



CIVILIZATION, REPRESSION AND THE MODERN HORROR FILM

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Contents

CIVILIZATION/CULTURE	1
THEORY OF CULTURAL ORIGINS	2
ORIGINS OF CIVILIZATION AND DISPLACEMENT OF RITUAL AND CULTURE	3
RISE OF THE HORROR STORY	5
THE DOPPELGANGER MOTIF	5
FREUD AND THE UNCONSCIOUS	8
THE MODERN HORROR FILM	13
BIBLIOGRAPHY	19
FILMOGRAPHY	21

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*“What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
seem all of paradise that we shall know?”*

Wallace Stevens, “Sunday Morning”.

Civilization/Culture

Many people, including such eminent writers as Freud and Herbert Marcuse, have used and continue to use the words “civilization” and “culture” interchangeably. Etymologically there may appear to be some justification for doing this, since tillage of the soil (agriculture) and the development of permanent town settlements date from around the same time: Jericho is commonly thought to be the world’s oldest town, being perhaps as much as 9,000 years old, and its evolution is a natural consequence of an agricultural rather than hunter-gatherer mode of life.

Theory of Cultural Origins

Culture, however, is much older than agriculture. Worship and devotion to “the gods” may date back at least 50,000 years, according to the theory expounded by Chris Knight in *BLOOD RELATIONS*. To summarize the theory very briefly: culture’s emergence depended upon a hunter-gatherer moiety society, in which the women (together with their male kin), by an elaborate pantomime, coerced the men to hunt for them by going on sex-strike at dark moon. By pretending to be infertile (menstruating) male animals they were collectively signalling “no” (“wrong sex, wrong species, wrong time”) as well as indicating to the hunters what they were wanting: bleeding (raw) animal meat **brought to them**. Such a tactic could only have been successful through female solidarity. A group, rather than an individual, was sharing the same fantasy, creating another world which inverted the physical facts. Culture, in other words, inverted nature. It is thus more accurate to speak of the “human revolution” rather than “human evolution”. Animal instincts were repressed or subverted as the male hunters were coerced to choose hunting over sex. This certainly enabled them to plan and manoeuvre more effectively, hunting together as the new moon was waxing, when there is the maximum amount of continuous light: since at this time of the month the moon rises before sunset, unlike the waning moon, which does not rise until several hours **after** sunset.

Human consciousness and language are essential concomitants of this process. Proto-cultural females share a collective desire for something to be done, and **act out** this desire together until the proto-conscious hunters respond to the message, and act on it. The domain of the sacred/taboo is born, as the hunters do not eat their kills on the spot but return to the “home-base” with them, where the women, turned back to themselves again, cook the meat, remove the blood, and there is feasting and “marital” sex. Kin allegiances – necessarily asexual, and the reason for the incest taboo – are displaced by sexual allegiances until the next dark moon, when the process starts over again. Language emerges at this point to label the collective fantasy (the other world”). There is an overwhelming urge to acknowledge what they have enacted together, and since this enactment is not visible after it is completed, it must be referred to, made real, in some way. The first word, then, would most likely be the label for the pantomime; its import would be something like our word “God”. Something outside space and time, *essentially beyond definition*. The image of the rainbow snake is common to many world mythologies, and this displays the inevitable paradoxicality of the enacted fantasy: an indefinable object which is on the earth and in the sky at the same moment (cf. the mythological dragon, the

winged serpent). It is also apparent from tribal dancing even today that the motions of the dancers are paradoxical, involving heavy stamping of feet as if into the ground at the same time as the arms gesticulate frenziedly skywards.

That which is beyond definition paradoxically gives rise to the need for references to time and space (past, present, future; nouns, verbs, objects). But these references to this world are dependent on the created other world, and the means by which the other world gains increasing credence. This point is valid in all languages to this day: the most powerful single words (for example, in English, “God”, “immortal”, “eternal”, “infinite”) cannot be defined except as **negatives**; similarly, the most powerful collections of words are never pieces of documentary fact but are always *fictions*, works of **art** which are crucial to our understanding and consciousness of this world. The **meaning** of this world is not, cannot be, in this world, since meaning depends on consciousness of this world as an object set apart from the imagined, created world enacted in periodic ritual, song and dance. Nietzsche said, famously, that God is dead. But he also said – quite rightly – that God is in the grammar. [“I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar” (TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS, “Reason in Philosophy”, section 5)]. Without God, indeed, there would be no grammar. It is our entry into the world of language which gives us our cultural inheritance and intimations of the ritual domain, although, of course, this domain is today merely implied in language rather than periodically enacted in order to get something done.

