

RHETORICS OF INTEGRITY: CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC IN AMERICAN
CINEMA AND TELEVISION

By

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INTRODUCTION

“To quote from Corinthians: ‘The body is not one member, but many. Now they are many, but of one body.’ I was just trying to stay part of the body now.” – Rust Cohle, True Detective

On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center in New York City was attacked. Millions of lives were altered by this sudden display of American vulnerability, as if the absence of the WTC somehow left a gap in the armor of what many American citizens previously considered to be – despite the defeats of the Korean and Vietnam Wars – an invulnerable nation. In the ensuing chaotic days while first responders combed the rubble for survivors, politicians shaped the foreign policy for years to come, and sports leagues warily resumed their matches, architects John Bennett and Gustavo Bonevardi submitted a proposal called “Project for the Immediate Reconstruction of Manhattan’s Skyline” to Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. At the same time, the *New York Times Magazine* commissioned an image called “Phantom Towers” by Julian LaVerdiere and Paul Myoda (Dunlap). Popular films released shortly after the attacks such as *Zoolander*, *Serendipity*, *Spider-Man*, and *Men in Black II* raced to have the WTC digitally removed before their release or had the scenes in which the towers appeared cut entirely. Other films set before 2001 but released after the attacks such as *Munich*, *Rent*, and *Miracle* had the towers added in post-production to complete the aesthetic of the pre-9/11 Manhattan skyline. In light of the nearly three thousand people that died in the attack, these attempts to reimagine or remember the shape of the skyline of New York City seem to inappropriately privilege the trauma of the towers themselves rather than the people who perished inside and around them.

In this dissertation, I propose an alternative explanation for this fixation on the shape of the skyline. The attacks on 9/11 reintroduced the American public to its vulnerability, which took many Americans quite by surprise. Years of cultural texts have built and reinforced the concept of American exceptionalism, a “deeply held conviction that...the United States is a ‘chosen nation,’ a country called by God to accomplish great things” (Domke and Coe 49). This divine ordination of American ideology is an important facet of American exceptionalism, because it provides the proposed moral authority of the United States to act internationally, with an implicit level of immunity from retaliation under God’s protection. When that perceived protection was breached on 9/11, Americans were left scrambling to reconcile their belief that the shining city on the hill was no longer impenetrable. The lengths that exceptionalists went to in order to avoid confronting the fallibility of exceptionalism were demonstrated by Rev. Jerry Falwell’s assertion that 9/11 was God’s punishment of the United States for harboring “pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians [and] the ACLU” (Goodstein). The importance assigned to restoring the skyline of New York City both physically and cinematically after the attacks indicates a close relationship between the nation’s physical representation of itself and its cinematic representation.

The American public identifies so closely with its physical symbols (landmarks, monuments, landscapes) that they have become a sort of national body that houses American national identity. In a 2015 article detailing the reconstruction of the World Trade Center, Andrew Rice refers to “a *void* in the densely packed Manhattan skyline” [emphasis added], and the Danish architect Bjarke Ingels suggests that “in a way, [WTC] is almost like a physical manifestation of the spirit of America” (“Meet the Superstar Architect”). As Gregory Clark claims in *Rhetorical Landscapes in America*, our national identity is necessarily tied to these landscapes as a way of providing identification across a vast space,

working to “constitute in individuals a sense of shared identity that has the power to shape their beliefs and actions in ways that unify them with one community and divide them from another” (4). Clark’s landscapes, then, function as a sort of public rhetoric, a non-discursive way for Americans to construct a cohesive public around a set of images and experiences.

But landscape and landmark tourism is only one way of bringing a disparate people together. The erasure and digital addition of the WTC in post-9/11 film served as sort of ritualistic mourning, a scramble to ensure that the aesthetics of the filmic New York City aligned with the newly altered skyline. As Clark notes, “In a time when images and symbols can be broadcast instantaneously, enabling a vast collection of individuals who are radically displaced in space to share the common experience those images provide, we need to be more attentive than we have to every exertion of rhetorical power” (11). One such exertion that has largely escaped the scrutiny of rhetorical scholarship to date is the constitution of American national identity through its film and television. I see this same potential in American film and television, where viewing characters, landscapes, and monuments stands in for landscapes in the same sort of shared experience that shape American publics. In short, film and television function as a sort of public rhetoric. While Clark focuses his efforts on landscapes, I see many of the same phenomena at work in the American cinemascap. I use the term cinemascap as opposed to cinema, mirroring Clark’s differentiation between land and landscape, noting that cinema becomes a cinemascap “when it is assigned the role of symbol” (9), particularly when viewing multiple cinematic utterances as emblematic of a set of a nation’s values, desires, and anxieties. Like landscapes, the American cinemascap unites its people across a vast space and time. The coherent image of an unchanging, unyielding United States depends on its continuous, unbroken identity, and American film and television contributes significantly to the maintenance of that continuity. American film and television encourages Americans to inhabit the physical spaces that constitute their

shared identity so convincingly that when one of those physical manifestations falls, they respond with the same vigor as if it had been their individual human body that was threatened. This observation is also noted by Daniel Flory, who argues that “threats to our body and threats to our social, moral, or political being often generate many of the same bodily responses, facial expressions, and linguistic utterances. Frequently, we have difficulty telling the two kinds of reaction apart” (79). The void left by the WTC after 9/11 altered Manhattan’s cinematic representations, and the American public ached to have it filled, driven by what I call rhetorics of integrity.

I define rhetorics of integrity as theoretical utterances that privilege the whole over the fragmented, the continuous over the disrupted, and the predictable over the unexpected. Americans see rhetorics of integrity invoked in political discourse, where a candidate with a consistent voting or campaign promise record is said to “have integrity.” Most recently, it was used by National Football League commissioner Roger Goodell when he announced that he would uphold Tom Brady’s four game suspension for allegedly tampering with the air pressure in official footballs. Goodell stated that “the closest parallel” for “the appropriate level of discipline” was “the policy governing performance enhancing drugs; steroid use reflects an improper effort to secure a competitive advantage in, and threatens the integrity of the game” (16). The word “integrity” is used sixteen times to justify Goodell’s decision – often in reference to the integrity of the league – but the previous passage is most telling. Goodell makes an explicit link between the *bodily* integrity of steroid users and *league* integrity, suggesting that a breach in one is equivalent to a breach in the other. The commissioner considered Brady’s alleged behavior so threatening to the league at large that he treated Brady as if he had altered his body in what the NFL considered to be an

unacceptable manner.¹ Goodell's comments on integrity provide a conceptual bridge that suggests an understanding of integrity as primarily a bodily concept, one that privileges whole, able, uncorrupted bodies and fears or attempts to repair bodies that are damaged, disabled or tainted. Rhetorics of integrity primarily function to ward off individual anxiety about the body's materiality, namely the idea that each body is fragmentable, permeable, and mortal. In this dissertation, I argue that rhetorics of integrity have three basic characteristics that allow them to be identified:

- An implicit or stated argument that embodiment forms the core of and is inseparable from individual identity, such that trauma to the body is viewed as equivalent to trauma to the self.
- A tendency to dramatize institutionalized trauma (i.e., racism) as individual human bodily trauma.
- A sense of embodiment as rhetorical, with a corresponding argument for which sort of embodiment (individual or collective) is appropriate for a given historical situation.

The discipline of Film Studies has long acknowledged, and rhetorical scholars have largely ignored the role that bodily anxiety plays in American culture, most notably in the volumes of text that have investigated how the horror film genre has used said anxiety to comment on shifting American values. One exception in rhetorical circles is Kendall Phillips, who argues that horror film “adapts to the particular cultural environment in which [Americans] face very real fears and anxieties” (10). However, the sheer volume of study that has been devoted to horror film has created the appearance that horror has a monopoly on bodily anxiety. I argue that other film genres trade in rhetorics of integrity with arguably

¹ Brady's suspension was subsequently overturned, not because the judge did not believe that Brady's actions were not detrimental to the integrity of the game but because Brady was never provided with a document detailing what types of actions could be considered

more success (as defined by box office receipts and cultural adoption) than horror, often by using horror film tropes and narrative structure to shape audience attitudes toward their characters.

The goals of this dissertation are to expose the depths to which rhetorics of integrity have penetrated American filmic discourse in and beyond the horror genre, locate the ways in which the individual and national American body is rhetorically constituted and dismantled in the American cinemascapes, and investigate how rhetorics of integrity provide strategies for everyday Americans as what Kenneth Burke calls “equipment for living” (“Literature as Equipment for Living”).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The three basic concepts of this dissertation – public rhetoric’s role in the constitution of social identity, rhetorical body theory, and rhetorical film analysis – each have an existing body of scholarship within rhetoric and related disciplines that sometimes overlap (i.e., body and film), and my project seeks to draw from them all. Accordingly, then, this literature review covers three separate areas of rhetorical scholarship: scholarship that is concerned with national identity and public rhetoric; scholarship that is concerned with bodies, agency and materialism; and scholarship that is concerned with the rhetorical analysis of American cinema, particularly cinema that displays traumatized bodies.

National Identity and Public Rhetoric

Vital to my understanding of the process of building a national identity is the concept of constitutive rhetoric. Maurice Charland argues in “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*,” that the process of interpellation plays an irreplaceable role in the formation of national identity, because

attempts to elucidate ideological or identity-forming discourses as persuasive are trapped within a contradiction: persuasive discourse requires a subject-as-audience who is already constituted within an identity and within an ideology (134).

According to Charland, creating a national identity through discourse then assumes the pre-existence and validity of that identity. Using the example of Québécois sovereignty, Charland argues that “the ultimate justification for [sovereignty] is the subject’s character, nature, or essence” (137). Working from this position, constitutive rhetoric assumes a set of values that are essential to the identity, making the desired action seem “natural” to those that would identify with it. Seen in marketing terms, constitutive rhetoric does not attempt to sell a person a product; it invites a person into a social group and then asserts that as a member of that group, it is natural or essential to own a particular product. Texts working to reinforce or alter national identity then instill the values of said national identity as the naturalized outcome of identification. Taking on the “shape” of a national identity ascribes certain characteristics that are presumed to be natural to the form.

Although Gregory Clark does not use the phrase “constitutive rhetoric” in *Civic Jazz: Kenneth Burke and the Art of Getting Along*, he repeatedly references Burke’s work on *constitutions* throughout, while discussing the ways in which art helps to craft American national identity. Clark defines the constitutional as “any situation that transforms the individuals it encompasses into the citizens it proclaims them to be” (4). Clark’s understanding of the process of national identity formation mirrors Charland’s: the constitutional prefigures a desired citizen and then hails them as that interpellated citizen, transforming them in the process. When writing of constitutions as physical entities, Clark argues that they manifest desirable traits in their citizens, that they “direct us in *substantiating* the ‘oughts’ they would have us together *embody* by prescribing ways of interaction that, for the period of that action, *transform* us into citizens” (8; emphasis added). The concepts of

substantiation, embodiment, and transformation indicate a physical component to American national identity that Clark sees here in the people that perform jazz, but in his earlier work saw as the material United States itself. *Civic Jazz* provides an important meditation on the possibility of the American entertainment industry's contribution to and reflection of national identity. Echoing Charland, Clark sees jazz as a way to call identity into existence:

Dana Anderson describes [identity] as a process of of “articulating ‘who I am’” in ways that can “address, and perhaps even transform, the scenes it inhabits and the other selves therein.” (168) That’s what making jazz is for those who perform it, and what “saying something” requires of them: contributing substantially to the highly disciplined, intensely collaborative project of ensemble improvisation. It marks in the music they are making with others the moments when a new identity, their own and maybe even a shared one, “*comes to be*” as Anderson puts it. (Anderson, 168)(Clark, 18)

What Clark, using Anderson, articulates in this passage is a process by which a public cultural text – in collaboration with the performers, the writers, and the audience – works to articulate and iterate a shared public identity through the shared experience of the performance.

Civic Jazz has roots in Clark’s *Rhetorical Landscapes*, where he acknowledges the rhetorical significance of having a material “scene” or “symbolic setting where [Americans] can enact both individual and collective identity” (3). Clark argues for a malleability of materiality in his definition of landscape, stating that “*land* is material, a particular object, while *landscape* is conceptual” (9). In doing so, Clark suggests a sort of symbolic transcendence, whereby something that is traditionally considered to be without agency (such as a mountain or a canyon) can take on the symbolic characteristics of human social identity. Clark expounds upon the importance of materiality to national identity, arguing that

“Kenneth Burke saw the [Manhattan] skyline that Americans and the rest of the world continue to recognize as an important – and since September 11, 2001, an intensely potent – symbol of who Americans collectively are” (30). National identity, according to Clark, necessarily has both a symbolic and a material component.

Michael Butterworth’s *Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity: The National Pastime and American Identity During the War on Terror* offers another way in which entertainment can be defined as public rhetoric. Butterworth deftly ties issues of individual bodily purity and national purity to the concept of American exceptionalism, positioning baseball as a corrective to the vulnerability that the United States felt after the attacks on September 11, 2001 (Butterworth 7). He argues that baseball is used rhetorically as “a model for national solidarity, as a link to a nostalgic past, as a redemption of collective innocence, as a vehicle for rehabilitating national symbolism, and as a site for international missionary work” (Butterworth 3). Steroid use among players during the early twenty-first century caused a media firestorm that coincided with American anxiety about terrorism after 9/11. The perceived impurity of individual players’ bodies resulted in the purgation of these players from the body of MLB, which in turn metaphorically addressed the “corruption” of “foreign” violence that plagued the body politic of the United States. Butterworth argues here that both individual human bodies and Major League Baseball stood as analogues for the body politic of the United States and were used to dramatize correctives to a perceived national bodily impurity.

Butterworth is not the first to notice the association between rhetorics of purity, bodily language, and national identity.² Kenneth Burke writes at length on the bodily analogues of catharsis in “Form and Persecution in the *Oresteia*.” Burke argues that “poetry mimics the body’s purgative ways of giving-off, when unburdening itself of impurities” and

² Burke’s comments are directed specifically at civic identity, but the concept is that large social groups benefit in some way from these rhetorics of purity.

that “we now found ourselves purgatively using body-imagery in our critical essay by talking about the use of it in poetry” (379). While attempting to locate the bodily origins of the function of catharsis in Greek tragedy, Burke noticed that bodily language cropped up in other unexpected places as well. This cathartic process, he suspected, served an important function in dealing with “civic guilt,” arguing that “the great Greek tragedies were devices for treating civic tensions (read: class conflicts), and for contributing to social amity by ritual devices for resolving such tensions” (394, parenthetical comment in original). Burke’s work with the *Oresteia* explicitly links the bodily concept of catharsis with the construction of social identity, while also noting the role played by fictional dramatic texts in the process.

Each of these texts uses a nontraditional definition of public rhetoric to justify an unorthodox object of study. Together, this body of literature creates a precedent for the study of fictional film as public rhetoric by taking various cultural texts and examining them for their ability to both reflect and constitute American culture.

Body Rhetorics and Materialism

The body certainly has enjoyed plenty of spotlight in rhetorical studies, from two contrasting positions: scholars who study Kenneth Burke and employ his theories tend to gravitate toward a position that considers the human body as the foundation of agency and philosophy while New Materialists and Object Oriented Ontologists move to decentralize the human body in order to consider other possible environmental contributions to agency.

Debra Hawhee’s *Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language* is an apt example of the Burkean position, in which Hawhee investigates how “clenching bodies, deformed bodies, recalcitrant bodies, or dancing bodies all sneak up on language” (5). In other words, Hawhee suggests that bodies might have some sort of capacity to convey meaning without their owners’ awareness or consent. The body for Hawhee sits at the pivotal point between the symbolic and the material, with all the accompanying complications of

subjectivity and agency. Particularly useful is Hawhee's interrogation of "the ways multiple discourses on the body in the twentieth century differently constitute bodies" (9). This statement positions the body as a malleable concept that can respond to situational demands – the body's overtly marked racial, gendered, and ability markers and their reference in public discourse shape the way that we understand how bodies are constituted. Her question, "what do we talk about when we talk about bodies?" (5) might be reframed for the purposes of this dissertation to read "when do we talk about bodies?" Particularly, when is bodily rhetoric employed when not speaking explicitly of the individual human body and how does this complicate our understanding of embodiment?

Jordynn Jack's "The Piety of Degradation" nods toward Hawhee's flavor of embodiment, suggesting that "communication patterns are intimately linked to biological factors" (462). Jack uses Kenneth Burke's research at the Bureau of Social Hygiene along with the concept of piety, which Burke defines as "the yearning to conform with the 'sources of one's being'" (*Permanence and Change* 69), to analyze piety in a way that accounts for both the material and the discursive. Among other things, Jack argues that embodied "glandular reactions" (458) contribute to human action in ways that complicate agency because of the uncontrollability of such glandular behavior. Bodies, according to this line of thinking, might not only house agents, but have some sort of agency themselves.

While Jack and Hawhee see bodies as agents acting in a relatively passive scene, Thomas Rickert and other new materialists approach embodiment from an extra-human perspective that privileges the environment rather than the human individual. Rickert's *Ambient Rhetoric* argues that "as important as embodiment is, however, it cannot be a resting point for rhetoric. A body needs a world, and rhetorical theory ought not assume this as a simple given but rather address it as a fundamental and complex issue" (163). Rickert's argument here is that the passivity of the surrounding scene in deference to the agential body

may not be as passive as previously thought. While addressing this complex world, Rickert attempts to demonstrate that “‘the human’ or human arts cannot exist in a manner ontologically distinct from material and informational spaces, including technology” (xv). The human, Rickert argues, is inherently bound to the environment in which it exists to the point that the environment can be considered to be contributing to (or even completely denying) human agency. While discussing the difficulty with which early 90’s robotics researchers taught their robots to navigate their environments, he argues that “agency is not a matter of a subject choosing a path of action in an exterior, objective world; rather, ‘agency’ is a hybrid of co-adapting material forces, parts of which we call the robot, parts of which we call the room, and parts of which are the paraphernalia littering the room. Agency, such as it is, derives its bearings from the environment” (127). Rickert is eager to dethrone the human body as the sole source of rhetorical agency by considering the agential contributions of the material environment. This has serious consequences for a traditional interpretation of embodiment, namely that the body no longer can claim a monopoly on individual identity. Rickert bluntly states that one of his goals is the “dissolution of the subject-object relation” (xii). If human action can be shown to originate from outside as well as inside the human body, this complicates the issue of where identity resides. If my chair is contributing to my decision-making, should I consider it a part of me? Rickert’s answer might well be that we need to consider the possibility that the differentiation between “chair” and “me” might no longer be rhetorically useful.

Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway* contributed greatly to Rickert’s theory, particularly her argument for the concept of entanglement, which holds that bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries or properties; they are material-discursive phenomena. This concept that bodies are constituted in the realm of the symbolic provides vital support to my argument that we view and talk about our social constructs as sorts of bodies. “Human’

bodies are not inherently different from ‘nonhuman’ ones. What constitutes the human (and the nonhuman) is not a fixed or pregiven notion, but neither is it a free-floating ideality” (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 153). Barad attempts to rewrite the human body traditionally understood to be a biological container as instead constituted in material discourse. By referring to bodies as “material-discursive phenomena,” Barad argues for a physical definition of human identity that is malleable according to the demands of the situation – a sort of *kairotic* embodiment. Because bodies are constituted socially, materially, and discursively, their boundaries are not nearly as fixed or inflexible as a traditional interpretation of embodiment might suggest. Fluidity in human identity is widely accepted in symbolic terms,³ but the fluidity of physical identity is still a contentious concept in American culture.

Both Barad and Rickert emphasize a connectedness between the human body and the environment. Using the metaphor of a wine’s *terroir*, or privileging the region in which a wine is produced as opposed to its grape varietal, Rickert argues for a consideration of the environmental contributions of a given rhetorical situation that he calls an “ambient rhetoric” (*x*) or what Barad takes even further and calls “entanglement.” Barad’s theory of entanglement suggests that humans, objects, and their environment are “intertwined with another...lack[ing] an independent, self-contained existence” (*ix*). Where Rickert’s ambient rhetoric suggests an interconnectedness between humans and their environment, Barad’s entanglement denies the differentiation between humans and their environment altogether.

While New Materialists attempt to wrench the human body from the center of our philosophies, Bryan Crable explores the consequences for the decentralization of bodily thinking in “Rhetoric, Anxiety, and Character Armor.” He argues that “symbolic selfhood offers us an assurance that our identity is founded on more than the decaying materiality of

³ Burke’s *Attitudes Toward History* refers to individual identity as “a unique combination of partially conflicting ‘corporate we’s’” (264).

the body,” which offers “a powerful antidote to our awareness of the mortality and fragility of an embodied existence” (8). In other words, our social identities are used to assuage our anxiety about the impermanence of our bodies. The idea that our identities are solely housed in our bodies – along with the certainty of death and the uncertainty of what comes after it – makes for a compelling reason to construct ourselves symbolically. Ideally, Crable argues, “we would, if possible, flee our bodies by using the resources of symbolicity” (8). Where Barad and Rickert see the body dissolving into the surrounding scene, Crable characterizes the dissolution of the body as a symbolic act that takes place in the realm of language.

Philosophers and rhetoricians alike have aligned themselves with Barad through the lenses of Object Oriented Philosophy, which proposes a reality of objects that withdraws from human perception (Harman), Object Oriented Ontology, which flattens ontology to privilege the object on the same level as the human (Bogost, Harman, Bryant) and New Materialism, which considers the rhetorical consequences of this nascent field of study (Boyle, Nicotra, Rivers, Rickert). These materialist positions can certainly be of use in understanding the follies of humans in an ecological sense, where anthropocentrism has enabled deforestation and global climate change. However, the visibly marked body as representative of the human agent acting in key situations simply must be retained or we run the risk of a rhetoric that suggests that seeing every individual as simply “human” would solve the world’s problems. In other words, bodies must be one of multiple “resting points” for rhetoric because the aesthetic of the body is used to communicate – sometimes involuntarily or unwittingly – facets of individual identity that are used to marginalize populations.

Simply put, bodies are marked for their gender, race, and ability. Attempting to disregard these markers in deference to a completely material understanding of the world threatens to diminish the suffering of those who have been historically oppressed because of

these bodily markers. Joel Penney sums up the body's role in "Visible Identities: Visual Rhetoric," arguing that "[w]hile a wide range of popular consumption and media fandom practices may serve to express (as well as to self-reflexively construct) identity, *the physical human body remains the central locus for this sort of performative activity in the contemporary context*" (2320; emphasis added). In other words, the body is the primary visual means by which we communicate our identity, and according to Hawhee and Jack, much of that communication is outside of the realm of our explicit control. That the aesthetic of the body is the primary mode of identity communication makes visual representations of bodies (such as those found in the cinema) vital to this project, and representations that depict those bodies in ways that make the viewer confront their materiality doubly so.

Bodies in American Cinema

There is no more thorough critique of cultural representations of materiality and bodies than the existing scholarship that investigates those concepts in the realm of American cinema. Film studies and rhetorical research that examines the role of materiality and bodies in film tend to do so almost exclusively using the horror genre, and for good reason. The role of the body in horror film is often foregrounded through increasingly explicit images of said body as it is slashed, dismembered, consumed, and destroyed. The consensus of the cinematic community is that the dramatization of trauma to these bodies through a supernatural force serves a corrective cultural purpose.

The most prominent work on the role of horror film in American culture is Noel Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart*. In it, Carroll argues that horror film seeks to evoke an emotional response that he defines as "art horror" by encouraging the audience to mirror the protagonists' emotional reaction to the monster of the film. In fact, Carroll defines horror as a genre "essentially linked with a particular affect – specifically, that from which it takes its name" (15). Audience response to the film plays a

pivotal role in the categorization of horror film, meaning that it is inherently participatory; horror is always asking its audience to *do* something. Echoing Kenneth Burke's characterization of literature as "equipment for living," Carroll argues that "art-horror has built into it... a set of instructions about the appropriate way the audience is to respond to it" (31). Audiences are meant to "parallel [the emotions] of [sympathetic] characters" when encountering the monsters of the film, mirroring reactions ranging from "shuddering, nausea, shrinking, paralysis, screaming, and revulsion" (18). Already preoccupied with the body on screen, horror seems to want to work within the audience's body as well. These bodily reactions are prompted in response to a very specific set of monsters, which Carroll notes are "*object[s]* or *being[s]* [that are] categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless" (32). In other words, monsters are defined by their impurity and bodily nonconformity, and as a result we experience a type of horror – art-horror – that relies heavily on the feeling of disgust. In this way, horror film can be seen as a sort of cultural corrective of various societal ills that surround the rhetorical situation in which the films are released, defined by its attempts to influence its audience's emotions.

This influence can be wielded in ways that reflect subtle shifts in cultural norms, as Carol Clover argues in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Clover argues that the horror genre – particularly the sub-genre of the slasher film – mirrors the cultural progress made along gender lines in the 1970's. While watching several slasher films, Clover noted the intense focus on the female body (8), coupled with the fact that the monster in these films tended to be feminized, "figured as a mama's boy, a transvestite, or genitally defective" (162). Clover argues that the target audience for such slasher films is primarily teen males, who are encouraged to identify with both the victims and heroes. This comes on the heels of a movement that Clover identifies in Klaus Theleweit's *Male Fantasies* that attempts to hold men culpable for violence toward women and children (226). What is

strange about these victim-heroes in Clover's analysis is that they are primarily sexually active young women, which she calls "The Final Girl" (x). Clover suggests that these films seek to solve what she calls "the femininity problem" by "regendering the woman. We are, as an audience, in the end 'masculinized' by and through the very figure by and through whom we were earlier 'feminized.' The same body does for both, and that body is female" (59). Clover argues for the power of cinematically rendered traumatized bodies to drive the constitutive rhetoric of gender, interpellating a more nuanced male audience by challenging them with a "categorically contradictory" male monster.

Barbara Creed takes the notion of femininity and monstrosity one step further in *The Monstrous-Feminine*, where she argues for an explicit link between women's bodies and horror film monsters. Creed does so through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, noting that modern horror films "construct a border between what Kristeva refers to as 'the clean and proper body' and the abject body, or the body which has lost its form and integrity" (11). The "proper body" and "abject body" are respectively gendered male and female, revealing Creed's Freudian roots that privilege the male body as whole and residing in the realm of the symbolic, and the female as lacking and residing in the realm of the material (13). The result, Creed argues, is that horror is inextricably linked to the feminine because it deals so heavily in the abject. Horror film's main purpose according to Creed is the

purification of the abject through "a descent into the foundation of the symbolic construct." The horror film attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) in order finally to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and non-human. As a form of modern defilement rite, the horror film attempts to separate out the symbolic order from all that threatens its stability, particularly the mother and all that her universe signifies. In

this sense, signifying horror involves a representation of, and reconciliation with, the maternal body. (14)

The maternal body recalls a time before separation from the mother when “bodily wastes, while set apart from the body, were not seen as objects of embarrassment and shame” (13). This link between abjection, the feminine, and the human body puts horror film in a particularly profitable place for studies such as this one that seeks to investigate the rhetorical positioning of bodies in film.

The considerable cultural power of horror to both construct, modify, and reinforce group identity makes it an enticing target for rhetorical study. Kendall Phillips’s work is particularly interesting in this way because both *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* and *Dark Directions: Romero, Craven, Carpenter and the Modern Horror Film* view American history through a lens of its contemporary horror film. *Projected Fears* analyzes a litany of horror films ranging from *Dracula* to *The Sixth Sense* in an attempt to construct a sort of rhetorical film history of American horror. Phillips’s analysis situates each horror film in its cultural and historical context for its ability to observe and contribute to the nation’s emotional state. The chapter on John Carpenter sees his film as a response to frontier mythology, most notably the idea that “the frontier is a site of perpetual progress – the manifest destiny of a people who can and in some ways must continue to move forward into new uncharted territories” (125). Carpenter is seen as pushing back against this concept, instead providing a frontier that is populated by “the isolated remnants of a civilization that has begun a slow, painful withdrawal” (125). Phillips suggests here that Carpenter taps into the nascent anxiety of the decline of American exceptionalism in the 1990’s. *Projected Fears* very clearly establishes horror films as responses to historical and cultural exigencies, a path along which Phillips continues in *Dark Directions*.

Where *Projected Fears* features an overview of horror as a historical genre, *Dark Directions* narrows the focus to three directors who have shaped the state of horror film in the twenty-first century. Phillips notes that each director plays to a particular set of cultural circumstances that drive their filmmaking: John Carpenter's horror centers on issues of space, place and repression; Wes Craven uses the murky division between reality and illusion; and George Romero is ultimately most concerned with "[the human body's] corporeal limits and the seemingly innate distaste for its destruction" (12). For Phillips, the living dead in Romero's film are not necessarily embodiments of American political or cultural concepts, but serve as correctives for undesirable cultural phenomena (41). The dead are animated in Romero films to serve as a sort of tool for societal cleansing. Phillips suggests that the living dead function as a sort of material "residue" (41) of the past, often playing significant roles in times of great social upheaval. Romero's focus on the body as material without agency dramatizes Rickert and Barad's position to the extreme, setting in motion a body without a central controlling interest. In this way, Phillips argues that Romero's films are historically aware and responding to cultural anxiety.

