VISUAL LITERACY, METAFICTION, AND HORROR MOVIES: AN ACCOUNT OF SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN THE NEW STALKER FILM

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE OF
ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
AND THE DEPARTMENT OF GRAPHIC DESIGN
OF BILKENT UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

by
Orhan Anafarta
July, 2001

I certify that I have read this thesis and that
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Mahmut Mutman (Principal Advisor)

I certify that I have read this thesis and that
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Nezih Erdogan

I certify that I have read this thesis and that
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Çetin Sarikartal

I certify that I have read this thesis and that
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Irem Balkir

I certify that I have read this thesis and that
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Asuman Suner

Approved by the Institute of Fine Arts

Prof. Dr. Bülent Özgüç,
Director of the Institute of Fine Arts

ABSTRACT

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IN THE NEW STALKER FILM

Orhan Anafarta

Ph. D. in A.D.A

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Mahmut Mutman

July, 2001

This study investigates the significance of metafiction, game, and visual literacy as they relate to today's changing practices of spectatorship. These concepts are elaborated in relation to the rebirth of the eighties' horror film genre 'stalker' as a self-reflexive text in the nineties. *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996) is taken as the purest specimen of the 'new stalker' in which the above-mentioned concepts can be observed with clarity.

Keywords: Visual literacy, metafiction, stalker film, game.

ÖZET

GÖRSEL OKUR-YAZARLIK, ÜSTKURMACA, VE KORKU FILMLERI:
YENI STALKER FILMINDE KENDI-ÜZERINE-DÜSÜNEN-KURGU OLGUSUNUN DEGERLENDIRILMESI

Orhan Anafarta

Sanat, Tasarim ve Mimarlik Doktora Programi

Tez Yöneticisi: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Mahmut Mutman

Temmuz, 2001

Bu çalisma üstkurmaca, oyun, ve görsel duyarlilik kavramlarini günümüzün degisen izleyicilik pratikleri çerçevesinde ele almaktadir. Bu kavramlar, 80'ler korku sinemasinin bir alt türü olan 'stalker'in 90'larda kendi üzerine düsünen bir metin olarak yeniden dogusu baglaminda tartisilmaktadir. Yeni stalker'in en saf örnegi olmak suretiyle yukaridaki kavramlarin net bir sekilde gözlemlenmesine olanak veren *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996), çalismanin odak noktasini teskil etmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Görsel duyarlilik, üstkurmaca, stalker filmi, oyun.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of a five-year struggle dominated mostly by an uncertainty as to whether it could eventually be completed. The last year of this fluctuating process contained the set of motivations that led me to harvest what I had gathered thus far and mold it into a Ph.D. dissertation.

Foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to three persons who have supported me from the very beginning. My advisor Dr. Mahmut Mutman endured the twists and turns of my research and constantly provided me with the courage to proceed even when I decided to make the most drastic changes in my areas of inquiry. His trust, academic mastery and open-mindedness made me feel comfortable with what I was doing and enabled me to persevere. Prof. Bülent Özgüç displayed great patience and tolerance throughout my work, considering the ways in which I handled my course work at Bilkent. Also, by giving me the permission to suspend my Ph.D. study at Bilkent University for one year, Prof. Özgüç provided me with the time required to complete my thesis. Dr. Nezih Erdogan has always been a great mentor as regards my work in various fields of film studies.

Throughout the last three years of my Ph.D. study, my work at *Geceyarisi Sinemasi* magazine constantly kept me connected with film studies and enabled me to develop my research and writing skills on horror cinema. On that account, I am grateful to the enthusiastic *Geceyarisi* crew, Kaya Özkaracalar, Savas Arslan, and Sadi Konuralp. I am always inspired by their writings and the discussions we have. In particular, I would like to thank Kaya for motivating and encouraging me to write on films that I enjoyed watching. Long live *Geceyarisi Sinemasi*!

Dr. Çetin Sarikartal, my dear friend and colleague, has given me enormous support for the last two years. Foremost, I will always cherish the memories of our wonderful collaboration in the Basic Design course (99-00) that we conducted together at Bilkent University. He not only helped me to advance my understanding of visual literacy and education but also assisted me in progressing my modest research into a full-blown theoretical structure for a Ph.D. thesis.

Furthermore, during my year at York University in Toronto, Canada, Çetin continued providing me with intellectual and emotional support via e-mail. He fulfilled the roles of both co-advisor and close friend. My gratitude toward him is beyond words.

As regards my year at York University in the Department of film and Video, I must acknowledge a group of people who provided me with much support and energy in actualizing this study. Professor Janine Marchessault, director of the department, contributed to my process of writing on various levels. As my professor in film theory, her comments on my work were very useful as I developed my thesis outline. As an experienced writer, she also gave me helpful hints on 'how to write a Ph.D. thesis,' all of which worked perfectly.

I would also like to acknowledge Professor Suzy Young, who supported me in a similar way: giving me advice and guidance. Lorraine Hardie, the Film and Video Graduate Programme assistant, did her best to make life easier for me regarding the official procedures of the University. I would have easily gotten lost among the many papers and forms that I had to fill out without Lorraine's help.

During my research on the new-stalker phenomenon, Steven Schneider of NYU, who is as far as I know the only other scholar writing specifically on that topic, provided the most important items of my bibliography by sending me the photocopies of his articles.

Finally, I wish to express my endless gratitude to people who form my family. Without the love and support of my father, mother and sister, I could not have accomplished anything at all in my life, let alone write a Ph.D. thesis. Also, my dear friends Mario Antognetti and Palma Pisciella, whom I consider to be my brother and sister, have enriched my life in so many ways. I constantly felt their presence even when I was working for days in isolation, without which my process of adapting to the life in a foreign country would have been extremely difficult. I wonder how I could have managed to focus on anything at all without knowing that Mario and Palma were always there if I needed help.

During the months of writing my thesis, I received the greatest support from my partner Geneviève Appleton, who helped me on various levels in getting through this excruciating process. It is already difficult to be partners with someone who has embarked on working toward a Ph.D. degree; patience and understanding were the only things I could have asked for. However, Geneviève provided me with much more than that. She never got tired of giving me emotional support even when I was unbearably worried and pessimistic. I always regained my confidence and motivation after hearing her encouraging comments. Besides her amazing ability to keep me within the boundaries of sanity, Geneviève never hesitated to take the time during her busy schedule to read difficult, complicated paragraphs and share her insights with me, which always motivated me to continue writing where before I had been blocked. As a part of her intellectual support, Geneviève shared my experience of watching the infamous new-stalker *Scream,* despite the fact that she was not particularly interested in horror films. Finally, she proofread the thesis manuscript, and inspired me to rethink the parts that seemed problematic. She not only made me feel better about the thesis but about life in general. Thank you Geneviève.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study started as a treatment of visual literacy, a popular keyword in visual studies. My initial aim was to redefine the concept with an attempt to fit it into a well-defined structure and render it 'operationally specific.' That would, in turn, provide me with a theoretical model that I could utilize in devising solutions for the viewers in their 'problematic' relationship with visual imagery. Such a utilitarian approach to producing a theory of visual literacy was mostly motivated by my experiences in the field of design education where a solid theoretical structure is required for the practice to perform consistently. The main objective of the whole project was to motivate the viewers of the contemporary media to become more 'aware,' thus 'competent,' throughout their various encounters with visual products; and the only possible context for a prospective solution seemed to be the field of education where it was possible to intervene, as a 'third party,' into the process that took place between the viewer and the image.

My continued research on various relations between the viewer and the visual image eventually revealed that the 'visual literacy project,' as I conceived it, was an impossibility. Given the multifarious nature of visual representation and reception, any attempt to devise a pragmatic model of visual literacy would end up being either too vague to account for the whole phenomenon of visual representation (this was one of the most pretentious aims of the project) or too focused on such an isolated realm of imagery and reception that it would remain insignificant.

I still hold that a totally comprehensive theory of visual literacy could only be an imaginary project. However, my studies on the phenomenon of visual self-reflexivity made me realize that the concept was not at all irrelevant. The very basis on which visual self-reflexivity functioned was a distinct assumption, on the part of the visual product, regarding the degree and kind of the visual literacy with which the viewer was equipped. The self-reflexive visual image itself, as it were, fulfilled the function of the 'third party' which intervened between the viewer and the representation. Consequently, it was possible to find different definitions or formulations of what it meant to be visually literate by analyzing visual images that, in one way or another, referred to themselves; and these definitions were quite well drawn.

The aim of the following two sections is to structure a theory of visual literacy along with some of the relevant concepts and issues it is connected with. The first section presents a criticism of the available theories of visual literacy with an intent to lay the groundwork for a more 'consistent' model. The second section develops this model to the point where it can be problematized on a more profound level, which would justify my further inquiry into the topic of visual self-reflexivity. The concepts and terms introduced in this chapter will be picked up in various parts of the following chapters that delve into certain distinct manifestations of self-reflexivity in filmic narrative.

1.1. Visual Literacy and the Problem of Communication

Visual literacy has long been an unnamed notion, aside from its open declaration as a 'project' to be tackled within the field of visual studies. A rethinking of the visual theory, including such diverse

fields as film studies and Gestalt psychology, reveals the fact that the concept of visual literacy has always constituted a serious, yet unacknowledged, implication. Although the term itself is almost never brought up within the written material issuing from these fields, it is possible to conjure up a more or less clear sense of 'what it means to be visually literate' (and illiterate) that has constantly been generated by the texts. For instance, such an implied meaning can be observed in the following quote from David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film*:

> …the spectator simply has no concepts or terms for the textual elements and systems that shape responses. It is the job of the theory to construct them, the job of analysis to show them at work (48).

Bordwell's spectator is 'simply' denied the privilege of being visually literate, and that space of consciousness is reserved for the film theorist and analyst. In other words, Bordwell's scenario, in order to justify the distinct role of the 'expert,' requires the spectator to be cast as a visually illiterate character who is not aware of the 'reasons' for his/her responses to the images s/he sees.

The emergence of visual literacy as a project can be observed in the term's change of status from being a covert textual implication to an explicit reference in the form of a keyword or a book title. This relatively new endeavor seems to originate from two distinct areas of study: visual design and [media] education. The peculiarity of the project comes from its decisive intent of blurring the clear-cut boundary between the expert and the layman. The fundamental problem that seems to motivate the authors to advance the project of visual literacy is the supposed inadequacy (illiteracy) of the viewers in 'decoding' visual messages. This problem has also been translated into a problem of miscommunication between the producer (designer, director etc.) and the consumer

(viewer) of visual images. Hence, to eliminate the problem, the ordinary viewer should be granted some of the technical knowledge held by the expert which would, in turn, make him/her 'understand' what the expert is trying to say through the agency of the visual medium.

The writers from the area of visual design contribute to the visual literacy project by publishing instructive inventories of the 'rules' and 'formal aspects' of visual composition such as line, shape, color, balance, composition, etc. As the writers of this literature are mostly art and design instructors (Curtiss, Wong, Dondis, Wilde & Wilde), the manner in which they organize their writings loosely coincides with the structure of a 'Basic Design' course taught in the first year at art and design schools. However, being written in the midst of the increasing awareness regarding the 'dominance of visual language in everyday life' and the constantly felt necessity to educate the viewing public, the implied readers of these books are simply 'everybody.' To justify their belief in the necessity of teaching the rules of graphic composition to everyone and to avoid the image of a hard-core schoolbook, the authors usually appropriate a 'popular science' style of treating their subjects. This intention is most obvious in the manner they use two illustrations: a cross-section of the human eye and the diagram of the Shannon & Weaver communication model. These figures constitute two powerful icons that force two distinct notions upon the reader: the basic mechanism of visual perception which is a 'physical reality' not to be denied, and the phenomenon of communication, as is abstracted by the diagram, that governs our relationship with others.

Three conspicuous problems crop up out of the theoretical structure on which the designers' approach to visual literacy is built. Primarily, although the authors of this field advocate the

idea that visual literacy is a mode of perception to be acquired by everyone, the way they treat it in their books is biased on the domain of production (design). This is mostly evident in the sequence in which they break up and introduce the subject: dot, line, shape, form, color etc. Although being useful concepts in design education, these terms are abstract for a non-designer who constantly receives complicated visual signals from various sources. In other words, lines, shapes, and forms, unless saliently presented by a particular image, do not exist in the actuality as separable elements of the visual world. By putting forward these professional (technical) terms to be learned by ordinary people, the designers are actually reserving a higher place for themselves on the hierarchy of visual literacy. What they end up asserting is that one has to be either a visual artist or a designer to be considered visually literate in the most genuine way. The second problem with the design-oriented approach is its basis in a presumption regarding the existence of an immutable and ever-present 'language of vision,' the rules of which are formulated in the highly influential treatises written by the Gestalt psychologist/art historian Rudolf Arnheim (1954; 1969). Such a solid dependence on Gestalt limits the designers' analyses to purely formal aspects of imagery leading to an oversight of the ways in which images may incorporate ideological or cultural constructs. Consequently, they focus mostly on the 'value of aesthetic appreciation' by presenting the compositional patterns of successful products of art and design, explaining the formal reasons for their being effective. Although sensitivity toward formal aspects of visual imagery can be put forward as an important criterion for being visually literate, it definitely can not be the only parameter. Thirdly, and in many ways the most important problem about the design-oriented approach is that its view on the 'effects' generated by visual images is restricted to a

simple notion of 'understanding.' That is, the advocates of this approach seem to support the idea that the only way to endow the ordinary viewer with an artistic sensitivity is to make sure that s/he 'understands' why a visual piece is so effective. This problematic notion of 'understanding' frequently comes up in many other domains of the visual literacy project as well.

At this point, I can speculate that the way visual designers theorize visual literacy is conditioned by their desire 'to be understood.' They must be concerned about the fact that what they accomplish, as the professionals of a 'communicative medium,' is 'not understood' by the ordinary people who are not knowledgeable enough to appreciate the benefits of a 'good' design.

The other field in which a great amount of writing has been produced on visual literacy is media education. The media teachers' project of visual literacy commenced about a decade after the designers had declared theirs. Educators took up the basic concepts introduced by the designers and positioned them within their own model of visual literacy, which turned the whole project into a more interesting one (media literacy), for the concepts got attached to the issues regarding the contemporary media (TV, film) - a territory where there is much debate.

In the field of education, the interest in visual literacy emerged due to an augmenting concern of the experts: the necessity of adapting the 'verbally oriented' primary and secondary school curricula to the contemporary visual technologies. What children learned and dealt with in their classes had become increasingly detached from their daily life dominated by television and computers, and this motivated the experts to diagnose "hyperturbulence," that is, "the condition results when available resources and institutions prove inadequate to deal with the speed and diversity of change" (Bristor & Drake 74). A new and 'more

effective' language was gaining power outside the borders of school and it was of utmost importance for the educators to incorporate this language into the curricula and teach their students how to be as 'literate' in it as they were with the verbal one.

One of the primary attempts was to integrate graphic imagery into teaching, one instance of which was the project known as VLM (visual learning materials) related to the use of visual images in math instruction (Bristor & Drake 77). Along with other similar applications for other courses, it was concluded that using visual imagery improved students' ability to understand the subject matter, and the teachers were given the serious responsibility for deciding on the 'most suitable and effective visuals' relevant to the subjects being taught (Moore & Dwyer 235-55). A greater percentage of the studies on the significance of visual literacy in education has been dedicated to TV and video, probably because these media are considered to cover a broader area of children's visual environment as compared to still images. The applications concerning the incorporation of the moving image into education range from motivating the students to write commentaries on short films (Buckle & Kelley) to teaching them the basics of camera work and editing (Stafford).

The problems and inconsistencies haunting the visual literacy project become more blatant in the educational approach. Educational experts seem to apply the notion 'literacy,' that is, the ability to read and write, to the domain of visual imagery in the most literal sense of the term. That is, if a literate person is someone who 'understands' what is written on a piece of paper, then a visually literate person would similarly be able to 'understand' what is drawn, painted, photographed, or filmed. The ambiguous use of the verb 'to understand,' which appears in many parts of the whole visual literacy discourse, is apparently more common among media

educators. A bunch of related expressions such as "improving the viewing skills," "extracting the meaning from images," or "recognizing the symbolism" etc. point to an instrumental conception of visuality as a 'linguistic tool to convey meaning'.

Regarding visual media as a distinct language with its own semantic and syntactical rules, the educational expert determines one of his/her duties as assisting the young students in their initiation to this language rather than letting them be 'exposed' to it in the disorganized environment of daily life (Strictland). A seemingly more important duty, however, is to render this powerful language subservient to 'controlled' transmissions of meaning to be understood by the receivers. Actually, in their attempts at taming both the viewers and the tools of the visual media, educators mostly display their intention to institutionalize this "effective means of communication" as an equally effective teaching instrument.

Despite its lack of an operational specificity that would definitely require a clearer definition, even a dictionary, of the so-called visual language, the visual literacy project is replete with premises, attitudes, and attempts. Moore and Dwyer aptly describe visual literacy as "a concept that captured the imagination of a movement" (102). It has coalesced as an endeavor, from a variety of visual disciplines, to 'retaliate' against the increasing dominance of visual media on everyday life. Along with its advancement as a project, visual literacy has also been taken up by various theorists in supporting their discourses on media. Some of its basic concepts and terms have frequently been brought up in many different contexts which, in a sense, endow the inherently ill-defined project with the appearance of an established discipline. Especially in the discourses produced within the context of 'media and violence,' the notion of visual literacy takes on a considerable

significance. Ron Burnett quotes the following description of an incident reported in *The New York Times* (February 6, 1994):

> On Martin Luther King day...69 students from Castlemont High School in Oakland, California, most of them Black and Latino, went on a field trip to see *Schindler's List*. An hour into the movie, a small but loud group of students laughed and joked during a scene in which a Nazi shoots a Jewish woman in the head. When others in the audience stormed out to complain, the theater's management stopped the film and ejected all the students. Then someone called the press, throwing the story onto the front page and the community into an uproar... (qtd. in Burnett 174).

This incident is quite significant in that it brings up two things to be pondered in the context of this thesis: the various possible reasons for the students' response, and the way in which this response was interpreted in relation to the concept of visual literacy. The former issue will be dealt with in the following chapters whereas the latter proves more important at this point to ascertain the central problem in the visual literacy discourse. Sissela Bok attributes the "inappropriate" behavior of the youngsters to their visual illiteracy. For her, the students simply did not understand what the film was about and confused it with 'entertainment violence':

> Works, such as Spielberg's *Schindler's List* show instances of extreme cruelty that are necessary to convey the horror and inhumanity of the work's subject, and are thus not gratuitous in their own right; yet that film also explores how gratuitous violence is inflicted, even enjoyed, by its perpetrators. The film *is about* gratuitous violence, then, without in any sense exploiting it or representing an instance of it; and it is emphatically *not meant* as entertainment violence [emphasis added] (143).

Although fiercely claiming that *Schindler's List* was not 'meant' to be received with laughter, Bok does not delve into the formal aspects of the film that she thinks avoid that effect. She simply celebrates Spielberg for his mastery in conveying his intended

meaning via the filmic medium, which is clearly perceived by Bok -a visually literate individual- whereas the students' visual illiteracy created a disruption in the otherwise ideal communication between the director and themselves. Bok consoles her reader by referring to the "media literacy movement" that began in Australia in 1980s as an important phase in the ongoing enterprise of rendering young viewers not only visually literate but also "self-reliant, more informed, and correspondingly less fearful and passive, when it comes to their use of media" (141).

At this point, I can identify the primary flaw of the visual literacy discourse as its direct application of the classic communication model (sender-signal-receiver) to the functioning of visual images. I term this presumption as 'communication fallacy' - the contention that 'visual language' is a well-structured medium through which a sender can transmit thoughts/concepts/meanings to a receiver. Accordingly, the sender 'encodes' his/her intended meanings in the form of a visual message and the receiver 'understands' this message by 'decoding' it into a mental scheme. Once we accept the notion that there are universal meanings waiting to be encoded and decoded then we have to agree that there is a 'standard of correctness' (or effectiveness) regarding the way the meanings are structured into visual images. In that case, the receiver/viewer also has to 'know' these standards to be able to get the message. These premises justified the introduction of the term 'noise' into the communication theory. Anything that obstructs the transmission of meaning, e.g. the incapacity of the sender, unknowingness of the receiver, or any other outside intervention to the message, is considered to be noise. As regards the 'sender' part of this model, the concept of noise dictates that some writers/directors are less competent than others in conveying their intended meanings; and this incompetence/noise can be identified by

visually literate viewers, whereas all the others simply misunderstand the message.

For a sound elaboration of the relationship between visual imagery and its viewers, we primarily have to discard the idea of the communicational link between senders and receivers. To be able to ascertain that we are receiving a visual message correctly, or incorrectly thereof, we have to know the intentions of the sender, which is quite impossible. How can we possibly know what the director had really intended, for instance, by including a stray dog in the frame in a long shot of a busy street? Maybe s/he did it unconsciously, without any determined reason. Can we think that it is a noise contaminating the otherwise perfect framing of the street? We can generate innumerable speculations about the scene in *Schindler's List* where the Nazi officer executes the Jewish captive, however we cannot know Spielberg's exact directorial intentions that could have determined a multitude of aspects ranging from the mere choice of including that particular scene in the film to the way it was framed. Even asking the director himself, which is hardly ever possible, wouldn't completely solve the problem, since the visual image incorporates too many layers to be put into lucid verbal statements. Besides, what if he claims to have had no clear intentions at all? Can we, then, maintain that non-clarity of intention (or unintentionality) is also communicable?

In this context, I conclude that the creator of the film, which itself is a vague notion, is practically absent for the viewer; what remains for us in elaborating the act of watching a film (or TV program), then, is the message (film) and the receiver (viewer). Detaching the visual product from its creator and considering it as a visual entity with some sort of self-contained existence invalidates the concept of miscommunication. Since, any possibility of setting a standard of 'correctness' or 'sufficiency'

disappears, and every single visible thing perceived on the visual product demands to be considered 'functional' possessing a well-determined intention on its own.

Roland Barthes, in a similar vein, writes on the absence of 'noise' in the reception of art. Accordingly:

> …in the realm of discourse what is noted is by definition notable. Even were a detail to appear irretrievably insignificant, resistant to all functionality, it would nonetheless end up with precisely the meaning of absurdity or uselessness: everything has a meaning or nothing has... one could say that art is without noise: art is a system which is pure, no unit ever goes wasted (1977, 89-90).

Barthes' rejection of noise can be considered as a strong argument against the treatment of visual media in terms of the communication model. Since we do not have access to the real intentions of the 'sender,' which may well be unclear or possibly nonexistent as mentioned above, we are not equipped with tools to judge whether some kind of 'noise' is obstructing the way through which the meaning is channeled. Therefore, regardless of what the images in a film make us think or feel, we, as viewers, have no other choice but to consider every single visible element on the screen as intentional - meant to be there.

1.2. Image as Myth and the Process of Representation

Detaching the message from the sender and endowing it with an intentionality immediately begs the question: if the visual image is made up of clearly manifested intentions, whose intentions are they? Having discarded the sender (director/writer/designer) from the discussion, we are left with the other two components of the communication model, that is, the message and the receiver. The decisive answer to the question of visual intentionality

incorporates both of these components in an integrated fashion. However, for the time being, I will detach the receiver as well from the model to focus solely on the message. This will drive the analysis into a rather 'hygienic' domain and enable me to formulate the terms for a theory of visual intentionality and a possible model of visual literacy. Later on in this section, the receiver will be reattached to this model with an intent to resituate the whole discussion in its proper context: 'the act of watching films.' This, in consequence, will set up the premises and the motivation for an inquiry into the issue of visual self-reflexivity.

When isolated from its actual context for the purposes of abstract scrutiny, the visual image embraces the responsibility for all the intentions it manifests. Then, the intentions that subsist on the visual image come to belong to the 'image itself' which, in its turn, starts functioning as a symptom/myth of concepts, attitudes, and ideologies. Treating the concept of 'intention' as a genuine aspect of imagery calls forth the necessity to figure out some concrete acts by which various intentions can possibly be embodied in visual images. The first step would be to break up the absolute continuity of the image: The visual image manifests its intentions by gathering a number of 'distinct visual entities' on its surface while manipulating their relative significance. I borrow the term 'participant' from Kress and Leeuwen to name these entities (45). Simply defined, a participant is a 'meaningful totality' that has a determined motive to exist on the visual image. This definition evokes Barthes' notion of 'lexia,' which he introduces in his textual analyses of narratives: "…the lexia will include sometimes a few words, sometimes several sentences… it will suffice that the lexia be the best possible space in which we can *observe meanings*" [emphasis added] (1974, 13). In alignment with Barthes' definition of the lexia, it is crucial not to confuse the term

'participant' with the categories of aesthetic formalism. Participants are meaningful entities that crop up, even materialize, over the visual image as opposed to some abstract notions that require analyses to reveal themselves. In other words, a participant emerges into visibility by virtue of its immediate meaningfulness. Here, the usefulness of the word 'participant' becomes apparent. Primarily, it evokes the presence of a target aim, a second order meaning, toward which the image as a whole animates its components 'to participate' in achieving. In this sense, the idea that the image bears an 'active intentionality' is emphasized, which opens up the conceptual space where the viewer can later be situated as the other active participant with his/her own intentions. Furthermore, 'participant,' for its non-specific and inclusive, even ambiguous, tone, helps in avoiding the various form-based connotations that overwhelm the terms such as 'element,' 'unit,' or 'figure.'

Participants function at the level of connotation (implied meaning) as opposed to denotation (literal meaning). The most appropriate guide in ascribing an operational definition to the participant is Barthes' influential essay "Myth Today" where he sorts out the ways in which visual images embody mythical intentions by structuring connoted values (1993). In this essay, Barthes examines a photograph he saw in a copy of *Paris-Match* magazine: "a young Negro in a French soldier uniform saluting the French flag" (116). If we consider photography as a sign system that uses shapes and colors, the literal reference of the image is quite clear: the words used to describe the photograph in the previous sentence. However, Barthes points to the presence of a second order (connoted/mythical) meaning to which the literal meaning of this image, as a whole, stands for: "a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness" (116). Semiotics proposes the relation of a signifier and signified to be the basis of a sign in its denotative

function. Accordingly, a signifier (the shapes and colors distributed on the photographic surface) denotes/refers to a determined signified (a-Negro-soldier-saluting-the-French-flag, as a consistent spatial structure) as a function of its firm acceptance to stand for 'things.' What the signifier denotes is also known as the literal meaning. The correlation of the signifier and signified, as a practically inseparable duality, constitutes the sign as a whole, and this alliance is the outcome of an arbitrary decision, which means there is no intrinsic/natural relationship between what exists on the photographic surface and what it refers to. Concerning the present example, it is then possible that a totally different organization of visible entities on the paper would come to mean a-Negro-soldier-saluting-the-French-flag.

