the preoccupations of the classroom.

Firstly, Barthes is clearly suggesting a grammar of the single frame, below the level of the shot. Although this kind of detailed analysis has become unfashionable in some areas of film theory and cultural studies, it is resurgent in the frameworks of analysis offered by social semiotics referred to in Chapter 1 and eslsewhere, on which I intend to draw. It raises questions in the context of education about the nature of children`s visual literacy - indeed, whether such a term is itself valid - and how such skills are best addressed in the classroom, in ways which have extensive analogies with debates about the teaching of reading print.

Secondly, Barthes suggests that the disjunction of the horizontal syntagm which the cinematic still constitutes is productively subversive. He argues that it allows a disruption, suspension, even rejection of narrative time, revealing what he describes as the "indescribable meaning":

> Finally, the still throws off the constraint of filmic time; which constraint is extremely powerful, continuing to form an obstacle to what might be called the adult birth of film (born technically, occasionally even aesthetically, film still has to be born theoretically). For written texts, unless they are very conventional, totally committed to logico-temporal order, reading time is free; for film, this is not so, since the image cannot go faster or slower without losing its perceptual figure. The still, by instituting a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical, scorns logical time (which is only an operational time); it teaches us how to dissociate the technical constraint from what is the specific filmic and which is the "indescribable" meaning. (pages 332/3)

We need to think what might be meant by subversion, and what kinds might be productive in the classroom; but part of his sense is of a textual subversion, in which the governing structure of temporal development of the film, the horizontal axis, is refused or denied by the reader. One question, then, about how young people read still images from film, would be 'How, in their reading of the still, do they read, register, interpret, transform, the temporal qualities of the film?' Also, is Barthes' notion of an *indescribable meaning*, qualitatively different from the mundane semiotic of the film, tenable, or observable in the work of these school students?

For Eisenstein, this `scorning` of time would have been unthinkable. The image presented by his vertical montage is of harmonious orchestration of elements in the single frame which all belong indissolubly to the horizontal axis also:

> This correspondence, or relationship, could be just as successfully described if, for the image of the orchestral score, we had substituted the montage structure of the silent film.
>
> In order to do this, we will have to draw from our silent film experience an example of *polyphonic* montage, where shot is linked to shot not merely through one indication - movement, or light values, or stage in the exposition of the plot, or the like - but through a *simultaneous advance* of a multiple series of lines, each maintaining an independent compositional course, and each contributing to the total compositional course of the sequence. (pages 64-5)

This suggestion of an orchestral arrangement in some ways anticipates the work of later semiotics, which sees the single frame as a syntagmatic arrangement, with its own grammar of elements. The difference between Eisenstein on the one hand, and Barthes and later social semioticians on the other, is in Eisenstein's ideal of a production of meaning in which author and reader form a harmonious unity - a

necessary ideal in the context of Eisenstein's political project. The dissonance between text and reader, the unpredictability of the reader's meanings, are what characterise the semiotic theory of Barthes and his successors; again, a view of the act of reading appropriate to the social and political context of, in particular, France in the 1960s.

Social semiotic theory provides further insights into the nature of the cinematic image which help in the understanding of the still. Robert Hodge and David Tripp consider the *synchronic syntagm* as a unit of meaning in their exploration of the American cartoon, Fangface, in their social semiotic study of 42 Australian schoolchildren's television viewing (1986). They define it in two ways: firstly, as a single image where the visual elements are arranged in a syntagmatic organisation that is read (virtually) instantaneously by the viewer; secondly, as a kind of image which carries particularly powerful ideological meanings for the viewer. This takes us a step further than Barthes, who, though endorsing the idea of vertical montage, stops short of describing the still as a syntagmatic structure. Although Hodge and Tripp are not describing the still, their notion of the synchronic syntagm applies in two ways: firstly, it offers a theory of a syntagmatic arrangement at rightangles, as it were, to the diachronic flow of the film, as well as a theoretical separation of synchrony and diachrony in the film's 'grammar'. Secondly, it offers an explanation of why certain images offer particularly powerful meanings to viewers, meanings whose sense is dependent on social contexts and structures of ideology.

We can ask, therefore, of the still image: how do children read this syntagm when it is abstracted from the moving sequence; and how and why have they been motivated to choose this particular image in the first place?

Hodge works further on the idea in his collaboration with Gunther Kress in *Social Semiotics* (1988). Hodge and Kress, in their consideration of synchronic and

diachronic syntagms, also use Eisenstein as one of their points of departure. They endorse his concept of shot-montage, as they see such a procedure of juxtapositions of image as a series of semiotic transformations, socially situated in ways that importantly determine the meanings it can produce. And, like Hodge and Tripp, they emphasise that, because the effect of the synchronic syntagm is instantaneous, it is peculiarly powerful, and resistant to analysis, thus particularly well suited to carry powerful ideological meanings, or meanings central to a text.

Another set of insights into the syntagmatic structure of the image, though in this case it is not the cinematic image, is offered by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), who analyse images in terms of a grammar of visual design, where each element operates as part of the grammar of the image, in analogy to the elements of Halliday's systemic-functional grammar. In this visual grammar, the objects and people in the picture function as *participants*, subjects of the action signalled by vectors of movement, and the angles and perspectives of the picture signal point-of-view, so function as deictics, or the system of person in language.The question here is, how does this theory develop when we look at the moving image? And what evidence is there of young people using such a grammar in their own comments on cinematic images; and, related to this, what kind of pedagogic practice could use such a grammar?

Kress and Van Leeuwen structure their account around the founding categories of Hallidayan linguistics (briefly described in Chapter 1 of this thesis) - the premise that all acts of communication can be described in terms three semiotic metafunctions - the *ideational*, the *interpersonal*, and the *textual*. In examining one boy's readings of an image from *The Company of Wolves*, I will focus on the first two of these, to see how he reads the text's structures of signification, and how he positions himself in relation to them. To briefly describe them:

- the *ideational* function refers to the property of semiotic systems which represents the world, encompassing, importantly for this study, objects/characters and their relations; and that important patterning of represented experience, narrative;

- the *interpersonal* metafunction refers to the way semiotic systems project relations between the partners in the communicative enterprise; and they distinguish between the `interactive` participants, that is, the actual producers and readers of the texts, and `represented` participants, the characters depicted in the text, who also enter into relationships of various kinds with the reader.

So, Ben has chosen an image of a werewolf (illustration 1) in the final stages of transformation. The choice itself is significant, for reasons outlined in Chapter 2: this is an image in which usually stable identities are replaced by disturbing processes of transformation, an image which carries accreted historical meanings from traditions of cinema and folktale. How does he read this image?

The Narrative

First, how does he deal with the `represented participant`, the wolf? It becomes immediately apparent that the elements Kress and Van Leeuwen describe as properties of the still image are there, but everywhere informed by a knowledge, or set of understandings of, the moving text. For instance, the function of the represented participants in a narrative image are analysed in two ways by Kress and Van Leeuwen - as objects of classification, carrying particular attributes; and as actors in the dynamic processes of the narrative.

In constructing the carrier/attribute function, Ben uses a number of words to describe the creature in the image - that is, he transforms the visual sign and its nominal function into a number of nouns of his own. His first sentence is:

In this image the man is in the final stages of turning into a wolf.

This sounds simple enough - but already, one noun will not suffice for the creature, but two are needed: "man" and "wolf", signifying both the syntagmatic structure of this brief narrative sequence that covers the werewolf transformation; but also a paradigmatic understanding of the genre conventions that produce both the creature that is man/wolf, the werewolf; and the characteristic sequence of transformation that is a hallmark of the subgenre, described in the previous chapter.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES
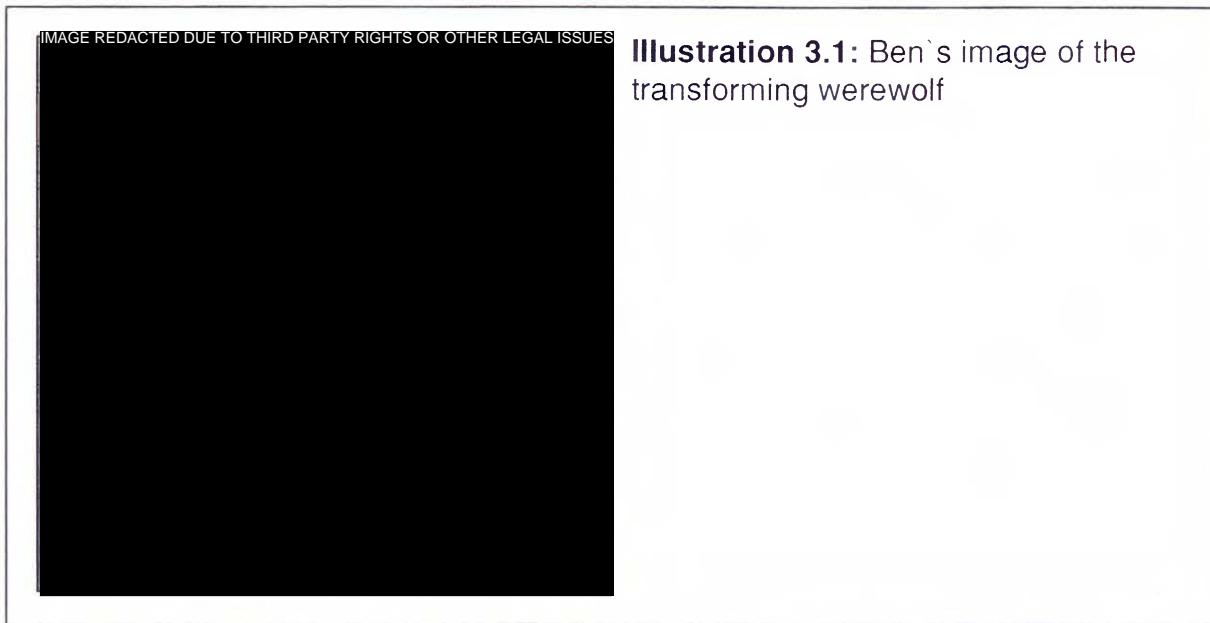
Illustration 3.1: Ben`s image of the transforming werewolf

Elsewhere in his commentary, Ben refers to the creature as "the monster (almost wolf)", a complex nominal group that articulates cultural echoes of the spectacular nature of the creatures of the Gothic tradition, "monster" literally signifying a showing, a demonstration, with a parenthetic representation of the dynamic process of the transformation, "(almost wolf)". Later, he calls it "the 'thing' ", perhaps indicative of uncertainty about its ever-transforming nature; perhaps an echo of an older sci-fi horror tradition which did indeed label one of its most celebrated inventions "The Thing". Elsewhere he calls it "the beast" - another choice resonant with apocalyptic

horror imagery. A significant point, perhaps, about all these selections is that they relate to the genre, their ruling paradigm, in a way that the everyday word - which Ben never uses - doesn't: the word "animal". It's clear that the processes of re-lexicalisation Ben uses to transform the transforming werewolf aren't by any means random, but carry the social history of meanings Vygotsky describes in *Thought and Language* (1962) :

> The primary word is not a straightforward symbol for a concept but rather an image, a picture, a mental sketch of a concept, a short tale about it - indeed, a small work of art. In naming an object by means of such a pictorial concept, man ties it into one group with a number of other objects. In this respect the process of language creation is analogous to the process of complex formation in the intellectual development of the child. (page 75)

Furthermore, this production of the image of a werewolf, the idea of a werewolf, the understanding of a werewolf, is a semiotic act moving simultaneously in two directions, made possible only by the joint work of the outer world of signs from which the image, with all its historically accreted meanings, proceeds, and the inner world of signs - Ben's mind - which absorbs, transforms, re-produces, those images as he works, transformatively, on his understanding of the world and his own subjectivity. This two-way movement, referred to in the last chapter and elsewhere in this thesis, is borrowed from Volosinov's view of the relation between ideology and the psyche, in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973).

The other function of participants in a narrative image in Kress and Van Leeuwen's account is their part in the processes of the text. In a still image, these are realised in vectors, lines of movement that relate the participants in terms of action and power. In a moving image, such vectors become signs of actual movement, of course, which

may be present in a freezeframe if it shows something in mid-movement. In this image, there are no such vectors, and the movement can only be read by reference to the whole diachronic syntagm, for which the still image stands in metonymic substitution. These movements, translated by Ben into verbs, of course, give some indication of how narrative processes are read. So, we have a recognition of the process in which the major participant, the werewolf, is the dominant Actor. An interesting question, in terms of the main process, the event that takes up most of the narrative time in this sequence, the transformation, is who functions as the Goal - who is on the receiving end. The verbs make it clear that Ben perceives three Goals. One of them is the represented participant in the image - the werewolf himself. That he is simultaneously the actor and the goal, the monster and the victim, is registered in the implied reflexivity of the verbs in the first few sentences: "the man is in the final stages of turning [himself] into a wolf. He has developed [in himself] his muzzle and teeth and all that remains is for him to get his fur." As has often been noted in the imagery of divided identity in the horror film (Jancovich: 1992; Clover: 1993), the monster is here literally divided against himself. That he appears as victim in the affective structures of the sequence is all too plain in Ben`s commentary in an interesting sentence which makes an affective articulation of the three victims of the horror - monster, the woman in the sequence, and the viewer:

> This image is particularly gory because the monster (almost wolf) is
> obviously in quite a lot of pain and as the lady keeps screaming and the
> music is becoming quite intense it is quite distressing [to the viewer].

As this sentence indicates, the other Goals of the transformation process are the woman, the other represented participant, not in this image, but in other the parts of the sequence which Ben is obliged to describe to make sense of the threat of the creature; and the viewer, whose position is of central concern in Ben`s piece. Such monster-victim relations are, of course, characteristic structures of the horror genre,

especially in this triple formation, where the spectator's sympathies and points of identification are divided between the actual victim and the monster-as-victim, a paradox reaching back to Mary Shelley's creature.

But there is more than just the transformation - there is the intention of the creature to do harm to its victims when the transformation is complete. At this particular moment in the sequence, this intention of the werewolf can be reasonably deduced from its threatening behaviour and expression, and by our knowledge of the genre. In this case, Ben knows from his previous viewing what is going to happen in any case. Reading mental processes like intentions or thoughts in general is harder than reading physical actions; but Kress and Van Leeuwen assign it a place in their scheme, using Halliday's term `projective structures`. Where the projection of such processes in a still image could only refer to what the image itself contained, this image contains expressions of threatening intent syntagmatically connected to many other such images - snarls, growls, showing of teeth, and so on - as well as to the shots of the screaming woman intercut with the transformation - and to the ending part of the structure, where the beast's purpose is frustrated by its decapitation. Ben registers an awareness, in particular, of a how the creature's intentions are represented by the image itself:

> You can tell that this wolf is out for the kill from its expression and this makes you think of it as being evil and horrible!

The Interpersonal

Let's move on, then, to the interpersonal metafunction employed by Kress and Van Leeuwen. I've already noted that part of the film's effect is to position the viewer as victim of the horror. In this frame, Ben has chosen an image that addresses the viewer in a particularly direct way. Kress and Van Leeuwen describe this kind of

image act as a `demand` which establishes a specific relation between the represented participant on the screen and the interactive participant who is the viewer:

> ... the participant`s gaze ... demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her. (page 122)

They also note that, in part at least, this relation is analogous to the system of person in language, in such a way that the image is addressing the viewer in the second person. They also relate it to Halliday`s four basic speech acts, different kinds of demand and offer. So we might see this image as demanding a particular service from the viewer, in fact, the dominant imperative of the horror genre, encapsulated in that memorable catchphrase of modern horror in David Cronenberg`s remake of *The Fly*, when one potential victim commands another: "Be afraid. Be very afraid". It`s revealing, I think, to look at how Ben has registered this relation between represented and interactive participant in his commentary. To begin with, he observes the nature of the `demand` image quite explicitly:

> As the monster is looking almost straight at the viewer it gives the viewer the feeling that the beast is looking at them personally!

In this sentence Ben conceives of the viewer in the third person, as if he is describing the process by which the implied viewer, the general audience the film is addressing, becomes the actual individual spectator - as indeed it does in the next sentence, where the third person viewer gives way to the first person Ben:

> I really felt that the 'thing' was looking straight at me.

As if to complete the trinity of persons, the next sentence positions the viewer in the second person:

> This image has great significance on the film because you can suddenly believe that it is possible for a man to transform into a wolf in a few seconds.

This shifting of pronouns which represent the viewer goes on through the rest of the piece, suggesting, perhaps, the multiplicity of positions Ben can, and does, take up - as an individual, positioned against his knowledge of this text and others like it; this viewing situation and others; as a member of a class who've shared their responses to some idea; as a pupil, discussing his response with a teacher-reader; as a member of a viewing public who might choose horror films. So we get:

> *I* didn't know how the makers of the film would cope with the transformation scenes
> *You* can tell that this wolf is out for the kill
> *you* think of it as being evil"
> *I* think it makes her seem innocent
> When *we* watched the film *I* was not aware of thinking this but I am sure that *the whole class* were unconsciously aware of this.

This last sentence also raises explicitly the levels of consciousness involved in reading and interpretation, which I will return to later.

As I have suggested, Ben has registered the affective nature of his response, and recognised the peculiarity of a genre which deliberately sets out to distress its viewers. The nature of this distress is one of the forms of pleasure provided by horror movies, and extensive accounts are given of it by other commentators. Carol Clover

(1992) describes it as a masochistic pleasure, and her account of the characteristic 'assaultive gaze' of horror is recalled by this image, and by Ben's awareness of how he is addressed by it. Oddly, though Ben uses words like 'distressing' to describe the effect of the music and the scene in general, he claimed earlier not to have been frightened at all by the sequence, in a piece written immediately after watching it for the first time:

> I thought that the transformation sequence was very unrealistic. I wasn't really scared. I almost though it was funny. I clapped my hands (don't ask why) and laughed. It was too unrealistic to make me scared but I thought it was funny.

This kind of disputing of the film's credibility is a final feature of the interpersonal aspect of the text, again described by Kress and Van Leeuwen - its modality: the extent to which its claim to truth, its believability, is accepted by the reader. In many ways, Ben's commentary, unlike his first reaction, signals a high modality, an involvement in the text which doesn't question the credibility of the fantasy images on offer, unlike some other pupils in this study, who question the fantasy sequences strongly. Where they are called into question, where the modality is low, it's often expressed in criticisms of the special effects. In Ben's case, where he does distance himself from the diegesis, it's to attribute to the special effects the credibility of the scene for him:

> I didn't know how the makers of the film would cope with the transformation scenes but I think they did it very well indeed.

There is evidence in my study that comments on special effects should never be taken at face value: they're often quite contradictory, or contradict other evidence in

the study, as when students (especially boys) react positively to the special effects, then claim afterwards that they're old-fashioned or unbelievable. It seems much more likely that such a claim is provoked by an unwillingness to appear affected by the spectacular horror scenes, an unwillingness more associated with boys than girls, though some girls in the study show it. (Martin Barker [1995] suggests that young audiences use a discourse of special effects for films they like, and distinguishes this from the kinds of language they might learn in school in Media Studies). In Ben's case, we seem to get both types of response: the initial reaction suggesting low modality; the written piece suggesting high modality. Clover gives us a clue to such shifting responses in her claim that the viewing position demanded by horror is a feminine position: identifying with the victim position, which is, Clover argues, structured as feminine, if not actually represented by a female character. Such a position, while producing an affective response as real for a boy as for a girl, is bound to also create discomfort, especially in the social setting of boys viewing together, and the demands this places on them.

In terms of Kress and van Leeuwen's scheme, this image and sequence are notable for a concentration of modality markers, for a particular reason - that this kind of fantasy image in horror films carries its own modality problem. Its effectiveness, that is, the affective response without which it is meaningless, depends on convincing the viewer to suspend their disbelief in its self-evidently fictional nature, or metaphorical nature. The wolf may signify adult sexuality in the wider symbolic frame of the film, just as, in Franco Moretti's influential reading (1988), Frankenstein's creature represents the unruly proletariat, or Dracula the parasitic behaviour of monopoly capital. But in the short term, the affective response needed to make the sign function requires that we read the fantasy image literally. The kind of modality markers referred to by Kress and van Leeuwen are all there then. There is the representation of closeup detail of the transformation - the hair, the teeth, the blood and slime, the bursting skin. There is the dramatic and naturalistic lighting, the

chiaroscuro effect of the candle in the image. And there is more, beyond the still image, that we might begin to describe as modality markers in the moving sequence: the straining physicality of the werewolf`s movements, and the articulation of them with the soundtrack, and its hyperreal composition of splitting, tearing and squelching noises, along with the groaning of the wolf, the screaming of the woman, and the music.

My main question here was about how young people read the still image. It looks from this analysis of Ben`s work as if, as we might expect, the grammar of the still image is everywhere informed by that of the moving sequence; though the text is not read as it presumably is at the moment of watching. This is a rereading, a transformation of the text. The freezing of the image allows for an anatomy of the elements of the frame, an uncovering of what Eisenstein called the polyphonic structure of elements. There`s a sense in which Barthes` account looks quite wrong: there`s no evidence in Ben`s work of a refusal of filmic time; in fact, we could even say that he is quite unable to escape the temporal echoes in the image. In another sense, though, Barthes` disobedient attitude to narrative time provokes productive reflections. Certainly, the time of the film is disrupted here, the `realtime` of the film is suspended, the diachronic sequence is undone. The strict temporality of the viewing is replaced by a different temporality, that of the interpretive performance, recasting the film narrative in the dominant present tense of exegesis, freezing the image for anatomical investigation.

I am struck here by the similarity to drama work in school, and the use of still image and slow motion conventions to slow down and freeze real time, for very similar purposes: the transformation through a kind of performative analysis of events, images, situations. There is an important point to be made here about pedagogy, of course. These drama conventions - the living grammar of diegetic movement - are controlled by students, used by them as a language of movement and the body.

They derive some of their power, as argued by Jonothan Neelands (1990), from their cultural referents - statues, photographs, video freeze-frames - which students understand from their own cultural experience. But their use in this instance derives immediately from explicit instruction by the teacher, who has taught them as a set of dramatic conventions. In the same way, though Ben's commentary depends in many ways on social and cultural factors from outside the classroom, other features of it - the freezing of the image, the explicit nature of the task, and his attention to some aspects of the image and the film - come from the classroom as a site of cultural encounter, and from explicit instruction by the teacher.

There seems to be no sign, however, of Barthes' "indescribable third meaning", no reason to suppose that all the meanings Ben finds can't be encompassed within the realm of the semiotic. This could lead us to dispute Barthes' notion of an indescribable meaning altogether, substituting a notion of meanings which for some reason resist explication (indeed, Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1992, argue something like this, and their argument will be examined in Chapter 8). For instance, it is clear that his explicit commentary only goes so far in pulling the meanings he finds in the image and sequence into fully conscious exposition. He doesn't offer any kind of reading of the werewolf's possible symbolic meanings; or, indeed, why he chose this sequence. The meanings tied up in his choice, the pleasure presumably contained in the scene - these unspoken meanings will be those described by Hodge and Kress as the aspects of the synchronic syntagm peculiarly resistant to decoding (page 175); those closest to Barthes' ineffable meanings. We need to look, then, at the significance of his choice - why these images, those closest to the semiotics of popular horror, rather than others which signal more clearly the elite aesthetic of art-house cinema? What structures of pleasure, of taste, are involved here? And how might all this, this classroom study of a film, be in any way remotely similar to the way children watch films at home, or in the cinema? What meanings are specifically linked to the classroom itself as a social site of cultural engagement?

Part for whole: synchronic syntagms 2

My second question was about the still image as a condensation of the film, a metonymic substitution for whole sequences, important themes, even the whole film.

Eisenstein is revealing here. Interestingly, his first example of how the montage principle works does not come from film at all. He describes how he builds up, in his memory, an image of a New York Street. Because the streets aren`t evoked as a visual image by their names, since the names are numbers, he says we build up an aggregation of what he calls `representations`, which are unified by the montage principle into our image of the street.

There is an ambiguity here between the synchronic and diachronic nature of these images: do we recall our images of the New York street in the sequence, the chain in which we first saw them - or do we recall them as a composite image? It seems quite likely that the two forms - sequential and superimposed - could co-exist in the memory of the individual - even that she could move between them at will.

The ambiguity is even clearer in Eisenstein`s second example, which is a passage from Maupassant`s *Bel Ami*, in which the image of midnight is evoked by a series of clocks striking at different distances around the city, producing a reinforcement of the sensation of midnight; a sensation that is at once sequential and unitary.

But there is another ambiguity - that Eisenstein is, ostensibly at least, taking about montage as a process of *composition*. His analogies, however, work equally well as images of composition and viewing, production and reception. If we produce a composite image of a New York street, are we making a mental film of it, composing our representation of it; or are we making our own reading of somebody else`s

composition? In our apprehension of midnight, are we adapting Maupassant for our own film version; or reading his text? The idea that writing and reading are two sides of the same coin, with analogous processes of meaning-making, is, in fact, Eisenstein's precise point, as he extends his theory of montage to include the viewer's reception of the text in a radical view of textual relations. It seems not unreasonable, then, to take from his account a view of montage, not only as the compositional process of juxtaposing and superimposing images; but also as the process by which a reader makes their own reading of the text by appropriating key images, reordering and restructuring them to produce their own remembered version of the film. Where we might dissent from Eisenstein, as mentioned above, is in questioning his belief that such acts of reading will inevitably be harmonious with authorial intentions.

Barthes approaches the problem the other way round, describing the still as "... the fragment of a second text *whose existence never exceeds the fragment*," suggesting that film and still are in a palimpsest relationship, "... without it being possible to say that one is *on top of* the other or that one is *extracted* from the other." (page 332)

He seems to be suggesting that each still, and the process of selecting it, provides the reader in question with one of an infinite number of texts, dependent in some ways on the whole, in other ways independent, each time a new text, condensed into the still, able, presumably, to be released into conscious thought by explication.

Hodge and Tripp's account of the synchronic syntagm gives some new insights, which complement Eisenstein's view of the agglomerate image. They describe, as we've already seen, a second type of synchronic syntagm, this time not a single image, but an agglomeration of repeated images, greatly reinforcing the power of the syntagm. They suggest, in relation to Fangface, that an important repeated synchronic syntagm is the image of the central character. This is easy enough to

imagine - if we asked a child to draw the central character of a film, she'd be likely to produce an image which would be a composite of ideal characteristics drawn from many of the versions she's seen.

They go on, however, to describe another interesting feature of this kind of synchronic syntagm - how readers interpret them, and link them together, can be quite unpredictable. They describe two extremes of reading, those who prefer paratactic, or chaining structures, and those who prefer hypotactic, or subordinating structures. Any kind of film narrative is likely to be hypotactic in nature, with complex hierarchies of subordination. Those who choose paratactic readings, therefore, are likely to produce subversive, unpredictable meanings. In other words, the reader has almost limitless possibilities for chaining together powerful images from the text to produce readings that suit his or her purposes:

> For the viewer oriented to paratactic structures the story will not exist as a unity. If there is a single meaning that is seen as *the* meaning of *Fangface* for the paratactic viewer, it is likely to be a repeated syntagm, or a repeated paradigmatic structure: especially a densely-coded meaning carried by a repeated synchronic syntagm. Of these, the most pervasive is the central character: in this case Fangface/Fangs. The meanings carried by this complex syntagm are, we have seen, ambiguous, contradictory and ambivalent. The non-hypotactic meanings, then, are the site of contradiction, subversion and contestation. We cannot even postulate an either-or, because paratactic meanings are primitive and powerful, accessible as an alternative even for someone who can interpret hypotactic structures. What we have, with Fangface and with children's programmes generally, is a double set of possibilities of different meanings. Different types of show could rely on different proportions of the two types of structure, or children of different ages might give different weighting to the two types of structure. (page 39)

So, if we could make some equivalence between Eisenstein's New York Street analogy and Hodge and Tripp's synchronic syntagm, we might get various versions. We might get a hypotactic reading of the street, say in a detailed tourist account of Times Square, like the Rough Guide to New York, which superimposes different historical versions of the square on each other. We might get a paratactic reading from a theatre-goer, who articulates only the images of the ticket-booths; or from a police officer or drug dealer, selecting elements of the street and square most relevant to their opposed purposes.

The questions that emerge from all this for me are: do young people, as they choose the frames they want to digitize, select images of this kind, powerful synchronic syntagms? What causes them to choose the images they do? How do they deal with them? What transformations of the film do they produce? Are they controlling the film, the genre; or is it controlling them?

Gemma and Ellie have chosen three images for their piece of work. The first shows the heroine of the film, Rosaleen, asleep in her bedroom at the start of the film (illustration 2). A relevant point, noted in Chapter 1, is that she's a contemporary

Illustration 3.2: *Rosaleen sleeping*

heroine, inserted like an envelope around Angela Carter's original story, providing a new narrative frame, as it's her dream that contains the story of the company of Wolves.

Their second image is of the werewolf-hunter, as he meets her in the wood on the way to her grandmother's (illustration 3).

Illustration 3.3: *the Hunter*
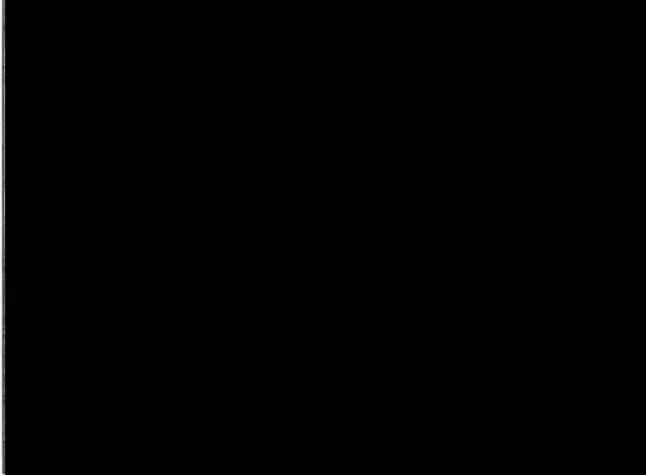
Their third is of the wolf that once was Rosaleen, after a transformation that she has invited, even controlled, in order to gain access to the world of adult sexuality that the werewolves appear to represent (illustration 4).

Illustration 3.4: *the wolf-Rosaleen*
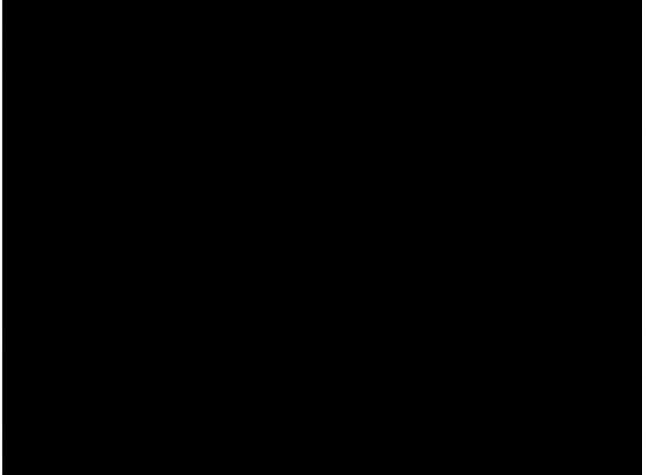
What does their selection reveal? It it is their own condensation of the entire film. Significantly, they have selected images that all come from the main narrative, or its envelope; what they have omitted is any images from the subordinate narratives that are told by Rosaleen and her grandmother. Perhaps, for them, the overarching narrative structure is important; or perhaps it is important to them that this structure is bound up with the consciousness of the character they are interested in. They have chosen images that concentrate on the girl - the first positions her, as it were, in the first person, dreaming the story; the second, in the second person, addressed by the hunter, imagined as the reverse of the shot; the third, in the third person, as the object of the action, object of the werewolf transformation, object of the attack with a gun from her father who doesn't recognise her, saved by her mother who does, alerted by the cross around her neck.

The reading of the film represented by such a selection privileges the fairytale element - the hunter/wolf on the path; the point-of-view of the contemporary teenage girl, and the concomitant complexity of the narrative structure and its attendant modalities; and the deeply ambiguous role of the girl in relation to the monster/victim axis of modern horror movies. Several commentators, including Stephen King himself (1982) have noted how, in films from the late seventies onwards (with Brian de Palma's *Carrie* as a landmark, perhaps) female characters have occupied victim roles much more ambiguously, with such roles blurring into traditionally male hero functions, or into the role of the monster, or sometimes (again, Carrie is the classic example), all three.

So their condensed image of the film reads it as a film about a girl growing up, predominantly; the spectacular horror of the werewolf transformation scenes is marginalised. Ben's reading, on the other hand, places the film closer to contemporary body horror, selecting the most replete image of horror, foregrounding

the images closest to popular horror, furthest from the art-house style of much of the fantasy.

All of this, it seems to me, is a detailed and explicit reading of features of the visual text that would be noted, in the act of viewing, in a much more condensed way, perhaps unconsciously, or more accurately preconsciously, to use Freud's distinction (1915) between the repressed unconscious and that which is waiting to become conscious. So we might envisage this reading of the film which uses a still image supported by a written commentary, as a kind of triple movement: first, the reader recollects the image mentally; then she finds it, and fixes it (though this process, involving the often long and complex business of fast forward, rewind and freezeframe before the digitiser is even brought into play, has its own narrative of textual engagement), thereby condensing an understanding of an aspect of the film into one synchronic syntagm which metonymically represents, in this case, the protagonist/narrator. Thirdly, the condensation effect is reversed, as they unpack the meanings of the image, resituating it in their own version of the narrative syntagm, and elaborating the elements of the image and their significance in both synchronic and diachronic terms.

The lesson we can learn from Eisenstein in particular, I suggest, lies in the analogy between commonplace, unconscious montage - the ordinary person's habit of retaining composite after-images, selected to form that person's ideal version of the text, whether it be street, book or film - between this everyday process, and the much more formalized analysis of the relationship between single images and the whole visual text. I am suggesting, then, that the freezing of the image and a detailed commentary on it, is not dissimilar from what viewers do in any case - retain key images, reorder them mentally, discuss them with friends ("What about the bit where he ..."). So the classroom operates as an amplification, a rehearsal, an explication, a bringing into consciousness, of processes that happen into the social context outside

the classroom anyway. Consciousness is a tricky question here; but provisionally, I mean the kind of consciousness Vygotsky (1962) describes as self-aware conceptualization:

> We use consciousness to denote awareness of the activity of the mind - the consciousness of being conscious.` (page 91)

What is in question here is a difficult issue about the nature of explicit instruction in language, made doubly difficult by its application to popular texts. The classroom and the teacher are open to charges of cultural appropriation, of subjecting popular meanings and pleasures to forms of investigation that are, as Barthes once remarked, anything but popular themselves. This is an area where teachers need to tread delicately; and there is no room in this article to develop the argument; but Eisenstein`s analogy suggests that there are some connections between the way we make sense of and retain after-images of films in their more usual recreational setting, and the more formal, explicit ways in which we do this in the classroom. So it is not necessarily a denial of popular uses, nor an appropriation of them. It is, however, clearly a transformation of the social uses of the film, transferring, in part at least, the motivations for making meanings from the domain of family, friendship and recreation to the domain of education and the academy.

Social uses, social pleasures: stills as quotation

My third area of investigation took its cue from Barthes` recognition that the still was a kind of quotation:

> Moreover, the still is not a sample ... but a quotation (we know how much importance presently accrues to this concept in the theory of the text): at once parodic and disseminatory. (page 332)

To this extent, pupils use it as a quotation, in what is often a self-consciously expository text in quasi-academic mode. Gemma and Ellie`s commentary, though far from a traditional expository essay, makes the nature of textuality its explicit theme. Writing, as Halliday asserts, emphasises its theme as the first item in the clause. Gemma and Ellie`s sentences consistently display that their theme is the textuality of the image and the film, and the audience`s interpretation of it:

Our first image ...

We chose this ...

In this image ...

Then the camera pans ...

You can tell ...

We could tell ...

The atmosphere ...

The camera angle ...

Only the last sentence places the character and the diegesis as the theme:
Her face is very distressed ...

Elsewhere in their piece, there are the vocabularies and structures of quasi-academic discourse:

... it is symbolic of her ...

... panning around her face ...

... closeup of each of her toys ...

... it gives the indication that ...

But there are other voices in their piece, voices of popular, informal comment and judgement:

... she was new at putting makeup on ...

... the hunky hunter which has now turned into a wolf.

... Her granny told her to stay away from men whose eyebrows join but she didn`t

pay any attention to what she said but is totally blown over by him and his charms. ...

You can tell from the beginning that he is a slimy prat who just wants to eat her, the

silly thing is that she totally falls head over heals [sic] about him.

Such a hybrid discourse signals a corresponding mixture of social intentions, what

Hodge and Kress call motivation, what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the *speech will*, or

speech plan, determining the "compositional and stylistic features" of the utterance

(1952). They are simultaneously addressing a peer, as in an informal discussion of

the film, peppered with indignation and concrete social detail, and a teacher, or

academic system, and its expectations of formality.

It is tempting to want to clean up this discourse, make it either one thing or the other

- and such a move often characterises educational debates, promoting either the

supposed objective rigour of a supposed monolithic expository form - the essay; or

the supposed artless authenticity of a `personal response`. Both of these are

unrealistic. Speakers/writers are much more likely to have a mixture of motives, and

their speech and writing will polyphonically suggest this. Our job as teachers should

be to help them clarify their intentions, and find the representational resources to

carry them out. If that makes for hybrid and contradictory discourses, we need to live

with these, at least provisionally, without becoming censorious. Such a move would

probably only result in driving the contradictions underground, never losing them.

Bakhtin`s view of language (1981) is much more tolerant of contradiction than

Barthes`:

Such is the fleeting language of a day, of an epoch, a social group, a

genre, a school and so forth. It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language. (page 272)

Pleasures of the image

There are several types of pleasure implicit in the model I have offered of the reader's use of the still image. Let me move chronologically through the experience of film viewing as I have described it.

Barthes` notes on the still begin with some speculations about its fascination, rooted, as so often with Barthes, in his own behaviour. He confesses to a fascination with stills, photos from films in *Cahiers du Cinema*, or in magazines, or outside cinemas. He uses this to mount an attack on the common view of the still as a sample of the whole, thus necessarily a `remote byproduct`:

> I thought of myself as like those children who prefer the pictures to the text, or like those clients who, unable to attain the adult possession of objects (because too expensive), are content to derive pleasure from looking at a choice of samples or a department store catalogue. Such an explanation does no more than reproduce the common opinion with regard to stills which sees them as a remote subproduct of the film, a sample, a means of drawing in custom, a pornographic extract, and, technically, a reduction of the work by the immobilization of what is taken to be the sacred essence of cinema - the movement of the images. (page 331)

Barthes evokes, though it is not really part of his argument, the part that stills play in the small social history that is the individual's experience of a film. All parts of this

social history are important, as is recognised by later cultural theory, especially in the cultural studies tradition - so the fact that Barthes describes himself looking at stills in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinema*, or outside a cinema, immediately affects the kinds of meanings that might be made from such images; as opposed to, say, posters of Sigourney Weaver in *Aliens* in a local video shop, or of Madonna in the pages of *Just 17*, or Paul McGann as Dr Who on the cover of the *Radio Times*.

The pleasures evoked here are the pleasures of particular individual tastes, socially formed, acceded to, contested or transformed. As Bourdieu (1984) describes, they may have their roots in formations of social class, in traditions of elite or popular taste; but they're at least modifiable. In any case, the immediate or gradual recognition that "this will be a film I'll enjoy" begins here. The question of pleasure and taste, and of the particular pleasures involved in the viewing of horror, will be examined in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Finally, I would want to say that oppositions between the pleasure of productive work - making film - and the unpleasure of analytical work are false in principle - they offer different axes of pleasure, that may be oriented towards different social experiences and intentions; but they need to be recognised as legitimate, nonetheless. So one child might find it intensely pleasurable to learn analytical terminology and perform this kind of transformation; another might find it much more pleasurable to work with image, film and editing equipment.

Conclusion

I have argued, then, a number of points about young people's viewing of film, and horror film in particular, relating these to their use of digital stills in the classroom.

They read a grammar of film both synchronically and diachronically, I suggest. They make such readings explicit more clearly with the help of their own digital stills; though their transformations of the text are different because of the use of stills, allowing them to superimpose a temporality derived from their own meanings over the original diachrony of the film. I have also argued that young people can use digital stills to construct their own abbreviated preferred version of the film, choosing images that represent themes important to them, pleasurable to them.