While Phillips deals with American history throughout the life of the genre of horror film, Kevin, J. Wetmore's *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* instead focuses on the trauma of 9/11 and how it was remediated in film afterward. Wetmore argues that post-9/11 horror film can be characterized by its "nihilism, despair, random violence and death, combined with tropes and images generated by the terrorist attacks" (3). These elements are best understood using an Aristotelian interpretation of catharsis, as Wetmore suggests that "horror becomes a means of indirectly dealing with the experiences of 9/11 and the decade of despair which followed" (14). This pairing of catharsis and horror film is not unique to Wetmore, as many scholars reference it either explicitly (Creed 14; *Dark Directions* 118; Carroll 7; *Projected Fears* 93) or implicitly by employing Freudian psychoanalysis as a

theoretical lens (Clover 10; Theleweit 57). However, Wetmore is alone in arguing that American catharsis for 9/11 was uniquely available outside the realm of realistic representation. The films that directly engage 9/11, he argues, “fail to present 9/11 in a manner that captures the experience and the understanding of that experience” (2). Wetmore suggests here that some events are so traumatic that their remediations must be fantastical in order to adequately portray the emotional toll that they took on the American public. The result is that “the terror attacks and wars that followed have been co-opted into other genres, most notably horror” (2). According to Wetmore, horror film is uniquely positioned to provide the cathartic release that the United States needs after such a traumatic event.

Robert Torry addresses horror’s cathartic value alongside the importance of embodiment for national identity in “Therapeutic Narrative: *The Wild Bunch*, *Jaws*, and Vietnam.” In it, Torry argues that *Jaws* offers an embodied enemy – the shark – that can be tracked, located, and destroyed in a way that the Viet Cong denied American soldiers to their infinite frustration. Coupled with the setting of the film – an “all-American” city leading up to Independence Day – the narrative functions as a therapeutic outlet for American anxiety regarding the moral wasteland that was the Vietnam War. This theme of the embodied other, the monster standing in for national problems, is repeated in horror film regularly. If we consider Bryan Crable to be accurate in stating that “we experience ourselves as bodies” (4), Torry’s argument might be framed to indicate that we desire or even need to experience the other as a body as well. In the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate that this need for an embodied other is present in many of our texts that simultaneously seek to embody American national identity.

Torry’s article also provides a piece of the methodology of this dissertation by pairing a traditional horror film – *Jaws* – with a western – *The Wild Bunch* – to comment on Vietnam, a crucial moment in the formation of contemporary American national identity. The

conceptual link between the three is trauma, as *The Wild Bunch* and *Jaws* offer “a therapeutic, violently cathartic alternative” to “the moral bankruptcy of American foreign policy in the Third World” (27). Torry argues not only for the contribution of horror film to American national identity, but also acknowledges the power of the traumatic bodily image in war and western films. Torry’s “Therapeutic Narrative” functions well as an example of how scholars can incorporate a rhetorical theory of embodiment in the analysis of cultural artifacts for their constitutive and therapeutic value. I will continue along these lines, arguing that the embodiment and subsequent maiming, dismembering, disemboweling, and suffering of American national identity in its war films and disaster epics is similarly therapeutic for American exceptionalists.

On the whole, scholarship that deals with bodies and cinema tends to gravitate toward horror film for reasons both practical and disciplinary, but the body is doing work in war film, disaster epics, and fantasy film and television that could benefit from analysis grounded in bodily concepts. Horror filmmaking strategies have permeated this cinemascapes, particularly the narrative structures and tropes outlined by Carroll and Clover, coupled with graphic imagery of bodily trauma. The imagery of traumatized bodies is both a powerful cathartic and corrective, allowing nations to both recover from cultural trauma and as a means of subtly shifting cultural values.

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

These three literature review sections provide a foundation of concepts that I use to propose rhetorics of integrity, based on the following observations:

- The construction of American national identity through the use of public and constitutive rhetoric spans multiple modes and genres, and not all of them fall under the traditional definitions of public rhetoric.

- Our disciplinary representations of materiality and embodiment suggest that while we understand that embodiment has some undesirable consequences, we remain highly skeptical of identities without physical representations. In other words, we both desire and fear our bodies because they give us our aesthetic shape (and thus our identities) but are doomed to eventual decay.
- The previous two concepts make the imagery of the traumatized body a potent cultural tool, capable of influencing action and assisting in cultural catharsis. As a discipline, we have trained ourselves to look primarily to horror film for these images of traumatized bodies.
- The main tools that we have in place to read bodily trauma in film are too genre-specific and could benefit from a theory that allows for application to genres that are seemingly unrelated.

With these thoughts in mind, I propose that rhetorics of integrity will allow for the application of popular horror film theories – Carrol, Clover, and Creed – to a wide range of genres. If American identity is closely tied to its material existence and we understand material existence as a type of embodiment, then we can see the United States’ physical manifestation – which is typically considered to be a scene – as a type of body. Consequently, this opens up the cinemascapes that prominently features the destruction of American monuments and landmarks to a bodily critique that has traditionally been reserved for horror film.

THEORETICAL FRAMES

The Paradox of Bodily Purity

The theoretical frame that drives my bodily critique of the American cinemascapes is derived from the blending of two familiar theorists’ work: one, Kenneth Burke, is readily

accepted in the rhetorical canon while the other, Julia Kristeva, is seldom used in rhetorical circles in the way that I intend to incorporate her ideas.

Burke attempts to answer one of the fundamental questions of western philosophy and rhetoric by tackling the location of the self in relation to the body. If our bodies are filled with living things that we do not consider our selves, then where does that self reside? Burke answers in his famously noncommittal fashion by elaborating on John Locke's concept of the "Paradox of Substance." The paradox of substance is that we consider a thing's true identity to be somehow found in its substance, usually referring to its physical makeup or essence, while "etymologically substance is a scenic word. Literally, a person or a thing's sub-stance would be something that stands beneath or supports a person or thing" (*A Grammar of Motives* 22). Burke also discusses this ability to shift the symbolic role of the body in *Permanence and Change* when he muses "[a]re the microscopic creatures in our blood stream separate from us or a part of us? They are members of a 'civic corporation' which we call *the organism*" (*Permanence and Change* 233). Where Rickert and Barad look externally to undermine the body's stranglehold on agency, Burke simply destabilizes the body by pointing out that it is hardly the homogenous, monolithic slab of agency that we are inclined to consider it.

If we take substance as Burke describes it, then the "essence" of a person resides not only in the body, but in the surrounding scene. This sense of distributed identity, where a person's job, political association, nation, or other external identifier serves to define them, downplays the body's role in other identifying attributes. In other words, Burke suggests here that what a body is physically is secondary to what the self performs⁴ and shifts the burden of agency into the surrounding scene. I have to this point used the words agency and scene

⁴ Burke is anticipating Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* here.

outside of their Burkean contexts, but wish to situate them within the concept of his theory of dramatism for the remainder of this dissertation.

Burke's rhetorical theory of dramatism famously seeks to answer the question of "[w]hat is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it" (*GM xv*), by "consider[ing] the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action" (*GM xxii*). Burke accomplishes this consideration by creating the dramatisitic pentad – a collection of five terms (*act*, *scene*, *agent*, *agency*, and *purpose*) that allow a reader to assess a rhetorical situation in its component parts. The *act* answers the question of "what happened," *scene* encompasses the surrounding context, *agent* defines the performer of the act, *agency* examines how the performer accomplished the act, and *purpose* attempts to locate the agent's motive. Most important to the pentad is the understanding that the terms are often employed unevenly, with some interpretations focusing more on one element of the pentad than another. Burke acknowledges and even encourages this imbalance in his discussion of the ratios between each pentadic element. Particularly useful for my proposed theory is the scene-agent ratio, which Burke argues is a "synecdochic relation...between person and place" (*GM 7*) and notes that "the contents of a divine container will synecdochally share in its divinity" (*GM 8*). The suggestion here is that scenes and agents derive their characterization from each other much like Charland's constitutive rhetoric, and that individual characteristics "leak" out into the surrounding scene while scenic attributes "leach" into the contained agents.

What I argue for here is quite close to Burke's scene-agent ratio, with the added element of bodies as "material-discursive phenomena" introduced by Karen Barad earlier. Burke's discussion of blood parasites recasts our bodies as scenes for microbial agents, with each parasite acting according to its own motives within the landscape of our bodies and our

selves taking a back seat. When discussing blood pathology, it is acceptable to talk about the body as a host or scene, but when the conversation shifts to matters of nations, races, gender and ability, the tendency is to refer to the body as a discrete individual human entity containing a pure self, operating within a wider sociological scene. Even the use of the word “individual” is telling here, as its Latin roots suggest that it is the lowest possible unit of human measurement - *in* (not) *dividuus* (divisible). When discussing affairs of state, we very seldom talk about people as collections of cells, organs, bacteria and microorganisms even though these elements of personal bodies do not cease to exist in those situations. If we do, the effect is often humorous, such as when, in her keynote speech at the Kenneth Burke Society 2014 Conference, Jody Nicotra chose to thank the conference coordinators as “those two bags of microbes, Paul Lynch and Nathaniel Rivers.” When viewing the individual from a microscopic perspective, individual agency becomes less of a consideration. On the other end of the scale, viewing larger societal constructs (nation, race, gender, etc.) similarly deemphasizes individual agency in favor of larger corporate concerns. It would appear, then, that the body functions as a scene, a container for individual identity and as a microbe itself in a larger corporate body. This “regression” from body to scene is often accompanied by a sudden awareness of said body’s materiality.

The concept of the embodied scene-agent ratio has serious implications for the understanding of individual human embodiment as a homogenous, freestanding entity. A human body riddled with bacteria, parasites, viruses and even fungus is a body that houses a dizzying array of potential material agents in a form that it is customary to think of as housing only one – our human selves. Piety, which Burke famously defines in one section of *Permanence and Change* as “the sense of what properly goes with what” (40), often drives the pursuit of continuity or integrity, which encourages us to view our bodies as temples or shells – a continuous physical manifestation of our identity that represents our selves, our

whole selves, and nothing but our selves. What Burke first problematizes with the discussion of our microscopic hitchhikers he further complicates with his discussion of Locke's "paradox of substance." If we consider our bodies as our physical manifestations, then our substance "though used to designate something *within* the thing, *intrinsic* to it...refers to something *outside* the thing, *extrinsic* to it" (*GM* 23). Here, Burke undermines the concept of a homogenous body once more, suggesting that our material essential self is in fact composed of that which is external to it, and – if Rickert, Jack, and Barad are to be believed – responding to those seemingly unrelated "external" agencies. This at first blush seems to be somewhat of a relief; with our ethereal identity seemingly freed from the concept of inhabiting a pure, homogenous body that bends only to our will, we are free to seek other external physical manifestations for ourselves. However, this bodily exodus is not without consequences because it draws attention to the body's materiality.

Bodily Anxiety

This sudden acknowledgement of bodily materiality and the anxiety accompanying it is precisely the subject of Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. She argues that the abject is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). The acknowledgement that the body – and thus its borders – is "material-discursive phenomena" breaks down the border that separates the agent from the scene, disturbs our system of individual identity, and thus prompts abjection. Kristeva's contribution is then to provide an additional grammar for discussing the coping mechanisms for confronting our bodily materiality, both physical and social. Abjection is widely used in gender studies, but seems to be oddly missing from rhetorical accounts of bodily issues. Kristeva famously defines the abject as "[a] massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not

nothing, either...a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (*Powers of Horror 2*). To put it plainly, abjection requires the confrontation of pieces, parts, or components of the body that no longer reside within the borders of the body. The abject is something outside the body, to be certain, but in examining her examples of the abject, a theme recurs. Filth, waste, dung, birth, the corpse, and vomit (2-3) all play a key role in Kristeva’s theory of abjection and all share a common component: they are unincorporated representations of the materiality of a still-living body, most notably the confrontation of its fragility. Specifically, these parts are in some way tied to the self, retaining some symbolic representation that causes the individual to recognize his or her self on the outside of the body. As Kristeva observes, the transgression of this bodily border often has traumatic consequences:

There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border.... If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, “I” is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without a border? (4)

The corpse, waste, and the amputated limb all are previously incorporated pieces of self that were not dangerous while still attached or internal, but once they cross the border of the body, they are still recognizable as the self *while residing outside its borders*. Consider the concept of swallowing saliva throughout the day and then imagine spitting into a cup and then drinking it. Similarly (and more disgustingly), consider the social taboo of picking one’s nose and eating the mucus versus the suggestion by some scientists that we swallow a quart of mucus per day through sinus drainage. Abjection – and the accompanying nausea – only occur when the substance has crossed the border and is located “outside.” These are physical pieces of *I*, formerly recognizable as my self, outside the border of *me*.

Coping with this realization requires the individual to do one of two things: attempt to reincorporate the abject or dismiss it as no longer a part of the self, allowing it to die. Both moves function to preserve the body's integrity by either forcing it to retain its shape and function by reattaching or re-ingesting the expelled self or by purging the "corporate we" associated with the newly separate appendage. This practice has considerable power in certain cultures, manifested as cannibalism to consume an enemy's power or even as new mothers harvesting and preserving their placenta in capsule-form (or raw) for its restorative power after childbirth. Both actions are strongly tied to reverence for the bodily boundary – effectively, the skin – as a container or limit for non-physical identity. I argue that it is more difficult to dismiss the abject when it is imbued with significant symbolic power than the individual considers a definitive part of his/her identity. We are inescapably bound to our bodies because they provide the vehicle to both perform and perceive our symbolic actions, but we are doomed by their eventual decay and death.

Coupling Burke's body theory with Kristeva's abjection provides an understanding of the consequences of our tendency to view social constructs as bodies, namely that both our individual and social bodies' boundaries are materially and discursively constructed, permeable, and impermanent, and that acknowledging this results in an overwhelming anxiety. Rhetorics of integrity suggest this feedback loop has contributed to a structure of language in the United States that privileges purity and wholeness and that has seeped into American culture and institutions through its cinema. These appeals to integrity are demonstrated most visibly through images of bodies (both human and social) in various states of trauma, as a sort of corrective or commentary on the state of the nation. The assumed other half of the binary is the whole, pure, ideal body that is either imperiled (in the case of horror film victims) or in need of reconstruction (in the case of disaster epics). My theory of rhetorics of integrity draws from both Burke and Kristeva to locate these bodily appeals in

cinema, particularly film that attempts to create national anxiety through imagery that promotes bodily anxiety.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTS OF STUDY

The bulk of the work done so far in this chapter has been geared toward demonstrating the importance of the concepts of integrity and purification to the perpetuation of American exceptionalism and developing a theory that allows for the reading of social institutions as a type of body, with all the accompanying paradoxes and anxiety. I have compiled a significant collection of films and television series that have at their core an element of individual or national bodily trauma. These films and series span multiple genres, but most often are concentrated in the genres of horror, war film, and disaster epic.

I used several criteria to select film and television series for analysis. The most important criterion of each selection is that it feature bodies (whether individual or national) in various states of trauma. The sheer volume of film and television that fits that description requires that I narrow down the field, so I further focused my selection to include films released around 1998, coinciding with the debut of *Saving Private Ryan* [*SPR*]. I chose to center my research on *SPR* because it marks a significant shift in the evolution of war film by adopting the narrative structure (Noel Carroll's complex discovery plot), tropes (Carol Clover's "final girl"), and imagery of horror film, particularly the human body bleeding, dying, disemboweled, and dismembered. Even then, there have been thousands of horror, war, and disaster epic films and television shows released during that time, so I will focus on films and television that have achieved significant financial, critical, and popular success. The films and series that I selected from that (still much too large) pool are those that have enjoyed widespread popularity to the point that they could be considered representative of their genres. I will read each film and series for its traumatic bodily alterations and subsequent therapeutic moments, if any. The trauma is often associated with an undesirable

character trait, coupled with a therapeutic restoration of what the filmmaker might consider to be an acceptable one. I suggest that this trauma and redemption cycle is a particularly powerful way in which filmmaker's can wield constitutive rhetoric by shaping audience reactions to the characters' suffering and recovery, such as the multiple characters who experience physical trauma and subsequent identity crises in *Game of Thrones*. When coupled with imagery that evokes a sense of national identity, such as the paired images of the mangled human body and American World War II paraphernalia in *Saving Private Ryan*, these texts are granted the ability to shape not only individual identity, but that of their nation as well.

I do not wish to paint film and television with too broad a brush by suggesting that they all employ rhetorics of integrity in the same manner. Borrowing Bob Torry's method from "Therapeutic Narrative," I have chosen to pair each film and series with another that illustrates the flexibility of the theory. In Chapter 1, I examine the hit HBO series *Game of Thrones (GoT)* paired with the less-marketed but eminently provocative NBC series *Hannibal*. Both series are very much interested in how bodily trauma alters individual identity, with wildly differing results. These two series mirror the ways that American exceptionalism deals with trauma, by considering it to be either transformative and therapeutic as in *GoT* or destructive as in *Hannibal*. In doing so, I intend to examine how texts that highlight individual bodily integrity mirror the language Americans use in times of national bodily crisis.

Chapter 2 takes the individual body issues that pepper *GoT* and *Hannibal* and situates them in a national historical context using American war film. I evaluate *Saving Private Ryan* in conjunction with *Ravenous*, examining how rhetorics of integrity reinforce American exceptionalism through its portrayals of the maimed, dismembered, and even consumed bodies of exceptional Americans. Both *SPR* and *Ravenous* rely heavily on horror film

narrative structure, gender tropes, and focus on the traumatized body to function as a corrective for American national identity.

In Chapter 3, I evaluate the American national body not only as a symbolic, but a physical construct by reading the disaster epic films *Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and *Cloverfield* as national horror films. I consider the destruction of the White House, Statue of Liberty, and Manhattan skyline as appeals to rhetorics of integrity on a national level, with the American national body standing in for the human individual and the supernatural disaster as an analogue for traditional horror film monsters. The bloody and maimed human body is replaced by images of exploding, crumbling, or burning monuments, threatening American exceptionalism by attacking its physical foundations.

In my conclusion, I lay out a future for rhetorics of integrity in other cultural manifestations. The implications for the theory go beyond our cinematic representations into our political parties, our sports leagues, and even our academic disciplines. The nascent field of food studies already trades in the realm of purity and authenticity, and rhetorics of integrity may help to further develop scholarship that sees food at the center of issues of cultural integrity. I will also address the potentially troubling complications of rhetorics of integrity, particularly how an understanding of bodies as scenes works both for and against issues of women's bodily autonomy in the United States and how further study might recontextualize integrity through a gendered lens.

CHAPTER 1

“IT’S JUST A FLESH WOUND!” COPING WITH NATIONAL TRAUMA

*“Oh the skin, Oh the skin,
That this old world has placed me in.
I can’t wait to shed, I can’t wait to shed.
Lord I’ll be free when I’m dead.”*

- William Elliott Whitmore

Rhetorics of integrity certainly prime us to consider the ideal state of our bodies as whole, unadulterated, and consistent. But however desirable that state of being, every body necessarily experiences some traumatic event over the course of its life. Aging and death are statistical certainties for any physical manifestation, while some also experience disease, dismemberment, amputation, puncture, laceration, and more. Each of these bodily changes is associated with trauma, with some traumatic events eliciting more anxiety than others. These traumatic realizations are then prime fodder for dramatization in American cinema, particularly in a post-9/11 context where national trauma needs to be processed in order to move forward with a unified national identity. For many people, 9/11 was a moment of existential crisis, where American vulnerability was first on display after decades of perceived invincibility. The nation itself had been struck physically and symbolically, its body violated by the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center and Pentagon. If we consider American monuments to be a sort of body for American national identity, the fall of the World Trade Center can be viewed as an involuntary dismemberment. This sudden alteration of the American national body provoked an anxiety about the nation’s supposed divine ordination, as evidenced by the rhetoric surrounding the attacks that emphasizes a

recommitment of the American public to unity by focusing on the symbolic coherence of the concept of American-ness and deemphasizes the physical trauma of the destroyed buildings and dead Americans. In his address at Barksdale Air Force Base on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush claimed that “the resolve of our great nation is being tested” (Bush). In the speech that President Bush gave on September 20th, 2011,⁵ President Bush argued that “in our grief and anger [after 9/11] we have found our mission and our moment” (Bush). After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Roosevelt argued that America is protected by a "righteous might" and that divine ordination will "make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us" (Roosevelt). Similarly, after the Boston Marathon Bombing, President Barack Obama stated that “Bostonians will pull together, take care of each other, and move forward as one proud city” (Obama). In the wake of the Orlando nightclub shootings, President Obama insisted “we will stand united, as Americans” (Obama). When addressing the nation after the shooting in San Bernardino, President Obama stated that “I have no doubt that America will prevail” (Obama). Following the 2016 shooting of eleven police officers in Dallas, presidential candidate Donald Trump addressed the nation, saying, “Now is the time for prayers, love, unity, and leadership” (Trump), while President Obama asked Americans to “reject such despair [about the possibility of a divided America]. I’m here to insist that we are not as divided as we seem. I say that because I know America. I know how far we’ve come against impossible odds” (Obama). Each of these appeals is rooted in the rhetorics of integrity, as the dismissing of trauma as a test prevents the disruption of continuity by suggesting that the attacks did not touch the American essence, and the call to unity argues for a redrawing of individual identity boundaries in favor of a wider, national boundary; individuals are asked to forgo their inhabitation of their raced, gendered, and socialized bodies in favor of a national one. These physical attacks on American soil require

⁵ This speech is famous for the line, “They hate our freedoms.”

affirmation from American political leaders that the concept of the United States remains unharmed, which simultaneously acknowledges the perception that physical attacks incite existential crisis while attempting to deny that the accompanying anxiety is warranted.

These appeals to unity in response to existential anxiety are readily identifiable in the realm of political discourse to the point that Americans can reasonably expect some sort of call to unity or denial of trauma following any national attack, whether that attack is real or perceived. What interests me, though, is that these appeals are not unique to presidential political discourse – they trickle down through American media from video games to cinema and television, often in unexpected ways. The conspicuous deployment of appeals to unity and identity essence in politics makes identifying them fairly simple, and their ideological work is similarly on the surface. But somewhere along the line, it became expected or even necessary for politicians to call the nation together in a moment of national trauma. The nation has been conditioned for so long to associate this appeal with national trauma that Americans identify this particular rhetoric of integrity with a sort of nationalist sentiment. In other words, seeing someone shrug off a traumatic event that results in character growth is viewed as a somehow inherently American event; the narrative sequence of trauma, struggle, and redemption are somehow perceived to be uniquely American experiences, even in fictional situations where a character's nationality is either unknown or explicitly non-American. In other words, a non-American, or even potentially nonhuman character could have what American audiences consider to be a uniquely American experience simply by struggling or experiencing trauma and then taking a redemptive turn.

The concept of narrative having therapeutic value during times of national trauma through the embodiment of abstract concepts is the subject of Robert Torrey's "Therapeutic Narrative." Torrey argues that both *The Wild Bunch* and *Jaws* are direct responses to the Vietnam War, where *The Wild Bunch* "advocates a cathartically violent reversal of American

policy in Vietnam,” and *Jaws* serves both as “obvious wish fulfillment of the annihilation of a murderous, devious, and implacable enemy” and emphasizes “the necessity of avoiding a dangerously obsessive reaction to the trauma of American defeat in Vietnam” (27). Both films function as therapeutic by either reinforcing the heroic quality of American violence in *The Wild Bunch* (31) or by embodying the “distinctive anxieties associated with the end of the Vietnam era” (32), particularly the danger of American obsession with the vulnerability implied by a military loss in Vietnam. Both films, he argues, advocate a “cathartic reversal of American policy in Vietnam as the means of reestablishing the mythically moral and political rectitude of the American antifascist enterprise of the Second World War” (34), heading a series of films around and about Vietnam that sought to provide a “compensatory American victory” (34). That this shift toward therapeutic narrative in response to the trauma of a loss in Vietnam was accomplished using films that were not set in Vietnam is particularly significant as it demonstrates that national trauma can be effectively addressed indirectly through fictional accounts that are only marginally tied to the trauma that they seek to redeem.⁶ Just as Torry argues that *Jaws* and *The Wild Bunch* gave 1970’s Americans a way to therapeutically engage the Vietnam War, I argue that *Game of Thrones* and *Hannibal* give post-9/11 Americans a path to processing the continuing trauma of terrorism.

The flood of political and fictional rhetoric that invokes the concepts of American-ness and traumatic redemption has naturalized their association. This association is by no means endemic to the American condition,⁷ but has instead become naturalized through the ritualized incantation of American values during moments of national trauma. In other words, Americans have for so long spoken about the unity and untouchable essence of American

⁶ Similar work has been done by Kevin J. Whitmore in *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, where he argues that horror film took a nihilistic turn after 9/11.

⁷ See Israel’s response to the U.N. Resolution condemning its continued settlements in the West Bank, where it contends that the state of Israel is inseparable from the land of Israel.

national identity in moments of national trauma that it has forged a culturally enduring bond between trauma, unity, redemption, and the United States.

This phenomenon is evident in the way that non-American trauma survivors are portrayed in American news media. When Malala Yousafazi was shot in the head for promoting the education of girls in Pakistan, she became an international sensation, prompting blogger Peter Georgescu to proclaim her an “American hero,” who was “the embodiment of what the United States stands for” (Georgescu).⁸ Nelson Mandela was released from his twenty-seven-year stay in a South African prison in 1990 and was greeted later that year in New York City by throngs of Americans in a ticker tape parade of the sort usually thrown for American sports teams and politicians, causing the South African General Consul to wonder “in what sense Mr. Mandela is an American hero?” (Stanley). Mandela and Yousafazi are by no means the only people outside the United States fighting for equality along racial and gendered lines, but their physical trauma coupled with their accompanying redemption through their subsequent rises to power and Nobel Peace Prizes have made them American heroes of some sort.⁹ These examples seem to indicate a disconnect between the United States as a physical entity and what constitutes American-ness. American national identity has crept steadily away from the constraints of its physical body and toward the conceptual, where people who have never been American in a geospatial sense can be considered American conceptually by a shared bodily trauma and redemption experience.

The relationship between the embodied American national identity and the conceptual American national identity is fraught with contradiction. On one hand, a physical manifestation is hard-coded into American exceptionalism, but the impermanence of these

⁸ This sentiment cuts both ways, as the Taliban soon after proclaimed that Malala was an American CIA agent sent to destabilize the region.

⁹ There is fictional precedent for the Americanization of the traumatized body as well, most notably the final scene of *Braveheart*, in which William Wallace screams “freedom” while being systematically emasculated, eviscerated, and quartered by English soldiers.

material representations makes them problematic when they fall. As a result, Americans have a complicated relationship with their material nation; just as with individual embodiment, Americans understand that the physical component of identity is necessary in order to exist as a nation, but the reliance upon materiality for existence comes with the existential threat that accompanies the moment in which that material is destroyed. When confronted with the destruction of the material representation of the self, whether in individual or national identity, we can choose to either accept the possibility of annihilation or deny the necessity of materiality for existence. This is ironically dramatized in the 1975 film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, in which a knight in black armor guards a bridge to prevent King Arthur from passing. After Arthur cuts both of the Black Knight's arms off, the knight continues to attempt to fight Arthur, who implores him, "Look, you stupid bastard, you've got no arms left!" to which the knight replies, "It's just a flesh wound" (*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*). The knight so thoroughly embodies his identity as the bridge-keeper that he is unable to see when his situation has fundamentally changed because of his dismemberment. After Arthur takes one of the knight's legs with another swing of his sword, the knight hops into Arthur shouting, "I'm invincible! The Black Knight always triumphs!" (*Monty Python*). In denial about the ability of his new body, he doubles down on the fight with Arthur until he is left without legs or arms, propped up on the ground taunting Arthur as Arthur proclaims the fight "a draw" and walks away. The Black Knight is incapable of imagining a world in which he no longer guards the bridge, which positions him to deny the bodily trauma that might preclude his continued performance of his bridge-guarding role. In this way, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* illustrates how difficult it is to set aside deeply embedded identities in the face of changing material circumstances. The body can be a site of both privilege and vulnerability, depending on the demands of the rhetorical situation. When the body provides privilege, it becomes indispensable, a critical element of identity that is inextricably tied to its

constitution. But when the body is a site of vulnerability, it is de-emphasized, marginalized by its materiality, suggesting its inability to participate in what “truly” constitutes being: the symbolic. This concept is best demonstrated in the “person first” method of linguistic prescription that is preferred in medical communities, in which the preferred mode of address is a “person with a condition” rather than a “conditioned person.” For example, the term “schizophrenic” in the mid 1900’s would encompass the entire person - “he is schizophrenic” – whereas more recent medical language would prefer to say that “he has been diagnosed with schizophrenia.” This language ontologically separates Jane’s identity from her body, preventing her diagnosis from consuming her by using language that depicts her condition as an appendage to her existence rather than a descriptor of *who* she *is*. A similar connection can be made in reference to offensive racial language, particularly when it comes to the terms “colored people” and “people of color.” The former indicates that color defines the existence of the person while the latter casts color as an ancillary attribute. Person-first language operates on the understanding that a bit of room is necessary between who we consider ourselves to be and our bodies.

