

The horror of the other: Stanley Cavell  
and the genre of skepticism

by

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## INTRODUCTION

This essay is about two things. On the one hand, it is about film genre, and on the other it is about philosophical skepticism. For the most part, it is about the work Stanley Cavell has done in film genre, but it is also about his work in philosophy, chiefly his concern with the skeptical problematic. In his book Pursuits of Happiness, he outlines a genre he has discovered, which he calls the comedy of remarriage, which include the films Bringing Up Baby (1938), The Lady Eve (1941), It Happened One Night (1934), The Philadelphia Story (1940), Adam's Rib (1949), The Awful Truth (1937), and His Girl Friday (1940), and he involves himself with discussions of the nature of genre, the nature of film, the nature of human relationships, and the nature of philosophy once these have all come together. It is my desire in this essay to work with these concerns, but it is also my desire to follow my own Whim with regard to them.

It may not be clear what relationship exists between film genre and philosophy. I think it is that philosophy is a world of discourse, and it is not confined to large tomes in German or French. Indeed, we live in a world of philosophy, where we philosophize daily about what is

going on, what we are to do, and what will happen. Some discourses of philosophy are rather simple and direct; some are more elaborate and complicated. In film, it so happens, the discourse can be as simple or complicated as you care to make it. Cavell has taken a group of screwball comedies made in the '30s and '40s and made them a lot more complicated than I had ever thought they were when I first saw them, but he has brought his experience as a philosopher to bear on them and made some remarkable discoveries about film and philosophy, not the least of which is that a world of discourse exists within them.

Through Cavell, I think I have made discoveries also, or rather, he has inspired me to look for things I had not previously counted on looking for or finding. The subject of my essay is a genre I have discovered which I call "the horror of the other." Within this genre I have found three films that I feel contain a world of discourse not previously reckoned with (or at least not reckoned with as I have): Night of the Living Dead (1968), The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974), and Last House on the Left (1972). They are normally thought of as grade-Z slasher films, but I have found them to be extremely articulate and less concerned with the glorification of violence (as

they have been accusingly described) and more concerned with the nature of our relationship to ourselves and to others (a preoccupation, I might add, of the comedies of remarriage).

I had an interest in these films previous to my contact with Cavell, but something he wrote in Pursuits has led me to the composition of this essay: "The bad or dark side of the myth of film as furthering the creation of humanity is its revelation that our hold on humanity is questionable, that we might merely possess ourselves, inhabit ourselves as aliens" (Pursuits, 222). It is here that I first came across the distinct possibility that the horror films I had been thinking about might indeed have a relationship to what Cavell was talking about in Pursuits. The possibility of such a discourse, or rather the interrelationship of discourses, intrigues me.

My thesis, then, is that such an interrelationship does exist between the comedies of remarriage and the horror of the other, and what I propose to do in this essay is engage in that discourse on the level of genre and generic form and on the level of the discourse of philosophy, specifically the discourse of the "good" and the "bad" sides of the myth of film. Something that concerns me

about this discourse is the issues of positivism and skepticism that are addressed in both of these genres, issues that will hopefully be made clearer in the content of this essay, but which I describe as the continual conversation that exists in these films about how far we can come to know ourselves and the other.

This essay consists of four parts by which I hope to reveal my argument: the conception of a theory of genre, which I have arrived at with the help of Cavell's work and the work of Stephen Neale, another critic within the field of genre criticism, whose work contains elements I find necessary in a picture of genre; the discovery of the borders of a genre which not only occupies a place of its own, but which I have developed as a genre adjacent to Cavell's comedies of remarriage; the proposal of further features which need to be elaborated in conjunction with the investigation of adjacency and the interrelationships of discourse; and finally, the features of form which identify the content of genres and inflect their interpretation.

CHAPTER ONE  
CONCEPTS OF GENRE

It is my purpose in this essay to discuss and apply Stanley Cavell's conception of genre. It will be helpful for this purpose to compare and contrast his work to that of another critic in this field who has contributed in an important way. Stephen Neale is appropriate because of the picture of genre that arises in the conjunction of his work and Cavell's; and although there is no direct discourse between them, the comparison is apt because of the different positions they take on similar or related issues. It is also important for my purposes here to draw in a second mind at work in film theory. While I find Cavell's work to be excellent on its own, I also have a desire to discuss an aspect of film genre that he does not explicitly approach, namely forms of narrative structure and address, which are the basis of Neale's criticism, and which I will be returning to later in this essay.

In his "Presentation" to Neale's book, Genre, Paul Willeman explains the aim of Neale's critical methodology, which he says "was to challenge and displace the dominant notions of cinema installed and defended on the basis of

the assumed excellence of the 'taste' of a few journalists and reviewers, appealing to the 'age-old canons and principles' of Art in general" (Neale, 1). Willeman's remarks explicitly state that there are other criteria for judgment in film study besides taste; we might say that Willeman's assertion suggests that there should be more standardized a criteria, perhaps something more systematic, that is independent of the "taste" of amateurs. Cavell, however, is just the sort of amateur whom Willeman is reacting against. In his introduction to Pursuits of Happiness, Cavell says that his book is about his "experience" of these films, suggesting that his interest is personal and not at all standardized according to such criteria as Willeman might have in mind.

The crucial contrast between Cavell and Neale seems to lie in their respective approaches to theory. Neale's book is explicitly theoretical, a sketching out of theoretical concerns and issues with much of their foundation in post-Lacanian psychoanalysis and post-Althusserian Marxism. Cavell, however, eschews theory as being a false constraint which limits his ability to find anything worthwhile in his study of film, and his advice is "that the way to overcome theory correctly,

philosophically, is to let the work of your interest teach you how to consider it" (Pursuits, 10). The question of whether Cavell has a "theory" or not is a touchy one. While he claims to eschew theory, he does have a method. In the Introduction to Disowning Knowledge Cavell pursues the foundations of his thinking as he finds it in Emerson's use of the words "intuition" and "tuition" in "Self-Reliance": "Primary wisdom [is] Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions" (qtd. in Disowning Knowledge, 4), and Cavell reads Emerson "as teaching that the occurrence to us of intuition places a demand upon us, namely for tuition; call this wording, the willingness to subject oneself to words, to make oneself intelligible" (Disowning, 4). It seems to me that Cavell is attempting to sidestep the notion of theory, or rather that, while there may be a theory behind what he says, he chooses not to think of or call it that. In fact, what happens is that Cavell shies away from theory as a professional activity, as Neale sees it, and calls upon intuition as his personal activity, bound only by his own Whim.

In order to examine the critical concept of genre itself as it is used by Cavell and Neale, it is necessary first to examine their dialectically opposite notions of

cinema. Neale, for instance, explicitly calls cinema "a social institution," and he goes on to state that the analysis of film involves consideration of "the filmic text as a signifying process involving specific aesthetic systems and subjective processes" and "of the differential social determinants and effects involved in distinct practices of cinema" (Neale, 6). Neale explicitly identifies film with politics and implicitly as the vehicle for extending the political discourse into the audience. He observes a kind of "pressure" that is placed on film due to its status as an artifact of popular culture, a pressure generated by the economic conditions surrounding "the production, distribution, and exhibition" of films, the need to bring in profits in order to justify the expense of making them. The very institution of Hollywood production, which is based upon an organized foundation of capital, contributes an aspect that cannot be ignored in the analysis of film. These economic considerations are ultimately political for Neale, and they seem to cast film in the role one time assigned to propaganda. According to Neale, all films are propaganda of one form or another.

On examination of Cavell, we find a more apolitical stance regarding the status of cinema, as in "The Thought

of Movies" where he describes his experience of films in purely personal terms, specifically concerning films he saw as a college student in the 1940s. Given his philosophical bent, Cavell endows film with a vision that is less political and more poetic, and film, conversely, endows him with the same poetic vision:

[I]t [film] says that the perception of poetry is as open to all, regardless as it were of birth or talent, as the ability is to hold a camera on a subject, so that a failure so to perceive, to persist in missing the subject, which may amount to missing the evanescence of the subject, is ascribable only to ourselves, to failures of our character, as if to fail to guess the unseen from the seen, to fail to trace the implications of things--that is, to fail the perception that there is something to be guessed and traced, right or wrong--requires that we persistently coarsen and stupefy ourselves. ("Thought," 14)

The vision that Cavell speaks about when he discusses film has even wider implications in his connection of it to his philosophical forebears, Emerson and Thoreau. Cavell's decision to approach movies as vision and visionary strikes a resonance in his approach to Emerson and Thoreau as visionaries who open up the path to human understanding. For example, Cavell understands the parable where Emerson proclaims his guide as Whim to mean that Emerson's goal is "to create the language in which to explain himself," to create his own discourse by which he may be understood,

to connect himself to discourse by discourse. Likewise, Cavell finds himself in a position where he desires to find some means to explain his relationship to film, which is not as an all-encompassing theory designed to "explain" movies but to express what's going on with him while he is watching them. Cavell's insistence on the "personal" aspect of criticism, however, is also an insistence that this aspect is crucial to a public understanding of cinema as a form of vision.