This rather reductive account suggests an optimistic and unproblematic view of the use of film in the classroom, and the possibilities for new understandings using new(-ish) technology. In fact, I am, on the whole, optimistic about all of this, but wouldn`t want to suggest that it is unproblematic - and I will conclude by considering some of the problems.

It might be argued that such transformations of film betray the pleasures and social meanings experienced in `real` viewings of them in cinemas and living-rooms, obliterating these authentic experiences for the sake of understandings imposed by, derived from, the academy. I will argue in Chapter 9 that this is a false opposition, that the classroom is an authentic social site like any other, and that no social site is free from the coercive effects of ideology, dominant meanings, and forms of social regulation. Indeed, these may operate quite as strongly within the family as within the classroom, as Valerie Walkerdine suggests in her study (1986) of a family watching *Rocky II*. However, granted this, we are still left with some difficult questions about the use of popular culture in the classroom, and its potential uses and abuses. The evidence of this study suggests that there are a wide range of possibilities. Such uses can result in transformations of the text which appear to be a kind of enlightened discussion of cultural questions, or a pleasurable amplification of important meanings found in film. Elsewhere, I have found suspicion, or even a refusal to allow popular pleasures to be appropriated by the work of the classroom,

and subjected to its quasi-academic discourse. The overwhelming experience,

however, has been of pleasure - pleasures brought in from outside; the thrill of

horror, sometimes disturbing, sometimes comfortable; pleasures of identification,

both challenging and affirmatory; and the pleasure of power over images, a small,

material pleasure.

Chapter 4: Spiders, Werewolves and Bad Girls

This chapter will look closely at the work of one student, Johanna, as she watches *The Company of Wolves*, and talks and writes about it. My questions in this chapter, about Johanna`s act of viewing, or reading, are partly (as in the last chapter) about the nature of response (a problematic term in itself, of course): what counts as response, and what counts as text; about the social context in which such response occurs (both the classroom, and outside). Also, however, I want to develop questions about the subject-as-spectator. What can we know about each of these people who engage with a film text? What aspects of subjectivity can we make reasonable informed guesses about, and how might these be derived from the traces of discourse available to us, which range from tiny gestural interactions at the moment of viewing to extensive written transformations of the film? How are the represented subjectivities in the film text related to actual aspects of her own self, the social identities she lives out at school, beyond school? In what ways might these actual and represented identities, senses of self, be determined by gender? What pleasures and unpleasures are implicated in what kinds of understanding, what kinds of recruitment of the text to the enormous, unconscious, daily creativity of the building and transformation of subjectivity?

While semiotic and social semiotic theory helps to give a convincing account of the semiotic field of the film and of the social meanings into which this is transformed by the reader, there is also a need to account for certain aspects of subjectivity, such as acts of identification, the nature of pleasure, and the interplay of conscious and unconscious engagements with the text. Here, psychoanalytic theory might be more productive. There are well-known difficulties in attempting to resolve cultural

materialist perspectives with the traditionally transhistorical character of psychoanalytic theory. However, I have argued in Chapter 1 that some kind of synthesis, albeit provisional, is better than none, referring to Volosinov's image of the constant semiotic exchange between the "inner psyche" and the "outer world of signs", the exchange which, he argues, constitutes all signs, and all ideology. Such a view proposes an idea of a self constituted through social exchange, through dialogue with textual utterance and the utterances of others in particular social contexts, at particular historical moments.

Engaging with the film: brushing away the spiders

My evidence covers various stages of Johanna's engagement, response, production. There are some observations of her in the journal I wrote as the class watched the film; an interview with her and two friends she is working with; and her finished assignment. The assignment, like that of Ben, Gemma and Ellie in Chapter 3, is to choose significant images from the film, 'grab' them with a video digitiser, and write about them, incorporating the digitised images into their desktop-published text.

While they watched, then, I observed, and wrote a journal. Boys' and girls' reactions fall into distinct patterns. They sit separately to watch. Boys are more likely to crack jokes, comment aloud, follow startled reactions at shock or suspense by laughing aloud, debunk the horror, contest the modalities of the film, ridicule the special effects. They also check out the narrative (one boy asking questions throughout), mimic the voices of the actors, and share sweets. At certain key moments of horror during the werewolf transformation scenes, however, they are completely silent, wide-eyed, frowning with concentration.

The girls comment much less, laugh much less, grimace at the horror, frown when

the narrative takes a complex turn, smile with appreciation. Some girls laugh when the boys laugh. One covers her face at the werewolf transformation. They whisper interpretations to each other - at the end, when the titles begin, they check interpretations and reactions, while the boys are silent. One girl, Laura, makes ironic `posh conductor` movements with her hand to accompany the Baroque music of the final title sequence. There are also some boys, and some girls, who fit less neatly into these rather stereotypical patterns. Johanna is one of them.

Clearly, the engagement with the text begins here: but I want to avoid the idea of a `response` - a process - which leads into the students' own `texts` - the finished products. Rather, I want to problematize the idea of both `response` and `text`, partly to avoid the kind of reductive, partial account described by Richard Johnson (1980) as 'the literary reduction':

> Here the concern is primarily with cultural products of a particular kind, text-like products, nicely lying there, inertly awaiting analysis or appreciation. (248)

- and partly because the insistence of social semiotic theory on the social and historical contingency of textual production and reception seems to me an urgent matter for the classroom. So, avoiding Johnson's neat, text-like products, and bearing in mind the variety of semiotic codes described by social semiotics, I want to look for Johanna's responsive `text` in all corners of the material context in which it is built.

Johanna and other students have approached *The Company of Wolves* through a group of related texts: *Red Riding Hood*, Angela Carter's story, 'The Company of Wolves' from *The Bloody Chamber*, and other werewolf movies, including the hybrid

horror movie/pop video that John Landis directed for Michael Jackson`s *Thriller,* and

Terence Fisher`s *The Curse of the Werewolf.* So, already, the borders of the film text

blur, and connect with these others, literary and film texts; as well as others Johanna

has seen, and mentions later in interview and written work: *The Hand that Rocks the*

Cradle; *Alien*; *Dracula*; *Terminator 2.* In certain senses, her particular work is as

much about the metatext that is the genre, as about this specific film. And (not to

render the teaching in the course too invisible!), the question of the representation of

women in horror movies has already been raised and discussed in the classroom.

So, already, discourses of the classroom - of textual study - have merged (or

collided) with discourses of popular understandings from beyond the classroom.

These appear, so far, to be *spoken* texts; Johanna`s first engagement with the film,

however, is *unspoken.* It employs a semiotic of gesture, facial expression; and

perhaps a reading of the film more visual than verbal.

My memory of Johanna is that she was one of the small number of girls who laughed

with the boys, but 'appreciated' with the girls. In my journal, I`ve only noted her

response by name once, during a sequence when a mass of spiders falls from the

church ceiling onto the bible of the central character, Rosaleen, and she fearlessly
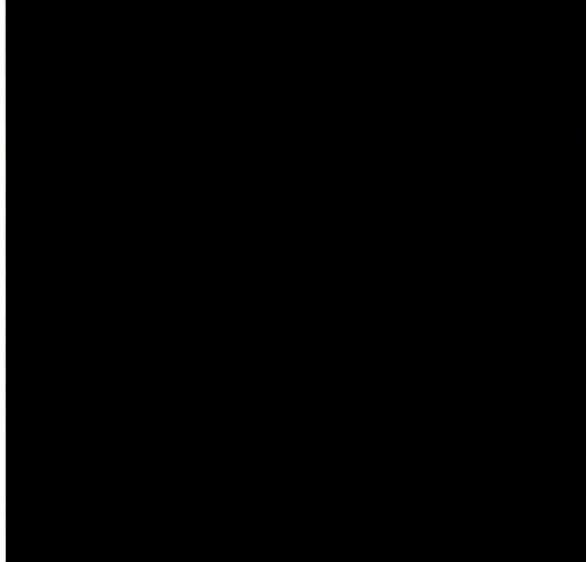
Illustration 4.1: *The Company of Wolves* - the spiders on Rosaleen`s bible

brushes them off (*illustration 1*). Several girls made `Ugh!` exclamations. Johanna made *brushing away movements* with her hand, imitating Rosaleen; and *smiled.*

What's happening here? Two things, it seems to me. She laughs with some of the boys at the sequences of spectacular horror; and the laughter seems to be an assertion of mastery - toughness for the boys - over the fear response, expressed through a laughter which seems to operate as a camouflage sign, disguising the more usual expressions of shock or fear (the `ughs` and grimaces of some of the girls). It seems linked to the familiar disparaging remarks about the special effects, which appear to be a contestation of the modality of these sequences; but may actually be again a discourse of misinformation, concealing a reluctant assent to the modality of the episode. We have already seen this kind of response in Chapter 3, where Ben finds the transformation sequence laughable at one moment, and describes it as "distressing" later. For boys, this kind of joky response is well-documented (Willis: 1990; Wood: 1993); for girls, less so; though Buckingham (1996) notes similarly dismissive remarks made by a 12 year old girl about Pet Sematary; and how they contradict her earlier claims that the film was " 'quite scary' " (page 101).

The other thing is her brushing away movement. What kind of sign is this? It looked almost unconscious - she wasn't looking at anyone else, didn't seem to want to share this gestural echo of the screen movement; but rather was looking directly at the screen, smiling. It seemed to be a mirroring, a bodily expression of a kind of identification with the film text. With the character? Or with the brief shift in the paradigm of horror heroine which this brushing away of the spiders represents? It's a shift that works *against* the affective structures of the genre: the fearless sweeping away of phobic myths prefigures the refusal of the girl to be afraid of the werewolf later in the film. If the fear response to horror is an identification with the fear of the

victim, then this film invites, to some degree, a refusal of such fear.

This gesture, the brushing away of imaginary spiders, the smile at the screen, raises some interesting questions. I take it to be part of a set of texts - here a bodily text of gesture and expression - that form Johanna's remaking of the film. It is a drama, a role-play of the film character, a semiotic replay. It raises the question, as it seems almost unconscious, of the nature of the unconscious in the viewing of film. Psychoanalytic film theory has spent a good deal of time on the puzzling two-way nature of the viewing of film - the viewer positioned by the camera's gaze, which creates the film; but also the gaze of the screen at the viewer. In some accounts, such as Laura Mulvey's well-known article (1975), this results in a profoundly pessimistic view of the helplessness of spectators, pinned to a point-of-view always structured as male. The deterministic effect this has on the representation of women and on women as spectators is refused by later feminist critiques, such as that of Teresa de Lauretis (1980), who associates it with effects of cultural domination intrinsic to the figures of Freudian/Lacanian thought. Christian Metz (1982) is criticized by de Lauretis for the same reasons; though his account is less negative. He explores the Lacanian image of the mirror in relation to the act of viewing, finding that the screen in some ways resembles the mirror which forces the first division of the self in Lacan's account; but is in other ways very different:

> A strange mirror, then, very like that of childhood, and very different. Very like ... because during the showing we are, like the child, ... prey to the imaginary, the double, and are so paradoxically through a real perception. Very different, because this mirror returns us everything but ourselves, because we are wholly outside it, whereas the child is both in it and in front of it. (page 49)

What light does this throw on Johanna's small act of identification? She mirrors the

character: a recognition of the likeness of self to the represented other, perhaps. We can only speculate on what's going on inside her head, on the basis of this bodily engagement with the text. Is it worth speculating on the conscious or unconscious nature of such a response? Such speculation makes a social semiotic reading difficult - we're no longer dealing with the relatively transparent signs of the fully conscious sign-maker; the Freudian unconscious raises the difficulty of a dimension apparently beyond the semiotic. Such a domain preoccupies Metz, in his comparison of film with dream. It's also a recurrent feature of critical commentary on horror literature and film, whose images and narratives, along with fantasy fiction in general, self-evidently connect with dreams and the repressed fears and desires of the unconscious. A dimension beyond the semiotic is also a feature of Paris school semiotics, in the form, for instance, of Barthes' 'third meaning' of the cinematic still (1978); and his *punctum* (1993) - moves to establish an ineffable form of apprehension beyond mundane signification.

Metz, on the other hand, attempts to bring the semiotic and the unconscious closer together. A main thrust of *The Imaginary Signifier* is to weaken the boundary between them (imagining Freud's 'censorship' as a leaky, fluid process rather than a solid barrier, for instance), to recognise the actions of the unconscious in conscious thought, and, with Lacan, to recognise the discursive nature of the unconscious, thereby pulling it into the realm of language, of the semiotic.

Similarly, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, in an article on Barthes' *punctum* (1996), reject the ineffable nature of this image, its attempt to move beyond the semiotic, arguing that such a move is mystificatory and elitist. Their proposal (examined more fully in Chapter 8) is to extend the realm of the semiotic ever further, bringing more material within its reach, in a move of demystification. Their argument is entirely consonant with that of Volosinov, who insists on the materiality of the sign,

but recognises the transformative power of the psyche, which consumes the signs of the outer world, and produces new signs which it returns to the external flow of semiosis, and of ideology.

This small sign of Johanna`s, the brushing away of the spiders, accompanied by the smile, is worth considering in the light of these perspectives. Volosinov recognises the importance of the social context of sign-making, situating his "utterance" within the play of other semiotic systems:

> Social psychology exists primarily in a wide variety of forms of the "utterance", of little *speech genres* of internal and external kinds - things left completely unstudied to the present day. All these speech performances are, of course, joined with other types of semiotic manifestation and interchange - with miming, gesturing, acting out, and the like. (page 20)

The only issue I would take here would be with the primacy of speech: Volosinov`s theory of the speech genre becomes even more helpful if all the kinds of "semiotic manifestation" he mentions can be regarded as "utterances" in their own right, rather than semiotic cladding for the word. In this classroom, then, Johanna`s gesture becomes an utterance, with an extensive social semiotic weight. How might we interpret it?

In the context of Volosinov`s idelogical sign rather than Barthes` ineffable one, Johanna`s gestural utterance is clearly ideological: it is a recognition of the strength of the female heroine, an emancipatory transformation of the Red Riding Hood paradigm and that of the horror heroine, as Carol Clover argues in her image of the female survivor figure, the Final Girl (1993). The growing strength of female characters has been often noted as a progressive element in the modern horror film

(Clover, 1990; Willis, 1992; King, 1982; Jancovich, 1992). This small gesture, then, recognises the power of this contestation of traditional representations of gender relations.

But it does more than just "recognise": it is a sign simultaneously of reception and production. In the one gesture, the ideological sign has been absorbed, evaluated, transformed into a personal expression of female strength, and returned to the outer world. The sign is made on the borderline between inner and outer worlds that Volosinov identifies as the locus of the production of subjectivity:

> By its very existential nature, the subjective psyche is to be located somewhere between the organism and the outside world, on the *borderline* separating these two spheres of reality. It is here that an encounter between the organism and the outside world takes place, but the encounter is not a physical one: *the organism and the outside world meet here in the sign.* Psychic experience is the semiotic expression of the contact between the organism and the outside environment. That is why the *inner psyche is not analyzable as a thing but can only be understood as a sign.* (page 26; original emphasis)

As well as being irreducibly ideological and social, this brushing away of spiders is, as should be clear from the above, a sign with a history - or more accurately, with a number of histories. The history of Johanna's own battles to construct social identities which will fulfil conflicting social needs, as her other work on the film will show; the histories of the filmic sign in folktale and cinema, which Johanna's gesture imitates.

To return to Barthes' ideal of disobedient reading, a theme which runs throughout the textual politics of post-structuralism and cultural studies, this is a sign which,

arguably, is both obedient and disobedient. To begin with, it seems absolutely in accord with the explicit intentions of the text to represent a girl who inverts social and textual stereotypes: an obedient reading of a feminist sign. Clearly, to read a progressive meaning obediently seems defiant (of dominant structures of power). It's not, however, a passive reading. She has the option to ignore this emphasis of the text, but chooses to markedly endorse, reflect, enact it. And it is still a transformation, a semiotic act: it is her sign, image of her decision, her pleasure, her self. As we look at other work - her talk, her writing - it will become clear, I think, that her reading of Rosaleen, and her own subjective alignments with the represented subjectivities of the film, produce a powerful image of what it is to be a strong girl, a semiotic construct woven from text and self.

Finally, Johanna's movement, from the gesture of immediate engagement to final written assignment, shows something of the way in which the discourses of the classroom move from unconscious to conscious modes of understanding and production. But Metz's argument reminds us that this movement, while it may shift from broadly unconscious to broadly conscious engagement, retains aspects of both throughout. So we can look, in our reading of the gesture, and other first responses to the film, for all the complexity of full engagement, and perhaps a particularly visual kind of literacy, accepting, perhaps, Freud's idea of 'visual thinking' (1984), and his association of it with the preconscious. And we can look, in final product writing, such as Johanna's written piece on *The Company of Wolves*, not just for unambiguous conscious structures, but for slips, gaps, silences, the polysemy which, Metz argues, is the repressed, unconscious field of meaning that lies behind the conscious sign. This interplay of conscious and unconscious needs to be synthesised with the social nature of semiosis examined above, and stressed by Volosinov and others - it's this which Metz, in particular, might miss in Johanna's brushing away of the spiders. In fact, critiques of Metz in the early eighties, such as those of Stephen Heath and

Teresa de Lauretis (1980), point out the need to restore the social dimension of cinema, and a historical materialist perspective, missing from Metz's account. So Johanna's gesture needs to be read alongside her choosing to sit with the two girls who later become her partners in the task of interpreting the film; and against her later choices to focus on Rosaleen's role as rebel, bad girl; and against what Bourdieu (1984) would call her 'cultural capital' in this encounter - her knowledge of film, of the genre, and the structures of taste, choice and pleasure in which this is bound up. And it fits the model of a social engagement with texts (especially those which deal in imagery of the grotesque) which can be derived from Bakhtin's carnival, which will be explored in detail in the next chapter. Bakhtin opposes his model of a social, carnivalesque engagement with the grotesque, in which all are part of the immortal social carnival body, to the alienated individualism of German Idealism and the Romantic version of the grotesque. All of this has certain implications, clearly, for which texts we choose to work on in school, how we deal with them, and how we recognise, make room for, films young people have watched outside school, and the manner in which they watch and enjoy them.

Talking about the film: 'she's the villain, yeah!'

Later, I interview Johanna with Clare and Laura. They have decided, as a group, to do the question on the worksheet about the representation of women, each choosing one image from the film as a point of departure. Johanna has chosen an image from one of the subordinate narratives of the film, a story in which Rosaleen becomes narrator of the folk-tales for the first time, taking over the role from her grandmother. She tells her mother the story of a witch from the village who takes revenge on an aristocrat who has made her pregnant, as he's about to marry another woman from his own class. Johanna's first real contribution to the interview is to explain connections she has made between the *Company of Wolves* and other films:

AB   Can you tell us the other ones you`ve written about?

J   Um - Aliens - where Sigourney Weaver is a - she`s the - sort of -
      heroine - and she has to - get rid of all the aliens.

The emergence of a paradigm of strong heroine is clear here; and, it seems to me, the connection with Johanna`s brushing away of the spiders, sign of fearless heroine, is equally clear. Carol Clover describes this class of horror heroines in *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1993), explaining how the price paid by the girl survivor, in appropriating the traditionally male hero role, is to become sexually ambiguous herself. Clover lists, as evidence, the androgynous names of several of these 'Final Girls', of whom Sigourney Weaver`s character - Ripley - is one (*illustration 2*).
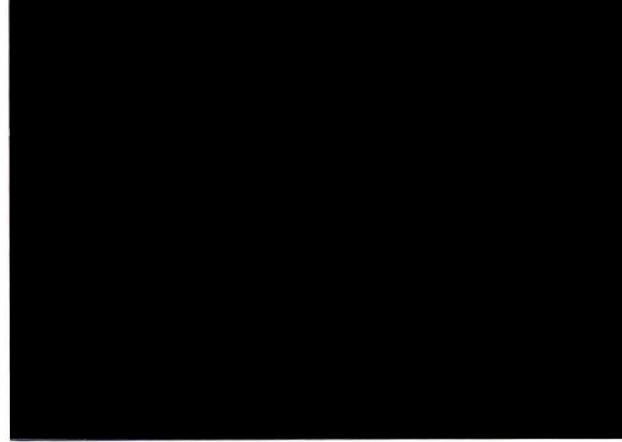
Illustration 4.2: *Aliens* - Ripley attacks the aliens)

The three girls go on to describe *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (Curtis Hanson, 1991), in which the main character assumes the role of a nanny to exact revenge on the woman who has indirectly caused her husband`s death:

J   And then she goes back to get revenge. Against the woman. And she
        plays a character - that she`s sort of acting -

C   - the (character she`s acting -

J   (it`s her fault that her husband died. And - she went back - she

went back to - take revenge - so she went and babysitted for - (for like - to find a new baby - and er -

C   (she's like an imposter, and you don't know -

J   - treated it like her own child, 'cos she's lost hers.

C   She's like an imposter, and at the beginning she's like a stereotype - sort of - mother, kind of - and she's actually the person who's - evil, person [laughs]

AB   So she's the villain as well, is she?

J   She's the villain, yeah.

Johanna's preoccupation with the imposter nanny is interesting. In fact, the film demonises her, and our sympathies are apparently invited throughout with the innocent mother whose motherhood is usurped and life threatened by the revenge-obsessed Peyton Flanders (Rebecca de Mornay). It looks, from this interview, as though Johanna is reversing the sympathies the film invites, unsettling the allocation of blame ('it's her fault [the innocent mother's] that her husband died'), and emphasising the reason for her act of maternal usurpation ('- treated it like her own child, 'cos she's lost hers').

These brief responses seem to produce a particular variant of the horror-heroine paradigm. The new elements of Johanna's version seem to be: a transformation of the heroine-as-victim into the heroine-as-hero (Clover's 'Final Girl'); the revenge motif; and, related to revenge, the heroine-as-villain. Johanna, in fact, also seems to attribute a victim-function to the villain of *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, emphasising her lost husband and child. This complexity of female role in horror - the woman who can combine functions of hero, villain and monster, is perhaps most fully realised in Stephen King's *Carrie*, in Brian de Palma's film (1976). King himself (1993) remarks of her:

For me, Carrie White is a sadly misused teenager, an example of the sort of person whose spirit is so often broken for good in that pit of man- and woman- eaters that is your normal suburban high school. But she's also Woman, feeling her powers for the first time, and, like Samson, pulling down the temple on everyone in sight at the end of the book. (page 198)

Writing about the film: "women as the baddies"

These themes appear again in Johanna's final written assignment. The visual design of the page (*illustration 3*) consists of five frames: four textframes and one picture frame; inside one large frame with a double border. Clearly, the picture frame, at the top left-hand of the page, is the element placed first in the syntagm of the page design. Johanna has chosen an image that foregrounds the witch, as the transformed guests destroy the wedding table in a carnivalesque inversion of the former social order: as gleeful disorder ensues, to the accompaniment of fairground music (previously it was Bach), and the servants stop playing and serving, and toast each other with their masters' wine, the witch looks on from Johanna's chosen frame, and laughs.

The page design then becomes ambiguous: do we read from the left (the box below the picture); or from the top right (the box on the right of the picture)? The one on the right echoes the theme of the avenging heroine:

This is the scene where the witch is at the wedding party and she is pregnant from the groom.She has come back to seek revenge because he left her and what she does is disrupt the party. She then goes on to turn them all into wolves.

[Illustration 4.3: Johanna`s page] <u>WEDDING SCENE</u>.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

My image is taken from about three quarters of the way through the video. This is the scene where the witch is at the wedding party and she is pregnant from the groom.She has come back to seek revenge because he left her and what she does is disrupt the party. She then goes on to turn them all into wolves.The wedding is very old fashionedand the costumes are great. I think this scene is showing women as the 'baddies' which you don't normally see in films because you usually see them as the weak one's and the scared one's because they are exploited so much. But it also shows Rosaleen as the heroine in the end, as she isn't scared and she tames the wolf and becomes a wolf herself.

This film is very different from, for example 'Dracula' where the women are the victims and the man is the threat. Nowadays, women are begging to take more of a main role in films as the threat themselves,to make men and women more equal. Two of these kind of films are 'Alien' and 'Terminator 2.' I have chosen this image because i think it's very important that women are treated as equals.

I think the director has included this scene in the film because it just adds to all the madness of the film and another reason is because again,it is showing women as the more evil type and the threat, because she is getting revenge against her ex-husband,which I think makes the film more exciting. I think probably the audience would not of expected a women to be the threat, so maybe that sort of evens out the stereotypical view of the threat because both women and men are playing the roles of baddies, the wolf being a man and the women being the witch. Also, Rosaline is sort of a baddie because she is sort of friendly with the wolf which gives her a bad side I think.

This film is very unrealistic and it makes me laugh more than being frightened. For me I think this film should come under a comedy genre. When you watch the film you can't really get scared because you can't imagine something like this happening because it's so incredibly unrealistic. The film was quite exciting at times because it had funny little stories within the main story, such as the wedding scene and Rosaline's gran telling her stories of the past which gave you a sense of what was really going on and it added into the story quite nicely.The film was quite weird at times because I couldn't understand what was going on, such as the scene where a man pulled up in a posh car and gave the boy a potion, the car drove off and the boy put this potion on his chest and a lot of hair sprouted out from it, which was really weird. But even more weird was the fact that Rosaline was driving the car. I also didn't understand the bit where Rosaline climbs up the tree into the nest and finds the baby in an egg which I found was really stupid. The overall film wasn't bad and because it was weird it was interesting, and really kept me thinking and awake!   By Johanna. 9A

What she seems to be doing with the image is to use it to reconstruct, in brief and condensed terms, the narrative syntagm of this sequence: beginning with the present tense moment of the image (*the witch is at the wedding party*); moving to the past tense of the understood prior events, her motivation (*She has come back to seek revenge because he left her*); and moving to a present/future telling of the consequences (*She then goes on to turn them all into wolves*). It is necessary to remark, though, that in the course of this three-part narrative syntagm, the paradigm of the avenging heroine is signalled clearly in the assigning of motivation to the witch: `to seek revenge`, linking this narrative strategy with the expository passages that follow.

The next sentence *appears* to be a complete non-sequitur:

> The wedding is very old fashioned and the costumes are great.

I will return to it later, however.

The remaining text in this frame, signalled by the introductory `I think...` as a discourse of explicit commentary or interpretation, develops the theme of the heroine who, like those mentioned by others in the group, is a transformation of the victim type; but who, as Johanna alone observes, is also a `baddie`:

> I think this scene is showing women as the 'baddies' which you don't normally see in films because you usually see them as the weak one's and the scared one's because they are exploited so much.

Here, weakness and fear are opposed to being a baddie rather than to strength; though strength seems to be assumed; and is implied in the linking of this heroine with the protagonist of the film (and the narrator of this episode) - Rosaleen:

> But it also shows Rosaleen as the heroine in the end, as she isn't scared
> and she tames the wolf and becomes a wolf herself.

Here, just as strength is implicit in the baddie-weakness opposition in the previous sentence, 'baddie' seems to be implied in the cluster of qualities implicitly opposed to 'scared'.

What does she mean by *baddie*? Johanna seems to be operating a kind of concept of 'admirable wickedness' - we sense that she considers both the witch and Rosaleen to be justified in their behaviour. She is constructing a heroine paradigm whose narrative function is to combine the role of heroine and villain in an exciting transgression of the conventional character types. The connection with the villain of *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* is clear; and the revenge motif links the witch and the imposter nanny.

Her second box has a different expository intention: to take an overview of a number of related films; but in relation to the same explicit theme, in which the political principle of the equality of women is realised through narrative structures in which heroines are transformed not just into heroes, but into that particular narrative function of horror movies which is the *threat* on which the fears and pleasures of the narrative turn:

> This film is very different from, for example 'Dracula' where the women are
> the victims and the man is the threat. Nowadays, women are begging *[sic]*
> to take more of a main role in films as the threat themselves,to make men
> and women more equal. Two of these kind of films are 'Alien' and
> 'Terminator 2.' I have chosen this image because i think it's very important
> that women are treated as equals.

Threat is Johanna`s word - an interesting word, because, like the admirable baddie figure she constructs, it is ambiguous in terms of the moral themes of the films. Unlike the word *monster,* or *villain,* which suggest intrinsic wickedness, *threat* derives its moral loading from its trajectory - who it is aimed at. So in *Alien,* it`s a benign threat (Ripley`s destruction of the monster); or is Johanna referring to the female monster of the sequel, which has attracted extensive commentary from feminist critics (see, for instance, Creed: 1986; Clover: 1993)? In *Terminator 2,* it is the more ambiguous threat of the guerrilla heroine, Sarah Connor - benign in the sense that she`s attacking the interests of global capital in constructing the computers which will threaten humanity; malign in that her action is against the innocent inventor of the machines, and is presented as excessively violent (*illustration 4*).

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES
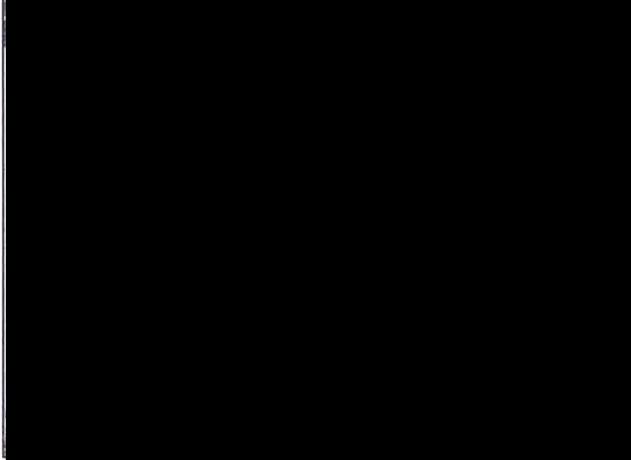
Illustration 4.4: *Terminator 2 - Sarah Connor, guerrilla heroine*

The next frame continues both the expository mode - "I think..." - and the 'female baddie' theme. It deals explicitly with the link between this scene and the whole film, in terms of her preoccupation with this paradigm, repeating the link she`s already made in the first frame between the witch and Rosaleen:

... it is showing women as the more evil type and the threat, because she is

getting revenge against her ex-husband,which I think makes the film more exciting. I think probably the audience would not of expected a woman to be the threat, so maybe that sort of evens out the stereotypical view of the threat because both women and men are playing the roles of baddies, the wolf being a man and the woman being the witch. Also, Rosaline is sort of a baddie because she is sort of friendly with the wolf which gives her a bad side I think.

We can see even more clearly here how Johanna articulates two sets of oppositions: one of good and evil, driven by the suspense dynamic of horror movies; the other of weak/good women against strong/wicked women, driven by an emancipatory inversion of gender stereotypes. Audience reactions might conceivably be thrown into confusion by this - simultaneously booing the villain for her wickedness and cheering her for her strength! Needless to say, it is more complex than that, and Johanna at least suffers from no confusion, holding together structures which, though apparently contradictory, depend on different orders of audience desire.

So far, Johanna emerges as a skilled, competent and experienced reader of film in general, and this film in particular. So far, I have only really asked the question - `How does she read this film?` There are features of her responses, however, that do not fit the surface logic of her expository piece, which relate more to the question - `Why does she read it like this?`

To backtrack a little - the first response that gave me pause for thought was that, while she gave signs, like the other girls (stronger, if anything) of identification with the strong female protagonist, she joined in, unlike most of the girls, with the dismissive and joky reactions of the boys. This seemed to be related to a reluctance to be taken in by the horror scenes; and in the interview, she asserts that `people like being sort of scared ... like being frightened ... just the thrill of being scared` - but

also, about horror films: 'they're so - unrealistic!'; and, about *The Company of Wolves*: 'It was funny [laughs]'. This oscillation between thrilled engagement and dismissive laughter is more typical of boys than girls in this study.

In her written assignment, I would identify two features that don't fit the rather neat account of her readings and uses of the film I've given so far. The first is what *appears* to be an irrelevant sentence in the first text frame:

The wedding is very old fashioned and the costumes are great.

This is a brief moment of delight in the beautiful fabrics which construct the world of aristocratic privilege in the scene: marquee and guests' and servants' clothing are all of pastel silks, contrasting with the ragged homespun of the witch. But this is not, in fact, an irrelevant aside at all. If the social meanings of these costumes can be read as a signification of outrageous social and sexual inequity on one level, they are read, by Johanna, in relation to a different pattern of female pleasures and social roles on another. The structure that holds together her pleasure in the costumes and her pleasure in the emancipated heroine is an unconscious one - it is not signalled by any conscious structure of rational discourse in her text - reminding us of Metz's emphasis on the action of the unconscious within conscious thought, and language.

Johanna's choices between the social roles available to girls in school are complex. She likes to do well in lessons; but draws back from excessive academic eagerness. She shares other girls' enthusiasm for work, but doesn't like to show it. She dresses in practical clothing with little decoration, little jewellery, no makeup. But she loves dance - and in musical productions, revels in tights, lyotard, tutu and ballet shoes.

So it comes, perhaps, as no surprise that she should inscribe this careful balancing

of social roles - good, but not goody-goody; appropriating 'boyish' toughness and 'girlish' sensitivity in well-judged proportions - into the narratives and images of femininity that she encounters. These structures of subjectivity extend even to the pleasures and unpleasures she experiences in the text, and to the actual cognitive processes of reading/spectating itself.

That she finds pleasure in the female roles of the film is clear from her language, producing the least ambiguous terminology of evaluation and pleasure: `exciting`, `great`. But there is also resistance. The film is commonly experienced by pupils as puzzling, because of its complex narrative structure, shifting modalities and use of opaque visual tropes, which Metz (1982) describes as the kind of pure metaphor rare even in avant-garde film. There is no doubt that Johanna can unravel these complexities: in the interview she demonstrates a clear understanding of the final sequence:

> J   Yeah, the dream comes into real life - dream sort of comes true - and it jumps through her window.

But in her written commentary, she adopts a different strategy to deal with the hypotactic narrative of the film, a strategy much more typical of boys in the study than girls - she uses much more ambiguous evaluative terms (`mad`, `weird`); refuses the fear/thrill response of horror (`it makes me laugh more than being frightened`); and contests the modality of the film (`This film is very unrealistic`; `stupid`). At the same time, she admits to the kind of textual pleasure of interpretation that is more characteristic of the girls in the sample - `The overall film wasn't bad and because it was weird it was interesting, and really kept me thinking and awake!`

There are other ways in which Joanna's dealings with the film are marked by these tensions, balances, mediations: the kind of open, fluid condition of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism. There is the mixing of genres she seems to me to employ: formal categories of film analysis alongside a colloquial refusal of the sort of abstract terminology she might associate with the English classroom ('weird'; 'mad'; stupid'). There is the link (but also opposition) between school viewing and home (she watched *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* at home on telly). There is the social nature of classroom viewing - with a group of friends; but close enough to groups of boys to hear their reactions to the film. There's the girl-group work: choosing the images from the film together; digitizing them; working and talking together as they write; sharing their (separate) pages on adjacent computer screens; putting together the printouts into a satisfying booklet.

Response, Reading, Production

The evidence of this study complicates the whole question of what counts as "response". The word itself carries a freight of controversy that is central to debates about the nature of culture, reading, and the production of meaning. I am certain that Johanna's 'response' is an active making of meaning; but I am not sure where we might place the boundaries of her engagement with the text, bearing in mind, for instance, that she arrives at the film text already conversant with Angela Carter's story, with Red Riding Hood, with a complex set of references from horror movies, and with her own version of the horror heroine well-articulated. My preferred image of what she does with the text is Bakhtin's image of open dialogism (1952/1981), and the active contributions to continuing discourse made by both reader and by author anticipating response:

> Responsive understanding is a fundamental force, one that participates in

the formulation of discourse, and it is moreover an active understanding, one that discourse senses as resistance or support enriching the discourse. (page 281)

Bakhtin's metaphor of centrifugal and centripetal forces in language, pulling between centre and margin, echoed in this opposition between 'resistance' and 'support', prefigures the hegemony theory in which were rooted the accounts of textual engagement given by cultural studies in the late seventies and early eighties, and later accounts of ways in which engagement with texts always involves ideological contestation of one kind or another (eg, Hodge and Kress, 1988, pp 7/8). The question of resistance to the ideologies surrounding the text seems clearly there in her specifically political work on images of women in these films; but also in her distancing from a film whose narrative structures signal the art-house movie, and its attendant structures of taste.

What about her 'response'? It's begun, as I have noted, well before she even begins to watch the film, in the sense that she arrives in the classroom already engaged with the discourse of which this particular film is one part, a dynamic process memorably described by Bakhtin:

> The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (page 276)

In the case of Johanna, what corresponds to Bakhtin's 'utterance'? Not only the film text, but also Johanna's 'response' - not just a response, then, but a remaking, a new text in its own right. Bakhtin's image of dialogue blurs the distinction between

text and response (the text, in any case, being a response to other texts). Gunther

Kress (1993a) has described, similarly, the undoing of `the settled distinctions of

reading and writing, of consumption and production generally; of speech and writing;

of reference and signification; ...`. This undoing, unsettling, is characteristic of

Johanna`s engagement with the film.

Final thoughts: pleasures, visual literacies and English

Much of this chapter has been about subjectivity, gender, and the ways in which

these determine readings and writings of film in the classroom. Johanna seems,

then, to be transforming the film into a text, or series of texts, of her own, structured

around the images and narratives of femininity which intersect with her own

experiences, desires, social roles. She embraces certain pleasures, readings,

understandings; and refuses others. She positions herself as a reader/viewer in ways

analogous to her positioning of herself as a girl among girls, a girl among boys, a

student, a dancer, a daughter watching TV. In all this, the material conditions of

viewing, reading, writing, producing, play an important determining role, so we need

to recognise the significance of classroom rather than home or cinema; the social

groups and gendered viewing patterns of the class; my role as teacher, choosing the

film; the representational resources and technologies available to her.

The question of textual pleasure will be developed in more detail in Chapters 5 and

6. I will only suggest here that these pleasures are not, as we often imagine, simply

the sugar on the pill that makes the curricular medicine go down. Rather, they are

indissoluble aspects of the processes of cognition and affect that allow meaning to

be made at all. The next two chapters will look to different theoretical perspectives

for a convincing account of these pleasures: to Bourdieu`s theory of aesthetic tastes;

to Freud`s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; to Bakhtin`s carnival; and to accounts of

textual pleasure in recent cultural theory. In spite of the many contradictions between these theories, they might all have a part to play in constructing a theory of textual pleasure that could inform the pedagogy and classroom practice.

Meanwhile, Joanna goes off to her next lesson, or to the next year, or to post-16 education, the processes of dialogue and the transformation of self continuing. Curiously, she has found in the film almost the opposite of the empty mirror described in Metz's Lacanian image of the film screen, the mirror which `returns us everything but ourselves`. She's found herself - or some of herself - for the time being.

Chapter 5: Pleasures of the Text:

pleasure, value, horror in the classroom

The problem of pleasure

Pleasure is an elusive idea: always complex, always shifting, but perhaps especially tricky when we think of young people watching horror films, and particularly in the context of perennial public panics about the effects of horror on children. Martin Barker (1984), shows, in relation to the video nasties panic of the early 1980s, how such concerns are never what they seem to be: how the "public" concern is in fact orchestrated by lobbyists and politicians with specific vested interests; how the conception of the child around which the concern is built is an idealised, sentimental construct; and how the attempts to define the culpable films collapse under scrutiny, based as they are on assumptions about their cultural or moral worth and the inevitability of their effects, rather than on real analysis of text or audience.

David Buckingham (1996), employing similar arguments in relation to the James Bulger affair of 1993 and its connection to the film *Child's Play 3*, develops the notion of pleasure, relating it firstly to the way in which such moral panics construct their own version of the horror audience to fit their argument. This supposed audience, argues Buckingham, is constructed as delinquent and largely male; and any forms of pleasure involved in the viewing of horror are, therefore, perceived as deviant and corrupting of `normal` processes of socialisation. In fact, however, as he goes on to show, the horror audience is wide, there is no evidence that it is deviant, and it consists of girls as well as boys. It becomes possible, in the light of Buckingham's argument, to talk of pleasures found by young people in the viewing of horror which are both normal, and a normal part of growing up - a view of pleasure consonant with

the experiences of the young people discussed earlier in this study. Buckingham and Barker do not extend their discussion, however, to the question of how such pleasures can be viewed in the context of the classroom, where they collide with all the officially sanctioned (but equally hard to define) forms of pleasure, as well as the related discourses that work to ignore, marginalise, reify, even suppress pleasure.

These contradictions are repeated, extended, problematised by the pedagogies teachers operate: practices based on theories that rarely, if ever, acknowledge the power of pleasure, official or otherwise; but which often operate around teachers' implicit understanding that students learn more effectively when they enjoy what they are doing. Where such enjoyment is made an explicit part of the pedagogic rationale, the danger is that it is seen merely as sugar on the educational pill, and so again reified, postponing both the attempt to theorise it, and also the attempt to see it as integral to cultural experience.