Origins of Civilization and Displacement of Ritual and Culture

An agricultural mode of production, such as began in the Middle East after the last Ice Age about 10,000 years ago, cannot sustain the kind of ritual process which effected the “human revolution. It does not make sense in agriculture for men to work together separated from women in a semi-permanent home base. It makes sense, instead, for there to be a great number of different homes of a “marital” nature, with men and women working together as couples or small families. The system is essentially patriarchal, the men taking advantage of the loss of female collectivity to set ritual apart from other human activity (i.e. turn it into religion) and oversee it themselves. Democratic collectivity is turned into a hierarchy and priesthood which gains credence through fear of punishment and violence. The male priesthood appropriate the ritual trappings for themselves: they

dress as the opposite sex, prohibit the opposite sex from participating in the ritual, and are strictly celibate. Ritual and culture are displaced from the form in which they began, and are used by the minority who have access to the surplus of agricultural crops to maintain their power against the rest. As Engels puts it in *THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE*, “Civilization arose as the reciprocal exchanges of goods and services became transmuted into exploitative consumption by a budding upper class and state apparatus”. This “civilization”, beginning in the Middle East and culminating in Ancient Rome before the Dark Ages, to be revived by the Renaissance, is largely oppressive because there is coercion instead of shared agreement. There was, of course, repression involved in the creation of culture, but this repression was created by females who were themselves already oppressed in a biological sense – although the evolving separation of hominid female sexuality from fertility, and the collective synchronization of menstruation with dark moon, is remarkable evidence of a crucial relationship between (female) biology and culture, the physical world and the mental world. Moreover, the repression was not violent but sexual, and the coercion was in some sense agreed to. It cannot be claimed that the hunters were slaves (“Slavery is the first form of civilization and exploitation” – Engels); they were caught up in a “willing suspension of disbelief”, in which sexual fulfillment was made dependent on success in hunting. To summarize the basic differences between culture and civilization:

Culture (c 50,000-10,000 B.P.): Females collectively construct themselves as alternately ritually unavailable (blood relations, the “other world”), and sexually available (marital relations, “this world”). Coercion is temporary and relieved. Culture and language create meaning and coherence.

Civilization (c.10,000 B.P.-?): Females constructed by a ruling male class as monogamous objects of ownership (wives) or polygamous objects of pleasure (prostitutes), with a strict division between the two “types”. Coercion is permanent and more or less unrelieved: oppressed women and male slaves are coerced into living for the “other world”, which is no longer a creative adaptation to prevailing conditions but an illusory substitute for “this world”. Culture is displaced and language is debased, leading to fragmentation, incoherence, the reassertion of dominant male animal aggression. “Culture is the tacit agreement to let the means of subsistence disappear behind the purpose of existence. Civilisation is the subordination of the latter to the former.” (Karl Kraus, *IN THESE GREAT TIMES*). It is important to bear these differences in mind when considering the Industrial

Revolution and its aftermath, the concurrent rise of the horror story and its offspring, the modern horror film.

Rise of the Horror Story

It might seem that the Industrial Revolution of the early 19th century liberated people from the oppressive, exploitative structure of society which had operated at least since the Renaissance. During that period, as Erich Heller notes in *THE DISINHERITED MIND*, there had been an ever increasing separation of the real from the symbolic. The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, a vestigial Western periodic ritual enactment, was increasingly undermined by proto-capitalist reformers such as Luther and Zwingli, who turned religion into something increasingly austere, so as not to distract people from the burgeoning Protestant work ethic. Instead of this process being overturned by the Industrial Revolution, however, it was only accelerated. The majority of people were forced off the land into the towns and into a mode and rhythm of work which was unnatural, being dictated by the maximization of profit rather than human needs. The worker was no longer in any way responsible for his or her work and instead became a replaceable adjunct of machine-line mass production (see *HIGH HORSE RIDERLESS* by L.T.C. Rolt).

In a profit-orientated society only “this world” counts; the “other world” becomes increasingly irrelevant, although useful to the oppressors so long as it reconciles people to “this world”. The Romantic movement, heralded in England by William Blake’s *SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE* (1794), was a counter-movement to this inhuman disregard for the human cultural inheritance. The horror story, whose first important practitioner was probably E.T.A. Hoffmann in Germany, was a particular aspect of this counter-movement, being specifically concerned with what happens to human identity in an age of mass production. The concern is that there is a likelihood of reification in an environment in which mainly useless and ugly objects overwhelm people (all for the sake of profit). In Hoffmann and in the contemporary *CONFESSIONS OF A JUSTIFIED SINNER* by James Hogg, the figure of the doppelganger first appears.

The Doppelganger Motif

The doppelganger is a crucial motif of the horror genre. The figure appears to step out of another world (often a mirror). If it is a man it is often there to

replace the protagonist, who is usually portrayed as weary of his life and unable to conform any longer to a dreary mechanized work ethic (see, for example, *THE DOUBLE* by Dostoyevsky and, in this century, Edward Thomas's poem, *THE OTHER*). If the figure is woman, however, it is often there to introduce an element of assertiveness and sexuality which is traditionally missing from the conventional fictional heroines of this time. This is especially true of vampire stories, such as Le Fanu's *CARMILLA*.

