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Behind Open Doors: The Cinematic Spaces of the Slasher Film

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Behind Open Doors: The Cinematic Spaces of the Slasher Film

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B.A., Denison University, 2006

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An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

Behind Open Doors: The Cinematic Spaces of the Slasher Film
By Marten Carlson

For many years, the slasher genre has been largely unappreciated by film scholars. The two authors who have dealt most with these films, Carol Clover and Vera Dika, leave much room for additional research. Clover and Dika base their criticism on gender and narrative, respectively and, while their theories apply well to a select number of films, many slashers are left unaccounted for. With this thesis, I offer a model that supplements the work of Clover and Dika.

Historical context is very important for an understanding of the slasher. Though this genre exists today in the form of remakes such as *Friday the 13th* (Paramount, 2009) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (New Line, 2010), these films were never as popular as they were between 1978 and 1982. Following the release of *Halloween* (Compass) in 1978, variations of the slasher model filled American cinema screens. To understand the success of films such as *The Prowler* (Sandhurst, 1981), *The Burning* (Filmmways, 1981), and *The Dorm that Dripped Blood* (New Image, 1982) during a relatively short time period, I analyze the socio-cultural milieu of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Looking at this five year period in American history, the state of the American nuclear family is truly striking. As scholars such as Natasha Zaretsky and Christopher Lasch discuss, the family unit was in great disarray during this time period. Divorce rates were at a new high, teen drug use was rising, and new abortion laws came into effect during the latter 1970s. These changes along with many others contributed to a weakening of parental authority.

These shifts in family structures are represented in the cinematic spaces of the slahser. In order to link the cinematic spaces with the history of this time period, I draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope." Film scholars like Vivian Sobchack employ the chronotope in order to draw connections between real, lived experience and cinematic representation. Like Sobchack, I consider the chronotopes or "time-spaces" of the slasher in order to comprehend the genre's pervasiveness during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

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The "Slasher" Reconsidered

When I was a small child, Friday night in my family was "movie night." We would make a trip to Mr. Video and I was given the chance to pick one movie for the evening. This was a very heavy decision for a boy of six and I would put much thought into my choice. I would venture past the family films, leaving behind *The Care Bears Movie* (Samuel Goldwyn, 1985) and *The Secret of Nimh* (United Artists, 1982). My journey through those rows of video wonders would inevitably lead me to the forbidden area, the "horror" section. The section was in the back of the store, hidden from the view of casual customers. As I crept around the corner and saw that vault of horror, I would close my eyes, terrified of the six foot cut-out of Freddy Krueger. I would then open my eyes for only a few seconds at a time, my vision drawn to the emotionless masks of Jason Voorhees and Michael Myers. After a few minutes of this, my courage would leave me and I would run away from these slashers. These figures have since become my nightmare and my obsession.

Though I grew up watching these films on VHS in the early 1990s, these killers and the films in which they appeared were never as popular as they were between 1978 and 1982. Though one could see characteristics of these films in Tobe Hooper's 1974 low-budget horror release, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Bryanston), or in Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 seminal thriller, *Psycho* (Paramount), the "slasher" genre did not truly begin until 1978 with the release of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (Compass, 1978). Both *Psycho* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* featured disguised killers and the mutilation of young characters, but it was not until *Halloween* that the slasher formula (as I will be

defining it) took hold of the American film market. Made for the low price of $300,000, the film went on to gross over $50 million. This striking cost to profit ratio inspired many low budget production companies to release variations and blatant rip-offs of the *Halloween* model. The very next year, Sandy Howard Productions invited the film's protagonist, Jamie Lee Curtis, to star in *Terror Train* (20th Century Fox, 1980), essentially *Halloween* on a train. A young pair of New Yorker brothers, Harvey and Bob Weinstein, set their version at a summer camp and called it *The Burning* (Filmways, 1981). Sean S. Cunningham, hoping to gross enough to make a film about teenage soccer players, created *Friday the 13th* (Paramount, 1980), which has gone on to spawn eleven sequels. While sequels and remakes still appear on cinema screens today, the genre's popularity dropped off considerably following 1982. Still, between 1978 and 1982, the slasher was a major contender at the American box office.

Looking at 1981, when the genre was at its zenith, the popularity of the slasher is quite evident. Amidst box office turmoil and the threat of the VCR to theatrical exhibition, the horror genre was prospering. Though individual ticket sales had reached their lowest point in ten years, horror films and other violent fare accounted for one third of the top 50 films in *Variety* the week of May 20th.[1] At the top of this horror pyramid was the slasher film. *Happy Birthday to Me* (Columbia, 1981) and *Friday the 13th Part 2* (Paramount, 1981) both held number one spots in 1981. *My Bloody Valentine* (Paramount, 1981) and *Halloween 2* (Universal, 1981) both reached top three spots as well and lower budget slashers like *The Prowler* (Sandhurst, 1981) and *Final Exam* (BCI, 1981) easily reached the top 40. The slasher was ever present in 1981 and, with the exception of a few weeks, at least one appears on the *Variety* Top 50 throughout the year.

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[1] "'Violent' or 'Horror' Tag Fits One-Third of Top-Money Pics," Variety, 27 May 1981, 35.

Given the slasher's popularity during the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is disappointing that so little serious scholarship has been devoted to this genre. Most work on the subject comes in the form of fan books such as Adam Rockoff's Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film and encyclopedias such as Jim Harper's Legacy of Blood: A Comprehensive Guide to Slasher Movies. There are only two notable scholarly works on the subject, Vera Dika's book Games of Terror and Carol Clover's oft-cited article "Her Body, Himself." What all these writings have in common, be they academic or colloquial, is the way they take for granted the generic grouping of the slasher. While it is not my project to prove that the slasher is not a genre, I believe Clover and Dika make many false assumptions about these films. Their theories only apply to a small number of films and so they leave many slashers unaccounted for.

I do not intend to discount the theories of Carol Clover or Vera Dika. Instead, I will offer up a supplementary lens through which film historians and theorists may view the slasher, filling in the gaps left by these two theorists. By doing so, I hope my new reading will come to enhance the existing academic understanding of these films. The first task will be to develop a specific historical context for the emergence of this genre, something that both Clover and Dika neglect to do. Clover does not periodize her reading of the slasher, while Dika limits her analysis to films released from 1978 to 1982, but does not consider the social history of that time. While I will use Dika's periodization, I will go further in my analysis and pay specific attention to the condition of the American family during this time. During the late 1970s, the American nuclear family was in a rapid state of decline. Following the recession of the early 1970s, many middle-class mothers had to enter the workforce and fathers found their authority over

the family unit to be weakening. While this trend predates the late 1970s, new youth drug and sex practices were unique to this time period. As I will discuss in the next chapter, these practices along with the rise of Second-wave feminism contributed much to changes in the American nuclear family.

While I do not contend that an understanding of this social history will account for all questions of genre and representation surrounding the slasher, I do argue that the condition of the American family of the late 1970s and early 1980s is clearly reflected in the spaces of the slasher films. Analyzing these spaces is one way in which we might understand the horror that these films provoke. In the third chapter, I will focus on three slasher spaces in several films, the house, the camp, and the university and discuss their relation to real spaces of that time period. My methodology stems from Vivian Sobchack's article "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir." In her article, Sobchack considers the cinematic spaces of the film noir in relation to America between the years 1945 and 1955 so that she might define this tenuous genre. For many years, film scholars such as Dana Polan and David Bordwell have struggled with defining the film noir because, in many cases, it is more a style than a genre. Variations in plot and subject matter make it very difficult to "genrify" the film noir.

To accomplish the difficult task of grouping these films together, Sobchack draws on the literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. In his article, "Forms of Time and Chronotopes in the Novel," Bakhtin coins the term "chronotope" in reference to spaces in literature. For Bakhtin, the chronotope is a link between the world of the text and the "real, lived" world outside the text. "The specific novel-epic chronotopes that serve for the assimilation of actual temporal (including historical) reality…permit the essential

aspects of this reality to be reflected and incorporated into the artistic space of the novel."[2] Sobchack follows this rationale and finds the spaces of the film noir to be chronotopically linked to the "real-lived" spaces of post-World War II America. These spaces or "chronotopes" are, in Bakhtin's words, "the basis for distinguishing generic types."[3] Understanding the strong relationship between the text and context of a literary or cinematic work can aid in defining a genre. Bringing the chronotope into horror adds to the scholarship of Clover and Dika. The chronotope helps Sobchack explain what made the film noir so pervasive between 1945 and 1955 and this tool can do this same for an understanding of the slasher's effect on American audiences of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the third chapter, I will consider three major chronotopes of the slasher, the suburban house, the summer camp, and the university. Analyzing these chronotopes and their relation to the "real, lived" America of 1978 to 1982 will go far in comprehending the slasher's appeal during this time period.

The slasher did not merely "appear" in 1978, but was instead part of a larger trend in the American horror film. In his decisive article, "The Return of the Repressed," Robin Wood charts how the threat of the American horror film moved from without to within. "The process whereby horror becomes associated with its true milieu, the family," Wood writes, "is reflected in its steady geographical progress toward America."[4] In the 1930s, the danger and the setting of the film were often foreign in nature, as in the case of the classic Universal horror films *Dracula* (Universal, 1931) and *Frankenstein* (Universal, 1932). By the 1950s, the setting was American, but the threat was still

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[2] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," in The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist, (University of Austin Press, 1981), 252.

[3] Bakhtin, 250.

[4] Robin Wood, "Return of the Repressed," Film Comment 14, no. 4 (1978): 29.

external, appearing in the form of atomically mutated insects, as in *Tarantula* (Universal, 1955), or aliens, as in *It Came from Outer Space* (Universal, 1953). By the late 1960s, in films such as *Night of the Living Dead* (Walter Reed, 1968), *The Omen* (20th Century Fox, 1976), and *The Exorcist* (Warner Bros., 1973), the setting was also American, but the danger did not come from without but from within the family. Wood's article, published in 1978, mere months before the release of *Halloween*, seems to predict the coming slasher craze. The slasher follows Wood's trend of the domesticization of the American horror film, with the horror occurring primarily within domestic or previously domestic spaces. This being said, the slasher of the late 1970s and early 1980s is by no means hermetically sealed off from the films that came before or after and owes much to previous horror films of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Carol Clover was the first theorist to tackle the subject of the slasher. Previous to this, the slasher was considered by scholars to be at the "bottom of the horror heap," and unworthy of academic research.[5] In her article "Her Body, Himself," published in *Representations* in 1987, Clover gives the first real definition of this "genre." She states:

> Its elements are familiar: the killer is the psychotic product of a sick family, but still recognizably human; the victim is a beautifully, sexually active woman; the location is not-home, at a Terrible Place; the weapon is something other than a gun; the attack is registered from the victim's point of view and comes with shocking suddenness.[6]

In this article, Clover follows in the footsteps of Laura Mulvey, author of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." This was, for many, the first work of feminist theory and was preceded only by Claire Johnson's "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema." In her seminal work, Mulvey employs Freudian psychoanalysis in order to evaluate

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5 Clover, Men, Women, and Chain Saws (Princeton Univeristy Press, 1992), 21.