This continuum of embodiment along which identity kairotically oscillates forms the very core of American exceptionalism and makes it essentially unassailable. During times of relative peace, the wholeness of the American national physical body provides it with privilege in the form of resources and ease of defense due to its natural borders. But when that body is threatened and its vulnerability is exposed, exceptionalism de-emphasizes the role of the physical body by drawing attention to its “mere” materiality and instead focusing on the conceptual disembodied constitution of what it means to be American. In this chapter, I argue that Americans find themselves in the latter situation, confronted with their nation’s materiality due to the increasing awareness of the United States’ vulnerability to domestic and external terrorism, but are unable or unwilling to respond to this trauma because of the

renewed focus on the conceptual component of national identity. The relentlessly positive political rhetoric that surrounds American national trauma functions as a sort of “terministic screen,” or a set of “terms through which humans perceive the world, and that direct attention away from some interpretations and toward others” (Stob 131). This particular terministic screen is one that directs the attention toward the redemptive possibilities of trauma and away from the damage that it causes, particularly any damage that might have the potential to alter American identity. The repeated deployment of political rhetoric that directs the attention of the American public toward its positive possibilities after trauma is a good indicator of the continued pervasiveness of American exceptionalism, an argument that isn’t particularly difficult to support considering how blatantly American political leaders appeal to unity and American essence in the speeches they give in the aftermath of national trauma. What interests me most in this chapter is that this terministic screen manifests itself in the narrative structures and character arcs of the wildly popular television series *Game of Thrones*. Specifically, I argue that HBO’s hit series dramatizes an embodied response to national trauma by using its characters’ bodily trauma as opportunities for character growth while the lesser known series *Hannibal* - based on the characters from Thomas Harris’s *Silence of the Lambs* and *The Red Dragon* novels - takes the position that bodily trauma is often transformative and unable to be redeemed by using human bodies for various impious purposes such as art, fertilizer, and food. *Game of Thrones*’s reverence for the identity-driving function of the human body echoes the arguments of American exceptionalism and its close ties to the physical component of its identity while *Hannibal* treats the human body with complete irreverence, often equating humans with pigs, cows, and natural resources. When considering that Burke’s theory of literature as equipment for living suggests that literature gives us “strategies for dealing with situations” (595), *Game of Thrones* and *Hannibal* suggest two very different strategies – embodiment and materialism - for dealing

with traumatic situations. The embodied strategy espoused by *Game of Thrones* proposes that trauma is best processed as a generative phenomenon, used as a redemptive strategy to strip away undesirable identity traits like a gardener prunes a shrub of non-conforming elements to shape it into its “true,” more desirable form. *Hannibal* offers a more grim strategy to cope with trauma, viewing it as destructive and transformative in a way that is unredemptive. If *Game of Thrones* views trauma as pruning, *Hannibal* sees it as a razing of the crops and salting the earth. Where *Hannibal* is willing to see a future that does not revere the historical identity of the body, *Game of Thrones* insists on its eternal immutability. Rhetorics of integrity invoked explicitly on the national political stage such as those spoken by American political leaders are readily identified as rhetorics of integrity, but as Torry shows us, those that are obscured through fiction and fantasy can do their ideological work on a more fundamental level, reinforcing American exceptionalism without having to bear the additional weight of representing the nation.

GAME OF THRONES

Based on the fantasy novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, HBO’s ultra-violent series has captured the American imagination for six seasons, with plans for a total of eight. The series is best known for the sudden, brutal, unexpected deaths, trauma, and dismemberment of its main characters. While much of *Game of Thrones*’s trauma is deadly, the moments in which certain characters undergo non-lethal bodily trauma are often processed as an opportunity for the victim to become more sympathetic in the show. Both *Game of Thrones* and *Hannibal* deal with death on a regular basis, but only *Game of Thrones* also trades in therapeutic trauma, defined for the purposes of this chapter as a moment of non-lethal violence that alters a character’s body and ability in order to advance the character’s development. When a character loses a hand or is horrifically scarred, it seems to have the effect of *humanizing* what often was once a quite unsympathetic character. For the purposes

of this chapter, I will focus on Jaime Lannister - a twenty-something knight of the King's Guard, Theon Greyjoy - a Viking analogue with a predilection for promiscuous sex and war, and Bran Stark - a ten-year-old boy with dreams of becoming a knight, as characters whose bodily trauma either blunts their villainous edges or makes them wildly powerful. These characters experience a bodily trauma that serves to strip away the extraneous aspects of the character's identity, resulting in a character much more sympathetic or powerful than they were before. Seen this way, the trauma becomes therapeutic, almost as though it reveals more desirable attributes that were hidden at the core of the character.

Jaime Lannister might be the most blatant example of therapeutic trauma in *Game of Thrones* because he is responsible for the transformation of Bran and is himself later transformed at the hand of Locke. In the series pilot, Jaime is caught having sex with his sister, Cersei, the queen of Westeros, by Bran as Bran climbs a tower in Winterfell. Jaime hoists Bran into the tower ostensibly to keep him from falling, then sighs, "the things I do for love" and shoves him out the window. Jaime shows no emotion at the fact that he has likely ended this child's life. The fall does not kill Bran, but leaves him paralyzed from the waist down. Upon hearing of Bran's newfound disability, Jaime discusses the boy's plight with his little brother, Tyrion:

JAIME: Well, even if the boy lives, he'll be a cripple, grotesque. Give me a good, clean death any day.

TYRION: Speaking for the grotesques,¹⁰ I'll have to disagree. Death is so final. Whereas life...ah, life is full of possibilities. (*Game of Thrones*, "The Kingsroad")

¹⁰ Tyrion is a little person.

Jaime clearly appeals here to rhetorics of integrity, suggesting that a body that can no longer serve the function prescribed by its preferred identity should be destroyed rather than linger in an altered state. Bran wanted to be a knight of King's Guard before his fall and loved to climb the castle towers at Winterfell. Upon waking from his coma after his fall, Bran asks his brother, Robb, "It's true, isn't it? What Maester Luwin says about my legs? I'd rather be dead" (*Game of Thrones*). Even the thought of altering what Bran considers to be his core identity is unacceptable; he would rather imagine non-existence than contemplate the existence demanded by his body's new abilities. In this way, both Jaime and Bran are examples of the embodied approach to American exceptionalism, not because their bodies are marked with national identifiers - they are not Americans, exist in a time analogous in history in which the United States didn't exist, and have no overt connections to the United States - but because their attitudes toward bodily integrity mirror the attitudes of American exceptionalists toward the American national body and American national identity. Both *Game of Thrones* and embodied American exceptionalism strive for an immutable identity housed by a body that reflects that identity's abilities when the opportunity calls for it, as if somehow the shape and ability of a body determines the nature of that body's identity. For embodiment, this is often reflected in the argument that the United States' geographical features make it difficult to invade and that its natural resources are a reward for inhabiting God's chosen nation. Missing from the embodied position is the constructedness of the national body, driven by Manifest Destiny, in which the violence performed to shape the United States into its current form is obscured by a narrative that considers the shape of the nation to be natural or preordained.

Bran's transformation as a result of the trauma that Jaime inflicts upon him is ultimately beneficial for Bran as a character, however. Bran's paralysis leads him to discover that he has the ability to invade and control the bodies of animals and people - what the series

calls “warging” - and the ability to visit and influence events in the past and the future. Before Bran’s fall, he is a ten-year-old boy, second in line of succession for his family’s lands; his life is marked by his inability to hit a target with a bow and arrow (he is surpassed in this endeavor by his younger sister to his great chagrin) and his irrelevance to the narrative of what appears to be a tale of the succession of kings. Bran’s trauma is then transformative, changing him from one of the least important characters to one of the most powerful beings in the entire series’ universe, as demonstrated when he wargs into his wolf, Summer, to save his brother from an attack at the end of the third season. In the sixth season, Bran develops the power to visit and influence the past in much the same way that he employs his warging skills, somehow warging into his friend Hodor in the past in order to save them from a zombie army in the present¹¹. The narrative of Bran’s paralysis is then redirected, changing from something that has him contemplating suicide to a beneficial moment that boosted his character into a position of unprecedented power. Bran’s trauma is no longer something to be coped with or processed, but a moment of immeasurable therapeutic power. Bran is no longer required to grieve for his body’s lost ability, but instead celebrates his newfound potential. When he is warging or time traveling, his body is *whole*, giving him the ability to walk– or at least the sensation of walking. Unsurprisingly, Bran spends an increasing amount of time in these visions, becoming reluctant to return to his broken body. Before his fall, Bran perceives his life’s narrative to be one of continuing growth and increasing power, and his paralysis results in his transition into a greenseer¹², allowing his life to continue along its narrative path as if the trauma not only did not inhibit that narrative, but even ultimately helped him to fulfill his destiny.

¹¹ This is exactly as confusing as it sounds.

¹² Greenseers have the ability both to view past and future events and to influence the people they see there.

Bran's trauma is then recast in the same way that 9/11 and subsequent attacks on Americans and their institutions have been reimagined by politicians and pundits. American narrative is, like Bran's, one of continuing growth and increasing power and is tied directly to the perceived invulnerability that is supposed to be provided by the United States' military, financial, and natural resources.¹³ Like Bran's paralysis, American trauma threatens the continuity of that narrative, forcing Americans to either confront the possibility of a world without a dominant US or to find continuity throughout the trauma that allows for that trauma to be considered therapeutic. As a result, those politicians appeal to the symbolic underpinnings of American identity that are physically unassailable. The repeated use of concepts like freedom, liberty, and justice removes the focus from the bodily trauma that Americans experience and redirects the American imagination in a way that allows them to reassert widely held beliefs about American-ness. As Bryan Crable notes, "The symbolic nature of our identities functions as a powerful antidote to our awareness of the mortality and fragility of an embodied existence" (8). As Americans become more keenly aware of that mortality and fragility, the emphasis on the embodied American experience necessarily shifts to a more durable symbolic discourse. The flags, bumper stickers, ribbons and other symbolic patriotic paraphernalia that sprout up after a national tragedy are a way for Americans to circumvent the grieving process of a national bodily trauma and instead focus on a symbolic power that can transform and grow *because of* said trauma.

While Bran's transition certainly encapsulates the shift from physical to symbolic identity, Theon Greyjoy's mutilation at the hands of Ramsay Bolton is one of the more gruesome storylines of *Game of Thrones*. Ramsay's physical emasculation of Theon is a pivotal moment in the series, sending Theon into a spiral of depression and identity crisis because Theon cannot at first imagine himself continuing to exist without his penis.

¹³ Bran's perceived invulnerability, on the other hand, is tied directly to his privilege, both as a male and as nobility.

Ramsay's violent torture of Theon straddles the physical and symbolic, not only altering Theon's body but also transforming his *self*. In the show's first season, Theon establishes that his identity is closely tied to the abilities of his body, as he brags that the Greyjoys are "famed for their skills at archery, navigation, and lovemaking" (*Game of Thrones*) and is often then seen either having sex or shooting a bow throughout the first-season episodes. *Game of Thrones* is thoroughly invested in the embodiment of Theon's sexuality, as his is the first scene in the show that displayed male genital nudity; in the first season, Theon is depicted fully nude in a sex scene with the prostitute Ros, after which Theon expresses his concern about Ros's other sexual partners, particularly Tyrion Lannister. After their encounter, Theon asks Ros, "What's a dwarf like down below? I've always wondered" (*Game of Thrones*), implying a connection between Tyrion's bodily difference and his sexual prowess. Theon is unable to imagine a situation in which a body that does not conform to his expectations could possibly perform the sexual and gendered acts that he embodies.¹⁴

¹⁴ Theon is hardly a sympathetic character early on in the series, when he is introduced as the arrogant ward of the Starks.¹⁴ He is described in the book series (on which the television series is based) as "a callow youth" (*A Clash of Kings*), and rebuked by Maester Luwin when Theon attempts to incite Robb Stark to march off to war, Luwin tells him "too easily words of war become acts of war" (*Game of Thrones*). When Theon is sent by the Starks to ask his family to join their rebellion, he gropes a woman on his approach to his childhood home, attempting to seduce her and not realizing she is his sister, Yara. He tells her "you can tell your grandchildren about this night," obviously assuming that the "common woman" would want to brag about a one night stand with a Greyjoy, to which Yara responds, "I don't imagine it will be a story fit for children" (*Game of Thrones*). Theon's father, Balon, meets with Yara and Theon together, and lays out a plan to attack the Starks by sea, a foray which Theon states he will lead himself. . Balon seems unconvinced, leaving Theon mystified, wondering "I'm your son. Your only living heir. Who else?" (*Game of Thrones*). . Balon reminds Theon that "this isn't Winterfell" and that the laws of succession don't apply; Theon's "birthright" to the Iron Islands is forfeit to Yara, and he is given a minor command while his sister leads the main attack. . Theon is then berated by his father Balon, who accuses him of sympathizing with the Starks, and then rejects the proposed alliance with the Starks. Noting Theon's clothes, Balon asks, "Was it Ned Stark's pleasure to make you his daughter?" and insists that Theon change his clothes. . Balon then asks whether Theon paid the "iron price"¹⁴ for his jewelry, or if he bought them with gold; when Theon admits that he bought the jewelry with gold, his father rips it from his neck and throws it in the fire, sneering "I'll not have my son dressed as a whore" (*Game of Thrones*). . To this point in the series, Theon is portrayed as insecure (his anxiety about Ros' partners), entitled (his

This presents a definite challenge for Theon when he is captured by Ramsay Bolton in the third season. Ramsay orders Theon tortured: he is beaten, his fingernails are pried off, a screw is driven through his foot, and his fingers and toes are flayed. But his defining moment of torture is directly related to Theon's sexuality; Ramsay sends two women to seduce Theon, who is in obvious distress, fearing that Ramsay may return during their encounter.

Throughout the seduction, both Myranda and Violet make repeated references to Theon's penis:

VIOLET: Don't you want us to see it?

MYRANDA: Oh, come on. Let us see it. Everybody talks about it.

VIOLET: We've heard so much about it. (*Game of Thrones*, "The Bear and the Maiden Fair")

Theon finally relents, only to have Ramsay enter the room and interrupt the encounter.

Ramsay understands how closely Theon has linked his identity with his body to this point, and chooses to torture him psychologically:

RAMSAY: Should we see this cock everyone's always going on about?

THEON: (attempts to get up and run. Ramsay strikes him across the face and knocks him down)

RAMSAY: Everyone knows you loved girls. Bet you always thought they loved you back. Your famous cock must be very precious to you. Would you say it's your most precious part?

RAMSAY: (moves toward Theon with a flaying knife)

assumption of prestige at home), and generally unlikeable (his advances toward his sister. Through the second season of *Game of Thrones*, Theon is convinced that his body in its maleness and nobility provides him with the essence of his identity and considers himself a prince,¹⁴ but the audience is all too aware of his shortcomings. By the time he has overthrown Winterfell, in the third season, Theon is one of the most disliked characters in the show.

THEON: No, mercy! Please!

RAMSAY: This *is* mercy. I'm not killing you. Just making a few alterations.

(*Game of Thrones*, "The Bear and the Maiden Fair")

Ramsay then cuts off Theon's genitals, completing Theon's transformation. Theon loses consciousness during the process, and when he awakes to find himself castrated, he asks Ramsay to kill him. Just as Bran struggles with his body's new abilities after his trauma, Theon initially sees no way that he can live without what he considered to be the defining part of his body. Throughout his time in Ramsay's custody, Theon has been systematically dismantled through Ramsay's torture, both physically and psychologically. Ramsay's most effective method seems to be calling attention to Theon's altered body as he does while Theon is again chained to the cross:

RAMSAY: You don't look like a Theon Greyjoy anymore. That's a name for a lord. But you're not a lord, are you? You're just *meat*. Stinking meat. You reek. Reek! That's a good name for you! What's your name?

THEON: Theon Greyjoy

RAMSAY: (punches Theon in the face) What's your name?

THEON: Theon Greyjoy

RAMSAY: (punches Theon again) What is your name?

THEON: (crying) Reek. My name is Reek. (*Game of Thrones*, "Mhysa")

Ramsay reinforces Theon's connection to his body by choosing and enforcing a name that "fits" Theon's current physical state, a sentiment shared by Theon's father, Balon, after he receives Theon's severed penis in a box from Ramsay with a command to withdraw from the North. When Theon's sister suggests that they mount a rescue mission for him, Balon resists:

BALON: Theon disobeyed my orders. The boy's a fool. He cannot further the Greyjoy line. I will not give up the lands I have seized, the strongholds I have taken. Get this away from me.

YARA: He's your son.

BALON: Son? (points to the box) He's not a man anymore. (Game of Thrones, "Mhysa")

Theon is beset from all sides by characters who insist that his body defines his identity, and he finally relents to the external pressure that insists that only "whole" men are fit to rule in the world of Westeros because they have the capacity to reproduce. Theon is given no choice but to change himself to survive his new circumstances, abandoning his hyper-masculine performance for one of subservient androgyny.

It is no surprise then that Theon's demeanor changes markedly after his castration. He is no longer confident, and he flinches when Ramsay enters the room or another character moves suddenly. Theon is so psychologically damaged that when his sister attempts to rescue him from Ramsay, Theon refuses to go, convinced that the escape attempt is another elaborate plot by Ramsay to torture him. Yara is so shaken by Theon's state of mind that she tells her companions that "my brother is dead" (*Game of Thrones*, "The Laws of Gods and Men"). The bold, arrogant Theon that exists in the first three seasons of the show is replaced by Reek, who sleeps in the kennels with the dogs and is forbidden by Ramsay to bathe. The audience moves from loathing Theon for his betrayal of the Starks to abject pity for the repeated trauma he experiences at the hands of Ramsay.

While Theon remains Ramsay's prisoner, Ramsay marries Sansa Stark, whom he repeatedly assaults and rapes with Theon present in the room, sometimes even forcing Theon to participate in the assault. When Sansa finally sees an escape opportunity, Theon aids her by killing one of Ramsay's guards and escaping with her. It is when Theon helps Sansa

escape the sadistic Ramsay Bolton that Theon becomes a redeemed character¹⁵, a transformation made possible by his physical alteration. Theon's castration abruptly halts his lecherous behavior and his attempts to "own" the women that he has sex with and transforms him into a sort of non-threatening champion of women¹⁶ in the form of Sansa and his sister Yara. When Theon's father dies suddenly, Theon supports Yara's claim to the throne instead of staking a claim for himself, stating simply, "I'm not fit to rule" (*Game of Thrones*). When Yara loses her bid for the throne anyway, Theon escapes with her to attempt to install yet another queen in Westeros to oppose the male-dominated rulers that existed at the time. The traumatic loss of Theon's physical masculinity drives him from an arrogant, womanizing traitor into a staunch ally of the remaining Starks and women in positions of power. The difficulty of Theon's transformation suggests that his trauma and abuse play a prominent role in his transition from loathed to loved. Ramsay's torture struck at the very core of Theon's identity, prompting Theon - like Bran - to wish that he had died; instead, audiences are treated with a narrative of redemption that presents Theon's trauma as a momentary obstacle in his life story.

Like Bran and Theon, Jaime Lannister's identity is closely tied to his body's physical ability. Described as the best swordsman in the world, Jaime's skill with arms and armor is an integral part of who he is. Such martial prowess in a world designed to reward a "might makes right" philosophy has instilled in Jaime a sense of entitlement and invulnerability that stems from his ability to kill and maim at will. As if incest and the attempted murder of a child were not enough to sour audiences on Jaime, he also is admittedly guilty of killing the king he was sworn to protect, earning him the moniker Kingslayer. Jaime's villainy is almost

¹⁵ The Starks are the closest thing in the series to a traditional protagonist, and Sansa endures some form of torture or another throughout the series, from Joffrey's beheading of her father and beatings, to being subject to Ramsay's abuse.

¹⁶ The use of a woman's sexual assault to dramatize a man's character development is problematic to say the least.

cartoonish through the first three seasons of the show as he swaggers through Westeros, unanimously proclaimed to be the world's best swordsman and the heir to the richest of the seven kingdoms. When he and his traveling companion, Brienne of Tarth, are captured, he attempts to negotiate their release but instead has his sword hand chopped off at the wrist. In his dismemberment, Jaime loses the one thing that has made him useful in the world of Westeros, an essential bodily component of his performed identity as master swordsman, a concept that is reinforced throughout subsequent episodes through his inability to learn to fight with his remaining left hand. Jaime did not just lose his hand, but also much of his arrogant, condescending attitude. In his last attempt to assert his lost dominance, he even rapes Cersei in the church where their dead son is waiting to be buried.¹⁷ While dismemberment is certainly a pivotal part of the series and Jaime's character arc, the surrounding circumstances that establish his character's sheer unlikability serve to highlight this moment of transformation. For that reason, I will circle back to the circumstances that led up to Jaime's dismemberment to establish exactly how widely disliked his character was up to that point.

The moniker "Kingslayer" is often used by the other characters to refer to Jaime throughout his pre-trauma narrative, a pejorative that is intended to mock Jaime for breaking his oath to protect the king that he stabbed. Before losing his hand, Jaime does not offer any explanation for his act of treason, and instead seems content to allow the other characters to believe that Jaime simply killed the king for personal reasons. It is only when Jaime finally feels vulnerable after losing his hand that the audience is made privy to his motivations:

So we opened the gates and my father sacked the city. Once again, I came to the king, begging him to surrender. He told me to bring him my father's head. Then he turned to his pyromancer. "Burn them all," he said "Burn them in their homes. Burn them in

¹⁷ The use of sexual violence to shape women in the show will be addressed in a separate section.

their beds”...First, I killed the pyromancer. And then, when the king turned to flee, I drove my sword into his back. "Burn them all," he kept saying, "Burn them all." I don't think he expected to die. He... he meant to... burn with the rest of us and rise again, reborn as a dragon to turn his enemies to ash. I slit his throat to make sure that didn't happen. (*Game of Thrones*, “Kissed by Fire”)

As far as the characters in *Game of Thrones* are concerned, Jaime’s defining characteristic is his disloyalty. While there are rumblings of his incestuous relationship with his sister and the Starks suspect that he pushed Bran from the window, his identity as the Kingslayer is concretized because he freely admits to the act. Being the Kingslayer provides Jaime with his primary link to villainy in the series and is the foundation for audience disdain for him as well. That he would clarify the act to soften his image is a wholesale change in Jaime’s attitude toward the world and the people around him. Jaime’s dismemberment is a moment that drastically alters his identity, pivoting him away from the series’ primary villain to one of its most sympathetic characters. Jaime’s vulnerability is the main component of his transition because for so long the audience has heard about and experienced his ability to physically overpower his adversaries. He is named to the Kingsguard at the age of sixteen before the series starts and kills two soldiers with his bare hands in its second season. When Tyrion Lannister names him his champion for a trial by combat, the court believes it to be a foregone conclusion that Jaime will win without even knowing against whom he will fight. The audience watches Jaime transition from the show’s bully before his dismemberment to a series of fighting sequences that show him losing badly to supposedly lesser swordsmen while attempting to learn to fight left-handed. Jaime’s new underdog characterization cements his sympathetic position in an American audience with a predilection to imagining itself as victimized and a propensity to support underdogs.

Jaime's victimization does not come quickly or easily, however. When Jaime is imprisoned, he refuses to take the situation seriously, believing that his eminently powerful father Tywin will ransom him. Jaime's belief in his superiority is so complete that while in captivity, he tells his (also imprisoned) cousin that "my life has left me uniquely unfit for constraint" (*Game of Thrones*). Jaime has at this point bought into the years of acclaim heaped upon him by the people of Westeros, oblivious to the scorn that accompanies the accolades. He truly believes that his imprisonment is somehow more unjust than his cousin's because it is not in his nature to be incarcerated.

After Jaime is set free, he and his new traveling companion, Brienne of Tarth, are later recaptured by the Brotherhood Without Banners. Jaime believes that his family's reputation and his fame will spare him, whereas Brienne will be sexually assaulted:

JAIME: When we make camp tonight, you'll be raped. More than once. None of these men have ever been with a noblewoman. You'd be wise not to resist.

BRIENNE: Would I?

JAIME: They'll knock your teeth out.

BRIENNE: You think I care about my teeth?

JAIME: No, I don't think you care about your teeth. If you fight them, they'll kill you. Do you understand? I'm the prisoner of value, not you.

(*Game of Thrones*, "Walk of Punishment")

Although he is technically correct, Jaime vastly overvalues himself as a prisoner, which directly results in his captors mutilating him. Jaime's deeply seated belief in his bodily ability is unsurprisingly coupled with a general disdain for strategy and diplomacy. He tells his captors that he "hated to read as a child. But my father forced me to study the books every morning before I could practice with sword or horse. Four hours every day holed up in the

maester's chambers. I learned a lot of fancy words" (*Game of Thrones*, "Walk of Punishment"). Jaime clumsily tries to negotiate his ransom with Locke, the leader of his captors, telling them that his father will pay his weight in gold for his safe return. Here, Jaime overestimates both his negotiating skills and his own worth as a prisoner. As Locke orders him unchained from the tree, Jaime believes that he's being led to more comfortable accommodations. He is then shocked when he's forced face first onto a tree stump with his arm outstretched while Locke looms over him with a meat cleaver:

LOCKE: You think you're the smartest man there is. That everyone alive has to bow and scrape and lick your boots.

JAIME: My father...

LOCKE: ...and if you get into any trouble, all you got to do is say "my father" and that's it, all your troubles are gone.

LOCKE: (presses the knife against Jaime's eye)

JAIME: Don't...

LOCKE: Have you gotten something to say?

JAIME: (groans)

LOCKE: Careful. You don't want to say the wrong thing. You're nothing without your daddy. Your daddy ain't here. Never forget that. Here, this should help you remember. (*Game of Thrones*: "Walk of Punishment")

Locke then cuts Jaime's right hand off at the wrist, and the episode cuts to black while Jaime screams in agony. In the space of a minute, the illusory world in which Jamie can talk or fight his way out of any situation is shattered, and he is forced to confront his newly discovered mediocrity. The privilege of martial prowess is gone with his right hand, and the privilege of his family name is erased with his imprisonment by a group of people who do not share his

values. This moment is decidedly traumatic, shifting Jaime's identity in a jarring sequence that is just as unexpected by the audience as the character. The audience has spent much of the first three seasons with Jaime as the most villainous character in the series, but is now forced to reevaluate him now that he no longer poses a threat to other sympathetic characters.

As with Theon's ordeal, the audience is given a front-row seat to Jaime's suffering after his dismemberment. Locke ties the severed hand around Jaime's neck while they ride back to Harrenhal, a decaying reminder of Jaime's wholeness taunting him every step of the way. Locke is thrusting abjection directly in Jaime's face, creating a situation where Jaime must constantly recognize his materiality. While the audience is left to assume that a significant portion of Theon's identity was tied up in his penis, Jaime leaves no doubt to anyone that he considers himself utterly destroyed by the loss of his right hand. While Jaime and Brienne sit by the fire, Jaime starts to nod off. Brienne notices, asking him:

BRIENNE: What are you doing?

JAIME: I'm dying.

BRIENNE: You can't die. You need to live to take revenge.

JAIME: (chuckles) I don't care about revenge.

BRIENNE: You coward. A little misfortune and you're giving up.

JAIME: (incredulously) Misfortune?

BRIENNE: You lost a hand.

JAIME: My sword hand. I *was* that hand.

BRIENNE: You have a taste - one taste - of the real world, where people have important things taken from them and you whine and cry and quit. You sound like a bloody woman. (*Game of Thrones*, "And Now His Watch Has Ended")

Jaime follows the pattern set by Bran and Theon, wishing for death rather than confronting the prospect of a life with an altered body and the corresponding altered self. But Brienne forestalls his despair with her own appeal to rhetorics of integrity by characterizing Jaime's loss as "a little misfortune." In doing so, Brienne dramatically redraws the bodily boundaries of who Jaime is. When Brienne sees the hand hanging from Jaime's neck, she sees a rotting piece of meat that no longer contains whatever essence comprises him, thus successfully performing abjection as described in the introduction.¹⁸ However, when Jaime sees the hand, he literally sees himself, unable to extricate whatever Jaime-ness might reside outside of the hand from its grasp. Just as Kristeva's corpse threatens those that confront it, Jaime's hand "harries [him] as radically separate, loathsome...a reality that, if [he] acknowledge[s] it, annihilates [him]" (*Powers of Horror 2*). Jaime's sword hand is the thing that defines him, yet he must confront it as a thing no longer attached to him. The separateness of his hand is literally rubbed in Jaime's face to achieve the maximum possible psychological damage. Unable to reconcile the confrontation of his self (the hand) outside of and separate from himself (the remaining body), Jaime simply chooses self-annihilation.