Why this distinction, then? There seems to be a genuine confusion as to the exact function of the doppelganger. In the modern age are human beings totally outmoded because they work inefficiently and must be replaced by the new species of "Homo mechanicus" (Robert Aickman's term), those with no cultural inheritance and no awareness of "God" 01 "the other world"? Or is the doppelganger the return of "the other world", our cultural inheritance, just at the time when agriculture is finally displaced by an industrialized mode of living?

Obviously it is more interesting (and hopeful) to assume the latter. It is because this idea can never be openly stated in fiction that many fine works appear almost torn apart by contradictions. In *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*, for example, a proto-surrealist novel, the "gypsy" foundling Heathcliff is present in the patriarchal family as all that it represses. The young Cathy sees him as her alter-ego rather than her sexual partner. There is no question of marriage between herself and Heathcliff. Rather, he offers her entry into a ritual mode of being, out of space and out of time, in which identity is dissolved. "Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff", she says in the book's "crucial sentence". (For a detailed discussion of the novel and other 19th Century writers, see J. Hillis Miller's study, *THE DISAPPEARANCE OF GOD* and, as a complement, Terence Eagleton's *MYTHS OF POWER*.) The realm of the "necessary" which Heathcliff represents is contrasted with the realm of the "agreeable" represented by Edgar Linton, Cathy's husband. The marital realm is light and frothy, but Heathcliff is the "eternal rocks beneath". In other words, "this world" is dependent on "the other world". The agreeable is dependent on the necessary and the "necessary", by definition, cannot be driven out. If it is, as Edgar and Cathy try to drive out Heathcliff, it only returns with a destructive vengeance, adjusting the "agreeable" realm of marital capitalist exploitation to itself rather than adjusting itself to the "agreeable". Unless the whole patriarchal structure is overthrown (which is consciously unthinkable) the only end can be tragedy. Cathy and Heathcliff's ritual fulfillment is doomed to be in the after-life, an "other world" which is an illusion rather than the necessary basis and defining structure of "this world".

Emily Bronte identifies (incorrectly!) the ritual mode with the male sex. Charles Dickens, in *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*, identifies it with the female, but, unfortunately, is unable to follow through the radical implications of his theme.

In the fairy-tale citadel, Satis House, the sole occupants are an old hag and her beautiful adopted daughter. All the clocks have stopped and Estella is brought up as Miss Havisham's revenge against the male sex. Pip, the protagonist, is quickly enamoured of Estella but frustrated as she seems always to be "moving away from him", as if in another world. She seems to be an aristocrat and scorns him for being a "common labouring boy". For the first time he discovers shame, a social construction which increases his repression and misery. Estella becomes his motivation in life, especially as he thinks her guardian Miss Havisham has given him a legacy to make himself educated and socially acceptable to her. He seems satisfied to spend years in preparation for joining "polite society" and being socially acceptable to Estella, but the repression this entails explodes in the otherwise inexplicable character of Orlick, a pre-moral, sub-human denizen of the marshes, who breaks into Pip's sister/foster-mother's home and delivers her a fatal blow to the head. Is this perhaps the fate which Dickens prophesies for the patriarchal family? Mrs Joe, although a woman, is certainly more "masculine" than her husband, the mild-natured Joe the blacksmith – Dickens presents the forge as an almost magical world in which the worker is creatively engaged. The outcome of the novel reveals the full irony of Pip's "great expectations". Pip's legacy has actually been given him by a convict he helped on the marshes as a boy; what is more, it is this man who is Estella's father. Anticipated by his nightmares, Pip finally sees that society has forced itself upon him for no purpose except destructive revenge and recrimination, confusing and even reconstructing his own natural desires. Estella, who has endured a failed marriage to a fellow-sadist, is alone at the end to meet Pip but (in the original, superior ending) there can be no possibility of marriage between them, since marriage assumes that the society and laws under which it is contracted are viable. Pip is too completely disillusioned for this, although also too powerless to change anything.

Dickens is undoubtedly indebted to fairy-tales, with their oblique references to the human revolution (see *BLOOD RELATIONS* and *THE WISE WOUND* by Shuttle and Redgrove), for his imaginative creation of Satis House and its female occupants. But the ritual power of these women has been drained. They are instead part of a repressive cycle of violence and humiliation which afflicts all the characters.

Freud and the Unconscious

Dickens' concern about the psychic pain inflicted on the people of modern industrialized society prefigures Freud's analysis of the human condition. Freud avers that "our civilization is built up on the suppression of instincts, the displacement of the original sexual aim for another one ("No food, no sex", according to Chris Knight's theory) being termed sublimation.