6 Clover, 23-24.

gendered viewing in Hollywood cinema. She argues that, in film, male characters and male viewers possess the active gaze. The female figure then exists as a passive object, representing "to-be-looked-at-ness."[7] In the patriarchal, phallocentric order, the female figure must be captured in the scopophilic male gaze and can take no action herself.

Clover's definition of the Final Girl employs Mulvey's gender paradigm and shows how a female character might appropriate these male traits and become active. Clover writes that the Final Girl's "smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically with the very boys she fears or rejects."[8] Her resourcefulness and willingness to battle the film's antagonist are traits usually associated with a male protagonist. At the end of many of these films the Final Girl picks up a knife or other sharp weapon, symbolizing her appropriation of the phallus. Along with this, she is often called by an androgynous name such as Marti or Chris and possesses the "gaze," a gift only given to male or masculine-coded characters.[9] "The Final Girl is watchful to the point of paranoia; small signs of danger that her friends ignore, she registers."[10] It is this gaze that allows her to see the killer and fight back.

While Clover's theories are interesting, her examples are very limited. She works primarily with three films; *Halloween, The Slumber Party Massacre* (New World, 1982), and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre 2* (Cannon, 1986), a very odd sampling. *Halloween* is, of course, a suitable choice. It was the basis for most slasher variations and was also the most successful. *The Slumber Party Massacre*, on the other hand, is problematic. It

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7 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Feminist Film Theory: A Reader, ed. Sue Thornham (NYU Press, 1999), 63.

8 Clover, 40.

9 Clover, 40.

10 Clover, 39.

was filmed by feminists attempting to disrupt the gender dynamics of the slasher and is a very self-conscious text. Director Amy Holden Jones tries to critique the "Final Girl" paradigm by including many lesbian-coded characters. At the same time, *Slumber Party Massacre* plays like stereotypical "slasher," featuring horrific kills and much female nudity. Though Jones' plan to upend the genre's conventions is finally unsuccessful, it remains a strange sample. Finally, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre 2* is more of a spoof than an actual slasher, made by Tobe Hooper as a comedy version of his original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Clover's sample set is ultimately too narrow and there is no real reasoning behind her selection process. She does not need to talk about *every* slasher film, but she should explain the validity of her sample.

As she ignores many of the other slashers, her theories on "Final Girl" really only apply to *Halloween*. Because of this, she chooses to focus on this film and only mentions *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* and *Slumber Party Massacre* when they might serve her argument. *Halloween*'s Laurie is the perfect "Final Girl." She dresses conservatively and abstains from sex while her friends Linda and Annie dress provocatively and constantly demand sex from their boyfriends. Laurie also takes up the phallic knife and displays the gaze usually associated with a male character. She realizes something is amiss, goes to investigate, and confronts the killer.

Though Laurie perfectly fits Clover's paradigm, few other surviving girls do. Many slasher heroines do not possess the gaze nor do they actively seek out the killer. In *The Funhouse* (Universal, 1981), Amy (Elizabeth Berridge) only accidentally kills the monster (Wayne Doba) as does Marti (Linda Blair) in *Hell Night* (Compass, 1981). In both these cases, there is no phallic weapon used in the killer's death, just as in *The*

Prowler where Pam (Vicky Dawson) shoots the killer (Farley Granger) in the head. Also, Clover's theories do not account for films where the Final Girl is male. In *The Burning*, Cropsy (Lou David), the film's killer, is bested by two males, Alfred (Brian Backer) and Todd (Brian Matthews). The specificity of Clover's genre criticism does not allow for all of these variations.

In her 1990 book Games of Terror, Vera Dika's criticism seems more systematic and applicable to a large set of "slasher" films. Whereas Clover focuses on the Final Girl and the gender dynamics involved, Dika focuses primarily on the slasher narrative and the socio-economic position of its characters, drawing upon a sample of five "stalker" films from 1980 and 1981. However, even this set of films is not as "representative" as Dika might suggest.

Dika first explores what kinds of characters inhabit the slasher film. She notes that "most all characters in the film are white, middle class, Americans."[11] The characters are usually very young and their interests are very selfish. As they focus on sex and drugs, these teens make themselves the perfect targets for mutilation. Dika writes that "These young people are full inhabitors of the present, but because they have forgotten their own past, or that of the killer, they have allowed themselves to become defenseless victims of his aggression."[12] These characters are quite different from the main protagonist of the film. Dika draws upon Clover and defines this female protagonist as "essentially masculine" because of her ability to complete "narratively

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[11] Vera Dika, Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle (London Associated University Press, 1990), 55.

[12] Dika, 55-56

significant action."[13] While the other teenagers think only of alcohol and fornication, the Final Girl is free to see the danger that surrounds the youthful revelry.

The difference between the slew of stalker prey and the Final Girl is of great importance to Dika. She believes that the stalker film is based on a series of binary oppositions. The Final Girl is differentiated from the rest of the teens based on a "valued/devalued" opposition.[14] Her resourcefulness sets her apart from the weak stalker bait. All these young characters, including the Final Girl, are part of an "in group" while the older members of the community make up the "out group."[15] Finally, a "life/death" opposition shows the normal community to be different from the killer.[16]

Dika's greatest addition to a study of the slasher film appears in her analysis of the films' narratives. Working within a Proppian structuralist paradigm, she sets down a seventeen segment narrative structure for the slasher film:

Past Event

1. The young community is guilty of a wrongful action.
2. The killer sees an injury, fault or death.
3. The killer experiences a loss.
4. The killer kills the guilty members of the young community.

Present Event

5. An event commemorates the past action.
6. The killer's destructive force is reactivated.
7. The killer reidentifies the guilty parties.
8. A member from the old community warns the young community (optional).
9. The young community takes no heed.
10. The killer stalks members of the young community.
11. The killer kills members of the young community.

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13 Dika, 55
14 Dika, 55
15 Dika, 57
16 Dika, 57

12. The heroine sees the extent of the murders.
13. The heroine sees the killer.
14. The heroine does battle with the killer.
15. The heroine kills or subdues the killer.
16. The heroine survives.
17. But the heroine is not free.[17]

This is perhaps the best structure one could put forward for the slasher and it fits many of the films of the cycle. However, there are still many exceptions to this narrative paradigm. In *The Prowler*, step 13, "The heroine sees the killer," occurs before many of the deaths. The heroine, Pam, sees the killer very early and spends the remainder of the film trying to find out who he is. This and many of these other films, such as *Happy Birthday to Me* and *My Bloody Valentine* are more akin to mystery films than "slashers." In these films, the murders take place over many days in many different locations and the identity of the killer becomes as important as who will die next and how.

Dika's argument is ultimately much stronger than Clover's because she mentions many more films than Clover. In addition to *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* Parts I (Paramount, 1980) and II (Paramount, 1981), she analyzes the structures of *Prom Night* (Echo Bridge, 1980), *Terror Train, Graduation Day* (IFI, 1981), *Happy Birthday to Me*, *Hell Night*, and *The Burning*. As she notes the differences between these films, she allows for slight variations from her slasher structure. Though this is much more than Clover allows, Dika ultimately ends up bending her structure to allow for these differences. She also admits that her sample is narrow, noting that these films "most closely adhere to the stalker formula."[18] So Dika is not looking for variation but rather sameness. When she does find major differences, she often uses them to make a qualitative assessment of the "strange" film. Basically, if a film deviates from the norm

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[17] Dika, 59-60.
[18] Dika, 14.

set in place by *Halloween*, it is just a bad slasher. Like Clover, she puts *Halloween* up on a pedestal and believes everything else to be derivative. The fact is, these "imitations" far outnumber the *Halloween* films and have done more in defining this genre.

Dika and Clover's arguments are extremely helpful, even foundational, for a critical understanding of many slasher films. It is my intention then to add to the work done by these two theorists rather than detract from them. Though my appraisal of their scholarship may seem critical, I wish to offer my chronotopic model as a way to tell the rest of the slasher story. These films are alike in the ways they deal with gender and their narratives, but, as I have discussed, this does not account for all these films. These films do have gendered connotations but in a different way than suggested by Clover and Dika. My reading will consider narrative and gender from a different angle as well as bring in a historical context for the slasher. This chronotopic model will help to complete our understanding of the power and meaning of the slasher.

Historicizing the Slasher

As I noted earlier, the slasher genre did not truly begin in 1978 nor did it end in 1982. Years before the release of *Halloween*, elements of the cycle appear in numerous horror films. *Black Christmas* (Film Funding) and the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* both released in 1974, exhibit many stalk-and-slash tendencies. Even earlier, in 1960, *Psycho* presented viewers with proto-"slasher" Norman Bates and, following the heyday of this cycle, these films did not disappear. The masked killer continued to grace movie screens through the 1980s and 1990s and still does today, mostly in the form of remakes or, as I call them, "neo-slashers" such as *Friday the 13th* (Paramount, 2009) and *A Nighmare on Elm Street* (New Line, 2010). However, the slasher never had a hold on the market like it did from 1978 to 1982. During this five year period, fifty to ninety of these films were released per year, making the total nearly 400. This quickly dropped off in 1982, with only a handful of slasher films released each year. Why is this? What socio-cultural factors played into the mass production and popularity of this genre during this relatively short time period?

I will argue that changing dynamics in the American "nuclear" family played a large part in the emergence of the slasher genre. Many historians note that from 1968 to 1980, the American family was in a gradual state of decline. Specifically, the position of the male patriarch was in flux. In many families, the father was, figuratively and literally, no longer head of the household. This is very different from the years following World War II. During the baby boom, the father was firmly positioned as breadwinner and disciplinarian. Talcott Parsons writes that the family living on "the occupational

earnings of the husband-father was the 'normal arrangement' in American society."[19] In comparison to this, the family in the late 1970s and early 1980s was in an abnormal arrangement. As I will explore in this chapter, the rise of feminism, the poor economy, and social institutions contributed to this loss of patriarchal authority and the subsequent shifts in family dynamics. In doing this, I will argue that slasher can be seen as a cinematic reflection of the demise of the American nuclear family.