What Barthes calls 'myth' is the outcome of a second order signification in which the denotative sign as a whole becomes the signifier of a new and more complicated signified. In this context Barthes refers to Hjelmslev's linguistic model of 'connotation' and devises new terms for the elements of this secondary system. Accordingly, the first order sign as a whole becomes the mythical 'form' which, in its turn, refers to the mythical 'concept.' Turning back to the example, the literal meaning of the photograph (a fragment of physical environment in which a black soldier dressed in French uniforms stands beside the French flag while giving it the salute) becomes a 'form' through which the mythical concept (French imperialism) is manifested. Although the functioning of the first order signifier -the shapes and colors of the image- depends on its arbitrary relation with its signified, the mythical signifier (form) is never arbitrary; it is always partially motivated and unavoidably contains analogies. Every kind of visual object, in principle, can refer to a black soldier standing beside a flag, but not every kind of image can stand for a determinate concept such as French

imperialism. The image has to bring together a group of 'already meaningful' elements and arrange their visual relations in specific ways to materialize such an intention. The placements of the images of the black soldier and the flag as they graphically relate to each other, the manner in which the soldier gives the salute, or the way the scenery is framed, all consciously contribute to the embodiment of an ideological concept. In other words, not the colors and shapes but the meaningful images of the soldier and the French flag are the principal participants of this photograph, and it is the specific ways in which the image manipulates the relation of these two participants that evokes the ideological concept in question.

Barthes refers to the realm where the concepts (e.g. imperialism) reside as the 'metalanguage.' The intentionality manifested in the ways participants come together is always linked to a concept; in other words, the concept *is* the intention that animates and structures the order of the visual participants. It is also important to point out that the sign directory of the first order language (literal signification) is immensely larger than that of the metalanguage. There can be millions of various participant combinations that can connote a specific concept; we can find plenty of other photographs than the 'black soldier saluting the French flag' that refer to French imperialism.

The concept of intentionality has a strong implication of authorship, that is, the presence of some human consciousness operating behind the construction of visual imagery. Since we have discarded the sender from the discussion, there remains the necessity to supplement our theoretical model with a notion of authorship that would make sense. Seymour Chatman's definition of the author proves relevant here; for Chatman, the author is a structural principle for the manifestation of which even the real writer/director functions as an agent (149). Sense of authorship

emerges as an effect of discourse which should clearly be distinguished from the person who actually produces the image. In this sense, the author of the visual image, the bearer of the intentions, is 'the specific manner' in which the visual participants are structured into concepts, attitudes, ideologies etc., whereas the end product acquires the role of a symptom. Chatman suggests the term 'implied author' for the structural entity which 'intends':

> …the implied author can *tell* us nothing. He, or better, *it* has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all means it has chosen to let us learn. We can grasp the notion of implied authors most clearly comparing different narratives written by the same author but presupposing different implied authors (148).

The notions of intentionality, participant, and authorship, they way they are theorized thus far, could be very helpful in constructing a theory, or even a project, of visual literacy. The primary reason is that the intention of the implied author, as it turns out, is something literally existent on the image as opposed to the obscure intentions of the 'real' creator; therefore, it must be possible to propose methods for figuring out the intentions manifested in, say, a filmic narrative without falling into any speculative (thus useless) accounts of what its real writer/director might have intended.

Barthes' analysis of the image in *Paris-Match* seems so consistent and his method works so conveniently that it makes the idea of reconfiguring a theory and a practice of visual literacy quite appealing. If the intentionality, a distinctly ideological one in Barthes' example, is manifested in the way participants relate to each other, then the initial premise for being visually literate would be the *awareness* regarding the fact that there *are* intentions on the visual image and some visible participants are responsible

for the embodiment of those intentions. The media theorist Paul Messaris, pursuing his own visual literacy project, similarly argues that the "awareness of intentionality and artifice" renders a person "resistant to ideological manipulation and insensate acceptance" (9).

At this point, the basic premise of the 'new' visual literacy project, formulated as "awareness of intentionality", sounds quite plausible, generating the incentive to move on to the next level, which would be the attempt to figure out a solid method for extracting the participants from visual images. In the following four paragraphs, I would like to hint at the possible venues to be pursued within the context of devising an inclusive model of observing participants. However, I will not delve too deeply into it, because it is this very attempt that causes visual literacy to disintegrate as a project, opening up a new space for improving it as a concept to be handled differently.

The basic definition of the participant, a meaningful totality that has a determined motive to exist on the visual image, connects itself to various theoretical models contrived to 'break up' the absolute continuity of narratives. Barthes, again, deserves the primary reference here for his concept 'lexia,' which he used in two major works to demonstrate the fact that classic-realist narratives utilize five basic codes in structuring themselves in a piecemeal fashion (1974; 1981). His method of re-reading texts through the scheme of the five codes of psycho-realism can easily be applied to the film narrative in figuring out the ways in which intentions are embodied as separate meaningful totalities.

Also, David Bordwell's theory of film narration can be useful in this context if we decide to endow the viewer with some of the consciousness he exclusively assigns to the theorist. In his attempts at sorting out the basic elements that make up the filmic

narrative, Bordwell recourses to a term couple suggested by the Russian formalists: *fabula* and *syuzhet*. Accordingly, fabula is the cognitive outcome of what the film evokes in its specific arrangement of textual elements; what it makes the viewer think / infer / imagine. The creation of fabula, as a consistent cognitive pattern, is accomplished by the viewer who picks up filmic cues, applies available mental schemes, and tests his/her hypotheses in relation to the upcoming narrative information, without, however, being aware of this mental activity. Bordwell also stresses that fabula is definitely not a whimsical or an arbitrary construct; it is based on the assumed intersubjective congruity of the viewers who would 'understand' more or less similar things from a film (49). In other words, the way the film structures its participants is based on the presence of what Chatman terms an 'implied reader' the cognitive scheme of whom/which is accepted to remain identical among viewers belonging to a similar historical and cultural domain (151). This is an encouraging presumption regarding the visual literacy project in that it imposes a certain 'coherence' upon the viewers which could be discernible in the similarity of 'reactions' within a particular audience group. Bordwell's other term, syuzhet, is the 'conscious' system which provides the necessary elements required for the viewer to construct the fabula. Whereas the fabula is never present on any material aspect of the motion picture, syuzhet is the assemblage of what literally occurs on the screen. For instance, two consecutive shots of a man and a woman looking directly into the camera might motivate the inference/fabula that they are looking at each other, whereas, what the film literally does is nothing more than presenting two human faces in a succession separated by a cut.

Following the progression of the above-described attempts to break down the continuity of the filmic narrative, I can start pointing at some concrete participants, the awareness of which could

render a viewer 'visually literate.' Going back to the end of the previous paragraph, I can argue that at its most technical level, a film is already composed of concrete fragments/participants that interact with each other. In this context, 'the shot', which Stephen Heath refers to as 'the minimum segment,' is one of the most basic participants of filmic narration (114). Simply defined, a shot is the 'continuous' event which the camera records in between two cuts, and it emerges as a 'meaningful totality' along the distributional axis of the narrative. Having defined visual literacy as 'the awareness that there *are* participants in films and these participants always manifest intentions,' the shot can be situated within the visual literacy project as an item of education - something which the viewers should be (made) aware of.

Paul Messaris presents a lucid illustration of how seeing shots as participants could contribute to the visual literacy of the viewer in terms of his/her resistance against the ideological apparatus. Messaris refers to the illusion of spatio-temporal coherence in film narrative as 'false continuity' which, he believes, is a powerful tool for visual manipulation, especially in the non-fictional case of TV reporting (35). He writes about one of the televised presidential debates of 1976 in which a series of reaction shots of an opponent was inserted into various parts of the video-recording on which the presidential candidate declared his remarks. It was then found out that the reaction shots of the opponent did not show his 'actual' reactions to what the candidate was saying, but they were taken from another tape on which his act of listening was shot separately. The editor's specific choice of the reaction shots made the finished videotape give the 'false' impression that the opponent was overreacting to what he was hearing, and this seriously changed the public opinion concerning the debate. It can be argued that such a result was mainly due to

the audience's 'unawareness' of the fact that each separate shot is a 'participant' intentionally placed in a specific part of the program. Here, it should be noted that even if the editor had inserted the 'correct' reactions of the opponent, this would still not solve the problem, for two interrelated reasons: because it already has to use separate shots to build up a coherence, a film is essentially discontinuous, in other words, the moving image has to tell lies first even in the service of telling the truth; besides, the viewer does not have any cognitive tools to judge whether a shot is genuine in terms of its relation to the temporality of the real event. In this situation, the proper mind-set of the viewer should rather make him think that shots are participants and they function in evoking meanings; whether they are 'correct' or not is not an issue in this context.

Whereas the validity of visual literacy as an educational endeavor could, in a way, be defended by referring to incidents such as the one described above, other incidents like 'the *Schindler's List* event,' which was mentioned in the previous section, causes the whole project to flounder on a more profound level. Which visual/narrative participants do the students have to be aware of in order not to laugh at the film? What are the participants that make the theorist decide that *Schindler's List* depicts gratuitous violence with the clear intention of displaying how 'bad' violence could be? Actually, these questions can be answered similar to the way Barthes elaborates on the concept of French imperialism as manifested in his treatment of the *Paris-Match* photograph. At this point, having established a relatively consistent terminology for visual literacy, Barthes' analysis needs to be reconsidered; however, this time, by reattaching the viewer (receiver) to the discourse.

The main reason for the consistency of Barthes' analysis is that his identity as a 'visually literate viewer' is meticulously defined. Barthes is particularly known for his antagonism before the illusory transparency of the sign, and his works mostly exemplify his continual endeavor to lay bare the mechanisms by which signs manifest ideologies (Young 133). His reference to the *Paris-Match* magazine, his choice of that particular photograph, and his decision to pick those two major participants (the soldier and the flag) are motivated by *his intentions*. The intentionality of the photograph emerges as a function of Barthes' own distinct intentionality informed by his position as a linguist and iconologist. An attempt to aggrandize Barthes' perspective, governed by his intentions, to an overarching theory of visual literacy runs the risk of overlooking other possible intentionalities exercised by other subjects. For this reason, Messaris' stated objective of making viewers aware of shots as participants, though meaningful in a limited context, may as well be irrelevant for the viewers who engage with the prime-time news in a totally different way, with different intentions. In this sense, while meant to give people the freedom to resist to ideological manipulation, visual literacy can itself turn into a major ideological project at the point where it starts pushing the viewers to change their intentions and prefer some participants over others.

The viewer, then, has to be considered as another participant within the event where the image is 'made to manifest an intentionality' by foregrounding various visual participants. Stuart Hall, in his early seminal essay "Encoding/Decoding," had elaborated on the possibility of 'deviant readings' exercised by different viewer groups of the televisual media. He introduced three basic viewing positions. Accordingly, the 'dominant hegemonic position' defines a viewer operating definitely inside the dominant code

through which any 'misunderstanding and distortion' of the messages is not possible. On the other hand, in the 'negotiated position,' while understanding the dominantly defined message, the viewer at the same time questions and opposes the main transmitted idea. In this mode the viewer is, in a sense, a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements. Finally it is possible for a viewer to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but decode the message in a contrary way. The viewer of this kind, who can be said to reside in the 'oppositional position,' never reads the encoded message in its intended mode. Whereas Hall's first two viewing positions, seemingly haunted by the communication fallacy, can be said to provide motivation for the visual literacy project fraught with the 'benevolent' intentions of rendering the public conscious of 'what the TV is doing to them,' the last position (oppositional reading) can arguably be related with my discussion on 'what the public does with the TV.'

Present debates going on in the 'reception' stream of media studies tend to dwell more on the difference among various reading strategies forged by the intentionalities that shape viewership. Bruner and Gorfain, in their article named "Dialogic Narration and the Paradoxes of Masada," elaborate on the process through which the mythical Jewish story of the Masada castle has been reshaped into different narratives by different peoples (57-79). They argue that what is at stake is not the deviant readings of a nucleus-story but a dialogic process that gives birth to many historically-situated particular narratives. Each narrative has been created by a public with particular wills and purposes that determine the intentions they perceive. In this sense, there exists as many literacies as there are publics nurtured by specific socio-historical structures; therefore, it is also not unsound to imagine a hierarchical

structure within a particular audience group regarding the degrees of literacy that individuals possess.

One of the most recent works that focus exclusively on the ways in which audiences determine their own participants is Janet Staiger's book *Perverse Spectators*. In the chapter "The Perversity of Spectators," she criticizes what she terms the 'normative approach' to media/film reception. I consider Staiger's critique of the normative approach, which she structures under seven distinct headings, as the consummate argument against the visual theory built on various totalizing presumptions. She has so widened the scope of her criticism that it addresses all the crucial flaws to be associated with normativism in media studies. Accordingly, the normative description 1) has been created by a specific group of people; 2) is built on a small set of types of narratives; 3) is specific to the period of its development; 4) does not take into account a variety of viewers 5) does not take into account the alibi [which refers to the fact that films are often supposedly about one thing when in fact they are easily read as another]; 6) functions from a very limited set of reasons why spectators might watch a film; and 7) assumes that spectators are knowledgeable and cooperative (39). Staiger's arguments and accounts on viewership will be brought up in finer detail in the following sections of this thesis.

To sum up, the concept of visual literacy, while providing an effective tool for elaborating on the relationship between the viewers and visual media, cannot be conceived as an educational project. The fundamental problem of the theory, cited as the normative approach in the previous paragraph, is its conception of visual representation as an 'object'; and it has been this very conception that spawned various models for 'teaching' visuality to

the visually illiterate. Various criticisms pitted against normativism in this chapter brings us W. J. T: Mitchell's suggestion that we conceive of visual representation "not in terms of a particular kind of object [e.g. a film] but as a kind of *activity*, *process*, *set of relationships*" in which both the visual product and the viewer 'participate' in the creation of meaning [emphasis added] (420). The following chapters of this study will adopt this perspective while delving into self-reflexivity via the guidance of 'visual literacy' as an instrumental notion.

2. FICTION, METAFICTION, AND REALITY

The previous chapter has brought the discussion to the point where the normative approach to analyzing visual images gives rise to the type of text which, more that anything else, serves as a site of exhibition where the analyst/theorist demonstrates his/her distinct visual literacy in relation to the images s/he chooses to work on. Actually, this cannot be addressed as 'the problem' in visual theory once we accede that every viewer has his/her own way of participating in the process whereby the image, inevitably, takes on site-specific intentions. After all, production of a theory, whether normative or otherwise, is what those theorists *do* about the images they encounter. Hence, the theory criticized in the previous section *is* valid in the sense that it grants us the passage through which we can observe the ways some other viewers have observed visual images. The problem is more about the fact that those observations have been presented as absolute truths regarding the ways in which visual images function while the participants attached to the observations receive the status of 'the formal features' of visuality.

There have been a number of different attempts at breaching the overwhelming appeal of normativism that haunts the production of visual theory. One extreme is the theorist's decision to foreground him/herself as 'the viewer' and carry on with the analysis driven by the awareness that every single participant s/he mentions is a product of his/her own intentionality. The most interesting instance of this mode of writing came from Roland Barthes. After spending his whole life sorting out the participants by which images and texts

force the dominant ideology upon people, he ended up writing *Camera Lucida*, where he reflects on the process of representation that takes place between a group of photographs and himself. The two participants he introduces, *studium* and *punctum* are the products of his unique perspective and cannot be rendered functional even within the processes by which other people encounter the very same photographs. A similar manner of writing can be observed in Ron Burnett's chapter entitled "Projection" where he sporadically indulges in 'speculations' on a particular film, to demonstrate the unavoidable presence of his own intentionality. For instance, at one point throughout his analysis of the film *Germany, Pale Mother* (Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1980), he starts describing what had happened on the set during the shooting of one particular scene; later, he admits that he 'imagined and fictionalized' the whole event (155). For him, what the film cannot do is "demonstrate through its structure how [he] experienced its narrative development" (154). Hence, there is no other alternative than 'projecting oneself' toward the visual imagery.

Many other theorists who are unwilling to rule out the possibility of 'reception studies' tend to formulate a composite theory that incorporates in varying degrees their own intentionalities as viewers, specific incidents that point to different activities of participation (e.g. the *Schindler's List* incident), and other texts written on the films they discuss. They utilize this compound theory to figure out various ways to 'observe observers' in their encounters with film narratives.

While utilizing a similar composite theoretical model in his analyses of visual media, W. J. T. Mitchell deflects from this stream in that he also points to a certain type of imagery he thinks is worth examining without necessarily taking great pains to imagine its viewers separately because he believes that the type in question

already does that by itself. The following section is reserved for a brief elaboration of Mitchell's arguments, which will be further developed and specified later to provide a basis for the choice of narratives to be treated in this study.

2.1. Hypericons and Metapictures

Mitchell has developed his most prominent discourse on visuality in his *Picture Theory* and *Iconology*. He refutes the purely textual normative approach to imagery primarily by claiming that the contemporary visual media points to the necessity of a model that incorporates both the image and the viewer in its scope. Addressing, in a sense, Staiger's third stated problem (that the available visual theories are specific to the period of its development), he goes on to argue that what we are experiencing right now is the "pictorial turn" which calls for the realization that

> ...*spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or "visual literacy" might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality. (1994, 16).

In his attempts to refrain from supplementing images with textual explanations and to regard the issue in terms of the ways images are received and circulated throughout history, Mitchell strives to align himself with the discipline known as 'iconology.' Based mostly on the theoretical structure devised by Erwin Panofsky, Mitchell conflates the image-text dualism by suggesting that we consider images 'as ideas' themselves. The next step is to observe the ways in which these images/ideas survive the visual history. For his assigning the iconologist a seemingly privileged position within the

discourse on visuality, Mitchell can be subjected to the similar criticisms directed toward the advocates of the normative model. Besides, his notion of picture-as-idea implies a regress toward the textual method he sets out to denounce. However, the visual icons he chooses as his objects of inquiry save Mitchell's theory from falling back into normativism and open up the space for a partially textual approach to visual images that might not necessarily be based on the total neglect of the viewer.

Mitchell sidesteps the above-mentioned problems by primarily abandoning the notion of a metalanguage or discourse that determines what images could 'mean,' which then leads him to explore the ways in which "pictures attempt to *represent themselves* - an 'iconography' in a sense rather different from the traditional one" [emphasis added] (1994, 24). His inquiry into such pictures motivates him to coin the term "hypericons," that is, visual representations that attempt to "depict the act of picturing, imagine the activity of imagination, figure the practice of figuration" (1986, 5-6). For Mitchell, hypericons are 'dialectical images' that have been brought up throughout the history whenever theorists/philosophers felt the necessity to reflect on the nature of representation. The most canonical examples would be Plato's cave, Aristotle's wax tablet, Locke's dark room, whereas Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit (the paradoxical drawing that embodies the representations of a duck and a rabbit at the same time) and Foucault's *Las Meninas* can be regarded as more recent instances of hypericons.

One 'risk' that threatens the dialogic nature of hypericons is their gradual transformation into reified signs that do not retain any connections with the processes by which they had come to life and had been viewed/utilized. Mitchell, identifying himself as a rather progressive 'iconologist,' takes on the responsibility to

'restore the dialogic power of hypericons' and to revive them as visual metaphors that inform their own discourses (1986, 159). He starts tackling this 'project' in his later work *Picture Theory* where he comes up with the new term "metapicture," accompanied with a clearer definition: "pictures that refer to themselves or to other pictures, pictures that are used to show what a picture is…" (35). In exemplifying this definition, Mitchell mostly alludes to pictures that in one way or the other refer to themselves in a 'paradoxical' fashion. One canonical example he brings up is Magritte's *This is not a pipe* - a painting that ponders, as it were, its own theory and problematic. He then goes on to analyze a bunch of newspaper cartoons that parody the conventions in which they were pictorially constructed. That is, pictures that deconstruct the representational codes of space, which end up saying two things at once: 'I am a fragment of space populated by solid objects' and 'I am nothing but a picture riddled with conventions of picturing.' I can also add to this list Maurits Escher's work on spatial dilemmas where part of the picture looks extremely 'realistic' while some other parts lay bare the fact that what we see there is simply a piece of paper scratched by a pen.

The list of metapictures can be extended to cover innumerable representations that somehow refer to themselves or to other representations from related genres. At this point, the term, which seems to command a great diversity of visual practices, needs clarification. At the most basic level, the composite word meta-picture denotes the picture's inclusion of the 'metalanguage' into its formal structure. In other words, rather than 'connoting' the concepts that give rise to its mythical forms, the picture chooses to 'denote' them by broaching the semiotic barrier that separates the first and the second order signification. This apparent transformation of metalanguage from being an imminent layer of

concepts to a representable substance has drawn the attention of theorists, motivating them to deal with the phenomenon separately. In many parts of the theory produced on elaborating metapictures, it is possible to discern the belief that these peculiar depictions, by explicitly embodying their connoted concepts, come up as visual phenomena in which the metalanguage disappears as we know it. Actually, this is the 'risk' that Mitchell talks about, namely, turning metapictures into reified idols. Before encountering this problem and searching for alternative solutions, I find it necessary to start elaborating the issue by taking in the premise as a possibility and to follow the path that runs through various useful definitions.

John Searle, writing on Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, suggests that metapictures elicit a visual regression evoked by the constantly recurring question "What is the picture a picture of?" However, he also maintains that this is definitely not a "vicious regress" which eventually stops at the 'picture itself' (258). In a similar vein, Barthes refers to self-mythification as the most powerful textual strategy that enables the text to abandon its status as an instance of mythical speech. He calls the product of this process as "artificial myth" which, in a sense, comes with its own meta-discursive commentary. He gives Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pecuchet* as an example:

> The rhetoric of *Bouvard and Pecuchet* becomes the form of the new system; the concept is here due to Flaubert himself, to Flaubert's gaze on the myth which Bouvard and Pecuchet had built for themselves... the signified becomes bouvard-and-pecuchet-ity... and the final signification the book itself" (1993, 136).

The text/image, by virtue of its fusing the first and the second order signification together, becomes a 'mythology'. In other words, it performs its own 'iconology' by 'looking at itself' from a

distance - recalling the term 'critical distance' which supposedly governs the relation between the image and the theorist/analyst.

The notion of critical distance being incorporated into the image evokes the sense that the metapicture manifests the co-presence of theory and practice. This is one trait of the metapicture that Mitchell deems extremely significant, for he believes that the power of the metapicture comes from its capability "to make visible the impossibility of separating theory from practice, to give theory a body and visible shape that it often wants to deny, to reveal theory as representation" (1994, 418). He distills his arguments into a single statement which he thinks epitomizes the whole issue: 'similar to how we theorize pictures, metapictures *picture theory*.'

But, which theory? This question opens up the space in which we can start talking about the usefulness of metapictures in elaborating on various notions of viewership. The theory through which the image looks at itself cannot be regarded as 'the theory' which has the capacity to extend over the whole issue of representation. To revisit the theoretical model I presented in section 1.2. (Image as Myth and the Process of Representation), the viewer's intentionality fragments the image into visual participants, and these participants reflect the viewer's intentions back onto him/herself. The metapicture, then, would go through nothing but the same process: it turns its gaze backwards to perceive itself via a distinct intentionality which motivates its act of reflecting on certain visual participants. Along the similar lines, Mitchell regards metapictures as "not merely epistemological models, but ethical, political, and aesthetic "assemblages" that allow us to observe observers (1994, 49). Our encounter with a metapicture draws us into the process whereby we 'look at one particular way of looking at an image.'

Can we then talk about the visual literacy of the visual image regarding its relationship with itself in the sense that it has the capacity to expose the ways in which participants embody intentions? Actually, this comes up as a possibility if we attach the viewer of the metapicture to this model as the 'third party.' Therefore, the condition for the metapicture to function as a metapicture depends on the particular alignment of the literacy of the image with that of the viewer. In other words, there must be a certain reciprocation between the intentionalities/literacies of the image and the viewer so that the image could be seen as 'reflecting on itself.' By creating some kind of 'detachable author' that hovers in between the image and the viewer, the metapicture, in a sense, tends to call back the communication model that I refuted in the first section of this thesis. The notion of 'misunderstanding the image' emerges as a faint possibility.

Hence, the exceptional usefulness of the metapicture in studying viewership becomes apparent. The metapicture, compared to many other pictorial modes, has a distinct consciousness regarding who its observers are. That is, its conditions of use/satisfaction are based on a well-defined set of presumptions regarding the literacy of the viewers to whom it addresses itself. This also implies that the metapicture strives to create a 'community' in which it can enact its dialogue with its own codes/conventions while articulating its viewers into that dialogue. Another aspect that renders the metapicture as an effective tool for studying viewership is that it is not simply a 'genre;' it should rather be seen as a phenomenon that emerges for various reasons at particular moments of visual history.

This last point brings us back to Mitchell's concern with the 'risk' at stake caused by the tendency of the iconologist to give in to the seeming transparency of the metapicture, that is, the

contention that metapictures announce the disappearance of metalanguage by incorporating it into their visible forms. If this were the case, then every single metapicture would mean the same thing regardless of the process within which it was received/used. A purely textual approach could certainly lead to such a dead end by forcing us to conclude that metapictures signify nothing other than themselves. Hence, what the iconologist has to be aware of is that the metapicture does not force metalanguage into nonexistence but simply shifts it to another level. This level, which transcends the purely textual aspects of the visual image, is the realm where various historically-specific practices of reception and circulation occur. The proper method for an iconology of metapictures should then supplement textual readings of the image with other surveys aimed at figuring out why/how the image was received by particular groups of viewers.