Jaime is no stranger to this repositioning of the material and symbolic, as he notes in the series' second episode. When taunting Robb Stark about whether he had ever actually used his sword in combat, Jaime sneers, "It's a strange thing, first time you cut a man. You realize we're nothing but sacks of meat and blood, and some bone to keep it all standing" (*Game of Thrones*, "The Kingsroad"). Considering that Jaime killed his first man at the age of eighteen, he has had considerable experience in navigating the troubled waters between the human body as material and symbolic. Jaime's referral to the human as "sacks of meat and blood" could be read as an attempt to frame the symbolic act of murder as instead a material

¹⁸ See page 25 of the intro. "abjection requires the confrontation of pieces, parts, or components of the body that no longer reside within the borders of the body."

act of butchery. When it is Jaime himself that is the subject of butchery, however, he struggles at first to deny the symbolic trauma that he suffers.

In the ensuing episodes, Jaime begins to come to grips with his new self. He soon abandons his attempts to learn to fight with his left hand and begrudgingly accepts a gilded steel prosthetic hand to wear. Upon ending his attempt to return to his former self, Jaime devotes himself to diplomacy and cunning, wielding the privilege of his family to rescue Brienne from the bear-baiting pit at Harrenhal. When Jaime returns to King's Landing after his imprisonment and dismemberment, he appears to distance himself from his incestuous relationship with his sister Cersei and seems more concerned with his legacy and honor than he was previously. This is underscored by King Joffrey's¹⁹ excoriation of Jaime's accomplishments to this point. While Joffrey and Jaime look over the Book of Brothers²⁰, Joffrey feigns surprise at Jaime's short entry:

JOFFREY: Ser Jaime Lannister. Hmm. Someone forgot to write down all your great deeds!

JAIME: There's still time.

JOFFREY: Is there? For a forty-year-old knight with one hand? How can you protect me with that?

JAIME: I use my left hand now, your grace. It makes for more of a contest.

(Game of Thrones, "Two Swords")

Jaime understands that much of his power in the world is derived from his reputation as a dangerous swordsman and then bluffs his way through the encounter with Joffrey by pretending that his efforts to learn to fight left-handed have been successful. His comment "there's still time" indicates an acknowledgement on Jaime's part that his approach to life up

¹⁹ Joffrey is Jaime's son, but he and the rest of the realm believes that King Robert Baratheon was his father.

²⁰ A history written by and about members of the Kingsguard that chronicles all their heroic deeds.

to this point has left him largely unfulfilled. Jaime then uses his father's own obsession with the family legacy to strike a bargain for Tyrion's life later in the series. He offers to resign from the Kingsguard if Tywin will spare Tyrion, preying on Tywin's anxiety about the absence of a male heir to carry on the Lannister name. In doing so, Jaime begins to wield influence and words as well as he formerly swung a sword. Jaime's newfound vulnerability leads him on a quest to restore his honor, endearing him to the audience by establishing him as a physical underdog and separating him from the character traits that positioned him as a villain earlier in the series. Jaime's final symbolic surrender to his new identity occurs in the show's fourth season when he gives Brienne his family's priceless Valyrian steel sword, Oathkeeper.

BRIENNE: (looking at the sword) Valyrian steel.

JAIME: Mmhmm. It's yours.

BRIENNE: I can't accept this.

JAIME: It was reforged from Ned Stark's sword. You'll use it to defend Ned Stark's daughter. You swore an oath to return the Stark girls to their mother. Lady Stark's dead. Arya [Stark] is probably dead too, but there's still a chance to find Sansa. Get her somewhere safe. (*Game of Thrones*, "Oathkeeper")

Having distanced himself for the time being from Cersei, Jaime's final path to redemption is to make amends for his attack on Bran Stark in the first season, equipping Brienne to defend what he believes to be the last surviving Stark by relinquishing the sword that his father had made specifically for him. This sets Jaime's character on the series' most improbably redemptive arc, going from a person who violates multiple cultural taboos with impunity to one of the few characters fighting for the closest thing to "good" that can be found in *Game*

of *Thrones*. Brienne's pep talk that prevents Jaime's death then proves prophetic, as Jaime transcends the material shape and ability of his body to become a "better" person.

Bran, Theon, and Jaime all suffer horrific physical and psychological trauma at the hands of others, causing each of them to ask for death as an alternative to living in a body that can no longer perform the identity that each had known for so long. However, all three characters find themselves in positions that are either more sympathetic to the audience or in positions of vastly increased power. This arc of trauma, grief, and therapeutic transformation provides American viewers with a way to process national trauma in a similar fashion, viewing that trauma as both transformative and empowering rather than as disabling or mutilating.

HANNIBAL

Like its titular character, *Hannibal* does not share the same definition of therapy that *Game of Thrones* espouses, instead arguing that "therapy only works when we know ourselves as we are, not as we'd like to be" (*Hannibal*, "Shiizakana"). Part horror, part police procedural, and completely gruesome, the series is set before the characters knew that Hannibal Lecter was a serial killer and cannibal, and the FBI frequently consults with Lecter on high profile murders to develop psychological profiles. As the series progresses, Hannibal physically and psychologically traumatizes Will Graham in an attempt to transform him into a serial killer and cannibal. In the first season, the series introduces a new serial killer for the FBI to investigate nearly every episode. As a result, the season is littered with the bodies of the victims of the various killers. In every case, the victims are left in such a state as to highlight the materiality of the human body, often by using human bodies in ways that humans are used to using deceased animal bodies: for food, fertilizer, construction, and art. *Hannibal's* materialist position on human embodiment stands in stark contrast to the

humanistic *Game of Thrones*, denying the audience the therapeutic take on trauma that has propelled *Game of Thrones* into the public consciousness.

Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter are central characters of the series, forming a close relationship when Hannibal is contracted to provide an independent psychological evaluation of Will after Will is asked to consult on murders that have stumped the FBI's investigators. Will has the ability to empathize with other people²¹ to the point that he can recreate a crime in his mind from the perspective of the killer by simply being at the crime scene. Will's re-creation is so vivid, however, that it sometimes makes it difficult for him to tell whether his re-creation is real. Jack Crawford hires Hannibal as Will's outside therapist to keep Will grounded in reality and to provide Jack with constant professional evaluations of Will's mental health (*Hannibal*, "Aperitif"). Hannibal instead feeds Will's developing delusions, pushing him to further empathize with the killers Will is trying to catch in hopes of turning Will into a serial killer in his own right. In the course of his "therapy" with Hannibal, Will kills Garrett Jacob Hobbes, a man who was luring young women who look like his daughter, killing them and eating them. Afterward, Will's delusions (which the audience later finds out are partly triggered by a case of bacterial encephalitis)²² become so intense that he starts to believe that he is becoming Hobbes. At the end of the first season, the audience discovers that Hannibal has been plotting to frame Will for the murder of Hobbes's daughter, Abigail. Hannibal uses Will's admission that he enjoyed killing Hobbes in the line of duty to try to push Will past his reluctance to kill for sport. After Will kills Randall Tier, one of Hannibal's ex-patients who constructs a cave bear exoskeleton in order to maul his victims, Will impales Tier on his own exoskeleton, stretching his body over the pieces and posing the exoskeleton

²¹ Hannibal diagnoses Will with an "empathy disorder." When Jack asks Will where he falls on the [autism] spectrum, Will says, "My horse is hitched to a post that is closer to Asperger's and autistics than narcissists and sociopaths" (*Hannibal*, "Aperitif").

²² Hannibal is aware of Will's encephalitis, but leaves it untreated, preferring to "see what will happen" (*Hannibal*, "Buffet Froid").

in a way that mimics a museum exhibit of a fossilized animal. When Hannibal is led to believe that Will also kills another person, Hannibal asks about his demeanor during the murder:

HANNIBAL: Tell me, did your heart race while you murdered her?

WILL: No, it didn't.

HANNIBAL: A low heart rate is a true indicator of one's capacity for violence. Your design is evolving. Your choices affect the physical structures of your brain.

WILL: Killing is changing the way I think.

HANNIBAL: Yes. You must understand that blood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel your radiance. (*Hannibal*, "Ko No Mono")

Hannibal and *Hannibal's* philosophy toward embodiment is made undeniably clear in the final line: bodies are here to be used like tools, manipulated without regard for their desires, fuel for whomever might possess the irreverence to see them as the material that comprises them.

Hannibal's bodily irreverence is focused in oddly artistic ways, notably through food and sculpture. One of the series' defining elements is the way victims' bodies are displayed when they are discovered. In the first season, victims are suspended and impaled like sculptures²³ on elk antlers (*Hannibal*, "Aperitif," "Amuse Bouche"), partially buried and fed sugar through an intravenous line to provide food for a mushroom garden (*Hannibal*, "Potage"), suspended with their backs butterflyed to resemble angel wings in a diorama (*Hannibal*, "Coquilles"), found on the stage of the Baltimore Symphony with their vocal cords exposed with a cello neck inserted into their throat so as to be played like an instrument (*Hannibal*, "Fromage"), and arranged with dozens of other dead bodies into a totem pole

²³ Will refers to this tableau as "field kabuki," because its overdramatized presentation does not match the killer's more subdued style.

(*Hannibal*, “Trou Normand”). Each scene evokes horror in the audience, a notable difference from the way materialism is used to deflect anxiety in *Game of Thrones*. Instead, *Hannibal* forces viewers to confront the possibility that not only are they “sacks of meat and bone” but that when that meat sack dies, it is subject to being used according to the whims of whomever killed it. In those cases, we can become art, fertilizer, instruments, or even food, altering our identities at a fundamental level through the transformation of our bodies and resulting in the loss of our humanity. So even though *Hannibal* and *Game of Thrones* both kill scores of their characters, only the characters’ bodies in *Hannibal* are treated with such irreverence that they can cause a sort of miniature existential crisis. While *Game of Thrones* might deny its corpses proper burial or even reanimate them as zombies, *Hannibal* revels in the taboo of cadaver disrespect, forcing the audience to watch and wallow in their meat-ness.

This constant reminder of the fragility of human existence and the body’s subjectivity to mutilation and manipulation after death is underscored by the complete powerlessness of characters in the series to do anything about it. Unlike *Game of Thrones*, there is no light at the end of the tunnel for *Hannibal*’s characters, a notion underscored by the audience’s foreknowledge that Lecter will be revealed as a cannibal, captured, sentenced to a state hospital, and then subsequently escape. The FBI’s exploits in *Hannibal* seem trivial considering that Lecter has killed, eaten, and served hundreds of victims to unwitting dinner guests and is not even considered a suspect until late in the second season. The futility of the FBI’s attempts to stop mass murder highlight and complement the relentless assault on the audience’s denial of the limits of agency, particularly after the death of the body.

The theme of bodily transformation and becoming is consistently employed throughout the series both physically and psychologically, evidenced by Hannibal’s attempts to groom Will as an accomplice to his serial murders. *Hannibal*’s subject matter often revolves around Lecter’s cannibalism, with his dinner parties at which he serves his unwitting guests

extravagant feasts composed from the offal of his victims. Cannibalism is a particularly taboo practice in cultures that revere the intact human body, specifically because it repurposes the human body in a way that subsumes the body's original identity in service of the cannibal. To eat something is to fundamentally transform it for incorporation into the body of the consumer, and when that something is so symbolically charged as the human body, it provokes an anxiety of self-annihilation.

Hannibal's forced transformations are not only reserved for the slain, however. Throughout the series, Hannibal mutilates and dismembers characters who survive their trauma and, unlike the characters in *Game of Thrones*, find themselves in the same or worse states than when Hannibal attacked them. For instance, when the convicted murderer Abel Gideon attempts to take credit for some of Hannibal's murders, Hannibal smuggles Gideon out of the state hospital and takes Gideon to his home as a hostage (*Hannibal*, "Futamono"). In the second season, Hannibal systematically dismembers Gideon and forces him to eat his own body, starting with his leg ("Futamono"). Gideon is completely detached from the scene, expressing no emotion:

HANNIBAL: (knives poised over the roast) Shall I carve?

GIDEON: I think you already have

CAMERA: pans down to reveal Gideon's severed leg ("Futamono")

Gideon's position is quite dark and is mirrored by that of Bedelia Du Maurier in the series' final episode, where she is shown seated at a table set for three, her leg cut off mid-thigh and roasted on the table (*Hannibal*, "The Wrath of the Lamb"). These two particular victims of Hannibal are forced to commit irredeemable acts against themselves, performing both self-cannibalism and self-annihilation simultaneously, adding insult to injury before their deaths.²⁴

Du Maurier and Gideon's lives get dramatically worse after Hannibal traumatizes them both,

²⁴ Gideon dies in the second season after Hannibal cuts steaks from him, but Du Maurier is not confirmed to die due to the series' cancellation after the third season.

proposing a theory of trauma and transformation that denies its redemptive capabilities.

These scenes are doubly traumatic because of the emotionlessness of the victims. Gideon and Du Maurier are resigned to their fate as food for Hannibal, offering no resistance that might hope to restore some semblance of personhood.

Hannibal's ability to emotionally and psychologically manipulate his victims is paralleled only by the brutality of his physical attacks. At the end of the second season, Hannibal stabs Will Graham in the stomach with a linoleum cutter, seemingly ending their oddly intimate²⁵ relationship and Will's life with it. Unlike the characters in *Game of Thrones*, trauma seems to amplify Will's less desirable traits, making him more cunning, less empathetic, and substantially more deadly. However, Will survives the assault and resumes his obsession with finding Hannibal - whether to join him or capture him is never made clear. Up until the third season, Will had never been a particularly moral character, but his ability to solve serial murders, as well as Hannibal's manipulation and framing of him, position Will as a sympathetic character. Will tests the limits of the audience's sympathy in the third season as he starts to seriously consider Hannibal's offer to join him in what could best be described as a cannibalistic commune. Will begins to manipulate people in the way that the audience is used to seeing Hannibal manipulate them, pitting a woman against her long-time prisoner in a way that forces her to kill her charge (*Hannibal*, "Contorno"). During his recovery from Hannibal's attack, Will has alienated most of his friends and has indirectly caused the deaths of several people. Will seems to recover to a certain point halfway through the third season, at which point the narrative jumps three years into the future after Hannibal's capture. When Jack Crawford shows up at Will's idyllic fishing cabin to solicit his help with a new case, Will is initially reluctant but ultimately relents. In a conversation with his wife, Will claims that "if I go, I'll be different when I get back" (*Hannibal*, "The Great Red Dragon"). Indeed,

²⁵ Considering that Will accuses Hannibal of being a serial murder, they remain strangely close.

Will immediately backslides into the destructive relationship with Hannibal, caught between his desires to befriend or kill Hannibal.²⁶

Will's trauma is transformative, but not in the mold of *Game of Thrones*, where trauma strips away the undesirable and reveals the "true" character of its victims. Instead, Will's inherent capacity for violence and self-destruction is multiplied by Hannibal's influence. The descent of Will's character is marked by his attempt to lure the Tooth Fairy into a confrontation by baiting him with Hannibal following a staged escape. Will argues that the Tooth Fairy would want to kill Lecter to "absorb him in that way, engulf him. Become more than he is" (*Hannibal*, "The Wrath of the Lamb"). Will convinces Jack to fake Hannibal's escape and then goes to warn Bedelia Du Maurier - whom Hannibal has vowed to kill and eat - that "meat is back on the menu" (*Hannibal*, "Wrath of the Lamb"). When Du Maurier questions Will's plan, he hints at his own transformation:

BEDELIA: However you think you are going to manipulate this situation to your advantage, think again.

WILL: There is no advantage. It's all degrees of disadvantage.

BEDELIA: "Who holds the devil, let him hold him well. He will hardly be caught a second time."²⁷

WILL: I don't intend Hannibal to be caught a second time.

BEDELIA: Can't live with him. Can't live without him. Is that what this is?

WILL: I guess. This is my becoming.

BEDELIA: What you're "becoming" is pathological.

WILL: Extreme acts of cruelty require a high degree of empathy.

²⁶ Will's pack of rescue dogs that serve to humanize him throughout the first two seasons of the series play a greatly reduced role, replaced instead by a wife (Molly) and stepchild (Walter) that feel more like trespassers in Will's life than a family. He does, however, seem happy for once, but this renewed and rejuvenated Will lasts barely half an episode. .

²⁷ (Goethe, *Faust*)

BEDELIA: You've just found religion. Nothing more dangerous than that.

(*Hannibal*, "Wrath of the Lamb")

Will's emphasis on becoming is an indication of the impending completion of his transformation into Hannibal-ism, a hint at an attitude toward the human body that mimics Lecter's, evidenced by his assertion that "extreme acts of cruelty require a high degree of empathy," which takes Will's talent for crime scene investigation and turns it into a motivation for unspeakable brutality. Hannibal has butchered and consumed countless others in service of the needs of his own body, he has symbolically butchered and consumed Will, breaking his body and mind not to the point of death, but to the point of persuasion and subservience. *Hannibal's* victims are broken and butchered like chattel, but also broken as a ranch hand breaks a wild horse. *Hannibal's* trauma is completely transformative, a conquering imperial force that - when not fatal - preserves a hint of the body's former shape while completely rebuilding its identity in service of the conqueror.

The transformative—unredemptive—capacity of violence is endemic to the films that inspired *Hannibal* the series, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Red Dragon* (2002), which were in turn remediated from the Thomas Harris novels of the same names. Foremost is the transformative nature of cannibalism itself, whereby a person is slain, butchered, and ingested, thus literally transforming their body into that of the cannibal. This act violates every notion of embodiment, suggesting that in the process of consuming the body of the slain person, the cannibal also consumes – and thus transforms – their identity. This layered horror, whereby the audience must confront the possibility of becoming non-human or having their identity subsumed into another person's, drives the horror narrative of *Hannibal* in all its incarnations. Cannibalism might be the main vehicle for horror in *Hannibal*, but it is hardly its only one. Both antagonists in *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Red Dragon* are men who commit heinous acts of violence, inflicting trauma on their victims to fuel their own

transformations. Jame Gumb, the serial killer in *The Silence of the Lambs*, dubbed "Buffalo Bill" by the FBI investigators for the way that he skins his victims, was denied a sexual reassignment surgery by Johns Hopkins for being "too disturbed" (*Silence of the Lambs*). Francis Dolarhyde, the antagonist of *Red Dragon* whom investigators name the Tooth Fairy for the bite marks he leaves on his victims, believes he is transforming himself into The Great Red Dragon from the William Blake painting *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun* (*Red Dragon*). Each of these characters juggles three identities, at least one of which is thrust upon them from an outside source: Gumb is called Buffalo Bill, but uses the skin he harvests from his victims to create a "woman suit" which would provide him with a third, unnamed identity. Dolarhyde hates the name Tooth Fairy and refers to himself as the Great Red Dragon. In each case, the trauma that Gumb and Dolarhyde inflict on their victims is used to advance their own transformation: Gumb's violence yields a material transformation denied him by his doctors, and Dolarhyde bathes in his victims' blood in the moonlight to mimic the appearance of the dragon. Women and entire families are destroyed and their body parts repurposed to "fuel [the] radiance" of these characters, further entrenching the annihilative capacity of trauma and violence. These acts of violence brook no argument that their victims could possibly be redeemed.

The series ends with Will and Hannibal teaming up to kill the Tooth Fairy, whose real name is revealed to be Francis Dolarhyde. Dolarhyde ambushes Will and Hannibal at Hannibal's remote seaside cabin, resulting in Will and Hannibal taking turns stabbing and slashing at Dolarhyde with axes and knives, while blood saturates the screen, coating all of the characters and flooding the ground around them. This gruesome sequence ends with Will on his knees, wounded and looking at his blood-covered hand:

WILL: [Blood] really does look black in the moonlight.²⁸

HANNIBAL: See. This is all I ever wanted for you, Will. For both of us.

WILL: It's beautiful. (*Hannibal*, "The Wrath of the Lamb")

Hannibal nods his assent, they embrace, and Will then pulls Hannibal over the edge of a cliff into the ocean. In this moment, Will seems to realize that his transformation is complete, that Hannibal has finally successfully traumatized him to the point that Will no longer recognizes who he is. Will's response, then, is similar to John Boyd's in *Ravenous*, as they both choose to self-destruct and take the monster with them.

CONCLUSION

Game of Thrones continues to enjoy both critical and popular success after six seasons at the time of writing while *Hannibal* was canceled after only three. It is not my intent to suggest that American audiences actively considered that one show represented American exceptionalism in the ways that I laid out in the introduction to this chapter and the other did not. I propose instead that *Game of Thrones* espoused a theory of bodily trauma that the American population has become quite comfortable with, as evidenced by the statements of our political leaders since the attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941. This constant reference to the resilience of the American national body and the impenetrability of the American national identity have created a sort of terministic screen that has "directed the attention" of Americans toward this interpretation of trauma, while functioning as a *selection* of reality that shuns the annihilative capacity of national trauma. Both series treat human bodies with equal impunity but differing levels of irreverence, resulting in a constant barrage of blood, bone, gore, and dismemberment. In positing that individual identity has the capacity to be destroyed through bodily trauma, *Hannibal* forces us to consider the prospect of our own

²⁸ This is a reference to a moment earlier in the season, when Hannibal is once again consulting with the FBI after his capture. . He tells Will that blood appears black in the moonlight to hint that the Tooth Fairy is bathing in his victims' blood and going outside to look at himself afterward.

impermanence, both individually and nationally, an argument at odds with not only a dominant cultural text such as *Game of Thrones*, but also with the political rhetoric of the nation's materiality.

CHAPTER 2

GENDER, HORROR, AND WAR: THE FEMINIZED MEN OF *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* AND *RAVENOUS*

“Because there is very little honor left in American life, there is a certain built-in tendency to destroy masculinity in American men.” – Norman Mailer

“Yes, we can learn from history. I just don't think there is any doubt about that, and we have. Whether or not we can act on it in a rational manner, I'm not sure.” – Victor Vitanza

I spent much of the introduction of this dissertation detailing the ways in which we as humans use our bodies to talk about issues of societal import, often allowing bodily terms to enter societal discourse - a concept I call rhetorics of integrity. The portrayal of gendered bodies in American film falls directly in the jurisdiction of rhetorics of integrity most notably because gender is so thoroughly entangled in both physical embodiment and societal performance, and such portrayals inform the selection of texts for this chapter. I examine both *Saving Private Ryan (SPR)* (1998) and *Ravenous* (1999) for their contribution to the concept of gender integrity as it applies to American national identity. While *SPR* is thoroughly imbricated in American society,²⁹ *Ravenous* is noticeably less recognizable. Both films employ a military historical aesthetic with period-appropriate costumes and props, but *SPR* is widely accepted as a war film while *Ravenous* has achieved a cult following as a horror film. Structurally, both films follow a narrative path that dramatizes the dismemberment and destruction of American bodies as a way of suggesting political action. While on-screen death is fairly ubiquitous in American film and television, on-screen mutilation and

²⁹ As evidenced by its rapid absorption into middle and high school history curriculums and the annual June 6th *SPR* marathon on the History Channel.

dismemberment are still relatively uncommon in film genres outside horror and deserve closer attention, especially in the case of *SPR*, which juxtaposes its dismemberment with the compelling case for national unity that World War II film makes extraordinarily well. I argue that *SPR* walks a line perilously close to horror film and that its appeals to integrity can be better understood by reading it as such. *SPR*'s use of horror film structure while remaining functionally separate from the horror genre make it one³⁰ of the most successful American exceptionalist films ever, a status achieved by preying on both individual and national bodily anxiety through the systematic destruction and dismemberment of several variations of the ideal, able, masculine American body at the hands of a feminized character. In other words, *SPR* casts the American national body as inherently masculine³¹ and instills a fear of emasculation in the American population by using a feminine character's inaction to imperil traditionally masculine characters. This structure is often seen in slasher and horror films as noted by Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, but *SPR*'s "historical" subject matter spares it the genre categorization of "horror" along with the reduced viewership and cultural capital that accompanies such classification. In contrast, 1999's *Ravenous* uses the same rhetorical appeal to integrity to problematize the notion of a masculine American body by exploring the uncomfortable logical ends to a society in which predatory masculinity is allowed to run unchecked. The film pushes back against *SPR*'s exceptionalism through its own historical positioning, set against the context of the Mexican American War and Manifest Destiny. However, despite *Ravenous*'s invocation of American and Western³²

³⁰ It is never categorized with horror films in libraries, online market places such as Amazon and iTunes, or movie rental stores, despite its position as the authoritative voice on the "horror" of war.

³¹ A concept that is reinforced by the overwhelming phallic nature of the nation's monuments and landmarks such as Devil's Tower, The Washington Monument, The Empire State Building, and many others.

³² Western as it is used in this chapter is meant to describe the Western film genre, not to describe the geopolitical structures of Europe and North America often referred to as the West.

historical aesthetics, it remains consistently catalogued as a horror film while *SPR* enjoys the prestige and wider societal acceptance afforded a historical or war film. Together, *SPR* and *Ravenous* dramatize a continuing appeal to masculine wholeness or integrity and feminine incompleteness on a national level. While the two films are opposed in their purpose, their appeals are consistent: feminized men are portrayed as incomplete or damaged³³ while masculine men literally embody their gender, satiating the desire for both gender and bodily integrity on an individual and national level. In short, *SPR* and *Ravenous* call attention to the thin line that divides the rhetorical appeals of the war and horror film genres; both films trade in gendered violence dramatized as a struggle between good and evil, with the main characters of both films serving as embodiments of gendered cultural values that meet wildly different ends. One of the defining distinctions between horror and war film is that horror film kills its undesirable characters (who are “coincidentally” overwhelmingly women) as punishment for their transgressions while war film offers glorious death to its most valued societal members (who are “coincidentally” nearly always men) almost as a reward. With so many body parts littering the scenes of both *SPR* and *Ravenous*, a look into who remains whole and retains their bodily integrity – both in death and in life – can help distinguish the gendered values of each film. With only two named women characters between the two films, *SPR* and *Ravenous* embody the national gender crisis of the 1990’s by exploring masculinity and femininity as they appear in the men of their respective wars.

The rhetorical appeals of *SPR* and *Ravenous* were supremely kairotic, as the films were released during a time at which challenges to gender identity were in the forefront of the American consciousness; both films debuted in 1998, just two years after President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which legally defined marriage to exclude same-

³³ This concept can be traced throughout rhetorical and critical theory, from Aristotle’s statement that “The female is, as it were, a mutilated male” (*The Generation of Animals*, 737a25-30) to Lacan’s positioning of femininity as an inherent “lack” of a phallus.

sex couples. A year later in 1997, Ellen DeGeneres won a battle with ABC to have both her and her successful sitcom character come out as a lesbian, becoming the first lead character in American TV history to do so (Adams). This revelation in the midst of a country whose attitude toward gender was brutally summarized by the official U.S. Military policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” caused a media upheaval, as advertisers refused to buy time during subsequent *Ellen* episodes, and some affiliates even refused to show the episode outright (Adams). The show was eventually canceled a year after “The Puppy Episode” in which Ellen comes out. *Ellen* paved the way for shows like 1998’s *Will and Grace*, but the portrayal of non-traditional gender roles largely fell along old biased lines with gay men overwhelmingly portrayed as feminine and weak.

The struggle for gender equality then provides a fitting scene for *SPR* and *Ravenous*. *SPR*’s appeals to integrity through the preservation of its masculine bodies follow a redemptive narrative arc in terms of traditional American national gender identity while *Ravenous* diverges from such cisgendered portrayals and is thus considered much more threatening to a nation that continues to place such a high value on masculinity. As a result, *SPR* enjoys the privilege of a historical war film in part because it redeems its feminized men by having them ultimately perform masculinizing violence while *Ravenous* is relegated to the horror genre partly because it refuses to complete the cycle of gender “redemption” by masculinizing its feminized male lead. Viewing these films as companions demonstrates that the appeal to integrity can be used either to reinforce traditionally held beliefs such as patriarchal dominance by preserving the integrity of masculine bodies or to critique such beliefs and make space for femininity in our national identity by portraying masculine bodies in states of dismemberment.³⁴ In this chapter, I will introduce a working definition of the horror genre as a group of films that often follows set narrative paths and demonstrate *SPR*’s

³⁴ One of my more upsetting observations from this chapter was that rhetorics of integrity can be deployed by both men’s rights activists and feminists with equal levels of success.

and *Ravenous*'s adherence to those paths. I then argue that *SPR* exhibits all the traits of a horror film, but avoids categorization because, while its contents are horrific and it follows the structures set forth by Carroll and Clover, its D-Day subject matter is so charged with American exceptionalism that American audiences do not recognize it as horror while *Ravenous* is situated in the Mexican-American War and is thus "safely" categorized as a horror film because doing so does not pose an existential threat to the United States as an exceptional, masculine nation.

DEFINING HORROR

From the perspective of genre, horror film's propensity to deal with damaged, decaying, dismembered, and dead bodies makes it an ideal candidate for the application of rhetorics of integrity because damaged bodies that litter the horror cinemascapes are so often playing parts in a morality tale. As Bob Torry and Susan Aronstein note, Steven Spielberg's devotion to and manipulation of horror film narrative technique buoyed his work in and after *Jaws*. They do so by employing Noel Carroll's theory that many horror films follow what he calls the *complex discovery plot* (99), which helps to identify these traditionally horror-only narrative structures when they exist outside the genre. Carroll argues that four basic movements of the complex discovery plot are:

- onset – the audience is made aware of the monster
- discovery – the characters discover the effects of the monster on their world but usually attribute them to "normal" causes
- confirmation – the characters finally realize the nature of their monstrous problem
- confrontation – the characters confront the monster. (*Philosophy of Horror*, 99)

Using Carroll's reading of horror plots to examine the work of Steven Spielberg, Aronstein and Torry show that the horror-based narrative structure that propels *Jaws* is evident in

movies such as *E.T.*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Jurassic Park*.³⁵ The interpretation of “monster” in each of these films is malleable – none of them (the shark, E.T., the aliens, or the dinosaurs) are traditional supernatural monsters. Each of these films features onset and discovery sequences that suggest a monster lurks in the film, followed by extended confirmation sequences that keep the audience guessing as to whether the films’ characters will ever know the nature of the phenomena they experience.

