**Yale University**


**The Things That Should Not Be: The Monumental Horror-Image and Its**

**Relation to the Contemporary Horror Film**


**The Senior Essay**

**Film Studies 491a**

**B. Peucker, Advisor**


**by**

**Sean Thomas Collins**


**New Haven, Connecticut**

**13 December 1999**

It is too incredible, too monstrous; such things can never be in this quiet world....
Why, man, if such a case were possible, our earth would be a nightmare.

—Arthur Machen, *The Great God Pan*

Drain you of your sanity,
Face the thing that should not be.

—Metallica, "The Thing That Should Not Be"

# 1    Introduction

The summer of 1999 saw a revival of interest in the horror film that, much like the genre's monsters and murderers themselves, defied all logical expectations.  Horror fans had all but given up serious genre efforts for dead, killed by the post-*Scream* wave of glibly self-reflexive slasher films (perhaps epitomized by Gus Van Zant's entirely redundant remake of *Psycho*).  The mainstreaming of gore for non-horror purposes by films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Saving Private Ryan* seemed to render horror's more sanguine outings a moot point.  Years had passed since *The Silence of the Lambs*, the genre's last truly original exponent (and even this had been more detective story than "weird tale").

The emergence of not one but *three* pantheon-worthy horror films—Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project*, M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense*, and Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*—in the space of three months is surprising for more reasons than those listed above, however.  Filmed on a legendarily low budget with a cast of unknowns, *Blair Witch* frightened millions of viewers without the use of violence, gore, or even the appearance of the titular character.  The ghosts of *The Sixth Sense* were horrifying despite their inability to inflict physical harm beyond relatively insignificant scratches.  And *Eyes Wide Shut* might not even be considered a horror film until one reflects on its frightening account of a man whose life is spiraling inexorably into chaos.

The success of these three films points to a gap in existing horror scholarship and theory.  Much horror criticism focuses on violence and gore as the defining characteristic of the horror film, leaving little room in its theoretical framework for non-slasher films.  Though such criticism puts a welcome spotlight on issues of spectator identification and response, its preoccupation with slice-and-dice renders difficult an expansion of such theories of spectatorship into other realms of horror.  Other theories focus on the monster as "other," pointing to the frightening and revolting "stars" of the movies and their relation to gender and social concerns.  Again, such theories can illuminate some important allegorical and subtextual aspects of certain horror films, but do little in terms of addressing the primary goal of the horror film, i.e. to horrify.  In short, the defining characteristic of the contemporary horror film has yet to be pinpointed.

It is unsurprising, therefore, to discover that certain types of imagery recurrent in many of contemporary horror cinema's most powerful films have gone either unnoticed or undiscussed by theoreticians.  Specifically, two types of related imagery occur in virtually every effective horror film.  The first is the sudden—yet curiously static—appearance of a being in a place where no one *ought* to be, in defiance of what character and audience know to be "possible"; the second is the sight of a monumental, monolithic, or literally statuesque object, serving as a testament to the presence of evil, madness, sickness, or irrationality.  Taken together, these two distinct yet related image types—call them the monumental horror-image, in that their subjects are horrifying more for what they

*represent* than what they actually *do*—comprise some of contemporary horror cinema's most definitively frightening moments.

The purpose of this essay, then, is to explore the monumental horror-image and its relation to the genre in which it appears. It will examine existing theories of horror that seem pertinent, pointing out the relative strengths and weaknesses of these theories in explaining and defining the monumental horror-image. It will also propose a new, connective synthesis of various aspects of these theories, in an attempt to determine what gives such images their undeniable power to horrify, and to justify the author's view that they are the definitive, characteristic images of contemporary horror. Finally, through close readings of examples from Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* and William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, it will show just how effective the monumental horror-image can be in creating and sustaining an overwhelming and thematically-inspired sense of horror.

## 2    Basic Characteristics of the Two Types of Monumental Horror-Image

To begin, let us propose an effective definition for the monumental horror-image itself. Again, the first type of monumental horror-image is the sudden appearance or discovery of a being in a place where no one *ought* to be. This appearance is in brazen defiance of that which the human characters in the film assume to be "real" or "possible." An exemplary image of this type is that of the two ghostly sisters, commonly referred to as "the twins," in Kubrick's *The Shining.*

Virtually all aspects of their initial appearance to the psychically gifted child Danny in the rec room of the Overlook Hotel are characteristic of this type of image in general.

While retrieving a bunch of darts from a dartboard, Danny quickly turns and stares off-screen.  As the background music hums ominously, we cut to a long shot of what he sees: two pale, identically dressed little girls, standing just inside the doorway of the rec room.  They stand isolated in the center and toward the back of the film frame.  The shot is totally immobile—neither they nor the camera move.  This gives them an inanimate, deathlike quality, reinforced by their ghastly pallor.  Defying prevailing horror tradition, they are not lurking in shadows—the entire room is brightly, even harshly lit.  Aside from their preternatural paleness and initial immobility, there is nothing out of the ordinary about them or their surroundings—they are simply little girls in a rec room.  However, we know from a story told earlier in the film by the Overlook's manager that they are probably the ghosts of two little girls murdered with an axe by their father, one of the Overlook's previous winter caretakers.  In addition, they have appeared to Danny before, in a vision he had had before moving to the Overlook, in which an elevator unleashed a torrent of blood.  Despite the fact that the girls do not attack or threaten Danny, the above two factors imbue their appearance (which in itself is quite static and uninteresting) with dread and foreboding.

Other examples of this first type of monumental horror image include the woman in the bathtub, the dogman and his lover in the bedroom, and the bloody bald man in the hallway, also in *The Shining*; the man in the trenchcoat who

follows Dr. Bill in *Eyes Wide Shut*; Father Damien's mother in Regan's bed in

*The Exorcist*; the battered woman in the kitchen in *The Sixth Sense*; Mike in the

corner of the cellar in *Blair Witch*; BOB in Laura's bedroom and Mrs. Tremond

and her grandson in the Double R's parking lot in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire

Walk With Me*; the Woman in the Radiator in Lynch's *Eraserhead*; and the

Mystery Man in Lynch's *Lost Highway*.  Though aspects of these individual

instances may vary (for example, the Mystery Man is certainly not ordinary-

looking), they all share most or all of the characteristics found in the appearance

of the twins: isolated placement in the rear center of a long shot; statuesque lack

of movement of both subject and camera; bright or harsh lighting; quotidian

surroundings and appearance; accompaniment by low-key, ominous music;

supernatural (or at least uncertain) origin; association with strange or sinister

forces outlined earlier in the film; importantly, the presence of a horrified onlooker

within the fiction of the film itself; and lack of a direct physical threat toward that

onlooker.

The second type of monumental horror-image is more explicitly

"monumental": a monolithic, monumental, or even literally statuesque object

which serves as a direct testament to the immediate presence of evil, madness,

or monstrousness.  The definitive example of this type of image occurs during the

climax of Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man*.   Again, most aspects of Sgt. Howie's

encounter with the titular idol can be seen as characteristic of this image type.

