

3 *Cinéma du Grand Guignol*: Theatricality in the Horror Film

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The historical link between horror films and the gory, sensationalist popular theatre of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has often been noted. Dave Beech and John Roberts, for instance, suggest that ‘the Hollywood horror movie is no doubt the true descendant of *Grand Guignol*.’¹ Similarly, Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson in their definitive study of the French theatre of horror assert ‘that the Grand-Guignol greatly influenced subsequent horror films.’² In the same vein, drama historian Michael R. Booth sees in the Gothic stage melodrama of the 1800s ‘an early equivalent of the modern horror film.’³ Filmmakers have often evoked the theatrical genealogy of horror cinema. Although there have been few actual film adaptations of Grand Guignol plays – Vernon Sewell’s *Latin Quarter* (1946) based on Pierre Mille and C. de Vylars’s *L’Angoisse* (1908; in English by José Levy as *The Medium*, 1912)⁴ is a rare surviving example – many horror movies explicitly refer to the stage as the originator of screen terror and the privileged site of cinematic fear. These references to the theatre of horror do not merely pay lip service to a revered predecessor. Rather, the films that acknowledge the theatre of gore do so to reflect on the nature of horror on screen. Looking at a number of horror films that identify explicitly the theatre as the *locus horribilis* par excellence, from the early Peter Lorre vehicle *Mad Love* (Karl Freund, 1935) to Douglas Hickox’s cult classic *Theatre of Blood* (1973) and the straight-to-video thriller *Acts of Death* (Jeff Burton, 2007), I will argue that such works use theatricality to foreground certain character types, expose structural paradoxes, and highlight modes of performance common to the cinematic tale of terror.

The films discussed here overtly conceive of the theatre as the *antecedent* of filmic horror, as the mayhem that afflicts the characters often

results from pathological desires rooted in prior theatrical experiences. In some cases, a character becomes obsessed with stage performances **her** or she attended or participated in, and manifests this perverse passion through violence. In other cases, a traumatic memory is associated with the theatre, and now returns with a bloody vengeance. In his contribution to this anthology, R.J. Tougas elaborates at length on the theatrical aesthetics of the revenge film in relation to fundamental principles of natural justice. While Tougas's argument and mine overlap to some extent, what matters to me is less that vengeance operates according to the theatrical principles of justice, than that in the horror films considered here the theatre is visualized in *concrete terms* as the instigator of cinematic revenge. Furthermore, in the films I examine the theatre is portrayed as a space specifically conceived for the performance of mercilessly violent retribution. In these works, cinematic horror does not only *result* from a theatrical experience, it also graphically *transpires on stage*, thus superimposing theatrical and filmic terror. Through this equation of the stage and the screen, these films propose that cinematic horror functions theatrically as an enjoyable form of strictly regulated overindulgence.

But before saying anything else, I should state that in the following pages I will not claim that *all* horror films work the same way. I will limit myself to arguing that explicit references to the stage provide insight into depictions of *masculine* monstrosity. Many horror films foreground what Barbara Creed has famously called the 'monstrous-feminine.'⁵ In their reliance on the abject and the pre-symbolic 'Real' to induce fear, such films might not call upon theatrical artifice. But other horror movies showcase what Hand and Wilson refer to as the 'monstrous-paternal,' which is typical of the Grand Guignol tale of terror.⁶ This is a type of horror in which the artifice of the symbolic order takes over the scene in the terrifying form of a domineering father figure, adopting the theatricality of aggressively phallic signifiers to affect the audience.⁷

Such films, I suggest, deploy the theatricality of the disciplinary monster whose very name, derived from the Latin *monstrare*, connotes the state of being put on display to educate spectators by scaring them shitless. Here, the monster functions as a 'Nemesis,' to borrow E. Michael Jones's concept;⁸ a punishing force that emerges to restore order in cultures that have rejected moral governance. The paradoxical notion of a brutal villain who uses gruesome violence to defeat immorality is central to the dual structure of disciplinarian horror, which operates simultaneously as a mode of outrageous spectacle and a practice of stringent

authoritarianism.⁹ It is no coincidence that the typical slasher-film device of first hiding the monstrous disciplinarian before displaying him in all his horrific glory for the spectator's petrified enjoyment finds its origins in medieval morality plays like *Mankind* (c. 1470). In *Mankind*, the appearance of the devil Titivillus, whose outrageous malevolence is exhibited to teach faith and obedience to audiences, marks the climactic point of the show. As the original stage directions of *Mankind* indicate, spectators are solicited for donations just before they are allowed to enjoy the exhilaratingly terrifying display of corrective evil.¹⁰ My contention here is that disciplinary horror thrives on the paradox of theatrical tragedy:¹¹ a Dionysian spectacle of bestial lust and brutal violence contained within the rigid Apollonian parameters of sadistic control; or, as Stephen King puts it in his book-length essay on the topic, *Danse Macabre* (1980), 'the horror tale generally details the outbreak of some Dionysian madness in an Apollonian existence.'¹² The argument below shows how the theatre as space and practice analogizes horror's aggressive urge to repress the very terror it generates.¹³ And at the centre of this paradoxical space stands a villain who performs his evil gestures to educate and delight his mildly sadomasochistic audience.

Grand Guignol Cinema, Sadism, and Theatricality

In his reflections on *The Life and Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*, first published in 1933, Geoffrey Gorer commented on the intriguing correlation between the sadist and the theatre artist in these terms: 'I do not intend to imply that actors or dramatists are sexual sadists either overtly or unconsciously; at most I am implying that some of the same psychological mechanisms are involved in both situations – to anticipate a little, that sadists are failed actors and playwrights.' Gorer added 'it is of course with the Grand Guignol, the theatre of blood and horror, that the connection with sadism becomes most obvious.'¹⁴ For Gorer, the sadist is a performer 'acting out a play with an audience of one,' where the disciplinarian tries to be an effective actor, striving to incite reactions in the spectator, seeking to compel his audience to respond according to his will.¹⁵ What matters here is that the sadist is a stage performer and his cruelty is essentially a *performance*. As John M. Callahan speculates, it is likely that at least some spectators would attend 'Théâtre du Grand-Guignol' to release 'their own sadism and/or masochism';¹⁶ 'sadism and/or masochism' because these two ordinary perversions are intrinsically linked. The sadistic performance irrevocably becomes a masochistic pleasure for, as

performance, sadism is ineffectual in concrete terms and fully dependent on the willingness of the spectator to play along. As such the sadist is the passive recipient of the spectator's active decision to be 'scared.' As such, the sadist's pleasure is a fundamentally masochistic submission to the spectator's reaction. As Havelock Ellis wrote in his 1933 *Psychology of Sex*, 'masochism, as Freud put it, is sadism turned round on to the self, or we may say that sadism is masochism turned on to others.'¹⁷ The idea that the Grand Guignol appeals to the sadomasochistic desires of the audience is central to the narrative of Karl Freund's *Mad Love*, which premiered only two years after the original publication of Gorer's commentary on De Sade and Ellis's book on sex.