The following section narrows down the theoretical scope circumscribed by the concept pair hypericon-metapicture to self-reflexivity in fiction. Treating the concept of self-reflexivity from a number of perspectives will later provide me with a framework within which I can situate my objects of study -nineties' horror films- as texts that exist in a particular process of representation where a peculiar activity of viewership is practiced.

2.2. Self-reflexivity, Metafiction, and Parody

Having performed an elaborate treatment of the metapicture as a significant concept for the theory of representation in general, Mitchell brings up the subcategory 'metafilm.' He determines the genre known as "the backlot film" to be the cinematic surrogate for

the hypericon due to its distinct act of reflecting on the movie industry:

> The members of this genre are more or less self-conscious about the institutional history of the cinematic medium to which they belong; they carry a kind of institutional memory, a myth of the medium, a picture of the theory of the medium itself (1994, 100).

Mitchell refers to Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) as the backlot film (metafilm) *par excellence*. His analysis reveals how the film in question exhibits the various aspects of Hollywood's system of movie production with all its intricacies. At that point, however, Mitchell's theory goes out of focus. Having provided a convincing and coherent case for the general significance of the meta-phenomenon in visual representation, he delves into such particularities concerning the 'backlot' film that the possibility of discerning an overarching metafilm theory in his treatment seems remote. However, *Sunset Boulevard* fits into Mitchell's own specific agenda, and it is possible to observe the dialogue he establishes with the film considering the participants of self-mythification he extracts from it. A relatively consistent set of notions, which he does not articulate at length, guide him in pinpointing the term "backlot film" and sorting out the aspects that render it significant in relation to the broad phenomenon of hypericonicity.

This last point brings forth the necessity of establishing an agenda and a consistent theory in analyzing particular instances of the hypericon. Aiming at fulfilling that requirement, this section is reserved for an overview of the literature that can be attached to an iconological treatment of the nineties' horror film, which, for various reasons, falls under the broad category of the metafilm. The background theory that proves most relevant for my purposes has been produced under the inclusive title of self-reflexivity. This term is mostly made to refer to the phenomenon in general whereas

some other sub-terms such as 'self-reference,' 'metafiction,' and 'parody' are used to provide room for slight shifts in perspective and resiliency in applying the theory to different practices of representation. Given the extensive practice area and intricacy of the theory of self-reflexivity, I will track down the parts that have the potential to contribute to my task. This involves surveying the literature through a perspective which would foreground a number of concepts to be structured into a more practical model.

As mentioned in the previous section, self-reflexive representations that fall into the category of the hypericon emerge for specific reasons at particular moments of the visual history. The contemporary phenomenon of self-reflexivity, which comes out in various representational practices, has been picked up as a concept that characterized the epoch known as the postmodern. Linda Hutcheon refers to Lyotard in identifying the collective psychology that caused the profound change in the practices of representation: "The "postmodern" world, as Lyotard calls our postindustrial developed West, may well be suffering today from a lack of faith in systems requiring extrinsic validation" (1). Accordingly, the ever-growing mistrust toward the legitimacy of 'external' art criticism has provided the motivation for the contemporary artists to incorporate the pertinent critical commentaries within their work, which resulted in some sort of a short-circuit in the conventional critical dialogue between theory and practice. This taken as the basic explanation, the postmodern period is seen as dominated by an intense mode of 'recycling' of ideas, images, icons, etc. almost in an unending mirroring process, whereas 'postmodernity' has been rendered into an omnipotent concept that speaks through all the contemporary forms of representation. In many sources, the horror films of the nineties are as well categorized under the title of 'postmodern horror cinema,' which, though not being totally unsound,

tends to overlook the specificity of the process within which those films were received. Here, it is useful to remember Mitchell's stated risk once again: depriving the hypericon from its connections and turning it into a reified sign that stands for only one thing.

The most elaborate theory on self-reflexivity has been developed in the area of literature under the title of 'metafiction'. The recent (postmodern) tendency of the contemporary novel to reflect on its own narrative structure motivated a group of scholars to contrive a theory that treats the ways in which literary fiction incorporates self-reflexivity. The theory of literary metafiction confers a significant advantage for this study for two reasons. Firstly, the structure of the novelistic narrative displays so many similarities to the filmic narrative that it is often possible to elaborate the latter in terms of the former. Secondly, the authors of the literary theory tend to adhere to the rigor they inherited from the authoritarianism of the tradition they come from, which requires them to be quite clear in their definitions.

The operational specificity advocated by the literary theorists gives way to a neatly structured framework for metafiction which, when applied to the filmic narrative, narrows the number of specimens down to a manageable quantity. Accordingly, the most prominent characteristic of self-reflexivity in the novelistic narrative is the irrefutable presence of 'metacommentary' as a genuine property of the text. Metafiction comes forth as a function of the novel's embodiment of a 'dialogue' that takes place between two texts where the reader is attached to this dialogue as the third party. In this scenario, the constitutive agent of metafiction is the novel itself which initiates the process by clearly doubling its voice into primary and secondary texts. The reader's participation, then, creates the trilateral dialogue that characterizes the process through which the phenomenon of metafiction is experienced.

The literary theory, outlining the tripartite structure of the metafiction, is also quite explicit about what metafiction is *not*. Images/texts have recurrently been rendered self-conscious throughout history by being observed via certain intentionalities. Theorists in need of hypericons tended to attribute their own voices to images/texts and make them capable of speaking for themselves. One classic instance of this tendency can be seen in the discourses produced in relation to modernist art. The constant struggle of the artists to discover the 'pure visual forms' and to liberate art from its dependence on an 'external reality' inaugurated the modernist paradigm of 'art about art.' The modernist artworks have mostly been regarded as visual structures that reflect on themselves. In the field of storytelling and literature, Karl Kroeber imposes a similar intentionality on narratives in general. Observing the historical development of the narrative through the notions of 'retelling-rereading,' Kroeber maintains that fictional storytelling has always been self-reflexive in various ways (9). Perceived via the model of metafiction delineated by the contemporary literary theory, both Kroeber and the disciples of the modern art discourse are actually dealing with structures that are not necessarily self-reflexive.

At this point, a few references to a similar phenomenon in cinema studies would help in clarifying the pragmatic range of the metafiction theory utilized in this thesis. Certain moments of 'saturation' in film theory must have lead the scholars to determine cinematic hypericons which they claim to 'speak' the theory through filmic participants. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) seems to be one of the most popular pieces to have granted the status of a metafilm by being made to stand for the whole process of spectatorship in cinema. Seen from the viewpoint of literary self-reflexivity, this phenomenon is the outcome of the 'film theory' to incorporate the film into its framework rather than the film's own intention of

presenting a theory of cinematic representation by reflecting on itself.

Similarly, an extensive number of films have been seen as effecting a parodic double-voice by incorporating other films into their structures as 'primary texts.' John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) has quite a large share in this discourse regarding the ways in which it 'reworks' Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) (Williams 201). Another film seen in a similar connection with *Psycho* is Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) which, as frequently suggested, presents a parodic joke on all the narrative aspects of the former. Janet Staiger admits that she also perceived Hooper's film in the same way; however, she attributes this perception to her own intention of defining an identity for herself as a visually literate film scholar:

> ...obviously my personal invoking of the intertext of *Psycho* has been a means to defend myself from the sadomasochistic fantasies I am also constructing in viewing the text. By using the intertextual frame "Tobe Hooper has used Hitchcock's *Psycho* as an intertext for *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and I am smart enough to see this," I am constructing for myself the role of a listener of a joke I am attributing to Hooper. Thus, I become complicit with Hooper in the mechanisms of a tendentious joke, rather than the joke's victim - the "average" viewer of the movie (185).

Staiger's explanation can be seen as one instance among countless other intentionalities that impose metafictional participants on the text/image.

Metafictional readings of the above mentioned filmic texts are made possible by their dialogic potential - a trait which Bakhtin attributes to the novel:

> The way in which the word conceives its object is complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of its socio-verbal intelligibility. And an artistic representation, an "image" of the object, may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are

> interwoven in it; such an image need not stifle these forces, but on the contrary may activate and organize them (277)

In this sense, it is quite natural for the viewer to discern the recurrence of various participants that s/he had already seen in other texts. However, textual dialogism, which is the common trait of all fictional narratives, is not a sufficient condition for the tripartite metafictional dialogue. The theory of literary metafiction deals with narratives that are 'explicitly' metafictional, that is, narratives that foreground their act of treating a text (primary) through the structure of another (secondary) text while aligning themselves with the readers who would observe the dynamic relation between the two textual layers. In defining the theoretical boundaries of parody as a mode of discourse, Dan Harries also maintains that although a metafictional/parodic viewing strategy could be engendered by viewers who are 'literate' in particular narrative forms, genuine narrative metafiction operates within the fairly specific formal structures that textually exist (7).

Literary theorists provide various complementary definitions of self-reflexivity with an attempt to cover the concept from different perspectives. In this context, the terms 'metafiction,' 'parody,' and 'self-reflexivity' are mostly used interchangeably. Robert Scholes provides a rudimentary definition of narrative metafiction with respect to its primarily dual structure: "a tale within a tale" (2). He then suggests that these layers could well be multiplied [a tale within a tale within a tale…] provided each layer preserves its integrity and specific connection with the others. Linda Hutcheon uses the term 'parody' to cover all sorts of literary self-reflexivity and devises a more comprehensive description of the textual/readerly practice it refers to:

> Parody... in its ironic "trans-contextualization" and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work... The pleasure of parody's irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual "bouncing" between complicity and distance (32).

Having determined the very basic textual structure of metafiction, the next step comes up as the necessary attempt to pinpoint the significance of it as a phenomenon. Literary theorists converge on the explanation that metafiction as a narrative strategy is brought up whenever the available genre conventions and the discourses they generate are observed increasingly through a critical gaze. Metafictional narratives emerge as textual sites within which the conflicts engendered by this critical attitude are worked out. Bakhtin, in a similar vein, maintains that the parodic disposition in the novel functions as a device to distance the author from the literary language of his/her time. As an outcome of this critical distancing, "the novelistic discourse dominating a given epoch is itself turned into an object and itself becomes a means for refracting new authorial intentions" (309). Bakhtin's emphasis on the historical specificity of parody reminds us once again about the significance of observing the appearance and progress of metafictional narratives in perceiving the "tenor of the time" to which they belong (Gehring 3).

Mark Currie determines the lowest common denominator of all metafiction as "to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction" (43). Accordingly, these two processes are forced to stay together in a formal tension which blurs the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the notions of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction.' Patricia Waugh, along similar lines, defines the essential textual move of metafiction as "creation plus critique" (19). The 'creation' part of

this model is invariably associated with the notion of 'mimicry' which proves to be a pivotal term in the overall discourse on self-reflexivity. Waugh incorporates this term into her discussion with a quote from Kiremidjian:

> ... a kind of literary mimicry which retains the form and stylistic character of the primary work, but substitutes alien subject matter or content. The parodist proceeds by imitating as closely as possible the formal conventions of the work being parodied in matters of style, diction, metre, rhythm, vocabulary (qtd. in Waugh 68).

Mimicry can feed on a myriad of different aspects belonging to a representation, genre, or discourse. For instance, an Escher lithograph problematizes the allegedly 'natural' status of linear perspective by mimicking its codes with great dexterity only to reveal that it is just one of the innumerable modes of pictorially representing space. In a similar way, Mel Brook's *High Anxiety* (1977) takes great pains to duplicate as close as possible the most prominent scenes of Hitchcock films so that its act of situating them within a different (comedic) discourse could be perceived. Robert Stam also raises the issue of 'auto-criticism' in metafiction in relation to Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* (1980) - a film about a filmmaker who reluctantly attends a retrospective in his own honor, where he finds himself in the painful situation of listening to the ravings of his fans and the relentlessly censuring attitudes of his critics. Stam observes that the film "places in the mouth of various characters all the conceivable charges that might be leveled against Allen's *oeuvre* in general and against *Stardust Memories* in particular" (196). Allen's film, by employing the above-stated mode of metafiction, engages in a critical dialogue with the artistic discourse as it is manifested in social reality.

When Kiremidjian presents mimicry as the 'primary' textual mode of metafiction, he must be biased on the 'writerly' process

whereby the novel/script is constructed by the author. In the process of receiving the text, however, the sense of mimicry emerges as a function of the explicitly foregrounded 'doubling' of two textual layers. This doubling is what assists Allen's film to give away the sense that it is primarily 'mimicking its own style' then criticizing it by introducing a second discourse. In this context, Waugh remarks that the lack of 'explicit metacommentary can cause the process of recontextualization go unrecognized (36-7). In that case, mimicry becomes mere repetition. However, there are borderline cases where the viewers/critics insist on interpreting extreme mimicry as a metafictional strategy. The most interesting example of such a mode of reception was engendered by Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* (1997) where many people tended to see it as displaying a critical attitude toward the notions of war and fascism by its mimicking the participants of the movies which openly advocated them. A 'user comment' on the Internet Movie Database starkly illustrates the possible viewerly activity at stake:

> This is either a really good, surprisingly intelligent satire of sci-fi and war films in general (particularly the WWII era recruitment films that Hollywood cranked out like they were actually a part of the War Department) or an incredibly vapid film that should only be watched for its glitzy, flash-bang qualities. I choose to believe the former, otherwise I can't justify watching it as many times as I have, and I'm not nearly as smart as I think I am (Foss, 8 August 1998)

I tend to believe that *Starship Troopers* intentionally raises such an ambivalence that pushes the viewer to oscillate in-between a feeling of guilt for enjoying the film and a feeling of 'smartness' for being able to 'get the joke.' However, this statement can only be regarded as *my* contribution to the debates that converged around the film. Here, the significant point is that *Starship Troopers* does not include any explicit metacommentary which could render its narrative strategy as 'mimicry for critical purposes'. Hence, it

cannot be seen as metafictional in the sense the term is defined by the literary theorists.

Waugh gives the works of William Burroughs as texts that arguably challenge the codes of classic-realist narration, adding that they can not be regarded as metafictional either. She maintains that Burroughs' narratives create a deep confusion of planes or orders of reality without providing the reader with an 'other' discourse to align with (37). There are innumerable films that can be seen as utilizing a similar textual method in dismantling the codes of psycho-realism while being indifferent to any possible meta-level discourses that could be foregrounded within their structures.

One example that can be given for the genuinely metafictional film that discusses the reality of the filmic medium is Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1998). The two main characters of the film, in their conversations, occasionally bring up the subject of 'the reality of the filmic representation.' The meta status of their comments are blatantly exposed in certain metafictional moments where the film fragments into two distinct layers of discourse: one of the main characters frequently stares directly at the viewer winking and smirking to insinuate that s/he is an active accomplice in the dreadful torture he perpetrates upon the family that exists in the 'other narrative layer'; the same character also has the capability to rewind the film with a remote control whenever he does not like the way the events have unfolded.

The concept of 'literacy' is repeatedly brought up by the theorists of metafiction because they believe that there has to be a cultural alignment between the text/image and the reader/viewer for the self-reflexivity to function properly. Hutcheon illustrates narrative parody as a textual mode that activates the past by situating it within a new context, and she goes on to argue that

this mode makes similar demands upon the reader regarding his/her knowledge and recollection (5). Bakhtin describes the whole process of metafiction as a 'quarrel' between a text and a reader filtered by an imaginary author (the narrative layer that effects the parodic stance toward the primary text) who/which is always a 'biased' third party. The genuine reader of metafiction, accordingly, is the one who has acquired the literacy to sense this intentional bias:

> We puzzle out the author's emphases that overlie the subject of the story, while we puzzle out the story itself and the figure of the narrator as he is revealed in the process of telling his tale. If one fails to sense this second level, the intentions and accents of the author himself, then one has failed to understand the work (Bakhtin 314).

Margaret Rose pushes the whole argument of the literacy requirement even further to formulate a four-leveled scale of competence regarding the reader's engagement with the metafictional text (27). According to Rose's scale, the reader of the first category does not perceive that there are two separate texts that speak to each other; the second category covers the readers who perceive the double voice but not the parodic dialogue that takes place between the voices; the reader of the third category recognizes the intertextual bouncing between the two texts but feels that both the primary text and him/herself are 'attacked' by the parodic discourse; and finally, it is the readers of the fourth category who are able to articulate themselves to the metafictional narrative and enjoy its parodic dialogue.

While elaborating on the issue of literacy as a prerequisite for engaging with the metafiction, it is important to avoid the pitfall of tagging metafictional narratives as objects waiting to be decoded by the cultivated public. Rose's scheme, due to its abstractness and rigidity, displays an inclination toward such an understanding. This insinuation is also generated by the fact that

her four-leveled structure includes three positions for 'misunderstanding' and only one for the genuine readerly engagement. Here it is crucial to remember that in terms of its contribution to understanding metafiction as a phenomenon, visual literacy is an 'issue' rather than a 'virtue.' Based on a similar comprehension, Hutcheon refers to the emergence of metafiction as a reciprocal cultural advance performed by the readers and writers toward each other, rather than one as trying to reach the other (19). Then, Rose's first three generalized positions of readership that indicate 'failures' in perceiving the metafiction could be regarded as irrelevant for they simply refer to the moments where there is no process to be observed. It is, then, more important to study how particular instances of metafiction articulate their readers/viewers to themselves by activating various assumptions about their literacy.

Rose's third category of misunderstanding metafiction (parody mistaken for an insult) displays a link to some corresponding arguments generated on the 'nondestructive' stance of the parodic discourse. Literary theorists maintain that although metafiction infuses fiction with criticism, this criticism is not aimed at destroying the validity of the targeted text. Accordingly, the desire of the metafiction is to 'refunction' the worn out participants of the primary text to its own needs, rather than to prove that they are of no use anymore. Actually, an 'evil' discourse pointed at the primary text could possibly end up destroying the secondary one as well due to the close proximity between the two; as Hutcheon notes: "Parodic art both deviates from an aesthetic norm and includes that norm within itself as backgrounded material. Any real attack would be self-destructive" (44). Bakhtin also renders the parodic attitude as a discourse that shows 'respect' to the language which it parodies:

> [Parody] must re-create the parodied language as an authentic whole, giving it its due as a language possessing its own internal logic and one capable of revealing its own world inextricably bound up with the parodied language (Bakhtin 364).

It is possible to observe the benign aggressiveness of the metafiction in the scene from *Funny Games* where the main character rewinds the film with a remote control because he is utterly dissatisfied with the way the scene has unfolded. Although the character displays an intense irritation toward the structuration of the primary text which is a fairly well-constructed classic-realist narrative, the film arguably would not intend to channel that irritation to the audience. Such a direct transfer of a feeling of dissatisfaction to the viewer could understandably eliminate the pleasure of the film.

Hence, the historical emergence of metafiction, as outlined by the literary theory, does not (can not) inherently initiate a major political change. In line with this opinion, many theorists have clearly articulated the conceptual difference of metafiction from other modes of textual advances intended to effect changes in ideology, one of which is 'satire.' Metafiction displays a rather ambivalent gesture by incorporating both conservative and revolutionary forces in its structure without blatantly valorizing one over the other. Umberto Eco uses the term "authorized transgression" in reference to this ambivalent deed and believes that it serves the function of 'curing the accumulated stress' created by the 'law' without removing or changing the law itself. He views the issue within the context of comedy and carnival both of which, he thinks, even reinforces the power of the governing system by issuing artificial transgressions. For Eco, carnivals especially represent "paramount examples of law enforcement. They remind us of the existence of the rule" (6).

Although metafiction is incapable of originating a genuine change in the dominant ideologies, it can symptomize the shifts and transformations taking place within the ideological domain. The latter point, as repeatedly brought up in various parts of this thesis so far, grants metafiction its invaluable status of picturing the state of affairs pertinent to specific processes of representation. To provide a demonstration regarding the usefulness of metafictional texts in developing such insights, I would like to conclude this section by expanding upon Mark Currie's particular take on the issue, which will be instrumental in structuring the arguments to be presented in the upcoming chapters.

The *Funny Games* example shows that the movie audience of the late nineties can handle even the most exaggerated modes of self-reflexivity. We are ready to accept a fictional character who is able to manipulate the 'reality' of the actual film in which s/he exists as a two-dimensional moving image; this would be quite extraordinary for the audience of the forties or fifties. Currie, in this context, believes that the increasing awareness of 'meta' levels of discourses in fiction is a consequence of an increased social and cultural consciousness through which we come to realize the constructedness of the 'real world'. He defines metafiction as "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (40). Hence, in providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such films/texts not only problematize the basic structures of narrative fiction, they also provoke the idea that 'the world' could itself be fictional.

As Lacan taught us in his discussions of "the symbolic," our access to the world is mediated through language which operates within various meta-levels. We always need 'frames [of

intentionality]' to derive consistent meanings from what we see and hear; signs, symbols, and gestures start functioning as meaningful participants only if the receiver is able to imagine that s/he is sharing the same metalinguistic realm/frame with the sender. In this context, literary fiction and cinema, both of which operate on linguistic signs and metalinguistic concepts, become useful models for learning about the construction of reality through frames and fictions (Currie 41). Metafictional narratives help us in this learning process by presenting the moments of 'malfunction' where the participants of a genre/style/convention openly reveal their intentions by abandoning their transparency. In a similar vein, Waugh writes about the opposition of frame/frame-break as the basic metafictional strategy:

> The alternation of frame and frame-break (or the construction of an illusion through the imperceptibility of the frame and the shattering of illusion through the constant exposure of the frame) provides the essential deconstructive method of metafiction (31).

We can speculate that the increasing popularity of self-reflexivity in literature and cinema is the symptom of a new social consciousness by which we 'take one step backwards' to see the linguistic frames that render our utterances and behaviors understandable/communicable. This subject has been elaborated by theorists who argue that reality is a theatrical construct in which we occupy 'roles' rather than selves. Accordingly, everyone 'plays' his/her own game of reality as long as the other players as well seem to obey a certain set of rules that are at least partly consistent with the game being played. The concept of 'reality as a game of being' had already been treated by existentialists (Waugh 42); however, the recent developments in communication technologies (nicknames, virtual identities etc.) and the increasing popularity of FRP (Fantasy Role Play) games arguably stimulate the emergence of

the popular belief that we are participating in the game of life as players.

Different games require different strategies of playing/acting and therefore different identities. In this context, David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999) is the most appropriate metafictional film, a picture of the above-described theory as Mitchell would call it, in which we can observe all these concepts in action. *eXistenZ* tells the story of people who jack themselves into a virtual-reality game, the rules of which are uncannily similar to the ones we encounter in 'real' life. The players who eventually win eXistenZ are the ones who have been more successful in developing strategies, deciding on the most appropriate lines to say, and figuring out the best actions to perform. The film also implies the inherent similarity between film and game by having its characters/players constantly criticize *eXistenZ* (the film) in terms of characterization and plot development. The concepts 'reality', 'game', and 'film' merge into each other through *eXistenZ*'s playful narrative which foregrounds its participants in the process of creating and violating frames of signification.

3. THE RISE OF THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM AND THE CLASSIC 'STALKER'

Having structured a theoretical model for the basic mechanisms of metafiction in the preceding chapters, the rest of this study will delve into a specific process of representation to be viewed through this model. A particular phenomenon in the recent history of horror cinema will be taken as the 'event' which calls for the activation of the theory laid out so far. One of the sub-genres of the post-*Psycho* horror film, namely the 'stalker,' enjoyed an extreme popularity throughout the late seventies and early eighties; however, it did not survive the nineties and disappeared from the scene; then the second half of the nineties witnessed the 'return' of the genre via an intense mode of self-reflexivity.

The metafictional horror film of the nineties displays an unprecedented capability of performing its own iconology and articulating its viewers to the parodic dialogue it performs with the genre conventions. At the most basic level, to remember Mitchell's argument, it allows us to 'observe its observers' with clarity by developing well-defined presumptions regarding the literacy of the audience to whom it addresses itself. Besides, by effecting a stylistic alignment with its primary texts, in that it stays within the generic boundary of horror as opposed to comedy, and taking viewership as its significant issue, the metafictional horror, in a sense, (re)writes its own version of the history of 'watching horror films.'

The notion of rewriting history brings up Bakhtin's concept of 'bias' - the cultural/critical intentionality of the 'imaginary author' who/which looks upon the language s/he/it parodies. Likewise, the metafictional horror activates a specific intentionality in refunctioning/recreating the participants of its primary texts. That is, its view of the history of contemporary horror cinema is determined by a particular perspective to be imposed on the activities of viewership that had taken place between the seventies-eighties' horror film and its audience. As an attempt to provide the history of the primary texts of the metafictional horror of the nineties, the following sections of this chapter allow that perspective/intentionality full play. In other words, the aspects of contemporary horror film to be treated in this chapter are mostly the ones that have reemerged within and have been dealt with, in one way or another, in the metafictional narratives of the nineties' horror film.

The following section deals with the horror films that enjoyed their peak popularity in 70-80s, under the inclusive titles of 'the contemporary horror film' and 'the slasher'. This general treatment is intended to provide the most prominent aspects of the post-*Psycho* horror cinema that were then reflected upon by the nineties' metafictional horror narratives. The perspective of this inquiry will later be contracted to focus on the subgenre known as the 'stalker' - a well-defined type of narrative which provided many of the primary textual participants for the nineties' metafictional horror.

3.1. The Contemporary Horror Film

Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) marked a turning point in the history of cinema by launching a new genre of horror. Primarily, as a highly popular motion picture by a noted director, *Psycho* legitimized the use of blood on the screen. It also introduced the 'psycho-killer' who slaughters his victims in the goriest ways; sharp and pointy objects became more and more prevalent as murder weapons whereas guns gradually lost their popularity. Many film theorists loosely categorize this new genre as 'slasher'; Sapolsky describes slashers as:

> ...commercially released, feature-length films containing suspense-evoking scenes in which an antagonist, who is usually a male acting alone, attacks one or more victims. The accent in these films is on extreme violence. Scenes that dwell on the victim's fear and explicitly portray the attack and its aftermath are the central focus...(38).

Due to the emphasis these films place upon violence and moments of death, other terms such as 'gore' and 'splatter' are also used for categorizing purposes. These subcategories are brought up mostly when a particular film foregrounds explicit images of disembowelment or gushing blood. However, the overarching term slasher, which seems to be based on the infamous 'shower scene' of *Psycho*, stands out as the prominent categorical tag throughout the theory produced on the post-*Psycho* horror cinema. The use of the knife as the murder weapon and the accented image of the stab as it *slashes* through the victim's flesh is the dominant visual participant that has motivated the term.