After being led on a wild goose chase by the pagan residents of

Summerisle, Sgt. Neil Howie discovers that he has walked into a trap: he is to be

sacrificed in a gigantic wicker effigy.  As he is forced to the top of a hill by the villagers in ominous silence, he sees the enormous Wicker Man, isolated the distance and placed directly in the center of the frame.  The camera slowly tracks in on it, accentuating its enormous size.  It is decidedly primitive in nature, having been used in rituals pre-dating Christianity by centuries.  No explanation of what the Wicker Man represents is necessary—Sgt. Howie screams in terror immediately upon seeing it.  As he is slowly led toward the idol, illuminated by the bright light of the setting sun, the only sounds that can be heard are his own screams for mercy and the slow beat of a ritual drum.

Additional instances of this second type of monumental horror-image include the corpse sculpture, the "bone room", and virtually every item of "furniture" in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*; the statue of Pazuzu and the crucifixion-like pose of the levitating Regan in *The Exorcist*; the elevator that gushes blood in *The Shining*; the stick-figure shrine in *Blair Witch*; the enchained Frank/Larry in Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*; Leviathan in Tony Randel's *Hellbound: Hellraiser II*; and the jungle gym covered with crows in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*.  Though these examples differ from one another more than those of the first, less explicitly monumental type, they still share many of the characteristics displayed by the final scene in *The Wicker Man*; placement in the distant center of a long shot; slow camera movement; camera position that accentuates the enormity of the objects involved; bright or harsh lighting; relative silence; association with primitive, pagan, or pre-Christian cosmology; a clear representation of evil or madness that "goes without saying."  As with the type of

monumental horror-image exemplified by the twins, a horrified onlooker is present.  Though the onlooker in this case is subject to the threat of physical harm, this harm does not stand to be inflicted by the subject of the image itself (obviously, most of the "monuments" in question are inanimate objects and not in the damage-inflicting business); rather, those responsible for the "monument" are the threatening parties.

It is important to reiterate that , though the latter subset of the monumental horror-image can indeed be literally "monumental," the appellation does not refer to its size, manmade quality, or anything necessarily literal at all.  The point is, like real monuments, the subjects of such images are more important for that which they *represent* or *stand for* than for their own abilities or actions.  In the case of our primary examples, the twins are a "monument" to the fact that Overlook Hotel is haunted; the Wicker Man is a "monument" to the fact that Summerisle is a place of dark paganism.  Neither the twins nor the Wicker Man possess physical power: as Danny says through his imaginary friend when he encounters the twins in a hallway later on, "It's just like pictures in a book, Danny. It isn't real"; Sgt. Howie's pleas for mercy are directed at the villagers and at God, not at the Wicker Man.

The power in these images, then, is uniquely difficult to account for.  How can one be horrified of something that, more often than not, presents no immediate physical threat to the characters who encounter it?  And why (if we are to believe the viewers of many of the above examples) are such images even *more* horrifying than their more directly threatening counterparts?  To answer

these questions, we will now turn to several existing theories of horror to see what light, if any, they may shed on this singularly problematic aspect of the contemporary horror film. To begin, let us investigate what many take to be a fundamental text with regards to the genre: Freud's "The 'Uncanny.'" Aside from the fact that the unique, almost exclusively "mental" impact of the monumental horror-image seems likely to have its roots in psychical phenomena, the similarity of the concepts Freud discusses to certain aspects of the monumental horror-image (similarities we will outline below) merit special exploration. In short, he's as good a place as any to start.

## 3      Freud, the Uncanny, and the Psychoanalytic Approach

In his essay "The 'Uncanny,'"[1] Freud attempted to summarize such concerns for an entire range of tropes and effects that fell under the admittedly ambiguous umbrella term "the uncanny" (in German, *unheimlich*). Freud pointed out that in certain German regions, *unheimlich* is virtually synonymous with certain usages of its supposed antonym, *heimlich* (literally translated as "homely"). Intrigued as to how a word meaning "homey and familiar" could be in anyway synonymous with one meaning "eerie and frightening," Freud discusses various examples of uncanny literature, most notably E.T.A. Hoffman's tale "The Sand-Man," which features a living doll and a boogeyman figure who tears out

---

[1] Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny.'" In James Strachey, ed. and trans., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII, *1917-1919*. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 220. Further references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.

children's eyes (227-230).  He traces the uncanny effect of the former to primitive, animistic beliefs ascribing the power of thought and magical power to non-human objects (240).  Such "primitive beliefs" clung to the notion of "the omnipotence of thoughts":

> This was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings; by the subject's narcissistic overvaluation of his own mental processes; by the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic based on that belief; by the attribution various outside persons and things of carefully graded magical powers, or '*mana*'; as well as by all the other creations with the help of which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strove to fend off the manifest prohibitions of reality. (240)

Freud believed that all of us passed through a stage resembling this larger stage of anthropological development at some time during our development, and that the residue of such beliefs cause us to regard something reminiscent of them as "uncanny" (240-241).  Instances of inexplicable synchronicity or coincidence, telepathy/telekinesis, the "evil eye," living dolls, the walking dead, and the like are examples of uncanny devices that touch upon such beliefs.

For Freud, though, there was a second source for uncanny feelings.  The eye-gouging Sand-Man of Hoffman's story called to mind a different concept, one more recognizably Freudian: castration anxiety (231).  Similar connections between uncanny effects and repressed infantile neuroses could be found in other recurring uncanny themes.  For example, the "double" harkens "back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted"—that of "primary narcissism" and, later, the ego's formation of a conscience—the reappearance of which is no longer reassuring but terrifying (235-236).  Also, the blurring of the line between

the imaginary and the real is attached to the infantile "over-accentuation of psychical reality in comparison with material reality" (244). Being buried alive and compulsive repetition, says Freud, can also be attributed to such repressed thoughts.

Unheimlich becomes heimlich, then, because that which we view as uncanny stems either from the apparent confirmation of surmounted primitive beliefs or the revival of repressed infantile complexes (249). That is, these beliefs and ideas, once familiar but since forgotten, "ought to have remained secret and hidden but ha[ve] come to light" (225). It is precisely their close affinity to concepts with which we were once quite "at home" that ultimately makes them frightening.

The concept of the uncanny as articulated by Freud is important for an understanding of the effects of the monumental horror-image. These powerfully horrifying moments display many uncanny characteristics. In the first type of monumental horror-image, the entities involved are ostensibly "living," yet remain strangely and rigidly immobile. Freud, quoting an earlier scholar, says that "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate" (226)—doubts of the type provoked when we are presented with animate beings who nonetheless remain eerily fixed in position—are indicative of an uncanny effect produced by the apparent confirmation of surmounted animistic beliefs. Indeed, since the subjects of this type of monumental horror-image are often strongly implicated as supernatural in origin, their very existence indicates a "world...peopled with

spirits" (240).  Freud also notes that "[t]he uncanny belonging to the first

class—that proceeding from forms of thought that have been

surmounted—retains its character...so long as the setting is one of material

reality"; given a fanciful situation, such uncanny themes lose their power (251).