He adds that the "renunciation has been a progressive one in the course of the evolution of civilization" (quotations are from the essay

'CIVILIZED' SEXUAL MORALITY AND MODERN NERVOUS ILLNESS (1908; Penguin Freud Library volume 12); originally "the sexual instinct may be freely exercised without regard to the aims of reproduction"; but, with the rise of the work ethic and moral or religious prohibitions against non-reproductive sexuality, "only legitimate reproduction is allowed as a sexual aim". This restriction (to the "greater" end of material profits), if continued, means that "the number of strong natures who openly oppose the demands of civilization will increase enormously". They are dealt with (as far as possible) by being treated as victims of nervous illness, for which a whole new "science" (psychotherapy) was developed.

Freud's position is that of a conservative pessimist. The unconscious is largely those sexual and aggressive instincts which are incompatible with "civilized" sexual morality, and liable to destroy it (despite all the best efforts of psychotherapy). There is an awareness in Freud that the price paid for civilization may have been too high: "One... gets an impression that civilization is something which was imposed on a resisting majority by a minority which understood how to obtain possession of the means to power and coercion" (THE FUTURE OF AN ILLUSION, P.F.L. volume 12). In his major essay, CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS (P.F.L. volume 12), he argues that the individual is the enemy of civilization, an interesting point in the context of a contemporary capitalist society which possesses an individualist ideology:

"A good part of the struggles of mankind centre round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation – one, that is, that will bring happiness – between this claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group; and one of the problems that touches the fate of humanity is whether such an accommodation can be reached by means of some particular form of civilization or whether this conflict is irreconcilable."

Freud does not seem to recognize that there might be a society in which enacted ritual experience means that people are only individuals for part of the time. Although such ritual experience is not an organized part of modern life (but it could be), its existence is implied through language. The “family unit” may be the “germ-cell of civilization” but it was not the germ cell of culture, and Freud’s haughty refusal to distinguish between civilization and culture is perhaps a symptom of his inability to consider practical steps to reactivate culture in the 20th century; all he can do instead is maintain a stoic resignation before the barbarism of the two world wars, a barbarism moreover that is endemic only to an individualist, anti-cultural ideology.

20th Century fictional works that concern themselves with the struggle against repression are widespread and numerous. One of the most prominent is Conrad’s *HEART OF DARKNESS*, a pessimistic work which sees no hope of healing the wound between contemporary Western civilization and our African origins. Once in Africa, the quintessential modern European, Mr Kurtz, loses “all restraint” and succumbs to all manner of depravities. Significantly, women are presented as isolated reifications (“They – the women I mean – are out of it – should be out of it. We must help them stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse”, the narrator Marlow remarks). Only men are deemed capable of solving the problem – Freud would have probably thought so too – although, ironically, they are really the source of the problem.

The most often quoted lines of *HEART OF DARKNESS* are Kurtz’s final words: “The horror! The horror!”, and it could be argued that all serious modern literature is in some sense the literature of horror. It is certainly implicit in such ostensibly mainstream “classic” works as *HOWARDS END*, *HEARTBREAK HOUSE*, *WOMEN IN LOVE* and

THE WASTE LAND, each written as the lights were going out all over Europe. Each of these is concerned with apocalypse, the ending (regarded as more or less inevitable) of Western civilization.

HOWARDS END (which contains the celebrated epigraph “Only connect...”) attempts a rapprochement between essentially feminine culture and masculine business interests through the marriage of its protagonists Margaret Schiegel and Mr Wilcox, but the union signally fails to convince, because among other factors the contract of marriage is not a neutral enterprise. The marriage in *HEARTBREAK HOUSE* is somewhat more convincing, partly because it is merely announced and partly because the two parties are more or less thoroughly disillusioned with the state of things, if not with themselves. The attitude to war is equivocal, as it is also in

WOMEN IN LOVE. Mass destruction is almost welcomed as a liberation from unbearable civilized restraint, but the crucial problem (which is also *our* crucial problem) is the conviction and commitment of the parties left alive. Ellie Dunn, the female protagonist of HEARTBREAK HOUSE, is left hoping that the bombs will drop again the following night, perhaps to finish them all off. In WOMEN IN LOVE, D.H. Lawrence is at pains to distinguish one pair of lovers (Ursula and Birkin) from the other (Gudrun and Gerald), but at many moments he seems more imaginatively committed to the second pair, who are death-infected. Ursula and Birkin exist in limbo at the end of the novel, having resolved to go “into nowhere”, “away from the world’s somewheres”. “This world” seems as if it has ceased to exist for them.