Spielberg’s manipulation of horror tropes resurfaces in *SPR*, using the authentic Nazi German as his monster and withholding the confirmation sequence until very late in the film. Like the delayed on-screen appearance of the shark in *Jaws*, Spielberg’s Nazis are obscured from view or only partially visible for much of the film. The first attacks in *Jaws* are either shot from the perspective of the shark or with only a fin or tail visible to the audience, heightening the tension of viewing the monster for the audience. In *SPR*’s gruesome beach invasion scene, the audience similarly experiences Germans simply as muzzle flashes from the pillbox bunkers that line the cliffs of Normandy, distinctive silhouettes shot from behind, with a face-obscuring backlight, or engulfed in the flame of a flamethrower. The effect is the same: the audience is denied the opportunity to get a good look at the movie’s monster. At the same time, the confirmation sequences in *SPR* delay confirmation to the point of frustration, leaving audiences to wonder if the characters will ever acknowledge the nature of their problem. *SPR*’s traumatic climax kills every sympathetic character in the film and

³⁵ E.T.’s initial encounter with Elliott in the shed evokes ghost and possession films, particularly the shot in which the shed’s inside lighting streams into the night. . Both *E.T.* and *Close Encounters* prey on science fiction film’s tendency to portray extraterrestrials as violent or monstrous to suggest to audiences that an attack (which never comes in either film) is imminent. . The abduction of Barry Guiler in *Close Encounters* supports this assumption, as the scene is shot with the extensive use of red light and smoke to give the appearance of a fiery alien invasion that is revealed only at the end to be a peaceful invitation – more Elijah and his chariot of fire than Area 51. In *Jurassic Park*, after the introductory sequence in which a park employee is mauled by a dinosaur, audiences and the main characters aren’t introduced to the CGI dinosaurs until they actually land on the island and are confronted by the beasts.

receives its therapeutic spin when Captain Miller demands that Ryan (and the audience by proxy) “earn this,” followed by Ryan’s teary salute to Miller’s grave fifty years later. While most horror film keeps its therapeutic side under carefully crafted layers of symbolism, Spielberg wallows in it, particularly in *SPR*.³⁶

The second part of Carroll’s horror definition is directly aimed at modifying audience behavior. Carroll argues that horror films use the sympathetic characters of the film to model an emotional reaction to the film’s monster that he calls “art horror,” a mixture of disgust and fear, for the audience to replicate (105). Carroll’s theory brushes against Kenneth Burke’s “Literature as Equipment for Living,” in which Burke argues that we should treat literature as “*equipment for living*, that size[s] up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes” (598). In other words, horror film provides for the viewer an easy way of identifying that which is socially undesirable along with an emotional response that allows the viewer to react appropriately should they find themselves in a similar situation. Horror film, then, not only teaches audiences what it is that they should find horrifying, but how to deploy the proper emotional response to something that is horrific.

Carroll’s theory of horror narrative structures aspires to universality while Carol Clover’s *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* approaches the violence endemic to horror film as an inherently gendered phenomenon. Clover is best known for contributing the Final Girl theory of horror to the film studies community, wherein she notes that early in the film, the audience is encouraged to identify with the killer or monster of the film as he slashes his way through the sympathetic characters, who are often women who realize the threat only shortly before their deaths (36). The Final Girl, however, lives with the foreknowledge of death throughout

³⁶ However, none of Spielberg’s films ever truly approach the level of anxiety of dyed-in-the-wool horror film. The dark tone of *Close Encounters* gives way to a celebratory closing twenty-minute light and music show with the camera focused on the rapt faces of the characters awaiting their ascension into the floating city of light filled with World War II heroes. . *E.T.* appears dangerous until his hankering for Reese’s Pieces and drunken consumption of children’s television turns him into everyone’s favorite extraterrestrial pet. .

the entire film. Clover suggests that the Final Girl is often indicated by her “masculine interests, her inevitable sexual reluctance, her apartness from other girls, sometimes her name” (48). She is marked by her feminine body and creates audience anxiety with her masculine performance. This masculinity is fulfilled, Clover argues, when

in the final scene, she stops screaming, faces the killer, and reaches for the knife (sledge hammer, scalpel, gun, machete, hanger, knitting needle, chainsaw), she addresses the monster on his own terms.... It is also a shared masculinity, materialized in ‘all those phallic symbols’ - and it is also a shared femininity, materialized in what comes next...the castration, literal or symbolic, of the killer at her hands. The Final Girl has not just manned herself; she specifically unmans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with (48-49).

The Final Girl is a gender transgressor, violating traditional gender roles but only through her ability to masculinize herself and eliminate the man whose masculinity is in question. This chapter considers the feminized Corporal Timothy Upham of *SPR* and Captain John Boyd of *Ravenous* as Final Girls, who are both ridiculed for their femininity up to the point that they “reach for the knife” themselves and commit masculinizing violence as methods of gender redemption, to separate degrees of completion. Like other Final Girls, Boyd and Upham embody both feminine and masculine characteristics, the masculine derived from their male bodies and feminine defined by their actions in the film.

Reading *SPR* through Carol Clover’s theory also calls to the reader’s attention the tendency of horror to use its gendered characters to embody abstract societal concepts. Clover’s argument that “horror operates in an allegorical or expressionist or folkloric/mythic mode, whereby characters are understood to concretize essences” (231) fits the cast of *SPR* quite well because every member of the squad who dies embodies some form of traditional masculinity. This concept of “concretiz[ing] essence” is embodiment at its core, providing the

tangible, visible, seemingly permanent physical manifestation for ethereal concepts. Like Torry's *Jaws*, horror films allow readers to confront nebulous, unbounded ideas as *knowable* embodied others. What horror does best is to provide a boundary for abstraction, not only in the monster but in the sympathetic characters as well. Just as monsters are often vice made manifest, sympathetic characters are often virtue embodied. Horror film might best be considered as a lashing out against the overwhelming symbolicity of our world by bringing a material – and thus destructible and disposable – component to the world's most difficult problems. Like Brother Nut, the Beijing performance artist who created a brick of smog by vacuuming the city's air, horror takes something ethereal and boundless and condenses it into a tangible object. The concept of integrity as it is used in the abstract in American culture similarly attempts to allay the anxiety of symbolicity by tying it to a more concrete materiality. To have integrity in American culture is at its most basic to *do* what you *say*. Understanding that words operate within the realm of the symbolic, we seem to have developed a need to embody them in the material by using integrity to ensure that the body will do the things that the tongue has promised.

This distillation of abstract societal anxieties into a monstrous body is one of the things that makes horror film so compelling. Torry argues that the shark in *Jaws* is an embodiment of American anxiety about the Vietnam War, which, when manifested physically, can be contained and destroyed in ways that an abstract concept like war cannot, allowing the film's characters to demonstrate “appropriate and inappropriate responses to severe historical trauma” (34). In other words, Torry suggests that horror film provides its “equipment for living” by providing embodied examples of appropriate responses to historical trauma, a sort of roadmap to grieving national trauma that he calls “therapeutic narrative.” The confluence of gendered trauma and the communication of appropriate behavior through embodied “concretized essences” filtered through Carroll's complex

discovery plot binds the horror genre together. That *Saving Private Ryan* fulfills all the broadly designated horror requirements should be enough to land it in the horror genre, but it also mirrors Clover's Final Girl narrative structure by feminizing a male character and "redeeming" him through masculinizing violence.

Despite its apparent horror pedigree, *SPR* retains wide cultural significance. It can be found running on a loop with *Band of Brothers* on the History Channel on any given Memorial Day and often on the anniversary of D-Day. *SPR* is one of hundreds of films about D-Day but stands alone in its nearly unanimous critical, public, and box-office acclaim. *SPR* is widely regarded as a groundbreaking film, if for no other reason than as a showcase for Steven Spielberg's newfound devotion to realism in his post-*Schindler's List* body of work. In 1993, as he transitioned from his early films which included *Jaws*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*, Spielberg openly pondered the merits of his fantastical oeuvre through the dialogue of John Hammond in *Jurassic Park*. While Hammond and Dr. Ellie Sattler share a bowl of ice cream during a power outage that sets the dinosaurs free, Hammond recounts his history as an entertainer:

You know the first attraction I built when I came down from Scotland was a flea circus – Petticoat Lane.... People would say they could see the fleas. 'No, I can see the fleas, mummy. Can't you see the fleas?' Clown fleas, highwire fleas and fleas on parade. But with [Jurassic Park], I wanted to give them something that wasn't an illusion. Something that was real. Something they could see, and touch, an aim not devoid of merit. (Jurassic Park)

Hammond's musings echo the aforementioned realist/historicist turn of Spielberg's work that would spawn *Schindler's List* later that same year and then *SPR*, *Band of Brothers* (executive

producer), *The Pacific* (executive producer),³⁷ *Munich*, *Warhorse*, *Lincoln*, and *Bridge of Spies*. It would seem that in historical filmmaking, Spielberg found his own escape from illusion. The effect that Spielberg's contributions to World War II film has had on the genre is apparent in the flood of WWII-themed film, games and television in the last twenty years,³⁸ but *SPR*'s roots are deeper than simple historical re-enactment. Spielberg wanted to give his audiences something real, an aim that – unlike his pursuit of fantasy and sci-fi films – he considered to be “not devoid of merit.” The most direct route to that “something real” appears to be, according to Spielberg, through filmic adaptations of historical narrative. While nearly all of Spielberg's historical films have been well received either critically or at the box office or both, none has approached the level of cultural influence of *SPR*. *SPR* spawned a resurgence in WWII film that has only recently died out in American cinema, alongside a litany of WWII video games that sought to replicate the frenetic battle scenes that first left audiences breathless in 1998. In doing so, *SPR* has since provided the rules for how America constructs itself as a nation with history, horror and film. Given its considerable cultural power, the fact that *SPR* has remained unexamined in rhetorical scholarship is frankly shocking.

HISTORY, NARRATIVE EMBODIMENT, AND RHETORICS OF INTEGRITY

SPR was not the first film to advocate for masculinity or American exceptionalism, and it certainly will not be the last. There are films that deal with the subject matter more directly, but what makes *SPR* such a good candidate for a case study is that it appeals to rhetorics of integrity on the individual, gendered, and national levels. It presents the reader

³⁷ While Spielberg is not credited as a director in these miniseries, the influence of *Saving Private Ryan* weighs so heavily on them that his role as executive producer seems to warrant their inclusion.

³⁸ *Medal of Honor* was developed in conjunction with *Saving Private Ryan* and was followed by titles such as *Call of Duty* and *Brothers in Arms*. Film and television rushed to exploit the renewed interest in WWII as well, led by *Band of Brothers*, *Nuremberg*, *U-571*, *Enemy at the Gates*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Windtalkers*, *Resistance*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, *Flags of our Fathers*, *The Pacific*, *Defiance*, *Valkyrie*, *Fury*, and *Inglourious Basterds*.

with individuals, men, and a nation all seemingly imperiled by the fragility of their material situation, both in the literal sense of their bodies penetrated and dismembered and the symbolic damage done to masculine dominance in the United States due to changing attitudes toward gender in the 90's. Writers looking to argue in favor of American exceptionalism are often quick to invoke D-Day in their quest for evidence of the phenomenon. Stephen Ambrose called D-Day "the pivot point of the twentieth century" (Ambrose). In Dick and Liz Cheney's book *Exceptional: Why the World Needs a Strong America*, they argue that on D-Day, "America had deployed the greatest military force ever known to secure freedom and to defeat tyranny" (Cheney 78). Ronald Reagan, in his speech at Pointe du Hoc on the fortieth anniversary of D-Day, made explicit reference to the divine nature of American exceptionalism, stating, "Something else helped the men of D-day: their rock hard belief that Providence would have a great hand in the events that would unfold here; that God was an ally in this great cause" (Reagan). Barack Obama echoed their sentiment on the seventieth anniversary of D-Day, claiming that the invasion came when it did for "the survival of liberty at its moment of maximum peril" (Obama). D-Day, it would seem, is the example *par excellence* of historical narrative that supports the concept of American exceptionalism.

When it was released in 1998, *SPR* was immediately praised and – perhaps more importantly – marketed for its historical accuracy and realism. Local news teams interviewed WWII veterans leaving the theater with tears in their eyes, proclaiming the film to be the most accurate portrayal of warfare they had seen, saying that it "couldn't be more real" and was "a very real experience" ("Examining 'Saving Private Ryan': Realities of War"). Spielberg had hit a veritable gold mine in his second foray into WWII Europe, in which a squad of D-Day veterans composed of Captain Miller, Sergeant Horvath, Corporal Upham, Private Caparzo, Private Reiben, Private Mellish, Private Jackson, and Medic Wade are tasked with finding and returning Private Ryan, who is set to return to the United States after

military commanders learn that Ryan's three brothers all died on D-Day. The squad embarks on the mission with the hope that it will earn them an early release from the war as well, but when they finally find Ryan defending a bridge against an overwhelming German force, he will not leave his unit even after learning of his loss. The squad stays and fights against the Germans, but only Upham, Reiben, and Ryan survive to hear Miller's dying exhortation that Ryan "earn this."³⁹ The story is loosely based on several separate events from US military history, tied together by setting it against the Allied invasion on D-Day.

That a film with a narrative that is only passingly based in reality³⁹ should find itself in so many history curricula in the U.S. is telling of the actual work that history does, particularly the work of US military history. The constitutive role of history in American society is fiercely debated, as any textbook editor who attempts to modify American history curriculums in the American South is apt to learn very quickly. The issue is no more clearly resolved within disciplinary discussions of history and historical methods, where history's ability to recount or recreate the past is a topic of debate to this day. I feel it necessary then to outline how I use the concepts of history and historiography throughout this chapter; my position on the value and function of history in American culture is informed by the work of Hayden White in *Metahistory* and Paul John Eakin in *Living Autobiographically*. White's interrogation of history is rooted in an attempt to discern what it is that history as a discipline does differently than other narrative disciplines. He argues that the stated function of historiography is to "naturally" discover historical narrative by careful research of primary resources, but that its actual function is more like that of fiction, which relies heavily on the rhetorical canon of invention (48-9). White suggests that historical narrative is fraught with choices rather than discovery, a distinctly rhetorical process that historians use to *shape*

³⁹ *SPR* is very loosely based on the four Niland brothers who fought in WWII. When it was believed that three of them had died (one was simply missing), the fourth brother was sent home after reporting to his division ("The Niland Boys"). The rescue mission plot was created for the film.

history from primary sources. In short, historians do not so much “discover” the stories that comprise their histories as they “invent” them (White 6-7). The traditional rhetorical canons of invention and arrangement play significant roles in White’s theory of historiography; he argues that historians select and arrange past events and artifacts to fit a range of presupposed narrative modes – Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire⁴⁰ – in a process that he calls emplotment (7). Through emplotment, historians create a sort of narrative shape governed by the expectations of a given mode that provides a boundary in which the events of the past can be interpreted. This provides the reader with an easily digestible image of history, suggesting a certain predictability and consistency that is derived from the reader’s predisposition to the structure of narrative. *SPR*’s tragic emplotment satiates a nation hungry for narrative that reinforces the tenets of American exceptionalism, urging the audience to act in concert with the film’s survivors/spectators, who according to tragic emplotment are expected to undergo “a gain in consciousness” similar to Upham’s decision to “reach for the knife” and masculinize himself with violence after the death of Captain Miller. This predictable tragic arc coupled with Spielberg’s shift toward historical realism lends an air of inevitability to the narrative arc of *SPR*, threatening to simultaneously naturalize and obscure the gendered work it does in the process. It is important, then, to call attention to the material process of writing history by remembering that “our discourse always tends to slip away from our data towards the structures of consciousness with which we are trying to grasp them” (*Tropics of Discourse*, 1). This predictability and coherency has over time taken on the hue of “truth” or “reality” because consistency and predictability relieve the strain of interpretation on the reader. Just as rhetorics of integrity suggest that we prefer whole bodies to those that are dismembered, we seem to prefer clean, neat, shapely narrative arcs devoid of interruption or inconsistency.

⁴⁰ These modes are derived from Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*.

White's theory of historical emplotment often finds its way into other areas of human life that are governed by narrative. The concept of narrative identity supports this claim, suggesting that our individual selves are similarly constructed, as argued by Paul John Eakin in *Living Autobiographically*. Eakin argues for an "extremely close and dynamic relation between narrative and identity, for narrative is not only a literary form but part of the fabric of our lived experience. When it comes to our identities, narrative is not merely *about* self, but is rather in some profound way a constituent part *of* self" (Eakin, 2). In short, when people tell stories about themselves, they are actively and simultaneously constituting *their selves*, interpellating, as Charland might argue, an identity simply by narrating it. The fact that Americans spend so much of their lives immersed in narrative from film to novels to video games makes the concept of narrative identity fairly easy to swallow. Considering that the root function of history is narrative and the power that narrative wields in the realm of constitutive rhetoric, history and its various modes of remediation can be viewed as an immensely powerful tool for constituting a nation, a set of stories that tells the nation who it is. To frame historical narrative in the terms of this project, we can consider history as another sort of verbal skin, a set of narrative cultural artifacts that give shape to the nation – in short history is a kind of narrative embodiment of the past. Coupling this with Spielberg's noted turn toward historical narrative and his relentless focus on authenticity and historical accuracy, we can view Spielberg's shift toward historical realism in *SPR* as an attempt to embody the discourse of American national constitutive rhetoric in two ways, historically and physically.

The embodiment of history in itself is not troubling, but when considered in concert with Spielberg's devotion to "realistic" portrayals in his later work, *SPR* has the potential to become not simply *a* history of the WWII in the United States, but *the defining* history of WWII in the United States. The film trades on the American version of D-Day that presents

them as a sort of white knight riding into Europe to save it from Nazi Germany, preserving the historical continuity of that narrative that is a cornerstone for American exceptionalist arguments. *SPR*'s ability to trade not only in historical embodiment, but also in physical embodiment compounds its appeal to integrity on two planes, fulfilling the viewer's desire for coherency in historical narrative and bodily integrity.⁴¹ Like all good horror films, *SPR* is not just about the peril of the characters, but also about imperiling the essences from which those characters are concretized and directing the audience's emotions toward that which imperils the characters. With masculinity "under attack" from a nascent push for legal recognition of gay marriage, Spielberg's imperilment of masculine characters mirrors a perceived imperilment of manliness itself in the United States at that time. As Carroll notes later in *Philosophy*, audiences expect to find fear, disgust, and repulsion in – and often *only* in – horror film, where the theater provides a safe place to process these emotions (159).⁴² *SPR* was not billed as a horror film, is often categorized as a drama, historical drama or military

⁴¹ Spielberg's manipulation of the film stock for *SPR* has been a fruitful subject of scholarly interest in the film studies community, but its rhetorical value warrants consideration as well. The four most discussed techniques that Spielberg employed in the film are the use of bleach bypass, small shutter angles, the extensive use of handheld cameras and the acknowledgement of the materiality of the cameras in the Omaha Beach landing scene. . Each of these techniques intentionally lowers the overall production value of the film in an attempt to attain an aesthetic similar to public perception of documentary film in the 1940's. . Bleach bypass eliminates the bleaching process in color film development, which leaves silver in the emulsion of the celluloid that results in a black and white image superimposed over a color image. This produces a grainy, high contrast image with muted colors and a silvery sheen. . This is particularly effective in conjunction with the small shutter angle, which reduces the usual motion blur of explosion and action sequences. . The result is a highly "realistic" image capable of capturing exceptionally high detail in moments that blur during traditional filmmaking. Spielberg also retains the acknowledgement of the materiality of the camera throughout the Omaha Beach scene, with water droplets running down the lens as the camera operator emerges from the ocean and mud splattering the lens during explosion sequences. *SPR* was certainly not the first film to ever use this combination of techniques, but the proliferation of films that claimed historical source material after *SPR* such as *Gladiator* (2000) and *The Hurt Locker* (2009) could be considered evidence that it altered the way that Americans interpreted realism on the film screen. In short, Spielberg created an amateur aesthetic for a historical narrative that American audiences could read as realistic.

⁴² It should also be noted that war and horror film often share "realistic" as a term of praise, particularly when it comes to the perceived accuracy with which the film portrays death and dying.

drama for retail purposes and does not possess an easily identifiable *traditional* supernatural monster. What makes Spielberg's manipulation of horror narrative so effective is that it is obscured by the veneers of historical realism and made palatable to the point that *SPR* has found its way into hundreds of high school history curricula as an acceptable and even desirable portrayal of "the horror of war," or the Second World War *wie es eigentlich gewesen*.⁴³

This point is underscored by the preservation of the bodily integrity of the main characters of the film. From the first battle scene, Spielberg proves that he is willing to employ the "expressly repulsive," which Carroll notes is one of the most recognizable calling cards of a horror film (159). As thousands of anonymous extras make their way up the beaches of Normandy during the invasion scene, the audience is treated with imagery that feels like it could have been lifted directly from Dante's *Inferno*. A man runs along the beach and a mortar shell hits directly underneath him, his severed lower leg flying across the screen in the opposite direction of his mangled body. Captain Miller drags a wounded soldier by the suspenders across the sand until an artillery shell hits behind him. Miller picks himself up, then continues to drag the anonymous man, but the camera pans down to show that the man was cut in half at the waist. A soldier casually walks through machine gun fire, sorting through piles of limbs and bodies to pick up his severed arm, then continues up the beach with his shredded stump. Miller rolls the radio operator next to him over to see that he's been shot, with nothing left but a gaping hole where his face used to be. Medics work to remove a bullet from a soldier's shoulder as he screams and cries, the camera unflinchingly capturing the peeled back skin, spurting blood, and exposed muscle. Another soldier lies on his back on the beach with his intestines in his hands, screaming for his mother. Countless limbs without

⁴³ "As it actually happened," a school of historiographical thought championed by Leopold von Ranke that seeks to subdue the rhetorical elements of historical writing and attempts to achieve the most "faithful" version of the past as possible.

bodies and bodies without limbs are strewn across the landscape. Multiple men simply disappear in artillery explosions, leaving behind boots and little else. When Miller gives the order to gather weapons and ammunition, one of the soldiers runs to another whose leg has been severed at the knee, takes his bandolier, and leaves him on the beach to die. Within the first twenty minutes of the film, the threat of dismemberment is imminent for American soldiers, but it miraculously spares Miller and his squad. Of the original eight members, four die from simple gunshot wounds, one dies from a stab wound, and another is caught in a fiery explosion that (considering his overt religious devotion) feels more like Elijah's biblical rapture in a chariot of fire than a dismembering, disintegrating blast. Coincidentally, these six squad members whose bodily integrity is preserved function as the archetypes for masculine American identity, setting up a conspicuous link between wholeness, masculinity, and American national identity. Spielberg both acknowledges the threat of dismemberment in his opening sequence but tellingly softens his approach to human materiality in a move that suggests that even though the main characters die, there is something worth preserving.

THE HORRORS OF WAR: MONSTROUS GERMANS

The absence of a traditional monster in *SPR* is an obstacle to reading it as a horror film that tempts readers to simply substitute in the German soldiers that appear in the film. In some ways, they are perfectly serviceable as monsters. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, Spielberg obscures the faces of German soldiers throughout the first half of the film, instead focusing on the death, dismemberment and maiming of American soldiers on the beach. Shot from the perspective of the invading amphibious forces, the first war scenes of the film begin when the ramp of the first Higgins boat drops. With no warning to the audience, eleven American soldiers are killed instantaneously without a whisper of gunfire or an indication of the direction from which it might have come. The Americans are incapable of returning fire and appear unaware that they have been shot as they crumple to the deck of

the boat. None of those original eleven even point their weapon in the direction of the beach. From an American perspective, this yields an almost supernatural hue to the carnage because the soldiers are not given a chance to defend themselves. Just as in *Jaws*, the audience is aware that there is something bad out there killing Americans, but Spielberg denies his audience the gratification of *seeing* who fired the shots. While I would argue that most of the people watching this film already know that the Germans are responsible for the kills, Spielberg refuses to *embody* the concepts of Nazism as long as possible. The camera briefly cuts to a shot facing the beach from behind the German machine-gun squad, but their faces are never shown. Instead, the audience looks over the German shoulders to see American soldiers stumbling and falling, sprouting bullet holes and losing limbs to artillery and gunfire from an unseen enemy. Similarly, the Germans who stumble or fall out of the bunker after the American grenade and flamethrower attacks are partially obscured by fire or smoke, and the audience is never given an opportunity to see their faces. Instead, the audience is presented with the familiar silhouette of the WWII German soldier with his iconic flared helmet and long jacket. Much as the shark's fin in *Jaws* gives the audience the *idea* of the shark while denying a full-fledged embodiment, so does Spielberg hint at the monstrous corporate Nazi Germany while denying the individual German soldier agency or individual identity.

The effect is similar to *Jaws*' pre-confirmation scenes – audiences are mostly aware that Nazis are responsible for the carnage of the beach landing scene but are denied a direct look at them. In doing so, Spielberg denies his audience the embodiment of Nazism in all its cruelty and brutality, delaying the confirmation that behind these concepts lies an actual physical thing that can be destroyed for its therapeutic value. In fact, the monstrosity of German soldiers for the balance of *SPR* is that they are ubiquitous but disembodied, a sort of Nazi Fog that litters the landscape but defies embodiment and thus defies easy disposal or destruction. The audience eventually sees what they consider to be German soldiers after the

beach landing, but they fail to fulfill the audience's expectation of a monster. Two unarmed soldiers dressed in Wehrmacht uniforms approach two unnamed Americans with their hands up, speaking something other than English. The Americans summarily execute them in a thoroughly unsettling scene after one comments, "I'm sorry, I can't understand you" (SPR). The first Axis fighters that the audience gets to see and hear turn out to be members of the *Ost Battalion*, Czech nationals who were often conscripted. Spielberg feints toward the monstrous German with their appearance, withholding confirmation for both the audience and the squad, just as he does in *Jaws* by having a group of fisherman hoist a Great White Shark on the docks of Amity; the audience sees something resembling the monster of the film, but knows that something much more sinister and dangerous is still on the loose.

This tension of the unseen, unlocatable monster is played out in the death scene of Private Caparzo. While attempting to rescue a young girl from a partially demolished house, Caparzo is shot by a German sniper. The squad immediately hides wherever possible, unable to administer aid to Caparzo, who bleeds to death in the rain because they cannot locate the threat. The inability to see the monster in a horror film has serious implications for both the audience and the characters, as noted by Carroll when he suggests "as the body count keeps mounting in *Jaws* in scene after scene, the question of what is killing them is intensified" (134). The question from the audience's perspective, I would argue, is not *what* is killing them so much as whether the protagonists will be presented with an opportunity to confront and destroy the monster. Judith Butler suggests that snipers, along with smart bombs, are "disembodied instrument[s] of destruction" ("Contingent Foundations," 45). Both instruments provide the wielder with the ability to "retain our visual distance and our bodily safety through the disembodied enactment of the kill that produces no blood and in which we retain our radical impermeability" (45). The longer such monsters remain hidden or unconfirmed due to the mechanics of the complex discovery plot, the more the audience must

remain uncertain about the film's conclusion. While the audience assumes that the shark will be located and killed in *Jaws*, it *knows* that the Allies eventually overwhelm the Axis powers in World War II. By delaying the on-screen confirmation of Germans in *SPR*, Spielberg builds tension that culminates in an audience's cathartic release during the expected confrontation scene. Spielberg underscores this disconnect between knowing and seeing by revealing the sniper's predictably Aryan face (blue eyes, light hair, light skin) to the audience, but not to the squad. Only the squad's own sniper, Private Jackson, sees the German sniper while he is alive.