The first type of monumental horror-image occurs in almost aggressively ordinary

surroundings (cf. the Overlook's rec room, bedrooms in *The Exorcist* and *Twin

Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, etc.), heightening the contrast between the real and

the unreal which is suddenly forced out into the open by the appearance of these

strange beings.  Often, individual cases of this type of monumental horror-image

will display additional uncanny traits that in themselves are not characteristic of

this type.  For example, the twins in *The Shining* bring to mind the "double"; their

speech is compulsively repetitive ("Come and play with us, Danny.  Come and

play with us.  Forever and ever and ever."); their gruesome demise at the hands

of their axe-wielding father brings to mind all manner of Oedipal anxieties.  Such

additional elements, though not definitive of the monumental horror-image's first

type, certainly contribute further frightening effect.

     The second type of monumental horror-image also falls into Freud's

category of the uncanny.  Though the subjects of such images are usually as

immobile as one might expect inanimate objects to be, they are imbued with an

almost palpable symbolic power; Freud holds that "a symbol tak[ing] over the full

functions of the thing it symbolizes" is a case of infantile "over-accentuation of

psychical reality" (244).  Many of these literal monuments (e.g. the Wicker Man,

the corpse monument in *Texas Chain Saw*, the stick figures in *Blair Witch*) are in

the shape of human beings; in addition, they are often shot with a slowly tracking or zooming camera, as if to compensate for their inanimate nature by giving them a subtle form of filmic "animation."  Moreover, such images are often literally representative of primitive belief systems.  Factors such as these trigger the types of surmounted beliefs Freud labeled as generative of uncanny effects. Finally, like the first type of monumental horror-image as well, this type utilizes bright lighting.  That which ought[2] to have remained hidden and secret has literally "come to light."

As much as such factors contribute to the efficacy of the monumental horror-image in provoking emotions of fear and horror, though, they can not be said to be sufficiently determinative.  One need look no further than Freud's essay itself to find dozens of examples of the uncanny that do not resemble the monumental horror-image as described above.  That such images are a confluence of uncanny motifs is worthy of note, but one could easily picture images and events which combine just as large a number of uncanny effects without the immobility, bright lighting, isolated placement within the rear center of the frame, and other elements characteristic of the monumental horror-image.

Freud's focus on the impact of the uncanny on the reader (and by extension, spectator) may be the key to another door by which we can access the source of the monumental horror-image's power.  We have said that such images possess a unique power to horrify—a power of such magnitude that one (me, for example) can assume it to be the archetypal horror image.  Surely, then, its impact on and relation to the spectator must be unique.  Theories that focus

---

[2] Exactly what is meant by "ought not"—an intriguing notion indeed—will be explained later.

horror spectatorship might therefore prove useful in determining what the monumental horror-image is doing.  In light of this, let us explore the relationship between horror film and horror spectator.

## 4        Williams, Bukatman, and the Embodied Monumental Horror-Image Spectator

In her essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,"[3] Linda Williams discusses the impact of the horror film on its spectator in a variety of different contexts.  Much of her essay focuses on an expansion of Carol Clover's notion of a "bisexual" identification progress, in which the viewer first identifies with the passive, terrified female victim and later with her "active empowerment" (707).  This conception of horror as "sadomasochism" posits violence as horror's defining characteristic.  Though normally such a view might be a roadblock to an address of the monumental horror-image, Williams devises an ingenious schematic that is quite useful in pinpointing audience response to what they see.

Williams compares the horror genre to two other film genres, pornography and the melodramatic women's film, tearjerker, or "weepie."  Dubbing them "body genres," Williams claims that:

> ...the success of these genres is often measured by the degree to which the audience sensation mimics what is seen on the screen.  Whether this mimicry is exact, e.g., whether the spectator at the porn film actually orgasms, whether the spectator at the horror film actual [sic] shudders in fear, whether the spectator of the melodrama actually dissolves in tears,

---

[3] Williams, Linda.  "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," 1991.  In Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, fifth edition.  New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 701-715.  Further references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.

the success of these genres seems a self-evident matter of measuring bodily response. (704)

In other words, the ideal spectator of these body genres displays the same sort of "bodily excess" as the characters she sees on screen. (A useful comparison is made to the genre of slapstick, or "[p]hysical clown comedy": Williams notes that this genre is rarely considered "gratuitously excessive" because the audience response to its display is laughter, whereas the characters often react with pain or with a total lack of emotion.) (704)

As framed above, Williams's breakdown of the audience/character analog works well. It places a welcome premium on the success of a horror film in provoking a concrete (indeed, physical) horrified response as the primary measure of such a film's success, something other critics of the horror film seem reluctant to do. But as Williams continues to discuss this "anatomy of film bodies," an important discrepancy comes to light. Williams breaks down the genres as those of "the sexually ecstatic woman, the tortured woman, the weeping woman—and the accompanying presence of the sexual fluids, the blood and the tears that flow from her body and which are presumably mimicked by the spectators" (706). She also devises a table that shows various traits of the three genres, including the following distillation of the "mimicry" theory (711):

| **Genre** | **Pornography** | **Horror** | **Melodrama** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Bodily excess | sex | violence | emotion |
| Ecstasy: -shown by | ecstatic sex<br>orgasm<br>ejaculation | ecstatic violence<br>shudder<br>blood | ecstatic woe<br>sob<br>tears |

Clearly, the mimicry involved in the horror film is not as neatly coincident as Williams makes it out to be. Like the characters involved, the "ideal" pornography viewer does indeed orgasm and ejaculate; similarly, the "ideal" melodrama viewer does indeed sob and weep. While the "ideal" horror viewer certainly shudders, by no means does she bleed!

One could argue that the release of fluids by the generic spectator is merely incidental, and that the notion of spectator/character mimicry in the horror genre is still valid. On the other hand, the concept of fluid release was apparently an important one for Williams; she easily could have ignored it in favor of the less sanguine physical responses involved, which *do* line up correctly between spectator and character. Since violence is seen by Williams and her theoretical forerunners as central to the genre, bloodletting is inextricably linked to any conception she may have of "ideal responses" within the film. But despite her inclusion of blood in her schematic, she never addresses the discrepancy this reveals, perhaps to preserve the strength of her theory.

However, this theory is salvageable were one to substitute the monumental horror-image for the moment of violence as the definitive trope of horror films. In both types of monumental horror-image, a terrified character-as-spectator beholds something that *ought not* to be seen, something representative of a profound wrongness or evil. Returning to our earlier examples, we recall that when Danny sees the twins in the hallway, he brings his Big Wheels to a screeching halt and sits slack-jawed and wide-eyed, then covers his eyes in horror; Sgt. Howie has much the same reaction when he first lays eyes on the

Wicker Man, then screams in fear.  Such experiences are virtually identical to those of the ideal horror film spectator.  We too are immobilized, staring at a fixed and centralized representation of evil, revealed by the bright light of the silver screen; our heart rates quicken, our bodies tremble, we shudder and scream.  In other words, the monumental horror-image yields a direct correspondence between the spectator in the audience and the spectator on screen.  Interestingly, though, horror is not the only genre in which such a relationship is present.  As we will see next, a move from the horrifying to the sublime yields pertinent information about the nature of horror spectatorship.