From the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, the number of children living with both parents was in a steady decline.[20] In her book No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, Natasha Zaretsky charts this dissolution of the family. Her research on divorce and single parenthood is invaluable here. She writes:

> By March 1973, the Department of Labor noted that approximately 855,000 preschoolers were living in fatherless families. By the early 1970s, one out of every six children was living in a family where the father was either absent, unemployed, or out of the labor force.

Zaretsky's figures allude to the growing divorce rates during the 1970s. Prior to the 1970s, it was quite difficult for couples to obtain a divorce. If one spouse did not agree to the divorce, it was even more difficult. The party wanting the divorce would have to "accuse the other of wrongdoing—of infidelity, perhaps, or mental cruelty."[21] Even if the couple agreed to a divorce, it was still a complicated legal process where "they had to resort to collusion or trump up grounds."[22] All this changed in 1970, when California created the first no-fault divorce law. One spouse could claim "irremediable

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[19] Natasha Zaretsky, No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline (University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 5.

[20] Stephen Lassonde, "Family and Demography in Postwar America: A Hazard of New Fortunes," in A Companion to Post-1945 America," ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew (Blackwell, 2002), 4.

[21] Flora Davis, Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960 (University of Illinois, 1999) 287-288.

[22] Davis, 287-288.

differences," and the divorce would go through.[23] By 1980, all but two states had passed some form of no-fault divorce law, making it very easy for most American couples to obtain a divorce.

In ninety percent of these cases, the mother gained custody of the children.[24] Due to this fact, the father was obviously absent from the household. Even with joint-custody, the mother's house was often the true home for the children. Divorce and single parenthood were most prevalent among the lower classes, but changes were experienced by the middle and upper-middle classes as well. Zaretsky very eloquently states:

> A literal crisis of father absence within poor and middle-class families was being mirrored by a figurative crisis of father absence with middle- and upper-class homes. Even men who resided under the same roof as their children were in effect missing.[25]

Even in households where the father's absence was felt, he was still "around." For upper-middle class families, many fathers began to see work as a retreat from home. Though this phenomenon began as early as the 1950s, it was felt most in the 1970s. At the time, psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner wrote that middle class families were, "now approaching the social disintegration of lower class families a decade ago."[26] Long hours caused the father to be gone before the children left and returned from school. After work drinks began to take precedent over family dinners. As Bronfenbrenner put it, "children's hour" was replaced with "cocktail hour."[27]

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23 Davis, 288.
24 Davis, 290.
25 Zaretsky, 13.
26 Urie Bronfenbrenner, "The Calamitous Decline of the American Family," Washington Post, January 2, 1977, C1.
27 Zaretsky, 13.

One of the causes behind these long hours was the poor state of the economy following the economic recession of 1974-75.[28] In many middle and lower class families, both the mother and the father had to work. The Senate Subcommittee on Children and Youth stated that "By 1976, for the first time, the number of married women with school-age children in the labor force exceeded 50 percent."[29] It was because of these changes that Daniel Bell dubbed America a "Post-industrial Society." Zaretsky explains, "This [Post-industrial] society was transforming the older, nuclear family model, which defined its security largely in terms of family wage, into one in which both men and women would need to enter the labor market in order to sustain a household."[30] Zaretsky makes the important point that, in working-class families, both mothers and fathers had been forced to work for some time. However, it was in the 1970s that the middle class felt the effects of the economy and had to adjust. "Although this had in fact always been the case for most working-class families in the United States, and although the transition occurred over many decades," Zaretsky writes, "In the early 1970s, the two-earner family emerged as a norm for the American middle class.[31]

The blame for many of these changes was placed on women. In his history of the American family, Stephen Lasonde writes, "Women who strained under the gendered division of labor approvingly depicted in the mass media and modeled on Parson's isolated nuclear family—working, divorced, and unwed mothers – appeared to threaten the healthy operation of the family."[32] Also, "By infringing on the adult male's role as

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[28] Zaretsky, 137.

[29] Senate Subcommittee on Children and Youth of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, American Families: Trends and Pressures, 1973, 8.

[30] Zaretsky, 12.

[31] Zaretsky, 12.

[32] Lassonde, 7.

'family task leader,' they were considered deviant and condemned for modeling deviance for their children."[33] More specifically, the rising feminist movement caught much of the flak for the changes of the family. First, there was the increase in divorces. Supposedly, as wives reconsidered their position in the family, they would exit the family. However, in her history of the American Feminist movement, Flora Davis has a different opinion. "Some conservatives...claimed that wives were abandoning their marriages in droves, and they blamed feminists." "However," she explains, "the divorce rate began to rise before the second wave of feminism took hold, and the second wave was, in part a response to the insecurity of marriage."[34]

In addition to this, the legalization of abortion, associated with feminism, also greatly affected the family. The Roe and Doe cases of the early 1970s redefined what kind of agency women had in relation to their bodies. Previous to this, abortions were hard to come by and very dangerous and, unless the mother's life was in danger, it was often very difficult to legally abort a pregnancy. Following these important cases, abortion became a viable option for many young mothers. This too contributed to a loss of parental authority. Under these new laws, adolescents gained new agency over their bodies. The bodies of children were no longer under the father's control and this served to weaken his reign over the family.

Regardless of who was to blame for these changes, mothers needed to work. As they did so, many children were moved into alternate forms of child care. The babysitter, already an important member of the community, became necessary. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, early child care became such an issue that, on numerous

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[33] Lassonde, 7.
[34] Davis, 286.

occasions, the Senate attempted to pass bills creating nationalized child care. On both occasions, Presidential vetoes shut the bills down. Many parents were against the bills as well, angry at the idea of leaving their children in the care of others at such an early age. One mother wrote, "Day care is powerful. A program that ministers to a child from six months to six years has over eight thousand hours to teach beliefs and behavior. The family should be teaching values, not the government or anyone in day care."[35] This is not to say that parents did not want their children taken care of. Rather, they recognized the dangers of giving over their children to alternate caregivers.

This hesitancy was also felt in parents' feelings toward their public school systems. While at one time relations between parents and schools were friendly, the late 1970s represented a loss of faith in the public school system. In his book Parents and Schools: The 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education, William Cutler explores the tumultuous relations between home and school. "It became conventional wisdom in the 1970s to portray conflict between the home and the school as part of a much larger problem," he writes, "Friction between parents and teachers was taken as symptomatic of the family's alienation from its social and economic surroundings."[36] As parents could not devote as much time to their children, the socialization of their progeny fell under the control of school teachers and administrators. The mistrust of teachers represents the fear inherent in a loss of control over the family. It is true that for many youths, teachers became like surrogate parents, their discipline relegated to these educators.

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[35] Davis, 284.

[36] William Cutler, Parents and Schools: The 150-year Struggle for Control in American Education, (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 196.

The school was only one outside force that began to fill in for missing parents. Many parents were beginning to feel a lack of confidence in their parenting skills. In the "normal" family (however troublesome that term is), the parents were responsible for the rearing and discipline of their children. However, in the late 1970s, these responsibilities fell under the jurisdiction of other "experts." In his book Haven in a Heartless World, Christopher Lasch describes how, even when parents were there to raise their children, they deferred to the advice of experts in baby and parenting books. These books, he explains, "Provided merely the most obvious example of this parental dependence on outside help and advice. Outside advice, however, weakens parents' already faltering confidence in their own judgment."[37] When the children would need discipline, parents would also often look for outside help, often turning to psychiatrists, school guidance counselors, and even the children's peers. Lasch describes how these outside sources would "Measure the child's academic, athletic, and psychological progress."[38]

In the midst of all this, many families made attempts to *appear* like one cohesive unit. Lasch writes that during those times, "The family tries to create for itself an island of security in the surrounding disorder. It deals with internal tensions by denying their existence, desperately clinging to an illusion of normality."[39] Mothers and father thus acted as they were *supposed* to act and this was based on some exterior definition of fatherhood and motherhood. But, as Lasch explains, this feigned "togetherness" still left many children feeling unsatisfied and unloved. "The family's struggle to conform

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[37] Christopher Lasch, Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged (Basic Books, 1977), 171-172.

[38] Lasch, Haven, 173.

[39] Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (Norton, 1990), 172.

to an externally imposed ideal of family solidarity and parenthood creates an appearance of solidarity at the expense of spontaneous feeling, a ritualized 'relatedness' empty of real substance."[40] Even though the family attempted to pull away from the school and from other social mechanisms, these forces were truly inescapable. The definitions of what a normal, contained, nuclear family was supposed to be came from external social structures, and thus undermined any sort of real cohesion. "The picture of harmonious domestic life, on which the family attempts to model itself, derives not from spontaneous feeling but from external sources, and the effort to conform to it therefore implicates the family in a charade of togetherness."[41]

In his study of the American teenager, Thomas Hine explains how many youths could not find authority figures at home or at school. Whereas in the past parents and teachers were seen as strict disciplinarians, now leniency replaced sternness. "Several different researchers who interviewed students in high schools from the mid-1970s onward found that one of the students' chief complaints was that nobody cared about them," he writes, "The schools had surrendered their role as substitute parents when parents themselves were increasing their working hours and reducing the amount of time they spent with their families."[42] No matter which way teenagers would turn, parental figures were hard to find.

This influenced many teenagers to act out their frustration through sex, drugs, and alcohol. In his 1979 book, The Culture of Narcissism, Christopher Lasch explores how changing family dynamics affected the personalities of youths in the late 1970s with many teenagers becaming quite self-absorbed or, as Lasch calls them:

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40 Lasch, Culture, 176.
41 Lasch, Culture, 172.
42 Thomas Hine, The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager (Bard, 1999), 269.

"pathologically narcissistic." He writes, "We can now see why the absence of the American father has become such a crucial feature of the American family: not so much because it deprives the child of a role model as because it allows earlier fantasies of the father to dominate subsequent development of the superego."[43] Lasch goes on to quote Arnold Rogow:

> The reversal of the normal relations between the generations, the decline of parental discipline, the "socialization" of many parental functions, and the "self-centered, impulse-dominated, detached, confused" actions of American parents give rise to characteristics that "can have seriously pathological outcomes, when present in extreme form," but which in milder form equip the young to live in a permissive society organized around the pleasure of consumption…The decline of parental authority reflects the "decline of the superego" in American society as a whole.[44]

Lasch's project sheds light on how the loss of parental authority, specifically that of the patriarch, might have affected youth culture of the late 1970s.

Drugs were a major part of this youth culture. Hine writes that drug use among teenagers "was generally on the rise among teenagers throughout the 1970s."[45] However, the increase in use was not the truly troubling thing. The *reasoning* behind teenage drug use had changed between the 1960s and the 1970s. Hine puts it quite well: "Unlike their predecessors, however, the 1970s students didn't talk so much about expanding their minds as dulling their senses, so they could make it through yet another boring day."[46] Drugs no longer played into a larger social movement, as they did in the 1960s. Teenagers now used controlled substances to fill their unmediated free time.