Genre as an activity within film is another point of divergence between Cavell and Neale. Since cinema is a social institution upon which pressure is exerted by the capitalist infrastructure which supports it, genre itself exists as a market strategy, according to Neale. He uses the image of a machine to describe the process of producing meanings, "a machine for the regulation of the orders of subjectivity" that serves the function of elaborating upon signifying processes. Genre serves a role as a "component" of that machinery: "Approached in this way, genres are not to be seen as forms of textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that circulate between industry, text, and subject" (Neale, 19). Neale traces the function of

genre as a commodity that can be sold, hence

regarding Hollywood as an institution, reference is made not only to specific economic structures and practices in the sphere of production, but also to a category of marketing which potentially includes discursive though non-cinematic elements such as advertising strategies, posters, stills, trade reviews, trade synopses, reviewing, and so on. All these areas of practice are seen as contributing fundamentally to the demarcation of genres, the establishing of categories and classifications within the social process of cinema as a whole. (Neale, 14)

Cavell places greater importance on genre as a philosophical concept rather than as a "marketing strategy." For him, genre exists as a significant part of our understanding of (as well as the understanding of artists towards) a work of film. In "The Fact of Television," Cavell refers to genre as a "medium," and he wants to "open to investigation the relation of work and medium that I call the revelation, acknowledgment, of the one in the other" ("Fact," 243). Cavell discusses "medium" in much more detail in The World Viewed, particularly in the chapter "Automatism" where he discusses the automatic quality of film ("reproducing the world is the only thing that film does automatically."):

[A] given movie can naturally tap the source of the movie medium as such. And the medium is profounder than any of its instances. This sounds like other ideas one comes across currently. But the idea of a medium of art is

stifled if one does not recognize that this was always true, that the power of a given sonnet or rondo or portrait was its power to stand for the form it took and thence to invoke the power of poetry or music or painting as such.

(World, 103)

Genre-as-medium places the issue of what "kind" of work a given film is in a much larger context than the one implied by the simple classification of stories; genre-as-medium provides meaning through the evocation of specific images and contexts which unite it with the power of film as a whole. But, as Cavell urges when he says that "the medium of film is profounder than any of its instances," the individual film does not necessarily evoke the ultimate expression of its concerns. Likewise, the individual film is not simply the formulation of a commodity, and we might see the divergence here in terms of point of view: while Neale cares to study film as a commodity, Cavell cares to study it as an object of meaning, specifically philosophical meaning, and so the signifying processes that Neale sketches are less to be thought of as machinery than as examples of tuition, as Cavell has received the notion from Emerson.

This is an idea that resonates within Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (which Cavell cites in his introduction to

Pursuits of Happiness) where he concludes that, because of the ease of the production of works of art, "to an even greater degree the work of art becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility" (Benjamin, 226). To be sure, Benjamin is describing the physical reproduction of the text, but, carried a step further, we can also see that he is describing "types" of texts that are reproducible. And the continual additions to genres attest to the wide availability of genres to artists who are able to approach them from a wide variety of perspectives. This is a valid description of generic texts for both critics since each observes that one text by itself cannot constitute the whole; while they may differ on the function of that reproducibility, it is also evident that texts are not sufficient unto themselves.

The issue of generic specificity is a continuing debate among genre critics. Essentially, the problem is this--we know a genre because we recognize its parts, but how can we know what the important parts are until we know what the genre is? Neale discusses genre in connection with narrative as a means of determining its specificity; and, according to his definition, narrative is "always a process of transformation of the balance of elements that constitute

its pretext: the interruption of an initial equilibrium and the tracing of the dispersal and refiguration of its components" (Neale, 20). Neale transmogrifies elements of narrative discourse into their ideological equivalents, which operation constitutes the articulation that is of primary concern to the specific genre. Therefore, the equilibrium consists of a condition of ideological "plenitude" (which Neale determines is an impossibility) which is disrupted by some form of "dramatic conflict," resulting in a form of incoherence. Since the return to equilibrium is impossible (not that it ever existed in the first place), it is necessary to "suture" incoherent elements in order to move towards closure. Reconciliability must be forced lest the ideological balance be left hanging (or damaged, making the surgical connotations of the word "suture" much more vivid). Coherence, however, as Neale goes on to say,

is not simply a fact of closure, of the achievement of the stability of an equilibrium, of the production of a final, unified position. It is also and equally a fact of the process which leads to that closure, of the balance of the movement of the positioning that disequilibrium itself involves ... The coherence of mainstream narrative derives largely from the way in which that disphasure [the disturbance of subject positioning] is contained as a series of oscillations that never exceed the limits of 'dramatic conflict' (that never,

therefore, exceed the limits of the possibility of resolution), and from the way in which such conflict is always, ultimately, articulated from a single, privileged point of view.

(Neale, 25)

It seems, as a consequence of this condition of narrative, that it needs some kind of a priori set of significations which will act as the source of the "privileged point of view." In this context, then, genre acts as a regulated order of the narrative's "potentiality"--it both "exploits and contains" the diversity of narrative.

A good example of uncontained narrative potentiality might be seen in Sam Peckinpah's Straw Dogs (1971) where the expectation of violence, once revealed, is not contained by any of the traditional restraints placed on movies, such as the shootout. Violence is always implied in the narrative and the mise-en-scene, and expectations are wildly overreached. (I think this nongeneric quality of the film might equally be taken as contributing to an explicit discourse on violence.)

Neale considers several Hollywood genres that articulate these orders, or "modes," which can be specified across generic boundaries. Since generic specificity is not only a process "of particular and exclusive elements, however defined, but of exclusive and particular

combinations and articulations of elements, of the exclusive and particular weight given in any one genre to elements which in fact it shares with other genres" (Neale, 22-23), it is actually more useful to locate these elements across generic boundaries and see how their signification can be shifted between genres.

One example of this process might be found in the iconographic figure of the gun, a common signifier of disruption within almost any text. In the gangster film, the gun is recognized as being hidden, an object of the underworld, and as small (like a snubnose or a .38 Special), indicating that it is portable, easily available, and indeed an indispensable object for urban life, like a watch or a wallet. These qualities are specific to a discourse on urban crime. The gun, being hidden, indicates a potential for sudden violence, and often our expectations of violence are associated with the fact that we know there are hidden guns, hidden potentials for violence, all over the place. (Another kind of gun that shows up in gangster films is the Thompson sub-machine gun, or tommy gun, and, more recently, the Uzi, which provides another signification, that of a war machine and also that of a technologically advanced weapon that works faster and is

easily associated with the escalation of violence.)

Compare this to the Western gun, which is worn openly, is often large and unwieldy (except for the expert), and is carried by everyone; in fact, people are defined within the society according to whether or not they will own or use one. All of these factors indicate a society in which violence serves an unavoidable function, and they contribute to a discourse on civilization by and about a civilization which is perilous and needs to maintain a rigorous control over its members. Neale discusses these distinctions according to their signification of and to the discourse on Law that is articulated in these films; however, "where they differ from one another is in the precise weight given to the discourses they share in common, in the inscription of these discourses across more specific generic elements, and in their imbrication across the codes specific to cinema" (Neale, 21).

Cavell's idea of genre and generic specificity, first of all, is nothing at all like Neale's. He does not feel compelled to accept or reject the traditional classifications. His emphasis, rather, is philosophical; that is, he is concerned with "conversations" that take place within individual films which could be articulated

by reference to particular iconographic, ideological, or historical determinants, but need not be. The comedies of remarriage that he examines in Pursuits of Happiness are defined by an inconclusive number of features that have to do with a conversation about

a phase of the development of consciousness at which the struggle is for the reciprocation or equality of consciousness between a woman and a man, a study of the conditions under which this fight for recognition (as Hegel put it) or demand for acknowledgement (as I have put it) is a struggle for mutual freedom, especially of the views each holds of the other.

(Pursuits, 17-18)

Some of these features have to do with the presence of actors (such as Cary Grant, James Stewart, and Ralph Bellamy) and actresses (such as Katherine Hepburn, Barbara Stanwyck, and Irene Dunne), but they also have to do with Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale in which a woman who was turned into a statue is reborn, and they also have to do with such a contemporary issue as divorce. The result of these considerations is that

the conversation of what I call the genre of remarriage is, judging from the films I take to define it, of a sort that leads to acknowledgment; a reconciliation so profound as to require the metamorphosis of death and revival, the achievement of a new perspective on existence; a perspective that presents itself as a place, one removed from the city of confusion and divorce. (Pursuits, 19)

Such considerations of genres according to their themes rather than their supposedly obvious and self-evident traits is a radical (to my mind) re-conceptualization of genre as a critical concept, and it contributes to the task of associating meaningfulness with generic forms. In "The Fact of Television" Cavell describes his critical approach to genre as

letting the discussion of certain individual works, which, so far as I know, had never been put together as a group, lead me, or push me, into sketching a theory of genre, and I went no further with it than the concrete motivations in reading individual works seemed to demand.  
("Fact," 242)

Hence, his "theory" seems to be more of a consequence of his analysis rather than a systematic methodology, as in Neale's case.