Mad Love is probably the first Hollywood thriller to refer explicitly to the French theatre of horror, with the opening scenes taking place at the 'Théâtre des horreurs,' where spectators scream and laugh, and where a nurse is even espied in a corner, evoking one of the better-known publicity gimmicks of the original 'Théâtre du Grand-Guignol.'¹⁸ After the opening credits, the film begins on a shot that brings us to the box office of the 'Théâtre des horreurs,' where a woman refuses to go in and chides her male companion for bringing her to such a sordid place. We then move to the dressing room of the famed actress Yvonne Orlac (Frances Drake), who says a few kind words about her most devoted fan, the brilliant surgeon Doctor Gogol (Peter Lorre). He has attended forty-seven performances of her current show, *Torturée*, and now arrives to enjoy Yvonne's final appearance in the play. Within the first five minutes of the film, Gogol's fixation on Yvonne is manifest. He stares, with his creepy Peter-Lorre eyes, at a wax figure of his idol in the theatre's lobby; he becomes jealous when a drunk patron lustfully addresses the wax figure; and sitting alone in his private box seat, he gazes with repressed passion as Yvonne is stretched on the rack in the climactic scene of the gothic drama in which she stars. As she is poked with a white hot iron before her jealous husband and screams 'yes, yes' in a mixture of pain and pleasure, Gogol slowly closes his eyes in a stoic display of orgasmic self-control. Conversely, the spectacle of 'actual' death, when he witnesses the execution of a murderer by guillotine, only affects Gogol mildly, as the scene of the beheading barely makes him raise an eyebrow. Horror on stage (and on film) is clearly something quite different from 'real' horror, and Gogol is evidently aroused only by the former.

Gogol's intense fixation on the spectacle of ostentatious wickedness and eroticism is at the core of his economy of perversion. As such, he embodies, at least in part, the Deleuzian masochist who is painfully enthralled

before the torturing feminine ideal. As Gilles Deleuze writes in his commentary on Sacher-Masoch, 'what characterizes masochism and its theatricality is a peculiar form of cruelty in the woman torturer: the cruelty of the ideal, the specific freezing point, the point at which idealism is realized.'¹⁹ Sitting in his box, Gogol is mesmerized by Yvonne who is at once kind, in appreciating his spectatorship, and cruel in relentlessly denying him any intimacy and sensual contact. As an actress, Yvonne is the ideal woman for the masochist, for she offers herself as tantalizing spectacle but forbids touch and physical proximity. It is no surprise that as the 'cold, maternal, severe'²⁰ woman torturer, Yvonne can appeal to Gogol's masochism even in the form of a statue. For the wax figure in the theatre lobby evokes the 'marble body, women of stone, Venus of ice,' that Deleuze recognizes as Sacher-Masoch's favourite expressions of the female torturer: 'his characters often serve their amorous apprenticeship with a cold statue.'²¹ But it is not surprising either that Gogol's pleasure results from a performance in which his feminine ideal is tortured by *another man*, for the surgeon's masochism carries with it a strong sadistic impulse. This other man evokes Sacher-Masoch's 'third party whom he calls "the Greek."²² Sacher-Masoch's Greek 'represents the dangerous father who brutally interrupts the [masochistic] experiment.'²³ The intervention of the male torturer in Sacher-Masoch's fantasy world has the masochist 'giving up masochism and turning sadist.'²⁴ The appearance of the Greek in the spectacle thus transforms the passive masochist spectator into a sadistic actor.

This transformation is precisely what transpires soon after the beginning of *Mad Love*. While the performance at 'Théâtre des horreurs' deeply appeals to Gogol's masochistic tendencies, the spectacle itself only makes up a small fraction of the film. Most of the narrative is occupied with obsessive love and sadistic revenge rather than the masochistic spectacle of pleasurable pain. The story of *Mad Love* revolves around Gogol's initial attempt to endear himself to Yvonne, by carrying out a delicate operation on her pianist husband, Stephen Orlac (Colin Clive), whose hands were crushed in a train crash. But when she refuses to reward him with her love – which she would refuse him even if she were not married because there is something about him that repulses and frightens her – he plots to incriminate Stephen so he can possess Yvonne. His desire to 'own' Yvonne as an object, which is first manifested paradoxically through his masochistic fixation on the spectacle of the woman torturer being tortured,²⁵ is further expressed through his purchasing the wax figure he had previously admired in the theatre lobby. He brings

the wax figure home, plays music for it and has his maid take care of it as though the statue were human. But the statue cannot reciprocate his love and therefore he must possess the 'real' Yvonne.

During Stephen's operation, Gogol and his assistant Doctor Wong (Keye Luke) did not reconstruct his crushed hands as they claimed they would. Rather they secretly removed the pianist's hands and grafted the hands of the recently guillotined murderer, knife-thrower Rollo (Edward Brophy). When Stephen confides in Gogol that his post-operation hands want to kill with knives, the vengeful doctor sees a way to get rid of the husband and appropriate the wife. Knowing that Stephen and his stepfather had an argument earlier, Gogol stabs Orlac senior, and then appears as a mysterious stranger in dark cloak to reveal the 'truth' to Stephen. As he shows his artificial, steel hands to Stephen, Gogol whispers: 'Look, I have no hands. Yours, they were mine once . . . and so, when you knifed your father in the back last night, you killed him with my hands.' He then reveals himself to be Rollo, whose head has been reattached to his body by the surgeon. Petrified by the vision of the knife thrower, as performed by Gogol wearing a bizarre contraption of metal and leather around his neck, Stephen runs away in fear convinced that he has murdered his stepfather with Rollo's hands.

It is no coincidence that, as part of his evil plot, Gogol would choose to dress up and play the role of a dead man, for theatricality is everywhere in this film, from the artistic practice that triggers Gogol's fixation to the 'Caligariesque' expressionism of the surgeon's clinic. While, as I observed earlier, an actual stage appears only at the beginning of the film and is not seen again after Gogol leaves the 'Théâtre des horreurs' following Yvonne's final curtain call, the narrative as a whole is dominated by sadistic theatricality. Dr Gogol provides an uncanny illustration of Gorer's theory of the sadist as actor, as the demented scientist relies on performance to impose his will on others, transforming them into objects. Gogol's sadistic urge to dominate is thus rooted in his desire for the theatrical artifice of symbolic authority. As J.P. Telotte argues, *Mad Love* 'explores the subjects of artificial creation . . . to expose the power of subjection we wield on both others and ourselves.'²⁶ That Gogol uses the artificial steel hands and neck brace as props in his performance as Rollo is but a minor, albeit clever, metaphor for the sadist's appeal to theatricality to impose his will on his audience.

The most obvious manifestation of artificialization or theatricalization is Yvonne's wax figure. Near the end of the film the actress, having entered Gogol's house and accidentally broken the statue, chooses to

impersonate the artificial figure. To avoid discovery, writes Telotte, 'she pretends to be that figure, that possessed, powerless, tortured piece of artifice – which she has, in another fashion, already become. A series of close-ups points out the agony of that status, as she tries to stifle her natural urge to flee or cry out – her very humanity – while Gogol plays to the wax figure.'²⁷

When he hears the wax figure scream, as she is scratched by a pet parrot, Gogol immediately believes his Pygmalion fantasy to have materialized (incidentally, the drunken maid who has been taking care of the statue also believes that the real Yvonne is the artificial thing come to life). As voices tell him that 'each man kills the *thing* he loves,' Gogol puts his hands around Yvonne's neck to squeeze the life out of what he believes to be an animated wax figure. In his *Erotic Theatre* (1973), John Elsom identifies the limits of theatrical sadism in these terms: 'the sadistic process cannot be completed because a man cannot become an object without ceasing to be human. A man becomes an object only in death.'²⁸ By strangling the wax figure, the insane surgeon seeks to bring to closure his sadistic performance of mad love through a final objectification of the already objectified Yvonne. In the words of Gregory W. Mank, Gogol then 'carries his Galatea to the couch and with a horrible smile, begins strangling her with her own hair, reciting: "In one long raven string I wind, Three times her little throat around and strangle her. No pain feels she. I am quite sure she feels no pain."²⁹ The declamation of a slightly revised passage from Robert Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover' combined with the declared end of sadism ('No pain feels she') draws the curtain on Gogol's show and ushers the return of spectatorial masochism. Stephen and the police arrive in the nick of time, and using his new-found skills, the pianist throws a deadly knife at the twisted doctor, reducing him to the ultimate passivity of death.