Mainstream English literature since the First World War has become increasingly trivialized, and much of modernism and post-modernism seems based on the (perhaps justified) assumption that the modern reader is now liberated from an outmoded cultural and religious tradition into a world of totalitarian consumerism, in which everything is separated from everything else. Most important, the human body, already separated from the mind, comes to be regarded as a machine:

we become the objects rather than the subjects of ourselves. Here the doppelganger motif is again important, indicating a narcissistic obsession with “self-image”. We may seem to work more efficiently as a consequence, but by doing so we become schizophrenic, fragmented, reified.

Seriousness can only be marginalized in such a context (since only seriousness can remind us of our former aliveness). It survives paradoxically in genres which are officially considered to be lightweight, such as horror and fantasy. One example from the U.S.A. is John Franklin Bardin’s DEVIL TAKE THE BLUE-TAIL FLY (which went unpublished in the U.S.A. for twenty years). Its subject is patriarchal power and female oppression, the protagonist Ellen (a talented pianist) being constructed as a victim first by her hypocritical Christian fundamentalist father and then by her envious, less talented husband. Multiple personality is the means by which she attempts to adjust to her hostile environment, but her inability to integrate or consciously recognize her assertive, sexual nature as properly *hers* leads her to kill two men and decline inexorably into madness.

In Britain the work of Sarban and Robert Aickman has been outstanding but remains little known. In Sarban there is an unresolved tension between the desire to liberate ourselves from sexual repression and the family unit, and the almost certainly destructive consequences of doing so. His most hopeful

work is probably the novella *THE TRESPASSERS*, in which a teenage girl becomes transformed in the eyes of two younger boys from a farm labourer into a reincarnation of the goddess Artemis, confidently sexual, but confined to walking at night in a fixed location (an island). When she urges the two boys to follow her on to dry land, they draw back afraid, and their own potential for transformation is compromised.

RINGSTONES also has an adolescent girl as its protagonist, a trainee P.E. teacher engaged to a Cambridge undergraduate, who is awakened to her sexuality whilst teaching an Egyptian boy in a remote country house adjacent to a megalithic stone circle. The strange surroundings assist her in releasing her inhibitions but the sexuality released is inseparable from cruelty. It is perhaps significant here that Sarban identifies the stone circle with oppressive patriarchal sun worship.

Sarban and Robert Aickman might be classed as surrealist writers, because in both there is a marked ironic disparity between the urbane manner of the telling and the horrific contents of the tale. This disparity is one of the ways in which the insupportable contradictions of our society are revealed: the most celebrated cinematic equivalent would be the films of Luis Bunuel. Surrealism, however, may be justly criticized for its negativity. While condemning the emptiness of modern technological rationalism, it easily embraces the delirious rapture of “amour fou”. Thus, in a story such as Aickman’s *THE STAINS*, the world is well lost for love, because the modern world is past all hope of saving anyway. Aickman’s greatest stories are those in which this world is not merely negated in a haughty and assertive fashion (a symptom of despair and hopelessness), but rather *challenged* by another mode of living. That other mode is the “other world” of ritual solidarity, which makes an impressive re-appearance in stories such as *RINGING THE CHANGES* and *BIND YOUR HAIR*. Newly married females are repelled from their otiose husbands by forces outside time and space. The church bells ring continuously as the dead rise up to take the young wife away from her husband during the night. She comes back safe the next morning, but the husband realizes that their relationship has altered for ever. She is no longer just a wife; *she is something else too*. Similarly, another new wife goes to the country to meet her conventional husband’s conventional family, and is befriended by the village eccentric, Mrs Pagani, who compels her to participate at night in ancient rites in a maze-like structure, crawling in animal skins on the ground. The next day all seems as before, and the newlyweds prepare to return to the city. Mrs Pagani waves to them as they go with the wonderfully enigmatic words (addressed to both of them or to the wife alone?): “Don’t be late!” There is a time for a world of

individualized competitiveness, but there must also be a time for a world elsewhere, a world of ritual solidarity which tempers and modifies the other, makes it sustainable rather than catastrophically destructive. [cf. *THE LADY FROM THE SEA* (Ibsen)].

These stories, as well as Freud's theories, do not take account of the social changes of the 1960s which brought about (ostensibly, at least) greater sexual freedom and loss of repression (aligned to the decline of religious belief). Works which do address the issue are hardly hopeful, however. John Brunner's *QUICKSAND*, for example, presents the protagonist with the choice between a conventionally repressed social-climbing woman and a woman from another planet (a disguise for the new classless self-reified consumer), who makes love to anyone who is nice to her. Trapped between an old world in which creative activity is painfully minimized, and a new world in which thinking is non-existent and individuality is replaced by interchangeable consumer objects, he can only commit suicide.