This chapter will argue the centrality of pleasure to the way young people read texts, especially horror films. It will review theories of cultural pleasure available to us in our attempts to understand the place of such affective structures in their readings; and especially, to theorise the peculiar pleasures of the horror movie. It will examine the case for a curriculum that recognises popular culture; and that moves towards strategies to shift beyond the sterile oppositions between cultural value and cultural pleasure which often emerge strongly from influential cultural and pedagogic discourses in 20th century Europe, and especially Britain.

Bourdieu and Kant: the pure and the vulgar

Pierre Bourdieu, in *Distinction* (1984), his wideranging sociological study of cultural tastes in France, grounds his analysis of structures of taste, pleasure and aesthetic judgment in a critique of Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory in its final definitive form,

in *The Critique of Judgement.* Bourdieu's position, implicit throughout his exhaustive quantitative survey, is made explicit in the postscript of the book, "Towards a `vulgar` critique of `pure` critiques" (p 486 ff). It may be summarised as follows.

Kant's aesthetic theory proposes a `pure` gaze, which appreciates the aesthetic object (in particular, the `beautiful`) in a way that is free from all interest, even the interest of Reason. This `pure` gaze is opposed to a `barbarous` taste, which is represented by Kant as `subject to every desire, every servitude`. Kant's "pure judgement of taste" (Kant, 1970) is an ideological project in the service of an elite social group to represent their own aesthetic preferences as disinterested, divorced from the realm of the social, the sensory, the affective. Bourdieu builds on the contrastive oppositions Kant suggests - that is, what pure judgment of taste *is not* - to describe his own ideal of the popular, in effect inverting Kant's hierarchy of aesthetic judgement. He derives his notion of `barbarous` taste from Kant's contemptuous dismissal of those who fail to match up to his stringent requirements:

> Taste that requires an added element of *charm* and *emotion* for its delight, not to speak of adopting this as the measure of its approval, has not yet emerged from barbarism. (Kant, 1970, page 65)

Rather than simply an inversion of Kant's aesthetic argument, however, Bourdieu finds Kant's reasoning contradictory and self-defeating. He argues that Kant's ideal is more *ascetic* than *aesthetic* in the original sense of Aristotle's ασκεσις and αισθεσις, and concerned with a promotion of difficulty of apprehension of the cultural object, and a concomitant refusal of the facile (the translator notes that *façile* also means *easy* in French), in the interests of a closed social group. He also argues that this ideal is self-evidently historical, associated as it is with a sacralizing of the process of artistic production and the artistic object evident from the Romantic period onwards; and that therefore Kant's insistence on the transcendental nature of the

pure judgement of taste is actually part of this very ideological project and its attempts to conceal its own historical nature. Bourdieu appropriates the notion of αισθεσις for his own view of popular taste, and its emphasis on affect and on sensory experience.

He argues that Kant admits, in spite of himself, the social nature of taste: he quotes Kant's image of physical appetite as a primitive instinct of the senses, imagined as a property of an earlier species of human; while " 'those who, occupied with thoughts as well as with the senses, are to a degree turned away from the sensuous.' " (Bourdieu,1984, page 490)

Kant, suggests Bourdieu, is attempting to set up a specious genealogy which privileges culture over nature, and by implication, the `cultured` class over the masses:

> We recognize here the ideological mechanism which works by describing
> the terms of the opposition one establishes between the social classes as
> stages in an evolution (here, the progress from nature to culture)."
> (Bourdieu, page 490)

So, although Kant refuses the social, grounding his claims for pure taste in a transcendental appeal, in fact his distinctions are grounded "in an empirical social relation" (page 490), and rest on an opposition between "the cultivated bourgeoisie and the people", a relation exposed in his allusions to the culltivating effect of pure taste, and to teaching and the educability of taste.

Kant refuses the social, as his project, says Bourdieu, is to naturalize the privileged class - so he presents their culture, their taste, as given, and universal. Pure taste, by this operation, is set up by Kant both as an opposition to the barbarism of nature

and as an imitation of, improvement upon, nature, therefore naturalizing the aesthetic prerogative of the dominant class, associating them with the defining characteristic of humanity, pure taste and the artistic creation, an imitation of the divine creation, that goes with it:

> Pure pleasure - ascetic, empty pleasure which implies the renunciation of pleasure, pleasure purified of pleasure - is predisposed to become a symbol of moral excellence, and the work of art a test of ethical superiority, an indisputable measure of the capacity for sublimation which defines the truly human man. (Bourdieu, page 491)

This artistic taste of sublimation negates enjoyment (natural pleasures), asserting the superiority of sublimated `free` pleasures. Bourdieu remarks, invoking Bakhtin`s vision of carnival, that, in the face of such dominance, the popular imagination can only invert it:

> ... responding to sublimation by a strategy of reduction or degradation, as in slang, parody, burlesque or caricature, using obscenity or scatology to turn arsy-versy, head over heels, all the 'values' in which the dominant groups project and recognize their sublimity, it rides roughshod over difference, flouts distinctions, and, like the Carnival games, reduces the distinctive pleasures of the soul to the common satisfactions of food and sex.
> (Bourdieu, page 491)

Bourdieu asserts that Kant opposes to pure pleasure a twofold term: not only barbarous enjoyment; but also civilised enjoyment. The latter is represented as potentially unnatural (as culture is not); with the potential for luxurious inclinations caused by a degeneration of Reason through the operation of imagination:

> The 'counter-nature' proves ambiguous: civilization is bad, culture good. ...
> This pure pleasure is indeed the rationalization of an ethos: pure pleasure,
> pleasure totally purified of all sensuous or sensible interest, as remote from
> concupiscence as it is from conspicuous consumption, is opposed as much
> to the refined, altruistic enjoyment of the courtier as it is to the crude,
> animal enjoyment of the people.
>
> (page 493)

On this critique of Kant, Bourdieu builds the theory of taste which has become so widely-referred to since its publication in 1979, in which he asserts the absolute social basis of taste, and its determination by `cultural capital`, the cultural competences of the individual conferred by their family and education, by a complex dialectic between their social class and the dynamic social trajectories on which they may embark through a variety of circumstances: marriage, job, further education, place of residence, and so on.

The influence of this theory has been profound on cultural theory through the eighties and nineties, both understandably and justifiably. It provided a materialist theory of cultural consumption sympathetic to cultural studies, and easily reconciled with Gramscian theories of cultural hegemony. It provided a rigorous base on which a championship of the popular might be mounted, in tandem with an assault on a range of anti-popular stances, from Leavisism to Adorno and Horkheimer's mass culture critique.

Its influence has, however, been tempered by some criticisms. Henry Jenkins (1995), while endorsing the value of Bourdieu's theory for the understanding of the poetics of popular film, argues that he "never succeeds in writing about the popular aesthetic in anything other than vaguely patronizing terms" (page 110-111). Further, in the same

article, he makes the point that Bourdieu, while perceiving the problem of the bourgeois academic in legitimating `pure` taste, exacerbates the problem by assuming that adherents of elite culture possess specialized knowledge, while those of popular culture have none:

> Bourdieu himself speaks as if the appreciation of high art involves specialized knowledge while the appreciation of popular art can be taken for granted. In practice, an avid viewer of Japanese animation or reader of popular romances or fan of television soap opera must master a complex array of aesthetic and generic conventions and interpretative skills necessary for a full appreciation of these forms. (page 113)

Steven Connor (1992) associates Bourdieu with other theorists of pleasure and popular culture, in particular Barthes, Lyotard and Bakhtin. Their work, he argues, has the common aim of `desublimating` pleasure: "... that is to say, it resists the attempt to raise up, educate or otherwise transform pleasure upwards into value ..." (page 48). This opposition between a sublimated, ascetic pleasure and an unsublimated popular aesthetic, which we have seen in Kant, and in Bourdieu`s critique, is usefully traced by Connor through successive theories of pleasure of the twentieth century, in which he finds this opposition repeatedly inscribed. He criticizes the attempt to take either side, arguing that pleasure itself refuses to lie easily on either side of the distinction:

> A politics of pleasure must accordingly resist both the hedonist and the moralist temptations insofar as they rely on or tend towards notions of `pure` (unsublimated) pleasure and `pure` (sublimated) value. (p 54)

To do this, he suggests, we must pay close attention to the instabilities of pleasure and value; and participate in the dynamic process whereby they endlessly reproduce

each other. His final suggestions, though highly nuanced and sophisticated, do not suggest any clear route for a politics of pleasure; though it may be that his refusal of simple answers problematizes the question as productively as anyone so far has managed to do:

> If the aesthetic has hitherto been constituted as a conceptual mechanism for separating pleasure and value out from each other, and for fixing their differential values, then it is conceivable that the aesthetic, in the enlarged form of a politics of culture, may yet become a realm in which the pleasurable renegotiation of the political value of pleasure may take place. (page 54)

How might Bourdieu's theory help with an account of the nature of pleasure in the very specific instance with which this study is concerned - a group of 14-year-olds studying horror films in an English secondary school?

To begin with, it is important not to underestimate the value of *Distinction.* The assertion of the value of popular cultural pleasures, and the exposure of the ideological motivation of an elite aesthetic, clears the ground profitably for an exploration of the horror genre, not least in the context of young people's aesthetic preferences. In this broad respect, this study will follow the example of other commentators in the cultural studies tradition.

There remain, however, some reservations. To begin with, there are, as I have argued, good reasons to problematize the simple popular/elite opposition Bourdieu makes; and its unreserved inversion of values, as Connor points out. It is possible in the vast quantitative survey Bourdieu makes to lose the complexity and nuances of the pleasures and tastes of individuals and small groups (though at the other end of the spectrum gains in detail are made by the range of data, as, for instance, the

charting of French social tastes in film, music and food in *Distinction* demonstrate). The experience of this study is that any individual displays such a complex of pleasures and tastes, even in the engagement with a single text, that it becomes very difficult to easily slot them into the kind of categories Bourdieu describes. Case studies such as that examined in the next chapter of this thesis may be able, then, to complement the charting of tastes presented by Bourdieu, focusing on detailed expressions of pleasure and evalation at key moments in the viewing of a film where his study observes larger patterns of preference across a vast sample.

Another reservation that might be expressed, however, about Bourdieu`s conclusions is that the distinctions he draws between the practices of elite and popular culture are no longer as easy to maintain - if they ever were. Clearly, there are extremes, for instance in cinema, between the popular commercial film and the self-proclaiming art-house movie - and Bourdieu constitutes these extremes, in tabulating audience`s preferences related to their jobs (pages 270-272). He does not take into account, however, the ability of films to shift their percieved value, adopted and sacralized by the cultural elite, promoted from popular to art-house status in spite of any original intentions of director or studio, the classic example being *Casablanca.* Nor is he able to consider the kind of intricate exchanges, reflections, mutual embraces between the two categories which some commentators have described as characteristic of a postmodern aesthetic, and its collapse of popular and elite cultures into each other (Featherstone, 1993; Jancovich, 1992; Connor,1990). This kind of effect can be seen in the production of movies - especially horror films - which merge the narratives, structures and traditions of the popular with stylistic signifiers of the art-house movie: *Don`t Look Now; Silence of the Lambs; Schindler`s List.*

The politics of pleasure which emerge from *Distinction,* in spite of its popularity within cultural studies, is similarly hard to maintain in any simple way. It is relatively easy to

demonise a faceless, collective bourgeois enemy, as Bourdieu effectively does in the critique of Kant at the end of his book. But when we find that this `enemy` is, say, a child of a professional family in a secondary classroom, like many of the young people in this study, it becomes much less easy to rail against her preferences, even if they do appear to fit Bourdieu`s description of the `pure gaze`. We need a much more complex account of the popular-elite dialectic, and the complex of uses, pleasures and practices of reading and interpretation associated with them, if we are to propose any set of principles to guide the classroom use of film, or literary text, in such a way that the rights of all young people are maintained.

Further, we might agree with Jenkins about Bourdieu`s failure to recognise the expertise involved in the reading of popular texts. A key argument of this study is that young people`s readings of horror films is a complex process of semiosis, articulated with an equally complex set of social conditions - and that these processes, these conditions, are profoundly implicated with the conditions in which elite texts (often hard to distinguish in any case) are read and interpreted. I will argue that these processes, amplified, ideally, by pedagogic practices, can be productive for all children and all texts.

Another reservation about Bourdieu`s critique of Kant is his omission of an important dimension of the *Critique of Judgement:* Kant`s theory of the sublime, his final version of this aspect of his aesthetic theory. Bourdieu makes no mention of the sublime, which is curious for a number of reasons. Firstly, Kant makes claims for the sublime which are considerable, in some ways greater than those he makes for the aesthetic judgement of the beautiful - that the apprehension of the sublime is a supreme confirmation of human reason, in that reason can comprehend the sublime though imagination cannot - so that huge expanses of space beggar our imagination, but we can find ways of calculating them mathematically. In spite of being dwarfed by the vastnesses of nature - rocks, hurricanes, storms - we can match them through

the power of reason:

> ... provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more
> attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime,
> because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar
> commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite
> another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves
> against the seeming omnipotence of nature. (page 111)

Bourdieu's critique helps us to see that this exaltation of the human spirit is, in fact, a congratulation of the aesthetic sensibilities of a cultural elite, distinguished by Kant from those whose souls are, presumably, unable to rise "above the height of vulgar commonplace". Kant attempts to get round this in a later passage, where he argues that there is a pre-disposition to the sublime in everyone, thus there is no conflict with his account of the judgement of taste as an *a priori* principle; but he claims that education is necessary for an awareness of the sublime:

> In fact, without the development of moral ideas, that which, thanks to
> preparatory culture, we call sublime, merely strikes the untutored man as
> terrifying. (page 116)

So we see the same kind of fault-line that Bourdieu exposes elsewhere: an attempt to argue a transcendental case for the `pure gaze`, undermined by a simultaneous claim for the civilizing effect of education and culture.

However, though Kant preserves the social distinctions he implies throughout *The Critique of Judgement*, the fact remains that he is constituting a category of aesthetic perception which is quite distinct from the apprehension of the beautiful, as a semiotic process: an apprehension, through a combination of reason and

imagination, of that which is limitless. Furthermore, the affect which Kant associates with the sublime is also quite distinctive: a mixture of fear and pleasure, a dynamic play of pleasure (at the capacity of reason) and unpleasure (at the failure of the imagination). This kind of affective dimension is quite different from the chilly pleasure of the apprehension of the beautiful, on which Bourdieu rests his case that the pleasure of the pure gaze is no real pleasure at all, unless a purely ascetic one. He does not engage with the dynamic thrill, pleasure and fear combined, that Kant constitutes as the affect of the sublime.

A further compelling reason why he might have done so is that Kant's account of the sublime fits much better with the domain of popular pleasures concerned with excess, the grotesque, the grossly material, which Bourdieu describes approvingly as a popular inversion of the values of the pure gaze, in the passage invoking Bakhtin's carnival (page 491).

Finally, it is worth looking beyond *The Critique of Judgement*. Although this work contains the definitive version of Kant's aesthetic theory, his earlier treatise, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (Kant, 1960), gives an account of the sublime that reveals the opposition between the tradition of cultural refinement he endorses, and the popular traditions he condemns, which reveals a good deal more of his ideological project. There is no room in this chapter to explore this further; chapter 7 will provide a full account. It is enough to say, here, that this treatise sets up an opposition between a version of the sublime in accord with the pure gaze - sublimated, refined, committed to the contemplation of vast empty spaces - and a version aligned with the popular, a vulgar sublime which Kant represents as a clutter of superstitious bric-a-brac. Chapters 7 and 8 will argue that it is this opposition, and the semiotic forms associated with it, an account more fraught, more engaged with the historical sublime of Romantic aesthetics, that better prefigures the popular-elite dialectic in the modern horror film than the account in

The Critique of Judgement.

Bakhtin, carnival, and the excess of horror

It is Bakhtin's image of a carnival inversion of the usual social power structures that Bourdieu invokes to endorse his championship of the popular. Though Bakhtin, like Bourdieu, can be accused of simply championing the underdog in his often idealistic imagining of the reversal of values (and Connor, as I've already mentioned, makes this point), his account, again like Bourdieu's, offers a powerful theory of the popular. It is particularly powerful, I think, because it is so rooted in a *semiotic* of the popular imagination - Bakhtin is fascinated by the imagery of carnival, which offends, repudiates and inverts `official` culture, which he sees as a kind of upstart latecomer, asserting an intolerant arriviste dominance over the ancient popular-festive ceremonies of mediaeval Europe. This fascination makes him unlike Bourdieu, who is less interested in the semiotic of the popular than in the social preferences that surround it. But it makes him very like Kant (at least, the Kant of the *Observations)*, not in the tenor of his theory, of course, which is diametrically opposed to Kant's aesthetic - but in his preoccupation with the semiotic stuff of culture.

Briefly, Bakhtin's well-known image of carnival is elaborated in *Rabelais and his World* (1965). He associates it with a persistent popular aesthetic, that of *grotesque realism*:

> ... the images of the material bodily principle in the work of Rabelais ... are
> the heritage of that peculiar type of imagery and, more broadly speaking, of
> that peculiar aesthetic concept which is characteristic of this folk culture
> and which differs sharply from the aesthetic concept of the following ages.
> We shall call it conditionally the concept of grotesque realism. (page 18)

The nature of this aesthetic is, as it were, a direct repudiation of Kant's pure, refined ideal. Where Kant idealizes the human form, Bakhtin revels in the principle of bodily degradation, reversing, as Connor points out, the values of Kant's sublimated taste:

> The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity. (page 19)

Bakhtin continues to develop, in colourful detail, the kinds of excessive imagery of the body which this aesthetic produces, in a way that suggests clear that he is not only describing a set of structural oppositions to the sublimated pure taste, but he's actually enacting the kind of glee in the images of grotesque materiality which he is endorsing.

This kind of imagery, in all its glorious messiness, coincides pretty well with the kind of vulgar sublime which Kant contemptously dismisses in the *Observations*:

> In human nature, praiseworthy qualities are never found without concurrent variations that must run through endless shadings to the utmost imperfection. The quality of the terrifying sublime, if it is quite unnatural, is adventurous. Unnatural things, so far as the sublime is supposed in them, though little or none may be actually found, are grotesque. Whoever loves and believes the fantastic, is a visionary. ... Monasteries and such tombs , to confine the living saints, are grotesque. ... Castigation, vows, and other such monks' virtues are grotesque. Holy bones, holy wood, and all similar rubbish, the high Llama of Tibet not excluded, are grotesque. (pages 56/7)

The coincidence is marked by Kant's and Bakhtin's use of the same word to

describe this semiotic field: "grotesque". That they exactly reverse each other's valencies could not be clearer. In fact, Bakhtin considers the way in which imagery of the grotesque changes in the Romantic period, subjected to the ideology of individualism which alienates the grotesque from its true social nature, rendering it an object of terror rather than laughter. It is this Romantic grotesque which derives, in part, from the Kantian sublime, its disquiet with the popular-festive, and its individualist ideology. Meanwhile, Kant, in his urge to refine the sublime of its grotesque excesses, misses its social value, like the nineteenth century German scholar Schneegans, whom Bakhtin accuses of missing the point of the grotesque repertoires of the *commedia dell'arte*:

> Because Schneegans relied on the idealised aesthetics of the second part of the nineteenth century and on the narrow artistic and ideological norms of his time, he could not find the right path to the grotesque. (page 308)

Bakhtin's imagery has provided a powerful argument for the value of popular culture within the tradition of cultural studies over recent years. John Fiske (1989), for example, uses the theory of carnival to explain the appeal of the grotesque in popular culture, embodying as it does the antithesis of the bourgeois ideal, and, for children, a heroic enlargement of the unformed adolescent body, plagued by growth and transformation:

> Bakhtin (1968) suggests that the grotesque is linked to a sense of earthy realism; indeed, he talks about "grotesque realism." The realism of the grotesque is opposed to the "aesthetics of the beautiful" (p.29) represented in sport's vision of the perfect body. The grotesque body is "contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man" (p.25); cleansed of, or liberated from, the social construction and evaluation of the body, it exists only in its own materiality. If the body beautiful is the complete, formed

social body, then the body grotesque is the incomplete, the unformed. Its

appeal to children (whose heroes, such as the Incredible Hulk or Mr. T,

often have grotesque bodies) may well lie in the relevances they see

between the grotesque body and their own childishly incomplete, unformed

ones. The grotesque allies their incompleteness with adult strength. There

is a sense, too, in which the principles of growth and change are embodied

in the grotesque, for it is in direct opposition to the stasis of the beautiful.

The grotesque is properly part of the vernacular of the oppressed." (pages

88-9)

The value of this reading of Bakhtin for an account of the pleasures of horror films is

clear - although Fiske's examples here are drawn from comicstrip fantasy, the

imagery of modern body horror, such as the grotesque transformation of Seth

Brundle into the Fly in David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) make even better

examples. The opposition between the idealised male form and the grotesque, abject

form of the fly is an explicit theme of the film, as its central semiotic strategy is a

gradual transformation from Brundle's athletic body, emphasised by semi-nude

gymnastics, into the lumpy, hairy, misshapen form of the human fly.

There is a problem, though, with Fiske's account. As with Bourdieu, there is a

temptation with Bakhtin's theory to apply it too critically, especially in the context of a

populist, celebratory account of popular culture. Fiske's place in a recent tradition of

cultural populism has been noted by Jim McGuigan (1992), who points out that the

drift to populism in the cultural studies of the eighties and nineties risks a politics of

inertia, since too simple a trust in the oppositional nature of all popular readings

removes the need to actually do anything about cultural power and domination.

In this particular instance, a little probing exposes the difficulties of Fiske's position.

He cites the grotesque bodies of comicstrip anti-heroes like the Incredible Hulk

approvingly, rightly identifying their popular appeal, especially to the young; and reasonably aligning this with Bakhtin's account of grotesque realism, and its defiant rejection of the idealised forms, bodies and tastes of modern European bourgeois culture. What he conveniently overlooks, however, is that the imaginative appeal of the Hulk is rooted in one of the key strategies of the semiotics of subjectivity in the superhero pantheon: the dual identity. The sympathy invited by the character is derived from his identity as an ordinary man, Bruce Banner, or David Banner in the TV series (in fact, represented in ideal terms, both physically and intellectually), as well as a misshapen, latter-day Caliban. The affective peaks of the narratives are located at the moments of transformation, characterised by physical pain, the agony of involuntary transformation, and the extreme contrast between the slight, intelligent hero and the grotesque, barely conscious anti-hero - a popular representation of ego and id if ever there was one. Similarly, the narratives are often built around Banner's attempts to rid himself of his alter ego, in a tussle between warring fragments of the self clearly derived from Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*.

So, in giving a full account of the appeal of these images and narratives to young people, I could certainly agree with Fiske in his account of the use of a semiotics of excess to represent the changes of the adolescent body; and in his use of Bakhtin to defend this kind of cultural form against conventional charges of triviality or debasement, and to postulate a kind of popular revelling in its flamboyant popular aesthetic, and the pleasures associated with it. I would also note, however, that the the superhero is as ill at ease with his body as many teenagers are; and that an in-your-face celebration of its awkward power goes hand-in-hand with an altogether conventional acquiescence in idealised images of the bodies of adulthood - just as Bakhtin's carnival inversions of the rituals of church and state dissolve on the following morning, and the usual hierarchies are restored.

The other problem of Fiske's analysis is its failure to recognise the phenomenon of

the postmodern, in the kind of qualified way I have suggested earlier in relation to Bourdieu. Though in many ways the old distinctions are still perceivable, between popular and elite, there are a good many instances where such distinctions are hard to maintain. Where it might have been easy to distinguish between the difficult, elite aesthetic of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the `easy` popular aesthetic of Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes*, two roughly contemporary texts on roughly similar thematic and semiotic ground, what are we to make now of a transformation such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*? Its references, images, style and marketing seem spread equally along the elite/popular continuum. (I am grateful to Anthony Easthope for a remark at a HETE conference in 1989 about the productive possibilities of a comparison of Conrad and Rice Burroughs).

It is arguable, of course, that the theory of the postmodern is not adequate to account for the ways in which the popular and elite aesthetic forms of modern European culture collide, merge, cross-fertilize, invert. The difficulties of the Brontës and Dickens, pulled on the one hand towards a novel form attempting to justify itself as the representative, through a particular mode of realism, of the unified subject of bourgeois ideology; and, on the other, towards the popular semiotic landscape of the Gothic - these difficulties are well-known. Though the Victorian novel had its feet, so to speak, in the stuff of popular entertainment, its moral and aesthetic aspirations were lofty. It is possible to see here the antecedents of modern slippages between popular and elite, revised and reconstituted by each generation in a shuffling of aesthetic preferences to accommodate their own nostalgias, their own treasured images and repressed fears, their renewal of the cultural distinctions particular to them. And if these in some senses reproduce the old distinctions, the distinctions of social class and aesthetic judgement which seem so rigid in Bourdieu's account, there are other senses in which there is a perceptible loosening of the divisions, a loosening that's greater in degree, at least than the slippages of Victorian fiction. And it is a loosening of the distinctions, not only between the social groups, but between

generational groups, which might justify the postmodernist hypothesis. What Connor (1992) calls the "pick`n`mix aesthetic" allows for choices between today and yesteryear, as well as between the cultural territories of different social groups.

So my argument will be to employ Bakhtin`s image of carnival, and of grotesque realism in particular, to explain the gleeful, insubordinate appeal of the popular, and of horror in particular. I will try to synthesise this account with the vulgar sublime that Kant notes and rejects, to work towards a social semiotics of horror, and the affective complex observable in the small audience in this study. It will be necessary to avoid an uncritical populism, but instead problematize the elite/popular dialectic, arguing for the profitability of deliberately choosing texts on the borderline to work on in schools, in the interests both of recognizing the cultural allegiances of young people, and of extending the range of resources with which they can transform these texts, and their understandings of *how* they represent, and *what* they represent.

It is important, before moving on, to bring the question of *pleasure* into the foreground. Bakhtin`s text is odd, for a book so often used in defence of the pleasures of the popular, in that it rarely mentions `pleasure` expicitly. It is, however, clearly a thesis of cultural pleasure in a number of important ways.

Firstly, it offers an account of laughter as a central manifestation of carnival, its characteristic mode of engagement:

> Laughter and its forms represent, as we have said, the least scrutinized
> sphere of the people`s creation. (page 4)

An interesting feature of this laughter is the complete lack of distance between the spectator and the cultural object (a distance Bourdieu notes as typical of the pure gaze). In fact, it is impossible, in Bakhtin`s account, to distinguish between the

laughter of the spectator and the laughter of the event itself - of the text, so to speak - just as it is impossible to distinguish spectator from participant in the carnival. This blurring of distinctions between actor and audience is extended later into an assertion of the ability of carnival to abolish distinctions between art and reality:

> It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play.
>
> In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. ... Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. (page 7)

It might seem that, while this vision of the carnival audience represents the life of popular culture well, it is restricted to comic forms: Bakhtin emphasises laughter as its characteristic expression, as we have seen, and he describes carnival as a comic form throughout his treatise.

However, he also makes it clear that there is a darker side to the laughter:

> ... this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival. (pages 11-12)

The laughter is a response to the cycles of birth and death, and carries the affective loading of both. Elsewhere, he describes carnival in terms of appetite, again asserting the unashamed materiality of this popular aesthetic (Kant is quick to condemn tastes which seek the gratification of the senses), repeatedly representing a culture of intensely pleasurable consumption whose ultimate image is that of the gaping, swallowing mouth:

> Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully and concretely revealed in the act of eating; the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient, and most important objects of human thought and imagery. Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself. (page 281)

So, far from trivial comedy, this is a terrifying kind of comedy, an image of the huge enterprise of the popular, which is no less, in Bakhtin's account, than an attempt at mastery over death itself, a vast, cyclical feast which swallows up the world. The acts of transgression involved here, the abolition of limits and boundaries, provide fruitful comparisons with the history of the sublime. Here, it's enough to note that this is an account of a serious kind of pleasure: a festive assault against death; a laughter whose purpose is to master fear:

> It was the victory of laughter over fear that most impressed mediaeval man. It was not only a victory over mystic terror of God, but also a victory over the awe inspired by forces of nature, and most of all over the oppression and guilt related to all that was consecrated and forbidden ('mana' and 'taboo'). It was the defeat of divine and human power, of authoritarian commandments and prohibitions, of death and punishment after death, hell and all that is more terrifying than the earth itself. (page 90)

So the intense unpleasure occasioned by the dreadful warnings of official culture is transformed by carnival laughter into pleasures of insubordination and a mastery

over supernatural fears. This, clearly, offers ways of viewing, not only the pleasures of the popular in general, but those of horror in particular. As noted above, however, Bakhtin observes a degradation, a "loss of laughter", with the arrival of the Romantic grotesque:

> The world of Romantic grotesque is to a certain extent a terrifying world, alien to man. (page 30)

This view should warn us against to easy a transposition of the productive image of carnival to a modern horror genre which derives from exactly this Romantic grotesque as much as from earlier poular-festive forms. However, Bakhtin also emphasises that the energy of folk culture persists in opposition to official culture, proposing "its own conception of the world, its own form and imagery" (page 473). We might regard modern horror, then, as a divided and contradictory form, permitting terrifying representations of the alienated individual, but simultaneously energised by the productive, gleeful irreverance of the popular grotesque, the "chorus of laughing people" (page 474).

Freud: pleasure, unpleasure and the uncanny

Bourdieu and Bakhtin, then, provide valuable ways of explaining how pleasure is socially situated, articulated with the lines of tension between dominated and subordinate groups at different historical points. Freud, as is well known, contributes to the theory of pleasure an economic and topographical account of the function of pleasure in the human psyche. This might be expected to shed some light on the vexed question of subjectivity, and how it relates to pleasure, and how we can constitute a theory of pleasure which takes account of social conditions and semiotic processes on the one hand, but also of the complexities of identity and individual subjectivity on the other.

Stuart Hall (1992) usefully summarises the history of how we view subjectivity, from the rational, conscious Cartesian subject to what he describes as "the post-modern subject", fragmented, contradictory, incomplete:

> If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or `narrative of the self` about ourselves (see Hall, 1990). The fully unified, completed, secure and coheent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, ant one of which we could identify with - at least temporarily." (page 277)

Hall describes the great shift which Freudian theory, and subsequently, Lacanian theory permitted in the conceptualization of subjectivity:

> Identity arises, not so much from the fullness of identity which is already inside us as individuals, but from a *lack* of wholeness which is `filled` from outside *us,* by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by *others.* Psychoanalytically, the reason why we continually search for `identity`, constructing biographies which together the different parts of our divided selves into a unity, is to recapture this fantasized pleasure of fullness (plenitude). (pages 287/8)

This gives a clear picture of one particular kind of pleasure we might expect to find in film: a series of fictions that provide this fantasy, fill the lack, provide the images we can use to fabricate our sense of our imagined identities. It is a notoriously bleak view, however, presenting an image of humans as blind, helpless creatures stumbling after a phantasmatic comfort which eternally eludes them, and which is worthless in any case. Later commentators have provided more optimistic versions

of the post-Freudian subject, notably Ernesto Laclau, whom Hall cites:

> We should add that, far from being dismayed by all this, Laclau argues that
> dislocation has positive features. It unhinges the stable identities of the
> past, but it also opens up the possibility of new articulations - the forging of
> new identities, the production of new subjects ... (page 279).

It is precisely this view of the positive possibilities of the postmodern subject that is grasped by Mark Jancovich in his history of horror films (1992), in which he argues that the body-horror of the eighties and nineties, which he describes as a postmodern form of the horror movie, depicts images of literally dissolving identity (he uses Cronenberg's *The Fly*, discussed above) which are troubling and disturbing, but liberating at the same time, offering possibilities of escape from the bodies and identities so long imprisoned by dominant ideologies, and increasingly regulated by the state.

So we have the possibilities here of a kind of pleasure occasioned by the search for identity, and the liberating experience of making and remaking identities; though an experience, as the horror film reminds us, that can be as troubling as it is exhilarating.

If we return to Freud, however, we find that his preoccupation with pleasure is much more an end in itself, an end which Freud ultimately associates with death itself. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), he begins by rehearsing his thesis of the pleasure principle, which describes pleasure as the lowering of tension, the attempt to reduce all forms of unpleasurable excitation until stasis is achieved. This economy of pleasure is articulated with its companion structure, the reality principle, which prevents the unhindered search for pleasure in the interests of survival, thus producing a deferral of pleasure until the external obstacle has disappeared.

The object of his piece, however, is to move beyond the pleasure principle - to briefly account for those forms of pleasure which don`t fit the hypothesis of the pleasure principle; but particularly to find a hypothesis for a kind of pleasure which seems independent of the pleasure principle altogether.

He mentions a number of phenomena, all of which are intriguing in relation to film, especially horror; but I will look here at three.

The first is his relation of pleasure and unpleasure to the phenomenon of repression, and to the struggle between different parts of the psyche. He argues that a complex of pleasure/unpleasure is occasioned by the efforts of one part of the psyche to obtain satisfaction while another part experiences the same stimulus as unpleasure. An experience which is found pleasurable by the id (Freud doesn`t use the term till later, in *The Ego and the Id,* but clearly already has it mind here, as well as the superego), but disapproved of by the superego, and so is either repressed, or, if it manages to break through into consciousness, is experienced as unpleasure. This idea is taken up by the French film theorist Christian Metz (1982), in an explanation of the conflicting pleasures of film, and the appearance of "filmic unpleasure", which, he says, can arise from insufficient "nourishment" of the id; or by an aggressive censorious reaction to the film by the superego (this idea will be explored further in Chapter 6).

The application to horror films is clear; indeed, this theory, enlarged to apply to the society as well as the individual, can help account for the perennial moral and aesthetic public arguments over horror, taste, and the corruption of the young.

Secondly, a repressed unpleasurable experience can be brought into the realm of the conscious in order to convert it into something pleasurable by gaining mastery

over it. Freud's example is the celebrated *fort/da* game, in which a young child symbolically re-enacts the loss of his mother, and institutes an imaginary finding of her, by repeating the throwing away and pulling back of a ball on a string.

That this model of pleasure is useful for a theory of the pleasure of film, especially films which are apparently distressing, such as horror, is reinforced by Freud's explicit linking of this hypothesis with the adult artistic imitation of distressing experiences for pleasurable purposes (eg, tragedy), which he sees as reconcilable wth the pleasure principle, presumably because the motivation for the mind is to increase the yield of pleasure by reworking the distressing event in such a way that it affords a lowering of tension. Freud is, however, tantalizingly vague on this point, dismissing it in his search for what truly lies beyond the pleasure principle, and consigning it to "some system of aesthetics with an economic approach to its subject-matter" (page 287).

The third hypothesis is the one which Freud employs in his attempt to move beyond the pleasure principle, a hypothesis which he admits is highly speculative. He looks at the effect of traumatic experiences on the psyche, asking why there should be a compulsion to repeat them psychically, in dreams, for instance. He suggests that the powerful stimulus of the original trauma breaks through the crust of the conscious, flooding the psyche, and temporarily displacing the pleasure principle by draining all other parts of the psyche in order to bind the excess energy. The accompanying feeling is of *fright*, which Freud associates with unpreparedness for the trauma. The pleasure principle cannot restore its dominance until the trauma has been re-enacted, in dreams for instance, the difference being that, unlike the original experience, the repetition is accompanied by *anxiety* instead of fright; anxiety being characterised by preparedness for the trauma. So, the dreams/repetitions are different from the original trauma in that they restore the anxiety that was missing, thus allowing a retrospective mastery of the stimulus.

There is a good deal in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that is, as Freud himself admits, highly tentative and speculative; and it's far from clear that the pleasure principle couldn't have been elaborated to account for all the phenomena he describes. The question for this study is, what can be usefully employed in a theory of the pleasure of the horror movie; and how can it be reconciled with the theoretical perspectives derived from Bourdieu, Bakhtin and others?

The parts of Freud's account that might prove helpful, as I indicated while reviewing them, are the following three.

i. The idea that different parts of the psyche might be differently affected by a text, the idea that Metz picks up in *The Imaginary Signifier*, when he considers film as a kind of nutrition for one part of the psyche at the expense of another, leading to the kind of contradictory feelings and ideas about a film that can be observed in this study.

ii. The idea that film, like dreams, allows for what Freud calls (in `The Uncanny`, 1919), the *return of the repressed*: primitive fears, of the dark, of the unknown, of imaginary monsters.

iii. The idea that film, again like dreams, can allow a retrospective mastery of troubling ideas, feelings and images, by changing the nature of the fear into a fear mediated by fore-knowledge (in this case, knowledge of the structures of the genre), which allows a transformation of fear into pleasure. In the case of the particular fears and pleasures of horror films, this needs to be considered against a more detailed account of Freud's paper on the uncanny, and against theories of the sublime.

Connor: cultural pleasure; cultural value

Before making some tentative proposals about a model that could afford some insight into what happens in the very specific situation of a group of 13 and 14 year-olds sitting down in a classroom in the late 1990s to watch a kind of horror film, it is necessary to make some brief further observations, about how these theories of pleasure have been developed and transformed in recent years.

Chiefly, I shall draw on the valuable review of theories of pleasure offered by Steven Connor (1992), since he has room to develop an account in much more detail than I can do here. His main points can be summarised as follows.

i. Cultural pleasure and cultural value have been constituted as binary opposites since the Enlightenment. The Kantian aesthetic tradition has privileged value over pleasure, associating it with a sublimated, disinterested aesthetic sense, opposed to all forms of sensual gratification.

ii. This tradition of ascetic cultural pleasure is continued into the twentieth century and the age of mass communication. Connor traces it through I A Richards, and his condemnation of "the cretinous gratifications of mass culture" (Connor, page 37), and Adorno and Horkheimer's mass culture critique, in both of which the `ease` of popular pleasure is imaged by the inertia of Freud's pleasure principle. He traces the ascetic strain to some aspects of feminist theory, in particular Laura Mulvey's essay calling for the destruction of narrative pleasure in film (Mulvey, 1975) , which always positions women as objects of a voyeuristic male gaze. Connor sees the asceticism of Richards and Mulvey as concealing another form of pleasure, however, so that the postponements and deferrals of the reality principle work in the end in the service of the pleasure principle by increasing the yield of pleasure qualitatively if not quantitatively: he finds in both authors a transfer of affective language from the

negative terms of inertia, the `ease` and `plenitude` of the forms they condemn to the positive dynamism of `thrill` and `daring` of the rejection of pleasure in the interests of value or ethics.

iii. He opposes against these ascetics a theoretical tradition at the centre of which he finds Lacan`s *jouissance*. He identifies Barthes, whom he sees as `desublimating`, in that he refuses to associate value with pleasure, with Bourdieu, Lyotard, and Bakhtin, whose carnival Connor sees as "a populist, democratic version of the textual erotics evoked by Barthes." (page 49)

iv. He considers the different pleasures of the sublime, the aspect of Kant`s *Critique of Judgement* ignored by Bourdieu. He sees the sublime as offering the potential for a more transgressive kind of pleasure, which he associates with the transcendence of Barthes. He goes on to find other championships of unsublimated pleasures in strands of feminist theory at odds with Mulvey`s asceticism, such as Cora Kaplan`s, which sees pleasure in fantasy (romantic fiction) as affirmatory of female subjectivities and difference:

> ... Kaplan argues that the pleasure of fantasy involves not a fixing of the subject in identification, but rather a mobile plurality of identifications, an identification with the syntax of the fantasy rather than with the central protagonist. (page 50)

Connor sees this account as valuable, attempting to find value in unsublimated pleasures, but with insecapable uncertainties - to what extent are such pleasures liberating, emancipatory; or do they simply offer imagined escape, while still being restrained by the reactionary frame of the generic forms which permit them (eg romantic fiction)?

v. He considers postmodernism, in particular Jameson, concluding that his acount of the sublime pleasures of the postmodern subject are yet another form of the desublimating strain of theory he has already noted:

> The fluxes of intensity, the skidding mobility of pleasures in postmodern subjectivity may therefore be seen as a form of the sublimity from below that I characterized earlier, which resists every traditional, Kantian sublimation of pleasure into higher pleasure, affirming the value of unsublimated pleasure against the sublimation ... of pleasure into higher values. (page 53)

vi. Connor ends up by suggesting that the hedonist/moralist opposing camps are both doomed to failure, since the two positions imply, reflect, derive from, each other. He argues that Jameson's attempts to sublimate the desublimating energy of pleasure by deriving a political value from it is an "impossible and self-contradictory project":

> ...for ... the hedonist and the moralist positions imply and inhabit each other. To assert the value of pleasure in itself, which is the only way in which it can be rescued from the false sublimation of bourgeois aesthetics, is always to moralize, to reduce to a principle its unprincipled refusal of sublimation. The hedonic position that pleasure is value always becomes a version of the moralist position that pleasure only conceals, implies or figures a value, which must, by some exterior or supplementary operation of theory, be spelled out of it." (pages 53/4)

His own solution is satisfyingly balanced; though this study will need to consider how it measures up to the observations of empirical audience research:

> A politics of pleasure must accordingly resist both the hedonist and the

moralist temptations insofar as they rely on or tend towards notions of `pure` (unsublimated) pleasure and `pure` (sublimated) value. (page 54)

To do this, we must pay close attention to the instabilities of pleasure and value; and participate in the dynamic process whereby they endlessly reproduce each other.