The theatricality of *Mad Love*, far from being limited to its brief opening references to the Grand Guignol, thus operates as the structuring principle of the narrative, as the whole plot revolves around the fanatical urge of the sadist-as-theatre-artist to control excessive objects to satisfy both his lustful fixation on a beautiful woman and his obsessive drive to stage the demise of his rival. The metaphor of the sadist-as-theatre-artist is literalized in a number of films, in which stage directors use the theatre as their public torture chambers where the paradox of strict discipline and gory excess finds a most pleasantly disturbing incarnation. *Theatre of Death* (Samuel Gallu, 1966), which also acknowledges explicitly the Grand Guignol heritage of the horror film, features Christopher Lee

in the role of Philippe Darvas, the domineering new director of Paris's 'Théâtre de la Mort,'³⁰ The film opens on a guillotine scene in which a beautiful young blonde, ingénue Nicole Chapelle (Jenny Till) is decapitated for the enjoyment of a bourgeois audience. A voice-over then gives us a brief history of the theatre that deliberately recalls that of the original 'Théâtre du Grand-Guignol,' which had shut down in 1962, just a few years before the film's production.³¹

Unlike Gogol's sadism, which always operates behind the scenes, Darvas's sadism takes centre stage. Darvas dominates his actors, hypnotizing them into submission, making them perform acts of unbearable violence. For instance, during a public play reading for an upcoming show, 'The Witches of Salem,' he *directs* his protégée Nicole into using a hot iron to burn the troupe's leading lady, Dani Gireaux (Lelia Goldoni). The torture would have been fulfilled if an audience member, Dr Charles Marquis (Julian Glover), had not intervened before the poker touched the older actress's face. In a later rehearsal for a sketch on voodoo sacrifice, Darvas threatens to run a spear through an actress's stomach because she can't perform fear convincingly. His histrionic malevolence is such that Darvas quickly becomes Doctor Marquis's main suspect in a series of creepy, vampiric murders he is investigating. Even when Darvas mysteriously disappears and some think he has been murdered, Marquis does not believe he is dead, seeing the director's disappearance as an elaborate trick devised by a sadistic murderer to escape justice.

Darvas is but one in a line of sadistic stage directors in horror films, such as Sardu (Seamus O'Brien) in *The Incredible Torture Show* (aka *Blood-sucking Freaks*; Joel M. Reed, 1976), and Montag (Ray Sager/Crispin Glover) in *The Wizard of Gore* in both its 1970 (Herschell Gordon Lewis) and 2007 (Jeremy Kasten) versions. In these films, the theatre becomes an arena for repulsive, mesmerizing, and sexually charged spectacles in which the male stage director performs excessively violent and gory attacks on female bodies. That Darvas, Sardu, and Montag are misogynistic bastards is undeniable.³² Yet the sheer artificiality of the *staged* violence undoes, at least in part, the disturbing impact of the sexist assaults and foregrounds the theatricality of both the villain *and* the victim. Both the histrionic villain and the overly eroticized victim serve as theatrical hyperboles used to create an aesthetics of terror that declares its own inauthenticity. While Sardu's and Montag's violence against women on stage translates into 'real' – albeit implausibly bloody and gory – violence offstage, Darvas's cruelty remains strictly theatrical. Although he is portrayed as an excessively unpleasant man offstage, Darvas is eventually

shown to have been innocent of the murders, and indeed turns out to be a victim.

As such *Theatre of Death* makes manifest what is implicit in *The Incredible Torture Show* and *The Wizard of Gore*, namely, that the terrifying deeds of the sadistic theatre artist are just for show. Sardu's and Montag's 'actual' slaughter and disembowelment of 'actual' victims are so impossibly gruesome, indulging in such improbable imagery of nightmarish carnage, that the 'reality effect' is utterly disavowed. This is not unique to the films considered here. For Steven Jay Schneider, 'the good horror film and the uncanny tale successfully marshal, cultivate, and maintain chary disbelief ... horror films are generally not as circumspect about maintaining the reality effect as Freud would like.'³³ The films that do foreground the artifice of theatrical horror only make the unreality of their shock tactics more obvious than other scary movies. Not surprisingly, at the very end of the original *Wizard of Gore*, Montag, the master hypnotist and illusionist, is dismissed by an incredulous female spectator (Judy Cler) as a phony, thus asserting the artificiality of his sadistic persona and exposing his 'real' acts of violence as mere fiction. The 2007 version of the film, which emphasizes the artificiality of neon lights, expressionistic camera work, and computer-generated imagery (CGI) special effects, opens with a *film noir* type voice-over narration by Montag's nemesis, investigative journalist Edmund Bigelow (Kip Pardue): 'they say all the world is a stage, and the sucker that I was bought the line. I made myself the star. I built the stage. I cast the actors ... and you'll see how it all went to the devil.' By the end of the film, where the past-tense narration merges with the present tense of the image, it becomes evident that the bloodbath we have witnessed was nothing but a performance staged by Bigelow's sick mind. Theatricality is foregrounded to highlight the horror film's own fictitiousness.

The vampiric killer in *Theatre of Death* is eventually revealed to be the angelic-looking Nicole. The point here is not so much that 'appearances are deceptive,' but rather that moments of horror created by discreet gestures of violence operate differently from suspense. While the narrative focuses on the mystery of the murders being investigated by Marquis, with scenes shot in a realist style with mobile camera and gritty cinematography, individual moments of horror interrupt the narrative and focus on gestures performed by the figure of the sadistic director. The shadowy form that kills innocent victims and drinks their blood, although eventually revealed to be Nicole, is clearly meant to resemble Darvas. The revelation that Nicole is a blood-sucking psycho is merely a

plot twist. The *figure* of Darvas, the impression of his threateningly overbearing presence, the perception of his violent gestures towards the victims is the main source of fear. While the narrative involves suspense generated by the 'lack of full knowledge'³⁴ of who the killer is, individual moments of horror are created through the disturbing theatrics of Darvas – or his semblance – savagely assailing defenceless victims. The sense of dread is thus always related to theatricality in the form of the stage director. Even the peculiar dagger used in the murders is identified as a prop from the 'Théâtre de la Mort,' thus strengthening the link between the killings and Darvas's staged cruelty. Moments of horror in *Theatre of Death*, as in other similar films, are always at once frighteningly violent and safely contained within the bounds of performance.

Darvas's theatrical presence is so central to the horror effect that even characters acknowledge his ability to instil terror in his own absence. When Nicole proves highly capable of performing her part as a coldly vengeful woman in 'The Witches of Salem' even after her mentor Darvas has vanished, the owner of the theatre Madame Angélique (Evelyn Laye) remarks as she watches the show with mesmerized unease: 'it's almost as if Darvas were still here.' In fact, Darvas is 'still here,' as he is evoked visually through stage lighting that foregrounds garish primary colours, especially blood red, whose arresting artificiality (in striking contrast with the more 'realistic' hues that characterize most of the film) is associated with the sadistic director's artistic persona in earlier scenes.