Spielberg continues to deftly hide his authentic Germans from the audience's and characters' views even after the sniper encounter, denying his characters confirmation of the film's monster. While the squad rifles through a stack of dog tags to see if Ryan has been killed in action, Private Mellish taunts a passing group of German POWs by holding out his Star of David pendant and shouting "*Juden. Juden. I am Juden, you know?*" (*SPR*). The Germans refuse to take the bait, denying both Hellish and the audience the desired confirmation of the anti-Semitic Nazi soldier and thus denying the confrontation as well. This forces the audience to participate in Carroll's complex discovery plot, until halfway through the film when Spielberg seems to relent and provides a fully embodied German in the person of Steamboat Willie, a German soldier captured shortly after his squad kills Medic Irwin Wade. Willie fulfills the aesthetic requirements of an Aryan: tall, lean build, oval face, thin nose, light eyes, and light hair. Aesthetically, he fulfills audience expectations, but his behavior is distinctly un-Nazi like. The historical baggage associated with German soldiers in WWII creates an audience expectation that the Germans will embody the merciless, brutal regime that governed them. However, Willie greets the audience pleading for his life and extolling the virtues of American tobacco. There is no hint of the murderous organization he was ostensibly a part of. Willie smiles and speaks affably with Upham while they sit on the

edge of his freshly dug graves, saying, “American. I like American. Steamboat Willie. *Toot Toot!*” (SPR). This childish exchange disarms the audience members expecting to be confronted by a militant, fanatically devoted Nazi and instead receiving what appears to be the world’s most unlikely Mickey Mouse fan. As Mellish, Reiben, Jackson, and Horvath close in around him for the execution, Willie frantically resumes digging. He pleads with his captors in German to not kill him, relying on Corporal Upham to translate his apologies for the death of Wade and his insistence that he was not the shooter, but merely the person responsible for reloading the machine-gun and changing its barrels. Realizing that his plea is failing, Willie launches a desperate attempt to identify with his captors in English:

Please, I like America! Fancy schmancy! What a cinch! Go fly a kite! Cat got your tongue! Hill of beans! Betty Boop: what a dish. Betty Grable: nice gams.
(singing) I say can you see. I say can you see. I say...Fuck Hitler. Fuck Hitler!
(SPR)

The scene alternates between Willie standing in his grave, looking up and pleading to the Americans and shots of the faces of the remaining soldiers, particularly Privates Reiben and Jackson. As in traditional horror, the Americans are disgusted and revolted when confronted by their monster, and for good reason in this situation. Having been denied a fully embodied monster for the majority of what is ostensibly a horror film, that tension should be resolved with the introduction of Steamboat Willie. But instead the audience is given the equivalent of a child wearing a monster suit, a red herring designed to thwart their expectation of embodiment and subsequent therapeutic destruction. Just when it seems likely that the film will finally introduce the true monster of WWII, Spielberg wraps innocent American colloquialisms in a Nazi body and uniform. Our German “monster” even explicitly rejects his supposed *Führer*, leaving this confirmation scene simultaneously frustrating due to Spielberg’s refusal to provide a fully developed monster and horrifying because Steamboat

Willie functions as a “proximate other,” which Suban Schibanoff notes is upsetting because it fails to adhere to the clear delineation of self and other by incorporating parts of both (255) Willie’s discomfiting blend of German aesthetic with American cultural reference leaves audiences without a true “monster” against which they can definitively root.

THE HORRORS OF WAR: MONSTROUS AMERICANS

Corporal Timothy E. Upham similarly embodies traits both monstrous and (eventually) “heroic” in the film. A translator and mapmaker drafted by the squad when Miller’s original translator dies, he fittingly brokers Steamboat Willie’s release. At a moment when Spielberg seems likely to abandon the horror narrative by ending the threat of the German monster, a more sinister monster’s development hastens. Upham is as unsympathetic a character as Spielberg could have created for a film dominated by overt displays of traditional American masculinity. Short, thin, clean, and timid, Upham expresses his reluctance to join the squad on their mission to Neuville:

MILLER: You’ve been reassigned to me. Grab your gear. We’re going to a place called Neuville.

UPHAM: Sir, there are Germans in Neuville.

MILLER: That’s what I understand, Corporal.

UPHAM: Sir, there are a lot of Germans in Neuville.

MILLER: Do you have a problem with that, Corporal?

UPHAM: No sir, it’s just if you consider that I’ve never been in combat, sir, I make maps and I translate.

MILLER: *(slowly)* I need someone who speaks French and German. My two guys were killed.

UPHAM: Yes, sir, it’s just that I haven’t held a weapon since basic training, sir.

MILLER: Did you fire the weapon in basic training?

UPHAM: Yes, sir.

MILLER: Well then get your gear. (*SPR*)

Upham is clearly agitated and afraid throughout the conversation, but eventually joins the squad. Upham's reluctance is jarring in contrast to the accepted historical narrative of a massive move to volunteer in the wake of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent stories of men committing suicide because they were designated 4-F for draft purposes.⁴⁴ Upham's appearance plays a significant role in his feminization, particularly the fact that his helmet and uniform are too large for him, almost as if he were a small child playing dress-up in his parents' old clothes. Upham speaks quietly and timidly, rarely raising his voice or speaking with confidence. For a 1998 male audience, his behavior throughout the film is simply unacceptably "unmanly."⁴⁵ Upham's outward appearance marks him as male – he wears stubble and has short hair – but his actions do not conform to the gendered interpretation of his body. Clover underscores the performative aspect of gender identity in horror film early in the work, noting that

the fact that female monsters and female heroes, when they do appear, are masculine in dress and behavior (and often even in name), and that male victims are shown in feminine postures at the moment of their extremity, would seem to suggest that gender inheres in the function itself – that there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something about the monster and hero that wants expression in a male. Sex, in this universe, proceeds from gender, not the other way around. A figure does not cry and cower because she is a woman, she is a woman

⁴⁴ I have found no historical evidence that such suicides occurred, but the story is so compelling that it made it into one of the pre-episode interviews with WWII veterans in *Band of Brothers*.

because she cries and cowers. And a figure is not a psychokiller because he is a man; he is a man because he is a psychokiller. (13)

In short, Upham's fear, reluctance to do violence, and passivity are read as feminine actions even through the veneer of his maleness. It is important to note that Upham's unseemly behavior is only unseemly because it occurs impiously; being marked as "man" suggests Upham's corresponding adherence to the tenets of masculinity. Every one of the squad's members carefully regulate their emotions – that is, everyone except for Upham. Captain Miller's trembling hand and tears of grief are "appropriately" hidden from the remainder of the squad, and Mellish's shock and sadness upon being handed a Hitler Youth knife is softened by the audience's foreknowledge of the Holocaust. Even Private Ryan's tears when talking to Miller about the last time he was together with all his brothers keep him from becoming feminized by coupling those tears with a masculinizing story about his brother losing his virginity. Mellish and Caparzo exchange mocking blown kisses and "I love you's" while marching, their tones carefully chosen so as to proclaim to their audiences that they were, in fact, straight men. Upham outwardly portrays fear and distress when pleading for Steamboat Willie's life and breaks down in tears at the seemingly impossible task of climbing the stairs while Mellish fights his German counterpart on the second floor. As such, Upham's abhorrence of violence and inability to "regulate" his emotions mark him as feminine in a film with no room for its perceived accompanying weakness.

Upham's gender confusion is consistent with Clover's description of the monsters in slasher films of the 1980's, particularly the way that the film's protagonists provide model appropriate emotions (namely disgust) for the audience to emulate toward the gender-troubled monster. When Upham taps on Mellish's shoulder during their march, Mellish lashes out at him, saying "You want your head blown off, you fancy little fuck? Don't you ever fucking touch me with those little rat claws again" (*SPR*). Miller watches with a

knowing smirk while Upham scrambles about the outpost looking for his gear, as if somehow enjoying the terror that had gripped the corporal. The feminization of Upham combined with the looks of loathing he receives from the rest of the squad entrench Upham as the monster of the second half of the film.

The audience is encouraged to lay the blame for both Miller's and Mellish's deaths at Upham's feet because he brokers the release of Steamboat Willie who kills Miller, and because he fails to climb the steps in the building while Mellish is stabbed to death. Beyond these two, the question becomes – whom does Upham threaten? The suggestion by Spielberg is that Upham's gender nonconformity threatens the entire squad, that somehow each of the cisgendered members' deaths are as a result of Upham's feminization. The juxtaposition of Upham's gender-bending with the loathing looks from the squad and their subsequent deaths encourages the audience to make that conceptual leap. Upham's "unmanly" behavior certainly jeopardizes the squad in the short term of the film; Miller is ultimately shot and killed by Steamboat Willie, and Mellish dies due to Upham's inaction. However, his femininity is played for laughs earlier in the film. As he stumbles about the outpost looking for his gear, the audience is encouraged to not only sneer at him, but to laugh at his expense. Mellish's "rat claws" comment is so vulgar and unprovoked that it often elicits a shocked laugh amongst audience members. It is not until Upham's femininity is portrayed as a direct threat to the intact, able, white male body that his femininity is then construed as potentially monstrous. As the audience watches the supposed paragons of masculinity – Miller, Wade, Caparzo, Mellish, Horvath, and Jackson – die in ways that reinforce their perceived masculine value while the final girl – Upham, the malcontent – Reiben,⁴⁵ and the damsel in

⁴⁵ Reiben threatens desertion of the mission several times in favor of rejoining the main army to fight the "real" war.

distress – Ryan⁴⁶, – all survive, they experience a growing sense of disquiet. The audience is invited to wonder why not only all the “good,” “traditional” men are dying, but why the least sympathetic characters are allowed to survive. This thought is bookended by Cpt. Miller’s dying exhortation of Ryan to “Earn this.” The underlying assumption of “earning this” is that Ryan is somehow indebted to Miller for his death; that those who survived the war were somehow less worthy of the United States than those that did not. Miller’s staid, Indiana-Jones-esque demeanor that positions him as a man of both action and knowledge is on display when he demonstrates his willingness to sacrifice enlisted men to take the German position on D-Day and his encyclopedic knowledge of the Field Manual that leads to his repurposing of the squad’s surplus explosives as sticky bombs. The revelation that Miller was an English teacher and baseball coach before the war underscores the fact that he has one foot firmly planted in both knowledge and action. Sergeant Horvath’s unquestioning obedience nearly causes him to execute Reiben for desertion after Steamboat Willie’s release. Jackson’s fanatical devotion to his religion and his rifle are demonstrated whenever he is shown pulling the trigger and simultaneously reciting verses from the book of Psalms. Caparzo’s macho gentle giant characterization results in his death when he attempts to bring along a young French girl to save her from the war, which makes him a target for a German sniper. Wade’s suicidal bravery ultimately catches up with him when he insists on storming the machine gun nest unarmed with the rest of the crew late in the film. Much is made of Mellish’s righteous vengeance, particularly as he shouts “*Juden!*” at the group of German POWs. All of these characters and their traits are all clearly considered to be superior to Upham’s empathy, Reiben’s critical eye (and mouth), and Ryan’s sentimentalism. In a way, when Miller dies, whispering “earn this” to Ryan, it is an ultimatum to the survivors to become more like the deceased—that is, more traditionally masculine. Through this lens, the United States finds

⁴⁶ Ryan’s contribution to the final battle scene is negligible. . He is often seen hiding or cowering during the fight, and very rarely engages the Germans directly.

itself diminished by the loss of its greatest men after the war, left to be run by “lesser” and certainly less traditionally masculine people. Upham’s monstrosity is damaging not only to the immediate members of the film but to the wider social structure of the United States as well. The film depicts a United States imperiled not only by German men and materiel but by an internal national feminization that threatens to attack the traditional values of the country from the inside.

Upham is effectively positioned as a gender traitor, particularly when considering the overlapping hyper-masculine settings that accompany a World War II horror film. Both genres encourage and reward traditionally masculine behavior to the extreme, particularly when dealing with issues of emotion. Sympathetic masculine characters are seldom fearful of or merciful toward the enemy/monster in these genres, and Upham has both of these emotions on display, particularly in Mellish’s death scene. Upham stands on the stairs of the house in which Mellish and the German soldier are struggling, crying and paralyzed by fear. The German soldier who kills Mellish gives Upham a blatant look of disgust as he passes him on the way down the stairs, as if nothing could be more repugnant to him at that moment than Upham. That the German feels no need to kill Upham could be attributed to the fact that even he recognizes Upham’s femininity and does not perceive him as a threat. Upham’s inability to perform violence makes him non-threatening to Germans within the confines of the film, but supremely dangerous to his fellow soldiers and to American masculine values that count the ability to do violence as paramount. Upham is a monster not only to the other characters, but to the audience; he is a threat not only to individual people, but to the concepts that the other soldiers in his squad embody. But Upham’s monstrosity is in effect only until he succumbs to the pressure to do violence. After watching Steamboat Willie fire the shot that kills Captain Miller, Upham “mans himself” as he captures and kills the German whose release he fought so hard to gain.

RAVENOUS AS COUNTERARGUMENT

SPR's appeals to the intact masculine American body did not go unchallenged in other cinematic projects, however. Oft overlooked for its somewhat disjointed pace and narrative, Antonia Bird's 1999 film *Ravenous* employs the masculinity-as-integrity argument as a critique of patriarchal tendencies. *Ravenous* is never categorized as a war movie, but instead is firmly entrenched in the horror camp. This is mainly due to the central tension of *Ravenous*, which pits the cannibalistic Colqhoun/Colonel Ives against the recently converted vegetarian Captain Boyd. Boyd's newfound dietary restrictions are brought on by an incident of accidental cannibalism; when he realizes that the enemy hopelessly outnumbers his company, Boyd pretends to be dead. In one of the film's more graphic moments, Boyd reveals that he took a Mexican command post almost by accident, explaining "I was buried, with my commanding officer's half shot off head in my face, his blood running down my throat" (*Ravenous*). The brutal subject matter of the film lends itself to the same gruesome, gory images that permeate *SPR*, with the bodies of American men in various states of dismemberment littering the film.

Both *SPR* and *Ravenous* wear their historicism on their sleeves quite literally, invoking their chosen era with careful costuming and set pieces designed to immerse the audience in a moment in US history. *Ravenous* double-dips here, trading not only in Civil War era costuming but in Western genre set pieces such as Fort Spencer, sprawling vistas and breathtaking mountain scenery. Horses and Colt revolvers figure prominently in the aesthetic of the film, conjuring imagery of the American West during the era of Manifest Destiny. It is no accident that *Ravenous* trades on the aesthetic of rugged individualism and the peculiar brand of masculinity that undergirds it. At a time in which the United States expanded westward and subsumed/consumed much of the Native population that resided there,

Ravenous presents a metaphorical cannibalization of western travelers, justified in the film by the ability of the cannibals to physically dominate their uninitiated counterparts.

Ravenous follows Boyd to Fort Spencer, where he is introduced to the garrison comprised of Colonel Hart, the commanding officer who unsuccessfully fills the shoes of the man of action/knowledge, displayed by his use of an impossibly large book to crack walnuts when he has failed to do so by hand; Major Knox, who spends the entire film in a constant state of inebriation; Private Reich, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed aptly named super-soldier whose most memorable scene consists of him standing shirtless in an icy stream in the dead of winter, water up to his navel, flexing, practicing his war cry; the perpetually stoned Private Cleaves, whose predilection for local peyote and Native American women cast him as an outsider; George, a Native American man who is informally attached to the fort and Cleaves's friend; and Private Toffler,⁴⁷ the scrawny, timid chaplain who skitters about the edges of the group. When a stranger wanders into the camp one night, freezing and starving, the garrison takes him in, warming and feeding him. The stranger awakes, reveals that his name is Colqhoun and tells them a story reminiscent of the Donner Party - he was a member of a traveling party that was stranded in the Sierra Nevada during the winter, taking refuge in a cave. When the food ran out, they began to eat the deceased humans, but this practice made their hunger "more savage." Colqhoun claims that he escaped the last two members of the party just as a man named Ives was about to kill and eat the final woman of the group, prompting a search and rescue mission by all of the garrison except Knox and Cleaves. Upon reaching the cave, however, Boyd and Reich discover that Colqhoun had eaten the rest of the party and lured them out there to kill and eat them. Toffler and George are killed and eaten by Colqhoun while Hart is grievously wounded. Reich is killed by Colqhoun and falls off a cliff, which Boyd later jumps off of to escape Colqhoun. Boyd lands in a pit under a fallen tree

⁴⁷ Toffler is played by Jeremy Davies, the same actor who portrays Upham in *SPR*.

with his shin bone protruding from his leg, where he finds Reich's body. He attempts to survive on the roots of the tree, but eventually resigns himself to eating Reich, which restores his strength enough for him to make the long hike back to Fort Spencer. Upon returning, he finds that Colqhoun has been assigned to Fort Spencer under the pseudonym Colonel Ives⁴⁸ and that Hart has been nursed back to health by Colqhoun/Ives through a cannibalistic diet. Because Cleaves was in town when Colqhoun/Ives first appears and Knox was too drunk to remember him, no one believes Boyd that this is the same cannibal who previously attacked the fort. Colqhoun/Ives then reveals to Boyd that his plan is to establish Fort Spencer as a cannibal colony, picking off lone travelers and eating them as they attempt to pass through the Sierra Nevada.⁴⁹

Audiences are again presented with a prominent feminized male character in Captain Boyd, who often flinches at the prospect of violence and is universally reviled by the masculine members of Fort Spencer, as demonstrated by a confrontation between Boyd and Reich during the fight with Colqhoun. Boyd urges Reich to run from the cannibal, but Reich grabs and shakes Boyd and insists that they stay and attempt to kill him, resulting in Reich's death. The first time Boyd sees Colqhoun/Ives after he discovers that the cannibal has been stationed in Fort Spencer, he nearly faints and then cowers behind a dresser. Boyd's passivity, his self-proclaimed "cowardly" actions at the battle that won him his promotions, and his inability to eat meat after his traumatic burial experience make him a target for constant ridicule by Private Reich and Major Knox, whose emotional reactions to Boyd

⁴⁸ It is unclear whether Ives or Colqhoun is his true name.

⁴⁹ Colqhoun/Ives provides a specious moral justification for his proposed cannibal colony, saying "Manifest Destiny. Westward expansion. . You know, come April, it'll all start again. Thousands of gold-hungry Americans will travel over those mountains on their way to new lives, passing right through here. We will not kill indiscriminately. No, selectively. . We don't want to break up families" (*Ravenous*). Colqhoun/Ives makes an explicit appeal to the concept of Manifest Destiny, employing the same sort of twisted logic that enabled the devastation of Native American populations.

mirror those of the squad to Upham in *SPR*. When Colqhoun/Ives sits down to dinner with the members of the Fort, only Boyd knows that he is secretly planning to capture, kill, and eat travelers who pass through. Knox asks Colqhoun/Ives why he isn't eating the meat at the table (Colqhoun/Ives seems to have a taste only for human flesh), to which Colqhoun/Ives responds, "I can never forget it used to be an animal" (*Ravenous*). Knox snorts derisively, calling Ives a "sentimental fellow" (*Ravenous*), calling into question Colqhoun/Ives's (and Boyd, who is established as anti-meat at this point) masculinity by calling attention to his emotionality and reluctance to eat meat. This link between meat-eating and masculinity is well-established in Carol Adam's *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, where she notes that "men who decide to eschew meat eating are deemed effeminate; failure of men to eat meat announces that they are not masculine" (12). This link, she argues, extends to a certain undesirable passivity, almost as if "to eat a vegetable is to become a vegetable, and by extension, to become womanlike" (15). This social text of meat eating and masculinity has a clearly established precedent that places Boyd in a position similar to Upham – the feminine character in a man's body. The revulsion of the other characters toward Boyd's cowardice is on display throughout the film. When Boyd is dispatched to Fort Spencer, General Slauson says with a sneer, "You're no hero, Boyd. I want you as far from my company as possible... We could shoot you, but as you single-handedly captured the enemy command, it might set a bad precedent" (*Ravenous*). Reich's facial expressions when interacting with Boyd throughout the film range between outright disgust and resentment. Knox abuses Boyd after his return to Fort Spencer, refusing to hear, much less believe, any suggestion that Colqhoun/Ives might be the cannibal. The garrison's attitude toward Boyd models Carroll's theory of art-horror perfectly, suggesting that Boyd's femininity might somehow be more monstrous than Colqhoun/Ives's cannibalism.

By all accounts, Colqhoun/Ives *should* be the villain of the film, but his association with masculinity and meat eating coupled with Boyd's overt femininity cloud the picture. Colqhoun/Ives recounts the story of his first meal/victim, noting that he "returned [from a tuberculosis sanatorium] that spring happy. And healthy. And virile" (*Ravenous*). The sexual implications for cannibalism are also at the fore of Boyd and Ives's first conversation. When Colqhoun/Ives notes that their party was forced to eat the flesh of a recently deceased traveling companion, Boyd asks:

BOYD: Mister Colqhoun, you said that when you ate the man – do you mind if I ask? You said that afterwards, your hunger was different; that you felt...wanton.

IVES: Yes.

BOYD: Did you feel at all physically changed? Stronger?

IVES: I seem to remember something like that. A certain virility. Why do you ask? (*Ravenous*)

Here, Ives makes his clearest declaration of the link between sexuality and meat eating, particularly cannibalism. In short, the simple act of consuming flesh had "rescued" Ives from a convalescent lifestyle (he claims it cured his tuberculosis) and reaffirmed his masculinity all in one. Boyd's refusal to eat then marks him as gender troubled.

Boyd thus occupies a position similar to Upham's, where his masculine counterparts react to him in a way that encourages audience members to view him as monstrous, but his role in taking down the true monster of the film coupled with his feminization suggests that he serves as Clover's Final Girl. But where Upham's redemption is contingent upon his embodiment of masculine values of violence and vengeance, Boyd resists masculinization. As Ives and Boyd lie dying in the trap, Ives again admonishes Boyd, telling him "eat or die" (*Ravenous*). The scene is fraught with sexual tension between the two men; they lie face to

face, with Boyd's hand almost caressing Ives's face as they pant and moan, Boyd looking up longingly into Ives's eyes while Ives mutters, "you know, if you die first, I'm definitely gonna eat you" (*Ravenous*). As each character dies, they give a suggestive moan and shudder until the camera pulls back to reveal them in what appears to be almost a lover's embrace. The film attempts to reinforce Boyd's femininity through a suggestion of homosexuality, in a display of late 1990's understanding of gender and sexuality that equates male gayness with femininity.

The film repeats this reference to gender, consumption, and homosexuality often, equating the concept of prey with femininity and homosexuality. This is particularly noticeable on the garrison's rescue mission to the cave, when Private Toffler is wounded after a fall onto a rocky outcropping. He is bandaged and medicated, but then awakens the camp in the middle of the night screaming with Colqhoun/Ives hunched over him. When Boyd and Reich enter the tent, Toffler first whispers and then screams, "he was licking me" (*Ravenous*). When Colqhoun/Ives is told to sleep outside, Toffler exclaims, "sick man outside!" while Ives is prompted for an explanation by Reich and Hart:

It's not what you think. I was having a nightmare. I was having a nightmare.

Your man screamed, I awoke, I was on top of him, my lips were on his – were on his wound. Jesus Christ, I'm sorry. Please, restrain me. Restrain me

Colonel Hart, I can't be trusted, please (*Ravenous*).

Ives's apparent compulsion to devour other people mirrors another late 1990's trope of male homosexuality. Cultural portrayals of gay men through the late 90's were often lumped into two binary positions, that of the submissive, feminine "sissy" (such as Jack, Will's friend in *Will and Grace*) or that of the predatory gay man, unable to control his appetite and preying on young straight men (such as Bruno in Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*). This is compounded with the pathologizing of homosexuality evidenced by Toffler's reference to

Ives as “sick man” and Ives’s crazed look, facial tics and erratic hand gestures. Ives then embodies the typical Clover monster as the “killer propelled by psychosexual fury, more particularly a male in gender distress” (27). Ives appears to be unable to control his appetite for human flesh, read through Adams’s lens as both a sexual and gustatory appetite. As a horror film, this should not be particularly surprising, considering the long list of precedent from Norman Bates to Jason Voorhees. What makes *Ravenous* an interesting foil against which *SPR* can be measured is that Boyd finds himself in metaphorical gender distress as well, torn between masculine meat eating and feminine vegetarianism. This monstrous take on the role of the Final Girl tweaks audience expectations in ways that can be both reductive in the case of *SPR* and Upham, or somewhat redemptive in the case of Boyd and *Ravenous*.

REDEMPTION, CATHARSIS, AND RESOLUTION

The method of both Upham’s and Boyd’s redemptions is controlled by the set of values that define what could potentially be redemptive for each character. In *SPR*, where there are numerous, explicit appeals to rhetorics of integrity, the central problem of the film is that of the perceived feminization of men as embodied by Upham. His path to redemption is quite narrow, then, as he can *choose* either to become more masculine or simply not to impede the “men of action” that inhabit the rest of the film. In Upham’s final scene, he is shown taking several German soldiers prisoner. The scene cuts to reveal that Steamboat Willie is one of the Germans, standing with his hands on his head. Upon recognizing Upham, he exclaims:

WILLIE: Upham! (to the other Germans) *Ich kenne den Soldaten. Ich kenne den Mann.*⁵⁰

UPHAM: *Halte die Schnauze!*⁵¹

WILLIE: Upham!

⁵⁰ Upham! I know this soldier! I know this man!

⁵¹ Shut your mouth!

UPHAM: *(shoots and kills Willie)*

While startling to the audience, this is in keeping with Clover's theory of the **final girl** who "addresses the monster on his own terms" (48). This process of taking up a weapon, which Upham has been loathe to do up to this point in the film, masculinizes the final girl, resulting in the "appropriation of 'all those phallic symbols'" (49). Throughout the film, Upham has been playing at soldier – and, by extension, at "man" – attempting to identify with the squad through literature and poetry, reciting Emerson and Tennyson when confronted with the "real" war that he is experiencing for the first time outside of his mapmaking outpost. He plays a central role in Miller's initial decision to release Willie instead of executing him by appealing to "the right thing." The audience is encouraged to read Upham's reluctance to do violence as weakness, passivity, and femininity. Redemption, then, comes in the form of Upham's sudden realization that good *men* are dying as a result of his pacifism and that to prevent this he must act. Spielberg encourages us to read Upham's decision to kill an unarmed Willie as his defining, redeeming moment because it marks the first point at which Upham is referred to as a man ("I know this *man*"; emphasis added) and is his only act of violence. In rejecting his pacifist, literary, word-centered self and embracing violence, Upham attempts to balance the ledger of bodies that have piled up as a result of his gender transgression. This redemption is part of what makes *SPR* a "safe" horror film for its wide audience; the thought of a horror film achieving historical canon status especially in high school classrooms in the United States is unconscionable, but *SPR* strikes a perfect balance of horror, nationalism, and redemption.

Boyd's redemption is quite different in that even though he succumbs to his "manly" meat eating urges twice during the film, he only does so when at the brink of death. Leading up to the final confrontation, Colqhoun/Ives stabs Boyd in the stomach with the intention of killing him slowly and then props him up at the table with a bowl of stew made from the

body of Major Knox. Ives lays out his plan to kill and eat travelers through the Sierra Nevadas and offers Boyd the stew as a way of healing his wounds and restoring his strength, saying “a couple doses of this – you’ll be right as rain, and twice as strong” (*Ravenous*). Boyd appears nauseated throughout the scene, and the effect is compounded by the camera cutting to his bleeding stomach wound. Blood drips from his nose and mouth, and he looks to be on the brink of collapsing at any moment. When Boyd finally relents and eats the stew, the sound of his chewing and swallowing is amplified to accentuate the already uncomfortable scene. Boyd is clearly eating against his will as evidenced by the pained groans and rolling of his eyes, forced to relinquish his femininity because of the threat to his and others’ lives.. Boyd resents the forced masculinization and as a result, plots Ives’s death by luring him into the aforementioned bear trap. Boyd’s femininity is underscored by his costume during this final scene, as he stumbles around Fort Spencer in an oversized cable-knit sweater that is too large for him, bulging at the sides and sliding down over his hands at the sleeves⁵² while he chokes down his stew and fights Colqhoun/Ives. Boyd’s self-loathing lands him in the trap at the same time, completing his redemptive arc as he attempts to end the threat of predatory masculinity. Boyd also “mans himself” with a saber and pitchfork, but is wildly ineffective with both weapons. He wounds Colqhoun/Ives, but Boyd’s ultimate plan is to trap both Colqhoun/Ives and himself in the bear trap. This passive approach again reinforces Boyd’s perceived femininity, along with the fact that Boyd himself is killed in the trap, suggesting that he believes he would be unable to continue his vegetarian ways after his latest relapse.⁵³ Boyd’s death mirrors that of *SPR*’s Miller, in that he dies defending his men, although Boyd seems to have failed. The possibility that Boyd’s death could be heroic, however, stands in stark contrast to the survival of the feminized Upham. As a war/horror movie, an honorable,

⁵² This oversized sweater was a fashion fad peculiar to young women during the late 90’s.

⁵³ Masculinity is not wholly defeated, however, as Colqhoun/Ives leaves a pot of stew over the fire that General Slauson tastes, not knowing that it contains human flesh. . The film implies that Slauson would become another unwilling cannibal after his consumption.

glorious death – denoted by the preservation of the intact male body – is an outcome reserved exclusively for the hypermasculine heroes of the film. That Boyd dies intact after consuming the “man’s man” Reich is a blatant reversal of war film expectations, but fits perfectly in the narrative of a Final Girl.

CONCLUSION

While both films have masculinity at their core, *Ravenous* is willing to consider masculinity as a potential threat to American values while *SPR* revels in its traditions and links them to America’s exceptionalism. That the two films approach masculinity’s role in American culture from different perspectives is not in itself particularly notable; what makes these two films so fascinating is that they use the same rhetorical strategy of the intact male body and the consequences for its dismemberment to accomplish wildly differing purposes.