If the aesthetic has hitherto been constituted as a conceptual mechanism for separating pleasure and value out from each other, and for fixing their differential values, then it is conceivable that the aesthetic, in the enlarged form of a politics of culture, may yet become a realm in which the pleasurable renegotiation of the political value of pleasure may take place. (page 54)

Towards a model of the pleasures of horror

In the light of Connor`s argument, it becomes very difficult to re-assert any kind of politics of pleasure along the lines of theorists in the populist tradition of cultural studies (Fiske, Willis), in which the twofold problem of a simple rejection of cultural value and sublimated pleasure, and a neglect of the possibilities of the sublime, render their position unbalanced and untenable.

The model I want to suggest, then, needs a number of criterial properties.

i. A social theory in which the possibilities of the mobility and transformative capacity of social identities can be accommodated, so avoiding the limiting rigidity of Bourdieu`s class groups, and allowing for the possibility of movement between the ease and difficulty of different forms of textual pleasure.

ii. A theory of subjectivity and consciousness which allows for productive struggle between different parts of the psyche; for popular understandings and affects to meet the explicit discourses of the classroom.

iii. A theory of the semiotics of horror which explains (historically and synchronically) the peculiar appropriateness of its images to represent the Freudian repressed; and how these representations cause pleasure and unpleasure, understood in terms of the Kantian sublime, Bakhtin`s grotesque realism, and Freud`s compulsion to repeat.

iv. A theory of the social semiotic properties of elite and popular texts, especially film, which accounts for the ways in which textual ease and difficulty, and the pleasures associated with them, are constructed and read; and which accounts for the blurring, merging, and dialectic movement between these two poles apparently characteristic of the postmodern moment.

v. An account of the collision and potential mutual benefit of pleasure and value in the context of public perceptions of horror, the English curriculum, and the classroom as a viewing space and a site of textual exploration.

Rather than develop this in abstract, I want to look, in the next chapter, at a case study, and see how a model can be built along the way. The evidence is derived from a classroom journal which documents how a year 9 class watched *The Company of Wolves.*

Chapter 6: Spectatorial Pleasures: A Case Study

This chapter takes a close look at an audience at the point of immediate contact with a film, as they view it. A good deal of the way we make sense of a film relies - necessarily - on retrospective analysis: film reviews, classroom and academic studies of image, script, and so on. We rely heavily on memory - on remembered reconstructions and transformations of the film text - partly because it's materially difficult for academics, reviewers, school students, to have the text before them as they write, in the way that they can with a literary text. Chapter 3 has examined the effects of this distancing between the moment of viewing and the moment of reviewing, exemplified, for instance, in Roland Barthes` essay, `The Third Meaning` (1978), in which his speculations about film derive from that versatile material instance of the processes of preview and review: the cinematic still.

Another reason why it is easier, and therefore more common, to scrutinise audience uses, readings, responses, transformations of film at the points of preview and review is the nature of the forms of discourse under scrutiny. Preview and review are encoded in less ephemeral forms of discourse - image, writing, speech (controlled by investigation, as in taped interview). The moment of viewing is characterised by more ephemeral forms of discourse. Speech is certainly there, again (and much more of it than might be imagined); but also a discourse of physical movement, from elaborate mime to the closing and opening of eyes. There is, then, the double problem for academic investigation of the difficulty of recording the viewing moment, and the difficulty of finding a language with which to describe it. It needs to be recognised, however, that despite its trickiness in succumbing to empirical observation and recording, this moment of viewing is valuable in that it throws into relief the social nature of reading a film, indeed, of any semiotic activity whatsoever. As Volosinov (1929/1973) points out, signs are inseparable from their social context, and to

abstract them, as it is tempting to do with residual forms of language, especially writing, is likely to mislead.

Students, classrooms and social roles

The data examined in this chapter is provided by a journal of observations, written by me as I watched the group of Year 9 school students watching *The Company of Wolves*. My intention was to observe as much as possible, though concentrating on a small group at the back of the classroom. The initial reason for this was because it contained three boys regarded in the school as low achievers, though for very different reasons. Jamie is perceived as a `naughty boy`, his classroom behaviour characterised by poor concentration, frequent disruption, distraction of and by other students, and a hostile attitude to official modes of learning and to the usual forms of authority sanctioned by the school. He is also a working class boy in a school with a large middle class intake, and so is often isolated by the discourses, rituals and aspirations of many of his peers. Rather than changing his language and behaviour to `fit in`, he adopts the familiar strategy of the `class clown`, seeking peer approval by his own brand of witty repartee, by noises, jokes, fidgeting, stealing pencil cases, and so on. Francis, sitting next to him, is also perceived as `naughty`; though in his case, again in the general perception of the school, his behaviour is related to his particular learning difficulties, described in the school`s register of special needs as connected with literacy problems, difficulties with sequencing and conceptual ordering, and consequent problems with attention span.

Nico, who appears in the second half of the journal (he was absent for the lesson in which the first half of the film was shown), also sits next to Jamie. He is an able, middle class boy - but also chooses subversive forms of behaviour, preferring the social styles, rituals and speech of Jamie`s persona to the obedience to the school`s official culture of some of his peers. If we adopted the evocative slang borrowed by

Paul Willis from the boys he studied in *Learning to Labour* (1977), Jamie would clearly be a `lad`, the boys at the front of the class, Richard, Jonathan and their group, would look like `ear`oles`; while Nico might exemplify a class we could extrapolate from Willis`s study - `wannabe lads`, middle class boys rejecting the style, image, language and aspirations of their peers and adopting those of their working class neighbours.

These images now look so reductive, however, as to be damaging stereotypes. Though there is no room fully to develop this here, Nico`s social identity in school needs, I feel, to be read against an account of how hierarchies of domination and subordination in two dimensions - class and generation - have been articulated in postwar Britain, and how in both these dimensions, the ostensibly dominant group have made cultural borrowings from the subordinate group (and vice versa). So, in the account given by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 70`s and 80`s, the youth subcultures of the 1950`s to 70`s (teddy boys, mods, skinheads, punks) are working class cultural forms making semiotic raids on the clothing of the midde and upper classes, at first in relatively simple appropriations, as in the drape jackets of teddy boys, later in punk`s assemblages from haute couture to trashcan, better described, as in Hebdige`s account, as a kind of *bricolage* (Clarke *et al*, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). However, the CCCS classic account of youth subcultures, valuable and influential though it has been, is marred by certain inedequacies. For one thing, it is largely about boys, in spite of Angela McRobbie`s early attempts to right the balance in her study of girls magazines (1979). For another, it avoids any sustained account of middle class youth culture, which is treated briefly if at all, and frequently reductively, defined against a cultural politics which championed working class style by demonising or ignoring middle class subcultural forms, notably hippies. Eric Hobsbawm, in his account of the `cultural revolution` of the postwar period (1995) corrects this imbalance by pointing out the bottom-up movement of cultural forms, middle and upper class youth borrowing from

working-class style, taste and speech:

> The novelty of the 1950`s was that the upper- and middle-class young ...
> began to accept the music, the clothes, even the language of the urban
> lower classes ... as their model. ... The fashion market for the plebeian
> young established its independence and began to set the tone for the
> patrician market. ... Young aristocrats began to shed the accents which, in
> Britain, had infallibly identified members of their class and began to talk in
> an approximation of London working-class speech. (page 331)

This account helps, I think, to make some sense of Nico`s social allegiances, and the collision between his preferences and the official cultures and requirements of school, as well as the traditional tastes and preferences of his class background. The most helpful kind of description of the cultural range which includes Jamie and Nico, but also middle class young people who remain closer to the preferences traditionally made by their families and peers (endorsed by forms of cultural hegemony and even coercion represented by, for instance, the National Curriculum), is, in my view, to avoid reductive kinds of demonisation and glamourisation. This makes cultural politics a much more complex affair; but there are, I believe, advantages in that.

Janine, who is also sitting with this group, and appears frequently in the journal, is able and successful in school, though perceived as an underachiever. Her style is fashionable, flamboyant, sometimes noisy: a rejection of the `good girl` classroom persona; but she manages, pretty successfully, to marry this with an interest in, and enthusiasm for, work in class - at least, as far as I`ve seen in my lessons. Like Nico, she seems to be somewhere in between affiliations to `official` and `popular` cultural forms - though her trajectory, rather than Nico`s migration from an inherited set of preferences to its opposite, seems to have found a relatively stable midway point,

allowing her to mix and match, and form her own hybrid transformations and uses. In some ways, then, she resembles Johanna, whose engagement with the film is described in Chapter 4; though her dialogue with the `naughty` boys in the group makes her more of a dissenting presence in the context of the official project of the classroom.

Questions of pleasure

The data provided by this journal allows insights into many aspects of film viewing, I believe. However, I want here to concentrate on one central question: what is the nature of the *pleasure* of viewing a film? In the light of the theories of pleasure reviewed in the previous chapter, and in the light of the specific nature of this event, this film, this location, the central question breaks down into a number of subsidiary questions:

- *can we observe tastes, preferences, forms of enjoyment aligned with the sort of elite-popular axis described by Bourdieu?*

- *can we observe pleasures specific to film and the visual; and to horror movies in particular?*

- *how can the pleasures of viewing be seen to be affected by the semiotic strategies of this particular film?*

- *are there any of the kinds of audience behaviour associated by Fiske with Bakhtinian carnival? and what might these mean in the classroom, the educational equivalent of the concert-hall of `official` culture?*

- *what kinds of subjectivity permit, inhibit or defer what kinds of pleasures? How do aspects of identity, elements of the psyche, social roles of young viewers become implicated with the representation of subjectivity and social roles in the metaphorical constructs of the film?*

- *how does the classroom as a social site of cultural engagement affect the kinds of*

pleasures that can be experienced by these young viewers?

- what kinds of discourse express what kinds of pleasures at the point of viewing?

- how might an understanding of these varieties of pleasure affect the pedagogical project of the classroom?

My commentary on the journal, in the right hand column, is fairly informal, seeking to open up questions and speculate on the detail of the observations. I intend to address the above questions, using the evidence in the journal and developing these initial speculations, in the third, concluding, section of this chapter.

JOURNAL NOTES	CORRESPONDING MOMENTS IN THE FILM	COMMENTARY
Janine: "It's a chucky doll ..."	**6.1:Title sequence: doll in the grass.**	The film starts; the room quite dark; the class facing the TV/video on one side of the room; I'm at the front writing these journal notes. I'm especially interested in two boys who have a reputation for naughtiness; but in fact I can't help noticing other remarks, movements, responses.
Janine making 'wolf-scary' faces at Francis...	Shots of wolf/Alsatian running through forest towards house.	Janine's excited but knowing whisper catches my attention first. It's directed at Nicky; and he repeats it later, after Janine has said it again to Sarah. The dolls are used in this film for uncanny effects; Nicky's "Chucky!" exclamation is in response to life-size versions of the dolls attacking Rosaleen's sister, in her wish-fulfilment revenge dream. The first image, to which Janine reacts, is signalled as uncanny, I guess, by the music, the title of the film, and the genre-expectations which the course has set up. Their responses read the image as popular horror, relating it to *Child's Play*, and its evil animated doll; their anticipation of thrills, signalled by their tone of voice and demeanour of fascinated engagement, seems to expect a pleasure associated with this class of images of the uncanny. Nicky signals a mixture of pleasure and revulsion: "Ugh - it's Chucky!", followed by a laugh.
David points imaginary gun at sister on screen.	Rosaleen's sister with parents outside house.	
Jamie gives quiet wolf howl.	Alsatian running upstairs to rosaleen's bedroom. Point-of-view shot from dog's POV.	
	Sister to Rosaleen (through bedroom door): "You can't sulk in there forever".	
Janine: "Chucky!" again, to Sarah 1.	Dolls shown in pan around Rosaleen's bedroom.	Meanwhile, Jamie is howling quietly at the screen; at the family Alsatian who does in fact prefigure the wolves that appear later in the story. Again, this seems to be an anticipation of the narrative, informed certainly by popular understandings of the werewolf subgenre, though also by the explicit study of it in class. It's a different kind of engagement, though - not the discourse of commentary that Janine and Nicky are displaying; but a kind of performative transformation of the screen image, or the 'anchor-text' that he's reading in it. He's performing back at the screen. His reaction, I'm sure he knows, is quietly subversive of the expected classroom response: he knows he's not supposed to howl at the film, which is why he's doing it quietly! This performance seems to reduce the distance between text and spectator, a distance that's clearly there in Janine and Nicky's remarks. And, like his gum-chewing, whispering and restlessness, it's an assertion of his insistence on watching the film in his own way, in defiance of classroom expectations (which, actually, I've explicitly requested!); but in a subdued enough way for us all to get along
Nicky: "Ugh - it's Chucky!".	Lifesize dolls in forest attack Rosaleen's sister in the dream.	
He laughs.	Sailor doll falls over.	
Sarah 2 smiles.	**6.2: Rosaleen in bed, dreaming.**	

Jamie chewing gum. I tell him to lose it. He goes to bin.	IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGA	without loss of face. David, pointing an imaginary gun at Rosaleen's sister, seems to be enacting a similarly performative engagement, entering an imagined relation with the represented participant, the detested sister. Why the gun? Is he sympathising with Rosaleen's hatred of the loved older sibling? I thought at first he might be making anti-girl gestures; but he shows no hostility to images of Rosaleen.
	6.3: Burial of sister.	
Nicky laughs at village boy.	Village boy at funeral.	And, alongside these signs of enjoyment, another kind: Sarah 2 smiles at the image of Rosaleen, asleep, dreaming the narratives of the film. Is this a quiet identification with the teenage girl, and with her powerful authorial role, dream-architect of the Red Riding Hood and werewolf narratives that allow her to play with the fire of adult sexuality?
Several girls: "Aaah!". Janine: "Aaah - he'll get buried!"	Toad on sister's coffin - earth thrown on it.	
Jamie 'pounces' on Francis.	Granny, describing wolves: "... they pounce!"	Jamie carries on enacting the narrative - but still apparently emphasising the wolf-theme - as he pounces on Francis. Their customary naughty-boy behaviour seems to be here a part of an engagement with the text, an engagement which insists on fun, on physical activity, subversive, again, of the imposed mode of classroom viewing - but not at all of the text. Another interesting feature is that the syntagm they've selected from the film - "they pounce" - is a verbal one, with no accompanying visual sign, other than that of the Granny's face as she speaks it. Jamie and Francis, then, are transforming the verbal sign into their own, performed, visual one: a reversal of the more usual transcoding by film-viewers of image into word.
Sarah 1 laughs. points at Nicky.	Granny's warning to Rosaleen about werewolves: "Never trust a man whose eyebrows meet!"	I don't think Nicky's eyebrows do actually meet - but Sarah seems to be casting him in that role. What about the laughter? Nicky laughs earlier at the nightmare life-size dolls, who are clearly intended to be disturbing rather than funny, as is this announcement of the sign of the werewolf. The laughter needs careful interpretation, it seems. Nicky laughs again as the bride remarks on the bridegroom's eyebrows meeting.
Nicky laughs.	**WEREWOLF BRIDEGROOM NARRATIVE.** Bride: "First thing I noticed about you is the way your eyebrows meet."	

Richard - grimace: "Oooh!" (gasp of mock pain).

Nicky: "... and she waited" (anticipates next line.

Looks pleased - looks at Sarah 1 for recognition.

Quiet laughter.

Shifting expectantly - Robin and other boys at front.

Jamie: "Helloooo!" (quiet, high voice).

Francis makes twisty face (mimicking the facial contortions on screen). Jamie - completely absorbed. David too. Nicky - brief laugh - then serious. Josh - laughing: "It`s sick!" David - laughing at beast. All serious again.

Someone - "Ugh!"; and "Wicked!" Nicky starts imitating tearing skin off face. Laura Ormerod: "Ugh!" Hands over face.

Some relaxation - Jamie stretching.

Bridegroom treads on hedgehog.

Granny: "So she waited ..."

"... and she waited ..."

"... not too shy to piss in a pot".

"... until one winter`s night ..."

Werewolf enters cottage.

6.4: Transformation sequence.

Husband chops wolf`s head off.

6.5: Head lands in bucket of milk.

Milk goes red with blood.

Calm music.

Nicky, like Jamie elsewhere, picks up the spoken narrative in a literally dialogic engagement, maybe recalling the lines from the Angela Carter story, which are the same. His pleased expression seems to be a sign of pleasure in this textual connection, understanding - and part of the pleasure comes from a recognition by others of his perception.

The response to the transformation sequence is always interesting. As I`ve observed in other classroom journals at this moment, there`s rapid alternation between serious, absorbed expressions - frowning, wide eyes - and laughter. There`s also Jamie`s funny greeting of the werewolf as he enters the cottage of his former wife. I`ve heard him do this before - he makes the same quiet, high-pitched "Helloooo!" when we watched Michael Jackson`s *Thriller*, a week earlier. On that occasion, he does it when the first zombie appears in the second half of the video. So it seems to be an ironic greeting of the monster -a simultaneous recognition of their status as key sign of horror, and a mocking debunking of their claim to terror; a complex, even contradictory modality judgement.

Francis, again, is performing the text, this time mirroring the facial contortions of the transforming werewolf. Shortly afterwards, Nicky does the same thing, pretending to tear the skin off his face - while Laura hides hers. These two, opposed uses of their faces seem to be a structural parallel to the two semiotic options of horror - to reveal or conceal: as the text can choose where to locate itself on the continuum of revelation-concealment, so can the viewer, pupils expanded to a maximum to absorb every last detail; or completely covered by eyelids or hands, shutting out the `assaultive gaze` (Clover, 1992) of the screen. The search for pleasure, of a highly stimulating, excited kind, and the avoidance of pain (the identical excitation) seem here very close - two sides of the same coin, or the same piece of paper.

There are clear signs of relaxation at the end of the sequence - a dissipation of tension: Jamie stretches elaborately, always larger than life. This relaxing responds to two signifiers in the text. One is a signifier of the end of a narrative sequence in this subgenre: the dead werewolf reverting to his human form. The other is the peaceful music which succeeds the agitated soundtrack of the transformation and killing.

Kate: "Is it the woman out of Bedknobs and Broomsticks?" Francis, to me: "Did they make this forest?" I nod. He nods. Laura O: "Weird film", to Nicky. Jamie:"She still dreaming?" to me. I nod. Someone else: "She sleeps a lot!"	Granny takes off glasses. Shot of forest. Shot of village. **6.6: Shot of Rosaleen`s bedroom.**	These are bridging scenes, reminding us of the narrative structure of the film (the granny narrating the subordinate narratives of the werewolf bridegroom and the Devil-in-the-Wood; Rosaleen in bed dreaming the whole film). Jamie clearly seems to be checking on this, consciously aware of the outer layer of the narrative structure - and feeling secure with me as the authority on this; so a response which this time defers to my social role, rather than establishing itself in more conflictual ways. Is this a pleasure in itself? or a precondition for other pleasures? Francis seems interested in the set - Anton Furst`s self-proclaimedly artificial fairytale forest. This is obviously a modality judgement, with the artifice of the set at issue - but it`s not clear whether Francis approves the artifice, as an impressive kind of special effect, or whether its unnaturalness lowers the affinity. I suspect the former - that he likes its fantastic exaggeration.
Rory: quiet - fixed attention. Robin - fixed. Richard - laughs quietly to Martin. Francis and Jamie lose concentration; whisper; Francis fiddles with pen. Jamie grabs pen off Francis. David intent, though Francis and Jamie are between him and the screen. Liam too - trying to see past Francis and Jamie.	Sound of parents` intercourse. Rosaleen and mother`s conversation about sex - "the beast in men...". Boy asks Rosaleen for a walk.	Laura`s dismissive remark to Nicky ("Weird film") is the kind of ambivalent response to the film`s narrative complexity that I`ve noticed before - I guess she`s intrigued and challenged by this, but feels a distance from it also, perhaps precisely to the degree that the film itself signals a distance from the more accessible structures of popular cinema. Again, how close pleasure and unpleasure seem here. Francis and Jamie get bored, and their physical restlessness now signals a lack of interest - in the "romantic" scene?
Rory - intent; and Martin, Richard, Robin, David, Liam. Jamie and Francis also eventually drawn in. Nicky - expression of puzzlement. All intent. Jamie: quiet howl. Nicky imitates twisted face again.	Devil in the wood: Granny narrates story of the priest`s illegitimate son who meets the Devil in the Wood (Devil anachronistically in vintage Rolls, with a blonde-bewigged Rosaleen as chauffeur).  Devil gives boy the potion.  Plants twine round his legs; hair grows on his body.  He screams. His twisted face appears in Rosaleen`s bedroom mirror.	The Devil-in-the-Wood episode is another of the film`s peaks of popular horror, at least in the transformation sequence, where triffid-like vines snake rapidly round the boy`s limbs, and rapidly-growing hair, indispensable werewolf signifier, appears on his chest and face. Other elements of the narrative syntagm, however, signal art-house inaccessibility: the puzzling anachronisms, the obscure representation of the Devil as a suave modern aristocrat; the migration of signifiers from elsewhere in the film (Rosaleen; the Rolls a transformation of one of the toys in Rosaleen`s bedroom). So their reception of it is a mixture of puzzlement (Nicky`s face) and the confident performative readings of the semiotics of popular horror we`ve seen in response to the earlier transformation scenes: Jamie`s howl at the screen; Nicky`s mirroring of the facial contortions of the transforming werewolf.

Laughter.

Janine: "Ugh, she's gonna touch them!"

Jamie and Francis playing pen games again. I stop them - click fingers.
David listening carefully (to sermon?).
Janine: "Ugh!"

Jamie mimes eating spiders from hand.

Jamie: "Straying from the path!"
All quite serious.

Janine mouthes: "Mirror!"
Jamie: "Gonna make her lips go all hairy!"

Nicky: "Ugh!"

Branch from tree hits granny.
Spiders on window;
Rosaleen reaching out.

In church.

6.7: Spiders drop on Rosaleen's bible. She brushes them off.

Boy and Rosaleen go into forest.
Boy: "Why won't you kiss me?"

She runs away from him, and climbs a tree in the forest, finding a stork's nest with eggs which crack to reveal stone babies, a small hand-mirror, and a pot of red lipstick.

6.8: The stork's nest

We see, below the tree, a dead sheep, killed by a wolf.

During these sequences, there's a kind of dialogue between Jamie and Janine - though in fact they're not looking at each other, or really addressing each other - but rather addressing the screen, though their remarks clearly affect each other.

Janine's sublime disgust at the spiders seems close to the characteristic ambivalent pleasure of the horror film: a simultaneous revulsion from and fascination at the explicit signifier of obscure phobias. But it's also, stereotypically, a gendered response, a girl's admission of fear of spiders, which, at the same time, allows sense to be made of Rosaleen's inversion of the stereotype by her fearless brushing away of the spiders, anticipating her fearlessness in the face of the werewolf later in the film.

Jamie bounces off Janine's response and the imaged horror by parodically intensifying the signifiers of horror and fearlessness, as he mimes eating the spiders. He moves, then, in a matter of seconds, from bored fidgeting, to a participative engagement with the text and with another viewer's response, to a quite different explicit commentary of generic competence, linking the film with itself, with the story, and with the fairytale, as he sees Rosaleen "straying from the path", and echoes the grandmother's warning and Angela Carter's story.

Janine mouthes a recognition of the signifier of female adolescence, the mirror - not discussed yet in class, not present in the Carter story, but a key sign in the film's semiotics of gender. Jamie moves, again, into a parodic inversion of this - the lipstick and mirror, signifiers of beauty, he reads as signifiers of sublime ugliness. But, though in one way this is a subversive reading, in another way it makes sense, linking with the Devil-in-wood episode, where the ointment *does* make the boy hairy.... For the girl, lipstick is a powerful signifier of adult female sexuality; for the boy, it's a magic ointment which he articulates with the mythic structures of the werewolf genre. I suspect this is a deliberate choice as much as an involuntary interpretation - his reading of the popular horror strand runs side-by-side with his transformation, inversion, of signifiers derived from popular romance, girls' magazines. For the pleasurable beauty offered by popular romance, he substitutes the pleasurable ugliness of popular horror.

Janine - mimes father`s action accurately. Laughter. Puzzlement - speculation ... They pack up... Richard: "Who understands? No one!" Jonathan, Robin - "I did - " Richard explains the dream structure to them. Some discussion of special effects (boys at front). Jamie puts his hand up - "Questions after - yeah?" I nod and smile. He says: "OK." All intent. David watching; chewing cartridge. Jamie laughs and points. Delighted horror (Richard S). Laughter. David uncaps pen, starts drawing? writing? Looks up - Caps pen, looks at screen. Jamie: "Bet he`s still alive." Nico: "He`s gonna be a man..."	Rosaleens father hits boy as he comes into village screaming "Wolf!" Boy`s father hits him too.  Rosaleen shows her mother the stone baby. **STOP VIDEO (END OF LESSON)**         **SECOND PART OF FILM: 1.10.96**  The trapping of the wolf; Rosaleen in the bath. The duck in the pit - bait for the wolf.  Rosaleen`s story of the witch and the wedding party; the marquee. Old bewigged woman gnawing chicken bone. Old woman transforming; tears dress to reveal hairy body. Wolf wearing wig. End of scene. Music crescendoes; wolves howl round witch in tree-house. At the end of the subordinate narrative of the witch, the film returns to the duck in the pit. The wolf is trapped; they cut off its paws; Rosaleen`s father returns to house with the paw, which has become a hand. The hand is thrown on the	More performative involvement, this time from Janine. Is this a girl`s imagined attack on the image of a boy, as David`s pointing of an imaginary gun at Rosaleen`s sister might have been the reverse?  At the end of the lesson, the group of boys at the front (whose image, reputation, behaviour is constructed in school as the exact opposite of Jamie`s - `good` boys), display a contradictory reaction to the film - a pretence at not understanding coupled with clear evidence that they do, actually, understand: Richard, in particular - a simultaneous distancing from, and engagement with, the film`s narrative device of the dream. Alternatively, perhaps he`s simply signalling confusion about some features (the opaque symbolism of the stone babies in the stork`s nest) and confidence about others (the dream-narrative).    Jamie`s first move seems to signal that part of his classroom identity that`s always there, part of the `naughty boy`, moderating, conflicting with, alternating with, his restlessness and small subversions: the part that wants to be `good`, wants my approval, so much so that, uncharacteristically, he`s prepared to defer a question voluntarily. The pleasure of watching this scene is always expressed in laughter, the kind of delighted horror I`ve noted in Richard. Much of this laughter isn`t in any way mysterious - this transformation is signalled as comical by images such as the wolf in the wig, and by the fairground music which accompanies the carnivalesque inversion of power - the wronged witch`s revenge, the transformation of the aristocrat who abandoned her, his bride and the entire wedding party into wolves. Only David seems unmoved by this; though it`s hard to tell. In this lesson, Jamie`s sitting next to Nico, who, while more successful in school, and from a middle class family, also has a `naughty boy` reputation to live up to. Here, they`re applying their knowledge of the genre and their reading of the clues in the film to guess, rightly, that it`s no ordinary wolf - Nico with complete accuracy. A pleasure of prediction - a kind of narrative mastery? - enhanced by predicting aloud, a loudly whispered dialogue.

Jamie: "Is that her teddybear?"

Interruption for Personal Learning Plan interview: David Cook goes out.

Nico: "Frog!"
Nicky comes in from PLP.

Nico - snigger.

Jamie:"A kiss!"

Richard - "Ugh!" - and smiles at Liam.

Nico and Jamie laugh (others too).

Laura K: "No blood?" (puzzled).

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fire.

Cut to Rosaleen's bedroom; tears falling from her eyes.

Cut to village.

Forest scene - Rosaleen on her way to Granny's house.
Toad on path.
Hunter appears.
Hunter: "It goes with me, wherever I wear my trousers." (the compass in his pocket).

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LE[

6.9: The Hunter

Hunter says if she gets to the cottage before him: "... you can - give me -"
"- a kiss!"

Granny's house. The Hunter arrives, enters, attacks the Granny.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LE[

6.10: werewolf attacked by Granny - huge red tongue lolls out.

Granny's head knocked off; becomes plaster; breaks against wall; white powder (slow motion).

I think, here, that Jamie's spotted one of Rosaleen's toys in the corner, and is maybe reading it as a centrally significant detail of the image (it's weighted by having been used, in giant animated form, in the scene of the nightmare death of Rosaleen's sister).
His questions and observations seem to be pleasures of textual involvement, prediction, generic competence. He continues with this, predicting "... a kiss!", remembering the Carter story, and, maybe, the fairytale.

Why this commentary aloud? Is it just a recognition of key signs, and a rendering of them aloud in speech - thinking aloud? What happens in this transformation? The selection - what to underline in this way - is important. The toad is part of a deliberate chain of signifiers of witchcraft and the supernatural through the film; maybe Nico recognises this partly with his "Frog!"

This is the beginning of the third transformation sequence. Again, indicators of the mingled disgust and enjoyment - Richard's "Ugh" and smiles; laughter from Nico and Jamie - all these responses to the lolling tongue of the werewolf. The decapitation of the granny resolves, like the decapitation of the werewolf bridegroom earlier in the film, in soothing music, slow motion, and a fairytale image of a doll's head breaking into white powder. Laura begins to make sense of this aloud.

Nico - mock wide-eyed, leaning forward, hand outstretched (mock alarm). Nico: "That's her hair, isn't it?" Francis: "Dirty man!" (quite loud). I shush him. Richard: "Did she shoot him?" Jamie: "Shoot him in the head!" Jamie: gun mime; gun noise. Nico - laughs.	Closeup of hunter's eye as he rocks in rocking-chair. Rosaleen comes in. Shot of granny's hair on fire-grate. Hunter: "Won't you take off your shawl?" IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEG **6.11: Rosaleen shoots the werewolf with his own rifle.** Hunter (replying to Rosaleen's question about whether he lives in the world above or the world below): "I come and go between them." He approaches her. Rosaleen: "Jesus - what big teeth you have!" She shoots him again.	Nico's expert mockery reads the alarm signals made up of the ominous closeup of one eye, the rocking, the music, and a cut to the moon, bloodshot - he's enjoying a parody of how horror audiences behave. He quickly reverts to his former use of question and commentary to check the details of the narrative. Francis' "Dirty man!" looks just like a gratuitously sexual interpretation - and he may have meant no more than that - the volume of his comment is clearly meant to amuse or annoy. It's worth remembering, though, that the werewolf's intentions are sexual - and even more so in the Carter story, which they've read. Jamie seems here to be positioned with Rosaleen, accepting the affective alignments the film invites, and the female positioning that this implies, maybe - but, if this is so, subverting this position with a demand for a violence which the narrative doesn't suggest. Does he know this? Is he just being `outrageous'? or is his acceptance of the female positioning required here modified by an excessive desire for revenge - a strategy linking the film to more violent horror films he's seen? He continues this enactment - the gun, the sound, a performative identification with the victim-turned-aggressor.
Maisy - hand over mouth. Nico - imitating wolf emerging - legs waving. Laughter. "Ahhh - sweet" - Laura K. Nico joking, moving around. I shush him. He salutes, and settles. Jamie: "... and she ran and she ran ..."	IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGA IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGA **6.12: Transformation: wolf face emerging from man's face.** End of transformation; calm; wolf like pet dog. Rosaleen: "I'm sorry." Rosaleen stroking wolf. Rosaleen tells wolf the she-wolf story. Rosaleen: "So she ran, and she ran ..."	Nico continues his performative parody, his pleasure in imitating the transformation, but in a way that recognises an important feature of it - its birthlike nature, the wolf emerging from inside the man. Maisy's response, the straightforward thrill of fear, hand over mouth, is juxtaposed with Nico's elaborate, mocking mime. End of scene - the calm of the music and the dog-like wolf: their response seems to indicate reassurance, relief, a relaxation after the discharge of tension (so is part of the pleasure of horror in the discharge of tension and the subsequent relief?) Jamie picking up the dialogue again, echoing the fairytale repetitions.

Janine: "That`s the dead one coming out of the grave! ... She looks ancient! She looks like Patsy out of Ab Fab!"

Francis: "Is she a wolf?"

Nico - "It`s got a necklace on!"

All intent.

Janine soundlessly mimes scream.
Janine: "That was her dream - she`ll wake up."

Richard: taps head and makes 'loony' face.
They start spontaneously to move back to places.
Jonathan: "It`s weird! - seen it before." I ask where - he says "Channel 4".

The priest takes pity on the wounded wol**f-girl**.

The girl stretches; naked; tousled; thick eyebrows.

She approaches the well in the village, and climbs into it to return to the underworld.

Back to cottage; villagers approach; Mother deflects father`s gun as he`s about to shoot wolf/Rosaleen - closeup of cross around her neck.

6.13: cross round the neck of Rosaleen/wolf

The wolves, including the wolf-Rosaleen, race through the forest.
Cut to interior of Rosaleen`s house; wolves coming up the stairs; through the walls, through her bedroom window.
Cut to her, screaming.

6.14: Rosaleen`s scream

Titles; music; cautionary rhyme voiceover.

I don`t really understand Janine`s remark - she seems to be remaking the image of the girl and the well as a horror `living-dead` image (maybe a link with the zombie scenes in `Thriller`). There`s a sense here, and certainly in her reference to Ab-Fab, that she`s subverting the art-house seriousness and obscurity of the film by making irreverent popular associations and transformations.

As the pace of the narrative speeds up, nearing the final sequence, Francis is checking on the story; Nico too, maybe, back in `running commentary` mode.

This final sequence usually provokes intent and serious responses, coupled with signs of puzzlement, presumably about how the wolf-Rosaleen of the dream is meeting the girl-Rosaleen of the waking world; and how the dream is erupting into the waking world.

I haven`t, though, seen a response like Janine`s before: it looks like a physical identification with Rosaleen, especially with the affective burden of the sequence, carried by the scream image; and she follows it with a quite different kind of transformation: a reading of the narrative dream-structure.

In the moment of relaxation as the titles roll, Richard does something very similar to what he did at the end of the first part: signals the oddness and incomprehensibility of the film (though I know he understands it well); as does Jonathan, acceding to the group feeling of the strangeness of it - though he is more familiar with it than all of them, having seen it before.

THRILLING TRANSFORMATIONS: TOWARDS A THEORY OF THE SUBLIME PLEASURES OF HORROR

Rather than attempt to squeeze these journal observations into the theories of pleasure reviewed in the previous chapter, I will attempt a more informal taxonomy, suggested by the observations themselves. It seems to me that four distinct - but related and overlapping - kinds of behaviour that could be described loosely as forms of pleasure can be observed:

• Thrills of the Spectacle

There is a pleasure that seems to be related to spectacular images of popular horror, manifested in reactions to the film that effectively shift its frame of reference to that of popular horror; and in reactions to the sequences which derive from recent (the last twenty years or so) popular body-horror (the transformation sequences). I use the term *spectacle* to associate these kinds of text with the 'spectacle' of Bakhtin's carnival (discussed in Chapter 5), its aesthetic of excess (Bakhtin's "grotesque realism"), and its reduction of the distance between text and audience.

I think it is the case that, in contrast to these pleasures derived from images of excess and revelation, there might be other pleasures to do with the semiotic counter-strategy of concealment, opacity, implication, mystery - though such responses might be harder to see, more likely to be encoded in the spectatorial counterpart to such a textual semiotic - that is, in a response such as an intent silence, maybe a slight frown. These are the pleasures that can be related, in terms of representational processes as well as affective uses, to the history of the sublime in literature and film, a history briefly discussed in earlier chapters, and more fully explored in chapter 7 and 8.

• Narrative Pleasure

There is a pleasure of narrative mastery - pleasure at understanding a difficult story. Related to this is the unpleasure of struggling with a difficult, less accessible story; and, further, an increased yield of pleasure (for some) at the harder-won mastery. We might expect here to find this kind of pleasure associated with academic aspiration and success, and unpleasure with the reverse. It`s not that simple, however, as I hope to show. Narrative operates in other ways: the narrative which allows the raising and lowering of levels of excitation in the ways Freud related to his economy of pleasure; or the ways in which horror narratives of transformation might involve related narratives of subjective transformation in the individual histories of spectators.

• Pleasures of Identification

There are pleasures of identification: pleasures of adopting particular subject-positions, where aspects of the social identities of the young viewers interact with the represented subjectivities on the screen. These seem partly to do with the feminist structures and intentions of the text and their assertion of a strong female central character; partly to do with the representation of youth in the film; and partly to do with victim/monster relations characteristic of the genre. All of these, of course, represent a particular moment in the historical development of film, and horror film in particular; as well as more general historical constructions of social identities of gender and youth in, say, post-war Britain.

• Pleasures of the Spectatorium

There are other pleasures to do with subject-relations - but here I mean those that obtain between viewer and viewer, viewer and classroom-text, and between viewer-as-pupil and the complex construction of regulation that involves teacher, institution and curriculum. These pleasures, then, involve the classroom as a viewing site, a spectatorial arena, and one which seeks to prohibit certain forms of pleasure and legitimise others - though I intend to argue that, especially where teacher and

curriculum have decided to legitimise forms of popular culture, the classroom is more characterised by complex forms of negotiation and a kind of permissible subversion, a constant shifting and resettling of cultural power and pleasure, than by simple binary structures of domination and subordination. This argument will be further developed in Chapter 9.

The other general matter to clarify provisionally before looking in detail at the journal is the forms of discourse employed by these young viewers. Clearly, two major semiotic codes are used: that of speech and that of gesture. However, as in the case of Johanna`s gesture in Chapter 4, both (all) codes will be treated as instances of *utterance* (in the sense Volosinov uses the term); and the interest for me will lie in distinguishing different types of utterance here: gestures or words which mime, which enact, which perform, which interrogate, which deny, accept, reveal, conceal; differences between those words and movements that seem oriented towards the screen, and those that seem more oriented towards other spectators in the classroom.

Thrills of the spectacle: "It`s a Chucky Doll!"

Janine and Nicky`s preoccupation with this idea fits, I think, the idea of the spectacle - though it also problematizes it. Three points spring to mind:

• it is a reference to, and reading of, an image pregnant with obscure pleasures and fears of a particular class of images central to the genre;

• it is an intertextual reference which relates this film to a tradition of popular horror, what Buckingham (1996) calls the "demonic doll" subgenre;

• it is a transformation by the viewers, with certain narrative properties, therefore perhaps certain pleasures dependent upon certain types of narrative structure typical of the genre.

This reading of the image evokes a single image with an extensive complex of meanings: the "chucky doll" of the *Child's Play* series of films (1988/90/92). For viewers like Janine and Nicky, this would certainly carry associations of the frightening uncanniness of the animated doll that turns against its young owner; of the monster/victim structure this depends on; and of the narrative outline that allows these fears to be played out (the animation of the doll; the stalking sequences, characterised by low-angle subjective camera; the killing of a number of minor characters; the eventual overcoming of the evil doll; but also the possibility, even certainty, of its return).

These concentrated images exist only in the mind of the viewer: by comparison, the single frame or shot in the film can only have a fraction of the burden of significance. In the viewer's mind, the single visual idea of "Chucky" (as of Frankenstein, Dracula, Superman, Wonderwoman) is the compressed result of many viewings of the image that produce the ideal version, densely packed with the narrative, affective and ideational structures that all the countless instances have played out.

From a social semiotic perspective, such a densely-coded image has been described in Chapter 3 as a synchronic syntagm: a syntagmatic structure in two senses; firstly, in that it consists of a compositional syntagm that is perceived as if instantaneously by the viewer (conferring on it a particular ideological power); and secondly, that it is carries a syntagmatic relation to all the other near-repeats of itself, for which it stands, and which it evokes (see Hodge and Tripp, 1986; and Hodge and Kress, 1988).