Similarly, in Anna Kavan's apocalyptic *ICE*, the nameless girl protagonist is constructed as an object to be competed for by three men: her husband, ex-lover and the Warden, a man who attempts to take over the reins of power after a nuclear accident has irreversibly altered the world's climate. She is not only nameless but virtually speechless, as if on strike against them. Only at the end is a bond of trust revealed between her and her ex-lover, but it is by then only a matter of hours before the ice covers them. It seems clear throughout that the social crisis is an outcome of the crisis in male-female relations. By setting the action partly in an ice-bound Madagascar, Kavan allows herself to speculate on the inherent superiority of the female-dominated lemurs, which she fancifully presumes could provide evolution with its next development after the failure of the human life experiment.

Crucial to an understanding of the implications of the sexual 'revolution' or 'counter-culture' of the 1960s is an exploration of what has happened to language. Deprived of its sacred origins (since belief in God is deemed irrelevant, making us less good consumers), language becomes deprived of all its power and meaning. Modern art has to be anti-art because it is divorced from the sacred domain, and is soon reduced to nothingness. So too does desacralized language become anti-language: all that remains is clichés which are perhaps appropriate when experience has been alienated by consumer objects, including the human body. The 1960s did not herald this decline in language, but nor did it reverse the decline. [For more on the implications of the decline of the "sacred" in language, see George Steiner's *REAL PRESENCES* (1989), especially the last pages.]

The Modern Horror Film

In his *HOLLYWOOD FROM VIETNAM TO REAGAN*, Robin Wood argues that the sexual “revolution” has come too late and perhaps too suddenly to allow for a mature post-industrial culture. Without evincing awareness of the need for a ritual element as a way to reach this maturity he charts the development of Hollywood cinema and its growing disenchantment with children. Obedient, well-behaved boys and girls gradually turn into young antichrists who are hell-bent on destroying their parents. Significant works from the 1940s show the prophetic tensions in the family structure. In many of Hitchcock’s films, for example, such as *SHADOW OF A DOUBT*, the family is depicted as being devoid of imagination and irritatingly complacent. The most dynamic character is the displaced Uncle Charlie, known to be the ‘Merry Widow’ murderer. The young female protagonist develops a crush for him, especially as he shares her name (the doppelganger motif is central to Hitchcock’s oeuvre), and her discovery of his nature horrifies her especially because it reveals something about herself.

Other forties films, such as *MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS* and Frank Capra’s *IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE* contain memorable scenes of violence against the family. In the former the children destroy the family of snow people they have built in the garden, while in the latter James Stewart rails against his wife and children just before going out of space and time into the horrific “dreamtown” sequence. As so often in classic Hollywood narrative cinema, the female energies are here divided into the good wife/mother and the bad floozy/prostitute. However, the inclusiveness of the director’s imaginative vision, combined with the quality of the acting, means that both women are rather more than stereotypes. Capra is conscious that the enemy is really a large-scale bureaucratic capitalism, which can only be offset by small, human-scale businesses in which what each individual does matters and makes a difference. As he grew older Capra could not understand what was happening in America (although he predicted it here and in *MEET JOHN DOE*), and stopped making films. All that has happened is that the enemy has grown much larger and more powerful, and the hopes of restraining it no longer fall within the sphere of democratic legitimacy.

Since the 1960s, however, there have been signs that this “enemy” is destroying itself from within, as all the vital signs of life reside in what the “enemy” represses: in modern horror films the monster is clearly more sympathetic than the ostensible hero (this is implicit from as long ago as

FRANKENSTEIN), and is only constructed as a “monster” by the conventions of the horror genre. In *BLOOD SISTERS* the “monster” is a Siamese twin whose dead sister’s personality continues to reside within her *at periodic intervals*. The mild passive woman turns into a murderous witch, and the doctor who has married her and performed the separation operation (killing the other sister in the process), must ensure that she keeps taking tablets to prevent the metamorphoses from occurring. But the action of the film – one of the most intense and powerful of modern times – shows that his efforts are doomed to fail. The romantic male lover must fall victim to the uncontrolled (because unintegrated) assertiveness of the female.