In the final section of the film, when Nicole seeks to get rid of her rival Dani, she adopts the persona of the domineering theatre artist, *directing* the other actress to stab herself to death. Marquis interrupts the scene, not unlike he had interrupted the earlier performance in which Nicole threatened to brand Dani's face. Nicole escapes, but Marquis eventually catches up with her in the wings of the 'Théâtre de la Mort.' There, the 'real' murderess is juxtaposed to the theatrical violence of Darvas's sketch involving a sacrificial voodoo ritual. The climactic scene of *Theatre of Death* merges the highly erotic dance of a curvaceously muscular black female performer with the death of Nicole, who is accidentally impaled by a spear used in the sketch – the same spear Darvas had used threateningly during the rehearsal. This amalgamation of performed violence and the 'reality' of Nicole's death foregrounds the theatre of horror's compulsion to eradicate the terror it generates. As the artifice of the voodoo performance arouses fiercely lustful desires in the audience, the apex of the sketch – the sacrifice of the virgin – coincides with the termination of 'real' horror through the slaying of Nicole. Sadistic theatre,

in its grotesque and alluring artifice, produces brutal displays of sex and gore only to neutralize their effects. This is one of the central functions of theatricality in the horror film: cinema relies on theatre's disciplinary artificiality to expose horror's dual purpose as an entertaining spectacle of fearsome excess and an unflinchingly repressive morality tale.

I would argue that this confluence of unruly overindulgence and strict control brings fictional horror close to tragedy.³⁵ Indeed, horror meets tragedy at the intersection of Dionysian erotic violence and Apollonian tyrannical discipline. The horror film relies on the theatre's well-known genealogy to evince the paradoxical Nietzschean thesis that the gory and destructive pleasures of Dionysus can be given form only through the oppressive constraints of Apollo, while the Apollonian insistence on the static conventions of civility can be injected with life only through the explosive fertilization of the Dionysian orgy.³⁶ This creative paradox is evident in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Gordon Hessler, 1971), another film that explicitly refers to the French theatre of horror as a space for bloody carnage and disciplinary revenge.

Grand Guignol Cinema and the Paradox of Theatre

Murders in the Rue Morgue opens on a scene reminiscent of *Mad Love*, as a frustrated sadist (Jason Robards) about to abuse a female victim (Christine Kaufmann) declares, 'Just as I once begged for your kisses, now you will beg for your death . . . prepare my darling for pain, exquisite pain!' But the impending torture is interrupted by an ape that bursts into the room and takes hold of the victim. As the woman is being carried away by the ape, she has nightmarish visions of being pursued in meandering hallways by a masked man armed with an axe; these visions reappear throughout the film. The nightmare is then cut short by the police barging in. An officer shoots the ape, but it still has enough strength to wrestle with the sadist and eventually chop off his head with an axe. As the ape triumphantly brandishes the sadist's severed head a woman is heard screaming. A cut reveals an audience, terrified, amused, and enthralled by what they have just seen: a stage rendition of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' performed at Paris's Rue Morgue Theatre. The sadist and the victim are Cesar and Madeleine Charron, the owner and leading lady of a Grand Guignol theatre troupe.

Shortly after the performance, it is discovered that the man who generally plays the ape was brutally murdered, his face burned with vitriolic

acid, and it was his murderer who played the role of the primate during the scene that opens the film. This is the first in a series of bizarre and gruesome attacks on current and former members of the Charrons' troupe, always involving disfigurement with acid. The murderer is revealed to be René Marot (Herbert Lom), himself an actor, believed to have died long ago. Years before, Marot and Charron were rivals for the love of an actress, Madeleine's mother, also named Madeleine (Lilli Palmer). One night, during the performance of a gothic torture play in which Marot, Charron, and Madeleine senior were performing, a special effect went terribly wrong and Marot was burned with real acid. The story goes that a disfigured, insane Marot killed Madeleine senior with an axe and committed suicide. But Marot's suicide was faked, and he has returned to reveal the truth and seek vengeance on his former thespian colleagues.

At the climax of the film, Marot confronts Charron *on stage* and exposes him as the man responsible for his acid disfigurement and as the mysterious axe man who killed Madeleine senior and who now haunts Madeleine junior's nightmares. All of the Charrons' troupe had lied to defend their boss, and swore that Marot was the insane killer. All but one, a demented dwarf puppet master, Pierre Triboulet (Michael Dunn), who now helps Marot achieve his revenge on those who lied, and especially Charron who disfigured him and killed his beloved Madeleine. After Marot kills Charron, the film closes as it had opened, on a performance of Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue.' But this time, when Marot, again wearing the ape suit tries to abduct Madeleine junior, 'real' police officers step on stage, interrupt the performance, and pursue Marot until he eventually falls to his death from the rafters of the theatre onto the stage.

Murders in the Rue Morgue is somewhat awkward in its baroque extravagance, and clearly derivative of Terence Fisher's classic Hammer version of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962), in which Herbert Lom also plays a disfigured man seeking revenge.³⁷ But *Rue Morgue* represents nonetheless an intriguing attempt to examine the nature of fictional horror and its relationship to the real. It overtly questions the nexus between pleasure and pain, explicitly foregrounds the artifice of horror on stage and on screen, and openly exposes the overlap of disciplinary control and gory theatricality. As Graeme Harper and Rob Stone observe, 'with its convoluted and baffling plot that deliberately mingles past, present and future, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* explores the confusion of the erotic and the monstrous, the real and the imaginary, dreams and waking

life, a thoroughly Surreal conceit.³⁸ What is crucial from my perspective is that Marot's revenge, triggered by dishonesty and lies, is aimed at *actors*. Marot does not merely kill people because they happen to have been associated with Charron. Rather he seeks revenge on Charron's *actors*, those liars and cheaters whose deception and pretense caused his demise. Their crime is to have been performers playing a role in his tragedy. It is no coincidence that his revenge on Charron himself is principally directed at making him tell the truth – to force him to put an end to his performance – before he beheads him on stage.

In its focus on a disciplinarian actor disfiguring and beheading other actors to teach them a lesson in unnatural justice, *Rue Morgue* cleverly exposes the paradox of theatre: the conflict between the stage as a space of unruly Dionysian carnality, and drama as a form of poetic dialectics where Apollonian control prevails. The theatre has always been torn between indulgence in extreme spectacles of pain and pleasure and the didactic urge to contain, stifle, and suppress such immoderation. As Anja Müller-Wood observes, 'by putting violence, bloodshed and terror on the stage, early modern playwrights demonstrated their ability to rein them in.'³⁹ Although Müller-Wood is talking about Shakespeare's contemporaries, the notion of theatrical indulgence in lies and vices and blood and gore as a means for drama to contain such excesses still applies today. Recent theatrical performances such as Wajdi Mouawad's *Seuls* (2008), in which academic intellectualism and creative insanity are in constant opposition, bear witness to the continued relevance of Nietzsche's thesis.