It must be made clear at this point, then, that Cavell's work in genre is not extensive. With this one book, Pursuits of Happiness, he has laid down a foundation for future study from which he hopes to be able to reach out into other areas of genre study. Cavell calls the subject of his book "the genre of the comedy of remarriage," and he says that it is an "inheritor of the preoccupations and discoveries of Shakespearean romantic comedy." And the reason why he can make that 300-year leap, from

Elizabethan stage comedy to Hollywood screwball comedy, is because what he is looking for in terms of generic specificity is "a picture of a genre," not defined by processes but constituting an organic wholeness. He is not attempting to break down the elements of these films but to follow their threads to wherever they might lead. Cavell calls the individual films of the genre "members," meaning that they "share the inheritance of certain conditions, procedures and subjects and goals of composition," and he goes on to claim "that in primary art each member of such a genre represents a study of these conditions, something I think of as bearing the responsibility of the inheritance" (Pursuits, 28). The responsibility is not, however, simply an instance of repetition but involves in each case a higher degree of participation in the themes in order to truly be a member:

[T]he members of a genre will be interpretations of it, or to use Thoreau's word for it, revisions of it, which will also make them interpretations of one another. The myth must be constructed, or reconstructed, from the members of the genre that inherits it, and since the genre is, as far as we know, unsaturated, the construction of the myth must be provisional.

(Pursuits, 31)

Consequently, participation in the genre will be participation in an ongoing conversation of myth-making.

Since all genres, however, are not alike, Cavell also integrates the idea of adjacent genres, a concept we shall be turning to in the next chapter. It is through the adjacent genres, beginning with the comedy of remarriage, that Cavell hopes to determine the field of generic activity, a task he has initiated in his essay on Hitchcock's North by Northwest (1959).

In "North by Northwest" he describes the film as sharing a number of features with comedies of remarriage, but crucial features have been inverted: the presence of the woman's father is here the presence of the man's mother, the death and rebirth of the woman is here enacted by the man, the education of the woman is here the education of the man. "Hitchcock is thus investigating the point that the comedies of remarriage are least certain about, what it is about a man that makes him fit to educate her and thereby to achieve happiness for both" ("North," 262).

Cavell has projected another avenue of investigation with "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman" in which he attempts to uncover a more direct negation of features in the comedies of remarriage. His project is prompted by the belief that

there must exist a genre of films, in particular some form of melodrama, adjacent to, or derived

from, that of remarriage comedy, in which the themes and structure of the comedy are modified or negated in such a way as to reveal systematically the threats (of misunderstanding, of violence) that in each of the remarriage comedies dog its happiness.

("Psychoanalysis," 14)

The ultimate aim of this investigation intrigues me as well and it is the motivation behind this essay. My starting point derives from my own personal interest, and I will admit that I am starting off on an extreme note by working with what are normally considered to be grade-Z slasher films (and thinking that they are quite a bit more than that). But I would like to reach beyond self-evident appearances and make a leap of sorts equally as much as Cavell.

In future chapters, I will mostly be concerned with Cavell's concept of adjacent genres and attempting to elaborate this principle through the horror of the other genre. What lies behind this kind of analysis intrigues me; the discovery of philosophy on the screen and in our relationship to the screen intrigues me, and it strikes me that the interrelatedness of genres is analogous to the interrelatedness of philosophies. When Neale discusses generic specificity as "exclusive and particular combinations of elements, of the exclusive and particular

weight given in any one genre to elements which in fact it shares with other genres," I think he is describing a situation which is indeed the formulation of adjacent genres, and it is one of the goals of this essay to focus on those elements that are "weighed" differently between the comedy of remarriage and the horror of the other.

CHAPTER TWO  
ADJACENT GENRES:  
THE HORROR OF THE OTHER

Cavell's concept of adjacent genres will be helpful in identifying a place for genres other than and beyond the boundaries of the comedy of remarriage. He makes several references in his work to possibilities of this sort. Cavell attempts to pursue this idea in "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman." In this essay he seeks out these negations of features so as to discover a genre which is related to the genre he previously discovered in the comedy of remarriage. Features, such as the education of the woman, can be analyzed in their relationship across the boundaries of genre.

I would like to take up with Cavell the challenge of this search for adjacent genres. What I have in mind is what he calls "the opposite side of the American mind" in "Psychoanalysis and Cinema." Cavell sought that genre in the melodrama and its threat to domestic life, but I would like to cross some other kinds of boundaries in my own search. I would like to explore my reasons for this

early on in this chapter, and then I would like to list those features that the genre I have discovered shares with the comedy of remarriage.

The genre I am investigating is what I call "the horror of the other." I derive this idea from Cavell's own musings in The Claim of Reason where he attempts to define horror in its relation to skepticism:

Horror is the title I am giving to the perception of the precariousness of human identity, to the perception that it may be lost or invaded, that we may be, or may become, something other than we are, or take ourselves for; that our origins as human beings need accounting for and are unaccountable. (The Claim of Reason, 418-9)

The relationship between the films I am talking about here and this remark by Cavell is somewhat subtle. What I mean by the horror of the other is the horror of the human that is monstrous, of the monstrous human, the horror that we perceive to be outside of ourselves, but can actually find within ourselves (being "human") as well. Characters in the horror of the other genre undergo transformations of being, but these are not supernatural transformations-- they are transformations of identity. These characters become something else in the spheres of their lives: sometimes they become victims, other times they become aggressors, some other times they become consumers (of human

flesh), and other times they become meat. In all of these cases the major transformation involves the transitions between life and death, and in a real sense they awake into a world where they are forced to reckon with their own mortality. I call this genre the horror of the other because the other that is feared by these characters is the other that lurks within their own selves, as though their deadness or their predatoriness were a quality that had existed in them all along, and it is only the mundanity of their ordinary existence that prevented them from seeing themselves as embodying this potentiality. These other selves that lie beneath the surface are those parts of their humanity that need accounting for, and it may well be, as Cavell suggests, that they are unaccountable.

The horror of the other is a common theme in literature, from the tales of E.T.A. Hoffman and Edgar Allan Poe to the current spate of psychopathic slasher films. The films of the genre under my consideration, however, differ from the works that Cavell considers. Cavell's films are members of that Golden Age of the cinema, Hollywood of the '30s and '40s. Horror films were made during this period, but it is not my feeling that they would serve very well for my investigation. Their horror

is not American, a trait that Cavell's comedies of remarriage can claim, despite their origins in Shakespeare. As Robin Wood has observed, the inheritance of the horror of the other is foreign in these films; it comes from Europe and it is alien to the American frontier. Indeed, it is not really until the 1960s that the horror film comes into its inheritance of the American with the release of Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho in 1960.

(I do not want to suggest that Hollywood horror films of the '30s and '40s could not be analyzed according to Cavell's methodology; I'm sure they could. It is only that I have another agenda in mind for my analysis.)

The films I choose for investigation are also not Hollywood films. They were independently produced on a low budget. In order to make films about the generosity of the human imagination, and its unity, the films must be made in a community, and the community of filmmakers in Hollywood could provide that. However, films about the disunity of American life must be made in isolation. Not the isolation of the individual, of course, since no film can be made alone (except for certain non-narrative films), but the isolation from a wider community that I think these independent regional films reflect. (There

is a precedent for this in the horror films made in Hollywood in the '30s and '40s by emigre filmmakers such as Karl Freund, James Whale, and Tod Browning; this observation could go a way in explaining the foreign-ness of the horror films given the cultural transplantation their creators underwent.)

The films under my investigation are Night of the Living Dead, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, and Last House on the Left, all of which share features with Cavell's comedies of remarriage. My choices are not arbitrary, and I hope that their appropriateness will become evident.

In the comedies of remarriage the country is a retreat. Characters move there from the city, where they work, in order to relax. In terms of the theme of this feature, the country allows characters a form of isolation from the larger community in which to work out their problems. In Bringing Up Baby Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant play like children, act like children, reliving a childhood that they had never enjoyed together. This is true of Hepburn and Tracy, too, in Adam's Rib; in the country is their home away from home, where they relax and can love each other. In The Lady Eve, characters reside in a magical place called "Connekticut." Cavell finds this pastoral

place to be significant in the genre. In the garden, so to speak, they can stop their pretense, they can "be alive to each other."