These properties of the image produce contradictory effects from the point of view of narrative. In one sense, they are strongly bound up with narrative structures, in a powerful package with its own inbuilt narrative expectations. On the other hand, they allow the image, the synchronic syntagm, to become detached from the immediate

narrative of the specific text, dislocated from its specific structures. To the extent that the specific text conforms to the expectations of the genre, this dislocation will result, for the spectator, in readings close to the intentions of the text; to the extent that it does not conform, the readings of such syntagms are likely to contest the intentions of the text.

What about pleasure, though? *The Company of Wolves* announces itself as a complex narrative, redolent of an art-house aesthetic, in ways which provoke resistance and reluctance to assent to its narrative meanings in some young people, as I have noted elsewhere. To read an image as narratively significant in the context of another film, and a different tradition of the genre, is likely to increase the spectator's readiness to accept the narrative, if her preferences are more orientated to the popular tradition she is enlisting. In plain terms, it might be that Janine derives more narrative pleasure by reading an image in this film through an image in *Child's Play 3*, even if she runs the risk of narrative expectations that might be disappointed. In fact, they aren't entirely disappointed, as the film does indeed develop the theme of the sinister dolls, animating them as giant figures that attack Rosaleen's sister in the first part of her dream, a sibling rivalry fantasy. Both spectator and director/writer, it seems, are enlisting the semiotic support of the popular.

But the dialogic movement is not simply between screen and viewer, a kind of particular instance of the abstracted two-way relation of classic *Screen* theory. Janine's first observation is directed at Nicky, and her second at Sarah; and Nicky's grimace and laugh: "Ugh, it's Chucky!" as their narrative expectations of the animated dolls are realised, is, I guess, for the benefit of those around him as much as an observation to the screen. So they're checking out their references, sharing tastes and allegiances, evoking Chucky to intensify the thrill for themselves and each other.

What about the nature of the thrill? This kind of affective structure, so particular to the horror genre, is a mixture of fear and pleasure I have described as *sublime,* following a number of other commentators (Donald, 1992; Jancovich, 1992). This idea has been briefly expounded in Chapters 2 and 5, and will be developed in detail in chapters 7 and 8. This mixture of fear and pleasure is clearly signalled here by Nicky as he combines an exclamation of revulsion with a delighted laugh. Donald's genealogy of the sublime ends in his own view of how horror films encode structures of identity characteristic of the cultural landscape of the postmodern period. My suggestion has been to use the term to make possible an understanding of this particular affective complex in modern audiences which recognises two kinds of history.

One is the history of the semiotics of the sublime, in which images of terror have been employed to represent and explore anxieties about social change and changing social identities. These images, while they are themselves continually remade as material signifiers, represent different anxieties and different imagined solutions in each historical period; but then also visit on the succeeding generation the memories of their older meanings (nostalgia; old insecurities and fears; and a return of those which have been repressed). In particular, as has been described in Chapter 2, the figure of the werewolf, so central to *The Company of Wolves*, has been used to represent social fears of those constituted as Other by the dominant group, as well as those aspects of selfhood most feared, least understood.

The other is the history of the individual, in which such signifiers have been pressed into service in the construction of the individual subject: employed, perhaps, in the language and rituals of family, school and community to give material substance to those fragments of the self expected to play such a wide variety of roles in these social arenas; and simultaneously internalised in the formation of the individual psyche. Chapter 4 has explored something of how Volosinov (1929/73) suggests this

dialectic relationship between the interior and exterior life of the individual, between ideology and the psyche:

> Between the psyche and ideology there exists, then, a continuous dialectical interplay: the psyche effaces itself, or is obliterated, in the process of becoming ideology, and ideology effaces itself in the process of becoming the psyche. The inner sign must free itself from its absorption by the psychic context ... , must cease being a subjective experience, in order to become an ideological sign. The ideological sign must immerse itself in the element of inner, subjective signs; it must ring with subjective tones in order to remain a living sign and not be relegated to the honorary status of an incomprehensible museum piece. (page 39)

Volosinov's vision of the interplay between the individual psyche and the ideological sign, both constantly remaking and renewing themselves, illuminates the connection between the two kinds of history I have suggested, in the context of which such affective structures as the sublime need to be understood.

In the transformation scenes of the film, the most obvious responses of fear and pleasure are evident. There is the shutting out of the image, the hiding of eyes (Laura) and covering of mouth (Maisy); the gleeful mimicry of the spectacular detail of the transformation (Francis and Nicky imitating the facial contortions and tearing skin of the transforming werewolf). There are kinds of parodic behaviour: Jamie's comic "Helloooo!" at the appearance of the werewolf; Nico's waving of the legs in imitation of the wolf's emergence from the mouth of the man in the third transformation sequence. There are verbal signs of revulsion - "It's sick!" (Josh); and "Ugh!" - and of delight - "Wicked!". And there is the silence and seriousness of complete absorption.

What can we make of this? Obviously it is impossible to speculate on many of the meanings these signs may have for these individual spectators as they receive and transform them, and the pleasures bound up in those meanings. There are some clues, however.

Firstly, it is clear that the images are horror are at least partly understood by reference to others previously seen, as we might expect. So Jamie reacts to the werewolf's appearance with the same ironic greeting he has previously used for the zombies in *Thriller* (Jackson and Landis, 1984), which we know he has seen at home as well as in the classroom. So his assured, humorous response, at once detached from the intense emotional impact experienced by others, and, simultaneously, intimately related to the text, bound up in knowledgeable (literal) dialogue with it - this response is part of a pattern of learnt gendered uses of horror. The expectations of and by male audiences to test themselves against images of horror as a male rite of passage are well-documented. They are clear in this review of the 1931 Universal *Frankenstein*:

> It is one of those weird and gruesome stories that brings shrieks and
> ejaculations from the feminine fans and sends a cold shiver up the spines
> of the sterner sex. ... Arouse public curiosity by stating: "To have seen
> `Frankenstein' is to wear a badge of courage." (Reel Journal, 1931)

At home, someone has bought *Thriller* for Jamie, seeing it as appropriate for him; or maybe he's asked for it. At any rate, it has become part of his cultural capital, part of what allows his confident use of this new film, a contradictory blend of experienced, joky detachment and intense, knowledgeable absorption. In fact, his response is well imaged by Michael Jackson in the video, as he is seen in the cinema, gazing delightedly at the werewolf on-screen (also himself), grinning broadly, devouring popcorn. So we can see at least some of the interplay between Jamie's individual

history and the historic development of popular images and narratives of the werewolf; and guess at some of the ways in which these signs are, as Volosinov puts it, immersed "in the element of inner, subjective signs", and made to "ring with subjective tones." Similarly, we can see how his transformation of those signs in the act of viewing allows the making of new ideological signs, in which part of the pleasure of the text - and his new text, his howlings, funny noises, and mimicry of horror's aesthetic of excess - is to contest the official culture of the English classroom, and its expected modes of viewing.

So, for Jamie, Nico, Nicky and Janine, part of the pleasure of this text is achieved by reading it through popular horror: *Child's Play* and *Thriller*, in this case. This operates in two ways we have observed: it raises the intensity of the experience, conferring the excitement and thrill of the other related synchronic syntagms; but also offers a degree of control and power, through a generic narrative understanding.

Narrative pleasure

There are many indicators of different kinds of engagement with the film narrative in this journal: Francis and Nico checking with me on the story; a pleasure in prediction, in mastery of a complex narrative. These features, clearly, are not specific to the text as a horror film. There are, however, aspects of the narrative which are particular to the genre, and it is on these that I wish to focus.

They involve a third kind of history, in addition to the history of the individual subject and the history of the semiotics of horror; a third history without which the effects of these images makes no sense. It is the diachronic structure of the narrative, the way in which the unpleasure and excitation of the appearance of the monster is related to learnt expectations of a narrative resolution, and to the actual dynamic of the sequence, in which the excitement and disturbance of the threat offered by the

monster are relieved by the end of the sequence. This aspect of the axis of pleasure and unpleasure characteristic of horror is the one best described by Freud's well-known economy of pleasure, described in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1920) and elsewhere. Chapter 5 has shown how the idea of a fearful response which is also pleasurable is explained by Freud's notion of *anxiety*, which knows something in advance of the outcome of the traumatic experience, since it is repeating it in dream-form; and is thus to be distinguished from *fright*, the uncontrollable response to the original trauma.

I propose to adopt a modified form of Freud's account, one which disputes his thesis that there is a "beyond" of the pleasure principle, but which assumes that his economy of pleasure, with the variations he rather impatiently reviews, is adequate as a basis to describe the thrill of watching horror films. Furthermore, I propose to align the axis of pleasure/unpleasure of his model with the fear/pleasure combination originally proposed by Burke and by Kant as the defining experience of the sublime.

Because Freud dispenses so rapidly with the idea of an aesthetic theory to explain the rehearsal, in art, of distressing experiences, he leaves us to simply match up his economic model of the pleasure principle with this phenomenon. If we do this, it immediately becomes obvious that there is a feature which needs amendment: that the ego will tolerate unpleasure if a greater eventual yield of pleasure is the outcome. From what we can see of the pleasure of watching horror, it is not enough to describe it as 'tolerance': the actual raising of the levels of excitation itself seems to be pleasurable: an adrenaline rush. Here is an account by Harry, written immediately after watching the first transformation sequence in *The Company of Wolves*:

> I felt a good feeling a rush of excitment *[sic]* run through my body.
> It made me laugh because it was quiet *[sic]* gory and it made me excited it made me get into the film more.

Four possible explanations offer themselves from commentaries on pleasure and horror.

The first is Freud's own insistence on the first principle of pleasure being a lowering of levels of excitation, which suggests the possibility that, if the subject knows that such a lowering will be the eventual outcome, the initial raising of excitation will not only increase the yield of pleasure afforded by the discharge of energy, but might allow the unpleasurable excitation to be experienced as pleasurable itself. In this explanation, the dynamic of pleasure is articulated with the diachronic syntagm which presents the distressing images in a sequence relating them to a narrative resolution of the distress.

The second can be derived from Bakhtin's idea (1965/1968) of "grotesque realism", which reduces the distance between text and spectator (increasing its pleasure), unlike the sublimated aesthetic, which increases it (diminishing pleasure). So Harry's experience of the images of spectacular horror making him "get into the film more" could be read as an example of precisely that diminishing of distance. Similarly, the performative responses of Nico, Francis, Nicky and Jamie - howling, tearing skin off their faces, waving their legs - could be read as an engagement which blurs the boundary between text and reader, actor and audience, the boundary on which Bakhtin's carnival exists.

The third explanation involves narrative, though it also helps explain the powerful appeal of the thrill of the spectacular image I have explored above. It is suggested, again, by Bourdieu: that pleasure in grotesque imagery consists of pleasure in an imaginary, symbolic victory over death: but nonetheless real, since it is a victory, not over death literally, but over the taboo of death: a coded, but relatively transparent way to speak that which we often can only represent by the opaque code of silence.

In Bakhtin's account, as Chapter 5 has shown, it is also a victory over the mystic terrors of religion used to oppress the people.

So it is possible (though here I can only speculate) that the individual history and its culturally acquired awareness of death is in some way related to the images and narratives of horror. Certainly, there is a striking resemblance between the images of grotesque, birthlike transformation in this sequence and the swellings, protrusions and procreative potency of Bakhtin's imagery. Also, if Bakhtin is right, both about the original redemptive power of grotesque representations of death and rebirth which symbolise the deathlessness of the social, carnival body, and about the subsequent alienation of the self in the Romantic grotesque, it is only to be expected that similar images in modern horror, derived from these contradictory traditions, should evoke the contradictory responses observed in this and other studies: fear and laughter. Kant and Bakhtin both argue, however, that the act of representing that which is fearful offers a sense of control, and of pleasure; and in this sense, accord with Freud's explanation of the compulsion to repeat.

However, there is, in this contradictory pleasure, a contradictory semiotic process also. The representation of limitlessness, itself a contradictory idea, involves a play between a semiotic of absence, silence, emptiness; and its opposite and counterpart, a semiotic of replete and excessive presence, noise, urgency, shocking detail. These are the two options open to the semiotics of the sublime: and though the history of their operations in the elite-popular aesthetic continuum show, as chapters 7 and 8 suggest, a privileging by elite groups of emptiness over plenitude, both are inevitably present in any horror text, and it is the dialectic relationship between them which allows the experience of the sublime to be felt at all.

In these responses to this short sequence of film, I suggest that we can see kinds of response by these young spectators which are a kind of spectatorial counterpart to

these textual semiotic options. That is, while the text has the choice of concealing or revealing the image of horror, the viewer simultaneously has the same choice: wide eyes or closed eyes, delighted screaming or hand over the mouth. Here`s Adam:

> I felt quite scared when he started to rip his flesh off and I wanted to close my eyes but I didn`t. I watched very intently as it happened and I said Wow because I didn`t think it was going to be that growsome [sic].

It is equally clear, however, that this is not the classic *Screen* relation of spectator and screen, but that it is socially situated. Here`s Clare:

> I thought that it was a bit grim in most parts. If I had been watching it by myself - not with the class I would probably have covered my eyes up or something. I normally watch gross things on TV even though I cover my eyes up.

So here, I suggest, diachronic and synchronic representational structures become indistinguishable, in the relation between socially-situated viewer and textual syntagm. In a single moment, textual understanding and textual pleasure are contingent upon the concealment of images (by text or spectator), which itself only makes sense in terms of revealed images which precede or succeed, either within the syntagm of the text, or in the paradigm of the genre.

Though we are moving, in some ways, well beyond the idea of narrative here, there is still a sense in which these options, this dialectic movement between concealment and revelation, closed and open eyes, is a defining syntagmatic structure of horror, is essentially a founding narrative, upon which the Freudian economy of pleasure depends, as I have suggested above. But it is important to reiterate that this apparently individual narrative, involving only spectator and screen, is socially

situated, so that this narrative structure, horizontal as it were, is vertically articulated with structures of taste: processes which find the text oddly poised between pleasures experienced by part of the self as liberating and by another part as repellant - those processes popularly described, especially in relation to horror, as `bad taste`. Christian Metz (1982) picks up on Freud`s suggestion that what is experienced as pleasurable by one part of the psyche can be experienced as pleasurable by another. Metz describes two kinds of *filmic unpleasure*:

> It can arise on the side of the id when the id is insufficiently nourished by the diegesis of the film; instinctual satisfaction is stingily dealt out, and we have then a case of frustration ...; hence films that seem to us 'boring' or 'ordinary', etc. But aggressivity against the film ... can equally result from an intervention of the super-ego and the defences of the ego, which are frightened and counter-attack when the satisfaction of the id has, on the contrary, been too intense, as sometimes happens with films 'in bad taste' (taste then becomes an excellent alibi), or films that go too far, or are childish, or sentimental, or sado-pornographic films, etc., in a word, films against which we defend ourselves (at least when we have been touched) by smiling or laughing, or by an allegation of stupidity, grotesqueness, or 'lack of verisimilitude'. (page 111)

Metz`s account, though rooted in his preoccupation with the individual psyche and its two-way relation with the screen, is pregnant here with recognition of a social dimension which he does not develop. With the benefit of later theoretical developments, we can develop this recognition.

The "taste" Metz refers to can clearly be related to Bourdieu`s account of taste. This allows an axis of pleasure/unpleasure articulated with social roles, education, class and the aesthetic preferences of popular and elite groups. Metz`s account is

valuable, I think, in that it recognises the way in which these contradictions are lived out in each individual, in distinction from the impression Bourdieu gives of people securely located in one social stratum or another, their preferences unambiguously made. Metz's implicit recognition of the social dimension of taste is coded in key words of his description. "Alibi", for instance, suggests the way in which the dominant aesthetic derived from the Kantian "pure gaze" obliges us to police and repress those desires associated with an aesthetic of excess, disowning them, rendering them illegitimate in our private discourse and our academic canons, and literally criminalising them in systems of regulation such as the video Recordings Bill and the debates that surrounded it, in which, as Martin Barker observes, apparently moral concerns concealed "a politically motivated rhetoric which systematically distorts the meaning and nature of the videos themselves" (Barker, 1984, page 7).

"Films that go too far" suggests a topography of representation, and the metaphorical suggestions evident in the etymology of the word "sublime", with its associations of liminality (see Connor, 1992, page 48, for an etymology and history of the sublime). This topography is characterised by metaphors of a borderland, metaphors which appear, as Donald (1992) notes, in discussions of the sublime from Freud to Kristeva; and which Donald himself borrows for his image of a cultural politics of a postmodern popular sublime:

> The step I am trying to imagine ... indicates a cultural politics and a political culture that would take heterogeneity and fragmentation, those blunt and comic facts of life, seriously. In this alternative, will-o'-the'wisp identities would still be conjured up by the dynamics of fantasy and desire, by the operation of cultural technologies, governmental disciplines and systems of representation, and by the interaction between them ... But it would resist the temptation to found a politics on the expression or perfection of such identities. Instead, as Franz Faron insisted in a phrase that recalls the

uncertainties and hesitations of Todorov's fantastic, `it is to the zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come.` What would a politics appropriate to such a shadowy borderland look like? ... This politics would be aware of the possibilities implicit in the critical manipulation and enjoyment of symbolic forms, the pleasures of the confusion of boundaries, and so also be sensitive to the need for responsibility in the aspiration towards community that always remains to be brought into being. (page 121)

So, the model of textual pleasure I want to propose will include a sense of the contradictory liminality of the semiotics of horror. Horror allows a representation of the unrepresentable, which reproduces the fear of the limitless, while in fact confining it within the semiotic, thus generating the thrill of the textual sublime. This begs the question of what the individual will experience as sublime. We need here to allow for two possibilities, both historically defined, and referred to above. The individual history of the individual, whose private fears will derive from her social experience in family, community, language, country, historical moment - in short, her culture. And the historical development of the semiotics of the sublime. These two histories of course interact - as I have suggested, it is Volosinov who proposes most helpfully the process whereby signs are exchanged between the individual psyche and the ideology, transformed in both directions in a dialectic remaking of the culture and the individual subject. So it might be the case, as Hutchings (1993) suggests, that the Hammer studio's *Dracula* cycle (Fisher, 1958, and others) represents for its contemporary viewers the anxieties of a crisis of masculinity in the bourgeois family of the 1950s; or that, simultaneously in America, the AIP studio's *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* (Fowler, 1957) represents the contradictory liberation and threat of the delinquent teenager (Jancovich, 1995). These accounts can only, however, describe one side of Volosinov's process (as Hutchings does, in his clear explanation of how the male executives and craftsmen of the Hammer studios encoded contemporary

anxieties about a crisis in patriarchy in the images of middle-aged professionals typified by Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee). The other side, how these powerful images are appropriated and internalised by viewers; and then transformed in new expressions, new ideological signs, as these viewers hide their eyes, gasp, howl, scream, gossip, debate, make their own films, write essays - all this can only be described by applying forms of discourse analysis to the behaviour of real audiences.

Metz's use of the word "grotesqueness" reminds us of Bakhtin's "grotesque realism", an aesthetic of robust, material excess opposed to the idealised bodies of Kant's aesthetic of the Beautiful, and its descendants in the sacralized forms of modern official culture; and such "grotesqueness", for the "us" of Metz's account, is to be expelled rather than embraced: in another metaphor of legality, it is an "allegation" that we make.

He also suggests that "childishness" is another charge we make against those films that disturb settled conventions of taste, suggesting, perhaps, the operations by which the dominant ideology of realism in 20th century cinema as in the 19th century novel drives narratives of fantasy and allegory underground, marginalising them as children's texts, or popular texts, or 'genre' texts.

The final charge he suggests we make against the offending texts is that of "lack of verisimilitude". This suggests a component I want to propose for this model of textual pleasure. It is clearly related to the socially constructed ideologies of realism referred to above. It is also explicable in social semiotic theory as a function of the dialogic relation of text to reader: a representation of the world which the reader agrees to accept as credible or not, through the operation of systems of modality. Modality judgments are clearly an important determinant of (or symptom of) the complex of pleasure and unpleasure experienced by readers/viewers. I will return to this idea later, in the context of the pleasures of identification.

So, this founding narrative of horror, a narrative of an economy of pleasure, of warring parts of the psyche, of personal and fictional histories, of the cultural histories of paradigmatic images of horror, of the sublime syntagmatic alternation of open and shut eyes, of the spectacular and agonised transformation of the werewolf, can be observed as a pleasurable experience in the words and gestures of this classroom audience.

Other possible explanations of the peculiar pleasures of the transformation sequences take us into the last two broad areas I am proposing as components of the textual pleasure of horror.

Pleasures of identification

Here, there are two broad possibilities suggested by previous commentators. The first is the question, raised in the *Screen* debates of the seventies (for instance, Mulvey, 1975; Heath, 1978; Metz, 1982), of the relationship between spectator and represented characters on screen (or the screen itself). Part of this debate, as Heath acutely observes, is about who exactly this spectator might be; and he usefully distinguishes between the spectator addressed by, constructed by the film; and the spectating individual, who may or may not assent to the text's expectations. Clearly, this is still an issue for the classroom; and the control young people might exercise over the extent to which they assent to the ideological meanings, pleasures, invited identifications of a film is a legitimate area for the work of the classroom.

The other substantial area of the debate is about what it might be exactly that the spectator is entering into a relation with. Mulvey characterises the relationship as invariably voyeuristic, an inescapably patriarchal relation in which the viewing gaze is structured as male, its object the helpless figure of woman. Metz's view is that the

spectator identifies with himself, the screen acting as a version of Lacan's celebrated mirror. These positions are criticized by Heath and de Lauretis; Heath in a critique of the phallocentrism of the Lacanian position; de Lauretis (1980) in an objection to the determinism of the Lacanian view. She problematizes the spectatorial relation, insisting on a historical materialist perspective, and restoring some power to the spectating subject, so helpless in Mulvey's view:

> `A film working on a problem`. This must be, provisionally, the task of the critical discourse as well: to oppose the simply totalising closure of final statements (cinema is pornographic, cinema is voyeurist, cinema is the imaginary, the dream-machine in Plato's cave, and so on), to seek out contradictions, heterogeneity, ruptures in the fabric of representation so thinly stretched - if powerful - to contain excess, division, difference, resistance; to open up critical spaces in the seamless narrative space constructed by dominant cinema and by dominant discourses ...; finally, to displace those discourses from where they obliterate the claims of other social instances, erase the insistence of practice in history. (page 197)

It is not clear whether de Lauretis is referring to the films or to the way they're read as 'dominant discourses' to be 'displaced' - or, indeed, to a combination of the two. The tradition of cultural studies would have much in common with her position, though the need to displace dominant discourses might be transferred from text to audience.

A later critique of Mulvey, addressed specifically to the horror genre, is that of Carol Clover (1992), who switches the emphasis completely. She argues that the viewer of horror is structured as female, tending to identify with victim figures, and subject to the 'assaultive gaze' of the screen. She inverts Mulvey's argument in terms of the gendered spectator-screen relation; and in so doing, also inverts the pleasure felt by

the spectator. Rather than sadistic-voyeuristic, it becomes characteristically masochistic.

The other broad possibility for a reading of the pleasures of identification looks less at the relational structure of viewing, and more at the motivations, interpretations, social meanings for viewers. The suggestions of Fiske (1989) and Jancovich (1992; 1996) about the attractions for teenagers in grotesque images of transforming bodies have been discussed in Chapter 5.

Is it possible, though, to discern forms of identification at the moment of *viewing*; and to make any judgements about the pleasures associated with them?

What, for instance, is happening when a thirteen-year-old mimics a moment on the screen? When Janine makes 'wolf-scary' faces at Francis? Or Francis and Nicky imitate the facial contortions of the werewolf transformation? It seems very grand to describe this kind of thing as a postmodern unsettling of identity, and much more tempting to see it simply as kids mucking about. Of course there is more to it. All the evidence of this study is that all these young people watch this film in complex, sophisticated ways, and the pleasures and understandings they show run deep - are never superficial. Also, they display quite different patterns. Francis, Nicky, Nico mime the transformation scenes (twisty faces, pretending to rip off their skin, waving legs). Jamie never does. His performative work is much less a mimicry, much more a kind of dialogue with signs in the text - and much more anticipatory. When the actual transformations occur, he is fairly quiet, engrossed, undemonstrative. He howls, not when the werewolf appears, but when it is remotely signalled by an Alsatian dog. He greets the werewolf with his funny "hellooo" *before* the werewolf transforms, when the only warning signs are his unkempt hair and starved appearance. His interest seems to be predominantly in the monsters of the film, rather than the victims - but he greets them as old, familiar friends rather than as enemies. Later, though, when

Rosaleen is facing the werewolf, threatening him with his own gun, Jamie speaks directly to her: "Shoot him in the head!" As I observe in the comments, this looks like a positioning with the victim, as Clover (1992) suggests. The violent injunction to shoot the werewolf isn't clear, though. It looks at first like a misreading of the film, or at least a misrecognition of how this text transforms the genre, tempering the violence of the traditional monster/victim relationship with a different set of generic qualities, suggesting whimsical fantasy rather than modern body-horror.

At this point, it becomes difficult to describe his response, his identifications, his pleasure, without addressing the ways in which the question of pleasure is implicated with the question of value, both aesthetic and moral, in the ways described by Connor (1992). So Jamie, reading this moment in the film through the structures of popular body-horror, seems to reject the ways in which the film modifies the popular aesthetic, lightening the brutality of the werewolf by resolving the conflict in the image of a pet Alsatian; rejecting, in fact, the way the film subordinates its moments of popular imagery to an art-house aesthetic. Immediately, Jamie's response invites the traditional questions of value: is he replacing the complex moral patterns of the text with cruder and less responsible patterns? Is he missing a refined aesthetic, preferring a more primitive, visceral set of pleasures? The latter question can clearly be referred to the popular/elite debate conducted in the cultural studies tradition. It is exactly the refined aesthetic, Kant's "pure gaze", Connor's "sublimated pleasure", that Jamie is refusing here - to a degree, at least, just as the text itself refuses it to a degree, or as Angela Carter's work, as Chapter 2 suggests, refuses it up to a point.

However, I believe it is arguable that Jamie's response, which would be easy enough to caricaturise as popular in the kind of polarised terms that often emerge from the cultural politics of Fiske and others (eg Willis, 1992), is in fact harder to pin down. The observable forms of identification shift between monster and victim, male and female: he displays a performative fascination with the monsters, echoing and

greeting them; but positions himself with the girl-victim as she, like Clover's "Final Girls", turns on the monster, appropriating his phallic weapon; or warning her, in the words of the Grandmother, about "straying from the path". This is a reading neither simply sadistic or masochistic, in the terms set up by Mulvey and Clover; but with overtones of both. Another example of ways in which it is easy to misread his understandings and identifications is his comment on the pot of lipstick which Rosaleen finds in the stork's nest: "Gonna make her lips go all hairy!" Again, superficially, this looks like a misreading: and it does do a kind of violence to the intended aesthetic of the film, as well as forming a dramatic counterpoint to the girls' frequent identification with these signs of female adolescence and the physical changes they signify. Jamie's reading is subversive, as I have noted in my commentary: but entirely consistent with both the refusal by "grotesque realism" (noted by Fiske) of the Kantian ideal body; and with the earlier sequence in the film where a boy rubs ointment (given by the Devil) on his chest, and immediately grows the hair of the werewolf. The symbolism of the film makes a radical, but in some ways reactionary, gender divide: a boy rubs on magic ointment to become an agonised, ugly, fearful monster (sexually threatening man); a girl rubs on magic ointment to become sexually fertile, beautiful woman. Jamie's reading recognises the connection, but refuses, perhaps, the stereotypical gender polarity, making an obstinately male identification, reading the female images through the earlier male ones, inverting the aesthetic of feminine beauty which they invoke.

Clearly, these profound and complex (though *apparently* simple and crude) forms of gendered reading and positioning take us into the areas of subjectivity described by Fiske and Jancovich. As the film sets up a dialogue with the mythic stereotypes of gender in fairytale and horror, living in a contradictory world where at one moment the stereotypes are revived, at another moment inverted, so these young spectators negotiate these imagined identities like clothes and masks in a Drama wardrobe, trying them on, feeling at home or uncomfortable, looking in the mirror, speaking the

lines, throwing them off, storing them in memory for future use.

From what kinds of regulation, if Jancovich`s argument about the liberating effects of representations of divided identity in horror (1992), does this offer some liberation? This is difficult territory. It is arguable, I think, that there are forms of shifting, provisional, multiple identity at stake here, and we have seen evidence for some of this. I think it is also arguable that represented identities in the film offer opportunities for the exploration of social identities of young people, which can at least be described in the context of the school`s systems of regulation. Horror films take us into areas of illicitness in the school curriculum, circumscribed by film and video censorship, statutory judgements of aesthetic value imposed by the National Curriculum, and wider forms of social approval and disapproval expressed by the community involved in the school (religious groups, for instance). So, to the extent that this film employs the imagery and aesthetic of popular horror, it can create unease in teacher and pupil - or a sense of subversive liberation - or, more likely, a contradictory mix of both.

Similarly, the elements of the film most dissonant from the elite aesthetic and the moral sensibilities associated with it *appear* to offer opportunities for joyful resistance to the school`s usual imposition of quiet and obedient aesthetic work. Again, however, it may be more complicated than that. The imagery which seems most consonant with the sublimated aesthetic - the feminist revision of the Red Riding Hood character, the `good girl` with guts - offers forms of illicit liberation to the teenage female audience that are altogether more confusing. The `good girl` of the Red Riding Hood story is the rebellious victim of intense sibling rivalry in the outer layer of the narrative, and it is this image, replete with its apparatus of adolescent experiment and risk-taking, that appeals to the `good girls` in the audience, as in Sarah 2`s quiet smile as she watches Rosaleen`s fevered sleep.

Meanwhile, the boys' apparently simple identification with the monsters and images of spectacular excess is counterpoised by more complex shifts of spectatorial positioning. It is also counterpoised by some surprising willingness to embrace the complex narrative, as in Jamie's questions about the story, its hypotactic structure ("Is she still dreaming?") and the connections he makes with the Angela Carter story. Also, the noisy, physically active engagement of some of the boys, an apparent rejection of the sacralized viewing of the refined aesthetic, is actually circumscribed in contradictory ways also, as the next section will describe.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the extent of these kinds of engagement with the text - identifications, performances, willing unravellings - is marked by rapid shifts in the modality judgements made by various individuals, and socially negotiated with their peers. Intent absorption, wide eyes, hands over mouth alternate with dismissive remarks ("Weird film!"). Claims of incomprehension ("Who understood? Nobody!") are rapidly succeeded by competent explanations of the film. Mingled pleasure and discomfort at the transformation sequence gives way to claims of weak modality, as in this report written immediately after watching the sequence:

> It was funny but a bit sick I thought it was original. I laughed when he was tearing his face off because he looked so funny. It was very fake like when his nose got longer and his neck.

Pleasures of the spectatorium

Bourdieu (1984) describes clearly the kinds of auditoria that fit his polarised model of the refined aesthetic and popular pleasure:

> In one case it is constant, manifest (boos, whistles), sometimes direct (pitch or playing-field invasions); in the other it is intermittent, distant, highly

ritualized, with obligatory applause, and even shouts of enthusiasm, at the end, or even perfectly silent (concerts in churches). (487-8)

These are clearly valid material instances of the aesthetic hierarchy at work in contemporary culture, and we recognise them easily. They are marked by the extremes of audience distance from the text, the kinds of engagement described by Bakhtin, whose carnival is distinguished by such closeness of audience to spectacle that the boundary between actor and spectator dissolves.

In this instance under scrutiny in this study, however, the auditorium - the classroom - is harder to categorise, a much more hybrid affair. It has something of the concert hall, with its expectations of obedient and quiet reverence, enforced by explicit instruction from the teacher (and I`m no exception here). It also has something of the commercial cinema, though, erupting disobediently as the teenage audience in semi-darkness express some of their pleasure aloud. Also something of the living-room, with a small-screen text, subject to video controls, pausing at times, stopping halfway through the film. And the text itself imports certain expectations, certain contradictions. School video carries expectations of `educational` programmes, scheduled school programmes, films-of-books in English, children`s documentaries, and so on. Horror films are less common, often scrupulously avoided and controversial - so they carry some of the expectations of popular, even illicit, pleasures with them.

There is a lot of work to be done, I think, on the physical space in which young people watch film in the classroom. Where are the boundaries so important to the accounts of Bourdieu and Bakhtin? What`s the significance of closeness to the screen? of who has control over the video remote? of the degrees of darkness achievable with inadequate blackout? of chairs and desks, their usual groupings dislocated by the shuffle to get a better view? of the teacher, perched somewhere to

the side, the usual point of focus in the classroom shifting to the screen?

Chapter 9 will explore these questions further. However, the evidence of the classroom journal does allow some tentative beginnings. There is clear evidence, to begin with, that the kinds of noisy, demonstrative involvement characteristic of popular cinema, which recall Bakhtin's carnival, are both present in this classroom and that they are modified considerably. Jamie howls at the screen - but quietly. His "Hellooo!" to the werewolf is in "quiet, high voice". Most of the miming - the twisty faces, waving legs, pointing of guns - is silent. Most of the laughter and comments are quiet, whispered.

What's going on here? Is it simply a kind of compromise between the desired behaviour of popular auditoria and the enforced reverential hush of official school culture? There might be something of that, though even this structure is a bit more complex than that. For instance, the fact that there is negotiation at all - that the official culture - me! - can accept a degree of demonstrative engagement seems to suggest a certain blurring of boundaries. Also, even those with the most marked reputations for dissent from the school's `official` culture behave in unexpectedly varied ways. Jamie switches frequently between imaginative, potentially disruptive engagements with the film and the kind of engagement more usually associated with the expectations of the English classroom: an attentiveness to the plot, to the connection with the Angela Carter story, and a willing engagement with the regulated dialogue of the classroom: "Questions later, yeah?"

It is more complicated than even this, however. This is a room full of many audiences, not the kind of homogeneous popular audience of, say, Fiske's account. The social relations between them are marked by kinds of solidarity - the exchanges of horrid faces, echoed exclamations, whispered comments between Nicky, Sarah, Janine, Laura, for instance. Or, on the other hand, the much quieter communities of

both girls and boys, exchanging less visible signs: puzzled expressions, proximity and positioning, silent assurance that it's OK to cover your eyes. There's also the possibility for kinds of coercion here: the pressure on boys to laugh at the images of horror, and the freedom for girls to look scared, for instance.

Finally, another sign of a historical shift, the emphasis on verbal text implied by the spaces of audience activity on which classrooms have traditionally been modelled - the scriptorium and auditorium - has been replaced by an emphasis on the visual, for which I have used the term spectatorium. These distinctions will be explored further in the final chapter.

Here, then, is one small instance of pleasures of the cinematic sublime. Because it is a film which addresses the aesthetic both of art-house and popular cinema; because it is a horror film, at least in part; because it's a classroom in late 20th century England - it is an auditorium more remarkable for its contradictions than its homogeneity. This, maybe, exemplifies something of Connor's refusal of the polarised view of the sublimated and unsublimated aesthetic, of cultural pleasure and cultural value; and something of the postmodern shadowlands of James Donald's account of horror. In any case, troubled and contradictory though they may be, the pleasures are real, and worth mining for their value as we construct the pedagogies of the future. Textual pleasure in the classroom may be a risky and volatile mix of loyalties, power and jostling subjectivities - but no more than is the case in living-room, cinema and street.

Chapter 7: Spectating the Sublime: the Thrill of Horror

Thrills in the Dark

It is night-time in a house in a small village.Two twelve-year-old girls are watchinga video of *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991). They watch in the dark; and, since the girl whose house it is has only just moved in, there are temporary curtains at the windows. One curtain is loose, and the fabric flaps eerily. As the girls thrill to the terror imaged on the screen, their fears are compounded by knocking on the windows - the boys of the village are outside, adding their mock-threats to the threatening mimicry of Buffalo Bill and Hannibal Lector in the movie.

Next evening, in the house of the other girl, they develop a reciprocal sleepover into an extension of the film`s thrill. They sleep in a tent in the garden, frightening themselves deliciously with the evil spirits outside the tent, quarrelling over whether to close the opening in the canvas to keep out the spirits, or open it to let out the insects.

This instance of spectatorship, of the viewing of horror, exemplifies the classic questions perennially raised about the genre and its social uses. In particular - the question I want to explore in this chapter - it highlights the perplexing emotion central to the genre: the thrill of horror, the fear which is also pleasure, "the insistent operations of terror and desire" (Donald, 1992), the "distress and delight" (Buckingham, 1996) of watching horror films. Why do these two girls (why should anyone?) deliberately set out to terrify themselves? What is the nature of the fear and pleasure they experience?

Theories of terror

Academic commentaries on the genre invariably address this contradictory affect. Carroll (1990) points out that the genre is unusual in being defined by its emotional consequences, rather than, as is more usual, by its content: "horror" is derived from the Latin "horrere", to bristle, or shudder, an etymology that at once emphasises the emotion and the physicality of its expression.

Analyses of this aspect of the genre take a number of different points of departure and theoretical frameworks. One influential strand develops the philosophical notion of the sublime, which was popular in the 18th century, following the widespread availability of Boileau`s 1674 translation of the treatise on the sublime by the classical scholar Longinus. The English philosopher Edmund Burke developed an account of the sublime (Burke, 1757/1960) which provided a theory of the conjunction of fear and wonder provoked by objects of terror and awe, both in nature and in art. Immanuel Kant wrote both an early thesis on the sublime (1763/1960) and a more fully developed (and more often-quoted) account in *The Critique of Judgement* (1790/1952), examined briefly in Chapters 2 and 5. Kant develops a theory of how both fear and terror can be stimulated by the sublime object; but argues that, while the sublime beggars our imagination in its immensity, it confirms the superiority of our reason in our ability to conceptualise it. As I will argue later, Kant`s developing theory in particular can be seen as an instance of the contradictions and tensions characteristic of the disjunction between the Enlightenment ideal of the rational self and the explosive forces of revolution and narratives of transgression and irrationality so typical of the Romantic movement. As Noël Carroll points out (1990), though he is rightly cautious about easy explanations, it is no coincidence that the modern horror genre, in the form of the gothic novel, emerges in this particular set of historical circumstances.

James Donald (1992) tracks the sublime and its influence on horror through the Gothic, into the popular forms of Victorian melodrama which succeeded it (often offering direct adaptations of the texts of the Gothic novel); and thence into the early cinema which produced further transformations of the texts of Gothic horror, first in German Expressionism, then in the Universal studios' films of the 1930s. At the same time, he parallels this development of a popular sublime with the sequence of philosophical accounts of the sublime, from Kant through Schiller and Nietzsche to the postmodernist sublime of Jean-François Lyotard. He also, in a productive move, allies the sublime to Freud's "uncanny" (Freud, 1919/1990), and to Julia Kristeva's notion of the "abject" (Kristeva, 1982), which she herself describes as a condition of debasement "edged with the sublime". Donald's project in this complex historical account is to find his own postmodern sublime, providing a general account of the shadowy and unstable politics and aesthetics of the postmodern condition, as well as a suggestion of why these uncertainties should be figured, precisely, by the monsters of the horror movie.

Gilles Deleuze (1992) also invokes the Kantian sublime in an account of the horror films of German Expressionism. In *The Critique of Judgement,* Kant outlines two forms of the sublime: the *mathematical sublime,* which involves awesome immensity, which, though unable to imagine, we can mathematically conceive of; and the *dynamic sublime,* which is an "infinite outstripping of form by content", as Connor (1992) puts it. Deleuze associates Kant's mathematical sublime with French cinema, and with Abel Gance in particular, arguing that the montage employed by Gance suggests limitless time and space. He associates the dynamic sublime with German Expressionist cinema, and with FW Murnau especially, suggesting that the limitlessness of the dynamic sublime is evoked by the intensity of characteristic images of the genre: the distorted perspective of the sets (indicating a terrifying non-organic life); the intensification of evil represented by monsters such as the vampire;

and the play of light, the chiaroscuro which emphasises - intensifies - these qualities within the structure of the image and the montage.

A second perspective frequently adopted in accounts of the thrill of horror is that of psychoanalytic theory. So, for instance, Robin Wood (1978), adopts Freud's theory of repression to argue that the monsters of horror represent the repressed features of the culture, and thus the films serve a progressive purpose in permitting the expression of these meanings, transgressing the censorial impulses of the dominant culture. Similarly, Franco Moretti (1988) argues that the Frankenstein monster and Dracula represent, respectively, the the return of an oppressed proletariat and the repressed object of Oedipal desire. And Freud himself, of course (1919/1990), argued the case for the mechanism of repression as an explanation of the force of the uncanny. His essay On *The Uncanny* does not directly consider the *pleasurable* fear of horror; but he does mention the puzzling compulsion to repeat apparently unpleasant experiences, a phenomenon he explores at length in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which he had already begun in 1919, and which is discussed in Chapter 5.