In the late sixteenth century, Stephen Gosson argued against the theatre in terms of the essential deceitfulness and treachery of actors, whose only purpose is to pretend; being the main attractions in a parade of duplicity. For Gosson, the theatre was the work of the devil. Plays, he wrote,

are 'the doctrines and inventions of the deuell.' Their material cause is 'such things as neuer were,' the devil being the father of lies and deceptions: distorted and exaggerated emotions, fantastic events and 'many a terrible monster made of broune paper.' Even when treating true events, the poet makes them 'seeme longer, or shorter, or greater or lesser than they were.' The formal cause is the manner of representation itself: to act is to lie, and to lie is to sin – a favorite argument with later Elizabethan critics.⁴⁰

The irony is that Gosson had been an actor himself, and his most vicious attack against the theatre, *Players Confuted in Fiue Actions* (1582),

adopts the five-act structure of Elizabethan drama and explicitly uses an Aristotelian model to construct his argument. So Gosson uses a classical conception of drama to suppress boisterous theatricality. 'The theatrical discourse of excess,' says Müller-Wood, fulfils 'the double function of exploring the dramatic value of excess and establishing a moral response to it.' This is not unlike *Mankind*, in which the theatre is enlisted to undermine the rowdy theatricality of the devil Tittivilus.

In this vein, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* uses the proscenium arch of the theatre of horror to foreground devilish theatricality as a means to exorcize it from the stage.⁴¹ The film uses blood and gore to expose and condemn unruly, deceitful, malevolent theatricality which cheats spectators into believing its ludicrous tales of terror. Charron's malevolent theatricality is suppressed by Marot's own spectacular malevolence. But while Charron is just a lustful, deceitful, and violent actor, Marot performs his brutal deeds under the rubric of self-righteous vengeance. Of course, the film itself must also punish Marot in the end. For regardless of one's justification, bloody vengeance is always on the side of Dionysus and therefore must be suppressed by the Apollonian design of conventional cinema. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* thus suggests through various levels of performance that horror on stage, and by association on screen, is a dangerous lie that is summoned for the sole purpose of being drained of its disruptive power.

There are a number of other films that similarly show actors killing actors to explore the paradox of fictional horror; flaunting carnal terror so it can be neutralized. *The Flesh and Blood Show* (Pete Walker, 1972) is a case in point. A minor cult favourite, *The Flesh and Blood Show* showcases 'lashings of French Grand Guignol melodrama and Shakespearian references and toss[es] in some gratuitous 3-D effects.'⁴² The film follows a troupe of putatively handsome actors and unassumingly bosomy actresses invited by an anonymous producer to rehearse a show in a creepy old theatre on the English seashore. As the young men and women rehearse their experimental piece, which consists mainly of primitive dances, esoteric gestures, and plenty of nudity, a shadowy figure is seen spying on them. Before long, actors start falling victim to a mysterious killer. It is revealed that the serial killer terrorizing the troupe is an old Shakespearian leading man, Sir Arnold Gates (Patrick Barr) who killed his wife (Jane Cardew) and her lover (Stuart Bevan) years earlier during the Second World War, and in his dementia now seeks to relive the traumatic killings by terrorizing the innocent thespians. The twist is that the original murders happened during a performance of

Othello, when Iago's fabricated romance between Desdemona and Cassio found a manifestation in the 'real' world as the unfaithful wife playing Desdemona indulged in a sordid affair with the actor playing Cassio. Flashbacks shot in 3-D show Gates at the end of a performance of *Othello*, still in full make-up and costume, catching the lovers in the act. He proceeds to tie them up in the bowels of the theatre, where they will eventually starve to death. *The Flesh and Blood Show* thus mirrors *Rue Morgue* in its assertion that the lust, deceit, and cruelty that the theatre breeds can only be redressed by the theatre itself.

But unlike in *Rue Morgue*, the present-tense victims in *The Flesh and Blood Show* had no role in the original tragedy. They are just innocent young actors involved in some hippie theatrical experiment. Yet they *are* guilty: guilty of being actors. When he reveals himself to be the killer, Sir Gates proclaims: 'They are all the same, young actors: filthy and degraded lechers. All of them! And the females: flaunting their bodies, offering their thighs and breasts. Scum! Excrements!' Gates had secretly hired the actors to come rehearse in his theatre, knowing that the young thespians would inevitably start indulging in exhibitionism, sexual misconduct, and deceit – like his wife and her lover, like all actors. Then he could assuage his monomaniacal compulsion to use the theatre to punish the innate depravity of actors. Sir Gates was 'an actor who needed to kill actors in his theatre,' observes one of the surviving players at the end of the film. The final twist is that one of the actresses, Julia (Jenny Hanley), is revealed to be Sir Gates's long-lost daughter, and confesses to having committed one of the murders herself. What is most striking about this finale is not the plot twist itself, but rather that the other actors are hardly surprised at all and barely react to this revelation, thus implying that it is all but natural for an actor to exact deadly punishment over other actors.⁴³

Actors punishing actors are also at the centre of *Acts of Death*; and again as actors the victims are guilty of the usual indulgences: sex, drugs, and deception. But those who are killed in this straight-to-DVD thriller are also guilty of having acted specifically to hurt others. These actors are bullies who use the stage as a space for 'initiation' rituals, during which new female students are humiliated and abused before they can join the inner circle of Baxter University's drama program. On a dark, snowy night, in between rehearsals for *Macbeth*, things go terribly wrong. New student Angela (Erin Scheiner) overdoses on a rape drug given to her by the troupe's leading man, Chase (Nathaniel Nose) – 'sadistic thespian numero uno' as night watchman Gus (Reggie Bannister) calls

him. Angela does not die from the overdose, but proceeds to hang herself, in front of her assailant and two other theatre students, Felix (Finn Wrisley) and Sabrina (Niki Huey). Chase and his acolytes hide the body and pretend nothing happened. But the following day, theatre students start dying in most gruesome ways. For a time, the frantically egocentric theatre professor Eamon, (Jason Carter) is suspected of being the psycho-killer, wanting to avenge the death of Angela, with whom he was having an affair. But he is also killed, when a rack of spotlights falls over his head. In the end, it turns out that Angela's death, not unlike Marot's in *Rue Morgue*, was a deception, an *act* devised by her and half-brother Felix to exact revenge on Chase. Chase, the spoiled son of the Dean (Bill Vincent) who always gets away with everything, had been responsible for the death of another student, Sandra. He had raped her, and she died during the botched abortion Chase's father paid for. Although Chase is the only one directly responsible for Sandra's death, all others like him had to die. 'Angela and I vowed revenge,' says Felix, 'revenge on you and every one like you': all those lechers, deceivers, and exhibitionists, all those 'sadistic thespians' who manipulate others into passive, spectacular submission. It is significant that Felix spends most of the film with fellow theatre students indulging in sex, drugs, and petty pranks, before revealing his finale role as a merciless disciplinarian. As such, he embodies the theatrical paradox of horror, torn between carnal recklessness and moralistic control.

In *Acts of Death*, as in the other instances discussed in this section, actors are punished for being actors, for wallowing in brutal eroticism, malicious pretense, and all the other dubious gratifications that the stage affords. These films use theatricality to make the point that horror cinema is first and foremost a pleasurable display of shapeless transgression and rigid control. To exaggerate a bit, I would say that fictional horror is just a gush of red goo that smears the stage and must then be cleaned up. The *Cinéma du Grand Guignol* is thus not about deeply hidden meanings and complex motivations. Rather, it is about the horror film as surface: a spectacle of garish primary colours or harsh black and white contained within a tight frame. Horror as surface is central to my reading of Vincent Price's role as Edward Lionheart in *Theatre of Blood*, which will conclude this chapter.