In the horror of the other, the country is the worst place to be. In the horror film, the country is recognized as a place away from civilization; it is a place of vulnerability--no police, no hospitals, no enforcement of the laws that keep us human. In Night a brother and sister visit a cemetery that is three hours outside the city. When the brother is killed by one of the dead, the sister is left alone in a barren, flat countryside. Her refuge is a farmhouse, a poor substitute for a safe place and a place that ultimately proves to be the least safe place. In Texas the country is where the slaughterhouses are, where the mysteries of food take place; here people are dead to each other, literally. And again, in Last House, two young women are brutally murdered in the acres of forest near their families' suburban homes; their isolation is counterpointed by the absurd attempts of the police to find their way to this home when their police car breaks down.

Another important feature of the comedies of remarriage is the education of the woman, as in The Philadelphia Story

where Hepburn must recognize the responsibilities she owes to the people around her. In His Girl Friday, this amounts to Hildy understanding what she really wants: to be a newspaperman. And again, it is important for Claudette Colbert in It Happened One Night to find out whom she really should love (Peter or King) given the kind of person she is. I have to admit that I find this feature to be somewhat disturbing in light of the feminist concerns I have inherited. It occurs to me that a woman might already know what she needs to know, and besides that, what isn't there that a man needs to be educated in? But I am willing to accept Cavell's perception that a woman is being educated in a certain way, that she is being created, or rather, reborn before our eyes. And it is not so much that the man is not being educated because in Lady Eve, Baby, and The Awful Truth he is. Cavell describes the transformation of a woman, Hepburn, as "the question whether the heroine is a goddess made of stone or of bronze, or whether a woman of flesh and blood" (Pursuits, 140). Such a transformation is not so chauvinistic, but rather idealistic.

In the horror of the other genre, however, the transformation to flesh and blood is literal, and it is

a grotesque transformation that we are asked to watch. In this case the woman dies ... and stays dead; she is not reborn into anything. This quality of flesh and blood-edness is looked upon as another state of vulnerability, as the country is a place of vulnerability. This transformation occurs in Night when the sister, after having survived her attack, falls into a coma-like state. This state of being reminds me of Cavell's description of the woman in The Winter's Tale who turns into a statue and is then reborn. When the sister reawakens in this film, it is to become food, to die, at the hands of her brother who has become one of the legions of the dead. This is true of the other films also. In Last House the women are incubated, tied and gagged and thrown into a trunk; their transformation is into victim. In Texas one woman is stored in a freezer, another is hung from a meathook. Each is suspended until she becomes useful, as food or as victim.

The fathers of the comedies of remarriage are exceptionally wise. While they are figures of authority by virtue of their age, they are also figures of kindness and generosity, of benevolence. In Lady Eve the father is likened to a magician, a Prospero-type. Cavell

emphasizes the father-daughter relationships in these films because he sees this as a special role for the father who has two obligations: "To provide his daughter's education and to protect her virginity." This is the classical model, anyway, and Cavell emends it to stand for the father's protection of "the concept of virginity" or at least of something to do with her "physically determinable condition," her "valuable intactness," or her "individual exclusiveness." I think he's reaching here, but the father's proprietary interest in his daughter is very evident in these films. He wants her to grow up to be a good human being, not flawed or defective in any way. In Lady Eve he is an unscrupulous wizard, but he has taught her to make her own way in the world, to take care of herself. In Philadelphia Story he is an outsider of sorts, judged by his daughter, yet one who would judge her back and has the authority and the words eventually to do it. In It Happened he is a millionaire, protecting his daughter but providing her with the means to go her own way, empowering her with his own self-sufficiency while he is trying to keep her from being her own worst enemy. The point is that the father is a figure of benevolent authority.

In the horror of the other the father is one of the more malignant figures possible. When he is not definitely evil, he is ineffectual to the point of being dangerous. In Night the father is a poor little man in the basement, hiding behind his family in order to hide his own cowardice. He is a constant foil to Ben, the man who would save the group, attempting to assert his authority at the risk of all others. His attempts to usurp authority result in death; his attempts to protect himself result in disaster. But the most interesting aspect of his presence is that his errors in judgment are a result of his status as a father, a title which gives him a false authority; anybody can become a father, but what does it take to earn the title? It turns out that he is just as vulnerable as anyone else. In Last House the father of one of the women who is murdered is also ineffectual. He cannot educate, he cannot protect, literally, his daughter's virginity. In the end, when he has taken his vengeance with the aid of a chainsaw, his blood-spattered victory is more pathetic than anything else. In the beginning he was an "old fuddy-duddy" according to his daughter. He could not keep up with her new knowledge; he had nothing to teach her about the realities of a world he had retreated from in

his suburban home. In Texas we find the most fierce example of the malignancy of the father in a family of males. Here there is Grandpa, the patriarch, whose skill with a hammer is legendary with his family. His is the wisdom of death, and that is what he teaches the daughter-figure who enters his home, as he tries to bash in her head with a hammer.

I have provided three features of genre for examination here. Their relatedness is puzzling because of the interrelationship between these genres. I am interested in a clash of ideas that I see at work here, a clash that I described in my introduction as the discourse between the "good" and the "bad" side of the myth of film. The good, as I see it, is represented by the comedies of remarriage; being comedies, you could hardly expect anything else of them, but truly they generate a deep conviction in their faith that the other is someone to be trusted. The features I have examined here, of the presence of the father, the education of the woman, and the environment in which the story takes place, are all features which can be construed as fundamentally benevolent. In the comedies, these features are part of a nurturing environment which supports the characters. And the myth is that film

does this, nurtures us so that we are comfortably entertained and provided with harmless amusement. Cavell explodes this myth in so far as he talks about these films as if they were far more than harmless amusement; they are thoughtful films, and worth far more than the price of admission because they are examples of tuition; they are teaching us about ourselves.

The bad side of the myth is, of course, the genre of the horror of the other. These films are not nurturing, and the features which typify the films of the genre powerfully negate, in Cavell's sense, the analogous features of remarriage comedy. The father is either unsound or homicidal, killing the young instead of protecting them, the education of the woman (or of anyone) is that she is a victim, and the environment is decidedly hostile and threatening. The myth that is exploded here (and did anyone ever doubt it?) is again that film can be harmless entertainment; it can certainly be much worse than that, and I would go so far as to say that the films of the horror of the other genre are structured so as to threaten the audience into experiencing the same destruction as the characters on the screen. Edward Lowry describes horror films this way in his essay "Genre and Enunciation: The

Case of Horror," where he describes the mode of address of the horror films as "its will to horrify the viewer." Its promise, he says, is to provide the viewer with "the occasional sensation of temporary insanity."

But this bad side of the myth needs some elaboration; there is more to the experience of these horror films than the experience of terror. In the Afterward to Pursuits Cavell discusses Heidegger's description of the disruption of the work-world:

It is upon the disturbing or disruption of such carryings on--say by a tool's breaking or by finding something material missing--above all in the disturbing of the kind of perception or absorption that these activities require (something that is at once like attention and like inattention) that, according to Heidegger, a particular form of awareness is called forth ... What this supervening awareness turns out to be of is the worldhood of the world --or, slightly more accurately, it is an awareness that that prior absorption was already directed toward a totality with which, as Heidegger puts it, the world announces itself. (Pursuits, 272)

I offer this elaborate quote to exemplify two aspects of Cavell's project. One is the example it provides of the contemplative mind in the act of discovery--this, as much as anything, is what Cavell is about, discovering things on paper. The second aspect involves the stark difference I find between the absorbed or contemplative mind and the mind filled with terror, because if the genre of the horror

of the other is about anything, it is about the inability of the mind to embrace the totality, and the terror which results. When Cavell discusses the disruption of the absorbed mind, he is thinking of something different than what I am thinking of when I consider the genre of the horror of the other--for these characters, disruption signifies imminent death and what the world is announcing to them is their insignificance. Naturally, this involves a drastic difference of viewpoint by contrast with Cavell because Cavell's project is to teach that awareness is just what is needed, treasured, and even held holy; this is the project of the comedies of remarriage with their arguments of acknowledgment, of "aliveness." But in the genre of the horror of the other, that "aliveness" translates into victimization since to be alive is to be a target of violence. Equally true is the translation of "aliveness" into "predatoriness", the arousal of the monstrous other.

If I were to be facetious, I might ask how Heidegger would feel about worldhood if someone were coming at him with a chainsaw (and this is not too odd if you consider the imaginative use of the tool). It is not my desire, however, to dispute the rightness or wrongness of

Heidegger's description of enlightenment. But enlightenment would also entail the individual's ability to live with wakefulness having once been awoken. For the contemplative mind, the awakening is a time for decisions based on the newfound enlightenment; because of my awakening I might be free to choose, for example, whom I marry. For the mind in action, however, enlightenment is a question of survival, and the films of the genre I have discovered suggest that survival is not assured, that whether I live or die may not be mine to decide.