Carol Clover, in her wide-ranging study of the genre, *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1992), also adopts a psychoanalytic stance to investigate how horror texts invite gendered forms of response and identification. Broadly, her thesis inverts Laura Mulvey's well-known Lacanian proposal (1975) that film narrative structures its audience as male and voyeuristic/scopophilic. Clover argues that horror audiences, rather, are invited to identify with the victim, and thus are structured as female and masochistic.

A third perspective is to approach horror from the tradition of cultural studies, which might encompass cultural theory, film theory, sociological analysis. Mark Jancovich (1992), for instance, considers modern body-horror, characterised by sequences of

grotesque transformation such as those in *The Fly* (Cronenberg, 1986) against a view of the contemporary moment informed by a Foucauldian sense of the increasing regulation of the individual, and a postmodernist view of the disintegration of the unitary subject. His picture proposes a weakening of the boundaries between the individual subject and the systems of regulation increasingly controlling it; an increasingly unstable global capitalism and consequent disorder in labour markets, families and communities; and social anxiety and paranoia, often focused (in horror texts) at the level of the family (both victim of and producer of threats to individual security) and the military (supreme example of institutional, coercive regulation). This formulation allows Jancovich to see the fragmenting of identity imaged by the transforming monsters of body-horror as a phenomenon at once threatening and liberating - and thus, though he doesn`t present it in these terms, we have a possible explanation for the simultaneous fear and pleasure of the experience of horror.

David Buckingham (1996) presents a study unusual in the literature in that it concentrates on real audiences rather than text or ideal reader. His research into the television viewing of 72 children from four schools provides a series of very specific insights into the pleasure of horror. His suggestions about the nature of the fear/pleasure of horror are complex. He partly agrees with Clover`s view of victim-identification, but demonstrates that in fact the pleasure derives from shifting identifications, in which the viewer slips rapidly from one point-of-view to another. But he also finds a pleasure in the critical distance young viewers can achieve, and their awareness of artifice; in an expert knowledge of the genre and its history; in forms of aesthetic judgement evident in their responses; and in the social play of viewing and of subsequent discussion. He finds a kind of subversive pleasure in the monsters and the havoc they cause, and observes that the children dwell on the "gory bits", seeming much more interested in this than in the "just ending" sometimes used by moral apologists for horror. He identifies this kind of viewing with the "paratactic" reading strategies observed by Hodge and Tripp (1986), in which young people stitch

together chains of images to provide subversive narratives often at odds with the ostensible structure or meaning of the text.

Finally, he also suggests that watching horror is a kind of rite of passage - that it's about learning to cope with fear, the pleasure afforded in part by the newly found power over the fear; and that these skills are socially modelled by friends and family, as well as being "taught" by the text, which contains coded instructions on how to deal with the affective charge it emits.

What concerns can we derive from these quite disparate commentaries, and how might they apply to the questions of this study?

One important question, with which this chapter began, and which is emphasised in all commentaries, is that of the *affect* of horror - the fear/pleasure response. This is valuable, especially from a pedagogical point of view, because of the stubborn refusal of this genre to be reduced to a cognitive view of how it is read: the genre is labelled after the affect it produces, and seems to insist on the inseparability of affect and cognition, the importance of which Vygotsky (1962) stressed:

> We have in mind the relation between intellect and affect. Their separation as subjects of study is a major weakness of traditional psychology since it makes the thought process appear as an autonomous flow of "thoughts thinking themselves," segregated from the fullness of life, from the personal needs and interests, the inclinations and impulses, of the thinker. (page 8)

A second, related, question is that of identity. Who is the subject who experiences

this thrill? How the identity of the viewer might be addressed by, affected by, submitted to by the text is a question invited by a consideration of the sublime (how does the phenomenon of the sublime permit both affirmation of and challenge to the ideal rational integrity of the Enlightenment subject, and successive constructions of subjectivity up to the present day?); by psychoanalysis (what elements of the psyche are addressed by what elements of the film text?); by cultural studies and social semiotics (how are social identities involved in the reading and social uses of horror?).

A third question (again, related) is the aesthetic question. The sublime, for instance, was originally formulated as a paradigm of aesthetic quality - for Longinus, it`s a matter of how to produce great writing; Burke`s examples of the sublime in art are drawn from Milton`s depiction of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. But if our modern equivalent of the sublime is to be found in the horror film, beset, as Buckingham shows, by assumptions of aesthetic worthlessness, how can we read the aesthetic preferences made by its viewers - preferences dependent on the stimulation of fear? And how is pleasure related to aesthetic judgement, in a tradition whose dominant group, as Bourdieu and others have shown (cf. Connor, 1992), privileges sublimated forms of aesthetic experience which deny or repress textual pleasure?

A fourth question is that of the politics of horror. How do its monsters and fantasies encode the real? How might they be instances of the kind of realism described by Brecht (1977), in a plea for a less superficial approach to realism that might have been constructed specifically for the horror fantasy:

> In the theatre, reality can be represented both in objective and in subjective forms. The actors may not use make-up - or hardly any - and claim to be 'absolutely natural', and yet the whole thing can be a swindle; and they can wear masks of a grotesque kind and present the truth. (page 83)

How do viewers judge the modalities of this kind of realism? What kinds of social truths might they discover? Will they be representations of an ultra-conservative kind, as some commentators claim of horror; or of a more progressive kind, as others assert? And, again, where does the pleasure/fear complex figure in these text-reader relations?

In order to address these questions, and to apply them to the specific cases of this study, I propose to adopt the model of the sublime; and in this chapter, to look at the semiotic mechanisms by which the sublime experience, the thrill of horror, is produced by text and reader. The advantages of the sublime as a descriptive model are, I suggest:

• it proposes a theory of representation in which cognition and affect are inseparable. Though constituted as a philosophical category from the Enlightenment to the present day, this opens the way to reconstituting the sublime as a semiotic mechanism, which is how I want to present it.

• it proposes a theory of representation which considers how that which is experienced as unknown, limitless, formless might be presented: presenting the unpresentable, as Lyotard puts it.

• it proposes a theory of fear and pleasure in relation to the horror genre.

• it invites a consideration of identity: how is the sublime experience differently felt by different individuals; what does it suggest about the nature of the self and its limits?

• it is an aesthetic category, inviting a critique analogous to Pierre Bourdieu's critique, in *Distinction* (1984), of the Kantian aesthetic in general.

• its own history is coterminous with the historical period over which the horror genre has developed; and its own growth manifests the same historical concerns which are represented within the genre.

One valuable feature of the sublime as a mechanism for description will be, this last point suggests, its complex history in European culture from the Enlightenment to the present day. A teenager's use of a modern horror film may seem a long way from the grand aesthetic debates of the late eighteenth century; but I think it is possible, even necessary, to see how modern genres and popular understandings of them carry the "sedimented traces", as Jameson (1981) puts it, of their antecedents - small details in the picture of contemporary society and subjectivity described by Michel Foucault (1984):

> We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to an extent, by the Enlightenment. Such an analysis implies a series of historical inquiries that are as precise as possible; and these inquiries will not be oriented retrospectively toward "the essential kernel of rationality" that can be found in the Enlightenment and that would have to be preserved in any event; they will be oriented toward the "contemporary limits of the necessary," that is, toward what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects. (page 43)

This search, through a genealogical investigation, of the *limits* of how the contemporary subject is constituted, seems relevant to the sublime, itself is an image of transgression and *liminality*, and one of the mechanisms through which this contemporary subject is discursively constituted.

Back to the two girls watching *The Silence of the Lambs*. This chapter will focus specifically on those questions about their relation to the text that can be described as *sublime*, in the senses I have outlined. If the sublime is a semiotic strategy, in what particular semiotic forms has it operated historically? And what social meanings

has it represented (or concealed)?

And, from the perspective of social semiotics, it is no less important to consider how the pleasures and fears of the sublime might be *socially* determined. How do they relate to aesthetic pleasure and taste, and to the social roles and identities with which such preferences are articulated? What conditions of social control and regulation do the sublime and the horror genre reproduce or undermine? What limits of contemporary subjectivity do they build or breach? How can such observations be understood against the social and cultural continuities and transformations from the Enlightenment to the present day? These further questions will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

Lucy and Jessica: "you have to see what happens next!"

Lucy and Jessica are talking to me about horror films. Lucy is an ardent fan - Jessica claims not to like them, though later in the interview she shows extensive knowledge of certain films. Lucy spends some time on *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), a film she's watched on more than one occasion. She explains why she likes it:

> L: No, I - I really like the film Silence of the Lambs - but it just really scares me. I don't know why. Because it's not just the fact that - I mean I'm not - like Predator - I'm not scared of, cos I know they're not true - but - I know there are people that - you know - might do that, and - the way that you see people mur - you see them being murdered, and you see all the blood down the well, and, you know, it's just the way he treats her, and the way he sews up the skin, and things -
>
> J: Yeah, and -
>
> L: I don't know, I suppose it's his voice as well - and the way they act, the

way they dress, the way they just basically [quietly] play the part.

AB: But in real life it would be horrifying, wouldn`t it? And you would

run a (mile to get away from it, so why -

L: (No but I mean, like - I`m thirteen, and I shut my eyes, when I, when

you were in his house, and the way, still now, that I watched it a year ago,

and I`ve watched it since, but still now, you know at the end, she has the

binoculars where he can see in the dark - still now, whenever it`s dark, like

if we`re playing a game in the pitch dark, or, I always think that he`s

somewhere and he`s got the glasses, he can see me and I, I don`t know,

but they, they, they`re the things that seem to scare me, because if ever

I`m in the dark I just think, something can see me and I can`t see it. I don`t

know why - might sound stupid -

AB: No! doesn`t sound stupid.

A good deal of Lucy`s account is about *seeing* and *not-seeing.* She doesn`t simply relate the violent events of the film, or simply describe the spectacular images: she makes the events and images *objects* of the viewer`s spectatorial act: "... the way that you *see* people mur - you *see* them being murdered, and you *see* all the blood down the well ...". In the grammar of her account, the spectator has become Actor, and the acts of murder in the film have become the Goal.

A little later, however, the Actor is located more conventionally within the diegesis:

> ... it`s just the way he treats her, and the way he sews up the skin, and things ...

So there is a shift of power between spectator and represented participant - one of the monsters of the film, Buffalo Bill, who skins his victims. If we continue to track the play of pronouns in Lucy`s account, which so far have switched between signalling viewer and fictional character as in control, we find the picture becoming more

complicated as she moves on to the dénouement of the film, the scene in Buffalo Bill's house where Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) has tracked him down, only to become herself the hunted, at the mercy of his infrared night glasses:

> L: No but I mean, like - I`m thirteen, and I shut my eyes, when I, when
> you were in his house, and the way, still now, that I watched it a year ago,
> and I`ve watched it since, but still now, you know at the end, she has the
> binoculars where he can see in the dark - still now, whenever it`s dark, like
> if we`re playing a game in the pitch dark, or, I always think that he`s
> somewhere and he`s got the glasses, he can see me and I, I don`t know,
> but they, they, they`re the things that seem to scare me, because if ever
> I`m in the dark I just think, something can see me and I can`t see it.

To begin with, the viewer is not represented by the second person pronoun here, but the first person - has the universal viewer become more intimate, Lucy herself? Though she shifts between herself-as-viewer and other-as-viewer: "... when I, when you were in his house...". Secondly, the viewer is back in control, and all the action, at least at the beginning, is a kind of spectatorial drama, even structured around its own narrative, a diachronic sequence of her first viewing of the film ("I watched it a year ago"), subsequent viewings ("and I`ve watched it since"), and a continuous present, made up of her memories, the film-in-her-head, vividly represented by the dramatic repetitions of "still now ...", so evocative of the tellings of ghost stories (*"And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees ..."*).

Even when the monster is at his most threatening, his actions ("... he`s somewhere and he`s got the glasses, he can see me ...") are subordinated to the main verb in the clause, which signals Lucy as Actor, in the controlling act of spectatorial mentation: "I always think ...".
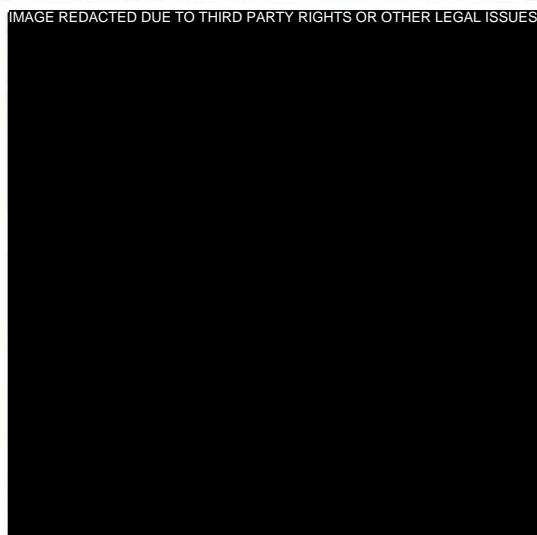
Illustration 7.1: *The Silence of the Lambs* Clarice Starling seen through Buffalo Bill's night-glasses

At the same time, the actions of the diegesis, always framed by the controlling viewer, operate within their grammatically subordinated context as if within the limits of the screen, showing the monster, the represented participant in the semiotic transaction. However, the Goal of his actions, ostensibly Agent Starling, has shifted to the spectator, Lucy herself, as if she's rewritten, or refilmed, the point-of-view shots to show, not Starling (illustration 1), but herself. The play of pronouns, though, is wider than these structures would suggest - not only the "I" of herself as spectator, the "me" of herself as victim/heroine, the "he" of Buffalo Bill - but also the "you" of the universal viewer (or perhaps me, the interviewer/teacher); and the "she" of Agent Starling (in an odd slip which reverses the seeing-seen roles: "she has the binoculars). Furthermore, in a pronominal extension which makes the social context of these textual transformations very clear, she refers to the "we" of herself and her friends, re-enacting the thrill of the dark:

> ... still now, whenever it's dark, like if **we**'re playing a game in the pitch dark, or, I always think that he's somewhere and he's got the glasses ...

A final point to note is, that while the semiotics of the text operate around explicit revelation of horrific images and an equally disturbing concealment of them through complex images of darkness and sightlessness, Lucy operates her own version of

these options, choosing to see the images or not, her own director, editor, censor:

> ... I'm thirteen, and **I shut my eyes**, when I, when you were in his house ...

So, as in the account given by David Buckingham (1996) of one teenager's viewing of *The Lost Boys*, the viewer shifts rapidly between different points of view. In Lucy's account, however, these shifting points of identification move beyond the film, as the structures of the fiction are replicated in the spaces and rituals in which her own actual social identity is bound up.

What about the sublime? As I suggested earlier, my concerns here are to do with the sublime as a social semiotic mechanism: how do texts and reader work with these structures to produce and control the meanings and their affective charge characteristic of the genre? And what social identities are bound up in these processes? To simplify - who, exactly, is feeling thrilled or scared, about what? and what part do they play in the production of this fear, and of the object of it?

Edmund Burke (1757/1977) is very clear about the mixed emotions provoked by the sublime object, emotions he describes as a mixture of fear and wonder, which he finds allied in the word *astonishment*, and which he also links to terror:

> Indeed terror is the ruling principle of the sublime. Several languages bear
> a strong testimony to the affinity of these ideas. They frequently use the
> same word to signify indifferently the modes of astonishment and
> admiration and those of terror. Θαμβος is in Greek either fear or wonder;
> δεινος is terrible or respectable; αιδεω, to reverence or to fear. (page 257)

And he remarks on the need for representational strategies of concealment:

To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. (page 257)

In many ways, this simple structure of a darkness - a space which is in one sense empty, but in another replete with imagined horrors - appears to be bequeathed directly from Burke`s time to our own. Lucy observes the same structure in *The Silence of the Lambs*: the empty darkness of Buffalo Bill`s house, replete with the threatened horror of the killer, and the partly-imagined, partly-remembered images of horror that have been briefly shown us: the bath of human skin; the killer sewing up the human skins. The "necessary obscurity" remarked on by Burke seems clearly to be a pre-requisite of the effect of horror in this film. Illustration 1 shows Clarice Starling seen through the killer`s night-glasses, and the image is extraordinarily obscure, especially as a still. Already, though, it is equally clear that the fear caused by the darkness, the emptiness, is no less dependent on the monsters it suggests, or only partly conceals. Indeed, at the beginning of Lucy`s account, she concentrates on starkly revealed images of horror rather than on concealed ones - the emphasis is on wide-eyed, shocked revelation rather than on concealment:

L: No, I - I really like the film Silence of the Lambs - but it just really scares me. I don`t know why. Because it`s not just the fact that - I mean I`m not - like Predator - I`m not scared of, cos I know they`re not true - but - I know there are people that - you know - might do that, and - the way that you see people mur - you see them being murdered, and you see all the blood down the well, and, you know, it`s just the way he treats her, and the way he sews up the skin, and things -

Here, as I have shown, the action of the sequence is subordinated to the action of spectation. And the object of the spectatorial experience is the event of the murder; but also vivid images: "all the blood down the well"; "the way he sews up the skin". These are brief images of extreme violence that can claim to represent important themes and ideas of the film, though in fact they account for an extremely small proportion of the footage. In this sense, they transcend the narrative structure, and are strung together by Lucy, in her act of reconstituting the essence of the film, to represent an important aspect of it for her: the nature of the monsters in the movie - the horrors that haunt the darkness. They function as "synchronic syntagms" (Hodge and Tripp, 1986; Hodge and Kress, 1988), powerful images which viewers might use to assert a particular version of a text. In this case, Lucy is constituting a version of the monster for two reasons: to show how really horrific he is, and how bizarrely horrible his behaviour, and so to convince us of the shocking nature of the film and account for the fear it causes; but also to make a claim for the credibility of the monster. She is making a modality judgment; and for her, Lector and Buffalo Bill are highly credible because they could exist, at least in the appeal to social reality made by the slasher/stalker subgenre of horror that really began with *Psycho*. She compares this kind of monster to *Predator* (McTiernan, 1987) in which the monster is a kind of invisible alien, who only appears as a barely-formed ripple of light. She's making a point often made by girls - that monsters based on "real" stories of rape and murder are more frightening than fantasy monsters. Another girl, Chas, writing about the film, concentrates on the way Lector in particular is made more real by the construction of the bond between him and Starling, an almost sexual link. She points out that it appears in the only image in the film in which there is physical contact between the two characters (Illustration 2). The sublime thrill of this image can only derive from the chain of significance in the syntagmatic structures which produce this monster; the significance of the *synchronic syntagm* is to underline the ordinariness of this particular monster: the point Lucy and Chas are both making.

Illustration 7.2: *The Silence of the Lambs*

Starling and Lector's hands touch

The point I want to explore further, however, is the relationship between the revelatory images of horror - the monsters - and the images of concealment. These two, I will argue, form distinct categories, but are related dialectically. It will also be necessary to consider how these structures may have changed since the 18th century: they appear strikingly similar, and indeed part of the point here will be that, as Foucault argues of subjectivity, our engagements with fictions are partly determined by those of the Enlightenment and of the Romantics. However, there are also differences, which are no less important, and which redefine the boundaries of representations which explore the indistinct anxieties of the culture.

Sublime Emptiness, Sublime plenitude: Kant's representation of limitlessness

Lucy and her friends organize their play, their textual engagements, and their environment around the mechanics of concealment and revelation: a darkness that's frightening and delightful both in itself and because of what it might conceal. She shuts her eyes as she imagines herself in Buffalo Bill's house. She describes the living-room where they watch the film:

L: ... But it was so scary because it was Ellie - it was when Ellie slept round

my house, and we were in the house on our own, and all the boys outside

knew we were watching it, and we sat there in the corner, and it was just

pitch dark, and it was just when she was in the well, and I was sitting there

under the covers, and the boys knocked on the window -

AB: [laughs]

L: - and scratched - and I - my - I screamed so loudly, I just -

AB: Which boys?

L: They're just some boys in the village. You know Will Phipps?

AB: Mm.

L: He was one of them. Cos he - um - and a boy called James Gardner -

AB: So they were just knocking on the window to frighten you?

L: And - they - cos that window - cos we haven't been at Swaffham Prior

that long - um - one of our windows still - just half the window - we didn't

have enough material for the curtains - so half a window hasn't got curtain

- if you see what I mean.

AB: Mm.

L: And - so we had no way of shutting it, and you just look out in the corner

of your eye, and -

AB: Were you there, Jessica?

J: Mm.

And after watching the film, Lucy sleeps at Jessica's house the next night:

J: And then she came to my house and we slept in a tent in the garden,

and she wanted the flap shut so that all the evil spirits or something

couldn't get in, and I wanted it open so that the insects could get out. Then

we just went back inside.

So it isn't just that the film operates these structures of concealment and revelation:

as we've seen, the same structures are operated by the viewer, and here, it is clear

that she carries them well beyond the film into her life and relationships. This offers

us, I think, a way out of simply seeing the resonance of the sublime as pure affect, or as a purely internal experience of the psyche, explicable in terms of Freud's theory of pleasure, say, but not assimilable to the social or the historical. A more useful image is Volosinov's image (1973), discussed in Chapter 6, of the dialectical relationship between the psyche and "the ideological sign", in which the individual psyche internalizes ideological signs, they become part of the governing unity of the individual consciousness and are made to "ring with subjective tones", and, upon being expressed, return to the outer world of ideology and history.

So Lucy appropriates the historic signs of the sublime, and they work for her, allowing social dramas woven of her own textual mechanics: the torn curtain of the vicarage, the village boys, Jessica's garden, the tent-flap. The girls recruit these fabrics, places, characters, to construct their own dynamic of concealment and revelation behind which lies the imagery of the film - this film, others they know and enjoy, and a set of cultural echoes stretching back to the Romantic sublime, through a series of transformations and distortions, seen from our historical moment, as Jameson suggests (1981), through a kind of x-ray, revealing the shadowy layers of accreted meaning.

We are still left with some of the questions raised above. How exactly does this semiotic mechanism work? What meanings does it carry? How is it historically transformed?

Kant produced conflicting versions of the sublime: a version constructed as rational and elevated, and a version constructed as vulgar and debased - a conflict important to my interest in questions of taste, pleasure, and a popular-elite dialectic; but also to the question of the *semiotic* nature of the sublime.

James Donald, as we have seen, draws on a discussion of Kant's refined aesthetic

theory in *The Critique of Judgment,* which gives an account of the sublime in exact accordance with the Enlightenment ideal of the rational subject. By this stage in Kant's thinking, he has ironed out all the loose ends, and decided that the sublime consists of objects characterised by limitlessness (as opposed to the beautiful, characterised by form). The sensation of the sublime is a feeling of mixed fear and pleasure - awe inspired by the sense of limitlessness; pleasure by our rational ability to conceive of the total *idea* of it:

> The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness,* yet with a super-added thought of its totality. (90)

He distinguishes, as I have observed earlier, between the *mathematically sublime* and the *dynamically sublime.* The former describes the sublime response which, unable imaginatively to grasp the limitless, is able nevertheless to conceive of it through a triumph of reason - to measure it, as it were.

The Dynamic Sublime is different, and consists of a dynamic tension between imagination and reason - a play of pleasurable and unpleasurable forces, as opposed to the apprehension of beauty, which is a state of "restful contemplation". As Kant's description unfolds, however, it looks as if this version of the sublime is more to do with a kind of comfortable (pleasurable) terror - a fear balanced by a certainty that we cannot be harmed (very much like that of the cinema, of course). The sublime is fearful; but we are not afraid - we are confirmed in our security against the terrors of nature:

> Spectacular forces of nature (rocks, storms, hurricanes) make our power of resistance seem trifling. But, provided our own position is secure, their

aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature. (page 111)

The social nature of the sublime is betrayed here, and it is exactly the same point that Bourdieu makes about Kant's aesthetic in general - that it posits a refined aesthetic gaze open only to a privileged elite. The antithesis of this, the pleasures of ordinary people, seem to be indicated here in the *Critique of Judgement*, dismissed as the "vulgar commonplace", those unable to rise to the heights of the sublime. The questions begged are, of course, who gets to join this elite, and what are the qualifications for entry. Bourdieu argues convincingly that Kant, in spite of his attempts to present the "pure gaze" as a transcendent quality, betrays an inconsistent awareness that education and training play a part in its construction.

Already, then, we can see contradictions in Kant's model. To summarise, these are:

• a tension between his two different categories: in both, fear is caused by awesome limitlessness; but the pleasure has two different causes - in the capacity of reason in the one case; and in a kind of pleasurable tension between reason and imagination in the other;

• the role of imagination seems contradictory: in the mathematically sublime, the imagination seems overcome by the sublime; in the dynamically sublime, it plays a more active role, balanced by reason;

• in spite of the transcendent nature Kant claims for his aesthetic, it is clearly determined by a social hierarchy, as Bourdieu demonstrates;

• there are hints of an aesthetically debased condition, the "vulgar commonplace", against which this refined form of the sublime is set.

These contradictions can be explained, I believe, by looking at Kant's project in its historical context. Briefly, my suggestion is that he is attempting to reconcile what are, in fact, irreconcilable desires of the European cultural elite of his time. These desires amount to a kind of cultural and philosophical cleanup campaign, an attempt both to acknowledge the imaginative power of recurring cultural forms and the unsettling social currents they might represent, and to deny the elements of them most inconvenient to the then dominant aesthetic and epistemological norms. The Enlightenment endorsement of the ideal of the rational, cogitative Cartesian subject, and the concomitant belief in the power of Reason as the ennobling constituent of such a subject, is clearly one desire, and, for Kant, an indispensable part of an aesthetic framework. At the same time, though, he betrays the excitement of the sublime as a description of the awesomeness of nature, a favourite topic for Romantic artists, allowing, for instance, a representation of the social and political explosion of the French Revolution (in the second year of which *The Critique of Judgment* was published). Carroll (1990) explains that the horror genre is often seen as the "underside" of the Enlightenment: the emotion to its reason, the dark side of its intellectual light. Though he is cautious about too simple conclusions of this kind, he acknowledges that there are interesting possibilites in this thesis.

Of course, such a view needs to take into account that Enlightenment constructions of the self, in spite of the ideal of rational integrity which appears to us the dominant image from a distorting perspective of historical distance, were themselves contradictory. EJ Hundert (1997) points out how David Hume and Adam Smith, for instance, viewed the self as "a kind of theatre", and how, for them, "social life of necessity resembles a masquerade". He continues by describing Rousseau's opposition to such alienating notions of identity, and his assertion of "certain knowledge of supposedly singular inner states" (page 83) which, in turn, become the model for Romantic formulations of subjectivity. Against this kind of background, then, Kant's efforts to hold the self together become simply one of many, rather than

a typical representative of a tranquil consensus. Furthermore, such divergent accounts of selfhood in the supposed Age of Reason should warn us against too simple a perception either of newly fragmented identities in the late Victorian period, or of the divided subjectivities of Lacanian or postmodernist theory.

If Kant's sublime is an attempt to repress different constructions of the self, it reveals similar fractures in its account of aesthetic pleasure. I have argued in Chapter 5, following Connor (1995), how Kant's aesthetic theory constructs an opposition between a privileged aesthetic based on sublimated pleasure, and a popular aesthetic based on unsublimated pleasure. This popular aesthetic is constructed by Bourdieu out of a close reading of repressions, suppressions, denials and silences in the text of *The Critique of Judgement*. The same is true, though Bourdieu doesn't attend to it, of the versions of the sublime constructed by Kant - they belong to a refined aesthetic, in which the sublime object might be fearfully formless; but is clearly intended to conform to a class of objects distinguished by their ennobling qualities, and distinguished from another class of objects described as vulgar. There is little more to go on in *The Critique of Judgement*, and we would have to operate on a good deal of inference if that were the only text.

Much more revealing is a text produced before Kant had refined his account of the sublime: *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, written twenty-six years before *The Critique of Judgement*, and briefly explored in Chapter 5. Rather than the cleaned-up version of his later work, the *Observations* are exactly that: observations, constituted as sequences of exemplary instances and metaphors, rather than a framework of philosophical propositions. So they reproduce, in condensed form, the metaphors of the sublime characteristic of the period, and are representative of, rather than analytical of, the semiotic field of which gothic horror is a part, producing representations of horror, terror and the sublime embedded in theological and moral uncertainties of the age. It is often the case, in Kant's

exemplars, that the metaphors give semiotic substance to the blind spots of material existence; and they do it in two ways - by producing a metaphor of the area of invisibility or mystery itself; and by filling the unknown space with invented objects or creatures:

> Deep loneliness is sublime, but in a way that stirs terror. Hence, great far-reaching solitudes, like the colossal Komul desert in Tartary, have always given us occasion for peopling them with fearsome spirits, goblins and ghouls. ...
>
> (page 49)

The semiotic options available at the time to authors of the Gothic novel, and later to directors of horror, fantasy and sci fi for constituting terror and awe in varying admixtures of images of emptiness, mystery, limitlessness and concealment on the one hand (space; the ocean; the underworld; the unnameable; the invisible); and fantasy creatures that might, at least in part, fill such spaces on the other - these options are outlined by Kant remarkably fully. He elaborates further, envisaging a continuum of perfect/imperfect, or natural/unnatural, along which the three kinds of the sublime outlined in the *Observations* (the *terrifying*, the *noble* and the *splendid*) each runs. The line which looks most revealing in respect of the horror genre is *the terrifying sublime*. Kant`s description of the transformation of the terrifying from natural to unnatural betrays very clearly both the fascination of such images for the Romantic imagination and the attempt to construct a social hierarchy of taste which classifies certain types of representation as either elevated or debased, the historical forerunners of the modern cultural distinctions which Bourdieu so clearly reveals.

Kant also associates such distortions of the pure sublime with the four humours; again, the conjunction of the sublime with what (to Kant) seems the most degrading influence - the melancholy - seems to produce the semiotic material we would

recognise as the stuff of horror and fantasy, reading almost like a recipe for a Poe story:

> In the deterioration of this character, earnestness declines towards dejection, devotion towards fanaticism, love of freedom to enthusiasm. Insult and injustice kindle vengefulness in him. He is then much to be feared. He defies peril and disdains death. By the perversity of his feeling and the lack of an enlightened reason he takes up the adventurous - inspirations, visions, attacks. If the understanding is still weaker, he hits upon the grotesque - meaningful dreams, presentiments, and miraculous portents. He is in danger of becoming a visionary or a crank. (pages 66/7)

The key determinant of purity/naturalness in Kant's portrait of the sublime is, predictably, reason; and it is in proportion to the apparent distancing from the rational that the sublime becomes, in his account, progressively degraded. Naturally enough, such a distancing is intolerable to Kant's efforts to resolve contradictory contemporary versions of selfhood; and at the same time a threat to the aesthetic rules permitting a distinctive culture for the bourgeois elite. Also, though, the eccentric eruptions within that elite of a Byronic preference for danger, revolution and amorality are recognised, perhaps, in Kant's willingness to entertain the notion of the sublime at all. It is a category so resistant to the taming force of reason, even in its tightly regulated form in *The Critique of Judgement*, that we wonder why exactly he doesn't just reject it outright. His philosophical justifications of it as the supreme confirmation of the power of human reason are much less convincing than his colourful evocation of the thrill of contemplating unpredictable, chaotic forces.

Semiotically, Kant's treatise broadcasts the ambiguity, paradox and volatility characteristic of the sublime and the uncanny. Upon his structure of the

perfect/imperfect continuum, for instance, we could superimpose a semiotic structure of abstract/concrete: he associates with an elevated, pure (and therefore rational) form of the sublime such abstractions as `solitude`, `height`, `depth`, `past`, future`; and with imperfect, irrational forms a veritable junkshop of gothic props: bones, ghosts, tombs, relics. So the `rational` becomes associated with the abstract unknowable; and the irrational with the palpable, the concrete, the visible. Intrinsic to these structures of perfect/imperfect, rational/irrational is, of course, the Enlightenment subject; and it is the threat to the integrity of this subject which most worries Kant: a "lack of enlightened reason" causes decline into "the adventurous" and "the grotesque", the subject becoming the opposite of the Enlightenment ideal - a "visionary" or "crank".

So Kant`s construction of the perfect/imperfect continuum projects both an evaluation of forms of subjectivity and the tastes associated with them; and the semiotic mechanism by which these social phenomena are represented in the context of the sublime.

It is the descendant of this mechanism that Lucy and Jessica operate in their uses of *Silence of the Lambs.* Their fascination with images of emptiness pregnant with potential horror, which they read both in film and in the rooms and gardens of their homes, betrays a lineage of imagery connecting them with Kant`s sublime, a lineage in which the representations of fear and the unknown are used to negotiate and explore political and social uncertainties of the age, and the subjectivities bound up in these.

Central to these semiotic mechanisms is the idea of the unknown: the thrill of the sublime, for Kant and the Romantics as for Lucy and Jessica, is the simultaneous pleasure and fear of deliberately contemplating the unknown, the semiotic operation of this contemplation being to both deny and to give form to the unknown object.

How might these processes be historically transformed? And what is the ideological purpose of a semiotic that allows simultaneous revelation and concealment, concession and denial?

Firstly, of course, the object of fear and delight itself will change. A dominant hypothesis explaining the thrill of horror since psychoanalysis is that of the "Return of the Repressed", outlined briefly at the beginning of this chapter, and explored at more length in Chapter 8. For the moment, it is enough to observe that the nature of the social repressed will change with time. For the Victorian bourgeoisie, the image of Bertha Rochester represents the twin threats of madness and the Black woman. For 19th century Britain, the image of Frankenstein's monster is popularly evoked to represent the threat of Irish nationalism, as Chris Baldick argued recently (*Frankenfest*, Royal Institution,19th January, 1996); and later to represent a different rebellious proletariat in Fordist America (Moretti, 1988). For 50s America, the teenage werewolf represents the threat of the newly emergent teenager (Jancovich, 1996). And later, it stands for the taboo of incest, argues James Twitchell (1985). For Lucy and Jessica, perhaps the higher modality of monsters based on a more documentary sense of sexual assault suggests a real concern and fear - and perhaps fascination - with precisely these features of the real world. Perhaps the monster-metaphor has become more transparent for them.

These social anxieties can be articulated through the sublime precisely because of its capacity, as Kant made clear, to represent the limitless. For each of these kinds of social anxiety, the limitless is that which lies beyond the limits permitted by prevailing social norms: limits of taste, political opinion, sexual mores, the new power of hitherto powerless social groups. The limit is the closure which these norms would impose; the sublime pushes us up to the limit, as its derivation suggests: *Sub limen*, "up to the lintel". John Carpenter, director of *Hallowe'en*, describes the effect of seeing a film which took him to the limits of taste (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*,

Hooper, 1976):

> In 1976 I saw a movie that I thought went right up to the line of taste in The
> Texas Chainsaw Massacre. It rode the taste-line that separates something
> unspeakably awful from something that you can handle, and I recall after I
> saw it I went to sleep and I slept like a baby because it had, sort of,
> pacified my soul, I was able to go down into the depths of human depravity
> and come up and not really be damaged by it. (Carpenter, 1994)

By now, then, the association of the sublime with the kind of ennobling qualities insisted on by Kant has given way to the possibilities of a sublime which, for cathartic purposes, courts images of depravity - much more like Julia Kristeva's image of the Abject, which she depicts as the other side of the sublime, "edged with the sublime" (1982).

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre makes the point about the semiotic of concealment and revelation very well. Popular impressions of the film at the time were that it revealed images of horror in a disturbingly explicit way. In fact, however, a good deal is left to the viewer's imagination, as the cuts between shots imply the most extreme moments of horror rather than revealing them, as Carol Clover shows in a detailed discussion of the film (1993).

However, the question of taste is a larger one which I will return to in the next chapter. My concern here is to identify the textual mechanics of such forms of revelation and concealment, and how they embody ideological structures and meanings in two particular ways.

Firstly, such images operate dialectically on the classic principle of Eisenstein's

montage: the closed eye only works because of the after-image received by the open eye, or the predicted image it imagines is coming next. In the text, the forest only works because of the werewolf it contains; while the werewolf robbed of its contextual darkness (forest or city), would fail as a sublime image. We picture our anxieties, like Kant, by imagining an empty desert, then by filling it with ghouls and goblins. The ideological structures which force us to repress such anxieties also allow us, though obliquely, to picture them, allowing us also the options of confirming our fears and slamming the door on them; or of eroding the fear and pushing the door a little further open each time. As Metz remarked (1982) of Freudian repression, the censorship barrier is fluid and leaky, rather than fixed and solid.

Secondly, however, the structures of taste which Bourdieu observes in Kant, and which he argues still dominate modern social structures of aesthetic preference, unsettle this dialectic. Kant refuses to accept one pole of the semiotic continuum, as we've seen, and privileges the pole characterised by images of emptiness. Over a hundred years later, Mikhail Bakhtin (1965/1984) sets up camp at the other end of this continuum of aesthetic and semiotic preference, asserting the benefits of the carnivalesque, of a "grotesque realism" which permits a visceral reversal of dominant aesthetic value and the refined, cerebral imagery in which it is represented. We need to ask, then, what are the effects of these two types of unsettling, and whether either kind can effectively banish its polar opposite.

There are two kinds of impossibility here. Firstly, it is actually impossible really to represent limitlessness, or to construct images which are truly empty - only to suggest these qualities. So a category which seems to be beyond the semiotic is in fact brought within the semiotic; or, in psychoanalytic terms, the repressed is given conscious expression.

The second kind of impossibility is that one pole of this continuum of empty/full,

unseen/seen, concealment/revelation, can actually do without the other, as Kant seems to try to do. This is, in fact, what the modern version of the `pure` gaze critiqued by Bourdieu attempts, however, in an aesthetic which praises Hitchcock for building suspense without revealing the horrific object explicitly. The same aesthetic, of course, will condemn popular body horror for tasteless explicitness, as Philip Brophy (1986) condemns Cronenberg, Hooper and Landis for the excess of modern body horror:

> ... the contemporary horror film often discards the sophistication of such a traditionally well-crafted handling of cinematic language. (page 8)

It is this sophistication which Brophy describes as "the Hitchcock debt", and he constructs an evaluative opposition between what he describes as the "telling" mode of the more restrained aesthetic (Bourdieu`s `pure gaze`; Connor`s `sublimated aesthetic`) and the "showing" mode of body horror, which he claims is "photographic", and which he presents as aesthetically degraded.

This argument is unconvincing, because it rests on an unsustainable attempt to split the two poles of the continuum, as Kant also tried to do. Brophy offers no reason for us not to suppose that this is simply a matter of degree, or that the twin structures of revelatory excess and sublimated concealment aren`t in fact interdependent.

In fact, Hitchcock`s most celebrated horror sequence, the shower episode in *Psycho*, demonstrably rests on a dialectic of concealment and revelation. The semiotic of concealment - the silhouette, shower curtain, and use of extreme closeup - only operate effectively in a montage that also employs shocking revelation - the knife, the blood, and the final shot of the dead, open eye (illustration 3).

So, for Lucy and Jessica, the darkness of the tent and the night is completed by the

Illustration 7.3: *Psycho*

Janet Leigh`s "dead eye", from the shower sequence

"evil spirits" they imagine; the darkness of their game and of Buffalo Bill`s house is completed by the monster it contains; the blindness of the heroine, by the allseeing nightglasses of the villain. If Hitchcock`s sublime depends as much on the revelatory as on the concealed, although its aesthetic (or that of its champions) privileges the latter, then popular horror, in spite of the bad press attracted by its images of excess, also depends on images of emptiness. At this point, however, it becomes difficult to assign particular films easily to categories determined by taste. Carol Clover points out how the horror genre has become upwardly mobile in recent years, using, in fact, *The Silence of the Lambs* as an example (1992: page 232).

Let us return, then, to Lucy and Jessica, to anchor and review some of the features of the sublime, to see how well it works as a descriptive model in their case.

The film constructs images of sublimely terrifying spaces. Buffalo Bill`s house inspires terror through Hitchcockian suspense, the narrative syntagm constructed of alternating point-of-view shots emphasising the enhanced sight of the killer and the blindness of the victim. This is the equivalent to Kant`s empty desert; and, in terms of the semiotic mechanism, we might remember Burke`s requirement that "to make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary". This space has a curious ambiguity which, on the whole, is missing from the natural sublime spaces of

the Romantic imagination: it is rendered sublimely limitless by the darkness. It is a limited, formal, internal, familiar, domestic space made limitless, formless, external (in the sense of alien, exotic), unfamiliar by the darkness, the sublime chiaroscuro Deleuze observes of German Expressionist cinema; and by the formal operations of the point-of-view shots that signify alternating sight/blindness.