A similar collapse of the audience-spectator and character-spectator is noted by Scott Bukatman in his essay "The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime."[4]  Tracing the spectacular sublime from its roots in panoramic painting to its current presence in the extravagant special effects of science fiction, Bukatman points out that "[p]anoramic perception (even in its simulacral, cinematic variation) remains a most definitely embodied phenomenon...There *is* [always] a being at the center of the panorama, enjoying the view" (260).  Films involving the sublime often feature a "pronounced spectatorial position within the diegesis," with cuts to the awestruck faces of onlookers within the film (272).  The presence of such spectator-characters do not distract us from our involvement with the spectacle before us by reminding us of its placement in a fictional world, but rather serve to reemphasize that such spectacles are "directed *right* at the viewer" (272).   A particularly instructive example of this phenomenon, according

to Bukatman, is Dave the astronaut's trip through the Stargate in Stanley

Kubrick's *2001*:

> The close-ups...do not reintegrate us into a fictional (*re*presentational space), neither do they situate Bowman as a psychologized subject to focus audience identification.  The cutaways to human observers in [this sequence] re-establish scale and re-emphasize the Otherness of the sublime environment.  They do *not* mediate the experience through the psychology of characters who are, uniformly, stunned into profound passivity.  The fictive and theatrical spaces are collapsed, as the diegetic and cinematic spectators are, in a metaphorical sense, explicitly united....(272)

Bukatman claims that the spectacular/sublime transcends a psychological

relationship between spectator and character,[5] instead conflating the two in their

appreciation of what they are seeing.  In a way, he is simply investing more

deeply in the same concept Williams explored before falling back on traditional,

violence- and gore-related psychoanalytic theories of audience identification.

Though the monumental horror-image is rarely "spectacular" in the sense

Bukatman describes—i.e. special effects-heavy—its phenomenological

similarities to the image of the sublime, i.e. overwhelmed spectators both inside

and outside the fictive frame, are considerable.  The point here is that the

monumental horror-image breaks down barriers between spectator and character

in a way that the violent horror-image does not.

---

[4] Bukatman, Scott.  "The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime."  In Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, eds., *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*.  Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, 254-289.  Further references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.
[5] Note that in the introduction to their anthology *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996, xiii), written at approximately the same time as Bukatman's essay, editors David Bordwell and Noël Carroll maintain that the "organizing principle to the volume...is that solid film scholarship can proceed without employing the psychoanalytic frameworks routinely mandated by the cinema studies establishment."  The insights Bukatman and (as we will see later) Carroll gain by taking this view in their approach to horror, as opposed to the psychoanalytic roadblocks unsurmounted by Williams, seem to me to lend credence to this

As mentioned before, the monumental horror-image seems to yield the greatest number of uncanny effects; so to does it allow the greatest degree of character/spectator mimicry or conflation within the horror genre.  But just as the theory of the uncanny seemed insufficient to explain the power of the monumental horror-image, so too does this latest insight.  This interpretation of Williams and Bukatman clearly shows *how* the spectator is affected by such images, and demonstrates *why* they can easily yield the ideal spectator response, but it fails to account for *why* this response exists in the first place.  What is the emotion engendered by the monumental horror-image?  If we accept such an image as special category, it stands to reason that to remain special, its surface aspects (as enumerated at the beginning of the essay) must be underlined by a unique or privileged emotional or mental response.  What makes us feel that such images are indeed a class by themselves?

To find the answer to this question, let us return to the idea of the sublime.  If the phenomenological aspects of Bukatman's conception of the sublime are the same as those of our conception of the monumental horror-image, perhaps their emotions they trigger are related as well.  Describing the sublime from an emotional standpoint, Bukatman cites Joseph Addison and Edmund Burke, who first conceived of the sublime as "aesthetic strategy":

> The field of the sublime was comprised of the majestic, the awe-inspiring, and the literally overpowering: it spoke the languages of excess and hyperbole to suggest realms beyond human articulation and comprehension.  The sublime was constituted through the combined sensations of astonishment, terror, and awe that occur through the

principle; however, I am admittedly not as conversant in psychoanalytic literature as perhaps I ought to be before making such a claim.

revelation of a power greater, by far, than the human...[i]t threatens human thought, habitual signifying systems, and, finally, human prowess. (266)

The "Otherness" of the sublime, as Bukatman puts it (272) is prevented from provoking a negative reaction by the spectator's "appropriation of, and identification with, the infinite powers on display" (167).  What Bukatman is essentially saying here is that the position of the character-spectator (and by extension, the audience-spectator) is such that she is *absorbed* and *made one* with the sublime.  Witness the "central" position of the spectator of a panorama (260) and the spectator's resultant, transcendent "ego dissolution" (273); or, to reference the science fiction films Bukatman discusses, witness the way different characters are absorbed into the Stargate, bathed in the light of *Close Encounters*'s mothership, welcomed into the organic ship V'ger in *Star Trek*, etc. Their unification with the Other, then, is what prevents the experience from being terrifying.[6]

In contrast, witness the spectatorial position of the character-spectators involved in the monumental horror-image: they stand paralyzed and isolated, regarding a distant, equally paralyzed and isolated Other.  There is no chance for unification, appropriation, or identification.  The monumental horror-image and the character-spectator are like two fixed poles, set in diametric opposition. Spectatorial appropriation/identification is what separates the sublime from the

_____

[6] In his characteristically plain-spoken and astute fashion, Stephen King explicitly points out the affinity between the sublime and the horrifying in his novella "The Mist" (1980, in *Skeleton Crew*, New York: Signet, 1986, 151): ""...there are certain things that your brain simply disallows.  there are things of such darkness and horror—just, I suppose, as there are things of such great beauty—that they will not fit through the puny human doors of perception."  It is not the least bit coincidental that the character who makes this connection has just encountered a truly "monumental" image of horror—an indescribably huge insectoid thing roughly the height of a skyscraper.  Such images, it should be noted, were a formative influence on the present author.

horrifying (as embodied by the monumental horror-image).  Without the

opportunity to transcend and commune with the Other, the character-spectator

(and by extension, the audience-spectator) is left with "a negative experience of

anxious confusion" (266).[7]


## 5      Carroll, Lovecraft, and Defining the Emotion of the Monumental Horror-Image; or, Just What the Monumental Horror-Image is a Monument *To*

We have begun to hone in on what may be the definitive horror

experience (and as such, the definitive monumental horror-image

experience)—the encounter with terrifying, inexplicable "Otherness."  Just such a

theory is central to "the philosophy of horror" as articulated by Noël Carroll in his

book of that name.  Using an analytical approach, Carroll "presume[s] that the

genre is designed to produce an emotional effect...attempt[s] to isolate that

effect...[and] attempt[s] to show how the characteristic structures, imagery, and

figures in the genre are arranged to cause the emotion."[8]  The results of his

inquiry are comprehensive and almost always convincing.  Though the intricacies

of his findings with regards to horror narratives are extremely interesting (indeed,

nearly indispensable to the serious student of horror), they are too numerous to

be discussed here.  A summation of his basic points will suffice for our purposes.