And perhaps enlightenment has something to do with the way I order the world that I live in. Once the world has announced itself to me, and once I have realized myself in it, I have a need to define my place in it. The good side of the myth of film suggests that I can do this; as a spectator I am enjoying a contemplative moment, free from action, devoted to an activity of contemplation. But the bad side, the dark side of this picture, is that I am held prisoner, spellbound in darkness; in horror films this is called suspense, where the moment of inaction is held indefinitely, and I am unable to think or move until the assault of images is finished.

The issue here is whether we can choose what is

available for us to acknowledge, whether we are free, so to speak, to decide what it is we wish to acknowledge. In the comedies of remarriage, acknowledgment is rewarded; characters have made decisions, and they are good decisions, and the experience of making them has been pleasant, even amusing. But in the genre of the horror of the other, acknowledgment is followed by danger; the world becomes a small place and the decisions are limited, survive or die. And given those choices, identity becomes precarious, and the monstrosity of the other becomes manifest.

There is a comment in Cavell's The Claim of Reason where he defines the problem of acknowledgment in this way:

It is as though we try to get the world to provide answers in a way which is independent of our responsibility for claiming something to be so ... and we fix the world so we can do this ... And we take what we have fixed to be discoveries about the world, and take this fiction to reveal the human condition rather than our escape or denial of this condition through the rejection of the human condition of knowledge and action and the substitution of fantasy.

(qtd. in Cantor, "On Stanley Cavell," 54)

Cavell means this to characterize the skeptic's tactic for avoiding acknowledgment, which Cavell takes as denying the human condition in which acknowledgment of the other is both possible and productive. I am bothered by this

remark, however, because it truly captures the way we operate; we do substitute fantasies for "real life," and some fantasies work better than others. Cavell describes and critiques a justification for the fabrication of ideals. But I can't help thinking that his philosophy is just as much a fabrication as anything else, that waking up in the world never means just one thing, that there are numerous possibilities available, and while the infinitude of possibilities may be the joy of philosophy, it is one of the terrors that the world has for us. Indeed, when our logic cannot keep pace with events, possibilities quickly disappear in their very multiplication.

But that fabrication of ideals strikes me another way, too, and this is related to the skepticism of other minds as inflected in the horror of the other genre. In Claim Cavell remarks that "if something is monstrous, and we do not believe there are monsters, then only the human is a candidate for the monstrous" (418). So then if there are such things as monsters, they are human. This then is the defeat of ideals; because ideals are human, they can be monstrous. To fabricate an ideal of the monstrous would naturally seem to be a monstrous act, but it is done and is as much among the possibilities available to us

as anything else.

In pursuing this line of thought, I am picking up a challenge inherent in Cavell's body of work on film, a challenge having to do with the multiple worlds implied by his conception of genre, the existence of genres adjacent to the one he has chosen as a primary form. The genres under discussion are only the first of what I interpret as a field of generic discourse, not linear in terms of descent, but spatial in terms of a discourse that may be extended outward into any area of human thought, including the realms of idealism and skepticism.

It would seem that the positions of idealism and skepticism are continually engaged in the field of generic discourse; this is not a struggle between good and evil, but a struggle of coming into the world, a worthy struggle, as Cavell has always pointed out. Cavell has (re)discovered a genre of films in which skepticism must be overcome in order for people to live in the world; in the genre of films that I have discovered, skepticism must be lived in order to survive: the other cannot be counted on, cannot be trusted; and, as you would suspect in a medium which must be engaged in the dark, the world is so dim that you have to squint.

It is additionally important to recognize and endure the contrast between the two genres in terms of the features they share. The prominence of fathers and the "incubation" of the woman (whether in marriage or in a car trunk) in both of these genres allows us an opportunity not only to see how different they are, but also to see how precariously close they are to each other. If the inhuman can "neighbor" the human, it can likely come for a visit as well.

CHAPTER THREE  
FURTHER FEATURES:  
TIME AND MONEY

For this chapter I would like to discuss two features shared by the comedies of remarriage and the horror of the other: economy and time. By economy, I simply want to refer to the bounty and poverty of characters within the films. These are equally at issue with both genres since not everyone in the genre of the comedy of remarriage is rich, and not everyone in the horror of the other is poor, and in both cases the issue of largesse is important to understanding the problems that characters have in dealing with their ideals. Likewise, the question of time will be important and complicated. By time I mean how much time characters have to work out their problems; again, the characters in the comedies of remarriage are not necessarily walking around with time on their hands and the characters in the horror of the other genre are not always on the run.

I don't want to talk about economy in the political sense, although that sense is certainly there. Some people have money and others don't, and I'm not sure that movies

have a lot to do with any of that. It has a lot to do with people in these movies, though, in the kinds of freedom and choices that they have.

Most of the people in the comedies of remarriage have lots of money. This is part of the world that they live in, and it is part of the reason why they are comedies. They are rarely struck by the tragedies of poverty (although not never, as I will get to later). People with money are often prey to people without, as is Henry Fonda in Lady Eve. He and his father are nouveau riche, however, and their possession of money has taken them from one status to another, from not-rich to rich. It has also put them in the peculiar position of not knowing the worth of money, or rather, it has put them in the position of not valuing it above everything else. Money has allowed Fonda to be able to study snakes with the absorption of someone who does not have to worry about anything else. It has allowed his father to enjoy society and to value people above everything else, as in the big parties he gives and as with his willingness to hand over a generous divorce settlement to Jean/Eve. Money has put Ellie in It Happened in the position of one who does not know its value. Rather than save her money, she would buy chocolates until she

is stopped by Peter. She is not aware of the privileges that money has given her until she is thrown out of the showers at the motor court. And, of course, there is Susan Vance (in Baby) who is so unaware of the value of money that she thinks nothing of committing all kinds of reckless acts that would cost anybody else a mint to get out of. But then part of the point of this activity in these films in this genre is that the characters learn what is of real value to them; at the same time, they can afford to make that discovery.

In the films of the horror of the other, people are not really rich; they are middle-class, which means that their money provides them with comfort. That comfort is a thing they are unaware of until they nearly lose their lives. They are confronted with the necessities of survival. In Texas the only people we see of significant wealth are the group of teen-agers who seem to be ambling through the south in their van. They can afford gas and food and probably whatever else they might need. These things are, of course, stripped from them, along with their lives. In Last House the suburban parents live comfortably, away from the cares of city life, and they concern themselves with fixing things around the house and throwing

a birthday party for their only daughter. Their "wealth" is a simple-minded kind of complacency that seeks to get what's coming to them and to be left alone by the outside world. The middle-class family that hides in the basement in Night is perpetually confused. Their comfort is destroyed and they are forced to live with people they don't like and in a situation they don't understand. Their attempts to cope are constantly in conflict with each other; Harry, the husband and father, wants the power over the situation and is frustrated at every turn by his errors; his wife, Helen, is torn between supporting him and realizing his foolishness. In all of these cases, money equals comfort and value is misplaced. Characters aren't really aware of what they have, and when they lose it, they find it never made any difference anyway, compared to the dangers they face.

Wealth--even in its most liberal sense--is not the only value at work in the comedy of remarriage. Jimmy Stewart in Philadelphia is too proud to take charity from Katherine Hepburn, even though she offers her gift of a free cottage with good intentions. He is more insulted by her assumption of royal grace; his democratic ideals won't stand for it, even if he has to suffer. Jean/Eve

in Lady Eve understands the sucker-value of a dollar, understands that people don't realize what it's worth to them, that even if they know they are being cheated they will pay up rather than be counted stupid. She has her pride too, though, because she is a professional who knows what worth is worth. Likewise, Peter in It Happened is aware of the value of money and peoples' stupidity with it. His pride is in knowing what he is owed, and when he collects his money from Ellie's father, he takes only what is owed him and nothing else. In all of these cases, pride is more important than money; these characters know their own value. But then again, there is money practically lying on the ground for them (notice Peter's collect messages to his ex-boss).

For the poorer characters in the horror of the other genre poverty is a condition that has warped them in some way. The poor in Last House are criminals; unlike Eve/Jean, they prey upon those that have more money not only for sport but for spite. For them, the other is a shell. This is true for the slaughterhouse family in Texas; humans are just another kind of meat, and like Alfred Packer, they have a special taste for it. The exception here is Ben in Night whose working-class poverty has made him

more resourceful. In fact, he is closer to the characters in the remarriage genre in this respect. It is only in the fate of things that he is killed by mistake; as a character in this genre, his resourcefulness is just a way of delaying the inevitable.

Time acts as a constraint in film. For one thing, the film has to be of a decent length for it to be enjoyed (three to six hour epics fall into another category entirely), and so the activity in the narrative must be constructed in an orderly manner. Likewise, the activity must be coherent for the characters in the narrative since they have to accomplish certain tasks before the end of the picture. A certain degree of temporal flexibility is allowed for certain films; 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) can afford to go slow because of its emphasis on the visual panorama, and a thriller relies upon suspense for its impact and so time is given the kind of flexibility we rarely see in real life.