But this is only half the story. The text is controlled also by the reader. Lucy makes her own sublime fear and pleasure, also by formal semiotic operations: she isn`t simply positioned by the point-of-view shots, but displays shifting points of identification. Furthermore, she has her own version of the night-glasses, and can conceal or reveal the sublime image simply by opening or shutting her eyes; or by choosing to recall the film, replaying it mentally; or by building it into her games in the dark. Even more extensively, the semiotic structures of concealment and revelation are replicated in the environment, and lived through as if the movie is articulated with the narrative of the flapping curtain, the boys knocking on the window, the garden, the tentflap.

This engagement with *Silence of the Lambs* seems largely to operate around textual representations of emptiness: darkness, blindness, suggestion. However, it would be untrue to leave it as a simple equivalent to Kant`s desert. The "ghosts, spirits and ghouls" with which we populate the desert are there too. The text provokes us into imagining the killer who we`re prevented from seeing; and the bath full of human skin of which we`re given only a glimpse. And the other monster of the film, Hannibal Lecter, provokes in the mind of viewers images of the mask of human skin he uses to escape from prison (though, again, we`re given only a glimpse of this); and of his cannibalistic habits (again, these are suggested rather than shown). This begins to look like the Hitchcock aesthetic Brophy promotes so vigorously - we are shown the sublime space, and the realisation of the monster is left to our imagination. And it is true, I think, that this movie does operate further towards the "empty" end of the

continuum. However, that it is quite possible for a viewer to reconstruct the movie in terms of shockingly replete images, rather than subtly elliptical ones - as Lucy herself does in the first few remarks she makes about why the film is so frightening.

To summarise. My argument in this chapter has been that the fear and pleasure of horror texts, examined both from the point of view of the history of discourses of the sublime, and from the point of view of specific contemporary examples of audience behaviour, reveals a number of features:

• the fear is a fear of the unknown, figured by signs of emptiness or of fantastic plenitude: Kant's empty desert, and the ghouls and goblins with which we fill it.

• but the unknown will always represent a known anxiety; or at least an unconsciously-known anxiety (more of this in the next chapter); and this will be specific to each historical moment, each viewer, each text

• the pleasure is partly occasioned by learning to cope with the fear, as Buckingham suggests; and as Freud also suggests in his image of the fort/da game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (again, more of this in the next chapter)

• coping with the fear - and finding the pleasure - is organised around viewing strategies which are analogous to the mechanisms of visual production; these are structured, in horror, around a dialectic of concealment and revelation, offering the viewer the possibilities of widely differing points of identification, as well as the controlling vantage point of directorial power

• this dialectic allows, in principle, a dynamic of fear and pleasure dependent on continued repression of the object of anxiety; but also the reverse - an opening up, a confrontation of the object

• the dialectic of concealment/revelation is historically aligned with structures of elite and popular taste, and an aesthetic of sublimated emptiness opposed to one of revelatory excess. This opposition can be read in terms of Kant's preference for the sublimated aesthetic, and in terms of Bakhtin's preference for its opposite, for the

carnivalesque, and grotesque realism.

In the next chapter, I will examine how these structures can be aligned with Freud`s arguments in his essay `On The Uncanny`, and how Volosinov`s dialectic between the psyche and the ideological sign might be observed in the way young people read contemporary horror. In examining these readings, I want to see how the young people who have made them deal with images of liminality, with texts which represent the limits of experience and subjectivity, and of the semiotic which frames them. What boundaries in their own worlds does this allow them to transgress, imagine beyond, and bring within safe limits?

Chapter 8: Emptiness and Plenitude: semiotics of the sublime

The previous chapter has explored how the sublime, from the Enlightenment to the present day, has allowed spectators to find appropriate representations of their fears, representations which permit them both to look beyond the limits of their experience and their subjectivity, and at the same time to transform and extend these by bringing such troubling questions within view, giving them semiotic form. This chapter will examine how these representations of limitlessness and limit are constituted in the act of reading a text through the continuum of revelation and concealment I have referred to. How are they realised in the cultural history of which the text is a part, and in the history of the individual spectator, and how do these two histories interact? Along with these questions, I want to examine Freud's ideas about the uncanny, and what they might contribute to a theory of the sublime. Finally, I will look at other more recent constructions of the sublime, in the context of theories of the postmodern. As in the last chapter, I want to examine these wider perspectives against the readings of a number of actual spectators.

Beyond the lintel: the sublime and the "extra-semiotic"

The idea of the limit, or boundary, indicated by the origins of the word *sublime*, raises a number of questions. If it is the limit of the known, how is it imposed? What is the "unknown" that lies beyond it? What is happening when we push against this limit, and when we perform the contradictory attempt to represent what lies beyond? Do these representations invariably result in opaque signifiers whose effect is to emphasise the mystery of the unknown, compounding its mythic obscurity, closing down repressed ideas, increasing fears, phobias, anxieties? Or are they a

progressive attempt to come to terms with the unknown, to give it semiotic form, to face up to the fears?

This theme of an ineffable dimension, which would seem to defy representation (but which actually, as in images of, say, the divine, invites a proliferation of representational ingenuity in certain cultures, and injunctions against representation in others), appears in various forms in the theories of language, identity and culture to which James Donald (1992) refers. All these theories necessarily rest on the paradox that the unpresentable is, in some contradictory way, capable of representation, though only ever obliquely - hence the imagery of boundaries, transgression, ambivalence, inarticulacy which pervade the theories of Freud, Kristeva, Cixous and Foucault to which Donald refers; and hence, also, the pervasiveness of such imagery in horror texts themselves. How can we understand such ambiguous images?

Theo Van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress, in an article (1992) on Barthes` theory of the photographic image, argue the case for approaching cultural analysis through looking at what is represented, and how the means of representation used by the text and its readers produce new meanings, new limits of meaning. They suggest that Barthes` strategy (by the late stage of *Camera Lucida*) of attempting to move beyond the semiotic, postulating an ineffable dimension of experience, identity, apprehension, is in the end mystificatory, throwing up new, exclusive myths instead of exposing the power structures of the old ones, which should be the proper business of semiotic analysis. Instead, they suggest, we should realize that the attempt to constitute areas of experience beyond the semiotic is in fact an illusion, since any such description is itself a semiotic act. In recognising this, they outline their strategy of a social semiotics, which is to analyse new meanings brought within the semiotic (and thus, democratically, made available to a wider audience), rather than to speculate on meanings driven beyond the semiotic (which would be elitist,

mythological, and in any case, false).

Though Barthes' *punctum*, which constitutes the ineffable dimension criticized by Kress and Van Leeuwen, is not conceived of by Barthes in terms of the sublime, it does seem to share some of its characteristics: a semiotic opacity, a demand to be made sense of in affective rather than cognitive terms; a resistance to limit and frame.

The issue between the two positions taken by Barthes and by Kress and Van Leeuwen clarifies how audiences' engagements with horror are to be understood. If we accept Barthes' image, it becomes easy to perceive the sublime as a kind of revelation, not to be reduced, resistant to decoding. This would allow us to make a distinction between one kind of response - to do with, say, relatively transparent features of the film, such as the power of the female protagonist; and a qualitatively different response to a set of much more opaque signifiers, those of the sublime itself, especially what I have referred to as the `empty sublime`. More worryingly, though, it raises the question of *who* is able to perceive the sublime, and through what special talents - as Barthes' *punctum*, and his "third meaning" of the cinematic image, also beg the question of who exactly is equipped to perceive these obscure and ineffable meanings. Kress and Van Leeuwen's argument, on the other hand would oblige us to continue to struggle to bring the sublime within the realm of the semiotic - indeed, to recognise that by attempting to describe it at all, we have, to some extent, done exactly that. We would also have to acknowledge that images of the sublime do not operate through anything like Barthes' *punctum* or *third meaning*, but are a part of the semiotic process like any other set of signs, and thus susceptible to analysis and to comprehension without the need for special insights of an intuitive kind.

Rather than just dispensing with Barthes' punctum, though, it is worth attempting to

recuperate some of its features. The attractions of Barthes' argument in *Camera Lucida* (1993) for an understanding of the sublime are:

• the *punctum* is associated with an affect, as is the sublime

• it is presented as in some way an unconscious response (this is clear enough in Barthes' distinction between it and the *studium* - the latter he invests with his "sovereign consciousness"; the former breaks through this, punctures it)

• the distinction makes a Freudian division between types of social awareness and aspects of subjectivity associated with them: the *studium*, superego-like, is obedient to social morality; the *punctum*, id-like, is subversive and amoral

• distinct categories of pleasure are associated with the two: liking/disliking with the studium; pain and ecstasy with the punctum (as well as a kind of Proustian nostalgia, which Lyotard, as Donald notes, associates with a postmodern vulgar sublime).

The drawbacks are precisely those identified by Kress and Van Leeuwen - that Barthes deliberately mystifies the *punctum*, placing it in an ineffable dimension beyond the semiotic (he claims it is, unlike the *studium*, without code). Kress and Van Leeuwen argue convincingly that this description, for one thing, proves itself false in giving semiotic form to the punctum; and that there is nothing beyond the semiotic.

This borderline of the semiotic is particularly crucial to horror films, and to their central semiotic and ideological strategy, which is, as I have argued, to simultaneously conceal and reveal images of terror. For this strategy to work, we need both to see and not to see, to open our eyes wide and to screw them shut. We need both the sensation of shocking, detailed presence, and of a giddy emptiness extending limitlessly into the distance. We need to be mystified by venturing beyond the semiotic; and to be reassured by bringing the terrifying object back to dry land.

In fact, as I have argued in Chapter 7, these twin poles are not separate option, but a

dialectic, mutually dependent. I want to look at a concrete example of how this operates in the writing of one 13 year old girl as she writes about a horror film in an English lesson. Before I do this, however, there is another moment in the history of the sublime to review - again, prompted by Donald`s essay - and that is Freud`s theory of the uncanny.

The Sublime, The Uncanny And Psychoanalysis

If we set Freud`s theory of the uncanny (1919/1990) ) against Kant`s sublime, the historical transformation of the category emerges, at least for the purposes of the present study, as a transforming representation of subjectivity. For Kant, the sublime is a subjective experience; and the subject who is in part confirmed by their ability to experience the sublime is, as we have seen, the rational, cogitative Cartesian subject. The integrity of this ideal subject, far from being threatened by the formlessness of the sublime, is apparently confirmed by it, in the triumphant capacity of reason to conceive of the sublime at all. The sublime becomes another way to serve the metaphysics of self-presence which Derrida (1974) describes as replacing God as the determination of an absolute presence from which authentic expression derives:

> In the history of this treatment [of the metaphor of spiritual writing], the most decisive separation appears at the moment when, at the same time as the science of nature, the determination of absolute presence is constituted as self-presence, as subjectivity. It is the moment of the great rationalisms of the seventeenth century. From then on, the condemnation of fallen and finite writing will take another form, within which we still live: it is non-self-presence that will be denounced. (page 16)

The attempt to produce self-presence is, Derrida says, always doomed to failure, as it can only proceed through the medium of signs, the `logic of supplementarity` which Derrida describes as the characteristic property of writing as it is conceived in the Western tradition. The transcendental ideal of self-presence, then, always becomes the divided self, just as the quest for the transcendental signifier becomes the divided nature of writing: the supplement is always both an addition, an extra presence :

> The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. (page144)

- but it also replaces, fills a lack, an attempt to fill the absence, the lack of the authentic presence:

> It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*, if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image of, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppleant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-the-place* [*tient-lieu*]. (page 145)

Derrida`s image of supplementarity, to make an analogy between it and the sublime, suggests two features of the sublime as it is transformed by the apparatus of psychoanalytic theory. The first, as I have already noted, is in the idea of the divided self. Just as writing both evokes self-presence and replaces it, adds to it and compensates for its absence, so the contradictory attempt to represent the sublime is an attempt to build and ratify an integrated self, as in Kant`s project, and also a recognition of the fragile limits of such a self.

The second is the *location* of the sublime object, as imagined in the semiotic act which represents the sublime, whether this be a text of fiction or, as in Kant`s case, a

philosophical treatise. For Kant, it is out there - in Nature: the desert, oceans, mountains. It is imagined, therefore, as an emptiness, infinitely distant, a sign of absence: but also as a supplement to the rational self, and therefore an enrichment - what Derrida describes as "a plenitude enriching another plenitude", and so a sign of presence (page 144). For Freud, the object of the sensation of uncanniness becomes the psyche itself, for which the class of uncanny images stand in substitution: so, from this moment, the object of the sublime can be located internally, its vast expanses and dark spaces becoming images of the mind. As Volosinov points out, the psyche can only exist through the material sign; but the sublime is that class of signs which point back into the mind, back to the imaginary darkness before the sign takes shape, evoking both the fear of an absence of the semiotic, and therefore of the self; and a relief that constitution of the semiotic, and thus of the self, has been possible.

Freud suggests that the effect of the uncanny proceeds from two kinds of unconscious source: from repressed infantile complexes; and from primitive animistic beliefs which we have culturally superseded. He presents an image of the uncanny (*unheimlich*) place, which Clover (1992) adopts in her analysis of terrifying places in horror movies. Freud's association of this place with a maternal space (womb/vagina) explains its troubling nature in terms of oedipal conflict. Julia Kristeva develops the image in her metaphor of the *chora*, the womblike space where she locates her pre-symbolic semiotic, and which she associates with her notion of the *abject*, which she presents as, in a sense, the other side of the sublime coin (1982). It is this complex of metaphors of an emptiness pregnant with the semiotic of horror which I borrow for my model of the sublime.

The sublime, then, constructed by Kant as a confirmatory instance of the integrated subject, is revealed historically as an instance of precisely the opposite - of the lack of such a form of subjectivity, rather, an image of divided subjectivity. It is Freud's

elaborate topography of the psyche which allows the return of those aspects of the sublime which Kant attempted to repress: the proliferation of popular imagery he condemns as "visionary" and "adventurous". This insistence of the sublime in popular imagination on producing images of irrationality that Kant perceived as a threat to the integrity of the self is clearly grist to the mill of psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, Kant's description of the sublime in his earlier treatise clearly recognises, in its imagery of the four humours, warring images of the self. The Freudian/Lacanian recognition of the divided self as both a threat and a necessary move into adult subjectivity provides a compelling account of some of the effects of images and narratives of horror. Freud analyses, for instance, the ambiguous nature of one particular signifier perennial to the horror genre - the double. Freud argues its initial benign effect as a narcissistic confirmer of the ego, and then its uncanny, threatening nature as an inexplicable throwback to that childhood time, now superseded. He makes the analogy between this growth from childhood to adulthood and the development of a society from one in which the primitive religious belief uses the soul as a double ensuring survival after death to one in which maturation beyond such belief transforms the figure of the soul into a troubling representative of that death:

> When all is said and done, the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted - a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The 'double' has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons." (1990: page 357)

The ambiguous nature of the sublime is a theme also observed by Donald, in the texts he uses to trace his genealogy of ideas of the uncanny, the fantastic and the sublime. He even generates ambiguities in texts not explicitly productive of them - so, in reponse to Jameson's suggestion that monstrous fictional figures represent

the 'Other', "evil because he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar", Donald points out that it can be read quite the other way round - that the Other is both a necessary indicator of the limits of identity, and another facet of that identity, and thus "terrifyingly *similar*" (as Freud suggests of the double).

This offers us also a way of not only recognising the ambiguity of such texts, but also of stabilising such ambiguity, to some degree. Monstrous images or narratives of the Other unsettle, because they semioticize the hitherto unknown; but they also reassure - for the same reason; that is, they reduce the terror of the unspoken, the unseen, offering a degree of narrative closure.

I will move, now, to a consideration of one example of how young people might interpret images of the sublime.

The Empty Sublime: a Case Study

Clare has watched *The Company of Wolves*, and is working with Johanna (whose work has been considered in Chapter 4), and Laura, on a commentary on the images they have chosen from the film.

In this interview, Clare, having been fairly dismissive of the thrills of the gory bits, notices how the location of the "horror" in *The Company of Wolves* shifts from external to internal images:

> C I just put [in her assignment], about, you normally think of inside as
>   safe, and outside as where everything awful happens.
>
> J Yeah, but inside you're trapped, inside, like, people come in and they
>   lock the doors and you're all trapped inside (and get all scared -
>
> C   (I know, but in most films

and things if people are being chased (outside they run sort of inside

J   (Yeah, like in the woods -

C   Yeah, I mean that -

J   - or dark -

C   - like in that -

J   - get to somewhere - inside -

C   - but then most of horror - basically all horror films - I mean some of it`s based around true stuff, but - is - comes from - the imagination - and that`s inside - so   -

J   - psychos, psychos! [laughs]

AB   Why is the outside frightening? More than the inside?

C   Cos you - it goes -

J   Cos it`s a bit - it could be anywhere -

AB   It goes on and on - it`s got no end -

C   Yeah, whereas the inside -

AB   The inside?

C   It`s kind of - restricted.

AB   Restricted?

J   Yeah.

     [...]

AB   And how does that work in this film - in *The Company of Wolves*? This inside/outside business?

C   Well she`s - I mean all the time it`s coming from her inside, and yet everything that`s horrible, except at the end, is outside.

AB   And what happens at the end?

C   Well it all changes, that she escapes outside - inside is -

J   (she changes -

C   (- this horror, and she just - her way of (escaping it -

J   (she turns into, sort of a - goes on the other side. Dunno, cos -

AB When?

J Cos she`s all safe - safe with her mum and like - her plans, and then she goes out and she`s a completely different person - then she turns into a - someone weird.

These girls` reading of Rosaleen`s bedroom, inverted in the final sequence of the film to become, as they realise, the place of terror, recognises the paradox around which the sublime is structured. Clare has developed a structural understanding of how horror can be both interior and exterior; and how this might represent its origin in the mind. Her understanding - and that of Johanna - is perhaps related also to the representation of psychological horror in film ("psychos, psychos!").

Clare`s final piece of writing, about an image showing Rosaleen`s bedroom, in which she dreams the story of the film (Illustration 1) seems to demonstrate that this complex syntagm of the sublime, in which the monster meets the empty space, and the exterior space collapses into its interior opposite, can be read with fascination by a teenager, and related to the structures of teenage female social and sexual identities in which she is implicated.

Just before this shot, the camera pans slowly around the room at last resting on Rosaleen lying asleep.This shows the whole atmosphere of the room which seems dark and mysterious. The open window, I think tries to give an element of scariness even though it is only the beginning. By the time you get to this shot, you have already seen the main elements of the film, and looking out of the window you see the wood where the majority of the film is set. This shows a comparison to the safeness of the inside.Throughout the film, you see these comparisons, and it always seems that inside is more like reality than outside, which is where the main parts of horror happen. This reverses in the last scene,(set in the grandmothers house- Rosaleen and the wolf) In this scene, the inside is

unsafe and the outside an escape. Although we always think that horror is outside and that you are safe inside, actually the majority of horror comes right from inside us. I think that probably Angela Carter and Neil Jordon *[sic]* (directors/ writers) were thinking about this when they wrote and filmed this scene.

The most obvious element of the film, seems its amount of comparisons, for example, there is the changes between light and dark and between inside and out. Everyone seems to come across as the opposite to what they are in reality. Rosaleen in the dream seems confident and in control, where as in reality she seems confused and upset. The family in reality seem rich, they have a large house etc but in Rosaleen's dream they are living in a small village house and seem much more "common".This is obviously an important concept in the film and perhaps shows what Rosaleen would like to be. I think there is a lot in this scene but it is a problem that a lot of its detail you do not realise until you watch it for the second time as most people only watch a film once.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES
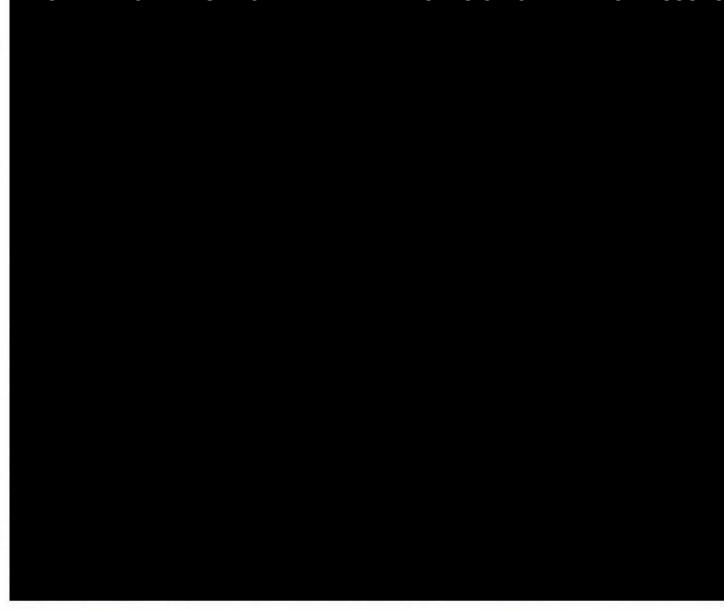
Illustration 8.1:
Clare`s chosen image from
The Company of Wolves:
Rosaleen`s bedroom

This response registers an identification with signifiers of adolescent anxiety and divided identity ("confused and upset"/"confident and in control"), as well as reading

the point-of-view, another form of identification, invited by the camera, planting herself as viewer in the "you" pronoun in the position of Rosaleen confronting the empty sublime outside the window. She also recognises, though she cannot resolve, the anomic implications of the fragmented social identities Rosaleen represents: both rich and poor, unhappy with both conditions.

Clare's writing also reveals the semiotic opacity of the sublime - its definitive resistance to semiotic clothing; the difficulties and opportunities it offers as a signified.

Related to it is the *affect* of the sublime, less obvious here than in responses to the spectacular images of transformation, but still, perhaps, distinguishable in Clare's efforts to describe the elusive and paradoxical effects of the horror she observes. This kind of observation, reading the emptinesses of the text with the excitement of new understandings, looks a little like Barthes' distinction between *studium* and *punctum* (1993: 25 ff) - the more dutiful observations about Rosaleen's economic conditions perhaps corresponding to the former; the insights into the fleeting horror to the latter. In this context, it's important to remember Kress and Van Leeuwen's critique of Barthes' *punctum* (1989), discussed above. Is there any sense in which Clare's writing exemplifies the points at issue there?

My suggestion is that she demonstrates something like a synthesis of the two positions. Her response contains the shift of perspective Barthes describes in apprehending the punctum, and some signs of the affective engagement it demands. On the other hand, she is trying hard to overcome its resistance to decoding, making the very attempt Kress and Van Leeuwen require - to bring the ineffable within the realm of the semiotic. The following aspects of her reading indicate what I take to be this balance between affective, intuitive engagement and explicit decoding.

• There is evidence of identification, at least indicated by her choice of these scenes of the girl's bedroom, and her interest in the fragmented nature of Rosaleen's identity: her unhappiness, her lack of control in the waking world, her fearlessness in the dream-world.

• There is a sustained degree of conscious interpretation at a high level, a conceptualisation of the way the affect of horror is related to the composition of the syntagm, both synchronic and diachronic; of the way the camera constructs spectator point-of-view; of the levels of narrative indicating different modalities, and how these in turn construct the central character. In short, she is using a conscious and sophisticated grammar of film, which is capable of generating its own interpretative structures. She invents her own structural reading of the sublime, its main components being an opposition of exteriority and interiority. This degree of abstraction derives in part from the curricular project on horror of which this work is part. The concept of horror she is elaborating here sems to qualify both as what Vygotsky (1962) terms a "spontaneous concept" and as a "scientific" one. "Spontaneous", however, is misleading. "Horror" is a concept derived in the first place from social experience beyond the classroom. It has then become the equivalent of a "scientific" concept in the classroom, as it has been subjected to explicit enquiry, divided into a number of properties, examined through a series of hypotheses, observed in historical sequences, and so on. Clare has taken on this movement from social pleasure to a kind of scientific enquiry, and developed it further. Buckingham makes the point, however (1993c), that Vygotsky's notion of "scientific concepts" is flawed in two senses: that it posits an ideal of abstract thought which seems to be beyond any social context; and that it does not recognise sufficiently the social processes involved in such mental operations. In this case, the extract of interview above demonstrates the importance of Clare's talk and relationship with Johanna in formulating these complex ideas. Also, her writing shows that the abstract idea of the interior/exterior opposition she has developed is

still intricately related with affective engagement, pleasurable identification, and understandings which owe as much to subcultural involvement with film and TV as to the quasi-academic discourses of the classroom.

• She recognises images of exteriority (woods) as signifying the `beyond` of Rosaleen`s subjectivity, and perhaps her own: a beyond of adult sexuality, but also a beyond offering an imagined escape from the interior of the home, both reassuring and threatening, a part of a set of anomic and disintegrating relationships within a modern wealthy family. She also observes images of interiority which invert, the domestic scene which becomes image of the psyche, of adolescent sexuality, of the ruptured hymen - the bedroom become the place of horror, as in Dracula, as in the babysitter narratives so popular with teenage girls. The limitlessness of the woods invades the limited space of the bedroom. She also picks up images of liminality, such as the window itself: "The open window, I think tries to give an element of scariness even though it is only the beginning".

• She shows a preference for the empty sublime, a choice of this synchronic syntagm over that of the werewolf transformation scenes. Is this a preference of those aspects of the film that gesture towards the pure gaze, the art-house movie? Or is it a gendered choice, the image of the contemporary teenage girl`s bedroom remaining more powerfully in her mind than the images of spectacular horror? I suspect that both are true: like many of the girls in these courses, she fixes on the "modern Rosaleen" as a point of identification and interest; but she`s also choosing this part of the film because of an ambition to analyse a more difficult part, and avoid the (apparently) easier pleasures of the sequences of popular horror. However, in spite of its semiotic invitation to view it as sublimated, this end of the sublime is replete in every detail with the lurking signifiers of excess: the moon, the wolf, the scream: and the lingering semiotic of slo-mo and closeup.

The empty sublime and hypotactic narratives

A further point to make about the "empty sublime" is that its pleasures and fears might be bound up with particular narrative structures and reading strategies. Broadly speaking, perhaps these can be described as the hypotactic structures and responses described by Hodge and Tripp (1986). The logic behind my suggestion is twofold. Firstly, that, while a "replete" image can be terrifying on its own, as a synchronic syntagm, even devoid of the all-important soundtrack, it is hard to see how a similar single frame showing the "empty" sublime can be terrifying on its own. It could only inspire fear (and pleasure) as part of a diachronic syntagm, deriving its power from the preceding sequence, from the soundtrack, from the process of gradually unveiling of visual and auditory clues about the hidden monster, or from the viewer's reading of its generic significance. Secondly, the mechanism of concealment, as in Brophy's argument about Hitchcock (discussed in chapter 7), seems to be associated with an aesthetic of sublimation, and structures of taste which repudiate the spectacular, the grotesque, and, by implication, the popular. Is it possible, then, to extend this argument to propose that such an aesthetic also prefers narrative complexity over simplicity, and opacity over transparency?

In fact, there is no good case to be made here for simple value judgements, either to prefer supposed aesthetic values of "subtletly" or "complexity" as Brophy seems to do; or to invert such preferences in a championship of the popular, as Fiske (1990) does. For one thing, this apparent continuum of complexity/simplicity is far from clear, and it may be that texts appear complex or difficult (and the reverse) as much for reasons of culture as for any intrinsic complexity. For another, my argument throughout this study is that we need texts of all kinds; and they need, depend on, derive from each other, in the dialogic play that is the development of culture and the subjectivities that produce it and are produced by it.

However, the fact remains that readers *experience* texts as difficult or easy, complex or simple, and we need, in every case, to examine why this might be so. In *The Company of Wolves*, some clear patterns emerge. For instance, when asked to write a letter to an imaginary friend, describing the film immediately after watching it, there was evidence that both boys and girls could make good sense of the very hypotactic structure of the narrative. So we have:

The story is a dream and the girl in a dream is the main part (boy)

its about a girl who falls asleep and dreams her sister dies and she gets told a lot of stories about wolves the whole film is a dream (boy)

The story has more than one story inside, but the main story is about a girl who meets a wolf when she travels to her granny's and when she gets there she is turned into a wolf, but during the story she tells people or her granny tells people stories about wolves. The whole thing is actually a dream by another girl. The story is quite complicated and the ending, is espeically difficult to understand. (girl)

However, every single response in this activity by a girl follows broadly the same pattern: it identifies the dream structure with its subordinate narratives, and explains them, more or less at length. The boys' responses are much less consistent. One soon abandons an explanation of the structure, and sidesteps first to disparaging comments about the film in general ("its one of the worst, corniest, weirdest, crapest [*sic*] films ever") and then to a bit he liked ("the only realistic OK part was when the wolf came to his ex-wife (as human) and then transformed"). Another jumps straight to a brief account of the end; and then, again, to a 'best bit': "The best bit is when the man tears the skin off his face".

The response which signals most distance from and puzzlement about the film is this one, by Adam:

> This film is very odd to me. I find that I cant catch the grip of the film. I like the gore in it like when the old womens head gets choped [sic] off. The end was very complicated at the part when she was in bed.

Adam's remarks capture neatly the contrast between the replete sublime, structured around spectacular images of popular horror ("I like the gore in it like when the old womens head gets choped off") and the empty sublime, characterised by narrative complexity ("The end was very complicated at the part when she was in bed"). It *seems* as though he is a reader who simply cannot cope with the complexity of the narrative, and is driven to paratactic reading strategies; but the situation, as his interview shows, is not quite what it seems. At first, Adam actually makes explicit his trouble with the extreme hypotaxis of the film: "This film is very odd to me. I find that I cant catch the grip of the film." When selecting his images for the final task of the project, he unhesitatingly chose (like many of the boys) the most spectacular scenes of transformation, which suggests that this repeated synchronic syntagm, which also functions as a secure generic paradigm locating this film as comfortably as it can be located within the horror tradition, allows Adam a set of meanings which are clearly appropriate to the film's inclinations to the popular horror genre; but which guarantee no access to its other social meanings, such as its feminist intentions, embodied in the central character.

I interviewed Adam right at the end of the course, and reminded him of earlier remarks he had made about preferring the "little stories" to the "big one":

> AB   Why's that?
>
> A   Cos the big one's too complicated - it's all up and down all the time.
>
> AB   And d'you think that gets in the way of enjoying it?

A   Yeah.

AB   In what way?

A   You can`t settle down to it.

AB   And d`you think that makes it not like a proper horror film?

A   No.

AB   So - what would you expect a proper werewolf film to be like?

A   Just - starts off - and the - what happens is, it builds up to someone turning into a wolf, and then at the end they get killed.

AB   At the end?

A   - or the good person gets killed - then it puts you on your edge at the end - it changes - then it doesn`t tell you the rest.

Adam seems pretty clear about both the problems caused for him by the complexity of this film, and the ways in which this makes it untypical of the traditional genre, which he describes quite accurately, including the partly open endings of modern horror: "then it doesn`t tell you the rest".

More surprisingly, though, there comes evidence later in the interview that Adam does have ways of reading the less accessible structures of the film:

AB   What do you think of the girl in this film?

A   She`s alright. She`s - like Red Riding Hood - yeah. And she - no-one takes notice of her - like her big sister, her mum and dad.

AB   So what does she do about that?

A   Just stays in her bedroom - locks herself in.

And later:

AB   Do you remember what happens at the end of this film?

A   She turns into a wolf.

AB   And then what happens after that?

A   Erm - she runs off.

AB   And then you see her back in her bedroom - remember?

A   Yeah.

AB   And what happens after that - d'you remember?

A   They jump through her mirror - the picture on her wall.

AB   So what's happening there?

A   Her dream's coming real - true.

AB   Is that like - ? [*Nightmare on Elm Street*, discussed earlier in the interview]

A   - yeah.

AB   How is it the same?

A   Cos they both dream, and it becomes real.

So Adam is capable of making sense of the structures of subordination in the film - at least the dream syntagm - and of aspects of the social identity represented in the heroine - and to relate them to generic paradigms of horror and fairytale. The moot points are: what implications does this have for pedagogy (partly answered by my teacherly probings in the interview!), since Adam's insecure grasp of the structures clearly needs support and development; and to what extent is the preference for paratactic structures more to do with taste and pleasure than to do with comprehension?

There is clear evidence that, for several of the boys, as for Adam, this impatience with the complexity of the film is to do with tastes and preferences, constructed in relation to popular horror films. In another interview, Harry and Dylan are adamant that, with the possible exception of the transformation sequences, this film is unsatisfactory ("crap"!) in relation to horror films they know and like:

H   Think it's a crap film.

AB   What would it need to be better?

H   Not completely weird - think it`s a bit weird - weird storyline -

AB   Does that make it not like a horror film, d`you think?

H   N - no -

AB   Do you expect horror films to be -

H   - yeah - a lot of horror films are weird - but this is weird in, like, a non-
      scary way, sort of thing.

D   Yeah.

AB   Weird in what way?

D   Like teddy bears that kill people.

AB   Yeah -

H   - and her going up and getting eggs, and finding stone babies.

AB   So all that bit, you think, to make it a proper horror film you`d do
      without?

H   Yeah. the only good bit - is the transformation.

Harry in particular is expressing the `tough` attitude that has been noticed in male

responses to horror, both by researchers (such as Wood, 1993) and by the young

people themselves: Clare and Johanna have a clear picture of how boys watch

horror together:

J   Trying to show themselves macho - `s a real macho thing.

Harry betrays this attitude by ambiguous feelings about the transformation scenes.

At one point in the interview, the reluctant admission that they were frightening

comes after a long pause, and is accompanied by a self-conscious laugh:

H   No - it was funny, sort of where - completely stupid - where - [pause]
      - bit scary [laughs as he says the words].

AB   A bit scary as well?

H   Yeah, sort of [very quietly].

The image Harry chose to digitise and work on (Illustration 2) was from one of the transformation scenes, the only scenes he felt truly belonged to the horror genre:

My image is taken from about a quarter of the way through the film. This is the scene where the lady's ex-husband comes back from being a wolf, and she has remarried.The husband then gets angry and transforms into a wolf. The 2nd husband comes back and finds the wolf just about to attack his wife and kids so he gets an axe and chops of the wolfs head. This scene is a good part of the film because it's quite scary, and is about the only part to do with the horror genre in the film.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Illustration 8.2: Harry`s chosen image from *The Company of Wolves*: the first transformation scene
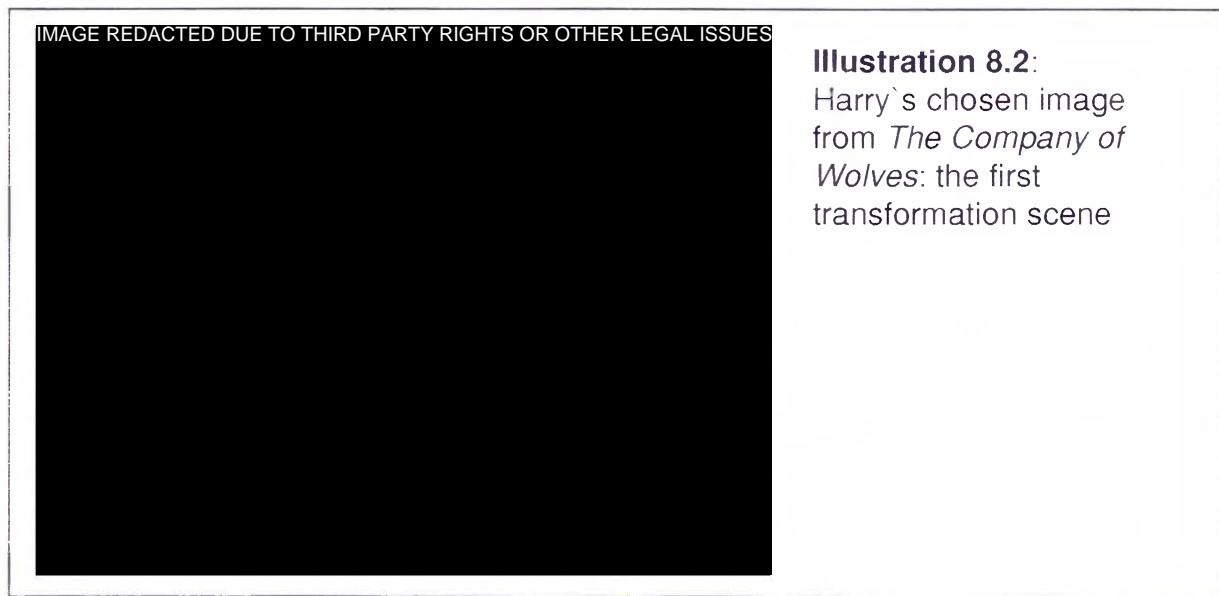
Like Adam, then - though in stronger terms - Harry registers a rejection of what I have called the empty sublime in favour of the powerful pull of the transformation sequences. This choice invites a number of explanations. Firstly, as I have suggested, he may be rejecting the complexity of the narrative, not, perhaps, because it is too difficult for him; but perhaps because any pleasure in it (and fear) is diluted by the art-house aesthetic which it signals.

Secondly, his reading may be subversive, rejecting (as the tone of his interview shows) a text chosen by the school's official culture, as well as the forms of response invited by that culture. The preference for the sequences furthest from that culture, and closest to the aesthetic of popular horror, represents the other side of this rejection.

Thirdly, his preference may be a gendered reading, registering a lack of interest in the imagery of teenage girlhood that pervades the empty sublime, the outer narrative structure (the girl's dream), and the Red Riding Hood syntagm.

I will now consider, then, the other end of the structure of emptiness/plenitude. Can it be associated with paratactic reading strategies, as it seems to be in Adam and Harry's case? Or with gendered choices? Or with a popular aesthetic?

Sublime plenitude: werewolves in closeup

Here is another commentary, this time on the second transformation scene (Illustration 3), by Sarah:

> In this image the werewolf has just been hit by Rosaleens grandmother. He is almost going to change into a wolf, but he doesn't. The camera is looking straight at the werewolf, even though he is on the floor after being hit. He has stopped being the victim and is now becoming the monster, so we can not look down at him. the lighting is very dark and gloomy so the only things that can be seen clearly are the mans face and the wolf's tounge [*sic*].The tounge has light glistening on it to show how long and slimy and disgusting it is and also to draw attention to it. The audience should be quite scared and disgusted when they see this image, because it

shows something that still seems to be totally human suddenly revealing that inside it is a monster. the man doesn't seem to mind or be frightened by what is happening to him.

this image is important because it shows that in this film the werewolf is inside and doesn't grow on the skin. Also it shows that the whole werewolf changes, even his tounge, and he turns into a real wolf. That is one of my favourite things about this film. there are no fake looking monsters, just real wolves. It doesn't use the old fashioned werewolf's head on a mans body. or a larger werewolf which is supposed to look scary but just looks unreal. The transformations in this film use real wolves and are gory and realistic.

Illustration 8.3:
Sarah`s chosen image from *The Company of Wolves*: the second transformation scene
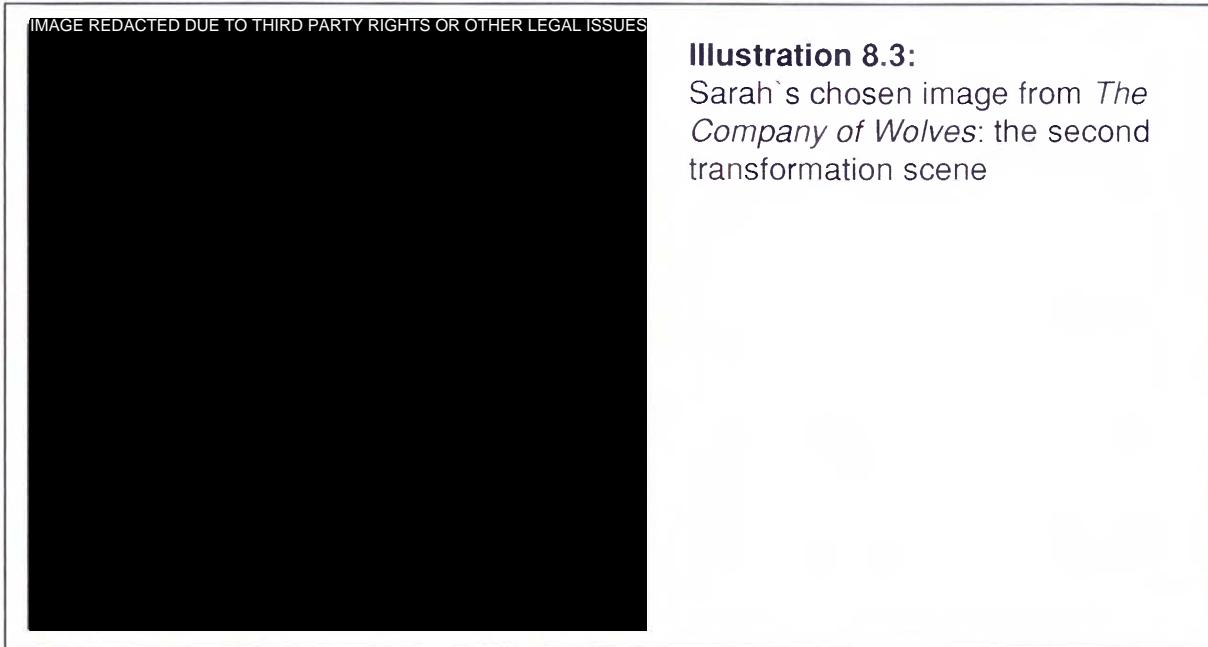
The first point to make about Sarah`s work is to look at her choice of image. In this course, the students have been asked, in pairs, to look at two themes: werewolf transformations and the representation of women. Sarah has worked with Iain: and they have decided that Iain will cover the representation of women, and Sarah will deal with the transformation sequences. If a preference for one or the other of these can be seen as a gendered reading, then we need also to allow for such preferences to invert.