This echoes Clover’s findings that the Final Girl as a horror trope can be reductive – *Halloween*, *Alien*, *Psycho* – or redemptive – *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Scream*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Carrie*. The Final Girl forces audiences to identify with her, and considering that the target audiences for both war film and horror film tends to be young men, this can function to either cement their perceived gender identities by masculinizing Upham at the end of *SPR* or challenging them by valorizing Boyd’s femininity at the end of *Ravenous*. In either case, both films are doing gendered work by relying so prominently on historical content, lending a sense of realism to their narrative that proposes a synecdochal relationship to the nation by holding up their characters as paragons.

Understanding our predilection to reading and performing gender onto and in our human bodies makes it less surprising to see that these two films have managed to project a desired gender onto the national body through its historical characters. In times of gendered crisis such as the late 1990’s when gender identity came under close scrutiny, it would be expected that such gendered bodies would be subject to dramatized dismemberment in order

to either reinforce old gendered identities as in *SPR* or to advance a more nuanced understanding of what it means to embody gender as in *Ravenous*. Where *SPR* threatens the “whole” male body through the death of masculine characters due to the feminine characteristics of other men, *Ravenous* attempts to make space for the possibility of masculinity’s diminished role in the United States. *SPR* falls back on the traditional gendered understanding of nation, reinscribing the national bodily boundary while *Ravenous* seeks to expand that boundary to be more inclusive. Both *SPR* and *Ravenous* use rhetorics of integrity to appeal to the concept of a whole, straight, masculine national body, *SPR* uses it to provoke fear of emasculation while *Ravenous* explores the patriarchal consequences and posits a more accepting world.

CHAPTER 3

“LET THE PEOPLE SEE WHAT I’VE SEEN”: RACE, SUBJECTIVITY, AND COLLECTIVE NATIONAL IDENTITY

One of the most readily visible appeals to integrity attempts to move audiences between individual and collective identities by directing the audience’s attention to their material representations, i.e., individual and national bodies. In this chapter, I focus on the collective American body as represented by the Statue of Liberty in the 1968 *Planet of the Apes* and the individual American body as represented by Black Americans in the 2016 remake of *The Birth of a Nation*⁵⁴. These two films use the dramatized destruction of their chosen material embodiments of the nation to drive audience identification, inviting viewers to align themselves with collective or individual embodiment by provoking anxiety about their respective bodies’ potential material destruction. While *Planet of the Apes* and *The Birth of a Nation* present their embodied perspectives as inherently moral – *Planet of the Apes* makes a distinct segregationist argument and *The Birth of a Nation* is clearly opposed – it is not my intent to associate collective or individual identity with a moral position; instead I make the case that when filmmakers employ rhetorics of integrity to move their audiences away from or toward collective identity, those embodied choices are *interested* in the sense that they argue for a specific way - in this case a quite racialized way - of constituting the American.

Complicating this chapter is the historical tension between the embodied American national identity and Black Americans, particularly because the American national material body often does a poor job of conveying the experience of Black Americans. This was most famously noted by Malcolm X in his “The Ballot or the Bullet” speech, when he noted that “we didn’t land on Plymouth Rock; the rock was landed on us” (X) and by Khalid Abdul

⁵⁴ Unless otherwise noted, references in this chapter to *Planet of the Apes* refer only to the 1968 version, and *The Birth of a Nation* refers only to the 2016 remake.

Muhammad in his 1994 Howard University address “Black Holocaust,” in which he slams the existence of a federally funded American Holocaust Memorial in contrast to the ongoing difficulty of funding America’s Black Holocaust Museum. In light of the historical oppression, enslavement, and torture endured by Black Americans at the hands of those represented by American national monuments, a certain level of Black skepticism about the American material body should be expected.

Because so much of the material body of the United States was constructed by and represents white America, appeals to integrity that rely heavily on the American national body to argue for national identity often exclude Black American experiences. As a result, the cinemascapes that deploy the American material body in attempts to privilege American national identity can be read as a sort of colorblind approach to race in the United States. This phenomenon can be seen most readily in *Planet of the Apes*, which demonstrates how disaster epics can be racially problematic in several ways, particularly in its plot twist that reveals that the strange alien world that George Taylor inhabits is actually a future incarnation of the United States on Earth that has regressed to a “primitive” civilization run by apes – a not-so-subtle historical reference to the dehumanization of Black Americans. In contrast, I read the 2016 film *The Birth of a Nation* as an individual reframing of Black American existence against the collectivizing, whitewashing tendencies of films like *Planet of the Apes*. *The Birth of a Nation* takes its title from the infamous 1915 propaganda film, and in doing so reclaims Black American individualism and reappropriates the ability to organize a Black American collectivity on its own terms through the dramatization of Nat Turner’s slave rebellion. *Birth of a Nation* accomplishes this reframing by focusing on racialized individual bodily trauma in the form of the explicit torture of Black Americans, whereas *Planet of the Apes* is primarily concerned with the trauma of a whitewashed nation at large, a perspective that ignores the trauma inflicted by the power differentials in the United States along raced lines. These two

competing appeals to integrity comprise two very different constitutive American rhetorics, with *Planet of the Apes* arguing for a collective, generic, white American identity embodied in the nation's institutions and monuments and *Birth of a Nation* presenting an America embodied by the individuals who have suffered at the hands of the same institutions and the people represented by the monuments.

I chose the 1968 version of *Planet of the Apes* because of its cultural significance as evidenced by its continued adaptation and reference in American cinema and television. The series has been rebooted twice, once by Tim Burton under the title *Planet of the Apes* in 2001 and once as the trilogy of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014), and *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017) by 20th Century Fox. These recent reboots do not, however, recreate the iconic image of the ruined Statue of Liberty that is central to a raced reading of the American cinemascapes in the context of American material identity. This image of the ruined statue has reverberated through American popular culture almost exclusively in the context of the disaster epic, a genre that speculates on the aftermath of the destruction of the United States. *Planet of the Apes* portrays the end of the United States as a result of an inverted racial hierarchy – a clear reference to white American anxiety about the civil rights movement – and then uses the ruined Statue of Liberty as a way to embody the destruction of the country. This portrayal of an imperiled United States pushes its audience to identify primarily along national lines and, more significantly, to abandon race as an identifier in favor of a shared – and presumed to be white – humanity. Toni Morrison demonstrates how problematic this raced school of thought can be in *Playing in the Dark*, noting that “silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse.... The habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body” (9). Morrison points here to

the appeal to “humanity” as a raceless phenomenon as a denial of black subjectivity, a sort of white supremacy by way of invisibility. In this chapter, I argue that appeals to a raceless national identity presented by *Planet of the Apes* function just as Morrison describes here, as a ham-handed attempt to reorient American individual identity around the nation during a historical moment in which people of color were attempting to draw attention to their plight.

I chose *The Birth of a Nation* (2016) as my second film for this chapter because it represents a nearly opposite approach to embodied American national identity than that of *Planet of the Apes*. Where *Planet of the Apes* pushes its audience to identify first and foremost with its nation, *The Birth of a Nation* instead provides a raced perspective that argues for a Black American individual subjectivity through its unflinching portrayal of violence done to Black American bodies by white Americans. Where *Planet of the Apes* elides Black American lives from the screen and nation through its appeal to a raceless United States, *The Birth of a Nation* makes Black American existence undeniable and undeniably human through its graphic imagery of Black Americans suffering at the hands of white Americans. While *The Birth of a Nation* is not the only film that portrays such suffering, it is uniquely positioned at a time when the disaster epic has made a roaring comeback and with it the whitewashing rhetoric that prods audiences toward a shared humanity and away from their individual embodied experiences. *The Birth of a Nation* dramatizes the transition from a collective Black identity to an individualized, humanized Black identity by first hiding the trauma before gradually revealing the effects of slavery on Nat Turner’s and other slaves’ bodies. While *Planet of the Apes* and *The Birth of a Nation* were released nearly fifty years apart, these two eras are linked by a common trait: the rising level of concern about state-sponsored violence against people of color in the United States.⁵⁵ I chose these films in part because

⁵⁵ Both movements were spurred by technological development as well – the Civil Rights Movement relied on a growing adoption rate of television, and #BlackLivesMatter has

they demonstrate two wildly different approaches to the problem of racialized violence in the United States – *Planet of the Apes* adopts the colorblind approach through an appeal to humanity that deflects racial tension by pointing to a seemingly impending nuclear war while *The Birth of a Nation* historicizes its violence and leans into the concept of individual raced identity in order to individually humanize victims of racially motivated violence.

In this chapter, I argue that *Planet of the Apes* and *The Birth of a Nation* offer disparate takes on American national identity that reveal their perspective on how race functions in the United States; they work as appeals to integrity by using the portrayal of traumatized bodies to move American audiences between individual raced embodiment and national “colorblind” embodiment. The unexpected racial overtones of disaster epics as demonstrated in *Planet of the Apes* are not readily apparent in a vacuum. What appears to be a meditation on the end of the world - or even just the end of the nation - takes on added significance when viewed in the context of the “Black Death Spectacle” films, such as *The Birth of a Nation*, that seemingly respond to them.

PLANET OF THE APES

Planet of the Apes (1968) is the story of George Taylor (played by Charlton Heston) and his space shuttle crew, who find themselves marooned on what they believe to be an alien planet. They soon find that the planet is governed by ape-creatures that speak, dress, and live like humans and that the humans are hunted like animals, captured, and used in pseudo-scientific experiments. As Taylor discovers more about human life on the new planet, he realizes that the planet that the *Icarus* crash lands on is actually Earth—three thousand years in the future. The closing iconic shot shows Taylor distraught at discovering the ruined Statue of Liberty, cursing the humans of the twentieth century for the supposed nuclear war that

benefited from the explosion of mobile phone cameras, surveillance cameras, and the ability to upload videos of police brutality to social media. .

made his present circumstances possible. The use of nuclear war as a threat for a 1968 audience is vital to my reading of this film because the large-scale destruction of nuclear weapons suggests an indiscriminate threat to all life on the planet. In other words, *Planet of the Apes*, composed when Black Americans worked to accentuate how state violence was disproportionately meted out against them because of their skin color, attempted to reframe the conversation around a common threat to all humans.

Planet of the Apes is relentless in its attempts to move American national identity away from raced individualism toward a collective identity, starting with George Taylor's opening monologue, spoken right before he puts the *Icarus*'s crew into stasis for their voyage: "Seen from [outer space], everything seems different. Time bends, space is boundless. It squashes a man's ego. I feel lonely. That's about it. Tell me though - does man, that marvel of the universe, that glorious paradox who sent me to the stars, still make war against his brother? Keep his neighbors' children starving?" (*Planet of the Apes*). *Planet of the Apes*' use of "man" as a catch-all term for humanity is the first indication of the film's position on how humans should organize themselves in the face of potential extinction. According to Taylor, the concept of humanity should trump embodied identity differences, resulting in people treating each other as "brothers." This reference to "man" – read as "mankind" – is a call to a particular species embodiment at the expense of raced individualism. The second sign of the film's humanistic approach is that Taylor mentions in passing that his ego is "squashed," noting a radical realignment of his identity priorities through his newfound exterior perspective. In noting his squashed ego, Taylor signals that his individual identity has taken a backseat to his species identity as a result of his widening universal scope through his interstellar travel. Taylor's ego is suggested to have impeded his ability to see the "whole" picture of humanity, implying that a more harmonious human existence relies simply on the ability of the other humans to set their egos aside as well.

Taylor's appeal to integrity in terms of a common humanity has roots in American history, notably in Lyndon B. Johnson's address to Congress at the signing of the Voting Rights Act, and filmic echoes in 1995's *Independence Day* when the president addresses the military in the counterattack against the invading aliens. During his speech at the signing of the Voting Rights Act, President Lyndon B. Johnson implored the nation, "Let us lay aside irrelevant differences and make our Nation whole" (Johnson),⁵⁶ a sentiment eerily echoed by President Thomas J. Whitmore in *Independence Day* (1995): "Mankind. That word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interests" (*Independence Day*). Both the real and fictional presidents make appeals to integrity by way of referencing the desire to make the nation (in Johnson's view) or humanity (in Whitmore's view) "whole" and "united" in its "common interests," while simultaneously casting racial inequality as "irrelevant" and "petty." The suggestion of Taylor's "improved" world view through the abandonment of his ego, coupled with historical and filmic moves to cast individual identity in opposition to national wholeness or unity, demonstrates how rhetorics of integrity work to move us

⁵⁶ The use of "irrelevant" is key here, as pointed out by Destiny Peery in "The Colorblind Ideal in a Race-Conscious Reality." When the Seattle School District No. 1 attempted to give students of color preference for enrollment, the pioneering process was struck down by the Supreme Court partially because, according to Chief Justice Roberts, "allowing the School District to consider race would interfere with the 'ultimate goal' of eliminating the use of race and other 'irrelevant' social categories in government decision-making." (477) The issue of irrelevance is again explored in Ian Haney López's *Dog Whistle Politics*, where when discussing colorblindness he states, "Colorblindness shifts the harm of racism from degradation, exclusion, and exploitation, to being treated differently on the basis of a socially irrelevant characteristic – no matter how benign the motive." (Haney) The use of "irrelevant" suggests to the raced audience that they are somehow wrong or mistaken to primarily identify as a person of color, and that the appropriate identification would be to one's country. This practice is not unique to these speech acts, but has precedence in the policies of colonial Europe and the Americas, where boarding schools were used to implement forced assimilation of indigenous peoples. These policies carry over into current school practices that prevent students of color from wearing traditional indigenous clothing or hairstyles. So even though the *Voting Rights Act* was a major coup for the civil rights movement, it is couched in terms that diminish the gains for a traditionally oppressed group and highlight the health of the nation at large.

between individual and collective embodiments. Framing individual identity as irrelevant, petty, or ego-driven creates a rhetorical tension in the audience that is alleviated by a reabsorption into a community existence.

Taylor's call to species solidarity is not in itself indicative of a racist ideology, but the timeliness of his appeal calls into question the racial values of *Planet of the Apes*. The film's historical position at the end of the Civil Rights movement, one of the goals of which was legal recognition of Black Americans and the acknowledgement of historical oppression, positions it as a push to reframe American national identity in non-raced terms at the precise moment that Black Americans are attempting to force the nation to acknowledge the injustice of their oppression. It is in the context of these ongoing attempts to solidify Black agency in the United States that *Planet of the Apes* makes its case for a colorblind society. This move, according to Eric Greene in *Planet of the Apes as American Myth*, is borne out of white Americans' fear of

the apocalyptic transformation of racial power relations. This is the main motif, some might even call it an obsession, of the *Planet of the Apes* series. Each film is concerned with and situated in significant relation to that apocalypse: either it has happened or is imminent. The films' narratives in general concern understanding, preventing, precipitating, or reversing that apocalypse. In this sense, while the series does not symbolically resolve the tensions with which it is concerned, it does project their apocalyptic culmination and eventual termination. (24)

In short, *Planet of the Apes* views the reversal of racial power structures as apocalyptic. I feel it important enough here to make this comparison explicit – the filmmakers draw an equivalency between an America dominated by Black Americans to that of a nuclear holocaust and enslavement of the entire human species by apes. To make such a comparison implies that Black Americans are less than American because they would be incapable of

preserving the US if given the reins and frames Black Americans in terms of apes just as the pseudo-sciences of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries claimed. The solution that *Planet of the Apes* offers to avoid such an “apocalypse” is detailed in Taylor’s soliloquy in which he chides humans for warring against their “brothers.” That *Planet of the Apes* compares Black agency to the end of the world is certainly enough to push the film into the realm of white privilege, but its position at the end of the Civil Rights movement and additional appeal to colorblind racial philosophies tip that scale to the point that *Planet of the Apes*’s racial philosophy feels quite a bit like 1968’s version of All Lives Matter.

Secondly, in his appeal to integrity by referring to humanity as the proper “whole,” Taylor reinforces a historically constructed binary of white wholeness in contrast to Black fragmentation, both in material and symbolic contexts. As Alexander G. Weheliye notes, “Whiteness connotes the full humanity only gleaned in relation to the lack of humanity in blackness” (27). The symbolic fragmentation of Black Americans is the history of the United States told through a lens of race - from the Three Fifths Compromise of 1787, which made official the position of the United States that Black Americans were to count as three-fifths of a person, to the use of craniometry to justify racial prejudice by proposing that Black Americans have smaller brains, to the white supremacists that compare Black Americans to apes. These pseudo-scientific studies of Black Americans were often done to support the differentiation of races as biological, genetic, or even species differences that ultimately led the studies to declare that their subjects were something other or less than human. Each of these examples seeks to position Black ontology as inferior or incomplete when compared to an ideal white whole. To lose the legal and cultural protection of humanity is to lose the ability to remain whole. The sanctity and wholeness of the human body is the foundation of American legal processes and at the center of the most vehement American legal debates. The question of abortion hinges upon the legal definition of humanity and whether matter is given

human status upon conception or birth. The issue of the right to die also relies upon our definition of human, particularly in the case of brain death and life support. Human status grants its bearer a ward against destruction and dismemberment first and foremost, and Black Americans find themselves imperiled by a historical and cultural predilection to either legally (Three-Fifths Compromise, phrenology) or functionally (mass incarceration, slavery, Jim Crow laws, police brutality) deny them that status. Alexander Weheliye is keen to point out this historical exclusion of Black Americans in “‘Feenin’: Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music,” arguing that

New World black subjects were denied access to the position of humanity for so long, “humanity” refuses to signify any ontological primacy within Afro-diasporic discourses. In black culture this category becomes a designation that shows its finitudes and exclusions very clearly, thereby denaturalizing the “human” as a universal formation while at the same time laying claim to it. Put differently, the moment in which black people enter into humanity, this very idea loses its ontological thrust because its limitations are rendered abundantly clear. (27)

Historical Black dehumanization has, according to Weheliye, caused the word humanity to lose its ability to define Black experience. As a result, Black humanity takes on a different connotation, and attempts to invoke a common experience in white terms of humanity “lose [their] ontological thrust” (27). In other words, the term “humanity” does not hail Black individual subjects in the way that it does white individual subjects because Black subjects have been historically excluded from humanity. So when disaster epics make a call to a common humanity, they do so in a way that, while attempting to draw people together, effectively divides them by framing communal identity in a way that is historically exclusive of Black Americans.

In *Planet of the Apes*, Ape City and its inhabitants are a pastiche of many of the historical ways in which white Americans have been taught to consider themselves superior to people of color. This is manifest in the general backwardness of the ape culture that Taylor finds himself in. Ape culture is a thinly veiled jab at the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement in 1968, preying on white American anxiety about the inversion of historical American race relations. The aesthetic of Ape City is primitive, with roughly hewn stone buildings, dirt roads, a stone coliseum reminiscent of ancient Rome, and no discernible modern infrastructure. The apes ride horses, herd humans over bluffs (in a nod to Native American buffalo drives), and believe flight to be a “scientific impossibility” (*Planet of the Apes*). In other words, the “progress” of Western (read: white) civilization has been undone because the (white) humans are no longer at the helm. According to the film, the apes rise to power after a nuclear apocalypse, presumed to be the result of the Cold War between the United States and the USSR. Taylor’s concern about making “war against his brother” takes on a racial connotation when considering that both the US and USSR are portrayed during the time as overwhelmingly white nations. The nuclear war between “brother” races provides the apes their opening to rise to power by breaking a presumed white solidarity coded as “humanity.”

What makes *Planet of the Apes* such a successful film about American national identity is not its portrayal of American-ness, but instead the notable absence of anything recognizable as American until the final shot. The film goes to great lengths to prevent viewers from seeing the planet as American in the first scene after the *Icarus* crashes, when Taylor's fellow astronaut John Landon plants a small American flag in the soil of what they assume to be an alien planet. Taylor notes Landon's nationalist sentiment and laughs uncontrollably at the gesture, as if to suggest that the idea of Americanness on a planet so (seemingly) unlike Earth is absurd. This gesture stands in contrast to the final scene of the film, where Taylor and Nova are riding along the beach, only to discover a partially buried

Statue of Liberty. Taylor suddenly realizes that he's not only on Earth, but in the United States, which serves as the catalyst for the film's iconic final moments as Taylor falls to his knees screaming, "Oh my God. I'm back. I'm home. All the time, it was.... So we finally, really did it. You maniacs! You blew it up! God damn you! God damn you all to hell!" (*Planet of the Apes*). The camera pulls back to show Taylor lying face down on the beach in front of the rusting Statue of Liberty.

The film implies that a nuclear war has destroyed civilization as humans now know it, but one of the film's insinuated horrors is the fact that something so "un-American" could exist in the space that was previously occupied by the United States. As Taylor encounters layer upon layer of injustice at the hands of the apes, it reinforces his belief that this must be an alien planet because it could not possibly be "home." Taylor's confrontation of the rotting statue sends him into a state of shock, as he is unable to reconcile the physical manifestation of the United States with the new inversion of power that places white humanity at the mercy of "ape" society. It is not until Taylor encounters the symbolic corpse of the statue that he is forced to confront the death of the United States as he knew it.

This symbolic American death is also manifest in the treatment of white American bodies, which the apes actively seek out and sterilize, lobotomize, and incarcerate. When Taylor is brought before the ape Minister of Science, Dr. Zaius, Zaius lays out Taylor's punishment for speaking: "Now the tribunal has placed you in my custody for final disposition. Do you realize what that means? Emasculation to begin with. Then experimental surgery on the speech centers on the brain. Eventually kind of a living death" (*Planet of the Apes*). The doom of the American national body is carried out synecdochally through the systematic targeting and destruction of its predominately white humans. When Zaius tries to force Taylor to tell him where the other "mutant" humans are, he threatens Taylor, saying that "if you're trying to protect others of your kind, it'll cost you your identity" and that if Taylor

doesn't confess, Zaius will "use surgery to obtain" a confession (*Planet of the Apes*). Taylor responds that Zaius can "cut pieces out of [him], [he has] got the power" (*Planet of the Apes*), acknowledging the film's approach to identity that views identity and the body as inseparable. What Zaius threatens Taylor with is self-annihilation through emasculation and loss of speech. This argument synecdochally sets up the final Statue of Liberty scene, as it distinctly argues that Taylor would effectively cease to exist without his genitalia or ability to communicate,⁵⁷ that bodily dismemberment is associated with identity annihilation. The Statue of Liberty, shown only from the waist up, echoes this sentiment in a similar sort of dismemberment. Taylor is able to finally identify the alien world he inhabits as his own, and his anguished response to this realization is reminiscent of the responses of dismembered characters in *Game of Thrones*, underscoring the link between bodily and symbolic identity. This is a direct appeal to integrity in that it suggests that the concept of the United States could not survive a direct assault on that which embodies it, in *Planet of the Apes*'s case, the white human body. By imperiling Taylor and his cohort, the apes are functionally destroying what remains of the nation, an idea borne out by the desolate landscape and primitive technology of the apes.

Planet of the Apes reveals its location only after carefully laying out the consequences of the potential of a race war apocalypse and then thrusts upon its audience the argument that the symbolic America can no longer exist without its presumed-to-be-white body. When the supposed nuclear strike that levels the east coast of the United States destroys the nation's monuments, it effectively destroys the nation as well. The material symbolic constructs such as the Statue of Liberty that served to reinforce American national identity are merely part of the scenery now. By finally providing a national frame of reference in the film's closing moments, *Planet of the Apes* tips its hand by suggesting that the disappearance of

⁵⁷ Taylor is threatened with sterilization earlier in the film as well and attacks the gorilla who enters his cage to take him for his castration.

“traditional” American values is precipitated by the destruction of American institutions (and thus its institutional racism) as represented by the neglect or abandonment of the nation's monuments. While *Planet of the Apes* chooses to articulate its concerns regarding human inability to “all just get along,” the jarring revelation of the Statue of Liberty at the end of the film shifts the argument in terms of American national identity. The ease with which Taylor processes each subsequent absurdity and internalizes the new ape/human hierarchy is contrasted by his anguished final lines, ““Oh my God. I'm back. I'm home. All the time, it was.... So we finally, really did it. You maniacs! You blew it up! God damn you! God damn you all to hell!” (*Planet of the Apes*). The personal trauma inflicted on Taylor throughout the film is certainly secondary to the realization that his *nation* has collapsed. The emotional weight given to the final scene is indicative of the core of the film's motive, that a strong sense of national responsibility is key to human relations in the United States. According to *Planet of the Apes*, to participate in humanity is to participate in Americanness, and the absence of one precludes the existence of the other as we know it.

The Statue of Liberty scene in *Planet of the Apes* is an early part of the long cinematic tradition in the disaster epic genre that focuses on the destruction of the American national body. The statue itself has been damaged, flooded, used as a weapon, and destroyed (*Batman: Forever*, *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*, *Cloverfield*, *Oblivion*), the White House blown up (*Independence Day*, *White House Down*, 2012), and the Washington Monument knocked over (*Mars Attacks!*, 2012, *Olympus has Fallen*, *Superman II*). The 1956 film *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* adds the destruction of the Supreme Court Building and the Capitol. Rhetorics of integrity here are evident in that these films look to establish a continuity between a material and symbolic American existence. But in attempting to frame Americanness through its collective materiality, these films marginalize the materiality of individual identity and the ways in which marked bodies have

been historically oppressed. In addition, these films often conflate Americanness with humanity by casting non-human agents such as extraterrestrials, apes, and deep-sea creatures as the antagonists and American humans as the protagonists. The implicit humanity of Americanness is particularly problematic because American history is littered with examples of the inhumane treatment of non-white people on American soil and subsequent attempts to justify this treatment by calling the victims' patriotism or belonging into question.

BLACK BODY SPECTACLES AND WHITE PRIVILEGE

The most pressing and dangerous problem with the argument for the humanist solidarity promoted by *Planet of the Apes* is that for too long, powerful white men have positioned themselves as the sole arbiters of wholeness and humanity. Certainly, *Planet of the Apes* reinforces this through its portrayal of human existence as an overwhelmingly white affair set against a racialized, nonhuman "other" that threatens it by subverting traditional racial hierarchies. This historical tradition has, on multiple occasions in the United States, yielded a verdict that Black American lives are not worthy of consideration or defense on the same level of white Americans--that Black lives are less than human. This symbolic fragmentation was coupled by the literal fragmentation of Black bodies by white Americans in the lynching of Black Americans accused of crimes. To give but one example, Sam Hose, a Black worker on a farm on which his mother was enslaved, was murdered by a mob of two thousand white people in 1899 after he was accused of killing a white man in self defense. The newspaper account of his lynching follows:

Before the torch was applied to the pyre, the negro was deprived of his ears, fingers and genital parts of his body. He pleaded pitifully for his life while the mutilation was going on, but stood the ordeal of fire with surprising fortitude. Before the body was cool, it was cut to pieces, the bones were cut into small bits, and even the tree upon which the wretch met his fate was disposed of as "souvenirs." The negro's heart was

cut into several pieces, as was also his liver. Those unable to obtain ghastly relics direct paid their more fortunate possessors extravagant sums for them. Small pieces of bone went for 25 cents, and a bit of liver crisply cooked sold for 10 cents. (“Negro Burned Alive”)

The distant, casual tone of the *Springfield Republican* is remarkable in that the paper finds the dismemberment of a human being unremarkable. Because white history has worked so hard to drive a wedge between blackness and humanity, the *Republican* treats the lynching of Sam Hose with the same sensitivity that one might read about a butcher carving up a hog. The disinterested tone of the article contributes to the dehumanization through the use of “the negro” instead of a name and through the description of the materiality of the act as opposed to the immense symbolic weight of dismembering a human. Yet Black filmmakers have recently begun to exploit the power of the traumatized Black body as a way to assert Black humanity in the face of these dehumanizing forces. The move to humanize and individualize the Black body is made necessary by what George Yancy calls a “communal sense of subjectivity” (25) that informs collective Black responses to individual acts of white racism. I use the term Black body here in the sense that George Yancy develops in *Black Bodies, White Gazes*. Yancy argues that “Black bodies continue to be marked, ontologically, as problem bodies, and...the white gaze continues to mark those bodies through processes of interpellation (or hailing), power, denial, hegemony, and privilege even as so many white people believe that they are innocent of racism” (xxii). Yancy uses the example of a white woman who recoils from his Black maleness in the elevator not because of the specific threat that Yancy poses but because of an “informed history of the mythical purity of the white female body and the myth of the Black male rapist” (25). As demonstrated in previous chapters, the myth of purity and rhetorics of integrity are steeped in boundary-drawing practices that have at their center the desire to delineate the self from the other. The border to

be protected here is the individual white woman's body against the mythical encroaching force of Black masculinity at large. The white woman clutching her purse at the presence of a Black man in the elevator is imbricated in a historical sentiment that at a particularly low point in US history was characterized by Rebecca Ann Latimer Felton, the first woman to serve in the United States Senate. In Leon F. Litwack's *Trouble in the Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, he notes that when Felton was asked about the possibility of voting rights for Black Americans, she referred to Black American men as "half-civilized gorillas" who had a "brutal lust" (Litwack) that resulted in the rape of white women and noted in a 1897 public address that "if it takes lynching to protect women's dearest possession from drunken, ravening human beasts, then I say lynch a thousand a week" (Brundage). Black bodies, and particularly Black male bodies, are mediated through a lens of whiteness that strips them of their individuality in favor of a blanket discriminatory communal identity.