Time can be valued in the same way that money can be valued for characters in the comedies of remarriage. Hepburn in Philadelphia is unaware of time in the sense that time is made for her. Her wealth gives her an enormous amount of time to do nothing, if she so desires. In fact,

however, time is a problem for her because she is scheduled to be married. During the course of the film, which covers the two days of her wedding (before and during), she is made aware of her future, and the possibility that her time might be wasted. I think we can see this more clearly if we just compare the earlier events of the film with the last ten minutes; whereas she is unaware at first, she is gradually made to understand her past and what will happen to her in the future. When she marries Dexter, the long plans and preparation for her wedding are thrown into a cocked hat, and she rushes through her real wedding; the decision of a moment changes the course of her future. Gable and Colbert in It Happened are in a race, of sorts; they are trying to get to New York where her husband is, but the two moments of her past and future are interrupted by the events of the film, which are extended by and on the road, where she will get to know Gable. This part of the film is almost leisurely since these events are so special that time is needed to invite our watching them. The events which occur in Adam's Rib are so important that the world within the film is invited to watch the spectacle of divorce. Here again, time is made for our perusal of events which are of such great importance; not just the

divorce in progress, but the progress of the relationship between Tracy and Hepburn. In all of these cases, time is made, made for the spectacle of human events.

Characters in the genre of the horror of the other rarely have time for leisure. In fact, their leisure is generally what leads them to the brink of disaster. The young men and women who are traveling around the South in Texas are wandering around until they eventually find themselves in trouble; vacation equals danger, time is not spent productively. And what happens is that they cannot return and start over again; they do not have time to learn. The suburban family of Last House feel they have earned their leisure, but they eventually find out that their pursuit of security has cost them their daughter. The characters in Night were driving around on a Sunday, far from home, when disaster struck them. Leisure time is vulnerability time.

It is a curious feature of the horror film, as Stephen King pointed out in his book Danse Macabre, that it is incredibly moral, conservatively moral, and so one can't help but recognize that characters who are victimized in these films are really being punished for their transgression. I think that characters in the horror of

the other genre are being punished for the transgression of misunderstanding value (while the characters in the comedies of remarriage are given another chance), but it is still not so simple as that. One thing that this genre shows us is that punishment is not just, that there are no favorites; everyone pays the price whether they ought to or not. Ultimately, there is no satisfaction derived from any of the proceedings; regardless whether anyone has really learned the true value of their lives, they have no opportunity to profit from their new knowledge.

If there are characters of leisure in the comedies of remarriage, there are also characters of intensity, who move along with the swiftness of lost time. Susan Vance in Baby is a character who is constantly on the move, restless and impatient. The speed with which she moves through the film hardly gives us time to register if she herself even knows what she is doing. Is she seducing Cary Grant? Or is she just trying to make life difficult for him? Whatever the answer, the characteristic of intensity that her personality exhibits is certainly a modern quality; she rushes headlong and trusts to her wits to help her survive. Of course all of her money, beauty, and intelligence helps. A similar intensity is present

in His Girl Friday, but where Susan has so many cushions around her, Hildy has the confidence of a professional to support her. One can say this about Jean/Eve as well in Lady Eve. The intensity of her words rushing out confuses the suckers; her confidence allows her to take control where they won't or can't. Intensity for these characters allows them control of the situation.

This is not the case for characters in the genre of the horror of the other. Intensity is always beyond their grasp; they are put in the position of reacting to everything around them. And intensity can be deceptive. In Night the dead are slow, lumbering creatures, but the intensity of their presence lies in their relentlessness. They don't stop for anybody. This increases the intensity of the victims who, although they can be quicker, are aimless in direction. They can move fast, but they don't have anyplace to go. This is true of the monsters/criminals in Last House. They are slow-witted, but relentless, and they master the situation because they know what they want, and the people they victimize are unaware of their choices (escape? attack? call the police?). The most startling image of this intensity occurs in Texas when Leatherface chases the woman around his house. He is slow and lumbering

and he keeps falling over his chainsaw; she is quick, but she doesn't know where to go. And this image of relentless, but lumbering, intensity is extended over a period of thirty minutes.

The problem for characters in the genre of the horror of the other is that their options are far too limited and their resources are far too scarce. Consequently, the possibility of their acknowledging the world is no guarantee for them, no comfort. I bring this up as an issue because of Cavell's description of skepticism and film. In The World Viewed Cavell describes the film image, in general, as "a moving image of skepticism"; this being the case, there is then a barrier between ourselves and the screen; the film is "present to us while we are not present to it," and so any acknowledgment of what is happening on the screen is like a heuristic leap--I acknowledge what is happening even though I know that what is happening really isn't happening. Cavell describes the situation of the theatre-goer in "The Avoidance of Love," where the spectator watches Othello murdering Desdemona but does not act: "What, if anything, do I do? I do nothing; that is a certainty fixed forever." This is because the act of theatre is understood as theatre

and not as real life. Likewise with film; the actions on the screen are happening, but they are not happening. What happens to us is that we understand the situation and act accordingly.

But what about the horror film? What is the situation here when I am asked to view scenes of unspeakable horror? Acknowledging the screen-as-barrier and acknowledging the human other may be analagous and analagously healthy gestures in the comedy of remarriage. But the analogy seems to break down in the horror of the other genre. In the latter genre, "action at a distance" is de rigueur; you don't want to cross that line lest you be victimized beyond desiring. Some peoples' sensibilities are structured so that they wouldn't want to watch these films; I can hardly blame them. What is true for one genre might not be true for another.

You can't really live the life of the other, but then you wouldn't want to. In the comedy of remarriage the question of the other's life at the expense of your own doesn't arise, which is what the comedy of remarriage is all about, finding yourself and finding yourself with the other. But in the genre of the horror of the other, even acknowledgment is a tricky thing. Acknowledgment is

actually a forced process, where people are violently torn from their absorption and forced into a world of terror. And enlightenment has no assurances; to awaken into a state of survival does not guarantee you the luxury of appreciating your position--in fact many people in this genre are cut down before even a few minutes have lapsed: characters in Night die without even understanding why or how the dead came back to life; the young women in Last House, after having arrived at a stage between adolescence and maturity, are mauled and murdered because of that maturity, when their killers recognize their physical over their spiritual maturity; and Sally Hardesty in Texas never arrives at a point of understanding who or what her assailants are about, and her friends are cut down without warning.

The issue of victimization is one that Cavell approaches in the chapter on His Girl Friday in Pursuits. "Victimization constitutes an interpretation of the passiveness of viewing ... This proposes a mythology, in a word, of the seductiveness of film; of art, therefore, to the extent that film is art." This seduction has far more radical consequences in a genre of horror than it does in a genre of comedy, but Cavell goes further:

"The point of the myth is that our condition as passive, as victim, might damn us or save us, might darken or illuminate us, depending on whether we are impassive or receptive to the experience offered us, closed or open to it" (Pursuits, 185). The characters in the genre of the horror of the other have little time, however, to be open to much; while they may be passive as victims, they are certainly active in their fear of what is happening to them.

The discourse at work between these two genres, what I have been calling the good and the bad sides of the myth, is a discourse on the effability of the world, or rather what we are able, or allowed, to know about the world and about ourselves. There are the seeds of the one in the other on this account. Part of the victimization of characters in the horror of the other is due to their lack of receptivity to what is happening; when Pam and Kirk in Texas enter the slaughterhouse family's home, they are ignoring all kinds of danger signals; when the two girls in Last House attempt to buy dope from the criminals, they are certainly entering a twilight world of uncertain laws; when Johnny is killed by one of the dead in Night it is because he is goofing off and not paying attention to the

danger he is in. But of course in each of these cases they could hardly be expected to believe that someone would try to kill them, and in their case, as it is with characters in the comedies of remarriage, we can hardly blame them for their mistakes. In a world without second chances blame hardly matters anyway.

I think that Cavell would encourage the pursuit of this discourse, the discourse of the good and bad sides of film within and across genres, if only because he refers to the possibility so often. Something that I would like to pursue in my next chapter is the ugliness he refers to in the chapter on His Girl Friday in Pursuits where he writes:

[T]here is, in each of the others [remarriage comedies] some glimpse of an ugliness in the world outside, within which, or surrounded by which, the actions we witness take place. In particular, a glimpse of the failure of civilization to, let me say, make human beings civil. Each shows a world in which beings view each other as objects of entertainment and scandal, as unequal to themselves, and would exclude others from civilization, treating them with civilized ugliness ... or they show beings whose weirdness suggests that civilization has been unable to recruit them as equal to itself, who cannot be imagined to survive outside the particular environment that knows them ... or they show worlds in which lawlessness and order as a whole are explicitly in struggle ...  
 (Pursuits, 182-3)

I think Cavell is talking about civilized manners in this

section, but in reading it outside the examples he gives, it strikes me that he could also be talking about the characters in the horror of the other. The slaughterhouse family, too, is excluded from others and treated with civilized ugliness by the young men and woman in the van. Civilization has been unable to recruit them because of their "weirdness." And lawlessness and order are in struggle in their world. Perhaps what distinguishes the horror of the other genre from a "dark" remarriage comedy like His Girl Friday is that in the former there is no "higher power" assuring the triumph of a comic order over everyday lawlessness. Lawlessness is the order of the day, everyday, everynight. This is dark indeed.