---

[7] Interestingly, in *The Wicker Man* (as well as in the bone room scene in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*), the character-spectator *is* integrated into the monumental horror-image.  It is arguable that this occurs because in said instances, the monumental horror-image was constructed (within the diegesis) by characters for whom these structures were indeed representations of the sublime.
[8] Carroll, Noël.  *The Philosophy of Horror*.  New York: Routledge, 1990, 8.  Further references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.

Carroll's first major advancement in contemporary horror theory is his rejection of violence as the central trope of the horror genre. Rather than allowing himself to be over-influenced by the slasher cycle of the mid-70's onward, Carroll selects the "monster"—that is, "any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science"—as the primary figure of the horror film (15, 27). But like Linda Williams, he assumes that "the audience's responses to...works of horror are *ideally* intended to run parallel to and often to be cued by the emotional responses of the relevant fictional characters" (30). Carroll breaks down this response, the emotion of horror (which he calls "art-horror"), in the following manner:

> I am occurrently art-horrified by some monster X, say Dracula, if and only if 1) I am in some state of abnormal, physically felt agitation (shuddering, tingling, screaming, etc.) which 2) has been *caused* by a) the thought: that Dracula is a possible being; and by the evaluative thoughts: that b) said Dracula has the property of being physically (and perhaps morally and socially) threatening in the ways portrayed in the fiction and that c) said Dracula has the property of being impure, where 3) such thoughts are usually accompanied by the desire to avoid the touch of things like Dracula. (27)

Particularly important here is the notion that the monster must be both threatening and "impure" in some way—that is, that neither simple fear nor simple disgust is sufficiently definitive for horror (28). This concept of "impurity" is central to Carroll's thesis. He develops it in large part from ideas advanced by Mary Douglas, who linked the notion of impurity with "the transgression or violation of schemes of cultural categorization" (31). In other words, beyond the physical threat monsters may pose, there is an additional threat posed by the monsters' "un-naturalness," their violation of a given culture's prevailing

conceptual frame of nature or reality (34).[9]  "They are threats to common

knowledge...they tend to render those who encounter them insane, mad,

deranged, and so on" (34).  The danger inherent in such assaults on rationality is

really what makes monsters horrifying.

The importance of this notion is driven home when Carroll attempts to

explain why one would voluntarily watch a horror film when, by definition, such

films stir unpleasant feelings.  Carroll proposes that monsters, vis à vis their

"violat[ion] of our conceptual schema" (186), exert a pull of fascination and

curiosity on the spectator, courtesy of our desire to know the unknown (185).

"[W]hat it means to say that the horrific being is "unknown" here," says Carroll, "is

that it is not accommodated by standing conceptual schemes") (185).  The

stronger the violation of cultural and perceptual norms is, the more rewarding we

find its revelation (184).  Since violation of conceptual schemes is the defining

characteristic of the impure and disgusting, which itself is a defining characteristic

of horror, our loathing of horrific objects is inextricably tied to our interest in them

(185).  Simply put, "[o]ne wants to gaze upon the unusual, even when it is

simultaneously repelling" (188).

It is noteworthy that Carroll bypasses a psychoanalytic explanation for this

phenomenon.  The unpleasantness of horror is not seen as a way to placate the

super-ego that prohibits us from seeking out transgressive forces; it is merely a

---

[9] Though, for the sake of simplicity, Carroll explicitly rejects the "human monsters" of films such
as *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* as being part of the horror genre (15), this notion of the impure as a
violation of a culture's view of how things ought to be seems to be a way to incorporate such
works, as well as films even less frequently labeled horror, such as *Deliverance* and *Eyes Wide
Shut.*  The potential for a "slippery slope" exists here—is *Schindler's List* to be considered a
horror film?  Is *Welcome to the Dollhouse*?—but I think further considerations (narrative structure,

concomitant factor with the extreme nature of the violations of the normal inherent in the genre (184).  Compare this approach to Williams's discussion of sadomasochistic pornography, in which she claims that the masochistic woman proves she is a "good girl" by remaining a passive, unwilling recipient of pleasure, while all along the "bad girl" is enabled to enjoy this pleasure, and indeed arranged for the pain that cloaks it (Williams 709).

Carroll's thesis is very, very broad, encompassing many different types of horrific objects, while remaining notably silent on the topic of things pertaining specifically to the monumental horror-image.  But all is not lost.  As we noted earlier, the monumental horror-image is such that the character-spectator's responses are mimicked by the audience-spectator more closely than responses to any other type of horror image.  It is an extreme—or rather, an ideal—instance of a larger phenomenon.  Assuming that Carroll's theory of transgression-as-fundamental is correct, is there a similarly extreme/ideal type of transgression-response that, finally, could explain the power of the monumental horror-image?

Let us return to Bukatman's discussion of the sublime.  Note once again the way he describes the unmitigated effect of the sublime: "The sublime initiates a crisis in the subject by disrupting the customary cognized relationship between subject and external reality.  It threatens human thought, habitual signifying systems, and, finally, human prowess" (266).  Such a passage, here speaking in reference to images of the infinite, could well be used to describe the effect of the

---

the presence of monumental horror-images (naturally)) could be used to stop the slide.  However, such distinctions merit deeper exploration than can be afforded them in the context of this essay.

most extreme cases of horror.  The question then becomes one of finding a type of horror that approaches the "infinitude" (267) of the truly sublime.

The answer, I would submit, lies in the concept of "cosmic fear."  As described by H.P. Lovecraft in his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature,"[10] cosmic fear stems from our simultaneous terror of and fascination with the unknown (1).  Regarded "with fear and awe" since the time of our primitive ancestors, the unknown (intimately linked to the infinite) is seen as "a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part" (1).  As Lovecraft puts it:

> This type of fear-literature must not be confounded with a type externally similar but psychologically widely different; the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome...these things are not the literature of cosmic fear in its purest sense. The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain -- a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (2)

Using this sense of cosmic fear as the defining characteristic of horror, Lovecraft holds that a given piece of literature is a true horror story if and only if it excites just such a profound sense of dread and awe in the reader (2).  (Note that cosmic fear is not necessarily "literally" cosmic in origin, just as the monumental horror-

---

[10] Lovecraft, H.P.  "Supernatural Horror in Literature,"  1927, 1933-1935, at http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/gaslight/superhor.htm.  Further references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.  Page numbers refer to a converted Microsoft Word 97 document.

image need not be "literally" monumental.  I believe that by using the word "cosmic," Lovecraft is simply suggesting the enormity of this type of horror's violation of large-scale cosmological, spiritual, physical, and moral schema.)