Horror as Surface and the Depthless Performance of Villainy

Robert Murphy, Geoff Brown, and Alan Burton have said that '*Theatre of Blood* is crude, witless Grand Guignol.'⁴⁴ Many would disagree that *Theatre*

of Blood is witless. Neil Sinyard, for one, has described it an ‘ingenious Vincent Price comedy thriller.’⁴⁵ But there is little doubt that this tale of a spurned actor, who takes revenge upon his scathing critics by using Shakespearean plays as templates for increasingly inventive and bloody reprisals against his scornful enemies, is indeed an instance of Grand Guignol cinema. What critics like Murphy et al. find crude is Price’s flamboyant performance as the avenging thespian, Edward Lionheart. But what is crude for the conservative viewers becomes evocative for queer theorist Harry Benshoff, who sees Lionheart ‘as a campy madman who busily avenges himself upon the body of heterocentrist discourse via the bodies of its patriarchal agents.’⁴⁶

For my purposes, the queer politics of *Theatre of Blood* – however elaborate and multifaceted it may be, especially when Lionheart appears as the gay hairstylist Butch to get at the only female critic on his blacklist⁴⁷ – is less significant than the film’s sense of theatricality; theatricality not only as a mode of display but as a principle of *doing*. If one of the central agenda items of queer politics is to imagine ‘new ways of becoming oneself and belonging,’⁴⁸ then a queer reading might not be the best way to interpret Lionheart’s performance of villainy. For Lionheart’s exaction of vengeance has nothing to do with issues of ‘becoming oneself and belonging.’ Rather Lionheart fixatedly demands to be recognized for what he *does*, for his achievements as a *great actor*. Like all villains, Lionheart is an actor – period!⁴⁹ The theatrical villain is not about *being* and *belonging*; he is about *doing*. For the villain, ‘being’ is exclusively a matter of performance and ‘belonging’ one of movement on stage. Issues of genuineness and identity are irrelevant to the villain. Iago states it clearly in *Othello*: ‘I am not what I am.’ The villain has no interest in asserting the value and worth of his true identity. For the villain, identity is but an instrument to be used against those who still believe in ‘being and belonging.’ Villainy is not about identity politics; it only uses identity politics to fool others.

Nor does the villain have any patience for post-colonial appeals ‘articulated around crisscrossing and overlapping allegiances: indigenouness, nationality, culture, region, religion, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender, immigration, and individual expression.’⁵⁰ The villain might feign interest in these allegiances, but only to rule over others. This is why Darvas in *Theatre of Death* feels free to appropriate elements of African culture for one of his sketches. The theatre owner, Madame Angelique, does express concern about the representation of ‘cannibalistic rites.’ But Darvas, as the domineering white man, is absolutely unwavering in his positivistic, self-proclaimed knowledge of voodoo rituals and his

inalienable right to co-opt and reproduce them on stage. The villain does not look for profound social, cultural, or individual complexities behind appearances. The villain is about self-declared depthless performativity. 'I am determined to prove a villain,' says Gloucester in *Richard III*. There is no psychological depth to Gloucester.⁵¹ He is cast as the villain and that is the role he will play.

In *Theatre of Blood*, theatricality is both Lionheart's motivation and his teleology. Theatricality is the alpha and the omega of the villain's stratagem. The theatre of horror so permeates every aspect of Hickox's film that it acquires a metadramatic⁵² function; it is not only a mode of display but also the subject of the staging. Returning to Gorer's remark, Lionheart is precisely the sadist as failed actor. Ridiculed by mean, pompous drama reviewers for the excessive theatricality of his performances, he assimilates theatricality to his logic of retribution as he appears in disguises for every vengeance he stages. Either as a surgeon who decapitates a man lying in bed next to his sleeping wife (inspired by *Cymbeline*) or as a chef who prepares a meat pie out of small dogs, which he then feeds to their horrified master (after *Titus Andronicus*), every gesture performed by Lionheart is an act of vengeance, and every act of vengeance is a performance. Lionheart, as the film's retributive villain, is *nothing* outside of his performance of villainy. He ignores psychology and exists exclusively through his performance of villainy.

After the opening credits, played over footage of silent film adaptations of Shakespearian plays that exhibit the sort of exaggerated theatrics Lionheart was probably guilty of, the first vengeful performance is set in motion. On 15 March 1972, the Ides of March, drama critic for the *Financial Times* and chairman of the Bermondsey Housing and Redevelopment Committee, George Maxwell (Michael Hordern), is called to deal with squatters in an abandoned building. As he arrives at the site, Maxwell is greeted by two police officers who escort him in. There he finds a group of homeless people huddled in a small area of a large warehouse, surrounded by *industrial detritus*, concrete walls, and grids of *metal wires*. As Maxwell walks among the wretched of the earth, contemptuously poking at them with the tip of his umbrella ordering them to leave the premises, some start moving, first slowly and uncertainly, but soon with increased determination and eventually with unbridled aggressiveness. One homeless man grabs a bottle and breaks it, another finds a cleaver, another has a knife. As they advance menacingly towards Maxwell, the threatened man appeals to the police officers, but they remain impassive. As the group of squatters starts chasing Maxwell

around this space of ruins and industrial remains, the camera becomes increasingly unstable, capturing the action through wire meshes, panning and zooming frantically, until the victim is cornered and stabbed to death by the hobos. One of the police officers starts reciting a passage from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: 'O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth, That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!' (Act 3, Sc. 1). The cop is Lionheart; he is accompanied by a young man who will later be revealed to be his daughter, Edwina (Diana Rigg). Believed to have committed suicide after having been denied an award in recognition of his artistic achievements, Lionheart is alive and well and ready to exact his revenge on those who have spurned and ridiculed him.

The clever gimmick of designing vengeful tortures inspired by Shakespearian plays is only the most obvious use of theatricality as a means to incite discomfort, fear, and panic. The scene described above also creates its shock effect through a less explicit but more striking theatrical allusion. As the dispossessed advance menacingly towards the scornful bourgeois, close-ups on distressed faces and grotesque bodies, shots through bars and wires, groaning, laughing, and demented taunting all work together to bring to mind the insane asylum of Peter Brooks's film adaptation of Peter Weiss's play *Marat/Sade* (1964/1967). Brooks's stage production of *Marat/Sade* and subsequent film version are often seen as the first full test of Antonin Artaud's theories of the 'Theatre of Cruelty.'⁵³ Artaud's goal 'to assault the audience's senses, to cleanse it morally and spiritually, for the improvement of humankind'⁵⁴ is shockingly fulfilled at the end of Weiss's drama when the inmates regress into ferocious Dionysian madness, attacking one another, and going for the audience within the play. The hectic camerawork, frenzied editing, and aggressive cacophony that overwhelm the scene at the end of Brooks's film are clearly evoked in the opening moments of *Theatre of Blood*.