CHAPTER FOUR  
THE FORMS OF GENERIC ADDRESS:  
OF "GAGS" AND "KILLS"

At this point I would like to return to Neale and his explanation of narrative address and the role it serves as a component of generic discourse; I would also like to raise the concept of "eternal return" as an aspect of pleasure in the viewing of these films. My purpose in comparing the two genres is to arrive at a position where I can relate them on adjacent planes in the field of generic discourse that Cavell describes in his writing on genre. However, if they relate, it is also possible that they contain hidden features; in other words, the seeds of the one may be present in the other. My quotation from Cavell in the last chapter on the ugliness present in comedies of remarriage suggests as much.

The first thing I would like to focus on is the narrative address of comedy and horror. I think that this is important to our understanding of the films because, on the one hand, our responses are drastically different (the difference between a scream and a laugh), but on the other hand our situation is much the same (the similarity

of a scream and a laugh). There are often elements of comedy in horror films. (See Return of the Living Dead (1985), which escalates the horror to the point where the only appropriate response is laughter; not the laughter of joy, however, but the laughter of helplessness.) It is also a component of comedy that it presents horrifying resolutions for a comic affect, as in most of the silent comedy films of Buster Keaton and Laurel and Hardy. (A recent example might be 1941 (1979) which escalates destruction for comic affect; it is again the laughter of helplessness that nothing can go right, but there seems to be joy in its lack of inhibitions.)

A mode of narrative address that both comedy and horror share is suspense. I want to make it clear that the generic specificity of narrative address prevents me from making an unqualified statement that suspense is the same in both genres, regardless of its use. Neale describes the mode of address in the comedy as a form of suspense: "the articulating [of] two 'wants' of a narrative, suspend[s] the subject in other structures of affect," so that

in comedy, for instance, the mode of affect is laughter, a release of pleasure which comes from a structuring of two narrative wants and pleasures across the point of intersection of two (or more)

discourses, of two (or more) discursive structures or regimes, together with the economy, the appropriateness--the wit--with which the contradictions and resistances generated between them are overcome. (Neale, 29)

What Neale is describing here is the construction of a "gag," and what I would like to argue is that the structure of a gag is similar to the structure of a "kill" in the horror film. What we need to decide first, however, is if the "wants" of the films are at all the same.

Something that strikes me about the comedies of remarriage is that they move along at least two lines; in other words, the viewing subject has two wants, or two wants are provided for him or her. One want is that the couple who are apart will get together again. This is the future of the structure, and we know that by the time they are really together again the movie will have come to a close. The other want is for the movie to keep playing, not in the sense that it is a great movie (I'm not saying it isn't), but because these characters are so much more interesting when they are involved in conflict with each other. We are rather in the position of Claudette Colbert in It Happened One Night who is having such a great time with Clark Gable that she forgets he is taking her to join her husband in New York. In other words, these

characters are having such a great time with each other, and we are supposedly having such a great time watching them, that it would be hard to believe that they would be this happy once they have tied their domestic knots.

Some of this is suggested in the films themselves when, as at the beginning of The Awful Truth when Cary Grant doesn't want his wife to know that he hasn't been in Florida. Such an aura of deception suggests that the continuum of domesticity is not what it should be. This is a perennial American trait, a sort of "Don't Fence Me In" kind of mentality. It shows up again in It Happened One Night when Colbert and Gable go back to the road on which they had such a good time. Maybe they will have to stay on the road if they are to stay together. In effect, there is a kind of "eternal return" taking place, such that experience is constantly defeating these characters, making them repeat their experiences all over again. This is, however, a comic world, and repetition is not necessarily a joyless activity. When characters in Louis Bunuel's The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoise (1972) undergo repetition, they are involved in a cycle of comic despair; this is not necessarily true for the characters in the comedies of remarriage, but it is one

of the dangers open to them.

Cavell hints at this problem in his chapter on It Happened in Pursuits. In The World Viewed Cavell has described the moving picture as "a moving image of skepticism" because "our normal senses are satisfied of reality while reality does not exist" (World, 188); or, as he says earlier in the book, "the reality of the photograph is present to me while I am not present to it" (World, 23). Consequently, there is a barrier between the subject and the screen which "represents both inner and outer censoring" (Pursuits, 109), which, for Cavell, is "a framing of the problem of other minds."

[W]hat it censors is the man's knowledge of the existence of the human being 'on the other side.' The picture is that the existence of others is something of which we are unconscious, a piece of knowledge we repress, about which we draw a blank. This does violence to others, it separates their bodies from their souls, makes monsters of them. (Pursuits, 109)

This is what Cavell calls "a circle of vengeance," and he suggests that the way out of it lies in the simple acknowledgment of the other: "You have to act in order to make things happen, night and day; and to act from within the world, within your connection with others, forgoing the wish for a place from which to view and direct your fate" (Pursuits, 109). In other words, comedy replaces

a "circle of vengeance" with a "circle of vigilance."

The structure of the horror of the other thrives on the "circle of vengeance," but it is important to recognize who is doing the violence. In this genre, people's souls are literally separated from their bodies. And the issue of the eternal return is significant here because the cycle of violence, while it will continue beyond one death, really ends for each victim; he or she cannot go back--death is final. (It is interesting that the one film of this genre that has even the slightest supernatural air about it, Night of the Living Dead, does not really treat the dead as though they were supernatural beings. The reasons why the dead have come back are confused, possibly the result of cosmic radiation, but that is not the point of their existence. One might say in this case that, since the dead return, death is not really final, but the impression I get of these dead is that they are animated figures of death; their existence is really the proof of the finality of death because there is no longer anything human about them.)

In the horror of the other genre there are again two wants. One is the want for knowledge, some understanding of what is going on. In traditional horror films, some

character will stand out as the man of wisdom in this regard; a Dr. Van Helsing, a gypsy, a priest, a psychiatrist, or even the madman himself will explain what is happening. This want is never fulfilled in the horror of the other; understanding is never achieved in the sense that narrative enigmas are explained. In Texas things move too quickly once they start happening; in Night there are authorities that could explain, but don't, even though the victims remain glued to radios and TV sets in an attempt to understand; in Last House people operate in a state of ignorance about each other, unaware of the dangers each presents to the other until it is too late. This denial of the want of knowledge causes problems for the viewing subjects. Generally the impetus for continuing to watch is to derive pleasure from knowledge; however, if this want is not fulfilled, impetus should be erased. And yet people will continue to watch, perhaps figuring it out for themselves, spellbound in darkness; even though the barrier still stands, they confront it, or at least endure it.

Edward Lowry describes the "want" to see as "scopic identification." His formulation of the spectator as identifying with the killer is something I have trouble

with, but he does describe the situation of the viewer of scenes of violence, through Noel Carroll, as "'the conflict between attraction and repulsion,'" so that "the genre presents the spectacle of horror as a kind of forbidden scene, simultaneously desired and dreaded--a scene which the mechanisms of the film repress, only to increase the amount of psychic energy called forth when it is presented" (Lowry, 17).

This description explains another want present in the horror of the other: not wanting it to end. I would say that the impetus of the viewer of this genre is to witness the disorder that prompts the narrative and to keep on viewing it. This is similar to an observation made by Susan Sontag in her essay "The Imagination of Disaster," which is actually about the science fiction film, but wherein she makes some observations relevant to the discussion here. She recognizes several pleasures of the science fiction disaster film, but one I would like to focus on is the release "from normal obligations," a pleasure that would seem to have a lot to do with the motif of survival in these films, as if endlessness and survival are equivalents. The movement from absorption to enlightenment is relevant here since characters are forced

to come to an awareness of their environment and their place in it.

Another motif that Sontag finds is the "theme of dehumanization," which we can regard in these films as a matter of the struggle for life. In the science fiction film, dehumanization involves the struggle against becoming an automaton, becoming lifeless or a being without emotion. This is the theme of such films as Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956) or I Married a Monster From Outer Space (1958), where characters are forced to struggle for the humanity they once took for granted. But unlike these films, in the horror of the other the struggle for humanity is nearly a lost cause because, in order to survive, characters must shed their humanity.