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43 Lasch, Culture, 175.
44 Lasch, Culture, 178.
45 Hine, 270.
46 Hine, 270.

The lack of discipline from authority figures such as parents and school officials allowed many students to experiment sexually as well. Grace Palladino echoes Lasch's sentiments when she states that, "High School students could look at sex through very different eyes. What had once served as the unofficial passage to marriage and adulthood, and all the responsibility that went with them, was now just another part of high school life."[47] Palladino does not suggest that *every* teenager engaged in pre-marital sex. However, research done on teenagers at the time is truly striking. Miriam Forman-Brunell writes, "During the 1970s, 75 percent of teenage girls became sexually active by age seventeen."[48]

All of these factors contributed to a reorganization of the family. The "normal" nuclear family was fatherless, whether figuratively or literally. These changes in the organization of the American family are expressed in the slasher. However, it would be wrong to imply that only the slasher explicitly expressed these changes in the family. Many other films dealt with shifting dynamics in the family sphere. *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Columbia, 1979) beautifully handled the effects of divorce on the modern family. Though *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Warner Bros., 1974) actually involves a widow, it still represents the troubles of single motherhood in the mid to late 1970s. What differentiates these films from the slasher is the fact that these issues are dealt with narratively and literally. In "Return of the Repressed," Robin Wood explains how the horror film is much more able to critique social issues because the genre film allows for this be easily hidden:

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47 Grace Palladino, Teenagers: An American History (Basic Books, 1996), 250.

48 Miriam Forman-Brunell, Babysitter: An American History (New York University Press, 2009), 149.

> For the filmmakers as well as the audience, full awareness stops at the level of plot, action, and character, in which the most dangerous and subversive implications can disguise themselves and escape detection. This is why seemingly innocuous genres can be far more undermining than works of conscious social criticism, which must always concern themselves with the possibility of reforming aspects of a social system whose basic rightness must not be challenged.[49]

As a subgenre of the horror film, the slasher can comment on these changes in the American family without doing so literally. Wood's quotation suggests that this social criticism need not be intentional. It would, of course, be troublesome to suggest that all slashers deliberately reflect these shifts in the family. Social relevancy does not seem very important to slasher directors such Tony Maylam (*The Burning*) and Joseph Zito (*The Prowler*). Following Wood's thinking, one could say that the spaces of the slasher reflect the exhibit the loss of patriarchy and the changes in the family even if the directors and audience are unaware of this exhibition.

To understand how these spaces reflect the social/cultural reality of the late 1970s and early 1980s, I turn to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. In his 1937-1938 article, "Forms of Time and in the Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin defines the relationship between time and space in literature. Dubbing this the "chronotope" he writes, "We will give the name chronotope (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."[50] The working together of time and space leads to narrative, to the emergence of "events:"

> It is precisely the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the showing forth, the representability of events. And this is so thanks precisely to the special increase in density and concreteness of time markers—the

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[49] Wood, 26.

[50] Bakhtin, 84.

> time of human life, of historical time—that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas.[51]

Using this definition, he works through many "genres" of literature, from Greek Romance to Rabelasian literature. In each section, he identifies different chronotopes, which are often spaces that exhibit a very specific organization of time. The road, the castle, and the provincial town are just a few examples. These are not just lifeless spaces, but spaces that represent time. He uses the provincial town of Flaubertian literature as an example. "Here there are no events, only 'doings' that constantly repeat themselves. Time here has no advancing historical movement; it moves rather in narrow circles: the circle of the day, of the week, of the month, of a person's entire life."[52] His analysis applies to small towns found in many genres of literature. All of Bakhtin's chronotopes work in this fashion. These chronotopes give life to the narrative; they are where time and space intersect.

In a section added to "Forms of Time and the Chronotope of the Novel" in 1975, Bakhtin considers new uses for the chronotope. Namely, he redefines the chronotope as a bridge between the literary world and the "real" world outside of the novel, in other words between the text and the context. Bakhtin does not say that the world of the novel exactly mirrors that of the "real" world, stating that the novel and the lived world can never be "chronotypically identical."[53] Rather, for Bakhtin, there is a process of selection and exaggeration of the elements of the real world. Bakhtin's discussion of the threshold is interesting here. He writes, "In Dostoevsky, for example, the threshold and related chronotopes…are the main places of action in his works, places where crisis events

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[51] Bakhtin, 250.
[52] Bakhtin, 247-8.
[53] Bakhtin, 256.

occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man."[54] For Bakhtin, it is not realistic that all action would occur around the threshold. Still, the space, though exaggerated, remains familiar to Dostoevsky's readers. Though the two "worlds" are not identical, the chronotope remains a very useful tool in connecting history to artistic representation.

Bakhtin's essay deals with literature and does not touch on cinema, but his ideas have been employed by film scholars. The first to realize the benefits of applying the chronotope to film theory was Michael Montgomery. In his book Carnivals and Commonplaces, Montgomery draws comparisons between Bakhtin's literary chronotopes and spaces of Classical Hollywood. He likens the castle chronotope to mansion spaces like Xanadu in *Citizen Kane* (RKO, 1941). He also looks at the "road" and its use in films such as *It Happened One Night* (Columbia, 1934) and *Sullivan's Travels* (Paramount, 1941) as well as the "salon" in *Mildred Pierce* (Warner Bros., 1945) and *Casablanca* (Warner Bros., 1942). Moving from more general discussions, he focuses on how the chronotopes of the castle and the threshold play out in Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (Universal, 1956) in particular.

Montgomery is most useful in his final chapter when he decides to break away from Bakhtin's set of spaces:

> The classical forms need a great deal of fleshing out if we are to speak confidently of the semantic associations they continue to engender for audiences…What study of the 1960s road film, for instance, could afford to neglect Western landscapes, California, Zen, biker films, rock and roll tours, or psychedelic trips?... We might also investigate new chronotopes as they emerge throughout distinct periods of filmmaking to determine whether they possess

[54] Bakhtin, 248.

> their own peculiar 'narratability,' or highlight particular beliefs, ideals, and taboos.[55]

Montgomery does not want to ignore how the cultural moment can affect filmic representation. It is not enough to compare films of today to chronotopes from seventy years ago and it is, in Montgomery's opinion, a valid choice to create one's own chronotope.

In his final chapter, Montgomery puts forth his own chronotope in the form of the shopping mall. Looking at films such as *Valley Girl* (Atlantic, 1983), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (Universal, 1982), and *Chopping Mall* (Concorde, 1986), he explores how this cinematic space relates to a real lived space for 1980s youths. "By continually referencing a 'real', dynamic social space, the mall setting functions as a chronotope. As a result, "a commentary upon the subculture is developed across the decade."[56] So, he not only discusses the mall in the films but also real malls American malls. He analyzes the architecture of Sherman Oaks Mall, a common shooting locale for the 1980s mall movie. In his opinion, these film spaces can tell a "social historian of the media" quite a bit about the very specific sub culture of 1980s "mall rats."

Montgomery is not the only film theorist to have worked with the chronotope. In his article "'Get Ready for Rush Hour': The Chronotope in Action," Martin Flanagan asks how the chronotope can help one to understand the popularity of a given genre, in this case the American action film. "Why do we flock in droves to the action movie, making it the most commercially potent of all Hollywood forms? And what does the

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[55] Michael Montgomery, Carnivals and Commonplaces:Bakhtin's Chronotope, Cultural Studies, and Film (Lang, 1993), 85.

[56] Montgomery, 82.

textual representation of time and space have to do with this success?"[57] Working with *Die Hard* (20th Century Fox, 1988), *Speed* (20th Century Fox, 1994), and the *Rambo* films, he looks at how spaces like the high rise tower and the bus present time in a unique, exciting fashion. Unfortunately, he does not extend his analysis out to American culture in the late 1980s and 1990s. He makes the point that "Films in the blockbuster action tradition rarely engage with a 'real' historical register, instead supplementing or conjoining historical allusion with self-conscious cinematic reference."[58] Thus, he does not draw connections between the represented world and the "real, lived world." Still, Flanagan very adeptly utilizes the chronotope in his discussion of the action film, linking time and space and using this to explain the genre's popularity.

Unfortunately, Montgomery and Flanagan do not explore all the possible insights into a set of films that the concept of the chronotope can provide. As I mentioned earlier, the chronotope can be very effective in defining genres and it is for this reason that Vivian Sobchack employs it in her analysis of the film noir. In her article, she focuses on the cinematic spaces of the motel, the cocktail lounge, and nightclub. Like all chronotopes, these spaces communicate a certain organization of time. These spaces are all defined by "lounge time." The characters inhabiting the cocktail lounge and nightclub have nowhere to go and not much to do. Time is idle. As noted earlier, she also discusses how these spaces could be found on the screen as well as out in the "real, lived" America. She wants to look at, "the films' concrete and visible premises," to "return to

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[57] Martin Flanagan "Get Ready for Rush Hour: The Chronotope in Action," in Action and Adventure Cinema, ed. Yvonne Tasker (Routledge, 2004), 104.

[58] Flanagan, 110.

the things themselves."[59]

In returning to the concrete spaces, she turns to the work of Gaston Bauchelard. When she defines the premises as "the prereflective phenomenological conditions for the intuitive reading of film noir as 'about' it historical and cultural moment," she draws specifically from Bauchelard's book The Poetics of Space.[60] In his book, Bauchelard very poetically philosophizes on the nature of space. There is something that attracts or *affects* the reader in a way that precedes thought. According to Bauchelard, this feeling cannot be expressed with words, it recaptures a naïveté lost when one tries to reflect or understand. The poetic "image, in its simplicity, has no need of scholarship. It is the property of a naïve consciousness; in its expression, it is youthful language."[61] Specifically, Bauchelard deals with poetic descriptions of spaces, namely houses. He calls his project "topoanalysis," a "systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives."[62] Using Bauchelard, Sobchack does not believe there was a cognitive understanding of these spaces by the audience. Rather, the spaces worked "pre-reflectively" to call up associations with a real lived experience. Returning to Robin Wood, this reinforces his contention that the horror film can perform social criticism in a very unobtrusive way. The cinematic spaces of a given film can relay as much information as any line of dialogue.

Sobchack's article is useful for many reasons. First, like the slasher the film noir is a very difficult genre to pin down and she uses the chronotope to help define the

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[59] Vivian Sobchack "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir," in Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 130.

[60] Sobchack, 130.

[61] Gaston Bauchelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas, (Orion Press, 1964), xv.