The stylistic allusion to *Marat/Sade* that hints at Artaud's theories is later augmented by Edwina's verbal reference to the 'Living Theatre,' Julian Beck and Judith Malina's hippie experiment in 'Theatre of Cruelty.'⁵⁵ As such, *Theatre of Blood* is not merely a 'witty ... self-reflexive horror film [... with] knowing self-reference to the world of theater (and its critics).'⁵⁶ Rather, it stands as a conscious and cognizant – albeit humorous – addition to a contemporary artistic movement exploring the nexus between terror and theatricality, patently positioning itself within a broader context of Artaudian experiments. It is no coincidence that Lionheart's revenge is rooted in Shakespearean performance, since

the Artaudian revival of the 1960s emerged in great part from Brooks's 'Theatre of Cruelty' experiments at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

It is no coincidence either that the critics' main affront against Lionheart's sense of entitlement was their decision to ignore his achievements and give the award to William Woodstock, a young, Brando-like *method actor*.⁵⁷ This is significant, because method acting is specifically anchored in individual psychology, something that Artaud's theatre of cruelty radically rejected⁵⁸ and that Lionheart completely eschews. In his insistence on acting exclusively in Shakespearean plays, Lionheart refuses to engage in the psychologism and identity politics of modern drama. In fact, Lionheart dismisses from his repertoire Shakespeare's over-psychologized hero, Hamlet.⁵⁹ He prefers the two-dimensional, action-oriented Richard III and Titus Andronicus – a character that Artaud had hoped to bring to the stage⁶⁰ – over the melancholy Prince of Denmark. As such, Lionheart specializes in characters without a psychology or subjectivity, and is thus in polar opposition to Woodstock's method-inspired character compositions. What is crucial here is that Price's performance parallels Lionheart's. Price's incarnation of the spurned actor is purposefully depthless; it is all *surface*. While it may have been labelled 'high camp',⁶¹ Price's performance as a psycho-without-psychology is better described, in my view, as pure theatricality. Price/Lionheart's theatricality exposes disciplinarian horror's symbolic simplicity as the staging of orgiastic moralizing.

Michele Soavi's *Stage Fright* (1987, aka *Deliria*) offers perhaps the most extreme example of the actor as psycho-without-psychology. As in a number of other films discussed above, Soavi's film revolves around an insane thespian who ruthlessly kills members of a theatre company. The difference here is that there is no explanation *whatsoever* as to why this fugitive from an insane asylum chooses to slaughter actors. And, in fact, there is only *one* reference to the fact that he is an actor gone mad: neither the cause of his madness nor the reason for his revenge is ever made clear. All this psycho-actor seems to want is to appear centre stage and indulge in a performance of sadistic carnage until the bloody spectacle has exhausted its Dionysian energy and returned to the stability of Apollonian death. The psycho-killer is but a poor player who slashes and slaughters his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more.

Conclusion

Through this reading of theatricality in Grand Guignol cinema I wish to offer a heuristic strategy for further explorations of this phenomenon in

fictional horror beyond my immediate corpus of study. My claim here is obviously not that all horror films function the same way. Many horror films do not include retributive villains whose horrific deeds serve the ironic purpose of neutralizing horror. But I would propose that a number of horror films, from *Freaks* (1932), *House of Wax* (1953), and *The Evil of Frankenstein* (1964) to *Halloween* (1978), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and *Saw* (James Wan, 2004), do rely on the theatricality of the villain and the victim to expose the paradox found in the works examined above. Cinematic tales of terror that acknowledge their theatrical antecedents, explicitly or implicitly, do so in order to comment on a common tension in horror cinema between, on the one hand, overindulgence in sex, violence, and deception and, on the other hand, a ferocious compulsion to contain and punish such behaviour. Of course, this tension is not causally arranged along a chronological axis. The punishing gesture does not necessarily follow the immoral action in linear progression. Rather, the two are often superimposed, as meaningless brutality and cruel retribution can be performed simultaneously by, and on, the same actors. It is not surprising then that Linda Williams would identify horror as a sadomasochistic genre, snugly nestled between pornography's active sadism and melodrama's passive masochism,⁶² for in fictional horror actor and spectator are indistinguishably intertwined in a play of pain and pleasure. The lewdly moralistic horror film is nothing but a grotesquely refined tragicomedy where Dionysus and Apollo are rivals for the leading role as the sadomasochistic hero.

NOTES

- 1 David Beech and John Roberts, *The Philistine Controversy* (London: Verso, 2002), 182; original emphasis.
- 2 Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), xi.
- 3 Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), 84.
- 4 Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *London's Grand Guignol and the Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 12–13.
- 5 See Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- 6 Hand and Wilson, *Grand-Guignol*, 111.
- 7 If as Hammer auteur Terence Fisher has said, horror films are 'fairy tales for adults' (cited by Paul Leggett, in *Terence Fisher: Horror, Myth and Religion*

(Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 12), then it only makes sense that there would be (at least) two types of horror films: those focusing on fear of the mother, the ‘monstrous-feminine,’ and those focusing on fear of the father, the ‘monstrous-paternal.’ For as Bruno Bettelheim argues, the fairy tale deals with the child’s overarching fear: the fear of the parents, whom the child loves and hates; see Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 111–23. The fear of being swallowed up by the overbearing mother and persecuted by the vengeful father makes for two types of fairy tale monsters – the witch and the dragon – and by extension, also two types of horror film monsters: the Blob and Dr Hannibal Lecter.

- 8 See E. Michael Jones, *Monsters from the Id: The Rise of Horror in Fiction and Film* (Dallas: Spence, 2000), esp. 91–2. My thanks to my co-editor Jeremy Maron for drawing my attention to Jones’s book.
- 9 While party-line Foucauldian readings of disciplinary discourse would tend to be concerned with the subjugation of those who are at the mercy of the controlling gaze, it is important to keep in mind that at the centre of *Discipline and Punish* (1975), stands a villain who is positioned as the bearer of ‘the eye of power’; see Michel Foucault, ‘The Eye of Power,’ *Semiotext(e)* 3/2 (1978): 6–19. As Terence Ball tellingly observes, ‘[the] genealogical approach is brilliantly and dramatically applied in *Discipline and Punish*, in which Foucault traces the origins of our own “carceral society” to various late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century humanitarians and reformers. The *main villain of the piece is Jeremy Bentham*, whose plan for a “panopticon” prison provides Foucault with his central metaphor.’ Terence Ball, *Reappraising Political Theory: Revisionist Studies in the History of Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 159; emphasis added.
- 10 David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 901, 920.
- 11 For discussions on the paradox of tragedy, see e.g., Amy Price, ‘Nietzsche and the Paradox of Tragedy,’ *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38/4 (1998): 384–93; Kurt Weinberg, ‘Nietzsche’s Paradox of Tragedy,’ *Yale French Studies* no. 38 (1967): 251–66; and Christopher Williams, ‘Is Tragedy Paradoxical?’ *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38/1 (1998): 47–62.
- 12 Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Everest House, 1980), 368.
- 13 Horror films are often criticized for claiming to denounce brutal violence while simultaneously indulging in it. For instance, Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* dismisses the psycho-thriller *Untraceable* (2008) on these very grounds: ‘The perpetrators of the script think they’re taking the high moral ground, showing us how we’re degenerating into a society of

sadistic voyeurs ever ready to log on to the suffering of others. And how are they doing this? By making a movie, directed with graphic intensity by Gregory Hoblit (*Fracture*), that shoves the torture right in our faces while inviting us to feel superior.' But of course the contradiction that Travers identifies is, in fact, just part and parcel of the paradox of the stage and screen tale of terror, in which Dionysian blood and gore go hand in hand with Apollonian self-righteousness. See <http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/11693796/review/18067067/untraceable>; accessed 29 May 2009.