This image, then, represents the replete sublime: the imagined monster with which we fill the dark spaces, in the binary structure which Burke and Kant both describe. And, if we accept Deleuze's use (1992) of Kant's dynamic sublime, this is an image which signifies sublime limitlessness by its use of an intense chiaroscuro in which the intensity of both dark and light suggest the infinite:

> These are the moments of the sublime, the rediscovery of the infinite in the spirit of evil: in Murnau, in particular, *Nosferatu* does not merely pass through all the aspects of chiaroscuro, of back-lighting and of the non-organic life of shadows, ... but he reaches a climax when a powerful light (a pure red) isolates him from his shadowy background, giving him an aura of omnipotence which goes beyond his two-dimensional form. (page 53)

The effect of sublime terror and pleasure is caused, Deleuze suggests, by both the intense concentration of the image, and by the breakdown of organic form it sets in motion.

There are difficulties with Deleuze's analysis. It recalls, in its description, the ineffability of Barthes' *punctum* and *third meaning*, and has the effect of mystifying this experience in its reference to the spiritual effects of the dynamic sublime on the cinema audience. This seems unnecessary: it is quite possible to give a materialist account of this semiotic process, bearing in mind Kress and Van Leeuwen's critique of Barthes. This would allow us to describe the process as one in which the text represents a threatening intensity of evil through dramatically heightened contrast and colour, coupled with representations of dissolving form, equally threatening to the viewer's sense of the stability of the natural order (a sense which, as Carroll points out, did not exist in such a way before the Enlightenment).

If we apply this to Sarah's image, these properties are quite apparent: the darkness of the background; the Caravaggesque lighting; the signifiers of dissolving natural form (the tongue, hair, eyes of the transforming werewolf). In fact, Sarah's analysis needs little adding to it. She remarks on the darkness of the background; and on the intensity of light: "the tongue has light glistening on it to show how long and slimy and disgusting it is, and also to draw attention to it." (Deleuze also remarks on "glistening" effects in *Metropolis* and *The Bride of Frankenstein*: page 52).

Sarah also refers in some detail to the affect of the spectacular sublime image. She describes the text-reader relation constructed by the camera angle:

> The camera is looking straight at the werewolf, even though he is on the floor after being hit. He has stopped being the victim and is now becoming the monster, so we can not look down at him.

And she makes it clear that the audience is expected to feel "quite scared and disgusted when they see this image". This registers the usual sublime affect of fear; but adds disgust, which keeps her view closer to Kristeva's *abject*, or to Carroll's insistence that disgust is the criterial "art-emotion" of our response to "art-horror". Sarah goes further, explaining what, in her view, causes this fear and disgust: "because it shows something that still seems to be totally human suddenly revealing that inside it is a monster". Again, her view is close to Carroll, who argues that our fear and repulsion is causes by images that offend against the natural order, creating unnatural monsters by processes of "fission" (dismemberment, animated parts of bodies, split creatures) or "fusion" (combinations of animals, or human and animal, such as the werewolf). Sarah, though, goes further than Carroll in her suggestion that the particularly frightening thing about this image is that the monster seems to come from *inside* the man. Our anxiety about the dissolving limits of the human

frame and identity is intensified by the idea that the transform is inside, and is extruded in a frightening imitation of birth trauma.

There are other interesting features of Sarah`s commentary. Though she doesn`t directly address the question of pleasure, she gives some clues. The giveaway word is, I think, "favourite"; and she uses the word in a context that suggests that the high affinity she has for the modality of the sequence is one of the sources of pleasure:

> this image is important because it shows that in this film the werewolf is
> inside and doesn't grow on the skin. Also it shows that the whole werewolf
> changes, even his tounge, and he turns into a real wolf. That is one of my
> favourite things about this film. there are no fake looking monsters, just
> real wolves. It doesn't use the old fashioned werewolf's head on a mans
> body, or a larger werewolf which is supposed to look scary but just looks
> unreal. The transformations in this film use real wolves and are gory and
> realistic.

The first point about this is that it upsets conventional notions of realism, presenting a view of realism that must accommodate exotic fantasy, itself representing, perhaps, the "causal complexes of society" which Brecht (1977) required in his definition of realism. Mark Jancovich (1992) recruits Brecht in his defence of the social and psychological realism of horror:

> In this way, there is no necessary opposition between fantasy and realism
> proper. The preoccupation with repression and forms of physical and
> psychological transformation which distinguish both the Gothic novel and
> horror in general, can make these forms closer to Brecht and Lukacs`
> definition of realism than many more conventionally 'realistic' (or
> 'naturalistic') forms of writing. (page 21)

But there seems to be more needed for the kind of satisfaction Sarah is describing. It is not just that the fantastic image can represent certain social or psychological "truths" - it is that the fantastic image demands a semiotic of realistic detail to assert its modality: the tongue, the light glistening on it, the "real wolves". Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) describe how modality in the visual semiotic is rendered in particular *coding orientations*, realised in modality markers such as colour, representation of detail, depth, illumination, brightness. In their scheme, this image would belong in the *naturalistic coding orientation*, asserting the high modality of the fantastic object by insisting on the kind of naturalistic detail that Sarah observes.

There seems to be a paradox here. Is this an image in which Sarah simply goes along with the kind of representation of reality most common in our culture, behaving as if the werewolf is real, and therefore not exploring its metaphorical significance in the sense Brecht requires? (Moretti argues of the monsters of horror that they are metaphors, but that the audience has forgotten this, and takes them literally). Or is the reverse possible? That a modality based on naturalistic detail is essential to generate the affective charge of the monstrous image, without which its complex of social and psychic significance cannot operate?

Perhaps it is even more complicated than that. Though it is certainly arguable that images of the replete sublime require modality markers of naturalistic detail (hence the intensive discourse about "special effects" typical of young people's modality judgements of such images), it is also arguable that other semiotic elements pull in different directions. The short depth of field of this image, for instance, ensures that while the face and tongue are rendered in graphic detail, the background (Kress and van Leeuwen's marker of *contextualization*) is left dark and indistinct, suggesting, perhaps, the more abstract context of fantasy; and also, perhaps, the empty sublime space from which the monster emerges.

Another paradox is that of the framing. The emphasis on closeup detail - hence spectacular revelation - has the contradictory effect of constricting the frame, limiting the representation of the entire creature - hence concealment. The cinematic history of werewolf transformations is notable for this contradictory effect: the shocking closeup on eyes, hands, teeth, splitting flesh constitutes an extreme revelation, a terrifying excess; at the same time, we never see the whole transforming creature, only the parts which stand in metonymic substution for the whole, so that the closeup montage has the effect of a suspense sequence. Even in images of such glaring revelation, we are left to imagine the whole, never given the satisfaction - or diasppointment - of an establishing shot.

A final point to make about this image of transformation is to do with the cinematic history of the genre. Sarah suggests this point when she refers to "fake-looking monsters" and "the old-fashioned werewolf's head on a man's body". The modality of the image for her depends on the technical effects of modern body-horror, which allow for new meanings to be made from the transformation sequence - in particular, the effect that the wolf seems to come from inside, as Sarah notes, rather than being grafted on to the outside (as in other sequences she has seen from older films).

Sarah's reading of this image of the replete sublime, then, shows us that straightforward assumptions about the "simplicity" of such images are not tenable. There is nothing intrinsically "simple" about such an image; and certainly not about the sequence of moving images of which it's a part (and we've said very little about this). It does seem that such images attract the kind of paratactic reading strategies displayed by Adam and Harry; but, though the pleasures of popular horror are there for Sarah as well, her reading strategies are no less "complex" than Clare's. So what can we say, finally, about the significance of the model of the sublime for which I have argued?

Transforming the grotesque: towards a postmodern sublime

The politicized aesthetics of the popular, as presented, for instance, by John Fiske, employ Bakhtin's theory of carnival to justify a privileging of the popular. In a similar way, Bourdieu argues for a reversal of the Kantian aesthetic, relying also on a model of Bakhtinian carnival. There are clear attractions in this stance. The chilly formality of elite culture, with its concert halls, its sacralization of culture, its sublimated pleasures, are all repudiated, and a vision of the popular realm, characterised by warmth, intimacy, and the liberating dissolution of barriers between spectacle and spectator is instituted in its place. Such a hypothesis provides a clear vindication of popular horror, its images of grotesque excess consonant with Bakhtin's "grotesque realism", its gory transformations and diabolical imagery redolent of Bakhtin's carnival hell, the delighted terror it inspires evocative of carnival laughter.

We do not need to lose the attractive features of this analysis - in a sense, they are all demonstrably there. The problem with the analysis is its simple insistence on a strictly polarised view of popular and elite culture; and the related assumption that Bakhtin's model, itself a transformation of an idealised mediaeval peasant aesthetic, can simply be transplanted unchanged in a quixotic unseating of bourgeois aesthetic values. The question is, then, how are these poles related, if not in a simple opposition, or relationship of denial?

Clare and Sarah's work offers some clues. In both pieces of writing there are suggestions of a hybrid discourse, of what Bakhtin (1981) describes as the "contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language" to be found within any utterance. Both of them display a discourse of academic analysis, the language of the secondary English classroom, the terminology of "Media Studies": *image, camera, pans, concept, audience, transformation*. And this discourse signals the distance between text and viewer

Bourdieu observes of the Kantian "pure gaze". But there's also the language of the pleasures of popular horror: *scariness, disgusted, fake, favourite.* Even the word *safe* for Clare, used of Rosaleen's bedroom, is articulated with her reading of popular horror films (she specifically mentions in interview *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*). And these parts of their text signal a closing of the gap between text and audience, more characteristic of the intimacy between actor and audience Bakhtin describes in his account of carnival.

Similarly, the film itself represents a hybridity of textual reference and aesthetic appeal. In some ways, it's an art-house film, the sets of Anton Furst based on Bruegel's depictions of peasant life, its imagery densely symbolic. In other ways, it employs the generic markers of poular body-horror, especially in the werewolf transformations, which recall John Landis' *American Werewolf in London.*

It is arguable, further, that the popular and elite poles depend on each other in a dialectic: but not an easy mutual cross-fertilization. Rather, the embattled condition Bakhtin refers to as a feature of his dialogism. The challenge for education, for this Year 9 lesson in horror, is not so much to privilege one pole over the other, but to ensure that the collision of discourses and aesthetic preferences allows the greatest opportunity of progress for each individual student. The cave must hide the monster; the monster needs the cave. The aesthetic preferences of different social groups will pull towards one or the other. In this context, the collapse of opposed aesthetic categories into each other often presented as characteristic of the postmodern (Featherstone, 1990) could be productive rather than confusing for pedagogic purposes, subversive as it is of the National Curriculum's "heritage" model of culture.

The postmodern sublime is imagined in various ways by different commentators. Jean-François Lyotard produces a sophisticated formulation of a postmodern, avant-garde sublime, in which the terror and limitlessness of nature in Burke's account is

reformulated as the infinite power of capitalism, destructive of traditional community and individual values - but also, in collusion with the avant-garde, of reactionary established rules:

> There is something of the sublime in capitalist economy. It is not academic, it is not physiocratic, it admits of no nature. It is, in a sense, an economy regulated by an Idea - infinite wealth or power. (1994, page 287)

Another postmodernist account - Fredric Jameson`s - similarly substitutes a different awesome limitlessness for Burke and Kant`s spatial infinities, or Freud`s profound depths of the Unconscious. For Jameson, like Lyotard, this new sublime is consequent upon global capitalism, and is a force ambiguously poised between negative, destructive effects and positive energising ones; but it is constituted, unlike Lyotard`s, by the very technology of representation, production and reproduction, itself:

> Yet something else does tend to emerge in the most energetic postmodernist texts, and this is the sense that beyond all thematics or content the work seems somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime, whose power or authenticity is documented by the success of such works in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us. (1991, page 37)

James Donald proposes a formulation of the postmodern sublime (quoted in Chapter 6) rooted in a new politics of community, in which horror films are symptomatic of the uncertainty and instability of culture and identity in a community characterised by heterogeneity and Bakhtinian heteroglossia, an ideally dynamic society which resists attempts to impose the political will of one group on the whole community in tandem

with the closure or perfection of culture (as in Lyotard's vision of the Nazis' monstrous perversion of the sublime).

There are obvious attractions in this analysis. Horror becomes a metaphor for shifting identities expressive of an anti-totalitarian community, opposed to the the semiotics of closure which are expressive of totalizing forces. There is a utopian pull in Donald's vision, however, which I want to resist, in the interests of a more focused account of contemporary classrooms. His view of horror as a representation of the instability of social identities, however, is a theme developed by others. Mark Jancovich (1992), as we've seen, sees modern body-horror as representative of a liberating dissolution of boundaries of the self in an era of increasing state regulation of private identity. He returns to this theme (1996) with an exploration of the idea that it is the representation of transforming teenage identities in films such as *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* that makes such films so attractive to young audiences - an idea also subscribed to by John Fiske, who relates such images of physical transformation and ugliness to Bakhtin's grotesque realism.

Noël Carroll, on the other hand, is dismissive of the thesis of horror as a figuration of postmodern dissolving identities. He point out that popular images of the fractured self are not the exclusive right of the postmodern, but are much older, citing Jekyll and Hyde, or the Platonic view of the conflict between reason and emotion.

What can we take from these wideranging ideas? What evidence is there for any of them in the work and talk of Clare and Sarah, Adam and Harry; and in the images they are reading? I propose to look at three specific ideas.

Firstly, the sublime as a representation of modern subjectivities. Carroll is right, I think, to be cautious about the postmodernist claim to exclusive rights over the divided subject. After all, Kant himself spends some time on the conflicting forms of

subjectivity aligned with different forms of the sublime. And it is true that the Enlightenment ideal of the unitary subject is often over-simplified. As I have mentioned in Chapter 7, E.J. Hundert (1997), argues that Enlightenment narratives of the self were varied and contradictory, characterised by an 18th century promotion of a "theatrical plasticity" of the self in the newly emergent commercial public sphere; an image repudiated by Rousseau`s assertion of the prototype Romantic identity (itself, ironically, self-dramatized). Perhaps it would be better to describe the postmodern self as one whose narrative of both dissolution and identity is framed by the Freudian topography of the psyche, discursively constituted in the ways that Lacan and Foucault describe. This allows us, in particular, to account for the progression, in images of the sublime, from a concentration on images of exotic exteriority (deserts, Arctic wastes) in which the self is presented as an explorer, to images of domestic interiority in which the sublime space can represent the psyche itself. Those sublime images of bedrooms and baths, clowns and dolls, which Clare and Lucy recognise and appropriate as part of their own furniture of subjectivity, constitute a particular, gendered rendering of the sublime limits of teenage identity, perhaps.

The appeal of the werewolf - to Harry and Adam, but also Sarah - is harder to locate in a history of subjectivity. It looks, at first sight, stubbornly resistant to history, locked into a folkloric timelessness. However, it yields when pressed. The narrative of the transforming subject it presents, for instance, undergoes clear changes. The ideology of youth which emerges in postwar America, for instance, clearly produces the metaphors of the threatening but appealing teenage werewolf produced by the - also very culturally specific - B movie environment of the AIP studio, as Mark Jancovich (1996) argues. Further, the technology of werewolf transformation sequences enables new representations of the transforming self, and new audience pleasures and fears. As Sarah notes, the special effects of *The Company of Wolves* allows for a representation of an emergence from within of the monster, not possible

in the previous transformation sequences of the Hammer Studio, or of Mamoulian's *Jekyll and Hyde*. Such technical progress would seem to permit the more effective representation of the Freudian/Lacanian birth of the self, as opposed to the grafting on of external appearances, more reminiscent, perhaps, of the theatricality of the Enlightenment self described by Hundert. The further development of sequences of sublime transformation is neatly captured in *Terminator 2* (Cameron, 1991) where the "old" mechanics of transformation, the ripped skin revealing the steel and circuitry of the cyborg, are set alongside the "new" mechanics of transformation in the liquid metal effects of morphing through which the second terminator is constructed. Such a juxtaposition allows for a more threatening, mercurial vision of dissolving identity to be contrasted with a relatively reassuring image of a more conventional flesh-and-metal android. It may be, further, that these processes recall Jameson's postmodern sublime, to be found in the dizzying possibilities of the processes of reproduction themselves.

And secondly, the collapse of popular and elite cultural forms into each other; what Connor describes (1990) as the "pick'n'mix aesthetic". In fact, it is hard to locate this phenomenon comfortably in the postmodern moment, especially in regard to the horror genre. In fact, such confusion of boundaries is quite characteristic of the genre in the pre-modern moment: Victorian melodrama was patronised by all social classes; the gothic novel was an uncomfortable bedfellow for the dominant "realist" novel; a classic tale of Victorian horror, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, was regarded as culturally light-weight by its author. Nevertheless, it is arguable that the genre, certainly within the history of cinema, is particularly unstable in its refusal to be easily located on the elite-popular continuum. *The Company of Wolves* itself is an odd example; but helpful in the sense that elements of its composition pull in different directions, towards art-house and towards popular body-horror. The effects of this, as Harry and Adam's responses show, can be to unsettle the audience, provoking conflicting loyalties. Other readers, however, such as Clare and Sarah, can live

easily with the mixed aesthetic, moving more comfortably between different sets of references, different discourses of response and interpretation.

A third question, of which we are reminded by Jameson's and Lyotard's views of a sublime which offers progressive potential, is about the *ideological* effects of such generic instabilities. From the social semiotic point of view, this becomes, perhaps, a question about the ideological effects of genre; though we might articulate this with the aesthetic question of the opposition between cultural pleasure and cultural value explored by Steve Connor (1992). Hodge and Kress (1986) give a social semiotic account of genre which analyses it as a *logonomic system*, "a set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive, understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities (how, when, why)" (page 5). They stress that the imposition of such restrictions is only effective to the extent to which it is not contested:

> Attention to the detail of semiosic process reveals countless instances of contestation, where smaller-level shifts in power have significant effcts, leading to modification in the structures of domination, at times tracing the success of dominated groups, at times the success of the dominant. This process is well described in Gramsci's work on hegemonic structures and their establishment. (page 7)

If this genre can permit a confusion of boundaries, in which the tastes dependent on the hitherto privileged ground of Hitchcock can mingle with the excesses of Cronenberg and Craven, and if this provides openings, albeit interstitial, for young people to negotiate real pleasures rather than dutiful ones, and appropriate images adequate to the range of social identities they need and which excite them, rather than the more limited range the official culture would impose on them, then perhaps

there is room for real progress. And in school, if we are to justify such texts as objects of study, we need to live with necessarily confused notions of taste, pleasure and cultural value. The sublime is a category of liminality and transgression, and such cultural fare is always risky for schools. Without risk, though, there is no hope of progress: perhaps, with Connor, we need to "inhabit the paradox".

Chapter 9: Conclusion -The Leaky Spectatorium: Boundaries of the Visual

We spectate from the boundary. Not an elaborate cricketing metaphor; rather, an attempt to picture where we are located, all of us, as we recruit the moving image to our tireless endeavour to produce ourselves anew, each day, in a world of sign and subject always changing, colliding and colluding. This metaphor of boundary, though, if it is to represent with any adequacy what has been described in this thesis, needs to evoke not only locations of marginality. It has to be a place capable of location at both centre and margin - at one moment a border, at the next the tightrope in the centre of the circus arena.

This boundary, this edge, has appeared many times in this thesis: in the liminality of the sublime; in the spectatorial choices between sublimated pleasures and hedonic ones; in spectatorial attempts to steer between polarised social identities, roles of obedience and subversion, of identification and refusal, of home and school, of hero and villain. It is Kristeva`s dividing line between abjection - a diarrhoeic degradation of the self - and the sublime - an elevating transformation of the self. It is "the shadowy borderlands" of Donald`s postmodern popular sublime. It is Metz`s leaky boundaries between dream and waking, conscious and unconscious, repressed and permitted. It is Bakhtin`s dissolving divisions of the spectacle, the edge of the stage over which the excess of the dramatic fiction spills, over which the excess of the audience`s participative energy surges. It is Volosinov`s boundary between the inner life of the organism and the outer life of the ideological sign.

For teachers, this place of boundaries is the classroom, a network of borderlines which energise the pull between home and the workplace, childhood and adulthood,

and a concentrated version of many of the cultural tensions at play in society at large, amplified by the politics of curriculum and pedagogy. David Buckingham describes (1993) the arrival and development of media education, concerned from its first moments with popular culture. He sets it in the context of the Leavisite project of "inoculation" against the popular; but is also critical of the "radical" approaches of the 70s which perceived young people "as passive victims of ideological manipulation"; and of "progressive" approaches which were simply celebratory of young people's responses to the media. He argues for an approach rooted in better understandings of young people and the media, derived from detailed audience research: an approach which recognises young people's expertise in the media, and which makes careful distinctions between different kinds of engagement with text, depending on differences of social cultural contexts, and between the different forms of response or consumption, as distinct from production.

This thesis bears out a good deal of this. Even within a single classroom, it makes it clear that we cannot afford to make simple assumptions about undifferentiated audiences, but must, rather, pay close attention to different experiences, literacies, pleasures, allegiances. We must be careful about the cultural status of the texts we choose to include in our curricula - the lesson of T*he Company of Wolves* is, I think, that the confusions of boundaries between popular and elite texts can be highly productive; and, as Buckingham points out, the choice is not between teaching Shakespeare or soaps, but rather what we do with them.

Gunther Kress, writing from a similar tradition of cultural studies as that embraced by Buckingham, makes a specific point about the recognition of the visual, going so far as to say:

> ... we are at a crucial point in the history of western literacy where the

supremacy of written language as the dominant form of public communication is challenged by the resurgence of the visual mode of communication. In this situation groups of children are coming with different predispositions into their first years of school: some oriented strongly to speech and writing; others oriented equally strongly to speech and the visual. (1993b [no page references])

A major part of the argument of this thesis has taken its cue from Kress's insistence on the importance of the visual mode, and has posed questions about what new model we might develop of a classroom, and associated pedagogies, that include the visual, even make it central to the educational enterprise. The classroom, a space modelled initially on the mediaeval monastic *scriptorium*, a model perennially reinvented in successive ideals of academic and educational value, becomes also, with the onset of modernity, an *auditorium*, incorporating the technologies of the auditory, along with those features of selfhood shaped by the auditory. Steven Connor (1997) argues the influence of the auditory mode on modern subjectivities, carried on the technologies of the telephone and gramophone (culturally gendered as male and female modes respectively, he argues), and continuing despite the explosion of the visual in cinema and television, to appear in forms like the Walkman, which translates the city into auditory terms, "auditizes the urban" (page 211). We can imagine how the classroom as auditorium grows with these technologies, accommodates these new subjectivities. In the post-war English classroom, the scriptorial resource-bank acquired an acoustic supplement to the literature curriculum - records of classic literature, including archive recordings of the stars of modernism, on the brink of new technologies of reproduction: Eliot, Joyce, Thomas, Pound. At the same time the moment of Leavisism proposed an endorsement of the folk traditions of Britain accompanied by a refusal of the emergent acoustic culture of 50's and 60's popular music. David Holbrook's *English for Maturity* (1961 and 1967) captured this feeling, and was influential in the training of English teachers.

Holbrook's approach showed passionate commitment to the pupils of secondary modern schools, embraced the traditions of popular dissent represented by Ewan McColl and A.L. Lloyd; and constructed an ideal classroom in which the new technologies of the auditory brought such voices into the array of representational resources available to school students: an expansion of the scriptorial model of the classroom into an auditorial model. At the same time, this pedagogy is profoundly conservative, of course, in ways which are well-documented, and are effectively those of Leavisism in general: a view of audiences as passive and suggestible; and a wholesale subscription to the mass media critique that *Scrutiny* shared, though from a quite different political analysis, with Theodor Adorno (1941). More interestingly, for the purposes of my argument, Holbrook's mistrust of contemporary popular culture emerges as a refusal of the visual. Holbrook savagely repudiates the turn to the visual already observable in classrooms of the sixties:

> ... the word is out of date. It is a visual age, so we must have strip cartoons, films, filmstrips, charts, visual aids. Language is superannuated. ...
>
> Some teachers fall for the argument. ...
>
> We must never give way: we are teachers of the responsiveness of the word. ... The new illiteracy of the cinema, television, comic strip, film-strip and popular picture paper they accept as the dawn of a new era. (pages 36 and 37)

The simplistic association of the visual with the popular ignores some obvious difficulties, of course - that popular culture exists also in an auditory and verbal form, as popular music; that the visual is a form of expression for artistic expression valued by elite groups, in the form of painting, sculpture, certain kinds of photography, and so on; that cinema has its own distinctions of aesthetic preference, its own hierarchies of taste; that the word is also a visual medium. These aside, however, it is evident that, in the time since Holbrook's view was influentially presented, a good

deal has changed - but that new versions of their stance are still with us. Attitudes to the visual have, in some ways, been reversed, thanks to the arguments and practices of cultural theorists and exponents of the visual within the pedagogy of English, and of the newly emergent media studies described by Buckingham. However, ambivalence towards the visual media (and towards popular culture in general) is still observable in English classrooms of the nineties and the debates about cultural value which inform them (such as the BFI's commission of enquiry, 1993, which acknowledges the importance of visual media but fails to resolve the question of value). It is against this ambivalence that writers such as Kress and Buckingham propose their argument: a powerful plea for the visual, and for the popular.

How do classrooms accommodate the kinds of predispositions Kress observes in the schoolchildren of today? How do they respond to the explosion of the visual in the new technologies of the digital media and information technology? An obvious ideal is for teachers to move towards an inclusive attitude to the hugely expanded array of semiotic resources; and there is plenty of evidence that what Kress calls the "admirably pragmatic" work of teachers (1994) is accomplishing exactly that. It would be a mistake, however, to adopt a pedagogic optimism that ignores the tensions still evident, the boundaries still to be carefully negotiated. The classroom orientated to the visual could be described, as I have argued in Chapter 6, as a *spectatorium*. *Spectatorium*, like *auditorium* and *scriptorium*, has the benefit of stressing the material engagement of those in the room, who become receivers and producers simultaneously of the text. At the same time, it raises the historical problem of the relation between text and audience. The scriptorium emphasises the production of text - yet its monastic original necessitated, in the act of copying, the act of reading. The auditorium emphasises the reception of text - but strongly implies the presence of textual production by the conceptual gap it leaves: in its first OED definition, it is only a partial space, "the part of a public building occupied by the audience". It also

implies talk, the oral production of text: its second OED definition is "the reception-room of a monastery". We can imagine, then, that *spectatorium* will imply similar slidings between reading and writing, speaking and listening, imaging and watching.

How, then, might this apply to the classroom; and what are the tensions, contradictions, liminalities, which it might embrace? I can only make a brief sketch here in an attempt to answer this question - a sketch arising out of the work in this thesis on the nature of visual literacies, visual pleasures, the classroom as a visual space, and the nature of the social identities which inhabit this space, absorb and rework these visual signs. Such a sketch must gesture towards the need for further work on this area. This thesis shows, as Chapter 3 argues, that the new technologies of the visual allow for the making of new, powerful meanings. Even the relatively simple process of the digital still image gives a power of selection, transformation, and, as Barthes suggested, intervention in narrative time, to school students - powers only before available to film critics or academics, who, even then, might have been dependent on selections of stills already made by film archivists or publicity executives.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argue:

> If schools are to equip students adequately for the new semiotic order ... then the old boundaries between `writing` on the one hand, ... and, on the other hand, the `visual` arts ... should be redrawn. This will have to involve modern computer technology, central as it is to the new semiotic landscape. But, above all, it is crucially dependent on having the means of analysis, the means for talking about the `new literacy`, about what it is we do when we read and produce images.` (page 33)

With this in mind, the work of young people and of teachers observed in this study

suggests a number of strategies which will need to be central to a new pedagogy of the visual. These will include:

• a theorization of the visual which recognises analogies with language and other semiotic codes; which recognises the dialogic relation between the reception and production of texts; and the development of systems of analysis able to be used by young people; and a common understanding of this theory across school subjects, especially in those areas where the analysis and production of visual texts is central to the curriculum

• a selection of visual texts for work in schools which reflect the same kind of criteria as those that might be applied to verbal texts (literary and non-literary); and a recognition, especially, of the need to include both elite and popular texts, as well as those (an increasing number, if the postmodernist hypothesis is correct) which confound such distinctions

• a use of appropriate technologies of representation, especially the newly available technologies of media production (video cameras, non-linear editing equipment, multimedia and website authoring packages)

• a recognition and understanding of the experience of the visual brought into school from all areas of visual culture.

This last point raises, again, the question of boundaries. Chapter 4 showed Johanna juggling social roles that cannot be confined to the viewing context of the classroom. They spill out into the unofficial social spaces of the school; out into the street and home - or rather, into the classroom from these spaces, returning to them a little changed. Similarly, the images and visual competences, the "predispositions" Kress remarks on, come from home, television, cinema into the classroom, bringing all the questions and dissonances, as well as the productive possibilities, of an encounter between the visual experience of the popular and that of the official curriculum, albeit an offshoot informed by what has been described in Chapter 1 as the "internal critique" noted by Richard Johnson. I suggest that the classroom is - not simply, but

in a rather particular way - another social context in which meanings are made and explored, cultural affiliations are exposed, tested and negotiated, and, yes, forms of subjectivity are questioned, opened up, confirmed or disconfirmed. All this within a complex system of open and hidden procedures, incorporating their own special repertoires of communication and social ritual, and built on interlocking tensions between adult and child, different social classes, institution and family, state and street, and so on. However benign it is or is not, it is a real part of the culture of schoolchildren: binary oppositions between `street` culture and school are indefensible. The social contexts in which a teenager might have to discuss, defend or mediate her cultural affiliations are wide-ranging and heterogeneous: an argument with a grandparent; a party of a new friend (perhaps with different tastes); a holiday abroad; a part-time job; a school French exchange; the family; a boyfriend; a youth club; school, both curricular and extra-curricular; leisure pursuits - sport, or dance, or playing a musical instrument.

Other boundaries are apparent also. The dividing line between childhood and adulthood is thrown into relief by a film with an adult certificate, even in an edited version. In terms of the general relation of fiction to questions of morality and censorship, this dividing line is profoundly ambiguous, impossible to pin down. How to teach adult texts - and which texts to choose - has been a matter of great difficulty for teachers at a time when the cultural politics of the nationally-regulated English curriculum prescribes an increasingly-dominant diet of adult literature for secondary students, and at the same time encourages a moral climate which denies the sexuality of the young, represses discourses of sexuality in teenage literature, and demonises children who disrupt nostalgic constructions of the innocence of the child. The obvious discursive domain affected by this is that of sexuality, where, while a discourse of apparently liberated sexuality obtains in society at large, school and children's literature (and film) remains in the grip of repression and silence. This position is complicated if we accept Stephen Heath's argument in *The Sexual Fix*

(1982) that the apparently liberating explicitness of such discourses (literature, popular fiction, sexology) is really a kind of coercion, essentializing the experience of sex in repetitive, normalizing representations which oblige us to conform to their narrative of sexuality. His plea, though, is for people to resist, not sexuality, but the deceptive 'naturalness' of these discourses; to fragment and problematize the smooth surface they offer; to dissent from the uniformity of their account.

There are two points relevant to this study. The first is tangential, but apposite. *The Company of Wolves* is a story and film about sexuality. The story is actually more 'explicit' than the film - about menstruation, nakedness, and the sexual act. The word, however, is less of a problem than the visual image in the regulatory processes of censorship - especially when the verbal discourses of sexuality are aided by the alibi of cultural value. So, in this classroom, the reading of the Angela Carter story has never been a problem - a similarly explicit rendition in film (of, for instance, phrases such as "His genitals - ah! huge!") presumably would be.

The second, larger, point is this. There is an analogy between the semiotic of sexuality and the semiotic of the sublime, as it has been described in Chapters 7 and 8. In particular, I have argued that the semiotics of the sublime turn upon a textual mechanics of concealment and revelation, and related forms of audience engagement. In Freudian terms - and the Foucauldian terms employed by Heath - these mechanics permit both repression and the return of the repressed. The semiotic of concealment and revelation which produces the affective energy both of the sublime and of the erotic, then, exploiting the intensification of affect noted by Freud (1915), and shaped by the history of social appropriations of the imagery of sex and terror over the last three centuries, is bound to be a controversial domain in the classrooms of the late twentieth century.

In simple terms, the questions discussed above of the value of the visual and the

ethics of the sublime (or the erotic) become, in the question of an imaginary governor or parent, "Why are you showing them videos instead of reading books; and why are you corrupting their minds with horror films?"

Images of the sublime and the erotic evoke the risks and dangers of the adult world; parents and schools have a difficult moral balance to strike between protecting young people from such risks and allowing them space to consider them. A social value of imaginative fictions, inside the classroom as outside, from fairytale to horror film, must be that they provide the resources for young people to imagine their own social futures, roles, identities. Inevitably, this psychic and social drama, this internalization of the signs at hand, and re-production of their own new signs, will include signs of danger, the unknown, the frightening, the thrilling, even the evil, the morally illicit. How else can they prepare for adulthood? Bazalgette and Buckingham (1995) argue:

> Children - like everyone else - need to be able to come to terms with the
> fear of annihilation, of power (their own as well as other people's), of
> anger, and of sexuality. (page 3)

In this thesis, it has been far from clear what images of the sublime are used to represent, either in the texts or in the work of these young spectators. It is clear, however, from the words of Lucy and Jessica in Chapter 7, for instance, that these images, and the powerful narratives they produce from them, belong to a web of signification, affect and transforming subjectivity that incorporates the films they watch, the lessons they attend, the dolls in their bedroom, the games they play. This is one of the ways in which they produce themselves, their relationships, their morality, their pleasures. It is clear, therefore, how leaky is the spectatorial experience of the classroom - how impossible it is to divorce it from the culture Raymond Williams famously described as "a whole way of life" (1961, page 46).

The value of the visual, finally, remains a complex question, to which this study can only hope to make a small contribution. The fears of Holbrook about the vulnerability of the word were, of course, ill-founded, and that, if Kress is right about the new resurgence of the visual, it must also be argued that the spectatorial space of the classroom will *subsume* , not simply *replace*, the earlier models of scriptorium and auditorium. The image I choose to represent this multiple literacy comes from a short film made by a group of girls after finishing their project on *The Company of Wolves*.

They have gone into the editing suite next to my classroom to make a trailer for the film, using an analogue editing system with a digital vision mixer. Two things about their finished trailer strike me. Firstly, the visual sequence makes extensive use of the digital still funtion and the mix function of the vision mixer - they mix very slowly, lingering on superimpositions of one shot on another. Their first sequence consists of two digital stills, showing two closeups of female characters: Rosaleen`s dead sister, and the the grandmother (illustration 1). These have been mixed with, respectively, a scene of wolves running through the forest; and the first werewolf transformation scene. The mix makes the images of the female characters a little more "solid" than the moving scenes, which, in addition to the fact that they are closeups, makes these

Illustration 9.1: still images within Alex`s trailer for *The Company of Wolves*, showing their foregrounding of female characters. The first traces of the mix between the grandmother and the transformation scene can just be seen.

images stronger in the whole composition, a form, perhaps, of the quality of *salience* used by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) to denote relative weightings of elements of visual composition. This reordering of and selection from the film text not only creates a new montage, then, but a new synchronic syntagm, which depends for its meaning on the articulation of two images related by another kind of "vertical montage", one which constructs the impression (as, indeed, is materially the case) of an image laid on top of another (evoking, perhaps, the image of the palimpsest which Barthes uses to describe the still). The selection of the female characters, followed by another still of Rosaleen's face, seems, in the light of the work of these girls, as well as the discussions of the representation of women in the film, to signify their recognition of the importance of these related female roles: two roles to be surmounted or replaced: victim, narrator/wise woman; and the stronger role which replaces them: strong heroine (Clover's Final Girl), and dreaming narrator - it seems to make explicit the narrative envelope of the film, and to foreground the representation of teenage female identity that, for these viewers, is at the centre of the text and their engagement with it; and now, their literal remaking of it.

The other point is one which this thesis has not had space to develop, but which is implied by parts of the argument of this final chapter. That is, the importance of the auditory. As Eisenstein realised in his image of vertical montage, an opposition between word and image is fruitless; and, in practice, as in this work of these girls, there is no such opposition. Their work is informed by reading, by viewing, by talk and writing; and, in the construction of their trailer, their editorial work on sequences from the film involves both an editing of the film's soundtrack, especially its music; and the addition of their own voiceover:

> A young girl, entering into womanhood, exploring her dreams and fantasies of the future. Love, lust and mystery, all incorporated into a chilling drama, created by Angela Carter and directed and adapted by the skilled hands of

Neil Jordan.

This is a fantasy tale of a girl`s curiosity and eagerness to explore different worlds unlike her one, in the enchanting and always mysterious surroundings of the forest, always believed to be infested by the werewolf.

The Company of Wolves, coming to a cinema near you!

Alex`s voice indicates many meanings, intricately related to the chain of texts of which this forms one part. The words show an understanding of the film`s narrative, themes and imagery ("entering into womanhood,"; "Love, lust and mystery"); the imagery of the empty and replete sublime ("enchanting and always mysterious surroundings of the forest, always believed to be infested by the werewolf"). But this text also indicates the social nature of such symbolic work, and of the pleasures associated with it. The slight thrill of the voice at the risky mention of sexuality; the parodic overtones of the use of the trailer voiceover (the final word, "you!", is drawn out in mock spookiness), and the expert awareness of this genre. The pleasure of making this material transformation of the text, the fun of working, unsupervised, with friends: these are social pleasures of the spectatorium, pulling together practices of classroom, friendship and the workplace.

Connor (1997) argues that, in the end, a simple opposition between the visual and auditory modes, and the forms of subjectivity structured around them, is untenable. Rather, he proposes an image of subjectivity which articulates the two. He borrows Michel Chion`s term, the *acousmêtre*, which is neither the screen voice to be seen and heard (of a character on screen), nor that of the unseen voice dissociated from the diegesis (the voiceover, Chion`s *acousmatique*). It is, rather, the voice of an unseen presence within the diegesis - examples being a voice from a tape-recorder on screen, the voice of Polonius behind the arras, or the voice of the Invisible Man.

Connor's emphasis is on text rather than audience, and he continues to problematize the visual by an exploration of acoustic imagery in Joyce and Beckett. Nevertheless, the image of the *acousmêtre* as a metaphor for the modern spectator has some merit: invisible in the text (and, literally, in the cinema); but a voice behind it, in a shifting play of identification, appropriation, transformation. In this particular case, it represents more powerfully than ever the dissolving boundaries of the spectatorial space. Alex and her friends, already beyond the limits of the classroom, move beyond the boundaries between screen and cinema, theatre and auditorium, spectacle and audience, as Bakhtin (1965/1984) describes:

> In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. (page 198)

Alex and her friends have stepped through the screen, manipulated the visual, employed the acoustic features of a visual technology to speak from behind the latterday arras of a horror film trailer, to speak of present tastes and pleasures, and imagined futures of womanhood and sexuality. Like the Wizard of Oz, she'll have to come out from behind the curtain, to resume her more usual size and social role. But the acousmetric act, the voice in the image, has changed a little part of her mind, and as a text in the public sphere, can change a little part of the mind of others - including, for instance, my own.

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