[62] Bauchelard, 8.

generic boundaries of the film noir, a necessary task. Since it is my task to complement Clover and Dika's definitions/analyses of the slasher genre, Sobchack is very helpful here. Second, the film noir, for Sobchack, takes place within a limited time. Though she does not believe the years of 1945 and 1955 to be an exact starting and ending point, she shows that the cinematic grouping was strongest during this time. Though film noir still exists today, she defines these new films as "neo-noir." They are different in that they do not have the same relationship with a real lived experience. Like the film noir, the slasher films appear within a limited time frame. They too extend before 1978 and after 1982 but find the greatest foothold during that time. Finally, she returns to "the things themselves," the concrete spaces of the genre. Though she is wary of completely "genrifying" the film noir, she agrees there is still something "there." I too wish to return to "the things themselves." I want to consider the spaces of the slasher in light of my discussion of the American family during 1970s and 1980s. How do the fears regarding loss of family autonomy play out in the physical spaces of the slasher film?

A World without Privacy: The Spaces of the Slasher Film

In her discussion of the chronotopes of "lounge time," such as the cocktail bar and the hotel, Vivian Sobchack writes, "[These spaces] substitute impersonal, incoherent, discontinuous, and rented space for personal, intelligible, unified, and generated space. They spatially rend and break up the home—and, correlatively, family contiguity and generational continuity."[63] As opposed to other genres that focus on homes, the hotel and cocktail lounge suggested the American nuclear family's changing status. The anxiety surrounding the post-World War II family is akin to that of the post-Vietnam family. Similar to the spaces of Sobchack's lounge time, this postwar anxiety is felt in the spaces of the slasher.

Though there are other spaces found in the slasher, the majority of these films' most pivotal moments take place in post-Vietnam suburbia, specifically in the house, the summer camp, and the college campus. All three spaces and their sub spaces are built to be lived in even if it is just a home away from home as in the case of the camp and the college campus. However, as I will discuss, no matter how much effort is put into making these spaces into homes, they always appear empty of familial warmth, thus reflecting the weakened status of the American family in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The new, substitute families headed by the babysitter and camp counselor cannot replace the cohesive American family. Just as Vivian Sobchack, citing Mikhail Bakhtin, believes that understanding the spaces of novels and film can aid in the grouping of these noir texts, I will argue that by considering these spaces in relation to the historical context, a

[63] Sobchack, 158.

more complete model for the slasher will emerge. In doing so, I will argue that the horror springs from familial spaces that lack real nuclear families.

The House

"Somebody help me!" exclaims babysitter Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis), running through a darkened suburban neighborhood. She has just discovered the dead bodies of her best friends and Michael Myers creeps close behind her. The night is Halloween, the year 1978. On this particular All Hollow's Eve, the monsters, those things that go bump in the night, stalk the streets of Haddonfield, Illinois. As Laurie bangs her fist on random doors, porch lights are extinguished and shutters closed and she is left to fend for herself against the real-life boogeyman. One house turns on their lights and then turns them off again, the denizens unsympathetic to Laurie's plight. No one answers her call for aid because, in many ways, no one is home. These unassuming domiciles are not without tenants, but they exist without those things that make a house a *home*, without the warmth of a complete, functional nuclear family.

While I spent much time discussing the weakness of using *Halloween* as a prime example of the "slasher," the film's cinematic spaces are representative of other films of the genre. The film takes place in the suburbs of Chicago, in the aforementioned small town of Haddonfield. Though the first act takes place in other areas such as a mental hospital and high school, the majority of the narrative takes place in two houses. One is the Wallace residence, where Annie (Nancy Loomis) watches over Lindsay (Kyle Richards). The other is the Doyle residence, where Laurie takes care of Tommy (Brian Andrews). Both these houses are inhabited by what we might call "surrogate families."

The parents are gone and the children are left under the guidance of an alternate caregiver, the babysitter. Though the babysitter watches the children and is ultimately responsible for their well being, she is a poor substitute for a real family and her attempts to create a warm, congenial home space will never be authentic. She makes popcorn, carves a jack-o-lantern all while wearing an apron, a testament to her domestic role. However, she will never be Tommy's real mother and evil enters this suburban house. Laurie is like many real parents of this time period, dealing with "internal tensions by denying their existence, desperately clinging to an illusion of normality."[64] These attempts toward "normality" were not enough for children of this time period and, in the slasher film, they are not enough to safeguard the house against external threats. As much as the Doyle residence is haunted by the omnipresence of the killer Michael Myers, it is even more haunted by the absence of a real, nuclear family. In fact, the horror that takes place is even more insidious because it occurs within the house, a space that used to be a home. Similar to the spaces of lounge time, "There are houses, but no homes."[65]

As the house overseen by the babysitter communicates an absent family, it also offers up a space where maturation occurs without the supervision of parents. Without true parents, the coming of age and maturation of the children in the slasher becomes perverted. Francis Shor writes, "The horror film plays out the rage of a paternity denied the economic and political benefits of patriarchal power."[66] The shifting dynamics of the family are expressed in the death of the babysitters and other youths. What was once a space and subsequently a time of learning and change becomes a space and time of death

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64 Lasch, Culture, 172.

65 Sobchack, 144.

66 Francis Shor, "Father Knows Beast: Patriarchal Rage and the Horror Personality Film." Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture 3 (1995): 70.

and destruction. Though the slasher film does not show the parents to be the killers, it is their absence and loss of power that come forth in the ensuing horror.[67]

Without the parents, there is a loss of two barriers that were previously intact. In the spaces of the slasher film, what is usually myth or superstition crosses over into a horrifying reality. The nuclear family would usually be there to allay childhood fears and say "that is just a story." In the house overseen by the babysitter, the scary stories associated with the job come true. For instance, *When a Stranger Calls* (Columbia, 1979) tells the story of Jill (Carol Kane) a young babysitter terrorized by phone calls. Jill soon realizes that the phone calls are coming from inside the house and the killer is upstairs. The plot is a variation of an urban legend involving a killer calling a babysitter from within her house. In this film, this urban legend becomes reality. Likewise, children's tales of the boogeyman cross over into these spaces. Though Michael Myers is a real person in *Halloween*, for Laurie and the children he represents the boogeyman of their nightmares. Early in the film, Tommy sees Michael's shadow skulking across the street. While Laurie assures him that "there is no such thing" as the boogeyman, Tommy's childhood fears are quite real. After facing off with the killer, Laurie asks her savior Dr. Loomis (Donald Pleasance), "It was the boogeyman?" He replies, "As a matter of fact it was."

The other barrier that is blurred and often broken in the slasher space is that between the public and the private. In *Halloween*, the house no longer exists as a private space. While the Doyle's doors may be locked, this does not stop Michael Myers from intruding. Windows and side doors offer easy access to the private space. Even when locks are secured, they work to hinder the heroines of these films. In two scenes, we see

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[67] *The Stepfather* series is an exception to this, but these films do not appear until the late 1980s.

how the babysitters have no control over the portals between spaces. Annie, babysitting for Lindsay, washes her clothes in the family's laundry room. The wind slams the door shut and she is locked in. When Lindsay comes to rescue Annie, she shuts the door very carefully because she knows the trick to this door. Late in the film, as Michael Myers chases Laurie through the suburban neighborhood, she attempts to re-enter the Doyle house. Unfortunately, she has misplaced her keys and it is Tommy who must let Laurie in. In both these scenes, the children hold the keys to these doors. This is not surprising because the children are the real residents of these spaces. In this house space, their babysitters have less power than they do.

This position of the babysitter and her relation to cinematic space in the slasher reflects a real loss of respect for and a true fear of this time honored profession. In her book Babysitter: An American History, Miriam Forman-Brunell traces the rise and fall of the babysitter in American society. In her chapter on the 1970s, she reflects on the babysitter, the babysitter's house, and the babysitter in the horror film. She quotes a *U.S. News and World Report* from 1975:

> The ordinary yet omnipresent suburban ranch or split level became the standard site for modern horror just as the gabled Victorian house had been the scene of many gothic tales. Though its open floor plan lacked mystery, it now haunted the imagination. Emptied of nurturing mothers and protective fathers who spent less time at home and more time at the office, the suburban home ceased to be imagined as a haven. Rising divorce rates, one-parent families, working mothers, and geographic mobility were all factors that created a crisis and exacted a high toll on emotions of both parents and children.[68]

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[68] "As Parents Influence Fades--Who's Raising the Children?," U.S. News & World Report, 27 October, 1975, 41.

Forman-Brunell explains that in the late 1960s and early 1970's the babysitter had become a sexualized figure. Media accounts had always depicted her as pretty, but in this post-industrial era, she came to represent untapped erotic energy.

This change in the babysitter came from a change in the sexual activity and agency of teenage girls in the 1970s. "During the 1970s, 75 percent of teenage girls became sexually active by age seventeen."[69] Forman-Brunell also discusses how new legislation regarding the reproductive independence of teenage girls contributed to a shift in the depiction of babysitters. "Ordway v. Hargrives (1971) protected pregnant girls from being expelled from public school. Congress made birth control services available to teenage girls. In Eisenstadt v. Baird (1972), unmarried girls were granted the right to birth control without parental permission. Then in 1973, Roe v. Wade legalized abortion."[70] This sexualized image mostly popped up in fiction depicting illicit affairs between the sexually promiscuous babysitter and the sexually unfulfilled father. Dating back to Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita, "eroticized teenage girls had become an object of desire for men increasingly anxious about manhood."[71]

In the slasher film, the sexualization of the babysitter plays a prominent role although the Final Girl is usually not sexually active. Her friends, on the other hand, are often very frisky. In *Halloween*, Laurie is the classic virgin. She is more interested in her chemistry homework than in dating boys. Her best friend Annie (Nancy Loomis), also a babysitter, criticizes her for her studiousness and lack of sexual experience. As she explains, Annie's sole reason for babysitting is to have a place for sexual trysts. Scholars such as Clover often interpret the murder of young babysitters as a punishment for

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69 Forman-Brunell, 149.
70 Forman-Brunell, 148-149.
71 Forman-Brunell, 142.

premarital sex. Forman-Brunell agrees, "Although legislation had contributed to the loosening of sexual mores, horror movies would serve to check desire by showing the girls the punishment that awaited their transgressions."[72]

While I agree with this somewhat, I find that Forman-Brunell and other theorists such as Vera Dika and Carol Clover clearly simplify this issue of punishment. Teenagers do often die after ignoring sexual mores, however it is not a matter of *what* the teenagers do but rather *where*. In *Halloween*, Annie allows her friends Linda (P.J. Soles) and Bob (John Michael Graham) to rent some space in her employer's master bedroom. While everyone is gone, Linda and Bob essentially "play house" in this foreign bed. As they do so, the killer Michael Myers watches from the shadows. Both of these horny youths are murdered for this sexual act, but I do not believe it is the act itself that brings down this punishment. It is the location. Like Goldilocks, Bob and Linda have been sleeping in someone else's bed. As discussed before, there is a loose barrier between the public and the private in the slasher film. However, it is not only the killer who crosses this boundary. In this case, it is the babysitter, or the babysitter's friends. They invade this very private space and are punished accordingly. The master bedroom represents the last bastion of parental authority. It is the site of marital union, the creation of the family. Entering and soiling this space ushers in the final dissolution of parental power, of patriarchal agency in particular. So, the deaths of these youths result not from their mere sexual transgression but from the space of the sexual experience.