Cythia Freeland lists *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), *Frenzy* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1972), and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986) as the emblematic specimens of the

genre, and she goes on to claim that slashers do not necessarily feature murders committed by the use of knives or blades. The killer, accordingly, may strangle his victims or even snap their necks. The generic label 'slasher,' Freeland maintains, refers to the movies which revolve around the murderous activities of a psychopathic killer, usually a male, whose blood lust drives him to repetitive extreme violence (161). The recurring carnage, which is often eroticized by the killer's act of satisfying his voyeuristic appetite prior to the assault, is showcased by the camera which rarely shies away from the graphic violence that takes place at the moment of killing.

Aside from various definitions that dwell on the gruesome moments of killing, theorists writing on the slasher repeatedly highlight its basis in 'reality.' They put the realism of the slasher in opposition to the fictional worlds of other gore flicks that are mostly 'unrealistic.' The human status of the killer seems to be the main reason for this generic claim; as Freeland notes: "the monstrous killers of these films are not undead, supernatural vampires or hairy hulking werewolves but living, breathing men" (162). In other words, rather than featuring a combat against an anomalous monster like a vampire, an evil alien, or a mutant cockroach, the slasher narrates the story of a human being who commits ordinary violence, namely 'murder.'

The alleged realism of the slasher's antagonist has spawned innumerable treatments of the genre in terms of the ways in which it stands for the tenor of times. Paul Budra epitomizes the arguments that converge on the slasher's representation of social reality with the following statement: "...there is only one Godzilla; there are potentially thousands of Norman Bateses..." (194). He argues that the 'shivers' generated by the slasher is due to its evoking of a *zeitgeist* which is much more terrifying than the particular identity

of the killer. As the fearful uncertainty of the former attributes an anonymity to the latter, the monster pool becomes almost limitless. Contrary to the undisputed sense of monstrosity fleshed out by the blatant physical difference of the classic monster, the slasher's human psycho-killer is, in a sense, a "monster of choice." Then, what is really frightful is not the killer but the fact that anyone could be the killer. The manifestation of such anonymity of the contemporary evil can be seen in Michael Myers' expressionless mask in *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978). The film even reinforces this sense of facelessness in one of its final scenes where Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) unmasks her inhuman enemy: Michael's real face is not so different from the mask he was wearing. The closing credits of *Halloween* also deny Michael his name and tag him as "the shape." Jonathan Lake Crane, who ferociously blames the contemporary horror cinema for advocating societal hopelessness, writes along similar lines about Jason, the killer of the *Friday 13th* series:

> Any large human who can don a goalie mask and wield something sharp can play Jason. Jason is a cipher; a stumbling mute who lurches through his appearances without benefit of voice or personalized gestures. He is a murderous blank... (142).

What the Post-*Psycho* horror cinema offers as the 'threat,' then, is the 'psychotic,' that is, the killers who walk around us, human devils who are somehow a product of our own society, of the nuclear family, often indiscriminate from ourselves. Thus, the origin of the problem is not an outlandish creature; *we* are the problem (Budra 189). Actually, 'the monster as one of us' is a concept that has endured the shifts and transformations of the horror genre; we can observe its pertinence in some of the serial killer films of the late nineties. In the final scene of Joel Schumacher's *8 MM* (1999), Tom Welles (Nicholas Cage) is baffled by the totally ordinary and benign physiognomy of the killer when his face is unmasked. The

killer, before the puzzlement of Welles, makes everything even more confusing by saying that he did not have any traumatic childhood memories or anything similar which had pushed him to torture and kill people; he was simply the way he was.

The slasher's 'realism' is not only a purely textual act of mirroring the hidden monstrosity haunting the society in which we live. Freeland, in defining the violence perpetrated by the slasher's antagonist, also uses the word "newsworthy" (181), that is, violence that qualifies as a news item. Seen from this perspective, the slasher discloses its intimate kinship with the media along with the public's relentless fascination with the psycho-killer, energized by its craving for an 'explanation' or some disclosure that would unveil the 'real face' of the monster. Screenplays of some slashers are inspired from real-life stories of individuals who attract the attention of the media as intriguing psychopaths or serial killers. *Psycho* was based on a book by Robert Bloch about a murderer and corpse stealer named Ed Gein. Years later, we witness the reemergence of Gein's story in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), a story about the fictional cannibalistic killer Hannibal Lechter. The audience doesn't seem to effect that drastic of a discrimination between the fictional psychopath of the movie screen and the real psychopath of the prime-time news, as long as they are both 'interesting' enough. In this context, Cynthia Freeland writes about how the media publicity over the cannibalistic serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer's arrest threatened the box office take and opening of the horror film *Body Parts* (Eric Red, 1991) (162). In the case of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* we can see a more profound interlacing of reality with fiction; the real story of Henry Lee Lucas and the quasi-documentary feature of McNaughton has almost turned into one big event in which the character played by Michael Rooker and the televised/published image

of the real psychopath Lee Lucas commingle. Seemingly catering for the ongoing merging of fiction and reality, the recently released DVD of *Henry* supplements its feature with various extracts from the tabloids that issued news and photographs about Henry and his partner Otis. Also, the included interview with the director McNaughton repeatedly comes back to the issue of how he was intrigued by Henry's social skill of approaching his victims without scaring them. Hence this gives us Jonathan Lake Crane's interesting claims on how the serial killers have become parts of the entertainment elite (1).

As brought up in the above paragraph, the slasher's move into the nineties transformed it into the 'serial killer feature' which can be described as a character piece revolving around the idiosyncrasies of an individual psycho-murderer. The fascination with the idea of 'the killer as one of us,' which enjoyed its nascent phase with the faceless killer of the slasher, translated itself, in the nineties, into the explicit filmic depiction of the killer as an intriguing genius. The focus of the nineties' serial killer film is mostly on the distinctive methods of the antagonist who has the unbelievable ability to conceal its tracks along with the baffling courage to leave playful clues for the police as a display of his invulnerability. The fascinating persona of the killer is usually reinforced by the screen presence of powerful actors such as Kevin Spacey and Anthony Hopkins.

In the seventies-eighties' slasher, however, the excessive fascination with the identity of the killer was not manifested as the major issue to be cinematically addressed. The excess was discharged simply through the repetitive acts of violence; the anonymous monster was, in a sense, disguised with sights of blood and gore. The slasher's showcasing of 'gratuitous' violence has impelled many theorists to categorize it under the title of

'exploitation cinema.' In some sources, the boundary between the two terms even disappear (Modleski 288). The main point put forward in the literature on (and against) exploitation is that the slasher exploits the audience's intrigue with the psycho-killer by making him 'present his art' as much and as explicitly as possible. Such an 'exploitative' aspect of the slasher can be observed with greater clarity in the ways it was promoted in posters and film trailers. Advertising campaigns for the slashers always enticed their potential audiences with the promise of death and escalating body counts - a discourse which also lead the genre's many opponents to denounce it as 'dangerous' (Waller 259). Taglines used for some of these films are illustrative of the particular way in which the slasher attempts to lure its viewer: *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972): "Mari, 17, is dying. Even for her the worst is yet to come.;" *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), "Who will survive and what will be left of them?;" *Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1978): "The lucky ones died first.;" *Terror Train* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1980): "The boys and girls of Sigma Phi. Some will live. Some will die.;" *Graduation Day* (Herb Reed, 1981): "Graduating from high school has never been so deadly...;" *Happy Birthday to Me* (J. Lee Thompson, 1981): "Six of the most bizarre murders you will ever see.;" *Friday the 13th part II* (Steve Miner, 1981): "The body count continues..."

The audience of the slasher - or the 'victims,' as pronounced by the detractors of the genre - is mostly considered to be dominated by teenagers. In fact, many accounts on the emergence of the contemporary horror film determine the rise of a separate teen culture as the prime mover behind the whole phenomenon. Accordingly, America's teenagers were increasingly seen as a privileged group with the sufficient income, leisure, and motivation to support a theatrical business. As the structural and financial problems of the

studio converged with the growing recognition that teenagers represented the core of Hollywood's audience, the producers started capitalizing on this large group of people (Sapolsky 34). The slasher is regarded as the most fruitful attempt in this process through which a vast number of films were consumed in series by a teenaged public. Two sub-terms that were coined in relation to the convergence of exploitation and the teenaged viewer are 'exploitation teenpic' and 'teen-slasher.' Mikita Brottman forces the theory into a sharper focus by pronouncing that the percentage of the males in this group is higher that that of the females (7).

Vera Dika brackets the age spectrum of the most enthusiastic teenager public of the slasher as between 12 and 17 years, and adds that these youngsters used to populate the movie theaters in large parties (9). One of the most interesting issues about the teen-slasher phenomenon is that slashers have always been 'illegal' for 'groups of teenagers'. MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) had issued the infamous R-Rating for the genre which dictated that no one under seventeen was to be admitted in the theatre without a parent or a guardian. In this context, the issue of rating turns out to be another perspective through which the contemporary horror film can be observed. Waller suggests the year 1968 to be regarded as the interval that marked the advent of the contemporary horror cinema for that was when "MPAA instituted its 'Industry Code of Self-Regulation' as a response to (and an attempt to sidestep) public concern over the role of censorship in the media" (259). The period between the late 1960s and 1980s was dominated by CARA's (MPAA's Code and Rating Administration) constant struggle against the new horror films, including its refusal to grant an R-rating to Romero's Dawn of the Dead (1978), and openly declaring its adversarial position against films like *Halloween II* (1980) in that they tend to display 'graphic violence.' The long struggle brought an R-rating

status to the slasher, in a sense, allowing and perhaps even legitimizing the presentation of explicit violence, as Waller lists: "the violence of decapitation and dismemberment, of needles to the eyeball, and of scissors, kitchen appliances, hand tools and shish kabob skewers as deadly weapons" (259). Still not for the unattended teenager, though. However, every single account of the incidents that took place in the horror film screenings of seventies-eighties announce the fact that slasher was particularly enjoyed by teenagers. One speculation could be that the allure of seeing something which is not supposed to be seen might even have whet the appetite of the defiant youngsters. Brottman writes that some films of this era even used "self-imposed R ratings" as a ploy to attract the viewers who were legally prohibited to see them.

Especially in the first half of the eighties, the slasher, along with the other sub-genres of the horror cinema, had an unprecedented popularity, urging scholars to identify it as a major mass phenomenon. Crane, as one of the fierce detractors of the genre, puts forward his anxiety-ridden postulate: "Violent pastimes are nothing new, but there has never been anything quite as violent and massively popular as the contemporary horror film" (1). His 'picture' of the horror viewer in turn is "an audience of millions that crave for gore" (3). Philip Brophy's take on the issue, as will be clarified later in this section, is more cheerful as he interprets the rise of the genre as a cultural phenomenon that had a revitalizing effect on various social domains:

> In 1983, the contemporary horror film is definitely a felt presence, with the never-ending onslaught of horror films reaching large audiences, a rejuvenation of the drive-in circuit, the rise in video libraries and the increasing value and relevance that the genre currently holds not only for mainstream film audiences but also for rock culture and film culture (278).

Brophy's reference to drive-in theaters (the outdoor cinemas where people used to watch the film through the windshields of their cars) and the emergence of the video cassette as an alternative medium, sheds light on the issue of R-rating that ostensibly barred the young from having access to horror flicks. Many other emergent (sub)venues such as 'bump-and-grind houses,' 'dusk-to-dawn screenings,' and 'double-feature venues,' can be added to this list, fine tuning the social picture that refers to the massive circulation and accessibility of the contemporary horror film despite the contra activities of the MPAA (Hawkins 223).

Going back to the topic of tenor of times as symptomized by the slasher, there has been a remarkable body of rigorous textual analyses that illustrate how a distinct sense of the 'apocalypse' surfaces in these horror narratives. The massive popularity of the films coupled with the diagnosis of 'apocalyptic discourse' called for a socio-historical treatment that could elucidate the reasons for the genre's frantic acceptance and circulation. Waller maintains that the slasher presents an extended dramatization of and response to the "major public events and newsworthy topics in American history since 1968" (263). He foregrounds the following items: fluctuations in key economic indicators and attempts to redirect domestic and foreign policy; Watergate and the slow withdrawal from Vietnam; oil shortages and the Iranian hostage crisis; the rise of the New Right and the Moral Majority; and the continuing debate over abortion, military spending, and women's rights. Dika adds America's deteriorating world position, inflation, and unemployment to the this list which can be extended with other related problems that arose during the specific period in question (131). The social milieu delineated by these events was regarded as the main political and cultural backdrop against which the slasher revealed itself as a symptom. Accordingly, the overwhelming social anxiety triggered by

all the above listed occurrences initiated a swinging from the liberalism of the late sixties to a fifties-style conservatism which was manifested, for instance, in the slasher's brutal antagonism against promiscuous sex (of females especially), and the dark/hopeless world that it depicts. Waller refers to Sobchack in rendering the slasher with more inclusive concepts: the crisis of bourgeois patriarchy, postmodernism, and a profound sense of the apocalyptic (264).

Robin Wood openly refers to the slasher as the 'apocalyptic horror film' due to its obvious expression of despair and negativity (23). One particular film he brings up as an example is *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which received constant attention from many other theorists as well who studied the filmic iconology of the apocalypse. What the film connotes, Wood suggests, is the inevitability of annihilation, the powerlessness of humanity, and the sense that there is nothing anyone could do to arrest the spiraling downward into the dark end. Accordingly, the main concept of 'uncontrol' is emphasized throughout the whole narrative: "...not only have the five young victims no control over their destiny, their slaughterers (variously psychotic and degenerate) keep losing control of themselves and each other" (Wood 20). Along similar lines, Brottman brings up the concepts of irrevocable anarchy and disorder as the most powerful concepts that underlie the hysterical narrative of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (111).

Budra introduces the term 'ontologically incoherent films' in reference to the representation of a chaotic world, and he includes more recent horror films to the category where the human slasher has started to come to terms with his nightmarish invulnerability by taking on explicitly manifested supernatural traits. One of the most prominent examples he gives for these films is *The Nightmare on Elm Street* series, where the killer is an invincible dream slasher who

keeps coming back no matter what happens to him. In this context, Budra refers to 'sequelization' as a manifestation of the ever-presence of the evil. Almost all slashers spawned sequels, some of them even turning into filmic serials by reappearing 7-8 times in a row. This, Budra maintains, epitomizes the slasher's refusal to see any eventual resolution beyond the dreadful chaos. In the case of sequelization, the repetitive violence that drives the narrative of the individual film is expanded to the film's multiplying itself into cyclically reappearing episodes. To quote Budra himself:

> [the contemporary horror films] stopped offering closure; they abandoned the comic formula. The threat was not satisfactorily vanquished at the end of the film. Recent horror films have left the audience acutely aware that the threat still exists, will perhaps always exist (189).

The validity of the slasher theory reviewed in the above two pages comes from its severe consistency regarding the way it sorts out the filmic participants of the apocalypse and the ever-present threat. Then, can it also be claimed that watching these horror films must have been a horribly unpleasant experience? The theorists who carried out the textual reading of the apocalypse via the most passionate mode of 'imposing intentionality over the filmic narrative' actually believed so by tacitly including the viewer into the text, that is, by treating him/her as if s/he was one of the fictional victims delineated by the slasher narrative. Crane, activating such a perspective, quotes Carol Clover in describing the specific intentionality of the contemporary horror film: "To the extent that a movie succeeds in 'hurting' its viewers... it is good horror; to the extent that it fails, it is bad horror" (2). This statement recalls the issue of 'communication fallacy' treated in the first section of this study. In Crane's case, the slasher happens to be a serious social problem by virtue of its ability to communicate/convey a sense of hopelessness/desperation to the

audience; in other words, the 'corruption' starts at the very moment when the viewer 'understands' what the slasher is trying to say. Thus, the whole process which allegedly runs without fail should be rejected as a whole for its hazards to the social spirit. Crane ends the chapter in his book where he presents an elaborate analysis of *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1979) with the following sarcastic passage: "We are idiots living only to perish in deaths made memorable by their sound and fury. Thankfully, horror film keeps us secure against the threat of hope" (154).

Contrary to Crane's description of the slasher as a filmic text that evokes a climate of social malaise, many descriptions of the seventies-eighties' slasher screenings picture a Bakhtinian carnival where the audience sometimes reached its peaks of cheerfulness. Obviously, what is at stake here is a difference between intentionalities. As mentioned throughout the introductory sections of this thesis, the intentions and participants of a filmic text are dependent on the ways the viewers choose to participate in the process whereby the film is rendered meaningful (/useful). As a matter of fact, the filmic participants of the apocalypse are also evident for me on condition that I see the slasher through the similar intentionality activated by those theorists. However, as the observational evidence suggests, the participants that seemingly connoted hopelessness for Crane, Brottman, Clover etc. were transformed by the teenager audience of the slasher into other codes that elicited playful behavior.

To be able to account for the peculiar manners of the slasher audience, what is needed is an adjustment in the iconological treatment of the contemporary horror film. Some adjustments have actually been effected by the film theorists who occasionally moved into an 'optimism' in their writings. In this context, Wood mentions the potential 'progressiveness' of the slasher as a counter-argument

to its purported regressive stance. Accordingly, the apocalyptic mode of the stalker could be seen as an indication that the general social negativity cannot be alleviated if the society insists on staying within the dominant ideology. The idea of progress and the optimism that follows are the outcomes of the slasher's depiction of the conventional values as going through the irreversible process of disintegration (23). As opposed to Wood's attribution of a state of passive resistance to the slasher, Modleski believes that slashers are actively progressive in their declared war against the "ideologically manipulated illusion of taste [which] lures [its public] to a false complacency with the promise of equally false and insipid pleasures" (288). In reference to some theorists' reception of the slasher as being nothing but terrible, Modleski points at the link between the contemporary horror film and Kant's 'sublime,' and claims that the latter requires 'literacy' to be apprehended: "Without the development of moral ideas, that which, thanks to preparatory culture, we call sublime, merely strikes the untutored man as terrifying (Kant: 1952, 115)" (291).

Budra's explanation for the audience's celebratory and sympathetic attitude to the killer of the slasher foregrounds the killer's 'consistency' in an inconsistent/postmodern world. Accordingly, the anonymous killer of the slasher, who is 'truly mad,' does not suffer from a confused view of the world around him; on the contrary, he has a distinct tendency to see things in an extremely simplistic and clear way (194). At the moments when the young audience cheered and rooted for the killer to slaughter his victims, it is possible to discern the envy directed toward the clarity of vision that enables him to settle everything into an equilibrium. Seen through this framework, the slasher's killer is the 'hero' that valiantly 'destroys anything that moves recklessly.'

As a conclusion for this section, I would like to give a brief account of Philip Brophy's article entitled "Horrality." Brophy's work seems to be the only theoretical treatment that addresses the rise of the contemporary horror film as a historical convergence between the audience and the films which propelled the emergence of a new filmic textuality. The terms and concepts introduced in "Horrality" explicitly point at the possibility of an iconographic analysis that accounts for the activities of the viewer as well - reminiscent of the way Mitchell defines the 'proper' methodology of the iconologist. Throughout Brophy's article, the playful attitude of the slasher audience surfaces as a significant issue to be tackled along with observing the way the filmic text structures itself in accordance.

"Horrality" was written in mid-83, the historical juncture which Brophy designates as the 'golden period' of the contemporary horror film. Accordingly, this interval witnessed a saturation of the most characteristic aspects of the new horror-text, demanding a rethinking of the genre conventions in relation to a new set of concepts. Brophy delineates various features of this new horror such as 'showing as opposed to telling,' 'the destruction of the family' etc., while prioritizing 'a perverse sense of humor' as its most prominent peculiarity (276). As Barthes remarks in his discussion of the mythologist's chief responsibilities, emergence of new concepts always requires 'neologisms,' that is, the coinage of synthetic words which have the capacity to impose a terminology on the emergent metalanguage. Along similar lines, Brophy carries out his treatment by introducing a set of metalinguistic terms which the participants of the contemporary horror film refer to via connotation: "horror, textuality, morality, and hilarity." "Horrality," as the principal synthetic word, merges all those terms into one overarching concept. Seen through Brophy's perspective, a

film such as *Friday the 13th* connotes 'horrality' more than the 'apocalypse.' The implication is that the viewer of the slasher plunged into a cheerful mode by choosing to see the film through the former rather than the latter.

The primary textual mode of the contemporary horror that evokes "horrality" is its "violent awareness of itself as a saturated genre" (Brophy 278). In other words, the rise of horrality is not based on a totally new set of filmic forms, but on an unrelenting repetition of the ones that were introduced in the early seventies. What is at stake is some sort of 'historical overexposure' through which the contemporary horror film, via recurring plot structures and sequelizations, turned into a filmic scheme that excluded all the 'unnecessary' story devices. There is one single iconography that is constantly repeated whereas all the extraneous plot contrivances are eliminated. In this context, Brophy elaborates on the intentionality of the contemporary horror:

> It is a mode of fiction, a type of writing that in the fullest sense 'plays' with its reader, engaging the reader in a dialogue of textual manipulation that has no time for the critical ordinances of social realism, cultural enlightenment or emotional humanism (279).

As seen through this perspective, the feelings of tension, fear, anxiety, sadism and masochism evoked by the contemporary horror narrative are hardly ever attached to anything other than themselves. In other words, the pleasure of the text involves more of an adrenaline rush than intellectual reasoning, as Brophy more aptly puts: "getting the shit scared out of you - and loving it" (279).

Brophy's treatment elicits a particular process that must have taken place between the contemporary horror film and its viewer - a process that calls for the notion of 'game' as opposed to contemplation. The film, as per its participation in the game,

"*knows* that you've seen it before; it *knows* that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know," and devises its plot in accordance with this awareness. The other participant, namely the viewer, enjoys the game by rooting for the fictional characters (or the killer), trying to anticipate who's going to "get it" next, and relishing in the momentary terror that shudders his/her spine. The 'carnival ride' continues along recurring 'scares.' To quote Brophy again: " A nervous giggle of amoral delight as you prepare yourself in a totally self-deluding way for the next shock. Too late. Freeze. Crunch. Chill. Scream. Laugh" (279).

3.2. The Playful Audience: The Classic Stalker and Viewer Participation

Brophy's approach to the contemporary horror film is mostly biased on textuality, for he treats the notion of playfulness as a genuine presence within the filmic narrative. Waller displays a similar tendency in his accounts of the post-*Psycho* period: "What horror films offer, after all, is the representation of violence - violence embedded in a generic, narrative, fictional, often highly stylized, and *oddly playful* context" [emphasis added] (260). At the level where the claims about the contemporary horror film are laid out through purely textual scrutiny, it is unsound to valorize either the 'sense of the apocalyptic' or 'playfulness' as the authentic discourse spoken by the narrative. Because each of the claims would be thus based on the extraction of participants engendered by the particular intentionality of the analyst.

This study also chooses the concept of 'playfulness' as the dominant discursive paradigm to be observed in the post-*Psycho*

horror film. Without necessarily aiming at invalidating the claims about the 'apocalypse,' I would like to introduce a threefold justification for this preference. At the very rudimentary level, the treatment of playfulness is intended to stand against the assumption that the pleasure derived from watching a fictional psychopath kill his victims is excited by a similar tendency of the viewer. We cannot simply assume that the spectators would turn into homicidal maniacs or develop suicidal tendencies by attending the screenings of horror movies. In this context, the argument of playfulness is also pitted against Sissela Bok's claims on the untutored kids' misperception of 'artful violence' and the 'inappropriate' viewerly manners in the movie theater, as mentioned in the first section. Secondly, there are various publicized observations regarding the playful behaviors of the teenage public during its acts of watching slashers. That is, we do have substantial evidence to regard such a peculiar relationship between the contemporary horror and its young audience as a distinctive process of representation with its own participants. Especially the period between late seventies and mid eighties witnessed a mutual advance of the viewer and the horror film toward each other, giving rise to a playful mode of viewerly participation and a filmic text that catered to that mode. It is viable to view the slashers of the seventies-eighties through this perspective not simply because they contain all the relevant textual codes objectively, but a multitude of filmic participants starts revealing itself when those narratives are handled via the theories that dwell on the playful and participatory acts of the targeted audience. Lastly, the concept of playfulness, as a useful way of treating the seventies-eighties' horror films, is supported by the metafictional horror narratives of the mid-nineties in that they reflect on their old counterparts (primary texts) through a similar intentionality/perspective.

Although both Brophy and Waller regard most of the specimens of the post-*Psycho* horror cinema as playful texts, a specific slasher sub-genre, known as 'the stalker,' stands out in this respect, for it seems to have generated the most suitable horror narratives to be observed through the perspective of film-as-play/game. The stalker formula, at the most basic level, can be identified by a predominantly off-screen killer who is known primarily by his/her distinctive point-of-view shots. Unlike the term 'slasher' which mainly refers to acts of murder, 'stalker' alludes to the killer's murderous gaze and his/her act of looking. The stalker enjoyed its peak period between the years 1978-1981 starting with the release of John Carpenter's *Halloween*, which set the narrative formula to be repeated by a series of horror films. *Halloween* has the overwhelming distinction of having earned one of the largest proportional box office returns of any feature in film history (Dika 30). Carpenter, with his executive producer Irwin Yablans, managed to produce *Halloween* on an unpretentious budget of $320,000 whereas the film grossed $80 million through its worldwide distribution. *Halloween* not only inscribed the basic iconography of the stalker genre by coining a series of unique filmic participants but it also stood for a method of production that was taken up by many independent producers interested in horror and who did not have the financial resources for big features. The immense popularity of *Halloween* started the stalker cycle by spawning a slate of films which iterated its participants almost verbatim: *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1979), *Prom Night* (Paul Lynch, 1979), *Terror Train* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1980), *Graduation Day* (Herb Reed, 1981), *Happy Birthday to Me* (J. Lee Thompson, 1981), *Friday the 13th Part II* (Steve Miner, 1981), *Hell Night* (Tom DeSimone, 1981), and *The Burning* (Tony Maylam, 1981). If we were to resort to neologism in reference to the prime metalinguistic concept evoked by these

stalkers, it wouldn't be unsound to call it Halloween-ness. For the latter almost stands as a meta-text that writes the essential participants of the whole genre.