Cosmic fear, then, is the link in the chain that connects the various theories discussed above to the monumental horror-image.  It utilizes the Freudian conception of primitive beliefs as the progenitor of uncanny effects (without, however, explicitly referring to such beliefs as "repressed" or "surmounted"); it serves as a dark flipside to Bukatman's conception of the sublime as the awe-inspiring Otherness that lies "beyond human articulation and comprehension" (Bukatman 266); it echoes Carroll's theory in that it posits as the defining characteristic of horror the presence of the "unknown" and the violation of the laws of Nature and reality as dictated by cultural norms.  Moreover, by returning to the idea that the horror exuded by the monumental horror-image is, like the sublime, "an embodied phenomenon"  (simply embodied in a way which does not allow the identification of the character-spectator and audience-spectator with the infinitude presented), we can easily mesh cosmic fear with Williams's body genre schematic.  The "ideal" horror response, as articulated in our revision of Williams's breakdown, is indeed the response evoked by cosmic fear.  (Indeed, Lovecraft made the distinction between the truly horrifying and the "merely gruesome"—a necessary one for our revision to be of any merit—decades before an unfortunate conflation of the two would lead to the roadblocks in horror theory mentioned above.)  Moreover, such a response is

shared by both character-spectator and audience-spectator, as required by the theories of both Williams and Carroll.

Finally, then, we have discovered exactly what the monumental horror-image is a "monument" *to*: cosmic fear.  Through the filmic techniques (stasis, bright lighting, isolated central position in the frame, etc.) discussed earlier, these immobile images incontrovertibly concretize the existence of forces that violate mankind's conceptual framework to an awe-inspiring degree, just as normal immobile monuments concretize less horrifying concepts and ideals.  Moreover, they afford the greatest degree of similarity between the experiences of the character and the spectator, unmitigated by violent interaction.  Finally (though this is not as central to its importance) they deploy a great number of uncanny effects, possibly more than any other type of horror-image.  They show us that which *ought not to* be seen, that which transgresses the flimsy framework of reality in which we have placed ourselves.  In short, the monumental horror-image is the ideal, and therefore definitive, horror-image.

Before we continue by exploring horror as exemplified by the monumental horror-image, let us pause briefly to consider an objection to cosmic fear as the definitive horror characteristic (therefore an objection to its avatar, the monumental horror-image, as the definitive horror-image).  In his own discussion of cosmic fear, Carroll rejects this emotion as an "arbitrary" criterion for defining horror (164).  Though he owns that cosmic fear "is one effect of (perhaps) relatively high achievement within the horror genre" and that a tale that provokes cosmic fear "would (probably) be a very good horror story," he feels that this

establishes too narrow a "standard for inclusion into the genre" (164).  To put it bluntly, so what?  We have already seen that both Williams and, more explicitly, Carroll have no problem setting up an "ideal" audience response as indicative of a "good" horror film; what, then, is Carroll's objection to further raising the bar?  Setting the inspiration of cosmic fear as the standard for horror—a standard in which mere chain-rattling and bloodletting are ignored in favor of true quality—could well lift the genre out of the sewers of public perception in which it has languished for much of its history and elevate it to its proper place in the pantheon of film and literature.

## 7      Applying the Monumental Horror-Image: *The Shining* and *The Exorcist* as Ideal Horror Films

Fortunately, several films have lived up to—and surpassed—just such a standard.  In the endless debate between horror aficionados as to which is the most frightening film ever made, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* and William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* command two of the largest camps.  It comes as no surprise that both films utilize the monumental horror-image to a remarkable degree.  Though Friedkin's film promotes the power of faith and goodness to overcome evil, while Kubrick's film all but holds this notion in contempt, the use of the monumental horror-image manages to reinforce their differing agendas by lending both movies a palpable, overpowering sense of cosmic fear.  It is the weapon that drives their horrifying messages home.

Analyses of *The Shining* often focus on its psychological horror, in particular the madness of Jack Torrance, its central character. This detracts from the painstaking manner in which Kubrick sets up monumental horror-images (particularly those of the first type) so as to overpower characters and audience alike with the horror of the "unreal." In a way, the confines of the Overlook Hotel come to define a new world, one where old conceptual frameworks of time, space, and human behavior are mercilessly hacked to pieces. Jack's insanity is simply his method of adapting to this systematic violation of his old world—a violation for which the indelible monumental horror-image stands.

The first encounter we have with such an image is fleeting, yet unforgettable—an almost subliminal flash of the twins seen during Danny's vision/episode before he and his family move to the Overlook for the winter. They pop out at us unexpectedly in the midst of a slow-motion shot of a torrent (Torrance?) of blood gushing forth from the hotel's elevator doors, accompanied by ominously low, droning music, and mirrored by a subsequent flash cut to Danny screaming. However briefly they appear, the twins are presented as a concretization of the fluid, a personification of the forces of violence, fear, and death present in the rest of the vision. Further, since we have already heard the story of how the twins were slain by their father, one of the Overlook's winter caretakers, we know that seeing them at all is a violation of physical reality.

This "violation of reality" is reinforced when the twins next appear, in the rec room scene described at length above. Though there is nothing particularly special about the way the twins are presented or shot, they are clearly out of

place in this quotidian setting.  A careful look at the shot structure of the film reveals why they make us feel so uneasy: throughout the movie, the camera has been in constant motion.  We begin with a breathtaking fly-over shot of Jack's car as it snakes through the mountains toward the Overlook; we are constantly following characters with Kubrick's trademark tracking shots, made even more fluid by the recent invention of the Steadicam; even simple close-ups are usually made mobile with slow, barely perceptible tracks or zooms into the characters' faces.  But in monumental horror-images of the first type, such as that of the twins, the camera comes to a jarring halt.  Kubrick has accustomed us to movement, subtly training us to be uneasy when this movement ceases.  In the rec room scene, the jarring nature of this contrast is highlighted by an uncharacteristically rapid zoom-in on Danny just as he turns to see the twins in the doorway.  Their presence, standing there like twin tombstones, is a violation not only of the physical laws of the film, but in this movie's case, a violation of the physical laws of *film*.

The usefulness of the movement/stasis contrast in making the spectator uneasy is even clearer in the twins' final appearance.  We follow Danny on his Big Wheels as he glides through the corridors of the hotel, until he turns a corner and comes to a screeching halt, finding himself face to face with the twins once more.  As mentioned earlier, this scene highlights the Freudian "uncanny" aspects of the girls, one such aspect being the compulsive repetition in their speech.  But the phrase they repeat—"forever and ever and ever"—calls to mind the concept of overwhelming infinitude central to both the sublime and to cosmic

fear.  Danny reacts by covering his eyes to block out the horror of what he is

seeing, then using Tony to tell himself that, "like pictures in a book," the twins

can't hurt him.  But his uncertain tone of voice belies this claim.  The twins have

hurt him, but through his *mind's* eye, which no hands can cover.   They have

shattered Danny's feeling of safety, both physical (they were slain by their

father—might he fall victim to a similar fate?) and metaphysical (they are dead,

and yet they are standing at the end of the hall and beckoning to him—what

other cracks in the fabric of reality might threaten to swallow him up?).

By the time the film reaches its climax, dangers of both types have

reached enormous proportions.  Jack turns violent, chasing his wife and son with

an axe.  His total transgression of behavioral norms is mirrored by the hotel,

which in turn unleashes its most numerous and large-scale violations of

reality—many of them, naturally, in the form of monumental horror-images.