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[72] Forman-Brunell, 150.

The Camp

The camp is, for many children, "a home away from home." Much like the babysitter house, the camp is a feigned family space. Abigail Van Slyck writes, "With their porches, fireplaces, and spaces for social interaction within the cabin 'family,' these buildings incorporated many of the trappings of domestic architecture."[73] What differentiates this from a real "home" is its transient and utilitarian nature. "Despite the inclusion of such details, these cabins were not meant to emulate the home; instead, they were intended to serve as seasonal surrogates."[74] In *Friday the 13th* and *The Burning*, the cabin interiors are lined with cast-iron bunk-beds. The mattresses appear to be uncomfortable and appear to have slept many generations of campers. These are not the camper's own beds, but are instead just a temporary sleeping space. In *The Burning*, the girl's cabin is filled with trunks and sleeping bags, further signs of the campers' transient position in the cabin. Added to these objects are the plastic water cups and card-tables, both easily packed up and moved. In this space, the counselors and camp directors are surrogate guardians for these parentless children. They create a new family and a contrived "home" for the lonely campers.

As with the house and its babysitter, the camp represents fears surrounding the surrogate parenthood of camp counselors. When these parents leave their children with other caregivers, much can go wrong. In 1978, the Senate Subcommittee on Child and Human Development met to discuss "Programs for Children and Youth Camp Safety."

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[73] Abigail Van Slyck, A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960 (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 122.

[74] Van Slyck, 122.

At the hearing, camp directors, senators, and other concerned figures spoke about the dangers inherent in the camp space. Senator Abe Ribicoff of Connecticut said:

> The fact is, Mr. Chairman, that conditions at many summer and youth camps are simply appalling. All too frequently there is dangerous equipment, unsafe or improperly operated vehicles, poor sanitation facilities, inadequate medical provisions, untrained personnel, improper supervision, and hazardous activities. Consequently children have been killed, permanently injured, sexually abused, or suffer accidents requiring some degree of medical attention. Many of us have seen disturbing and dramatic news accounts of some of these incidents. Nevertheless, only ten states have some type of agency responsible for monitoring camp conditions and operations.[75]

Senator Ribicoff's statement demonstrates the real fears about the safety of these summer camps. Many of the murders in *Friday the 13th* and *The Burning* mirror real camp accidents. During this hearing, many Senators cited examples of drowning and shootings to support their claims about the unsafe conditions of the American camp. Along with the fear of the camp space, this statement from the hearing also demonstrates concerns about the maturity and responsibility of camp counselors. Senator Lowell Weicker Jr. said, "To an alarming extent , these [accidents] are the result of poorly trained camp staffs, many of whom are juveniles themselves,"[76] When the parents pass of their parental duties to teenagers, there can be deadly results. Thus, camp represents, for the late 1970s and early 1980s, a space where the children are not always watched carefully.

These real fears play out in the spaces of the camp and reflect how the lack of authentic parents weakens the boundary between illusion and reality. In the camp space,

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[75] United States. Cong. Senate. Subcommittee on Child and Human Development of the Committee on Human Resources. Hearing: To Provide for the Development and Implementation of Programs for Children and Youth Camp Safety 95th Cong., 2nd sess. Washington: GPO, 1978, 5.

[76] Subcommitte Hearing, 8.

there is the campfire, a place to spin stories of creatures in the woods. Again, these tales become reality and these monsters cross the threshold between fiction and fact. In *The Burning*, counselor Todd (Brian Matthews) tells the story of Cropsy, a former camp caretaker who was mysteriously burned in an accident years earlier. In *Madman* (Legend, 1982), a camp counselor, telling a variation of the "Bloody Mary" myth, warns the campers that if they yell the name of Madman Marz, he will come to claim them. Of course, both Cropsy and Madman Marz come out of the woods, out of the imaginary, and take their victims. These killings ultimately take place because nuclear family structures are not there to prevent it. It goes beyond mere physical protection though. Parental figures define truth and fiction. They are usually the masters of reality, the ones to say, "There's no such thing." Without them, the house and the camp become fraught with the dangers of childhood nightmares.

The boundary between the private and the public is also weakened at the camp, and is even more extreme given that there is also nature to contend with. The camp is such a part of its natural surroundings that it is often difficult to keep those surroundings out of any sort of private space. In *Friday the 13th*, Jack (Kevin Bacon) explains to the group how there are alligators in the cabins. In one early scene, a snake slithers into the protagonist's cabin. The to-be Final Girl, Alice (Adrienne King), jumps onto the bed and screams for help. Bill (Harry Crosby), another counselor, kills the snake, but the door is still open to invasion by nature and its creatures. In a later scene, Alice opens a kitchen cabinet to find the town drunk, Ralph (Walt Gorney), hiding. Alice asks, exasperated, "What's next?" This foreshadowing comment conflates nature with the violence brought

by the killer. Snake or drunk, alligator or murderer, there is no barrier between the inside and the outside at the summer camp.

It is often the lack of locks that allows for this crossing of boundaries. While the locks in the babysitter's house hinder the protagonists, in *Friday the 13th* and *The Burning*, the cabins have no locks. Still, in *Friday the 13th*, Alice encounters locks, usually at the most inopportune times. In the final act of the film, when she is being chased by Mrs. Voorhees, the killer, Alice sneaks into a storage shed and grabs one of the small .22 rifles. Of course, the gun is unloaded and the bullets are locked in a filing cabinet. The bullets are clearly locked up to protect campers and counselors but, in this dangerous situation, the locks only exist to keep the counselors from safety.

As the camp communicates an absent family, it also offered up a space where maturation occurs without the supervision of parents. The subspaces of the camp act as places of informal sexual education. Without true adult family members, the coming of age and growth of these children becomes perverted in the camp space. In her book Manufactured Wilderness, Abigail Van Slyck explores the history of the American summer camp. She writes on the space of the cabin as well as on the social institution of the camp. It is the latter that is most helpful here. She writes, "Home had lost its undisputed status as the best setting for the nurture of healthy children, and the summer camp was claiming a place as an effective substitute."[77] Camp owners and directors felt that "The modern world deprived youngsters of essential childhood experiences, and camps were one means to compensate for those losses."[78] So, the camp existed to offer children a safe place to act like children and also grow up to be responsible adults.

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[77] Van Slyck, 99.
[78] Van Slyck, xxi.

One way in which camps encouraged this was through a Native American themed camp setting. Teepees, campfire circles, and totem poles could be found at most American summer camps. Van Slyck writes that the integration of Native American culture into camp settings was "motivated in part by the desire to reconnect the camper with primitive impulses threatened by modern existence."[79] The archery range was one place where campers could find their "primitive" selves using a Native American weapon. Since campers would not often use a bow and arrow in their daily lives, this was a chance to show off strength and agility. As discussed in the previous chapter, many parents deferred to outside authorities regarding the raising of their children. The archery range communicates how acting out these primitive desires can be dangerous as they undermine discipline and modern parenting techniques. Early in *Friday the 13th*, Ned (Mark Nelson) scares Brenda (Laurie Bartram) when he shoots an arrow right by her face. This scene foreshadows a later scene when the killer, Mrs. Voorhees (Betsy Palmer), turns Bill, another counselor, into a veritable pincushion of arrows. This death occurs in a space where campers are invited to reappropriate childlike impulses under the supervision of surrogate parents. This subspace of the camp communicates the danger of delegating child rearing to outside experts.

This fear is also present in the space of the lakefront. The fear of drowning pervades this space in both *The Burning* and *Friday the 13th*. In *The Burning*, Alfred falls in the water and must be saved by his friends. In *Friday the 13th*, Ned pretends to drown so that he can sneak a kiss with Brenda. In this film, the lake is also the place where the killer's son, Jason, drowned. Years before, the camp counselors of Crystal Lake ignored their duties and this resulted in this young boy's death and this is the entire motivation

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[79] Van Slyck, 212.

behind his mother's killing spree. For this film, the lake takes on special significance as the place of death. At the end of the film, Alice floats in a canoe in a search for safety. She soon learns that the lake is not safe when Jason, the perfect image of the perverted child, bursts from the water and drags her below.

Another subspace that represents this threat is the camp bathroom/ shower room. This location plays an important role in both *The Burning* and *Friday the 13th*. In *The Burning*, the shower room is the setting for more "harmless" youthful tomfoolery. Sally (Carrick Glenn), a teenaged camper, takes a hot shower in the girl's shower room. After getting an eyeful of the beautiful Sally, Alfred (Brian Backer) scares the unsuspecting camper and is then reprimanded by his counselor Todd. This scene shows what the shower space represents for many campers. It is a place for pranks as well as adolescent sexual gratification. In *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock showed how the shower was not a safe private place. Likewise, in the unlocked camp shower room, there is always the fear of intrusion. This space is filled with unbridled adolescent hormones and, without the supervision of parents, it is easy for these teenagers to succumb to temptation. This creates a space where wishes can be fulfilled, be they sexual or violent, in the case of the killer.

A bathroom scene from *Friday the 13th* plays out differently than the scene in *The Burning*. In the former scene, no murder takes place. In this scene from *Friday the 13th*, we see how this space of sexual differentiation and gratification becomes a place of death. After a roll in the hay with her boyfriend Jack (Kevin Bacon), Marcie (Jeannine Taylor), another young counselor, goes to clean herself up. Washing her face in the sink of the girl's bathhouse, she does not realize that someone is watching her. As Marcy acts

out a scene from *Bringing Up Baby* (RKO, 1938) in the mirror, the killer lurks inside a shower stall. Unlike the scene in *The Burning*, this lurking voyeur is in fact a murderer. Marcy looks behind the shower curtain and her curiosity is rewarded with an axe in the face. All these spaces communicate children left to their own impulses. This freedom is met with murder.