The stalker initiated by far the most playful mode of viewership in the sense 'playfulness' is defined in this thesis. Stalkers also genuinely belong to the period in which they were popular. In this context, we can argue for the endurance of 'the slasher' as an inclusive category of horror in that the serial killer features of the nineties evoke some of its participants in various narrative contexts. However, the meticulously defined narrative form of the stalker almost completely disappeared from the horror scene around the second half of the eighties. An overview iconography of the stalker, which would in turn provide the basis for an analysis of the metafictional stalkers of the nineties, will be presented in the next section (3.3). The following parts of the present section will delve into the issue of audience participation (playfulness) with an attempt to situate the upcoming textual account in a process-related context.

Karl Kroeber regards 'audience participation' as an integral part of all storytelling. Modernist discourse, he believes, tends to disregard this interactive process by assigning an impermeable structure to the narrative, making it expel all the 'outside' intrusions to preserve its hygienic space. Kroeber emphasizes the traditional and postmodern narratives that go against the grain by welcoming their publics in terms of their creative contributions to the story. Accordingly, these forms of storytelling display an awareness of the fact that they are 'impure' - they do not try to obstruct the "messy situations of everyday life" from entering their fictional worlds. As Kroeber himself puts it: "Narrative tends to flourish through association with 'popular' culture, and so...it does not easily become the purely aestheticized object desired by

many modernists (8). Apparently Kroeber's criticisms are directed toward both the theory and practice of modernist fiction. The modernist theory imposes its wholistic perspective on narratives that have the potential to interact with their viewers in many unpredictable ways; this argument can be pitted against the acts of reading by which many film theorists imposed the concept of 'the apocalypse' on the contemporary horror film whereas something else was going on in the movie theatres. As regards the practice, Kroeber believes that the traditional and postmodern narratives welcome participation mainly because they are based on 'retelling,' that is, repetition, as opposed to the modernist fictions that strive for 'absolute originality and uniqueness.' The idea that retelling advocates participation certainly makes sense in the case of stalker film which has its roots in repetition - individual stalker narratives featured recurring scenes of killing; each narrative spawned sequels that carry on with the repetition; and stalkers repeated each other in that they constantly 'retold' the same story with slight variations. However, whether stalkers could be regarded as essentially postmodern due to their repetitious structure remains as an issue to be addressed separately.

Participation, as Kroeber addresses it, emerges as a function of the listener/viewer's intention of rendering the story 'situationally relevant.' The retold/repeated story, in this sense, supports this intention by presenting ideas and beliefs "without permitting them to harden into abstract dogma. [It] allows us to test our ethical principles in our imaginations where we can engage them in the uncertainties and confusions of contingent circumstance" (Kroeber 9). Michael Montgomery, expanding on the idea of contingency, claims that a film that cannot be situated by audiences in the context of their own lives is one that simply cannot be made to "mean" (2). For both Kroeber and Montgomery, a

meaningful/satisfying experience of film viewing, then, is the result of 'positioning the story in the present' acted out by the viewer, on condition that the filmic text provides him/her with a narrative that is more or less 'familiar.' Dennis Giles, in a similar context, shifts the emphasis from 'making sense' to 'generating pleasure.' He claims that a "good" filmic experience is the one in which the subject genuinely contributes to the 'good of the experience' rather than becoming a simple recipient of it (40). Namely, the mundane adjective "good" is attached to a particular film by the viewer whenever s/he feels that the pleasure in question is partly due to his/her active involvement in the process.

Audience participation, as treated in general terms above, can take various forms depending on the type of narrative and the context in which the event of watching occurs. The stalker phenomenon featured its own kind of participatory behavior. Pauline Kael writes about her experience of sitting in a theatre with the 'most' playful horror audience she had ever seen:

> They were so noisy the dialogue was inaudible; they talked until the screen gave promise of bloody ghastliness. Then the chatter subsisted to rise again in noisy approval of the gory scenes. When a girl in the film seemed about to be mutilated, a young man behind me jumped up and down and shouted encouragement. "Somebody's going to get it," he sang out gleefully… They'd gotten what they came for: they hadn't been cheated. But nobody seemed to care what the movie was about or be interested in the logic of the plot - the reasons for the gore (Hawkins 58).

Mentioning the audience's disinterested state in "what the movie was about," Kael displays the difference of intentionality between the audience and herself. Apparently, the former did not exhibit any cognizance whatsoever of the darkness and the apocalypse that the latter so blatantly observes in the narrative. Namely, if Kael was engaged in a game with the movie in question, it was definitely based on a different set of rules by which to abide. Wood draws a

similar picture of viewerly participation in reference to his experience of attending a screening of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*: "Watching it recently with a large, half stoned youth audience who cheered and applauded every one of Leatherface's outrages against their representatives on the screen was a terrifying experience" (Modleski 290). Although Wood sees a potential for progressiveness in the dark horror films of the seventies-eighties, he seems to have conceptualized the actual viewers as a part of the frenzied world created in those narratives. In other words, the horror film and its playful audience, for Wood, altogether constituted the world of the narrative that he contemplated from a distance.

Expanding on Wood's idea regarding the young viewer's playful attitude toward the bloody annihilation of his/her screen surrogates, Modleski brings forth the notion of 'joyful self-destructiveness,' which she considers as a highly paradoxical phenomenon. She mentions *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* as exemplary cases where the teenaged spectator is placed in the position of an unseen nameless presence through which s/he 'violently enjoys' his/her own destruction effected via the destruction of the fictional character that stands for him/herself in actuality (290). In reference to Barthes, Modleski identifies such behavior as a "perverse response," and advances her arguments with a very interesting example: George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1979), a horror film about an army of wayward zombies taking over a large shopping center, at its time became a midnight favorite at shopping malls all over the United States. Apparently, the fact that the masses enjoy watching the demise of the culture which they actually support, and that they joyfully identify themselves with zombies appears paradoxical and perverse when observed via the classic theories of identification that tend to exclude a substantial part of the process that takes place between the films and their public.

As an attempt to account for the historical context that partly motivated the above-described playful responses to horror films, Staiger refers to the 'transitional postclassical period' during which there emerged new opportunities for public-sphere experience (45). She puts Jim Sharman's movie *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) at the center of this socio-cultural process. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* opened in New York City in 1975, and by the end of 1976, every single screening of the film was a big party where the viewers yelled at the screen, roamed around in the theatre in monster costumes, and sang along with the characters during musical sequences. The stalker phenomenon most likely had its share in this newly developing tendency of the audiences to turning screenings into boisterous public events.

It has been asserted by some film critics that the stalker mostly gratifies male desires, and motivates the male audience to root for the killer in his murderous rage against women. William Schoell argues against this claim as far as the participatory performance of the male audience is concerned. He thinks those critics walk out of the movie theatre in disgust long before the movie is over, and that is why:

> ...they don't realize that these same men cheer on (with renewed enthusiasm, in fact) the heroines, who are often as strong, sexy, and independent as the [earlier] victims, as they blow away the killer with a shotgun or get him between the eyes with a machette. All of these men are said to be identifying with the maniac, but they enjoy *his* death throes the most of all, and applaud the heroine with admiration (qtd. in Clover 2000, 297).

Clover claims that no one who has attended a matinee or a midnight show of a stalker movie with a young audience can doubt the essentially 'adversarial' nature of the whole process. However, as Schoell maintains, this antagonism is not directed against either one of the opposite sexes. Clover chooses to describe it rather as a

cat-and-mouse game where the film and the audience are, in a sense, pitted against each other. Accordingly, "a 'good' moment (or film) is one that 'beats' the audience, and a bad moment (or film) is one in which, in effect, the audience wins" (1995, 201). The loud vocal agitation which breaks out especially when the audience expresses its approval and disapproval marks the instant in which, Clover argues, the (imaginary) filmmaker and the 'competent (literate) horror viewer' come remarkably close to addressing one another directly. The viewer shouts out his/her approval to the imaginary author whereas the latter accentuates the moment with either a tongue-in-cheek gesture or an actual pause to accommodate the reaction (1995, 201).

Robert Stam writes about the phenomenon of playful audience participation within the context of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. Along similar lines with Staiger, he primarily foregrounds *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as an instance for films or film-related experiences that strive to erase the barriers between spectator and spectacle. Under the list where he sorts out the ways in which the filmic experience can take on carnivalesque qualities, Stam, with particular reference to *Halloween*, includes stalker films as engendering a peculiar carnival through the vision of a dystopian/dark world (111). The alleged value-laden political structure that infuses the malicious world of the stalker is, however, stripped of its solidity once it bounces off the playful viewer. In this context, Stam echoes Schoell and Clover's treatment of audience playfulness as flourishing within a social space that is less permeated with the ideological tensions of the political realm: "The carnivalesque principle abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes, and creates another life free from conventional rules and restrictions" (86). Hence, the participatory acts of the audience prioritizes 'pleasure' by rendering the filmic spectacle as a text

from which to derive enjoyment. The viewer, in this sense, refunctions the stalker narrative with an attempt to turn the solitary act of watching a movie into a cheerful group experience through which s/he can exercise the fundamental forms of carnivalistic performance: "comic and parodic verbal compositions, and the diverse genres of 'marketplace speech' (curses, oaths, profanations)" (Stam 87).

Also, seen through Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogue,' the stalker phenomenon presents a peculiarly dialogic mode of spectatorship. The narrative dialogism, as mentioned in the second chapter, that metaphorically exists within the discursive realm of the filmic text is literalized through the playfulness of the stalker viewer. Namely, the dialogue that originally belongs within the textual confines of the diegesis reemerges as a fleshed out act of impromptu verbal participation on the part of the audience (Stam 63). The playful viewerly dialogue, in effect, takes over the allegedly official discourse of the movie via parallel parodic utterances: synched repetition of songs and lines from the film, interjected phrases that play off and mock the 'indisputable' on-screen dialogue, ad-lib exclamations of approval or disdain thrown at the screen, etc. As the detractors of the filmic genre known as 'exploitation' deplore, the emergence of such a boisterous 'speech community' was a freakish occurrence that subverted the system of orderly presentation of features to well-mannered spectators thus far encouraged by Hollywood (Schaefer 134). The process of film viewing was 'carnivalized' - an event that went against the professedly contemplative act of spectatorship by which the audience was passively exposed to the filmic affects.

In elaborating on the development of the stalker's speech community, it is necessary to recapitulate Kroeber's claims on how the traditional and postmodern narratives advocate audience

participation via rereading/retelling. In his treatments of the dialogic mode of spectatorship, Stam mostly refers to the Forty-second Street movie theaters of New York where it was the custom of a large audience to attend the screenings of the same feature repeatedly. As the viewers already knew what was going to happen in the upcoming sequences, it was practically impossible for the film to have a total diegetic hold over its audience. Such familiarity opened up the space where the viewer could activate his/her playful participation without necessarily being overwhelmed by the authority of an entirely unique and original narrative. Remembering Clover's comments on the stalkers as "cat-and-mouse games," the viewer who played with the stalker was always a 'competent one' who knew what to expect in which parts of the storyline.

The rise of the video culture contributed a great deal to the emergence of the competent and playful audience of the stalker. For the possibilities of repeated watching and playful participation it offers to the viewer, videotaped film is a highly resilient medium. As the viewer can stop, pause, or rewind the film anytime s/he wants, the overwhelming diegetic effect that Kroeber attributes to the monolithic narratives of modernism already loses its primal impact and starts developing cracks through which a secondary dialogue can leak in. For Staiger, the advent of video is one of the most significant events in the movie history in that it assuaged the overpowering audio-visual impact of the big screen on the audiences. The more people watched films at home among friends, that is, in 'institutionally less regulated viewing situations,' the easier it was for them to activate a similar mode of spectatorship when they returned to the confines of the big movie theater (45).

Observed within the period perspective delineated so far, the stalker stands out as a 'filmic game' that enjoyed an immense popularity as per its capacity to afford playful audience

participation. Every single stalker that assumed its place in the cycle repeated almost the same story as the previous one, solidifying the narrative structure that depicts the playground and defines the rules by which to abide. Dika maintains that the repeated usage of a singular structure reinforced the gaming mechanism of the stalker for it motivated the viewer to interact with the film via a play of expectations (62). Waller, in reference to Noël Carrol, interprets this repetitive stance of the stalker as being self-reflexive and parodic in that it flaunts its status as a genre by quoting, alluding, and remaking its former specimens (256). Although Dika and Waller seem to converge on a similar point, the latter's association of the genre with self-reflexivity is problematic especially if we attempt to elaborate on that claim while considering the process through which the stalker was utilized by its teenage audience as a game/film. Although stalkers do mimic and remake each other, they are not metafictional in the sense that the term is defined at the second chapter of this thesis. In this context, Dika further clarifies her position by stating that the repetition effected by the stalker is not discursively positioned; that is, every new feature came up with a varied piecemeal arrangement of the most 'effective' participants of the former without effecting the 'bias' Bakhtin attributes to the imaginary author of the parodic text. The repeated participants of the stalker, as Dika writes:

> ...are not intended to involve the audience in an intellectual play of reference. Instead, they have been chosen because they are successful images that are uniquely suited to their purpose, that is, they "work" well (Dika 62).

The resulting effect of the intense circulation of the participants of the stalker is that they eventually lose their ability to refer to anything other than themselves. The visual surface of the film,

as it were, hardens into a patchwork of 'already seen' elements, whereas the particular arrangement of the pieces matters the most. For Stam, what happens with the playful audience is not so much different; while the speech community fully appropriates the filmic text as the playground, the collectivity and playfulness that breaks out in the theatre 'celebrates its own existence.'

By speaking of 'participants referring to nothing other than themselves' and 'a playfulness that breaks out for its own sake,' are we totally ruling out the possibility of accomplishing a textual analysis of the stalker? Given that the iconography (or mythology) of a genre can be carried out by taking its recurring textual participants into consideration as they relate to a metalanguage (as described in the section 1.2), how are we to situate these terms in reference to the process whereby the stalker was enjoyed (played with) by its audience? Actually, an iconography of the stalker emerges as a possible venue to be pursued if we merge the text and the context into each other; that is, take the whole historical process, as described in this section, as a big narrative in which the playful viewers appear as participants of a 'biased' secondary discourse positioned before the primary one that is the stalker. Once we let that bias infuse our accounts of the stalker as a text, it becomes possible to talk about how the film connotes 'gaming' by bringing together a number of filmic participants in particular ways. In a similar vein, Staiger refers to the talkative viewer as an entity that, in a sense, dwells in the metalinguistic realm in that s/he assigns a new set of connoted values to the filmic text by orally responding to it. Hence, Staiger introduces the concept of "meta-talk" in reference to the verbal participation effected by the viewer (52). Meta-talk, acquires its 'meta' status by its potential to adjust, or even recreate, the metalinguistic layer to be attached to the narrative. This account includes the viewer in the text as a

secondary discursive effect, an imaginary parodic author, to be taken into consideration by the analyst.

Such decision to observe the effects of the context via textual participants informs Timothy Corrigan's categorical approach to films that received verbal participation from their audiences. He discriminates between "gaze cinema' and "glance cinema": while the former refers to the modernist films that base themselves on solid structures, the latter refers to the preclassical and postmodernist fiction characterized by fragmentation and inconsistency, which in turn invites verbal participation (Staiger 15). The gaze cinema, accordingly, creates a fixed subjectivity and a consistent identity through its powerful narrative flow, closure, and well-defined central characters. It is a cinema of "interpretation and reading." In opposition, the glance cinema, by fragmenting and subduing these features, encourages a "sporadic attention" to the screen whereby the viewer is not engulfed by the narrative. It is a cinema of "[viewerly] performance." Obviously, this discrimination could not be possible for Corrigan unless he had considered the ways in which audiences responded to what he calls 'modernist' and 'postmodernist' films. His explicit bias is motivated by his investigations not on the texts themselves, but on the viewers who 'gazed' and 'glanced' at those texts. This bias, in its turn, enables him to project the outcomes of the whole process onto the filmic narratives as self-contained participants 'intended' to evoke them.

The next section, which delineates the key participants of the stalker narrative, utilizes a mode of reading activated by a similar bias. Namely, playfulness, inherently a phenomenon that emerges as a function of the process by which films are received and circulated, is set as the perspective through which the stalker text is analyzed. This analysis will render the stalker narrative as a textual construction energized by an intentionality that calls for

the playful audience participation described throughout this section. The textual participants of playfulness, referred to as the 'rules of the game,' will then be useful in accounting for the reemergence of the stalker in the nineties as a metafictional text that incorporates these rules into its parodic discourse.

3.3. The Rules of the Game: The Narrative Participants of the Classic Stalker

Among numerous film theorists treating the phenomenon of the stalker, Vera Dika stands out as the one who pre-empted the aforementioned bias in her exhaustive analysis of the genre. Her book titled *Games of Terror* focuses exclusively on the stalker narrative as an intentionally-contrived text to elicit playful behavior. The stepwise account of the stalker participants to be covered throughout this section will predominantly be set in alignment with Dika's perspective. The resulting scheme will delineate the basic rules by which the stalker renders itself a filmic game with a high capacity to be played by its audience.

In support of her 'directory of rules' that make up the stalker playground, Dika suggests a more accurate explanation than many other analysts regarding the underlying reasons for the value of playful behavior in the movie theatre. Her primary observation that explicates the valorization of gaming as an attitude is that the audience for the stalker is largely an adolescent one - the age group in particular need for various 'initiations' into the social world. As mentioned before, the predictability/familiarity of the stalker pulls its viewer into a play on seeing / not seeing, knowing / not knowing, which encourages interaction. The voiced participation that breaks out as a result of this encouragement

primarily unifies the audience into a group populated by individuals interconnected via a similarity of wills and purposes. Hence, the adolescent's need for establishing contacts with his/her peers is satisfied (Dika 128). Andrew W. Miracle elaborates on a similar case of need-fulfillment as regards the college students' participation in sports events as viewers/supporters. Echoing Dika's approach toward the issue, he classifies these events as 'rites of intensification' whereby the young people reorder relationships and reinforce group solidarity (101). On the other hand, in terms of the interaction between the film and the audience, the stalker, by virtue of its openness to participation, evokes the illusory sense that the viewer has 'control over the filmic elements.' The degree of such a feeling of control that could be entertained depends on competence/literacy, which certainly varies among viewers. Hence, as a counter-force against the unifying dynamic of participation, the parallel feeling of superiority arises as well with the individual viewer's belief that 's/he plays better than the others.'

John Cawelti, in relation to the western, had already introduced the idea that a filmic genre can constitute a 'game' by conventionalizing a series of participants into a formula. His analysis demonstrated the fact that the repeated usage of the codes that delineated the settings, characters and plot structure of the western gave rise to a specific act of viewing whereby the audiences took the film almost as a peculiar sports event the result of which was determined in advance. Hence the similar anecdotes of viewers rooting for the hero, yelling at the screen, chatting among themselves etc. Though agreeing that repetition/familiarization creates a certain playfulness in the sense that it allows for diversion and participation, Dika maintains that the stalker game did not emerge merely because it was repeated. Accordingly, the audience's reaction to the stalker is more active compared to the

participation elicited by the western because the stalker involves an interaction "not only [through] its narrative elements but its formal elements as well" (22). To clarify Dika's discrimination, the stalker is less 'hygienic' in terms of its relation to the viewer than that of the western. Namely, through various participants that infuse the narrative on a multitude of layers (e.g. the specific use of POV shots), the stalker explicitly situates the viewer in its structure. In this sense, the playful participation evoked by the western mostly resembles the act of watching a football match whereas the stalker is more reminiscent of a 'video game.'

Denis Giles deals with the stalker along similar lines via the following questions:

> My question is not why? but how? More precisely, how are the sounds and images of this genre developed so that the viewer can gain pleasure in fear? And how do I, the viewer, work with the film to gain the pleasure it offers? How do I allow the movie to move me, to play with my emotions; how do I put myself into its field of play? (40).

In regards to the 'contagious' nature of the stalker narrative, Giles particularly avoids reference to the fictional world of the film where the events and characters exist. He focuses on the 'surface' of the narration - the realm that holds the filmic devices of 'viewerly contamination.' Utilizing Lyotard's terminology, he designates the moments in which the viewer is 'pulled' into the dynamics of the picture frame as manifesting certain 'figures.' Namely, rather than being decorative or punctuating tropes of the discourse, as a rhetorical account would suggest, 'figure' engenders a more primary or even preconscious disposition that merges the film and its spectator on a more elementary level. Giles goes on to exemplify numerous figural strategies by which the stalker 'viscerally' involves its audience - filmic moments that will be treated throughout the upcoming pages of this section. To sum up,

both Dika and Giles approach the stalker as a text that genuinely embodies the key ingredients that elicit playful audience participation. Dika particularly regards this as one of the constitutive factors behind the genre's unprecedented popularity.

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon named as the 'stalker cycle' (1978-81) commenced with the enormous popularity of John Carpenter's *Halloween*, which set up the basic 'rules of the stalker game.' The iconographical overview presented in this section takes *Halloween* as the fundamental text to be studied for its embodying all the traits that account for the viewerly playfulness invoked by the stalker narrative. As per the factor that motivated the title of the genre, 'stalker' refers to the most prominent visual participant that draws the viewer into the dynamics of the film, namely the POV shots that bespeak the lurking gaze of the killer. Similar to Cawelti's attribution of 'settings' as the definitive filmic agent that sets the playground of the western, the recurring moments in which the viewer accesses a dark fictional world via the killer's look distinguishes the stalker from the other horror genres (Dika 13-4). These moments are further punctuated throughout the film by the use of a repetitive music that, in a sense, echoes the malevolent footsteps of the evil antagonist.

Regarding its contribution to the sense of gaming, the killer's POV is essential in the stalker narrative. In various parts of the film, we see the victims through the sneaking vision of the killer who observes them for a while before releasing his inhuman rage. The way the killer's look is manifested in the stalker engenders a peculiar mode of viewerly involvement; although drawing us into the fictional space of the film, these POVs do not trigger the mechanism of identification. To experience a proper state of filmic identification with the killer, we have to become familiar with his 'character' through a number of character-building

codes/participants. What the stalker mostly informs its viewer about the killer is the primal motivation for his frenzy, and sometimes even that is kept secret until the very last scene. Hence, due to his lack of a proper filmic identity, we are "figuratively put in a spatially congruent position with [the killer] but not in a narratively congruent one" (Dika 40).

Such 'ghostliness' of the antagonist fulfills a two-fold function. Primarily, by being able to see what the killer sees, we satisfy our scopophilic desires via the agency of an inherently nonexistent identity that does not abstain from looking at anything that could be obscene. Thus, our presence within the fictional space of the narrative is established while sidestepping the burdens of a solid mediating presence. Correspondingly, the unidentified status of the relentless and powerful voyeur relieves us from taking on the responsibility for the sadistic action that we witness through his eyes. We are not genuinely familiar with his intentions, motivations, and inner world; he doesn't even have a clearly delineated body or face to empathize with. Then, what we identify with is not the character but the 'gaze' of the killer, which results in an image that is 'simultaneously our vision and not our vision,' and so "we are encouraged by the dynamic structure of the film to participate in the killer's look with a lessened degree of culpability or responsibility" (Dika 41).

This state of spectatorship is analogous to our involvement with a first-person-shooter video game (Doom, Heretic, Duke Nukem etc.) in which we destroy the approaching enemies by projecting ourselves into the virtual body of the hero who exists in a digital 3D space. Although the heroes of these games are mostly pictured as human, the limitations of that premise is alleviated with the inclusion of various tricks that allow him to see through walls, jump or fly over long distances, and occasionally take on superhuman

strength. In a similar way, the human status of the stalker's killer is usually made ambiguous by his display of certain abilities that could not possibly be possessed by a real person. *Halloween* initially introduces Michael Myers as a kid-gone-berserk due to a traumatic experience; however, later in the film when Michael comes back to his hometown Haddonfield for the carnage (game), he seems to have taken on supernatural abilities (bogeyman). He can suddenly appear out of nowhere, chase and catch his victims without hurrying, and smash wooden doors with his bare fists. These abilities do not turn Michael into a well-rounded monster such as a werewolf or a vampire, for they are not planted in his identity as consistent features. Similar to how the first-person-shooter game offers a variety of pleasures to its player by not bothering with 'realism,' the arbitrarily ascribed superhuman status of Michael serves a parallel function of widening the range of the stalker game. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the stalker's departure from realism engenders an effective narrative economy in that the need for special/visual effects hardly ever comes up. *Halloween* successfully draws the viewer into its world by basically using a mask, a knife, and a steadycam.

The shots and scenes that do not explicitly utilize the POV of the killer are also haunted by his ubiquitous presence. The stalker keeps up with the game by impregnating every single one of its frames with the malicious presence of the 'bogeyman.' Usually, a series of ambiguously sequenced and attributed shots fragments the visual field of the film in making the killer's exact spatial location unclear. As being the most conspicuous way of instilling Michael with superhuman traits, *Halloween* uses the basic shot/reverse-shot structure to give him the ability to appear and disappear all at once. Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) momentarily sees Michael in the backyard; she looks away for a second; and when she

directs her gaze to the backyard again, Michael is gone. Hence, he can be just 'anywhere.' *Friday the 13th* uses a similar technique even more economically; the killer appears out of the blue as a pair of feet at the foreground of the shot.

The stalker indicates the imminent presence of the killer also without physically including him in the frame. A distinctive series of shots, used in a particular set of situations, insinuate that he is close by or closing in. Usually, these sequences end up with the punctual scene where a character, frequently a couple who has had sex, gets butchered. However, the point is that, seen through the menacing vision of the stalker's imaginary author, every fictional character becomes a potential victim. Giles elaborates on these pre-attack sequences as 'figural strategies' that play on the anxiety aroused in the viewer's imagination (43-44). The most prevalent strategy manifests itself in the scenes where the potential victim approaches a site which the viewer is previously made to believe to be inhabited by the killer. In such moments, the narration prolongs the approach, dwells on trivial actions such as walking or climbing the stairs etc. via fragmenting them into a variety of angles: "foot on the stair," "hand on the banister," and erratic cut-backs to long shots that momentarily reintegrate the whole space. The series is also usually intercut with close-ups of the victim's face and his/her POV of the 'empty staircase' where no bogeyman is visible yet. The other strategy Giles mentions is rather intriguing in that the viewer thinks that the killer can definitely not be in the space where the scene takes place, however, the position or movement of the camera apparently contradicts this conviction by overlaying the sequence with the sense of a murderous threat. This feeling is mostly evoked by a non-assigned POV shot that irritatingly resembles the way the killer looks at his victims. Hence, even though the

'bogeyman' is technically not present in the scene, he *is* there by speaking through the film's narrative system.