Indeed, as a terrified Wendy, having become separated from Danny, runs

through the hotel to find him, she is practically bombarded with such images.

After climbing a flight of stairs, she looks into a bedroom down the hall, where a

man dressed as a dog kneels and performs fellatio on a man in a tuxedo.  They

sit up and stare at her, unblinking.  Minutes later, after discovering the body of

the Overlook's chef Dick Halloran (who has been slain by Jack), she turns to find

another tuxedo-clad man at the end of the hallway.  His bald head covered with

blood, he raises his glass and says merrily, "Great party, isn't it?"  Like the

dogman and his friend, he is isolated in the distant center of the frame (his

central position is accentuated by the presence of a chandelier hanging directly

above him, just as the dogman and his lover's position was highlighted by their framing in a doorway), where he stands like a monument to the malevolent party being held in the hotel.

It is important to note that as these sequences unfold, we are also tracking Jack as he chases Danny out into the snow-covered hedge maze on the hotel grounds. We know that Wendy is no longer in physical danger, as the axe-wielding madman that is her husband is no longer inside the hotel with her. This does not detract from the horror of her situation, however. The presence of these spectral "guests," unthreatening as they may seem, proves incontestably that much more is wrong with the Overlook Hotel than its caretaker. By the time Wendy sees the final, truly monumental image of the elevator (which she approaches as if she knows what is going to happen) gushing blood, it is clear that the Overlook itself is a "monument," a physical embodiment of undying evil capable of warping both time and minds. In this sense, Jack's demise is fitting: frozen and immobile, he becomes a monument himself, a physical embodiment of the cosmic horror of the Overlook Hotel.

The inspiration of cosmic fear—specifically the type stemming from Catholic dogma—was an explicit thematic concern of William Peter Blatty, who adapted *The Exorcist*'s screenplay from his own novel of the same name. He carefully constructed his story so that the demon Pazuzu, who possess young Regan MacNeil, would be more terrifying for its mental effects on those around Regan than its physical effects on Regan itself. In the novel, Father Lancaster Merrin, the missionary and archaeologist who is summoned to exorcise Regan,

insists that "the demon's target is not the possessed; it is us...the observers...every person in this house."[11]  Merrin discusses this further in a conversation with the conflicted Father Damien Karras, found in another scene that was cut from the film's final cut but was present in both novel and screenplay:

> Fr. Karras:   Why this girl?  It makes no sense.
> Fr. Merrin:   I think the point is to make us despair.  To see ourselves as...animal and ugly.  To reject the notion that God could love us.

Director William Friedkin stressed the importance of the idea that the film's true horror stemmed from what the demon represented in his introduction to a recent special edition video release: "...it's a story that can perhaps make you question your own value system, even your own sanity, because it strongly and realistically tries to make the case for spiritual forces in the universe, both good and evil....[t]his had to be a realistic film about inexplicable events."

　　With their unequalled, specifically representative power, monumental horror-images were the logical choice to convey these themes in the film.  Unlike *The Shining*, however, *The Exorcist* focuses on the second, more literally "monumental" type of horror-image.  From the beginning, Pazuzu is associated with monuments and statues.  During a dig in Iraq, Fr. Merrin accidentally unearths the head of a small Pazuzu statue after removing the St. Joseph's medal that had been placed mysteriously nearby.  At that moment we first hear the unearthly buzzing sound we come to associate with the demon; the discovery of this mini-monument appears to have "unleashed" him once again.

---

[9] Blatty, William Peter.  *The Exorcist*.  In Mark Kermode, *The Exorcist*.  London: British Film

Later that day, a shaken and disturbed Merrin travels to the site of an ancient, ruined fortress.  Though he earlier told a fellow scholar that he was leaving because "there is something [he] must do," he seems shocked to discover exactly what this "something" turns out to be.  As Merrin stands in the ruins, a shadow covers his face.  He looks up to see an enormous statue of Pazuzu looming in the center of the frame, blotting out the harsh glow of the midday sun.  As droning, atonal music is heard on the soundtrack, Merrin climbs a rocky hill; the camera rapidly swings around his head to reveal the statue, now fully visible, atop a hill opposite Merrin's.  A series of quick cuts follow: a startled Merrin turns to see an Arab atop a similar hill, watching the proceedings (rifle-toting Arab security guards had threatened Merrin at the gates to the ruins moments before); he turns again and sees two wild dogs, fighting and growling in the desert.  Finally, he turns back to the statue.  The camera zooms in slowly on Merrin's face, then on the statue's face.  Finally, as the dogs' angry growls become distorted, merging with the droning music, the buzzing sound we heard earlier, and what appears to be a woman screaming, we cut to a final shot of Merrin and the statue, standing on opposite ends of the screen, facing off in an archetypal image of good versus evil.  This in turn dissolves to a shot of the setting sun above the barren desert landscape, which itself dissolves to a placid aerial view of autumnal Georgetown.   The bizarre sounds gradually fade out.

By first showing us Pazuzu not in his "real," demonic form, but in a representational, monumental form, Friedkin offers us a hint as to the true threat that the demon represents.  Pazuzu is a holdover from an outmoded, ancient

Institute, 1997, 44.

belief system, an embodiment of an evil for which the modern, complacent, atheistic America into which it has been introduced (in this very sequence) cannot account.  Fr. Merrin seems to understand this threat simply by gazing upon its graven image in the ruins.

Pazuzu itself appears to understand the power of the monumental horror-image to concretize evil in a supremely disturbing fashion; in fact, the next true monumental horror-image we see—a desecration of a statue of the Virgin Mary—is its doing.  A series of leisurely cranes, pans, and tracks follow a bespectacled priest as he enters Georgetown University's chapel to place flowers by the statues of the Holy Family.  As he crosses the altar after placing the first batch in front of St. Joseph, he stops short, and the camera swoops in on his face as he looks up.  We cut to a still shot of the Virgin, centered and illuminated by the light from the chapel's windows.  Crude red and black breasts and an enormous, conical penis have been affixed to the statue, whose hands have also been painted blood red.  The priest reacts with a horrified whisper of "Oh God."

This horror-image, once again literally "monumental," comes a solid half hour into the film.  We have yet to see anything explicitly supernatural or violent; nevertheless, the fact that something profoundly wrong is happening has been undeniably confirmed by this indisputable, literally concrete depiction of evil.  The defiance of contemporary Judeo-Christian conceptual schemes implicit in the ancient Pazuzu statue is made explicit in this direct violation of a Christian icon.  Furthermore, it is worthy of note that by this point in the film, Regan has been shown to be an amateur sculptor.  As the gaudy coloring and childish

workmanship of this desecration indicate, Regan was the vessel in which the demon committed its crime; her talents neatly lend themselves to its mission to boldly proclaim the presence of irrational, diabolical forces in the world.  Pazuzu, it would seem, picks its victims well.