The University

In the later 1970s, the American university, like the American family, was undergoing great changes. On a purely quantitative scale, university populations were growing. In the fall of 1969 there were 7,976,834 students enrolled in American universities. In the fall of 1979, this number had risen 42 percent, reaching 11,669,429.[80] The most striking changes, however, were not numeric, but social and perhaps even ethical. During the tumultuous 1960s and early 1970s, the academic quad was the site for political protest and expression. By the late 1970s, this communal fight against "the man" had been replaced with a very individualistic "me-oriented" social milieu. In his "portrait" of the 1979 college student, Arthur Levine writes, "Students are more different now as individuals than they were before. They have little sense of shared collegiate culture…As a group, they have very liberal attitudes about personal freedoms. Even in the group activities they pursue, 'me' stands out."[81]

This "me-ism" manifested itself in a new obsession with career. As college populations grew, competition among students became more extreme. Whereas in the

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[80] Arthur Levine, When Dreams and Heroes Died: A Portrait of Today's College Student (Carnegie Foundation, 1980), 6.

[81] Levine, 100.

1960s, a student might easily land a job in his or her chosen field, there were now ten students competing for the same job. Due to this, the dynamic of many liberal arts colleges shifted. College was no longer a place for self realization, but for career planning and training. Levine explains:

> When undergraduates were asked in 1969 what was most essential for them to get out of college, they ranked learning to get along with people first and formulating values and goals for their lives second. Seven years later… these aims fell to third and fourth position, being replaced by getting a detailed grasp of a special field and obtaining training and skills for an occupation.[82]

Students thus committed themselves to classes only pertinent to their career aspirations and this served to alienate students from one another. Other students were competitors, nonentities at best. Lansing Lamont wrote at the time, "The era of specialized studies increased the sense of isolation. Professors immersed themselves in their scholarly arcana, premeds studied and shop-talked among themselves, and minority students clustered within their own camp."[83]

As pressure to succeed rose, so did students' need for some sort of escape. Many students found this escape in alcohol and drugs. While this had been a problem on the college campus for some time, alcoholism reached new heights in the late 1970s. In a 1979 Carnegie Foundation study on college culture, Ernest Boyer wrote, "The national survey of drug abuse reported that at least 75 percent of the nation's college students drink. According to our survey of undergraduates, 42 percent of the respondents say that alcohol is a problem on the campus."[84] Though drug use on campuses decreased during the 1970s, drug culture was changing in a frightening way. Many students no longer

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82 Levine, 61.

83 Lansing Lamont, Campus Shock: A Firsthand Report on College Life Today (Dutton, 1979), 7.

84 Ernest L. Boyer, College: The Undergraduate Experience in America (Harper & Row, 1987), 201.

looked at drugs as a form of expression, but instead saw them as a way of shutting out outside pressures or enhancing performance. Drugs such as speed helped students study all night and supposedly remain more "focused." Whereas in the 1960s, drug use was often group-oriented, in the 1970s it reflected a new individualism. Levine writes, "Drug use has changed over the past decade. It is less worshipped now, less communal, less part of a shared youth culture, and less the object of youthful rebellion. Students are less ritualistic and more matter-of-fact about drug use."[85]

College students found another form of escape in sex. Pre-marital sex was nothing new on college campuses. However, co-ed dormitories and relaxed visitation rules in the late 1970s made it much easier for students to meet in the bedroom. In addition to this, by the 1970s, women made up 40 percent of campus populations.[86] Lamont writes that in the 1950s:

> It was still considered a mercy that parietal rules and the distance between places like Harvard and Vassar prevented the distractions of sex from completely undoing the male inmates of the Ivy League colleges and other unliberated schools. By the 1970s, however, with the living distances between the sexes shrunk to the width of a fire door, the presence of sexual possibilities had become a daily constant.[87]

With campus officials leaving students to their own devices, sneaking around was no longer necessary. Boyer relates the story of a female student at a Southwest university[88]: "My freshman year, we had a fire drill in here on the weekend because somebody set a trash can on fire. It was about three in the morning. And from every single room in the fourth-floor women's wing, a guy came out. Every single room—I'll never forget

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85 Levine, 90.
86 Lamont, 37.
87 Lamont, 33.
88 The Carnegie Foundation does not name its sample schools.

that."[89] While boyfriends staying over could be interpreted as a form of intimacy, for the other roommate it could be an invasion of privacy. This tenant did not often have a choice has to who was let into his/her room. Thus, as I soon will discuss, dorm rooms were no longer private spaces, but open to many visitors.

Similar to last chapter's discussion of the family, this acting out by students came from a lack of care by authority figures or surrogate parents in the case of the American College. In the late 1970s, many students felt as though teachers and college administrators did not care about them. A woman at DePaul University said, "We'd like you to understand one thing. We don't want the university to interfere *in* our lives, but we want someone in the university to be concerned *with* our lives."[90] A male senior at the University of Michigan echoed this sentiment: "They don't give a damn about us. They don't care about the quality of our life."[91] Both these statements communicate a sense of loss or abandonment. Through the 1950s and 1960s, teachers and college administrators had filled the role of *in loco parentis*. "In earlier times," Lamont wrote, "when the colleges' function of *in loco parentis* remained unquestioned, developing conscience in students had been a centerpiece of university life."[92] This concern over the character and conscience of students changed in the 1970s, when university officials wished to give students more freedom in regard to their social lives. Though this relative independence was enjoyed by students to a certain extent, many felt that this new autonomy showed a lack of care on the part of collegiate authority figures. Administrators were at a loss and did not know how much control to exert over student

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89 Boyer, 199.
90 Boyer, 204.
91 Lamont, 6.
92 Lamont, 102.

affairs. "Many [administrators]," Boyer writes, "were not sure what standards to expect or require. Where does the responsibility of the college begin and end? Where is the balance to be struck between students' personal 'rights' and institutional concerns?"[93] The American college, like the American family, was in a state of confusion. Authority was lax and college students, only a few years older than the high school babysitters, found themselves without even surrogate parents to look after them.

Unlike the babysitter or camp films, the collegiate slasher film deals with these issues of careerism, sex, and drugs in a very literal way. *Final Exam* focuses on the students' competitive spirit and career-mindedness. Mark (John Fallon) is President of the Gamma Delta Psi fraternity. In his introduction, Mark complains to Courtney about their impending Chemistry exam. He explains how he will not need science when he enters business school, exemplifying the specialization of many college students during this time. In addition to this, Mark cheats on his exam. Wildman (Ralph Brown), Mark's fraternity brother, stages an elaborate diversion, allowing Mark to grade his own test and put it on the bottom of the teaching assistant's grading pile. Lastly, when Mark answers the telephone, he asks, "Tests or pills?" He and Wildman sell stolen tests and speed to help students pass their classes. Their actions are not too far from what many real students would do in order to get a good grade. As Lamont writes, "Students sifted through professors' wastebaskets, broke into locked offices, pried open storage cabinets with crowbars, even tried bribing janitors with marijuana to give them access to examination files."[94] In addition to this, "At Michigan and Stanford, students were known to ring false alarms or phone in bomb threats in order to evacuate a hall while an

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[93] Boyer, 203.
[94] Lamont, 76.

exam was in progress."[95] At Lanier College, the setting of *Final Exam*, as well as on offscreen campuses, the ends justify the means.

Success on the late 1970s early 1980s college campus did not come from studying, but often from cheating or finessing teachers. In *Final Exam*, sexpot Lisa shows just how easy it is to sleep one's way through college. While her more homely roommate Courtney (Cecile Bagdadi) studies for her Chemistry exam, Lisa explains that she will never have to study for Chemistry, "not as long as a man is teaching it." This is no idle comment, as an earlier scene shows Lisa turning in a little "sextra" credit to her professor. Courtney complains to her friend Radish (Joel S. Rice) about how easy Lisa has it. Radish, a true bookworm, tells Courtney that there is no such thing as a "free brunch" and that Lisa will get hers in the end. Radish's prediction is correct and the killer dispatches Lisa, her looks not enough to save her in this situation. Her freeloading nature is punished with her death.

This willingness is do anything to "beat the system" is also seen in *The Dorm that Dripped Blood* (New Image, 1982). Craig (Stephen Sachs) discusses with Patti (Pamela Holland) the secret to skating through college. According to Craig, college is not about studying, but instead getting teachers to like you. "In geography last semester, I didn't open the book. I didn't even take the final. All I did was tell the teacher how much I respected him." Like Lisa, Craig finesses his teachers in order to get out of real work. Because Craig is the killer, he is not punished like the other victims. However, through him, cheating is associated with murder. Craig is willing to do anything to get what he wants, in this case murder his classmates so he can be alone with Joanne. As I will soon discuss, this lack of respect for scholarship leads to a secularization of what was once

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[95] Lamont, 66.

sacred space. The college is no longer a place for personal growth, but an obstacle that must be circumnavigated in order to become a successful adult.

Also represented in the collegiate slasher film is the real increase in violence on college campuses. Radish is obsessed with serial killers and violence and it is he who informs the other students of the recent murders at a nearby college. As he relates the story to Courtney and Mark, he is excited, almost salivating at the thought of a real killer being near his school. Also, before an exam, he regales his classmates with tales about Charles Whitman, one of his "favorite" mass-murderers. His bedroom wall is adorned with movie posters for *Murder is My Beat* (Allied Artists, 1955) and *The Toolbox Murders* (Cal-Am, 1978). Though Radish is very interested in serial killers, he is also paranoid about violence coming to his little college. He constantly warns his crush, Courtney, that anyone could be a killer and that Lanier College is not as safe as students and faculty would like to believe.

Radish's fear of violence on campus is not unreasonable given how dangerous universities had become in the late 1970s. Lamont wrote, "In the 1970s, with parental rules dead and colleges generally more accessible to the public, criminals found the situation tailor-made for their purposes."[96] In 1976, there were 1,500 reported criminal incidents on Berkeley's campus.[97] These crimes included theft, assault, and rape. The latter was most frightening because it often went unreported. "At the University of Pennsylvania, two women were raped in the same science building in 1977, and early in 1978 there was another rape in a high-rise dormitory. During the first five months of 1978, the total number of rapes in the low Philadelphia precincts of which Penn is a part

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[96] Lamont, 19.
[97] Lamont, 16.

came to thirty-eight."[98] Murder rates on campuses were also at a new height. At Yale in 1978, two stabbings as well as numerous other assaults were reported.[99] Once an island of education and relative safety, the college campus now found its privacy invaded by outside crime as well as crime perpetrated by students.