The significance of these narrative participants regarding their contribution to the stalker game is that they give the audience information about the killer's approaching assault before the film's characters become aware of it. However, as Giles remarks in his second figural strategy, the threat might not always be truthful. After a long and suspenseful scene, the killer may simply decide not to strike, or a cat can comically discharge the built-up tension by jumping out of a closet to land on the character's head. The uncertainty of the ultimate assault encourages the viewer to "warn" the victims, because, in a sense, 'it might just work.' As Dika notes, the increasing presence of the threat along with the contingency of the killer's attack motivates the viewer to articulate him/herself into the authorial system of the stalker as s/he experiences the illusion of control over the filmic elements (22).

The playful stalker audience always 'knows' that the killer will eventually stalk-and-slash every one of his victims no matter for how long the attacks are delayed. Each scene involves the viewer in a play of expectations with the narrative, and the involvement brings about verbal participation. The essential question that goes with this game is not so much "Who is the killer?" but "Where is the killer?," "When will he strike?" and "How?" As the viewer tunes his/her attention to the screen to guess the location of the coming attack, the four sides of the frame-line and the area in the screen's depth become dynamized with the possibility of the killer's looming entrance into the film's visual field (Dika 54). The participation is often cued by an awkward framing where either the off-camera space or the blurred recesses of the interior gains significance in terms of a potential intrusion. In one of the last

scenes of *Halloween*, we see Laurie in the foreground at the left side of the frame, whereas the seemingly dead body of Michael is seen out of focus lying on the floor in the background. The competent stalker viewer would warn Laurie in this situation mainly because of the suggestiveness of the framing, and also for knowing the fact that in the final scenes of stalkers, the killer always comes back to life for one last time before he gets killed for real. At least, until the sequel.

The above-described features appear as the most prominent participants of the genre in that they construct the immediate visual surface of the film, marking it as a stalker. However, to endow those participants with the outward dynamism required for the game and correspondingly accommodate the audience participation without hindering it with extraneous narrative substance, the stalker displays a distinct economy in setting up its fictional world. The stalker does not want to entangle itself with complicated plot devices or variant back-stories for the characters. In this context, it is important to note that anniversaries and commemorations are significant participants of the stalker narrative; almost all stalker titles refer to annual commemorative events, e.g. Halloween, prom night, graduation, birthday etc. The reason for this is twofold. Primarily, the compulsive murders committed by the killer are motivated by a traumatic past event. In the opening scene of *Halloween*, we watch the primal trauma of Michael Myers: he stabs his sister on a Halloween night after witnessing her act of illicit sex. The particular day of annual commemoration comes to stand for the trauma that had caused the 'bogeyman' to awaken, hence, the killer acquires his basic motivation to strike in a cyclical fashion, that is, presumably every year on that day. Secondarily, the association of a special date with the uncontrollable rage of the killer helps the stalker

narrative in sidestepping all sorts of narrative contrivances used in intersecting the stories of separate characters. A commemoration is an effective alibi to bring a high number of potential victims together without the necessity of an interwoven plot structure that justifies the meeting of all those people in one particular place. Consequently, the stalker can easily limit its story to 24-48 hours and to a single location.

The singular setting of the stalker hosts the young, mostly teenaged, community that is fated to get slashed by the psycho killer. The stalker resorts to two basic patterns of action to start the mayhem. The killer, who used to be a member of the community long ago, comes back to his hometown for retribution. As per the other alternative, the young community travels to the place where they encounter the killer who had been waiting there nurturing his taste for vengeance. Once the initial action is accomplished, the setting that supports the stalker narrative not only remains singular throughout the whole film but it also displays a distinct sense of isolation. The young community, which happens to end up in a camp, the semi-deserted streets of a suburb, or school, is totally isolated from the rest of society. The teenagers face the killer "in the middle of nowhere" - a place that resembles many locales in America, and does not display any particularity that could refer to a specific state or a city. According to Dika, the stalker film positions its fictional young community in a middle-class American setting that fosters the greatest degree of likeness to the young members of the audience (58-9). However, this likeness functions on the utmost generic level in that the viewer can actually imagine him/herself as an inhabitant of the represented locale without identifying site-specific factors. Such 'facelessness' of the settings enables the stalker to invite the largest possible American audience to its game. To foreground the participants of playfulness,

it carefully stays away from endowing its 'playground' with a tone that could discriminate among the viewers in terms of their familiarity with the filmed environment.

The (fictional) teenagers of the stalker display a similar sort of facelessness in that they hardly satisfy the basic conditions of being a film character. Modleski notes that, the narrative people of the stalker are such shadowy and undeveloped figures that they do not motivate the audience to attain a 'narcissistic' identification. Accordingly, the viewer rather enjoys indulging in an 'anti-narcissistic' identification whereby s/he watches those fictional people from a distance without genuinely 'feeling' for them (Modleski 290). The characters of the stalker are white, middle-class Americans in the most generic and abstracted sense of the term. They either appear in outfits that do not distinguish any particular style or trend other than a non-specific American-ness, or they put on fanciful costumes to conceal any possible codes that refer to 'aberrant' particularities concerning taste, culture, or history. Dika sees the stalker characters as figures that embody the America of the print ad and of the television commercial, which are intentionally contrived to embrace the largest number of members in the audience (55).

The behaviors of the stalker characters are infused with an intense mode of playfulness: as being ordinary, active and youthful people, they are primarily involved with 'enjoying themselves and each other.' All of their actions are trivial, seemingly innocent and mostly nonproductive (they are "playing around" rather than working), consequently, they do not display any awareness of the malice that threatens them, namely the relentless psycho-killer. As regards the structure of the fiction which he is the pivotal part, the killer represents the 'past', which the young people do not care

about. The carnage which befalls upon them, in a sense, is meant to retaliate against that carelessness.

One character who stands out among the blank figures of the stalker is the heroine, also known as 'the final girl.' The stalker heroine is usually presented as a relatively strong character with a variety of well-developed skills. Contrary to the other young members of the community, who practically waste their times on trivial activities, the heroine displays a dedication to duty and holds a set of ideals. She emerges as the narrative figure who comes closest to being a subject; the viewer is allowed to acknowledge her interiority and consciousness of the danger that threatens all the members of the community. In this sense, the heroine is the most accomplished 'player' in the stalker's teenage group; the audience roots for her as much as it roots for the killer. Unlike the other youngsters, the heroine is not held for long periods as the target/object of the killer's destructive look. Dika maintains that, in her relatively heightened ability to cinematically take others (especially the killer) as the object of her gaze and to engage in narratively significant action through the use of violence, the heroine occupies an "essentially" masculine position within the film (55). Along similar lines, Clover believes that the stalker compromises the gender of the 'final girl' by attributing her masculine interests, a distinct sexual reluctance, and distance from the other girls. She displays the ability to exercise a power that has conventionally been assigned to the male subjects of the filmic narrative. Accordingly, the final girl "looks *for* the killer, even tracking him to his forest hut or his underground labyrinth, and then *at* him, therewith bringing him, often for the first time, into our vision as well" (Clover 298).

The 'final girl' is the worthiest adversary of the bogeyman. Her function in the stalker narrative is unmistakable in that she

boosts the playfulness of the viewer by providing him/her with the other origin of power to be pitted against the power of the killer. The term 'final girl' has been coined in reference to the heroine's ability to arise among all the other members of the community to fight the final battle with the killer. She manages to unmask and destroy the killer in the final scene, yet the killer always strikes back in the sequel to confront her again, or another final girl.

The stalker organizes the participants discussed so far into a two-part narrative structure. The first part screens the primal event that had occurred years earlier: the experience of an extreme trauma drives the killer into insanity. This trauma is caused by his 'seeing,' or participating in, a wrongful action perpetrated by one or more members of the young community. The killer develops a deep mental wound only to be healed or assuaged by revenge. He either responds with rage immediately with an act of violent retribution or holds his reaction back until the second segment of the film. In the second, or modern day, part of the narrative, the killer returns to take vengeance on the guilty parties or their symbolic substitutes. Director John Carpenter's take on the plot line of the stalker is rather different in that he describes *Halloween* as a movie meant to 'scare' the audience via a tripartite narrative structure. Accordingly, the film is based on the recurrent formulation of the statement "he's coming to get you" which is realized with an increased relevance in every consecutive act of the narrative. Carpenter seems to have broken down the second (or the modern day) part of the plot line into two sub-acts: the killer is coming to get the heroine - the heroine confronts the killer and fights back to claim the title 'final girl.'

Dika notes that the stalker occasionally features a catalyst character who 'knows' what the killer is capable of and is aware of the stakes involved. This character, e.g. Dr. Loomis (Donald

Pleasance) in *Halloween*, constantly warns the community of the impending danger, whereas the members of the community take no heed. Dr. Loomis' prophecies (danger is "looming") heighten the tension of the game as they keep raising the amount of risk involved and the degree of the expected on-screen violence.

Advancing through the narrative participants described in this section, the stalker reduces the conventional conflict-resolution flow of the classic realist narrative to a series of killings. Every act of violence perpetrated by the killer resolves the tension only until it is built up again through the next couple of scenes. This pattern also applies to the way the stalker films relate to each other: the killer is destroyed in the end by the final girl, however, he 'strikes back' in the sequel to haunt the young community again. This cycle is repeated until the film loses its power to draw the viewers into its game.

4. THE RETURN OF THE GAME OF HORROR: THE NEW STALKER OF THE 1990S

As indicated in the previous sections of this study, the stalker, as a well-defined genre of horror, disappeared around the early eighties. During the years that followed the retreat of the stalker, horror movies incorporated various aspects of it in a sporadic fashion without, however, reviving the genre in its entirety. The genuine resurrection of the stalker took place after roughly two decades, similar to Michael Myers' return to his hometown following his twenty years of silence. The most significant trait of the nineties' new stalker' is that it is intensely metafictional in the sense in which the term was defined throughout the second chapter of this thesis. In fact, it is possible to situate the new stalker within a broader phenomenon of self-reflexivity that has infused the nineties' film narrative in general and the horror genre in particular. As regards the latter, among a series of metafictional horror movies mostly scripted by the 'new talent' Kevin Williamson, *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996) and its two sequels stand out as the specimens of the new stalker. Each episode of the *Scream* trilogy 'refunctions' the participants of the classic stalker via a distinctly renewed intentionality.

The new stalker's parodic/metafictional perspective on its antecedents provided the guidelines by which the preceding three chapters of this thesis have been structured. The objective of the present chapter is to address the new stalker of the nineties primarily as a phenomenon to be pondered in terms of the ways it stands for the 'tenor of times.' Hence, the question can be

formulated as: "Why did the stalker come back in the nineties?" The search for the answers to this query will reveal the underlying mechanisms that have set the climate for the new stalker's immense popularity.

The explanation for the revival of the stalker as a metafictional text is multileveled. It is connected to a series of circumstances that gave birth to an audience willing to receive and circulate self-reflexive fictions. The primary issue to be considered here is the rising popularity of games as forms of entertainment in the nineties. The increasing predisposition of the audiences toward games and playfulness might have motivated the writers/producers to retrieve the stalker for its having been one of the most playful genres in the movie history. In this context, the new stalker can arguably be examined in relation to the attempts of nineties' film and game industry to effect an extensive integration. The merging of these two separate media has been accomplished in more concrete terms in the nineties than the way it appeared in the eighties. Namely, whereas the emergence of playfulness in the eighties' stalker phenomenon could be described as a mode of viewerly appropriation (a 'perverse response,' as Barthes would say), the nineties witnessed the conscious efforts of games and films to blend into a more unified medium of entertainment. Films had always been rich sources of inspiration for video game designers; however, in the nineties, the reverse has occurred: many popular video games have been 'remade' as action movies. Also, the increasing sophistication and affordability of the digital technology enabled the game designers to create interactive CD-ROM films that give the viewer/player the power to project him/herself into the world of a filmic narrative in which s/he can change the course of events depending on his/her dexterity as a player/actor.

In this context, I consider self-reflexivity as another 'concrete' act toward merging game and film as two formerly distinct modes of entertainment. As noted in the section "2.2," metafiction is an unambiguous textual presence that endows the narrative with a certain playfulness. At this point, it is necessary to note the distinctiveness of the new stalker regarding the way it incorporates self-reflexivity as a tool to induce a gaming attitude in its audience. Primarily, the 'authorial intentions' manifested by the new stalker's secondary discourse clearly acknowledge the status of both the old and the new stalker as 'filmic games' that reside within the same genre. In other words, the new stalker is still a stalker, as opposed to many other metafictional films that tend to fall into comedy or satire as a function of their critical attitudes toward their primary texts. While keeping itself within the boundaries of the genre, the new stalker exploits the 'literacy requirement' attached to the reception of metafiction to evoke a similar game played by the eighties' stalker audience. However, this time, the invitation to the game is openly manifested via various self-reflexive narrative situations that address the viewer as the 'third' party of a tripartite metafictional dialogue. All these surely point to a particular film and media culture that came to dominate the nineties. The new stalker nourishes itself on a particular 'speech community' which is quite 'literate' about the cultural products it consumes.

The following sections will delve into more detail on the issues presented in this introductory section. Section "4.1" is reserved for an elaboration of the process through which the concepts of game and film came to overlap each other. Section "4.2" will provide an overview of the peculiar literacy of the nineties' movie fandom, with an attempt to render the other perspective through which the emergence of the new stalker seems meaningful,

even inevitable. The last two sections are reserved for a closer account of *Scream* as a metafictional text that 'speaks' the whole discussion presented so far.

4.1. The Mingling of Game and Film in the Nineties

In reference to the now irreversible progression by which the visual world is increasingly invaded by video games, Alex Hutchinson introduces his article with the following paragraph:

> If you need something to blame it on, blame *Space Invaders*. In 1978 it caused a yen shortage in Japan. It was the first video game to break out of seedy arcades and into general stores and pizza parlors, kick starting the '80s arcade game craze and fathering the now multi-billion dollar video game industry.

Interestingly, the very seed that led the way to today's 'game phenomenon' coincides with the release date of *Halloween* in the US. One particular difference between video games and the stalker, in this context, is that the former never left the arena. The invariable rise of the video games can primarily be seen in the recent phenomenal success of Sony's PlayStation along with its rivaling enterprise Nintendo 64 in that they managed to attract a huge general audience to games, selling over 70 million systems worldwide along the way. Hutchinson interprets this situation as a phenomenon that signals the fact that " we are on the threshold of a new entertainment age."

In 1999, sales of home consoles and game software have risen to 20 billion dollars, which surpasses the Hollywood box office figures for the first time in history. Hutchinson asks what possibly this could mean. The answers are quite dramatic: more people are playing more games more often than ever before; more people are

playing games than going to the movies or reading books, which comes down to saying that "games are now quite probably the single most popular form of entertainment on the planet." The trait that enables these games to beat all the other forms of entertainment is 'interactivity,' that is, their unique capacity of giving the player the power to become an actual participant in the fictional game world. The visceral thrills of the movie narrative engulfs the player in a more profound fashion in the game as s/he literally becomes the part of the plot line through the identity of a digitally-designed character. Looking at the increasingly participatory game structures introduced by companies such as Nihilistic and Elixir, Hutchinson believes that the aspect of interactivity will be the primal item to be exploited by the producers as the individual players around the world start forming a big 'gaming community.' Hence, he puts forward his prophecy:

> Imagine being able to create scenarios instead of linear plot threads, world environments instead of single scenes. Imagine taking your friends through a custom designed adventure which you could manipulate to their tastes every time someone seemed bored.

The participatory activities of the player, then, would surpass the limits of mere playing to render him/her as an 'artist,' a creative agent of the whole experience.

The problem with Hutchinson's prophecy is that it does not qualify as a prophecy; everything he imagines regarding the future of games is actually happening. And the phenomenon by far surpasses the formal limitations of the digital medium. The reference here is to what came to be known as the Fantasy Role Playing (FRP) games that have enjoyed an immense popularity over the last decade. James Beach gives the rudimentary definition of the FRP as an interactive game in which "players take on the roles of imaginary characters, usually in a setting created by a referee, and thereby vicariously

experience the imagined adventures of these characters." The actual environment of the FRP game is not necessarily a digitally-constructed virtual space. The most typical scene of an FRP game in progress is a group of people sitting around a table holding a few game paraphernalia (game cards, pieces of paper to put down points, comments etc.) while verbally acting out the game identities they assume for the present adventure. FRP can also be played online through computer monitors, or it can as well be staged as a theatre play where each player wears the outfits and carry the gadgets that typify the character s/he is performing. The basic principle is that the player "pretends" to be another character quite apart from his/her own personality while using intellectual skills to make that character thorough and effective so that s/he can advance through the ruses and complications created by the game itself and/or other players/characters. Hence, FRP is not medium-specific; once the means of communication is set to accommodate two or more players, the basic condition for the playability of the FRP game is satisfied.

As mentioned at the end of the section "2.2," David Cronenberg, in his 1999 movie *eXistenZ*, advances quite a provocative elaboration of the FRP games as referring to a contemporary mode of behavior informed by the awareness that "one exists as a constructed identity to play the game of life." The discourse that praises the FRP games on every possible level also hints at such a notion by focusing on the resiliency of the game in terms of its playability in any situation and the similarity of the social/communicative skills used in the real world and the game world. For Beach, who is a huge FRP fan, these two points render the FRP game as the best possible leisure activity ever to be imagined. Accordingly, FRP far surpasses board games and beats computer games as rather limited; "it can go in so many different directions that it could easily be

your primary pass-time hobby for decades to come" (Beach). Such distinctiveness of the FRP comes from its 'organic' structure that is quite different from the ones used by the traditional games that determine set playing times and very specific rules and conditions of victory to determine the winners and losers. In contrast,

> ...the playing time for an FRP game can be a few minutes (over coffee), hours (a quiet afternoon), days (holiday get-togethers, conventions, etc.), or more. And instead of having a victory condition that brings the game to a close, it is more *like real life* and may last for years as the players keep getting together whenever then can and add to the on-going story [Emphasis added] (Beach).

Thus, the main objective of a skillful FRP player is not exclusively focused on 'winning' the game, which is not quite possible in the conventional sense of the term anyway. There is such a variety and intricacy to the situations that can occur in an FRP adventure that targeting a strictly-defined goal would hinder the flow of the game by working against its organic structure. It is possible to talk about 'successful' and unsuccessful' players, whereas these two value judgements are attached to the individual player's skills in developing his/her game identity into a full-fledged fictional character, not to his/her ability to, say, finish the game before everyone else. Hence, the advocates of the FRP games believe that the fictional world created by the game is not different from real life where one similarly strives to establish a character and confront challenging situations by activating various physical, mental, and social skills that are attached to it.

Here, the FRP's similarity to film is more striking than its similarity to life; the latter can be repetitive and boring as a narrative whereas the former has to involve its viewers/participants by creating excitement and progression. The players carry on with the game only if it 'grows' toward something - not necessarily a foreseeable or predetermined final scene, though. As Allegra Geller

(Jennifer Jason Leigh) of *eXistenZ* remarks: "You have to play the game to find out why you are playing the game." At this point the significance of the "Game Master" becomes apparent. Reminiscent of the writer or director of a film, the Game Master is responsible for rendering the FRP game into an exciting event that is worth participating. Although the dominant characteristic of the Game Master is his/her contraposition toward the players/characters, s/he does not intend to beat them by making everything difficult, and conversely the players do not simply take him/her as the ultimate foe. Beach foregrounds three main functions fulfilled by the FRP Game Master. Primarily, s/he makes up the world of the game and is responsible for the development of the story; hence, the Game Master is expected to hold a high degree of knowledge regarding the type of FRP s/he directs. Secondly, s/he adjudicates the rules of the system, and decides whether your character is capable of performing a particular action in case the game situation does not induce it by itself. Finally, it is the Game Master's responsibility to make the game exciting and challenging for the players. In accomplishing these basic functions, the Game Master becomes the background texture of the game world; s/he assumes all the roles other than the player characters (PC's), that is, villains, monsters, guards, other heroes and heroines, mentors, kings, princes and princesses, beggars, prostitutes, sailors, shopkeepers, innkeepers, blacksmiths, potters, porters, scribes, etc. S/he also controls such aspects of the game world as the weather, the geography, and the dominant political situation that creates an agenda for each character. Hence, the Game Master provides the means and the challenges by which a player can develop his/her game identity into an evolved character who has strengths, weaknesses, a back story, and specific wills and purposes throughout his/her existence in the fictional FRP world.

Understandably, FRP games center around exciting adventures rather than the ordinary and the mundane, and the most fertile domains that provide the inspiration for the FRP narratives are literature and cinema. FRP has primarily appropriated the term 'genre' from film and made it refer to the particular settings and characters of specific games. At this point, the FRP world comes significantly close to the movie/TV world in terms of the fictional contents it incorporates. For instance, within the genre of science fiction, we encounter such game titles as *Dune*, *Star Trek*, *Babylon 5*, and *Stargate*. Similarly, if the players are interested in a game of action and espionage, it is very well possible to play a James Bond game through various characters that have emerged in the history of the series; one can even play Mad Max in a game titled *Road Warrior*. Yet, to be able to create a game world out of such popular fictions one has to have acquired a thorough iconological and iconographical comprehension of the genre and the specific narrative in question. The Game Master basically has to qualify as a 'mythologist' in Barthes' sense, whereas the players should be cultured enough to keep up with the intensity of the codes and information involved.

Requirement of such a high degree of 'literacy' doesn't seem to have intimidated the potential FRP players given the enormous popularity of the whole phenomenon. Most likely, the introduction of the FRP games was already due to a certain cultural saturation whereby the fans acquired a thorough culture regarding the fictions in which they had long been interested. The numbers that Craig Branch gives in reference to the commercial successes of FRP companies verify the idea. Wizards of the Coast, the largest provider of game equipment, holds more than 500 employees and has international offices in Antwerp, Paris, Milan, and London. The popular FRP game *Magic the Gathering* was released in late 1993 and

sold out its first 10 million game cards in six weeks instead of a projected six months; today more than 500 million cards have been sold and there are more than five million game enthusiasts in 52 countries, which far surpasses the all-time-favorite Monopoly. The number-two ranked FRP game *Vampire* has more than 100 websites that link the players all over the world.

Branch's research figures out that the majority of the FRP game participants are between 18 and 30 years of age, and they are mostly men. However, women have recently become 25% of the population. In Branch's words, the profile of the typical 'gamer' is "a fairly intelligent, inquisitive person who prefers spending disposable income and a few evenings a week playing mind games instead of basketball." Although the fandom started out among students, it is known that it has lately expanded to lawyers, bank executives, and other such professionals as well. As emphasized in the advertising slogans that supported the sales of *Magic the Gathering*, FRP game is "the intellectual sport of the nineties' in that it promotes strategy, mathematics and critical thinking." Namely, playing FRPs could make one a more 'successful' individual in life.

The close proximity between the concepts of 'role playing' and 'real life,' as articulated in the discourses on the FRP phenomenon, calls back Mark Currie's contention that people are becoming more and more aware of the fact that what we know as the 'real world' is a construction where we act out 'roles' rather than 'selves' (40). For Currie, this has been the prime mover behind the rising popularity of self-reflexivity in fiction, for the contemporary viewer has become increasingly aware of the meta-discursive levels that determine the ways in which stories are told and characters are created. Whether the consciousness Currie is talking about has generated a 'metafictional' mode of living would be too large a

research question to be posed here. However, as Branch also points out, the idea has generated deep repercussions in the televised media spawning a series of 'reality games' that receive top ratings.

Televised 'reality dramas' have been gaining popularity over the last couple of years especially after MTV's introduction of the short series entitled 'Real World.' The main concept was to broadcast the daily actions of a group of youngsters who occasionally went through crises regarding relationships. The concept has been refined since then, which ended up spawning probably one of the biggest TV phenomena of the 2000s in North America: *Survivor*. The basic structure of *Survivor* is quite similar to an FRP game; the only difference is that the distinction between the concepts of 'player' and 'character' is somewhat blurred. About 20 people are placed on an island where they are totally deprived of the conveniences that characterize the modern world. The objective is to endure the challenging life in nature while getting on well with the other players. The latter point is actually a more important gauge of success in *Survivor* as the game advances through a process of elimination: the 'tribe' (this is what the community of the players on the island is called) holds a ceremonial gathering every week where one of the players is 'voted out' from the game for his/her observed failures as a player/character. Hence, the success depends not only on physical and psychological dexterity as regards the difficulties of living on a 'wild' island, which is made even more difficult by the producers who come up with various challenges everyday, but also on the development of a 'character' that receives appreciation from all the other players. The process of elimination determines the winner by leaving one player in the end who has managed not to be voted out by the others all along the way, for whom the award is one million US dollars.

The media coverage that centered around August 2000's *Survivor* winner Richard Hatch has foregrounded him mostly as a 'successful person' in general rather than merely an accomplished gamer. He has been pictured as a 'role model' especially for the people who strive to acquire the methods by which one develops 'strategies' and 'social skills' to make it through life. Correspondingly, in all his interviews, Hatch kept underlining the fact that he had acted with the awareness regarding the significance of seeing everything through logical strategies as opposed to giving in to his 'genuine' feelings for people and situations. The unsuccessful players/people were the ones whose judgements were clouded by emotions and empathy.

As regards the popularity of FRP games along with their manifestation as media events, the resurrection of the stalker via an intense mode of self-reflexivity, then, comes up as another feature of the dominant entertainment paradigm in the late nineties. In this context *Scream* can be seen as a fictional game where we watch a group of teenagers trying to stay alive while the 'serious awareness of being in a stalker game' can possibly have a survival value. The players/characters who have acquired the knowledge regarding the essential participants of the stalker narrative and who can put them in use turn out to be better players.