Other films in which a female protagonist appears to belong partly in another world, or otherwise to confound our (imposed) expectations of female representation are *BELLE DE JOUR* and *LA FEMME AUX BOTTES ROUGES*. In each case the woman (played by Catherine Deneuve), oscillates between being a wife and a prostitute, or somewhat passive and somewhat assertive. She is finally both, which is also to be neither, since we are forced to rethink our repressive habits of categorizing people. Much more recently, the film by the Canadian Patricia Rozema, *WHEN NIGHT IS FALLING*, shows a woman finding her autonomy and assertiveness when she leaves her fiancé for another woman; by doing this she is also leaving one world (a man, a repressive religious seminary, security) for another world (a woman, the spontaneous delights of the circus, insecurity). The ending shows the difficulty involved in making a choice, as the protagonist almost commits suicide. The fact is that *a choice should not have to be made*. There is no fulfillment to be had in living exclusively either in this world or in the other world. Repressive order is by itself unhealthy; but so is disordered spontaneity. A dynamic interaction between the two worlds is necessary for the vitality and viability of any human society; if the prevailing structures and codes of our society prevent this from occurring (which they do!), it is they themselves which are wrong, not us. Moreover, they can be changed if we become conscious enough of the need to change them. As Lindsay Anderson was fond of saying (and showing in films such as *THE WHITE BUS*, *IF* and *OH LUCKY MAN*), our fantasy is part of our reality. To think otherwise is a common bourgeois error, and a fertile source of “mental illness”, to be treated by the profitable “illness businesses”.

In a horror film such as George A. Romero’s *DAWN OF THE DEAD*, it is implied that the majority of people have lost all capacity to think at all, having been so successfully transformed into mindless zombie consumers, who gravitate to the shopping malls as if they were religious shrines. They

are a tribute to the advertisers' persuasive strategies, but what the advertisers did not anticipate was that the success of their strategies necessitates the attenuation of consumers' reasoning and linguistic capacities, thus accelerating a regression to pre-cultural barbarism. The shopping mall is a pseudo-ritual pseudo-experience in which the "participants" are totally passive, totally de-individualized but totally separate. Women are especially susceptible to this process owing to their neurological structure (see works by Stan Gooch and *THE GREAT COSMIC MOTHER* by Sjuo and Mor, which provide evidence that the woman's cerebellum is larger than that of the man).

Ironically, it was probably this difference in brain structure which helped to set off the human revolution in the first place: the crucial difference is that the women were then in control of the fantasy, whereas now the fantasy (of a different kind) is controlling them. It is not their own fantasy but a regressive addiction which usurps their own desires and wishes. Of course, men are addicted too, most often because the packaging of the consumer-object is a representation of the female body. Another, more recent horror film which concerns itself with this process is Larry Cohen's *THE STUFF*

If fantasy is to be recognized as part of our reality there needs to be a reorganization of the work/leisure relationship. Advanced capitalism depends on a clear distinction between the two. We "work hard" in order to "play hard". This distinction is imposed on us as soon as we enter full-time education. As Michael Schneider puts it in *NEUROSIS AND CIVILIZATION*:

"The worker must work hard to produce (renounce), then become the consumer of his alienated product. Late capitalism needs both: it must mobilize guilt feelings against capitalist desires as well as capitalist desires against guilt feelings."

Playing, and pleasure, turns into something we frantically have to buy. We can no longer produce it for ourselves, for nothing, through solidarity. Extreme tension alternates with extreme relaxation: the consequence is a society (the U.S.A. is the most obvious example) characterized by immaturity and irresponsibility, people who are well-qualified but uneducated, since "education" is constructed as a consumer product. Note here the importance of nouns: nouns facilitate the objectification of everything around us and prohibit any thought (or, rather, thinking) of change. In essence, education is a process of "bringing out" or "unfolding", something that cannot be said to disappear with an external product such as a degree. The dangers of systematic or objective thought are well explored

in works by T.W. Adorno, Paul Feyerabend and David Bohm (especially UNFOLDING MEANING and THOUGHT AS A SYSTEM).

The question which must be explored is whether the contemporary regressive tendencies are terminal, in which case full human language (dependent on trust and solidarity) and the human contract will disappear entirely; or whether they could be, as Schneider suggests, “the initial moments of progressive needs” (see also Harvey Cox’s THE FEAST OF FOOLS and Richard Gardner’s THE PURPOSE OF LOVE). The evidence of modern film is not very comforting. In THE RED DESERT, for example, the female protagonist is out of step with the encroaching technological barbarism but can only retreat into private fantasy (shared vicariously with the cinema audience): being unable to adjust to modern reality and being unable to live out or enact her creative (rather than imposed) fantasy, she drifts towards death. Similarly, in DAWN OF THE DEAD the two characters who manage to survive have all along shown no particular desire for the modern world’s regressive products: they are depicted as being still human amidst a world overwhelmingly populated by speechless cannibalistic zombies who were previously human.

In Pasolini’s masterful THEOREM a typical bourgeois family has its eyes opened to the submerged ritual element in life, but once the messenger who has brought it to them departs, they mostly flounder desperately. They instantly see the human poverty of living merely in “this world” but cannot create a fruitful interchange between it and the “other world”. The simple reason for this is that they *lack solidarity*. Each leaves the bourgeois household and goes their own way, into various forms of experiment, madness and destruction. Defined in terms outlined by Stan Gooch in his TOTAL MAN and PERSONALITY AND EVOLUTION, they lurch from “system A” consciousness (exclusive work and “objectivity”, or anti-trance) into “system B” consciousness (exclusive play and “subjectivity”, or trance), without reaching the maturity of “system C” consciousness, a dynamic interchange and transcendence of both.