In Night, for instance, characters must learn to do without the comfortable rituals of civilization, such as funerals, since the living are required to destroy the dead, or even without loyalty to each other, when it comes down to kill or be killed. In Texas they are not able to approach others for help, as Sally does when she hides out at the gas station only to find that the proprietor is one of the "family" that is trying to kill her, or when Kirk and Pam approach the house to borrow some gas and

are murdered instead. In Last House the suburban family members revert to deceit and murder to avenge the death of their daughter against criminals who would likely kill them, too. Sontag also observes that "the imagery in science fiction films is above all the emblem of an inadequate response," as if we are never sufficiently prepared for the shock of the unusual to our consciousness. Consequently, it is in our interests as viewers to see how survival is accomplished. These films, however, can only teach us that our survival is a questionable thing; for anything to survive, something must be lost, like a beaver in a trap, chewing off its own leg.

Again, as with the remarriage comedies, we have a situation of eternal return (however modified). Though nothing will be the same after the monster is destroyed (or perhaps not really destroyed but displaced), and while it may be no picnic for the victims, the desire for spectacle, characters engaged in conflict, is satisfied. It is certainly no treat to see what horrors this genre provides, yet these are the moments which the films return to, and which I return to in thinking about them.

At this point let me return to an issue I brought up earlier, which is the similarity in construction of

a "gag" and a "kill." I wish to point out that a kill is often as creative and complex as a gag can be. Neale describes two ways in which laughter as a "mode of affect" is produced. One is "through a 'triumph' over that which is represented to be resisting," and he provides the example of Buster Keaton, who mostly seems to be resisted by "reality." Another way is through the triumph of what is resisted:

[L]aughter here stems in particular from the way in which an anticipation of the inevitable is played across the specific temporal articulation of the event anticipated, from, precisely, the timing of the gag, joke or comic scene, the temporal--and logical--economy with which it is structured and realised, the suspense it embodies. (Neale, 29)

In light of Neale's formulations, I will now read a "gag" scene and a "kill" scene in order to show how the seeds of the one are embodied in the other. Both of my examples take their treatment from the second of Neale's two articulations. The comedy of the comedies of remarriage seems to be rooted in the laughter that comes from being conquered, conquered by love (or perhaps the enlightenment that comes from being in love). Likewise, the fear of the horror of the other comes from being conquered, conquered by death.

The two examples I have in mind are about falling.

In The Lady Eve Eve/Jean follows Charles to Connecticut where she impersonates an English noblewoman. She has not changed her appearance the slightest. When Charles first sees her, he cannot believe his eyes. The humor of the situation derives from his suspension between memory and denial. And he falls, over and over again. He falls over furniture and he falls in love. The articulation here is that he has been won over by what he has resisted--again. He cannot resist enough. Cavell interprets this situation as involving

his intellectual denial of [her] sameness [which] accordingly lets him spiritually carve her in half, taking the good without the bad, the lady without the woman, the ideal without the reality, the richer without the poorer. He will be punished for this. (Pursuits, 61)

He is separating her, as Cavell has said elsewhere; he separates her body from her soul, he makes a monster of her; and this is a literal transformation because she does become monstrous in her attempt to "get back at" him.

This is more than humorous because we know Charles is wrong, that he shouldn't have dumped her the first time, and that he shouldn't be trying to marry a woman just because she looks like the one he loved before. He is wrong; and his falling just shows him to be the fool that he is.

Midway through The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, after the young men and women who are wandering around the South find the childhood home of one of them, they do some more wandering and find a house which is only a stone's throw from where they parked the van. Pam and Kirk head for the house to see if they can get some gas. While Pam isn't looking, Kirk is grabbed and pulled into the interior. Eventually, Pam enters the house, as she inevitably must, as we know she must, even though we know she shouldn't. She enters a room and trips. She falls. In the room are bones of all kinds, bones that make up chairs scattered around the floor and mobiles that dangle from the ceiling. There is a chicken in a birdcage. Leatherface enters and scoops her up. He hangs her from a meathook and proceeds to carve up her friend with a chainsaw, separating his soul from his body, as she watches.

The structure here is similar to the one in The Lady Eve. The positioning of suspense, the knowledge of right and wrong behavior, the expression of the monstrous. It is difficult to get a fix on Leatherface as a character if only because he seems so inhuman. At this point of the film, we see little of that. But later on, after he has chased Sally around the woods, having destroyed the

front door and gotten yelled at for it by his brother, we see him cowering in shame. He is like a child, overenthusiastic with his toys. In his child's innocence, he has committed the same crime that Charles has, separating the woman's soul from her body, although in a more literal than figurative sense, but there is a figurative level at work here too. Leatherface does not see humans as people; he is behind that barrier, a barrier emphasized by his mask of human skin. Humans are meat, a commodity that he is familiar with. Although we can hardly feel sympathy for him, we can judge him, the way we do Charles, as someone who is committing an ontological fault. He is in a process of forgetting all that is human, a fact that is again suggested by his mask and butcher's apron.

Amazingly enough, the articulation of the mode of affect in both of these cases is similar. I repeat Neale here: "Laughter stems in particular from the way in which an anticipation of the inevitable is played across the specific temporal articulation of the event anticipated" (Neale, 29). Likewise, fear stems from this same source. In both films, the scene is played with the kind of abruptness reserved for shock: we do not see the sofa that

Charles falls over, we do not see the table he trips over, and falls over the curtain off-screen; it is only when he is wearing his last dinner jacket that we are allowed to see the mess he gets himself into, thereby fulfilling any expectations we had left. This process occurs in Texas also: each death of the members of the group is a shock, with Leatherface coming out of nowhere until his final pursuit of Sally where we are finally allowed to witness an "escape"; since she is the last, there is nothing left for us to anticipate, and we witness her subsequent torture in magnified detail.

I have approached this genre comparison from a perspective that I think Cavell would not have adopted in his pursuit of ideals as I have previously described it. Cavell's approach is based on his own particular experiences and study, and they have been worthy and valuable and certainly worth writing about; otherwise, I would not be writing about him. But my experiences and my study have been very different from his, and they have taken me in a different direction. I do not find acknowledgment to be an easily lived experience, however poetic it might be to read and write about. The life I

live is not one in which choices are easily made, if they are even made at all. And so the acknowledgment of the other, inside and outside myself, doesn't always seem to be enough, or at least it doesn't seem to be the key that Cavell thinks it is; the condition of my life and the options available to me rarely seem to connect. In a way, that is the problem that I have with the writing he has done.

What has this comparison accomplished? I might say that what I have tried to do is enter the field of generic discourse that is available to me, that I have sought to map the field of relationships rather than stage a debate of opposites. Cavell's position strikes me as one of confrontation with skepticism, as though he were working himself through the pits of hell and into enlightenment. His concern with skepticism strikes me as a personal concern that he feels it necessary to confront. But the problem that I see with it is the problem of all doctrinaire approaches in philosophy (a problem but, of course, one of its impetuses)--that it attempts to find a solution to a problem of mind. It may sound cynical (perhaps regressive) to say that there are no solutions to problems, but my experience has taught me that when people have

problems of mind, they tend to construct elaborate justifications or patterns or mythological structures. This may be considered a neurotic behavior, but as creative individuals such as Jean Genet, William S. Burroughs, the Goncourt Brothers, Edgar Allan Poe, and many others have demonstrated, it is also a major part of what we call artistic behavior. It may be marginal behavior, but it hardly befits us to ignore it.

I wrote earlier about Cavell's view of the "fabrication of ideals" in Chapter Two of this essay. I don't know if we need to describe this activity as "the rejection of the human condition of knowledge and action and the substitution of fantasy." It seems to me that the human condition of knowledge and action can only be materialized in a state of fantasy, because it is only by telling ourselves, or convincing others, that we can get anything done. And I don't see that Cavell's discoveries in philosophy are anything more or less than that. To speak of the enlightenment of the individual, as awakening from a work-world and having the world announce itself to him or her, is to speak of an individual who has gone beyond the pale of the ordinary, though Cavell would probably describe it as a matter of "recovering"

the ordinary, remarrying it. But beside Cavell's "quest of the ordinary" there is also the "quest of the extraordinary" which accounts for much of what happens to us. To acknowledge our desires, however extraordinary, is just as important a task as to acknowledge the world; perhaps our desires are the world.

I think Cavell might still ask me what on earth prompted me to even make such a comparison between comedy and horror; why would I want even to attempt to see such a thing? My only answer is that I am seeing things differently, not prompted by desire but by inevitability. Something that concerns me is why Cavell would see only the things he sees, but I know this is not true; he himself has led me in this direction. In his lecture, "The Fantastic of Philosophy," Cavell comments that "the capacity to let fact and fantasy interpret one another is the basis at once of the soul's sickness and of its health" ("Fantastic," 188). If this is true, then it is incumbent on me to approach that fantasy which makes the soul sick. Upon arrival, I have found that neither fact nor fantasy provide any guarantee of health. This may be horrifying, but it is closer to what I see; and in any case, it would seem to be a vision which is beyond my grasp to control.

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