Alongside the infusion of the nineties' film narrative with the consciousness of gaming that incorporates knowledge acquisition and strategic planning, a more 'visceral' integration of films and video games has also been progressing on a separate level. The most blatant sign of this progression can be seen in the transformation of video rental stores into 'home entertainment centers' where the customers can not only rent movies but also video games and related electronic equipment. In these places, it is sometimes even hard to figure out whether the title on the shelf is a videotape or a game cartridge as many former video games have started reappearing as

movies such as Super Mario Bros. (Rocky Morton, 1993), Mortal Combat (Paul Anderson, 1995), and Tomb Raider (Simon West, 2001). Some DVDs include both the game and the feature so that the viewer can not only play the movie but also 'play with' its game version.

Throughout the mutual advance of games and movies toward each other, there are a few products that stand out as manifesting the most physical hybridization of the two media. The reference here is to the CD-ROM films in which the viewer can actually participate as a character. Wheeler Dixon acknowledges the ongoing interlacing of films and games into each other while putting forward a CD-ROM film titled *Ground Zero Texas* (1993) as something that represents "the next step forward in the evolution of the cinematic/video fictive narrative construct" (114). In *Ground Zero Texas*, the viewer is an actual participant of the film, "directly addressed by the other performers within the fictive world, the giver and bearer of the gaze" (Dixon 112). To experience *Ground Zero Texas*, the viewer/player pops the CD in the Sega machine and watches the filmed action unfold through the POV of a special agent who has arrived in a Texas town in search for the dangerous aliens known as Reticulans. As the plot advances, the viewer/player finds him/herself in a variety of situations whereby s/he has to decide what to do, which way to go, and obviously, whom to kill.

Apparently, *Ground Zero Texas* is quite a violent film/game. John Tierney notes that the whole narrative involves three hundred 'point and shoot' scenes. Assuming that the film/game has a running time of approximately 90 minutes (which surely can change depending on the way the player proceeds), *Ground Zero Texas* contains a POV-killing sequence on an average of one every eighteen seconds (Dixon 114). On that account, Dixon maintains that these new interactive narratives are the resurrected versions of the classic stalker genre. He thinks, the *Friday the 13th* series has expired because the

public was saturated with the same narrative structure that involved repetitive killings 'merely' represented through the killer's POV. The recent outburst of these violent games signal the reincarnation of the genre, this time as an interactive video game/film, at first on the fringe of the industry, then gradually moving to the mainstream production companies (Dixon 116).

4.2 Film Literacy in the Nineties

In the previous section, it was pointed out that a satisfying FRP game required the direction of an accomplished Game Master who had accumulated a great deal of knowledge regarding the film or genre from which the game was derived. As a matter of fact, the cultural environment of the nineties is quite ripe for Game Masters to emerge, which would have been relatively difficult in, say, the seventies. It is not unsound to assume that the meaning of 'movie fandom' has remained more or less stable throughout the film history, which Henry Jenkins refers to as 'a cultural community consisting of people who possess a distinct knowledge of the fictions they consume' (144). In the nineties, the aspects of 'community' and 'knowledge' do remain as the essential elements of fandom, while the former is substantially larger and the latter has been rendered much more accessible. It is a lot easier to become 'film literate' in the nineties as the various movie-related 'info' has been stored and transmitted via the means of the digital technology. The nineties' film circulates within a plethora of data and links attached to it.

The primary reference here is to the internet in general and the Internet Movie Database in particular. IMDb has come to provide the most inclusive film guide for the 'buffs' interested in

'anything' that is connected to the movies they see. IMDb was initiated by a group of film fans in 1990 as a modest web establishment under the address 'rec.arts.movies.' Before the world-wide distribution of the first user-friendly web browser, IMDb was made up of a set of scripts and files that allowed the user to build his/her own local copy of the database on a Unix-based personal computer. Over the ten years of constant expansion, IMDb surpassed the movie sourcebooks mainly due to the fact that it is constantly updated and linked to other websites that go even deeper into particular films, directors, actors etc. The core of the database is the effective search capabilities it offers to the user. IMDb has catalogued all sorts of information on over 250,000 movies made since the very beginning of cinema, accompanied with the names of 900,000 people who were, in one way to the other, involved in the making. Within that 900,000, there are over 500,000 actors, 50,000 directors, 70,000 writers, and a wide variety of technical staff ranging from the producer to the grip. Amidst the web through which these titles and names are linked to one another, various other items of 'info' are also situated into the system, allowing the searcher to gather data on every single aspect related to a film. The main links of movie information presented by IMDb are as follows: plot summary, keywords, full cast and crew, user comments, external reviews, newsgroup reviews, awards & nominations, user ratings, recommendations, memorable quotes, trivia, goofs, soundtrack listing, movie connections, merchandising links, box office & business, release dates, filming locations, technical specifications, laserdisc details, DVD details, news articles, taglines, trailers, posters, photographs, schedules on TV, and sound/video clips. Depending on the particularities of the film or TV series in question, many auxiliary links are also added to the database; for instance, "crazy credits" appears in the list if the

closing credits of a film or program include humorous references or jokes; likewise, the "official site" link appears if the feature is already supported by a separate webpage; and the user can find out just about anything through the link titled "miscellaneous."

Probably the most important link that IMDb has recently established is the one with Amazon.com - the largest web-based mail order company that sells books and videos. As of April 1998, IMDb has become part of Amazon.com enterprise and posted a link section on each of its movie pages enabling the user to instantaneously order a copy of the feature on VHS or DVD. This alliance makes clearer the extent to which filmic fictions have become parts of a large network of cultural knowledge. In the late nineties, movies circulate across the vast landscape/netscape of information as 'entries.'

Speaking of the impact of the digital technology on movie fandom, the other reference is to the advance of laserdiscs and DVDs. Joan Hawkins observes that the digital media revolution has engendered a highly sophisticated consumer group that is into collecting the 'digitally-restored' versions of its favorite films. The pioneering company that created and catered to this public is The Criterion Collection, which had started releasing feature films on laserdiscs long before CD-ROMs and DVDs were used as commercial film media. The quality of the reproductions provided by Criterion was the primary issue that gathered a staunchly loyal consumer group that populated the mail groups on the internet to discuss and criticize the technical specifications of the recently released laserdiscs. As a matter of fact, the sound and image quality of the Criterion discs were quite remarkable; the digital image transfers were made from the 35mm or 70mm prints minted from the original negatives, and the master sound and effects tracks were separately

digitized and enhanced via the use of state-of-the-art technology (Hawkins 41).

Chris McGowan maintains that the real digital revolution started when Criterion introduced what has come to be known as the 'annotated movie' (Hawkins 42). The use of multiple soundtracks had been an unexplored possibility easily afforded by the digital medium. Criterion exploited this potential of the laserdisc in *King Kong* to "pull a neat trick": the audio track of the film was doubled into two parallel sectors that included both the original soundtrack and a shot-by-shot analysis recited by the film historian Ron Haver. The viewer could switch back and forth between these two ongoing tracks as s/he watched the movie. Due to the huge praise this digital feature received from the consumers, it has become one of the most common 'extra-features' provided by the laserdisc's more feasible descendant - DVD. The significance of the emergence of annotated movie, as regards the issues addressed by this study, is that it stands for the inclusion of Staiger's 'meta-talk' into the substance of the film. The movie, published in the digital medium, comes with its own metacommentary, in a sense, generating a self-reflexive mode of presentation.

The audio commentary feature motivated the outburst of a slate of other extra features that were included in the DVDs. The incorporation of theatrical trailers, interviews with the actors, televised reviews of the film etc. turned the DVD into a digital package that presented the movie, as it were, as a complete event that came with every link that is relevant. For example the *Halloween* DVD includes the following set of special features: screen-specific audio commentary featuring writer-director-composer John Carpenter, writer-producer Debra Hill, and actress Jamie Lee Curtis on her big-screen debut; Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert giving splatter movies two thumbs down while praising *Halloween* in a

controversial 1980 *Sneak Preview* segment; the original theatrical trailer; separate effects and music track; additional footage shot for the 1980 television release; photo-essay on the making, marketing, and mimicking of *Halloween*; illustrated filmographies of John Carpenter, Donald Pleasence, and Jamie Lee Curtis; genre guide by John McCarthy, author of *Splatter Movies: Breaking the Last Taboo of the Screen*, including capsule reviews of cold-blooded-killer movies from *The Bad Seed* to *Halloween 5* (Hawkins 43).

The metafictional stalker can be seen, in this respect, as a genre that encapsulates one of the dominant modes of film reception that holds sway in the late nineties. *Scream*, then, is a movie that effectively incorporates the 'relevant links' into its narrative structure by virtue of its intense self-reflexivity.

4.3. Kevin Williamson, the New Stalker, and *Scream* (1996)

> ...they're all the same. It's always some stupid killer stalking some big breasted girl-who can't act-who always runs up the stairs when she should be going out the front door. It's insulting.
>
> Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell) from *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996)

The new stalker phenomenon is predominantly centered around the upstart screenwriter Kevin Williamson. Following his big debut feature *Scream*, Williamson went on to write a series of movies that fortified his status as the 'iconologist of horror specializing in the stalker genre.' The now 32-year-old screenwriter was among the young audiences of the early eighties, experiencing in the first person the boisterous stalker game that broke out in the shabby movie theaters (Broeske). Apparently, Williamson did not have to

carry out deep narrative analyses of the genre or fulfill an exhaustive audience research to come up with the idea of a metafictional stalker movie. As reported under the Williamson-trivia links of various web sources focusing on the new stalker, an 'eerie' experience inspired him to script a film called "Scary Movie" that later turned out to be *Scream* (Krantz). During a moment of solitude in his bachelor apartment, Williamson heard a noise in the kitchen and noticed that the window, which was supposed to be closed, was ajar. He called one of his best friends on his cell phone, grabbed a butcher knife, and started creeping around while nervously chatting with his friend about 'where the intruder could be' and 'how he could possibly be avoided or eliminated.' They started referring to the rules of the classic stalkers to figure out what to do, which later on turned into a trivia-game whereby they asked each other questions about various aspects of the particular films belonging to the stalker genre. Williamson, then, blew up this experience into a feature-length script.

This anecdote is interesting in two respects. Firstly, it hints at the intensity of the old stalker phenomenon by showing that the rules of the genre managed to stay with its fans over the years. Secondly, it depicts a 'scene' that encapsulates one of the significant premises on which the narrative of the new stalker is built. Williamson gets through the above-described unnerving situation by setting up a fancied scene where he uses his knowledge of the stalker genre to deactivate a (in this case imagined) threat. Steven Schneider believes that Williamson's peculiar method of dealing with his fear made him nail down the axiom of the new stalker: if you are in trouble, then "consult your insider knowledge about those conventions governing the genre of which the movie you find yourself in is a member" (2000, 82).

> Because such knowledge prepares you for whatever may be hiding behind the corner, for whatever it is making noises in the other room. There is less to fear, not because the threat has gone away, but because you now have some idea of what the threat is, how to protect yourself from it, maybe even how to defeat it (Schneider 2000, 82).

Williamson's imagining himself as partaking in a movie and his recourse to the rules of one particular genre to get rid of his uncanny feelings resonates with most of the fundamental issues so far presented in this study. As regards Currie's contention that life is increasingly invaded by fiction, whereby we picture ourselves as being in a narrative (game, correspondingly), Williamson's anecdote stands out as an exemplary incident. The event also harmonizes with the general structure of the late nineties' metafictional horror movies where we can find an abundance of such scenes in which the characters either implicitly or explicitly convey the idea that they are aware of existing in a fictional world governed by filmic rules.

This awareness dominates Williamson's scripts in varying degrees. Besides the *Scream* series where he effected a head-on encounter with the issue by taking self-reflexivity as the fundamental premise that infuses all of the character actions, Williamson wrote several other horror movies that tackled the filmic consciousness regarding the basic rules and iconography of the genre (Brosnan). *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (Jim Gillespie, 1997) is probably the one that comes closest to merely imitating the classic stalker; the film centers around a group of teenagers who get stalked and killed by a man carrying a fisherman's hook in his hand. Nevertheless, two aspects of the narrative do reflect on the participants of the genre. Firstly, the title "I know what you did last summer" directly verbalizes the motivation behind the repetitive killings, namely, a past trauma that drives the psycho-killer to wreak havoc on the members of the young community who got

involved in a wrongful action, in this case a car accident ending up with a supposedly dead person. Secondly, the film opens with a scene where a bunch of teens tell each other scary stories based on urban legends and end up discussing whether they are real or fictional, and whether they should be taken seriously or not. *Halloween H20* (Steve Miner, 1998), which can as well be categorized as a stalker, comes much closer to the self-reflexivity of *Scream*. In this late sequel to the *Halloween* saga, Michael again comes back to haunt Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis), who now leads a new life as a school teacher and a mother. The events unfold in quite a 'stalkerly' fashion in that Michael starts killing people here and there while exhibiting himself to Laurie via uncanny apparitions. However, this time Michael has to confront with a 'stalker-literate' Laurie who knows the basic rules of the game. In various struggle scenes with Michael, Laurie consciously avoids the mistakes she made in Carpenter's 1978 feature. In the big final sequence, she chops Michael's head off with an axe to make sure he's not coming back again. Furthermore, Williamson also scripted a sci-fi/stalker hybrid titled *The Faculty* (Robert Rodriguez, 1998) in which a group of misfit high school teens discover that their town is invaded by aliens in an 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' sort of way. They struggle against those aliens, who are disguised as their friends and relatives, by retrieving their insider's knowledge on the sci-fi and horror genre.

The self-reflexive narrative mode initiated by Williamson also spawned other specimens issued by writers/producers who wanted to capitalize on the immense popularity of what seemed to be an emergent popular genre. The most prominent examples are *Urban Legends* (Jamie Blanks, 1998) and *Urban Legends: The Final Cut* (John Ottman, 2000) both of which resemble to a great extent the new stalker in terms of their basic narrative participants. One

difference is that the *Urban Legends* series utilizes another database of insider's knowledge, which is a series of spooky incidents that are believed to have repeatedly occurred in the modern cities. The teenaged characters of the film use their knowledge of this mythology to find out about the identity of a psychopath who performs copy-cat versions of these incidents all of which end with the death of a youngster. Hence, the viewer is called/challenged to participate in the film by retrieving his/her own knowledge of these stories. The sequel (*The Final Cut*) even raises the aspect of self-reflexivity by making all the events take place among a group of film students, one of which is interested in making a film called "Urban Legends."

Among all these new horror films, *Scream* stands out as the new stalker par excellence for its direct incorporation of the issues regarding metafiction, audience participation and playfulness. Arguably, *Scream*'s success depends on its incorporation/activation of the insider's knowledge (literacy) that is most pertinent to its time: the knowledge of movie culture in general and the horror/stalker genre in particular. The increasing prevalence and accessibility of this cultural domain, as treated in the previous section, must have helped *Scream* in gathering an audience that is not limited to the older generation that happened to have seen the classical stalkers in their own time. The renowned popular film critic Roger Ebert also underlines this aspect of *Scream* as its main device of drawing interest:

> True, [the characters] went to the movies in "The Last Picture Show," and the heroes of "Clerks" worked in a video store. Even Bonnie and Clyde went to the movies. But those movies were about the *act* of going to the movies. "Scream" is about *knowledge* of the movies: The characters in "Scream" are in a horror film, and because they've seen so many horror films, they know what to do, and what not to do.

Ebert, who is not really into 'clichéd' stalkers, appreciates *Scream*'s open discussion of them rather than leaving it to the audience, because "*Scream* is not about the plot. It is about itself. In other words, it is about characters who "know" they are in a plot" (Ebert). Ebert also thinks that the aspect of self-reflexivity 'defuses' the graphic violence used by the film. The particular focus on 'knowledge' must have convinced him, as a serious critic, that *Scream* is not really a stalker but a 'theory of the stalker.'

The figures that bespeak the immense commercial success of *Scream* are analogous to the ones enjoyed by *Halloween* at its time. It literally became the story of the year; as Chris Nashawaty notes, *Scream* became "a $102.6 million-grossing franchise spawner that has enabled Miramax to cross over from rarefied art house to sequel-happy grind house." Six months after its opening, *Scream* did not only do remarkable business in more than 400 theaters in the US ($181,000 the weekend of June 27-29 1996) but the director and the stars (Neve Campbell, David Arquette, and Courteney Cox, among others) quickly reunited in Atlanta on June 16th to start shooting the sequel. Another reported incident that makes the *Scream* phenomenon similar to the one initiated by *Halloween* is the presence of an audience that watched the film 'repeatedly.' The co-chairman of Miramax, Bob Weinstein, after experiencing the playful ambiance in the theatre, told the *Hollywood Reporter* that "some of [the viewers] *know every line* in the movie. Normally, it is four weekends and you're gone, but this one stuck around for twenty-six weeks in wide release" [emphasis added] (Robb 182).

The story, metafiction, and the game

Described through the condensed mode of a synopsis, *Scream* reads quite similarly to a classic stalker narrative.

On the outskirts of the town of Woodsboro (an anonymous American suburb that seems to exist in the middle of nowhere), high school student Casey (Drew Barrymore) and her boyfriend Steve (Kevin Patrick Walls) are brutally butchered by a knife-wielding killer who disguises him/herself behind a white ghost mask and a hooded black robe. This incident coincides with the anniversary of the rape and murder of Maureen Prescott, mother of Sidney (Neve Campbell) - another high school student in Woodsboro who has been 'sexually anorexic' due to the trauma caused by her mother's death (the androgynous name 'Sidney' seems to have been chosen to reinforce the girl's asexual nature; Sidney, later on, turns out to be the 'final girl'). Casey and Steve's murders put the town of Woodsboro into a state of panic, and the attention is centered on the town's high school. From here on, the film revolves around Sidney, her boyfriend Billy Loomis (Skeet Ulrich), and their fellow students, Tatum (Rose McGowan), Stuart (Matthew Lillard) and Randy (Jamie Kennedy). Except for Sidney, who seems somewhat serious and emotional in nature, all these teenagers are shady characters, mostly interested in 'playing around' rather than engaging in 'meaningful' activities. However, they are extremely cultured in a particular field: horror movies. Especially Randy, who works at a video rental store, displays a remarkable expertise in every aspect of the stalker film. Mostly guided by Randy's comments and declarations regarding the basic rules of the genre, the gang tries to make sense out of the ongoing murders by seeing them through stalker participants, *Halloween* in particular. The Woodsboro murders also attract the attention of the famous TV reporter Gale Weathers (Courteney Cox), who shortly arrives in town to investigate the case. The police declares a curfew, and the youngsters gather in Stu's house for a party (the most appropriate playground for the stalker killer). As the party goes on, the killer dispatches Tatum and the high school principle

Mr. Himbry (Henry Winkler). Finally, Sidney and Gale manage to crack the case and find out that Stu and Billy were the killers who had organized the whole carnage by studying some horror movies. In the closing scene, we see Gale Weathers in front of a live-broadcast camera turning the 'Woodsboro murders' into a valuable primetime news item.

Regarding its basic story, as summarized above, *Scream* does not constitute a total aberration in the stalker genre. In this sense, it is not appropriate to declare it as the new filmic text that 'subverts' the worn-out narrative structure of the old slice-and-dice movies. Many other horror films that appeared after the retreat of the stalker have already effected every possible digression of its essential participants. *Scream* does have certain 'twists' in its plot development, but these twists should be seen as 'adjustments' rather than serious diversions from the generic formula. The 'new' status to be attached to the 'stalker' tag of *Scream* mainly refers to the 'secondary (meta/parodic) discourse' it activates in relation to its 'primary discourse,' and these two levels of filmic articulation are kept more or less distinct from each other.

Hence, *Scream*'s intention, as regards the discreteness of its meta-discourse, can be seen to 'reanimate' the genre rather than to reinvent it or to come up with something completely new. This recalls some of the issues elaborated in the 2nd chapter regarding the basic mechanisms of metafiction. Mark Currie defined the term as 'the literary act of creating a fiction and at the same time making a statement about the creation of that fiction' (43). *Scream* manifests this definition verbatim in that the meta-commentary generated by its second order discourse is literalized through the characters' speeches. In this sense, as Hutcheon noted, via the verbal meta-comments stated by its fictional characters, *Scream*

'trans-contextualizes' the stalker narrative, that is, resituates the genre within the nineties' zeitgeist. And, to follow Hutcheon's definition, the pleasure generated by such double voicing comes from the "degree of engagement of the [viewer] in the intertextual 'bouncing' between complicity and distance (32).

As far as the idea of 'authorized transgression' is concerned, *Scream* less transgresses or mocks its dominant primary text (*Halloween*) than pays homage to it. In its several sequences, the way *Scream* positions itself against *Halloween* recalls Bakhtin's contention that parody re-creates the parodied language as an authentic whole, "giving it its due as a language possessing its own internal logic and one capable of revealing its own world inextricably bound up with the parodied language (364)". One particular scene of *Scream* epitomizes this principle. Randy, alone in Stu's living room, watches the scene of *Halloween* where Michael comes very close to Laurie while Laurie is totally unaware. Reminiscent of the eighties' participatory viewings, Randy starts yelling at the TV screen, warning Laurie of the impending danger. He 'knows' that this always happens in stalkers: the victim is arbitrarily made to overlook the killer while the latter comes dangerously close to the former. Meanwhile, the very same thing happens to Randy; the ghost-faced killer approaches him from behind without his being aware. The fact that he 'knows' all the rules of the stalker game, in this scene, does not prevent Randy from becoming the ignorant stalker victim; thus, *Halloween*'s validity is confirmed through the secondary text's mirroring of the primary one. *Scream*, however, does not settle with this filmic suggestion and literally includes a model audience that would react 'properly' to Randy's ignorance as manifesting a typical stalkerly behavior: TV reporter Gale Weathers and her cameraman, in their broadcasting van, witness Randy's victimization via a spy camera they had placed

inside Stu's house. Their reaction to what they see on the monitor is exactly the same with Randy's: they yell at the screen desperately to make him turn around. Nevertheless, the narrative arbitrarily rewards Randy by distracting the killer's attention with some noises coming from the outside that make him leave the room before he could attack.

Seen through the concept of 'mimicry,' which is a prerequisite for the metafictional stance to manifest itself, *Scream* effects a high degree of semblance in its relation to the classic stalker text. However, it is equally important to point out that *Scream* does not mimic its antecedents verbatim; that is, it *does* divert from the original stalker narrative in certain respects. These diversions have motivated some theorists to see *Scream* as a subversive text that revolutionized the genre in its entirety. To repeat what has already been stated above, the sporadic diversions brought about by *Scream* are 'adjustments' rather than 'subversions,' and their primary function is to adapt the old stalker narrative to the nineties' standards of plausibility, to render it 'playable' by the contemporary viewer. Here, Steven Schneider's concept of "conflict of judgement" proves useful in elaborating on these textual adjustments. Schneider contends that a horror film manages to evoke uncanny/unsettling feelings by affecting its viewer in such a way that s/he experiences a certain conflict of judgement regarding the 'reality status' of the events presented on the movie screen. Accordingly, the horror film involves its viewer by generating

> a palpable "conflict of judgment" regarding the possibility of reconfirmation in reality. What we must believe, in spite of our "better" (mature, conditioned, rational) judgment, is that the objects or events being depicted really *could* exist or happen. But note: this is not to say that what we must believe, in spite of our better judgment, is that the objects (events) being depicted really do exist (really are happening) [emphasis added] (Schneider 1999).

As mentioned in the section 3.1, the post-*Psycho* horror film had established a firm basis in a certain sense of reality by featuring events that *could* happen in real life. The classic stalker, as a subgenre, had its share in this general tendency toward 'realism' on account of its participants that enabled the viewer to imagine him/herself as a part of the fiction. Evidently, the filmic participants that bring about such a conflict of judgement are time-based, conditioned by what the viewer of the period has come to regard as plausibly realistic. Motivated by this awareness, *Scream* clematises its fiction to the nineties via a number of adjustments, hence sidesteps the problem of becoming a 'naïve slice-and-dice feature.'

For instance, *Scream* provides its viewer with an explanation for the asexual nature of the final girl Sidney. Sidney's reluctance to have sex with her boyfriend Billy is not seemingly linked to a moral code, as in the classical stalker, but to the severe trauma caused by her mother's rape and murder. To associate the survival of the final girl with her chastity in a straightforward manner would probably 'not work on' the nineties' relatively progressive female audience. Besides, toward the end of the film, Sidney *does* have sex with Billy. However, it is also important to point out that Sidney's sexual act with her boyfriend does not suffice to render her as 'sexually active,' hence subversive, regarding the stalker's 'survival of the virgin' rule. Primarily, the event is not quite visualized; we only see Sidney begin 'doing it' hesitantly and, after a brief insert showing Sidney taking her clothes off, the film jumps to the aftermath scene in which she is getting dressed. The narrative carefully stays away from giving the impression that Sidney 'enjoyed' engaging in sexual behavior. Hence, *Scream* manages to depict her as the asexual final girl of the stalker without aggravating the female audience for advocating virginity as a gauge

of survival. As another example for adjustment, the ambiguously superhuman status of the stalker killer is fit into a more rational explanation in *Scream*. In the final scene, the killer turns out to be 'two people:' Billy and Stu. In this way, the outrageous strength of the killer with his apparent ability to simultaneously exist in more than one place is rendered plausible for the nineties' viewer. The new stalker's killer is not 'really' the bogeyman.

If we keep on looking for the manifestations of conflict of judgement in the nineties' stalker, we eventually come across the requirement of self-reflexivity as regards the state of affairs described in the previous two sections (4.1, 4.2) of this chapter. Both Ebert and Schneider seem to believe that today's horror film's incorporation of self-reflexivity is an inevitable outcome of what has been happening with the audiences (Schneider 1977, 424). While today's viewer cannot simply assume that the final girl survives due to her virginity, neither can s/he believe that the nineties' fictional teenagers have not heard about Michael Myers and Jason. By this awareness, *Scream* is careful to include as much of the contemporary horror film history in its secondary discourse as possible; in the final sequence where Billy delivers his final speech, he mentions both Norman Bates and Hannibal Lechter, along with his beliefs regarding the transformation of the ways in which horror movies assign motivations to their fictional psycho-killers. *Scream* also incorporates various concepts related with the televised media into its meta-discursive layer. The constant presence of the TV personality Gale Weathers indicates that the events taking place in the fictional world of *Scream* are also valuable news items to be broadcast to the prime-time audience.