- 14 Geoffrey Gorer, *The Life and Ideas of the Marquis de Sade* (New York: Norton, 1963), 230. Indeed, the term 'Grand Guignol' is most commonly associated with horror tales that deal *not* with ghostly apparitions and supernatural forces, but rather with grotesque people indulging in sadistic sexuality, pathological persecution, and perverse performances. Noël Carroll is, in fact, quite unequivocal in excluding the Grand Guignol from his definition of 'Art Horror' precisely because of the genre's focus on the all-too-human tale of terror and its lack of paranormal elements: 'though gruesome, *Grand Guignol* requires sadists rather than [supernatural] monsters'; see Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 15. This is why horror films that are labelled Grand Guignol are generally not movies about vampires, spectres, or extraterrestrial aliens, but rather about those characters who wallow in lurid violence rooted in human insanity and flaunting 'injustice, cruelty, and lust.' See Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 36.
- 15 Gorer, *The Life and Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*, 230.
- 16 John M. Callahan, 'The Ultimate in Theater of Violence,' *Themes in Drama* 13 (1991): 167.
- 17 Havelock Ellis, *Psychology of Sex* (London: Home Farm Books, 2008 [1933]), 171.
- 18 As Hand and Wilson surmise (in *Grand-Guignol*, 71–2), seeing a health professional as they entered the theatre, spectators would be 'left wondering whether what they were about to witness would make them lose their self-control or their dinners.'
- 19 Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 55.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 52.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 64.

- 25 As Deleuze writes, 'the masochist manipulates the woman into the ideal state for the performance of the role he has assigned to her' (ibid., 124).
- 26 J.P. Telotte, *Replications: A Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 84.
- 27 Ibid., 85.
- 28 John Elsom, *Erotic Theatre* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), 157.
- 29 Gregory William Mank, *Hollywood Cauldron: Thirteen Horror Films from the Genre's Golden Age* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 146.
- 30 Although the theatre's marquee reads 'Théâtre de Mort,' the voice-over narration correctly calls the Theatre of Death 'Théâtre de *la* Mort.'
- 31 The last performance at the Grand Guignol was in November 1962 (see Hand and Wilson, *Grand-Guignol*, 25).
- 32 I will not discuss the misogyny of horror as a genre. This is a topic that has occupied much critical space and about which I could not possibly contribute anything particularly original or insightful. For useful discussions on this issue, see Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Isabel Cristina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).
- 33 Steven Jay Schneider, *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 150.
- 34 See Elizabeth Cowie on suspense in Hitchcock's films, in 'The Popular Film as a Progressive Text: A Discussion of *Coma*,' in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 128.
- 35 Stephen King, among others, agrees that horror and tragedy are related. See Tony Magistrale and Michael A. Morrison, *A Dark Night's Dreaming: Contemporary American Horror Fiction* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, c. 1996), 3.
- 36 On this topic, see e.g., Richard John White, 'The Individual and the Birth of Tragedy,' in *Nietzsche and the Problem of Sovereignty* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 54–77.
- 37 As Tom Weaver observes, 'AIP recruited Herbert Lom to play an acid-scarred Phantom-of-the-Opera type in their made-in-Spain *Murders in the Rue Morgue*'; see Tom Weaver, *Return of the B Science Fiction and Horror Heroes: The Mutant Melding of Two Volumes of Classic Interviews* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999), 150.
- 38 Graeme Harper and Rob Stone, *The Unsilvered Screen: Surrealism on Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 105.
- 39 Anja Müller-Wood, *The Theatre of Civilized Excess: New Perspectives on Jacobean Tragedy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 19.

- 40 Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 81.
- 41 As Jacques Bourgaux argues in his book *Possessions et simulacres: Aux sources de la théâtralité* (Paris: Epi éditeurs, 1973), exorcism always contains an element of theatricality, for the casting out of the devil must also scare the audience into religious submission. Exorcists have always been stage directors: 'Très tôt les exorcistes se transforment en metteurs en scène. Ils ont un message à faire passer mais les exorcisées sont peu dociles et les réactions du public les surprennent parfois. Il faut que les prêtres redoublent de conviction, trouvent de nouveaux effets spectaculaires' (46).
- 42 Steve Chipnall, 'Double Exposures: Observations on *The Flesh and Blood Show*,' in Deborah Cartmell et al., eds., *Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and Its Audience* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 91.
- 43 A very similar plot line appears in the little-known Canadian film *The Clown at Midnight* (Jean Pellerin, 1998) in which a group of theatre students is recruited by a drama teacher (Margot Kidder) to restore an old opera house. Again, the young actors are dispatched one after the other, and again the killer is revealed to be a jealous old man (Christopher Plummer) who had killed his unfaithful opera-signer wife and framed her lover. Again the 'innocent victims' are deemed guilty for their indulgence in the theatrical pleasures of dressing up, making pranks, playing violent games, and of course, having sex.
- 44 Robert Murphy, Geoff Brown, and Alan Burton, *Directors in British and Irish Cinema: A Reference Companion* (London: British Film Institute, 2006), 292.
- 45 Neil Sinyard, *Filming Literature: The Art of Screen Adaptation* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 23.
- 46 Harry M. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 205. Benshoff is referring here to Lionheart as well as other similar Vincent Price characters.
- 47 See *ibid.*, 214.
- 48 Robert Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer: Re-making the Australian Homosexual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 168.
- 49 As Aaron Taylor writes, 'any melodramatic villain worth the upturn of his moustache will be adept in the art of trickery, disguise, and deception. In other words, *he will be an actor*'; see Aaron Taylor, 'Cain's Homecoming: Villainy and the Cinema,' doctoral dissertation, University of Kent, 2005, 173, emphasis added.
- 50 Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort, *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 159.
- 51 William B. Toole is among those who recognize the absence of a 'deep psychology' in Richard III's character. As Toole writes, 'the delineation of

- Richard's character is ultimately conditioned more by his structural role in the overall design of the play than by psychological reality'; see William B. Toole, 'The Motif of Psychic Division in *Richard III*,' *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974): 25. There are, of course, counter-arguments. For instance, Bernard J. Paris insists that 'Richard is not a motiveless villain, like Aaron the Moor; he is a suffering human being, like Shylock, whose behavior is monstrous but understandable.' But such an argument does not hold water since Shakespeare's *Richard III* is most certainly *not a suffering human being*; rather, he is a *character in a play*, like all other characters in all other plays. See Bernard J. Paris, *Character as a Subversive Force in Shakespeare: The History and Roman Plays* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), 33.
- 52 See Frank Ardolino, 'Metadramatic Grand Guignol in *Theater of Blood*,' *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter* 15/2 (1991): 9.
- 53 J.L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 112.
- 54 Milly S. Barranger, *Theatre, a Way of Seeing* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1986), 271.
- 55 Styan, *Modern Drama*, 160.
- 56 John Kenneth Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 306.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, translated by Mary C. Richards (New York: Grove, 1994), 90.
- 59 The plays that compose Lionheart's Shakespearean repertoire are *Julius Caesar*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Cymbeline*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Henry VI part 1*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *King Lear*.
- 60 Susan Sontag, 'Approaching Artaud,' in Edward Scheer, ed., *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 94.
- 61 Jeffery Brown Martin refers to Price's *Theatre of Blood* performance as 'high camp' in his book *Ben Hecht, Hollywood Screenwriter* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 169.
- 62 Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Genre, Gender, and Excess,' in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 737.