The use of the monumental horror-image reaches a feverish peak in the film's climactic exorcism sequence.  In this sequence, Pazuzu's possession of Regan (which often displays inanimate, "statuesque" characteristics: catatonia, somnambulism, immobility, and of course the infamous "head-spinning" special effect, made possible by the use of an actual mannequin) becomes explicitly monumental in nature.  After a series of seismic tremors that nearly destroy her bedroom and a vicious verbal assault against Fr. Karras in which she blames him for his mother's death, Regan bursts her bonds, her eyes going white.  She slowly levitates off her bed, arms outstretched in a blasphemous, satanic parody of Christ's crucifixion.  After further earthquake-like shocks to the room, we cut to a shot from above, in which the Regan-thing, bathed in cold blue-white light, is placed dead-center.  This "vulgar display of power" stuns both Merrin and Karras; they respond to it by repeatedly invoking a rival power, that of Christ.  After she finally sinks back down onto the bed, she assaults Karras as he attempts to re-fasten her restraints.  Another tremor sends Karras and Merrin crashing against the wall, where they look up to see the supposedly bound Regan, arms outstretched, silhouetted against a strange blue light.  The clear graphic similarity of this shot to the introductory shot of Pazuzu's monument is made unmistakable by the inexplicable appearance of that very statue behind Regan's bed,

accompanied by the same buzzing, droning, and screaming heard during the original sequence.

Regan's levitation and the subsequent appearance of Pazuzu are the one-two punch apotheosis of the horror of *The Exorcist*. Their near-total violation of moral, spiritual, and physical norms can only be described as obscene. Displaying nearly all the characteristics of the archetypal monumental horror-image, they clearly demonstrate the unforgettable power of such images to make "real" the unreal, the abnormal, the things that should not be. Their accompaniment by cataclysmic physical trauma to the bedroom reinforces the fashion in which such images rend the fabric of reality that Karras and Merrin have viewed as normal all their lives. Their exhaustion at the end of this scene stems not from any great physical ordeal, but from the tremendous toll these monumental horror-images are taking on "[their] value system, even [their] own sanity." Such are the effects of horror at its best (or worst?)—the horror of cosmic fear.

## 8  Conclusion

As we have seen, the monumental horror-image is a remarkably effective key to unlocking the power of the contemporary horror film. It offers us a defining characteristic of horror with a greater degree of sufficient specificity than Freud's "uncanny." It overcomes obstacles posed by designating violence as the definitive horror-image, rectifies problems with William's attempt to depict an

analogous relationship between character and audience, and echoes

Bukatman's conception of an embodied spectator overwhelmed by the infinite.  It

fulfills Carroll's conditions for the object of "art-horror" while surpassing his

conditions by embodying Lovecraft's "cosmic fear."  Ultimately, its presence in a

film (like *The Blair Witch Project* or *The Sixth Sense* or *Eyes Wide Shut*, the films

that sparked this inquiry in the first place) is a reliable indicator of the power of

the film to frighten.  The monumental horror-image, and its attendant emotion of

cosmic fear, offers filmmakers a clear and definitive aesthetic strategy for the

inspiration of true, overwhelming horror.  Like *The Shining*'s twins, the next batch

of horror classics may be lurking around the corner.  And we may rest assured

that the monumental horror-image will be waiting there too.

# Bibliography

Barker, Clive.  *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror*.  Ed. and comp. Stephen Jones.  New York: HaperCollins, 1998.

_____.  "In the Hills, the Cities."  In *Books of Blood, Volume One*.  New York: Berkley Books, 1984, 172-210.

*The Birds*.  Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, writ. Evan Hunter, story Daphne du Maurier.  Universal Pictures, 1963, 120 min., videotape.

Biskind, Peter.  *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock'n'Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*.  New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

*The Blair Witch Project*.  Dir. and writ. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez.  Artisan Entertainment, 1999, 80 min., 35mm.

Bukatman, Scott.  "The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime."  In Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, eds., *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*.  Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, 255-289.

Carroll, Noël.  "Introduction."  In Noël Carroll and David Bordwell, eds., *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies.*  Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

_____.  *The Philosophy of Horror*.  New York: Routledge, 1990.

Clover, Carol J.  *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*.  Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

*Eraserhead*.  Dir. and writ. David Lynch.  American Film Institute, 1976, 89 min., videotape.

*The Exorcist*.  Dir. William Friedkin, writ. and novel William Peter Blatty.  Warner Bros., 1973, 159 min., videocassette, special widescreen edition.

*Eyes Wide Shut*.  Dir. Stanley Kubrick, writ. Stanely Kubrick and Frederic Raphael, story Arthur Schnitzler.  Warner Bros., 1999, 159 min., 35mm.

Freud, Sigmund.  "The 'Uncanny.'"  In James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII*, 1917-1919*.  London: The Hogarth Press, 1955, 217-256.

*Hellbound: Hellraiser II*.  Dir. Tony Randel, writ. Peter Atkins, story Clive Barker.  New World Pictures, 1988, 108 min., videotape, widescreen collector's edition.

*Hellraiser*.  Dir. and writ. Clive Barker.  New World Pictures, 1986, 118 min., videotape, widescreen collector's edition.

Jameson, Richard T.  "Kubrick's Shining," 1980.  In Mario Falsetto, ed., *Perspectives on Stanley Kubrick*.  New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996, 243-252.

Kawin, Bruce.  "The Mummy's Pool," 1981.  In Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*.  New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 679-690.

Kermode, Mark.  *The Exorcist*.  London: British Film Institute, 1997.

King, Stephen.  "The Mist," 1980. In *Skeleton Crew*.  New York: Signet, 1986, 24-154.

Kracauer, Siegfried.  *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film.*  Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

LoBrutto, Vincent.  *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography*.  New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

*Lost Highway*.  Dir. David Lynch, writ. David Lynch and Barry Gifford.  October Films, 1996, 135 min., videotape, widescreen edition.

Lovecraft, H.P.  "Supernatural Horror in Literature," 1927, 1933-1935.  Hypertext document located at http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/gaslight/superhor.htm.

Lynch, David.  *Lynch on Lynch*.  Ed. Chris Rodley.  Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997.

Mayo, Mike.  *Videohound's Horror Show*.  Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1998.

Modleski, Tania.  "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory," 1986.  In Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*.  New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 691-700.

Pinedo, Isabel Cristina.  *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing.*  Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

*The Shining*.  Dir. Stanley Kubrick, writ. Stanley Kubrick and Diane Johnson, story Stephen King.  Warner Bros., 1980, 144 min., videotape.

*The Sixth Sense.*  Dir. and writ. M. Night Shyamalan.  Hollywood Pictures, 1999, 106 min., 35mm.

*Twin Peaks*.  Television series, episode 14.  Dir. David Lynch, writ. Mark Frost. Lynch/Frost Productions, 1990, 43 min., videocassette.

*Twin Peaks – Fire Walk With Me*.  Dir. David Lynch, writ. David Lynch & Robert Engels.  New Line Cinema, 1992, 134. min., videocassette.

*The Wicker Man*.  Dir. Robin Hardy, writ. Anthony Shaffer.  Republic Pictures, 1975, 85 min., videotape.

Williams, Linda.  "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess."  In Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, fifth edition.  New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 701-716.

_____.  "When the Woman Looks," 1984.  In Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, fourth edition.  New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.