The literacy aspect of metafiction brings us to the game engendered by *Scream*. As elaborated in the previous chapter, the playful participation provoked by the classic stalker was based on

the activation of the viewer's literacy. A large group of 'repeat' viewers, who had acquired a deep knowledge regarding the participants of the stalker genre indulged in a playful mode of viewing whereby they verbally interacted with the fictional characters and among themselves (meta-talk). This event, as treated earlier, was an instance of the viewer's act of 'utilizing' the film through a distinct intentionality. The difference of *Scream*, in this respect, is that it directly addresses the issue of literacy by turning it into an unambiguous textual construct. Namely, the intention of playfulness is embedded in the metafictional narrative of *Scream* as a solid participant, and it is linked to movie/stalker literacy as a conspicuous requirement. The scene in which Randy presents his *Halloween* video to his friends can be seen as the consummate moment where such transformation can be observed. Randy introduces the movie to his friends by letting them 'know' the rules by which the stalker film functions, otherwise, he believes, they can not possibly interact with it. Actually, Randy's remarks are directed both toward *Halloween* and *Scream*; while ascertaining the fact that the old stalker was meant to be played/interacted with, Randy, by clearly articulating the rules, invites the nineties' viewer to switch to a similar mode of reception as s/he watches the present movie. Later on, as previously mentioned, we see Randy play with *Halloween* by shouting at the screen, warning Laurie of the approaching danger. While this perfect reenactment of the eighties' stalker game continues, the killer creeps toward Randy from behind, mimicking exactly what is happening on the TV screen. In this particular moment, *Scream* encourages its viewer to do the same thing: warn Randy to watch out.

The aspect of literacy incorporated by *Scream* can be viewed in two ways: the literacy of the characters - the vessels by which the secondary/parodic discourse is articulated, and the literacy of the

actual viewers. All the teenaged characters in Williamson's scripts sound as if they belong to the generation-X, that is, the people in Williamson's age (32) who have seen the peak period of the stalker genre, and who had the chance to observe the ways in which media exercised an increasing influence on our lives. In this context, Schneider maintains that the sophistication of *Scream*'s characters is more indicative of a general 'enculturated self-awareness' that came to typify the nineties' youth (2000, 85). Here, we can remember Currie's contention about the increasing consciousness regarding the fictionality of life, stimulated by the rise of 'gaming' as a mode of behavior coupled with a high degree of media/movie literacy. Hence, the movie literate teenagers of *Scream* simply cannot ignore the fact that they exist in a stalker film. What they do, then, is to deal with the situation by retrieving their 'knowledge' of the genre to which their film belongs. However, in alignment with the idea that metafiction cannot initiate a major ideological change, the knowledge that determines the characters' (meta)comments on the fictionality of their situation does not produce a major effect in the fiction. In other words, the fact that they 'know' the rules of the stalker only enables them to 'talk' about it rather than giving them the power to alter the essential structure of the genre. Therefore, in *Scream*, the 'display of knowledge/literacy' proves more important than its inherent capacity to effect change. By this way, *Scream* manages to resurrect the genre in its entirety while also encouraging the viewers to interact with it in the way the eighties' viewers did.

One illustrative example for the non-transgressive display of literacy is the scene where Tatum is confronted by the ghost-faced killer in the garage. Not believing that it is actually him, she starts joking around with a playful meta-commentary: "Oh, you wanna play psycho-killer? Can I be the helpless victim? Okay, let's see.

'No, please, don't kill me, Mr. Ghostface. I want to be in the sequel.'" By the time Tatum figures out that it really is the psycho-killer, it is too late. As she runs away, her behavior epitomizes the 'big-breasted/small-brained' stalker girl; she tries to escape through the little pet exit in the garage door. The inevitable consequence is that the killer activates the door, dispatching Tatum via a broken neck. We hear a similar display of literacy from Billy in the final sequence where he delivers a discourse on how the lack of motivation for the psycho-killer is so fashionable these days: "...did they really ever explain why Hannibal Lecter liked to eat people? Don't think so. You see, it's scarier when there's no motive, Sid." Nevertheless, following this interesting meta-commentary, Billy fits himself back into the identity of the stalker killer who does have 'stalkerly' motivations: "Did you know your *slut mother* was sleeping with my dad and she's the reason my mom moved out and deserted me...You know what time it is, Sid? It's after midnight. It's your mother's anniversary. We killed her exactly one year ago today." Also, in the 'aftermath' sequence where the killer is lifelessly lying on the ground, the video guru Randy reminds Sid of what always happens in a similar stalker moment: "Careful. This is the moment when you think the killer's dead, but then he springs back to life for one last scare." What Randy says happens and Billy jerks forward 'for one last scare'. However, Sid had already pointed a gun at Billy that she fires immediately to annihilate him for good; then comes the somewhat paradoxical meta-comment: "Not in my movie!"

As regards the literacy of the viewer, *Scream* is conscious of the fact that it would be enjoyed by a particular group of spectators. Schneider determines the target audience of *Scream* as "curious adolescents looking to ride the stalker film roller-coaster themselves, and nostalgic Gen-Xers hoping to see the subgenre - and

their teenage years - revived" (2000, 85). As a matter of fact, today's 'film literacy' situation, as treated in section 4.2, has almost rendered the difference between the adult and the adolescent audiences insignificant. As Williamson himself declares: "I think our target audience today is just so savvy, so I try to write all of my characters so that they are self-aware" (Schneider 2000, 86).

Actually, the narrative strategy manifested by *Scream* takes a more focused aim than merely catering to a generically-literate audience. *Scream* seems to have taken up a distinct literacy project whereby a particular speech community can be formed and sustained. The way *Scream* positions its viewer as the third party of a tripartite metafictional dialogue is remarkably strict; to be able to fully align him/herself with the secondary discourse of the narrative, the viewer has to have acquired a high degree of 'stalker-literacy.' In this structure, the stalker-illiterate viewer is almost denied access to the intertextual bounces effected by the text whereas various other scales of literacy are echoed/accommodated through different 'levels of difficulty.' The opening scene, which will be treated in detail in the upcoming section, delineates the perfect example for *Scream*'s act of categorizing its viewer's into ranks of aptitude: novice, regular, advanced, etc. In this peculiar structure of interaction, the alternative player/literacy positions for the viewer could arguably be interpreted as follows: s/he may fall behind the text's level of expertise and remain inactive; manifest a full alignment with it and 'echo' the meta-comment (verbally or mentally) either before or after the comment is delivered; or surpass the text's command of the metalinguistic realm and prove him/herself to be more advanced/literate than the narrative.

4.4. *Scream* (A Supplement)

This final section is reserved for a closer look at *Scream*'s text to provide the main argument of the thesis with a few more solid examples. Various scenes and sequences of the film have already been cited throughout the previous sections for their capacity to illustrate the concepts of metafiction, game, and visual literacy. This section activates a tighter framework with an intent to expose 'literacy in action' in particular as manifested in certain moments of the narrative.

Before going into some specific sections of the screenplay, I would like to point out two participants ingrained into the whole text, which confer significant implications regarding *Scream*'s bringing about a requirement of literacy and its declaration of being a self-reflexive narrative. The primary reference here is to *Scream*'s use of the name 'Loomis.' It had first appeared in *Psycho* as the last name of Marion's (Janet Leigh) boyfriend Sam (John Gavin); then, it reappeared again as Sam Loomis (Donald Pleasance) who was Michael's psychiatrist in *Halloween*. In *Scream*, it is Sydney's boyfriend Billy Loomis, who turns out to be one of the killers at the end of the movie. The viewer has to retain a high level of horror movie-literacy to be able to follow this subtle thread that runs across three milestones in the history of the stalker: *Psycho* as the film that initiated the rise of the contemporary horror cinema, *Halloween* as the stalker *par excellence*, and *Scream* which heralds the rebirth of the genre. The other incessant participant in *Scream* that particularly stands for self-reflexivity is the design of the mask worn by the killer. *Scream*'s mask is an abstracted replica of the human face depicted in Edward Munch's painting *The Scream*. The significance of this particular

form is that it represents a 'scared/irritated' human face rather than a scary/irritating one. The mask used in *Halloween* was arguably intended to frighten the viewer with its blank expression whereas the *Scream* mask 'reflects' the viewer's facial expression of fright back to him/herself.

The introductory quiz

The opening scene is probably the most fertile section of the whole narrative in which the 'new stalker' status of *Scream* is established via a multitude of participants. Casey Becker (Drew Barrymore) is alone at night in a big house that apparently is located in the middle of nowhere. She makes popcorn as a part of her ritualistic preparation to watch a 'scary movie' on video when she receives a phone call from a male stranger, seemingly calling the wrong number. The stranger insists on talking to Casey, calling her repeatedly, and finally manages to get her attention by raising a topic in which she seems interested:

> MAN
> Do you like scary movies?
>
> CASEY
> Uh-huh.
>
> MAN
> What's your favorite scary movie?
>
> He's flirting with her. Casey moves away from the stove
> and takes a seat at the kitchen counter, directly in
> front of the glass door.
>
> CASEY
> I don't know.
>
> MAN
> You have to have a favorite.
>
> Casey thinks for second.
>
> CASEY
> Uh...HALLOWEEN. You know, the one with the
> guy with the white mask who just sorta walks around and
> stalks the baby sitters. What's yours?

MAN
Guess.

CASEY
Uh...NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET.

MAN
Is that the one where the guy had knives for fingers?

CASEY
Yeah...Freddy Krueger.

MAN
Freddy-that's right. I liked that movie. It was scary.

CASEY
The first one was, but the rest sucked.

This section introduces us to the peculiar world of *Scream*. Primarily, the setting and the situation (the blond teen alone in the big house, confronted by an invisible stranger) is indicative of the stalker genre. The movie dialogue adds on the metafictional layer, which I consider as a warm-up round for both Casey and the viewer in preparation to the forthcoming challenge. The introductory lines are pretty straightforward and 'simple;' it is stated, in the first place, that a scary movie fan has to have a favorite and Casey's is, quite understandably, *Halloween*. Then, we are given a concise plot summary of this film followed by information on Freddy Krueger and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). Casey's last comment on the sequels of the latter ("the rest sucked") hints at the ostensibly critical attitude of *Scream* toward its primary texts. Following this brief metafictional moment, *Scream* swings back into the classic stalker mode, albeit with a significant twist:

MAN
So, you gotta boyfriend?

CASEY
(giggling)
Why? You wanna ask me out?

MAN
Maybe. Do you have a boyfriend?

CASEY
No.

MAN
You never told me your name.

Casey smiles, twirling her hair.

CASEY
Why do you want to know my name?

MAN
Because I want to know who I'm looking at.

Casey does have a boyfriend, which we find out shortly afterwards, however, she doesn't seem to have problems being flirtatious with a total stranger. Behaving the way Casey does is simply a death wish in the world of the stalker. The significant twist in this passage is manifested in the stranger's response to Casey's last question: "I want to know who I'm looking at." This line reminds us of the fact that there have been no POV's of the killer throughout the whole sequence, which seems to be quite an aberration for the genre. In a classic stalker, a scene like this would definitely be conveyed through the killer's lurking gaze; we would be peeping at Casey through the big windows of the house. The killer of *Scream* was also observing his victim, whereas the narrative chooses to make him 'verbalize' this act rather than to show it. At this point *Scream* effects a formal difference in its relation to the classic stalker narrative: the latter was highly visual whereas the former is dominantly intellectual and loquacious. *Scream*, in all its scenes of violence, sacrifices the POV to open up space for the metafictional commentary to be delivered by the characters. By valorizing 'utterances' over sights, *Scream*, in a sense, replaces Carpenter's gliding steadycam with the telephone.

The situation with the stranger gets serious when he demands Casey to answer a series of questions on 'movie trivia,' otherwise he will kill her and her boyfriend who is tied up to a chair in the patio.

CASEY
Is this some kind of a joke?

[...]

More of a game, really. [...] It's an easy category.
Movie trivia

MAN
Name the killer in HALLOWEEN. [...] Come on. It's your
favorite scary movie, remember? He had a white mask, he
stalked the baby-sitters.

CASEY
Michael...Michael Myers.

MAN
YES!

Casey SIGHS...relieved.

MAN
Now for the real question.

[...]

MAN
Name the killer in FRIDAY THE 13TH.

CASEY
Jason! Jason!...JASON!

MAN
I'm sorry. That's the wrong answer.

CASEY
It was Jason. I saw that movie twenty goddamned times.
It was Jason.

MAN
Then you should know Jason's MOTHER -Mrs.Vorhees was the
original killer. Jason didn't show up until the sequel.

Having declared that what he is really demanding from Casey is her participation in 'a game,' the killer confronts her and the viewer with a challenging quiz where the right answers would most likely have a survival value for the former. This introductory test arguably encourages all the potential participants in the movie theatre to yell out the answers that would save Casey, while discriminating among three types of players: the one who cannot answer any of these questions is practically out of the game as s/he will not be able to fully observe the 'intertextual bounces' between

the primary and the secondary texts; others who know the answer for the first question (Michael) can be regarded as average players who had attained the basic knowledge of the stalker genre; and the few who can answer the tricky question about the killer in *Friday the 13th* are the expert players - they must have watched the film very carefully (The difficulty level of this question is remarkably high primarily because in the classic stalker the identity of the killer is always less important that his location in the scene; besides, *Friday the 13th* spawned 9 sequels all of which featured Jason as the killer).

The killer asks Casey one last question before his assault - the ultimate question that a stalker game revolves around:

> MAN
> What door am I at?
>
> CASEY
> What?
>
> MAN
> There are two doors to your house. A
> front door and a back one. If you answer
> correctly-you live.

The stalker-literate viewer has enough reason to believe that this is quite a difficult question to ponder as the 'bogeyman' could possibly be behind both of the doors at the same time. That turns out to be the most probable case at the end of the movie for it is revealed that there had always been two psychopaths on the loose. Hence, this introductory sequence unavoidably ends with Casey's brutal murder. Here we can ask whether Casey's right answers could have saved her life. The answer would definitely be "no" since the rest of the film establishes the principle that knowing the rules, in *Scream*, does not necessarily save lives, especially if the character is fated to be slashed by featuring the typical traits of the stalker victim. However, the opening sequence with Casey does have some potential to compel even the most stalker-literate viewers

to assume momentarily that she could actually save herself by delivering the correct answers, because Casey is portrayed by Drew Barrymore - the most well-known actress among the overall cast of *Scream*. The 'loser' female characters of the stalker are never played by known actors, which, in the opening sequence of *Scream* is cleverly subverted to present a bigger challenge to the viewer. Later on, the homicide of Barrymore's character turns out to be an effective reinforcement of the idea that the stalker rules still hold sway in the metafictional narrative of *Scream*.

Reality merged with fiction

Scream utilizes the meta-level commentaries of its characters also to display the ongoing process through which our sense of reality is structured via premises that originally belong to the representational categories of filmed and televised fiction. The behaviors of the narrative individuals of Scream are distinctly infused with the notion that life is something to be 'broadcast.' The most interesting scene in this respect is the one where Billy talks about his sexual relationship with Sydney as something that could be 'rated' in MPAA standards:

> BILLY
> I was home, bored, watching television, THE EXORCIST was on and it got me thinking of you [...] it was edited for TV. All the good stuff was cut out and I started thinking about us and how two years ago, we started off kinda hot and heavy, a nice solid "R" rating on our way to an NC17. And how things have changed and, lately, we're just sort of...edited for television.
>
> SIDNEY
> So you thought you could sneak in my window and we would have little bump-bump.
>
> BILLY
> No, no. I wouldn't dream of breaking your underwear rule. I just thought we might do some on top of the clothes stuff.
>
> [...]
>
> SIDNEY

> Would you settle for a PG-13 relationship?
>
> BILLY
> What's that?
>
> She pulls her flannel gown open for a split second...flashing her left breast. His mouth drops open...surprise, shock. Their eyes meet. They share a smile.

Even when it is not surfaced as distinctly as in this dialogue, *Scream*'s characters 'know' that they are being watched by an audience. Especially, the way we learn about Sidney's past manifests a compacted illustration of this idea: *Scream* reveals the information regarding the rape and murder of Maureen Prescott through televised news. As Sidney flips through channels, she keeps coming across compacted versions of her 'back story'; prime time news hosts tell briefly how Maureen had been attacked and slaughtered by the man named Cotton Weary (Liev Schreiber) who, then, was identified by Sidney as the killer and has been waiting on death row. These televised synopses almost function as memory flashbacks that annoyingly confront Sidney with the past she cannot escape from. Throughout the whole narrative, Sidney undergoes a transformation regarding her relationship with the idea of life as fiction. At the beginning, she seems to be the only character in *Scream* who makes an effort to remain indifferent to this state of affairs; she refrains from talking about horror movies and doesn't seem to be as enthusiastic as her fellow students about the nineties' media culture. Sidney's refusal to busy her mind with such 'trivial' stuff actually adds to her identity as the final girl who is supposed to be 'more serious' than her peers. She displays a particular hostility toward Gale Weathers who believes that Sidney falsely identified Weary as the killer and the real criminal is on the loose. For a long time, Sidney regards Gale as an opportunist media person who is into making up stories that bring about commercial success. However, as the story unfolds, Gale turns out to

be the only person who is right about the reality of the situation, and later on she teams with Sidney in catching the actual culprit.

As Sidney starts facing the truth about her existence as being a part of a fiction, the existential crisis that has overwhelmed her transforms into a neurosis regarding the way her character and the fiction is structured.

> SIDNEY
> I think in some weird analytical, psychological bullshit way I'm scared I'm gonna turn out just like her, you know? Like the bad seed or something [...] Every time I get close to you I see my mom. I know it doesn't make sense.
>
> BILLY
> Sure it does. It's like Jodie Foster in SILENCE OF THE LAMBS when she kept having flashbacks of her dead father.
>
> SIDNEY
> But this is life. This isn't a movie.
>
> BILLY
> Sure it is, Sid. It's all a movie. Life's one great big movie. Only you can't pick your genre.
>
> SIDNEY
> Why can't I be a Meg Ryan movie? Or even a good porno.

This dialogue marks the moment in which the reality (of fiction) dawns on Sidney via Billy's comments, all of which seem to make perfect sense. In her last line, Sidney switches to a self-reflexive mode of awareness and expresses her angst through categories of fiction. She verbalizes her powerlessness to effect a change in her 'self' as a resentment for the unfair impossibility to alter the genre in which she exists as a character. However, as Billy aptly puts: "...you cannot pick your genre;" they *are* in a stalker and Sidney *is* the asexual final girl. As a straightforward attempt to change this fact, Sidney has sex with Billy. However, this effort ends up being a failure for two reasons: 1) she does not 'enjoy' it; 2) she finds out in the end that Billy was the psychopath responsible for her mother's rape and murder. Sidney's attempt to

transform a stalker into a Meg Ryan movie or a porno results in her rape by the stalker killer.

Rules repeatedly announced

Scream allows its viewer to participate in its playful narrative on various levels, and it occasionally feels the necessity to openly remind all the players (including the fictional ones) of the basic rules of the stalker-game. In one of the phone-harassment sequences, for instance, Sidney asks the killer: "Who are you?" and the killer immediately 'corrects' the question: "The question is not who am I. The question is *where* am I?" The scenes in which we are given the most outspoken knowledge about the stalker iconology are the ones where the teenager video guru Randy gives lectures to his friends on 'the rules of the stalker'. Before sitting down to watch *Halloween* on video, Randy feels the need to inform his friends about the basic principles of the film they are about to see:

> RANDY
> Not until TRADING PLACES in '83. Jamie Lee was always the virgin in horror movies. She didn't show her tits until she went legit.
>
> BOY TEEN
> No way.
>
> RANDY
> That's why she always lived. Only virgins can outsmart the killer in the big chase scene in the end. Don't you know the rules?
>
> Stu finishes his beer.
>
> STU
> What rules?
>
> Randy hits the pause button on the remote and stands in front of the television, explaining;
>
> RANDY
> There are certain rules that one must abide by in order to successfully survive a horror movie. For instance: 1. You can never have sex. The minute you get a little nookie--you're as good as gone. Sex always equals death. 2. Never drink or do drugs. The sin factor. It's an extension of number one. And 3. Never, ever, ever, under any circumstances, say "I'll be right back."

Randy is a well-suited filmic icon for the nineties' teenagers who were brought up in the midst of the booming internet-video culture, and the fact that he works at a video rental store reinforces this image. In Randy's imagination, fiction and reality seem to be firmly interlaced. He is the exceptional character in *Scream* who manifests the extreme point of self-reflexivity by insisting on interpreting the Woodsboro murders in direct reference to the classic stalkers:

RANDY
You're such a little lap dog. He's [Billy's] got killer printed all over his forehead.

STU
Then why'd the police let him go?

RANDY
Because, obviously they don't watch enough movies. This is standard horror movie stuff. PROM NIGHT revisited.

STU
Why would he want to kill his own girlfriend?

RANDY
There's always some stupid bullshit reason to kill your girlfriend. That's the beauty of it all. Simplicity. Besides, if it's too complicated, you lose your target audience.

[...]

STU
I think her father did it. How come they can't find his ass?

RANDY
Because he's probably dead. His body will come popping out in the last reel somewhere...eyes gauged. See, the police are always off track with this shit, if they'd watch PROM NIGHT they'd save time. There's a formula to it. A very simple one. Everyone's always a suspect--the father, the principal, the town derelict...

STU
Which is you...

RANDY
So while they're off investigating a dead end, Billy, who's been written off as a suspect, is busy planning his next hunting expedition.

BILLY
(o.c.)
How do we know you're not the killer?

Randy spins around to find Billy right behind him.
Busted.

RANDY
Uh...hi, Billy.

BILLY
Maybe your movie-freaked mind lost it's reality button?

Randy shrugs, laughing it off.

Randy's lines certainly make sense to the literate viewer who has seen *Prom Night*, and force him/her to associate its plot with that of *Scream*. The most interesting point here is that Randy turns out to be right in the two major claims he puts forward with precision and resolve: Billy is one of the killers; and, Sidney's father had been eliminated by Billy and Stu from the very start, the only difference being he was not dead. Considering the fact that the stalker killer could be just anyone, Randy opts for the simplest connection: "There's always some stupid bullshit reason to kill your girlfriend." Nevertheless, Randy's comments do not necessarily spoil the film/game, at least for the ones who are willing to play it by the rules: in the genuine stalker game, it's not the killer's identity but his/her location that really matters. Besides, the "stupid bullshit" motivation that turns Billy into a homicidal maniac is kept secret until the very last scene, which let's all the other red herrings effected by the narrative full play.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis, in a sense, has returned to where it began: 'visual literacy.' However, there have been quite a number of changes; the set of terms I started out with has taken on different values along the way. Primarily, due to the specificity of the representation process being accounted for, the term 'visual literacy' has been appended to a particular body of knowledge and transformed into movie/horror/stalker literacy. The overall transformation of the theoretical structure presented herein has taken the new stalker *Scream* as its prime mover.

Scream, treated as part of a broader event named 'the new stalker phenomenon in the nineties,' has been useful dominantly in two major areas of inquiry. Primarily, it helped in countering the arguments put forward by the theorists who tend to solidify the meaning of violence in horror cinema into a number of categories that are in turn attached to certain 'appropriate' audience responses. This problem has been criticized via the notion of 'communication fallacy' – the contention that 'visual language' is a well-structured medium through which a sender can transmit thoughts/concepts/meanings to a receiver whereby the receiver's illiteracy might hinder his/her understanding the message. The example of the *Schindler's List* incident, given in the first chapter, was intended to present the communication fallacy in action. Theorist Sissela Bok attributed the 'inappropriately festive' behaviors of the young audience to their visual illiteracy; she believed that the kids did not understand what the film was

really about and confused its 'serious violence' with 'entertainment violence.' *Scream*'s particular aid, in this context, has been its representation and revival of a similarly joyful mode of spectatorship that had taken place between the years 1978-81 centering on the horror genre known as the stalker. As the narrative of *Scream* proffers, the ostensibly dark and violent films belonging to the stalker cycle were received with laughter and playfulness by the teenage audiences of the time. In direct opposition to the claims of illiteracy as being the reason for the inappropriate joyfulness, it was the literacy of the viewer that motivated him/her to participate in the stalker game. This phenomenon evokes Mitchell's concept of 'representation as a process' where the visual product interacted with the intentionality of a particular group of viewers to generate a specific metalanguage filled with a peculiar set of concepts.

The 'new' status of *Scream* as a stalker has been associated to its act of resurrecting the whole classic stalker phenomenon as a textual construct. *Scream* genuinely incorporated the aspect of playfulness into its text by effecting a self-reflexive narrative in which the viewer is called up as the third party of a tripartite metafictional dialogue. The metacommentaries delivered by the fictional characters addressed different viewers who held varying levels of movie/horror/stalker literacy.

Scream, secondarily, has been useful in elaborating on the current state of affairs that dominates the world of visual media, manifested through both the forms of popular entertainment and the ways in which the audiences relate and interact with them. *Scream* seems to stand on the juncture where the issues related to the rising popularity of games and the merging of fiction with reality intersect.

Scream has generated two sequels. The second episode of the series, *Scream II* (Wes Craven, 1997), arrived before the rave around the first one settled. Again scripted by Kevin Williamson, *Scream II* continued with the metafictional project in full force by including the first episode in its primary textual domain. In the opening scene of *Scream II*, we see a huge group of teenage film buffs watching (and playing with) the movie called *The Stab* - a stalker adapted from the book about the Woodsboro murders written by Gale Weathers. The characters, this time, are film students who are even more movie-literate than they used to be in the first episode. The second sequel, *Scream III* (Wes Craven, 2000), came a bit later than expected, and Williamson was not credited as the principal writer. This episode revolved around the characters who were now in the movie business and had to track down a psychopath creeping around the set of a stalker movie, again, about the bloody events that had taken place in Woodsboro.

Although the new stalker project seems to have slowed down, it is early to announce its end. Unless the producers are determined to leave it as a stalker-trilogy and go on with the project in separate films, we can expect *Scream* to spawn at least two more sequels - like the successful stalkers of the early eighties.

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