At the time of the human revolution work was life rather than the means to life. The form was the content. Hunting was work, and so was singing and dancing. The singing and dancing was a necessary component of the consciousness and culture which set humans apart from other species. It brings about the subject-object relationship (we know that we have shared a fantasy retrospectively, and can talk about it afterwards as independent subjects), but the subject-object relationship only came into existence because we are conscious that it has already been, and will be again, transcended. This context makes the subject-object relationship (which must

by definition be “repressive” of our animal natures) at least bearable and at most consciously pleasurable. Animals may experience pleasure but are not conscious of doing so: humans are, and the consciousness *adds to* rather than subtracts from the experience: the evidence for this is overwhelming in language. Drawing on Schiller’s LETTERS ON THE AESTHETIC EDUCATION OF MAN (a complementary critique can be found in Stan Gooch’s PERSONALITY AND EVOLUTION), Herbert Marcuse in EROS AND CIVILIZATION argues that there is a distinction between “basic” and “surplus” repression:

“Surplus repression: the restrictions necessitated by social domination. Basic repression: the “modifications” of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the human race in civilization.”

This is another way of expressing the distinction between differing degrees of alienation in work. Marcuse goes on to criticize Freud’s error concerning cultural origins:

“It seems essential for Freud’s hypothesis that in the sequence of the development toward civilization the matriarchal period is *preceded* by primal patriarchal despotism: the low degree of repressive domination, the extent of erotic freedom, which are traditionally associated with matriarchy appear, in Freud’s hypothesis, as consequences of the overthrow of patriarchal despotism rather than as primary “natural” conditions. In the development of civilization, freedom becomes possible only as *liberation*. Liberty *follows* domination – and leads to the reaffirmation of domination.”

It is significant in this regard not merely that Freud was by all accounts a misogynist but that he totally lacked an appreciation of what Marcuse termed “the aesthetic dimension”. For Freud art was merely a socially tolerated form of infantile regression rather than a deliberate creation set up over and against “this world” in order to change “this world”; in other words a highly conscious activity (the activity which in fact *created* consciousness) rather than a lapse into barbarism. Nowadays, of course, it is only really the “artist” who gains pleasure from his or her work, although in fact there are rather more (and rather better paid) “anti-artists” about. The pleasure of genuine artists is also afflicted now by a sense of isolation, since art’s ritual origins have long been displaced. But genuine art remains wonderfully exhilarating and pleasurable – most of the works discussed here are examples of it and are proof in themselves that a more fulfilling way of living is possible as well as necessary.

This more fulfilling way of living could involve a reassertion of ritual solidarity, with its transcendence of the subject-object relationship, but it is

important to remember that that original solidarity was also a collective deception whereby sex was turned into meat. Marcuse claims that “the more complete the alienation of labour, the greater the potential of freedom: total automation would be the optimum” Thus if all *necessary labour* (which, as discussed, does not have to exclude pleasure) is done by machines, what happens to human work and play? It is surely mistaken to make this claim, and Marcuse has rightly been attacked for doing so. There is also the problem that machines tend to be used to produce more than is immediately necessary: the economics of machine production in prevailing social conditions are such that human needs are not served. This *may* change if the ownership of production is placed in the hands of the people as a whole but this process, involving massive decentralization, still does not resolve the question of human work which, as discussed, is inseparable in its healthy state from human pleasure.

Marcuse himself falls victim to bourgeois sentimentality when he sets “play” against “toil”, “display” against “need”. For the women on sex-strike during the human revolution play” was work, ‘display was need. What clearly needs to be done is to modify our currently harmful individualist ideology with consciously ritual activity; this must provide us with an awareness, first of all, that

“The gods’ fundamental glory is the fundamental glory of men and women, who being in *need* of it create it, elevate it... The people, not the priests, made the gods... The gods are the creation of the imagination at its utmost.” (Wallace Stevens: “Two or Three Ideas’ from OPUS POSTHUMOUS.)

We who have created the gods as a ritual enactment have turned against them/us as their/our role in society became incoherent, apparently superfluous or “surplus repressive”. Our capacity for belief in ourselves as a species – which requires a coming together in solidarity, since belief is much stronger when shared – must be a cause at once for celebration and for defiance. A conscious celebration of “the final belief.., in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else” (Wallace Stevens: Adagia” from OPUS POSTHUMOUS), and whose paradoxical nature must be a creative rebuke and challenge to the vested interests of “this world” which refuses to see that “reality is not what it is. It consists of the many realities which it can be made into” (Ibid.). As others have noted before, much remains to be done, and time is growing short.

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