As in the case of other slasher films, these changes and worries on the college campus manifest themselves in the cinematic spaces. The dormitory is perhaps the most important cinematic space in any college film, not to mention the collegiate slasher film because it exhibits the dissolution of barriers between private and public space. The ease with which people can cross these thresholds shows how changes in sexual relations and crime affected this private space. Levine writes, "Sexual activity seems much less covert today than a decade ago, with a concomitant loss of privacy."[100] With women and men staying over at each other's dorm rooms, many roommates felt unsafe, as if their space had been invaded. In addition, the failings of campus security made it possible for unwanted intruders to enter the dorm room. Lamont relates the tale that "at least one freshwoman told of waking up in the dark to find an intruder in her dormitory bed."[101]

This loss of protection plays out in these films in a number of ways. In *Final Exam*, Courtney's room is the most invaded by outsiders. Throughout the film, it is shown how little control she has over her space. While she studies for her exam, she exits her room for a moment only to return and find her textbook missing. Her roommate Lisa opens her closet and the book falls from atop the door. Someone (the killer we soon find out) has been inside their room. This is perhaps the least violent of the intrusions of

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98 Lamont, 16.
99 Lamont, 16.
100 Levine, 92.
101 Lamont, 16..

Courtney and Lisa's room. Near the end of the film, Radish discovers there is a killer on campus. When he comes to warn Courtney of the impending danger, the killer breaks through the middle of the door, grabbing Radish. Returning to her room, Courtney finds Radish's dead body stuffed through a hole in her door. This image truly illustrates the permeability of barriers between public and private space on the campus, with Radish's body literally stuck between the two spaces.

A similar situation is found in *The Prowler*. Pam (Vicky Dawson) and her roommate (Lisa Dunsheath) prepare for their graduation dance. It is the first dance held in over 30 years and this is quite an occasion. Pam, the coordinator of the dance, finishes dressing and runs to the dance, leaving Sherry to shower. Sherry is soon surprised by her boyfriend, Carl (David Sederholm), who wants to join her in the shower. As Carl exits the bathroom to disrobe, he is dispatched by a killer dressed in World War II fatigues. The killer enters the bathroom and, through the fogged shower door, Sherry believes it to be Carl. Her excitement is cut short when the killer impales her with a pitchfork. Here the killer easily takes the place of Sherry's lover. Leaving her door unlocked for Carl to enter, Sherry opens her room to more dangerous figures. This and *Final Exam* show how changes in sexual relations and visitation rules on college campuses led to a subsequent loss of privacy. As the *in loco parentis* authorities shirked their responsibilities, the college campus could become a strange and dangerous place.

In addition to the dorm *rooms*, the dormitories themselves also exemplify the loss of parental authority. This is communicated through the utilitarian nature of the buildings. In *The Dorm That Dripped Blood*, the building is a high rise, clearly built in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Made of concrete blocks and featuring few windows, the

dormitory resembles a prison more than a living space for college students. Though the buildings in the other collegiate slasher films are not as utilitarian as this, they too exhibit a functionality that is cold and unfriendly. The exteriors to the dorms in *The Prowler* and *Final Exam* are more antique, a Victorian house in the former, and a brick columned building in the latter. However, their interiors are very similar to those of *The Dorm That Dripped Blood*. The walls are white and blank, the carpets of plain design. The doors are evenly spaced and the overall look is one of a motel.

One could make the point that dormitories looked the same in the years leading up to the 1970s. This may be true, however, the feeling that these images evoke are quite different. These halls are empty, the excitement of collegiate life drained out of them. Like the babysitter house, these buildings used to be homes. Now, they are mere living spaces. Lamont wrote, "In the new high-rise, cement-block buildings put up to house students as economically as possible, there was so little of either charm or comfort that, as one undergraduate put it, 'People stop thinking they actually live here.'"[102] Again, this cold externality is due to a loss of parental authority, in this case that of surrogate parents. The responsibility for the care of students was ultimately passed to other students. Resident Assistants resemble the camp counselor and the babysitter. Youths themselves, they were forced to play parent to students their own age. It is no wonder that many students felt that no one cared about them.

Another space that exemplifies the loss of home is the college cafeteria and kitchen. Like the dormitory, the cafeteria is designed to stuff as many students into one space and in this case feed them quickly and get them on their way. Likewise, the kitchen is designed to make food in bulk at a very quick pace. There is little care put into

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[102] Lamont, 9-10.

the preparation of this food and cafeteria food is the pretty much the antithesis of home cooking. It is no coincidence then that the cafeteria and kitchen figure greatly in the collegiate slasher. In *The Dorm That Dripped Blood*, four scenes are spent in the industrial sized kitchen. Joanne, Craig, Brian, and Patti prepare their meals there. The group is dwarfed by the large space and the stainless steel machines. In a later scene, the kitchen becomes the site for murder. Craig, the unmasked killer, stuffs Patti into a sizable crock-pot, boiling her alive. He then turns on the mixers and deli-slicers to scare and confuse Joanne. These steely machines would never be found in a home kitchen. There is now a mechanism between the hands of the cook and the food product. The entire space of the industrial kitchen speaks to the distance between school authority figures (rarely depicted in these films) and individual students.

In *Final Exam*, the cafeteria and kitchen also play important roles. Much of the early action takes place in the cafeteria as we see Courtney, Lisa, and Janet (Sherry Willis-Burch) discuss their stress regarding exams and the poor quality of the cafeteria food. Lisa mentions how the cafeteria is usually full of students. Being that it is the last day of exams, the few students seem very small in the open space of the cafeteria. Like the kitchen in *The Dorm That Drips Blood*, this space dwarfs the college students. When these spaces are not filled with their intended number of employees or students, they seem very empty, truly showing how depersonal they are.

This depersonalization coincides with a secularization of the college campus. As mentioned before, the college space in 1970s had lost much of its hallowed nature. This was somewhat figurative in the way education was no longer respected in itself, only as a means to an end. It a literal sense, religion was on the wane on many campuses. In

earlier decades, the chapel was the center of campus life. Daily chapel attendance was often mandatory.[103] All this changed in the 1970s when most liberal arts colleges no longer required that students attend chapel, daily or weekly. Accompanying this was a growing mistrust of all institutions, the church chief among them. "Students in the 1970s," Levine wrote, "are twice as likely to say that they are opposed or indifferent to religion."[104] While many students became interested in Eastern religion and meditation, the chapel often stood empty, a testament to this loss of faith.

The empty chapel plays an important part in *Final Exam*. The setting for the first and last scenes of the film, the chapel is a shell of its former self. Broken girders attempt to keep the walls from falling in. Pews no longer fill the large floor. The most this space has to offer is solitude, and it is for this reason that Courtney goes there to study. It is also here that she runs to escape the killer's grasp. However, there is no protection in this space. Though Courtney ultimately bests the killer, pushing him over a staircase and then stabbing him, the space has still been soiled. It is no longer a communal place of worship or a sign of the sacred on the campus.

Often standing in for the chapel in the 1970s is the college athletic center, the church of the "me." Many students considered this the "emotional core of the university." Boyer writes,

> The athletic center completes the picture. The lobby of this modern shrine is filled with trophy cases for the seventeen intercollegiate sports that are played here. The cases overflow with symbols of success. The walls are lined with photos of star athletes and memorable moments in the university's athletic history.[105]

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103 Lamont, 102.
104 Levine, 98.
105 Boyer, 182.

It is interesting that Boyer uses the word "shrine" in reference to his unnamed college. The athletic center was a place of worship for the cult of the body. This extended beyond a love of sports to a narcissistic obsession with self image. Though many administrators saw the new interest in wellness as a positive, it also exhibited the "me-ism" of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This comes across in the collegiate slasher. In *Final Exam*, football star and frat boy Wildman breaks into the athletic office to steal pills. There he is confronted by the killer. After a drawn-out fist fight, the killer strangles Wildman with a weight machine. The tool for self-improvement becomes a tool for destruction.

All these spaces, like the camp and the babysitter house communicate a loss of parental authority. The weakening of strictures put on college students led them to express their freedom in somewhat troubling ways. The collegiate slasher shows youths right before they enter adulthood. If the camp is an early proving ground for sexual difference and masculinity, the college campus is the final test before the real world. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, perhaps students were treated like adults too early. They were left to their own devices when they still needed a place to decide what kind of adults they really wanted to be. No longer a space where consciences were formed, the college campus was, for many, a stop on the road to a well paying career. What was once an identity defining time was now aimless and depressing. As Levine writes, "For college students, all these changes—in the society, in the family, in the schools, and in the media—have resulted in a sense that things are falling apart…There is nothing left to hold on to."[106]

All the spaces I have discussed are transitional spaces. They are where youths become adults, or at least experience the freedom of adults. This conversion becomes

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[106] Levine, 21.

perverted without the supervision of parents. Spaces of fun become spaces of danger. Home spaces, once congenial, now appear cold and uninviting. These spaces reflect many realities of post-Vietnam America and how changing family structures caused much anxiety among the adolescents of that time. The suburban house, camp, and university all communicate a loss of cohesion within American nuclear families. While this may have been lost on most audiences at the time there is, in the words of Sobchack, a “there” there.

The Spaces Between Us

I offer this slasher model in the hopes that it might augment the criticism put forward by Carol Clover and Vera Dika. Together with a narrative and gendered reading, this spatial analysis helps to complete an image of the slasher. Building upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Vivian Sobchack, I have shown how historical context might relate to textual representation. The slasher does not literally express the 1970s American zeitgeist, but instead communicates shifts in the family pre-reflexively, in its cinematic spaces. This is by no means the only way to look at the slasher, but does apply to a larger sampling of films.

Still, there is much work that remains to be done on the slasher. I have focused on a period of time when the genre was at its height and on the spaces most prevalent in these films. However, it would be wrong to suggest that the slasher only takes place in three spaces. The house, camp, and university are the most evocative, and it is for this reason I chose to analyze them. However, there are still many other spaces that remain to be considered. *The Funhouse* takes place in a carnival spook-house while the horror of *Just Before Dawn* (Picturmedia, 1981) occurs in the deep woods. I believe these other spaces also represent the dissolution of the American nuclear family, but not so strikingly as the three main spaces of the slasher.

Scholarship should also not ignore the films that come after 1982. The slasher as I have defined it really only takes place during a five year period. However, sequels of the *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* series continued through the rest of the eighties and nineties and still appear today in the form of remakes. In addition to this, the late nineties

saw the rise of what I call the "neo-slasher," such as *Scream* (Dimension, 1996), and *Urban Legend* (TriStar, 1998). It would be problematic to group these films together with the slasher, but equally troubling to ignore their similarities. A similar study could be done on the spaces of these more contemporary horror films. Such a study might find that the spaces of *Scream* as well as the new *Friday the 13th* (Paramount, 2009) reflect the state of the contemporary American family. Perhaps audiences for the remake of *Halloween* (Dimension) in 2007 are not so different from those who saw *The Burning* in 1981. Parental issues may change but they will never disappear. Given this fact, the slasher and its offspring will likely remain appealing to their audiences for quite some time.

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