This discriminatory communal identity has palpable consequences in Black American lived experience. Yancy goes so far as to suggest that in police encounters, the individual Black body is all but nonexistent due to the effort it would require from the white police officers to acknowledge Black bodies. In Yancy's reading of the Eric Garner film, in which the New York City man is choked to death by an NYPD officer as he cries, "I can't breathe," he notes:

Each time that I listen to Garner's cries, I can't help but hear deep distress and existential anguish; I can feel his desperate attempt to hold tight to life. I wait to exhale. And when I see his body fall to the ground, I see violence used against his person. I witness the historical weight of the white gaze. I feel the urge, the obligation, to reach out to Garner. I feel the urge to shout at the white police officers: "This is a precious life here; this is somebody's son, somebody's child, somebody

loves this man!” I can hear Garner calling out for recognition, an entreaty of his very existence. His cry, his call, is intelligible within the framework of a relational ontology. “I can't breathe” is a call for help, a crying out to others, a call that says, “Please hear me.” (2)

Garner's cry is echoed in films like 2016's *The Birth of a Nation* as an effort to merely exist in the face of a white gaze that suffocates it. "The Black body," Yancy argues, "is framed through white ontological assumptions about Black bodies" (3). Yancy then continues with a quote from Judith Butler that positions Black body ontology as an intrusion into a "safe," "whole" space: "It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, what is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade?" (*Precarious Life*, 32). In other words, the emergence of Black body into the realm of white ontology provokes a visceral, existential crisis among white Americans as they are forced to either confront or fall back on pre-existing assumptions about what Black bodies can or might do.

The problem of Black collectivity set against white individuality is one of privilege, as Black bodies are seldom considered to be discrete individual entities but rather a collective amorphous threat, while whiteness allows for a granular spectrum of individuality disconnected from the broader collectivizing phenomena of a shared skin color. This problem is often demonstrated in publicized acts of violence. White perpetrators of violence (James Holmes, Dylan Roof, Adam Lanza, Jared Loughner, Dylan Klebold, and Eric Harris) are often implied to have mental health issues, a rhetorical move that sets these shooters apart from a “normal” white population. A particularly egregious example is mass shooter Stephen Paddock, who displayed no outward signs of mental health issues to those who knew him, but investigators believe “had a severe mental illness that was likely undiagnosed” (Farrell). Because Paddock's whiteness provided no readily visible ideological or racial predisposition

to violence, investigators turned to speculation about his mental health. Johnathan M. Metzl points to this in the Paddock case, noting that “when perpetrators of violence are people of color, journalists, politicians and many citizens treat their violence as natural, expected. But when shooters are white men who kill white victims, politicians like Trump, and indeed many other facets of white America, reach for the notion of an unstable, angry, isolated person driven to mass murder” (Metzl). Likewise, Metzl notes that President Trump’s characterization of Paddock was out of line with other statements that the President made surrounding mass violence:

President Trump, who is quick to label other global acts of mass violence as “radical Islamic terrorism” well before investigations establish such intentions, described the horrific shooting as the act of “a very sick man” and a “very demented person” without mentioning anything about the shooter’s background or potential political ideology. (Metzl)

The assumption of the investigators and the President is that a white male must somehow be altered in order to commit violence on this scale. On the other hand, unarmed Black victims of police violence (Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Christian Taylor, Trayvon Martin) are assumed to be always already violent by the prevailingly white reporters, leading to extended discussions of the victim’s police record. In short, Black collective identity enforced through a white gaze often serves to trap people of color in an ontological framework that enables white individuals to kill them with impunity. During the disaster epic revival in the early twenty-first century,⁵⁸ the most significant films created by Black filmmakers have been intimate, complex portrayals of traumatized individual Black embodiedness that ignore the colorblind rhetoric traditionally underpinning much of the

⁵⁸ The zombie (*28 Days Later*, *The Walking Dead*, *World War Z*), natural disaster (*The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Core*, *Deep Impact*) and alien invasion (*Cloverfield*, *Pacific Rim*) film revival has revealed in the destruction of the United States for much of the 21st century.

disaster epic genre. Where the disaster epic is more concerned with the image of thousands of (often computer generated) white Americans fleeing mass destruction, the Black Death Spectacle film instead exhibits a laser focus on the graphic suffering of the Black individual.

I use the term “Black Death Spectacle” as derived from Black artist Parker Bright’s protest of white artist Dana Schutz’s painting of Emmett Till, the Black child who was tortured, disfigured, and lynched for whistling at a white woman in Money, Alabama in 1955. Bright wore a t-shirt with the words “Black Death Spectacle” written on the back while standing in front of Schutz’s painting as a method of protesting the piece, which artist Hannah Black states in a letter to the Whitney Museum of American Art is unacceptable because it “transmutes Black suffering into profit and fun” (Muñoz-Alonso). In short, Black Death Spectacle films put a face and a name on the suffering of Black Americans at the hands of slave owners (*The Birth of a Nation*, *12 Years a Slave*) and law enforcement (*Selma*, *Chi-Raq*, *Fruitvale Station*). This focus on individual stories and images in the Black Death Spectacle film reasserts a sense of Black subjectivity in the face of a rising tide of colorblind rhetorics both in filmic and political arenas. But historically, Black Death Spectacles associated with lynching have been used by white supremacists to reinforce the non-humanity of Black subjects. Hannah Black’s protest comes at a time that Black Americans are attempting to reappropriate the Black Death Spectacle as a humanizing rhetorical act, making Bright’s painting particularly offensive. The Black Death Spectacle is a complex term that is resistant to absolute moralizing, and as such, the value of a Black Death Spectacle is wholly dependent upon the context in which it is presented. That these bodies are often shown in states of trauma helps to humanize the victims of abstract concepts of slavery, discrimination, mass incarceration, and police brutality. Just as *Planet of the Apes* helps to concretize the nebulous concept of American national identity through its use of the decaying Statue of Liberty, so does *The Birth of a Nation* help to materialize the concept of racism in flesh.

I focus this section of the chapter on Nate Parker's *The Birth of a Nation* (2016), but I would be remiss to ignore the historical context of the recent rise of the Black Death Spectacle film.⁵⁹ By examining the individual Black body in their films, Black American filmmakers such as Ryan Coogler (*Fruitvale Station*, *Creed*), Steve McQueen (*12 Years a Slave*) and Ava Duvernay (*Selma*, *13th*) have re-centered the Black experience in America in terms of the way that trauma at the hands of white America has shaped Black American existence. There remains an argument among people of color about the value of Black Death Spectacle, particularly as it pertains to the growing video catalogue of police brutality against unarmed people of color. As noted in Ava Duvernay's 2016 documentary film *13th*, the humanization of Black Americans through the image of the mutilated Black body is a controversial form of resistance to the symbolic and material dismemberment of the Black body by white Americans. The following exchange featuring Cory Greene,⁶⁰ Gina Clayton,⁶¹ Van Jones,⁶² Dr. Jelani Cobb,⁶³ and Melina Abdullah,⁶⁴ is situated in a sequence of interviews that discusses the moral and rhetorical implications of using the Black Death Spectacle. The following interview sequence in *13th* dramatizes the argument that the Black Death Spectacle collapses Black American experience into one of violence, with an accompanying historical understanding of how violence at the hands of the state is a significant factor in Black American identity.

⁵⁹ It is also important to note that Nate Parker was accused of sexual assault in 1999. These allegations gained prominence in the months preceding *The Birth of a Nation*'s release, often in the context of questioning whether Parker was fit to tell a story about Black victimization when he was accused himself of victimizing women.

⁶⁰ Founder of the nonprofit How Our Lives Link Together! (H.O.L.L.A!), which attempts to "Counter trauma from structural violence, mass incarceration, and police brutality of black men and boys by focusing on healing through organizing and advocacy." (Greene)

⁶¹ Immigration lawyer, founder and director of the Essie Justice Group, a nonprofit group that brings together women with incarcerated loved ones. (essiejusticegroup.org)

⁶² "Social entrepreneur, CNN political contributor, and host of The Messy Truth with Van Jones." (Van Jones)

⁶³ Ira A. Lipman Professor of Journalism, Columbia University.

⁶⁴ Professor and Chair of Pan-African Studies at California State University – Los Angeles.

GREENE: For many of us whose families lived through this, who are extensions of this kind of oppression, we don't need to see pictures to understand what's going on. It's really to speak to the masses who have been ignoring this for the majority of their life. But I also think there's trouble of just showing black bodies as dead bodies, too. Too much of anything becomes unhealthy, unuseful.

CLAYTON: I think they need to be seen, if the family is okay with it. It wasn't until things were made visual in the civil rights movement that we really saw folks come out and being shocked into movement.

JONES: You have to shock people into paying attention. (13th)

The tension here is between the rhetorical work that the Black Death Spectacle is capable of doing in both directions: as a way to humanize or materialize institutional racism and as a potential way for Black humanity to be diminished to a life of violence. Greene remains skeptical of the Black Death Spectacle because of a sense of saturation, where Clayton is willing to accept the potential bad (flattening Black ontology with violence) in order to accomplish a greater good such as the Civil Rights movement. The interviews continue with a mention of specific Black Death Spectacles and their effects on different viewers:

COBB: But there is a kind of historical trajectory that we can trace here, through media and technology. We went back to the slavery era, when people were writing autobiographies or slave narratives. Later in the 19th century, when people began to use photographs and they showed images. There's a famous image of slave Gordon and his back, and you can see this lattice of scar tissue that is evidence of the whippings that he received. Or the images of lynchings which white people produced.

ABDULLAH: The murder of Emmett Till was really thought of as being one of the primary catalysts for the civil rights movement. The willingness of his mother to have an open-casket funeral. Hundreds and hundreds of black folks filed past and see this young boy who had been killed by white supremacists in the South. To publish those photographs in black publications so the entire black world [would see them] like our Facebook or our Twitter now, right? So that the whole black world could see what had happened.

There is a distinct difference noted between the Black Death Spectacle as wielded by Black or white Americans. Emmett Till's mother, Mamie, made sure that Till's body was on display in an open casket to "let the people see what I have seen" (Till). The images of horrific violence and its evidence in the traumatized Black body offer a sense of undeniability, forcing Americans to acknowledge that the violence is occurring. While the lynching photos by white people might not have been taken with the same purpose in mind, they undoubtedly achieve the same effect. Abdullah notes the way in which Black audiences received Till's photos, saying that "the whole black world could see what happened," but this stands in contrast to Greene's assertion that the Black Death Spectacle is unnecessary for anyone whose family had experienced such a traumatic event. These two comments indicate that the Black Death Spectacle is primarily for audiences that have not experienced the violence that the spectacle materializes. It would make sense to first jump to the conclusion that white Americans would be the primary audience because of the immense privilege they enjoy, but Abdullah is careful to note that there remains nuance in Black American experience that would make such an image necessary for Black Americans to coalesce around. Her thoughts are echoed and expanded upon as the interview continues:

COBB: In the 1950's, Dr. King and the civil rights movement used television in this way. 'Look, this is what segregation looks like. These are dogs attacking children. These are people being fire hosed. Searching for the medium of technology, that will confirm your experience such that your basic humanity can be recognized.

JONES: The difference now is that somebody can hold up one of these [a cell phone] and get what's going on. They can put it on YouTube and the whole world has to deal with it. That's what's new. It's not the protest. It's not the brutality. It's the fact that we can force a conversation about it. (13th)

Cobb's comment that these images can "confirm your experience such that your basic humanity can be recognized" stands out here in favor of the potential of the Black Death Spectacle as an important way for Black victims of violence to confirm that they did not experience their trauma in isolation. One consistent narrative throughout the dialogue is that the image of the Black body can be used rhetorically to prevent "the masses who have been ignoring [state violence against Black Americans] for the majority of their life" from denying Black humanity. In other words, the Black Death Spectacle, when wielded by Black American rhetors, is an effective method to reassert Black individuality and humanity in the face of overwhelmingly white attempts to marginalize Black existence through a collective identity, which have historically taken the form of the enslavement, disenfranchisement, police brutality, and mass incarceration of Black Americans. It is no coincidence that the Black Death Spectacle has re-emerged in the early twenty-first century, wielded by Black filmmakers at a time when the criminal justice system collectivizes Black identity in the United States as criminal, violent, dangerous, and disposable. The Black Death Spectacle's ability to humanize Black Americans through the portrayed destruction of the Black body

makes it a potent anti-racist strategy for reaching audiences that are unaware or in denial of the existence or scope of racism in the United States.

Considering the previous paragraphs about the appropriate uses of the Black Death Spectacle, I feel it is appropriate to note that as a white male scholar, I too am appropriating these images to a certain extent. This triangulation between my own whiteness, a potentially therapeutic use for the Black Death Spectacle, and a history of white men using Black bodies to force a communal identity upon Black Americans makes this chapter particularly difficult to write. I do my best to let people of color speak for themselves, but my position as sole author and the intensely isolating genre of the dissertation prevents me from pursuing this line of research with a co-author of color. If this chapter were to progress to publication, it would require a collaborative approach.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. sought to use this revealing power of Black Death Spectacle to drive the civil rights movement in the 1960's, arguing, after the beating of several marchers from Selma to Montgomery, that "we are here to say to the white men that we will no longer let them use clubs on us in dark corners. We're going to make them do it in the glaring light of television" (King, Jr.). Dr. King's strategy of non-violent protest is defined here primarily as a method of humanizing Black Americans; the dramatized violence against Black bodies is rhetorically designed to force the recognition of Black humanity in American discourse. In this section, I argue that *Birth of a Nation* (2016) employs Dr. King's strategy by relentlessly focusing on the individual black body as a site of racialized individual identity.

Black Death Spectacle films like *The Birth of a Nation* seemingly respond to the white gaze of postapocalyptic film and disaster epics by forcing white audiences to see Black humanity through the embodied material perspective of historical violence against individual Black bodies perpetuated by white Americans. That is to say that Black Death Spectacle films

present a missing perspective in the traditional white understanding that sees Black Americans as either a collective or dismembered, drawing into focus the individually embodied Black body.

TRAUMATIZED BLACK BODIES AS RESPONSE

If we consider postapocalyptic and disaster epic films as pushing their audience toward a collective white American identity, then the increasing number of films that force their viewers to see the Black individual body in a state of trauma can be considered a powerful site of resistance to the argument that Americans should abandon their embodied racial individual identities in favor of a national identity. As disaster epics such as *2012*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Deep Impact*, and *The Happening* were released and were well received in American cinemascapes, films like *Selma*, *12 Years a Slave*, *Birth of a Nation*, *Fruitvale Station*, *Moonlight*, and the 2016 remake of the 1977 TV miniseries *Roots* rose to remind the American audience of the toll often exacted by the United States for the crime of having brown skin. These films dramatize the systemic abuse of Black bodies by Americans and their institutions, arguing that having a Black body in the United States has immediate, historical, tangible, internal perils that cannot be ignored by the simple national reframing endorsed by the disaster epic genre.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ The competing frames of reference are interested in wildly different temporal perspectives; *Planet of the Apes* takes place in the year 3978, and is concerned about a centuries-long decline of white Americanism that is imperceptible without the fish-eye perspective offered by pulling back to a sense of global humanity, while Black American filmmakers argue that to speculate on the potential end of the world in the distant future as caused by extraterrestrials, nuclear holocaust, disease, or natural disasters is to enact a very specific form of white privilege. It is a privilege, these films note, to not have to worry about a routine traffic stop turning fatal, or to not be disproportionately targeted for police brutality, or to not be systematically enslaved, incarcerated, lynched, or dismembered. The problems facing Black Americans are immediate, significant, and require the engaged participation of all Americans.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, white filmmakers concerned with speculative future disasters might consider themselves to be pursuing a particular set of problems, but from the perspective of Black America look more like they are actively avoiding the most pressing existential threat to any American individual today.

The Birth of a Nation takes the portrayal of Black bodies one step further in cutting scenes of violence with scenes in which Turner reinforces a collective Black subservient identity using biblical scripture. By dramatizing slavery in *The Birth of a Nation*, Parker refuses to allow the audience to look away from the mutilated Black body and stubbornly remains fixed on individual suffering. In short, *The Birth of a Nation* seeks to radically reframe the American experience through individual black human bodies, as opposed to the national embodiment espoused by *Planet of the Apes*.

The Birth of a Nation is based on Nat Turner's slave rebellion of 1831, focusing on his time as a traveling plantation preacher, the violence he witnesses slave owners perpetrate against the slaves, and the insurrection he leads as a result. Nat Turner's "owner" Samuel Turner accompanies him to neighboring plantations where Nat preaches biblical messages of subservience and docility in exchange for a fee brokered by the Reverend Walthall, which Samuel Turner unsurprisingly pockets. Nat's role is explicit - to reinforce with a divine text the collective identity of Black inferiority and deference. Parker leaves no room for confusion about the relationship between this reinforced collective Black identity and white violence, as the scenes are nearly always cut with one another, transitioning from bloodied Black bodies to Nat's staid quotation of biblical verses extolling the virtues of obedience.

When Nat and Samuel arrive at the Randall plantation, Joseph Randall explains the difficult time he has had controlling the slaves using force:

It's hard times for small farmers like you and myself. Breaking even is hard enough, getting ahead is impossible. To save some, I cut them down to a meal a day per head. A few of them started getting fidgety, so I had Abner come down on them. Now they needs to mind me, so you speak on that. They treasure in heaven from submitting and all. If they gets to moaning or carrying on, don't pay them no mind, because they lazy as all hell and do anything to get out of work. (*The Birth of a Nation*)

Randall explicitly instructs Nat to emphasize collectivized Black identity, referring to the slaves as “head” in the way that cattle ranchers refer to their cattle and recasting their protests of malnourishment as “lazy as all hell” in order to avoid work. This is compounded by Randall instructing Nat to reinforce submission to a person’s “natural” state as a virtue, suggesting that slaves who attempt to deny their slavehood would be disrupting not only the social order but the divine order as well. The camera cuts to the interior of the slave quarters, an image that would be at home in a Holocaust movie. The slaves are housed in bunks stacked three high on every visible wall of the structure. At least fifteen people occupy the small room, and as they clamber out of their bunks, the toll of malnourishment is obvious as their clothes hang from their bodies, and they move slowly to assemble in front of the bunks. The scene is eerily reminiscent of how Holocaust concentration camps are portrayed in film and historical documentary footage. The too-small quarters, the shock of the sheer number of people housed in such a small, confined space, the spectacle of the emaciated bodies, and the slow, zombie-like gait of the slaves all recall the imagery of Auschwitz. This scene then reveals the fruits of the collectivized Black identity, the results of the violence inherent in withholding individual identity, but it does so in a way that somewhat obscures the actual acts of violence. Randall “use[s] his club in a dark corner,” admitting to violence but keeping it from the screen. To complete the cycle, Nat then reinforces Black collective identity with his choice of sermon material: “Brothers and sisters, I lead you to Peter 2:18, ‘Slaves, submit yourself to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh’” (*The Birth of a Nation*). The message is clear: ignore your own personal suffering because it is the nature of the Black body to suffer. Randall’s instructions and Nat’s sermon are explicit calls to Black collective identity while the intervening scene lays out a case for Black subjectivity.

The next place that Nat visits with Samuel is defined by its tension between collective and individual identity. As Nat disembarks his wagon, the overseer sets his dog on him. When Samuel vouches for Nat and the overseer relents, he is sure to mention that "n*****s is n*****s here. We don't treat none no different than another. We got rules. Cost of breakin' 'em: stealin', sassin', or any other thing Earl and I thinks is worth dealin' with'll be paid for in skin. You interfere with that, we'll shoot you where you stand" (*The Birth of a Nation*). The overseer directly links a collective Black identity to control, ensuring that any sense of individuality is whipped from the slaves. The subsequent scene with Earl is when *The Birth of a Nation* first turns its gaze toward violence. Earl, Nat, and Samuel go to a small shack with two slaves chained to the wall, one of whom has decided to go on a hunger strike. Earl grabs a hammer and a chisel and begins knocking out the man's teeth one by one, while saying to Samuel,

EARL: You wonderin' why we can use that n***** of yours? You're seein' it first hand.

EARL: (To the OVERSEER) Mouth open.

EARL: If it ain't the Yanks, it's the drought. If it ain't the drought, it's goddamn mutiny.

EARL: (To the OVERSEER) Get that funnel in there.

EARL: Truth is, even the meanest n***** fears the gospel. A good word from your boy there - a disciplined word - would go a lot further than my pistol would.

SAMUEL: Nat's a good preacher.

EARL: I don't right care how good he is as long as he say what he's supposed to. (*The Birth of a Nation*)

Earl delivers this message with all the emotion of someone shoeing a horse. Knocking out the man's teeth is just another chore on the plantation. Earl's words are punctuated by the man's grunts with each hammer blow, and the sounds of him gagging and choking as Earl and the overseer pour what appears to be corn porridge into the funnel in his mouth. As the overseer releases his grasp, the man's head slumps to his chest where the food and blood mix, and the overseer wipes his hands on the man's shirt. The scene is both highly impersonal and terrifyingly intimate. The audience never learns the man's name, but his suffering is plain to see in his eyes as his body is maimed by Earl. The disharmony between Earl's collectivizing monologue and the man thrust onto a stage of individuality cause a painful incongruity. The tension between these two modes of Black existence begins to shift toward the path of individuality when the scene cuts to Nat's subsequent sermon:

NAT: (quietly, slowly) Brethren, I pray you sing to the Lord a new song. Sing praise in assembly of the righteous.

NAT: (faster, more animated) Let the saints be joyful in glory. Let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praise of God be on the mouths of the saints, and a two-edged sword in their hands to execute vengeance on the demonic nations! And punishment on those peoples! To bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron! To execute on them this written judgment! This honor hath all His saints! Praise the Lord! (*The Birth of a Nation*)

In referring to the assembled group of slaves as saints, Nat instills in them a sense of agency and moral authority. A saint is imbued not only with a divine existence but a divine *purpose*, an obligation to act righteously. While still referring to the slaves collectively, Nat's address hails them as individuals capable of, and duty-bound to, make decisions, a step toward individuality that is heralded by the hunger strike scene.

The scenes that complete *The Birth of a Nation's* endorsement of a fully embodied Black subjectivity begin with Nat asking Elizabeth Turner (Samuel's wife) for permission to baptize a white man who has been banned from all of the white churches for molesting children. Nat explicitly invokes his obligation to act justly in his statement to Elizabeth:

NAT: No one is without sin, Miss Elizabeth. This man wants to repent and be delivered. As a shepherd of the Lord, it's my duty to serve. So I'd like to baptize him.

ELIZABETH: Are you sure you want to do this, Nat? Samuel may not like it. Nor will a lot of other folks around here.

NAT: I don't got too much choice, Miss. This man still belongs to God. To stand between the Lord and his people is a dangerous place to be. (*The Birth of a Nation*)

Nat suggests plainly here that the white preachers of the area are derelict in their duty and proceeds to baptize the man in a nearby river with a congregation of slaves. When Samuel returns, he scolds Nat in front of Reverend Walthall for baptizing a white man on his property. When Nat does not respond to Samuel's upbraiding, the following exchange takes place:

SAMUEL: Boy, you'd better say something and quick!

NAT: Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood.⁶⁶

WALTHALL: Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again⁶⁷ - (interrupted)

NAT: You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Acts 20:28

⁶⁷ Titus 2:9

WALTHALL: He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger⁶⁹ - (interrupted)

NAT: Beware of false prophets who come dressed in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves!⁷⁰

WALTHALL: You black bastard!

SAMUEL: Nat!

NAT: (talking over SAMUEL) He that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death!⁷¹

SAMUEL: (talking over NAT) Don't you eyeball me, boy!

SAMUEL: (strikes Nat square in the teeth with the butt of a shotgun)

SAMUEL: Get him to the post. (*Birth of a Nation*)

The shouting match between the three men then cuts to Nat, tied to the whipping post and receiving his lashes. The scene is shot with Nat's face filling a full third of the frame, and the background - including his tormentor - blurred. As the whip cracks, the camera focuses on Nat's wincing. It then cuts on subsequent lashes to the other slaves' faces as each blow lands, returning often to Nat with a stream of blood running down the post from his chin. Each crack of the whip is met with another cut to another slave's face as they watch him suffer, each one wincing and crying at the spectacle. For a moment the audience sees Elizabeth and Samuel as she silently expresses her disapproval, but it quickly returns to Nat with tears streaming from his eyes. After a brief vision of an angel, the scene dissolves into Nat, still tied to the post at night while Jethro, the man who whipped him and vehemently opposed Nat's plan to baptize the white man, whispers into his ear, "Hey boy. If you make it out of this alive, I'm gonna ride you harder than hogs on slop. Die" (*The Birth of a Nation*). Nat's rise to

⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:23

⁶⁹ Mark 3:29

⁷⁰ Matthew 7:15

⁷¹ Exodus 21:16

subjectivity is seen by his owners as inappropriate, impious, and punishable by beating and possibly death. The camera refuses to let the audience look away from the whipping scene in the same way that Nat's execution at the end of the film stubbornly portrays his death. As Nat is hoisted into the air by his neck, the camera follows with a crane shot, maintaining the prominence of his face in the middle of the screen as he struggles to breathe. There is no change of perspective or widening of the shot for context; there is only Nat's bloodied face filling the center third of the frame while a crowd of blurred white onlookers applauds and taunts him. The camera is determined to show its audience that this is a person, a fully embodied individual subject who suffers and dies. By relentlessly capturing the violence, gore, and death of one single person, the camera forces the violence of white supremacy into the glaring light for all to see.

This shot evokes a comparison to the execution scene in 1995's *Braveheart* in that both films use an intense focus on the condemned character's face to humanize him while a state executioner simultaneously carries out his sentence. The characters both face their execution after a failed rebellion against an oppressive regime and are treated posthumously as martyrs for their cause. In the end, *The Birth of a Nation* circles back to a communal identity, but with a significant difference: Nat's communal identity in the beginning of the film is foisted upon him by his white plantation overseers who disregard the potential for individuality in the Black American experience, while the communal identity that Nat has forged by the time of his execution is negotiated through the collaborative efforts of his fellow enslaved Black Americans with respect for each participant's individual identity.

CONCLUSION

The attempt to wrest control of national identity away from historically marginalized bodies by denying their struggles as "petty differences" belies a singularly white privilege to speculate about a distant future and a threat of external violence. White filmmakers are free to

imagine a whitewashed American future in which an external factor forces a drastic reimagination of race relationships in what was once the United States. Prompted by the repeated attempts to diminish the role that race plays in American national identity, Black Death Spectacle films emerge as a stinging rebuke of the disaster epic and postapocalyptic genres by forcing American audiences to confront the reality of the danger of simply existing as a Black individual body in the United States.

However, this does not mean that individual identity is always desirable and that communal identity is always undesirable. In fact, Nat Turner's slave rebellion would have been impossible without having first forged a communal identity with his fellow enslaved Black Americans. Communal identity can go terribly wrong when it is imposed upon a population, such as the hailing of "humanity" evidenced in my analysis of *Planet of the Apes*, because it considers its raced communal identity as essentially homogenous. *The Birth of a Nation* then brings diversity to its Black communal identity through the intense focus on individual traumatized Black American bodies, and only then does it attempt to craft a communal Black identity as heterogeneous.

CONCLUSION

In my attempts to determine how American identity was formed, I was drawn into investigating the dominant social and cultural discourse used to define “American” in the first place. Before I could articulate the phenomenon in these terms, though, I had at least a dawning understanding of the privilege of wholeness and continuity in American public, cultural, and academic discourse. Words like “disunity,” “fragmentation,” and “incomplete” were immediate signifiers that the speaker/writer held some disdain for the object of these modifiers, and politicians deftly pivoted toward unity at times of crisis in order to justify their previously unattainable policy goals, such as the involvement of the U.S. in World War II after Pearl Harbor and the second Iraq War shortly after 9/11. Integrity and unity were such widely acclaimed, morally pure concepts that I felt compelled to investigate them as rhetorics to satisfy my own misgivings about the supposed moral value of the concept of integrity.

Simultaneously, the world of cinema and television hurtled toward the dismembered human body as a way of conveying verisimilitude in series and films such as *Band of Brothers* (2000), *Saw* (2004), *Hostel* (2005), *Teeth* (2007), *Evil Dead* (2013), *Hannibal* (2013) and numerous others. In contrast to the overwhelming rhetorical appeals to integrity that showered the American public from political and non-fiction addresses, Hollywood seemed to be advancing as fast as it could in the opposite direction. Each of the films and series I chose for case studies, then, shared a rhetorical technique – the image of dismembered, decaying, or dying bodies – deployed to wildly different ends, from moving audiences away from gender trouble in *Saving Private Ryan* to advancing character growth in *Game of Thrones* and to humanizing Black Americans in *Birth of a Nation*. These appeals to wholeness resonated with Gregory Clark’s *Rhetorical Landscapes in America*, in which Clark argues that landscapes and monuments provide a common physical structure under which

national identity can coalesce. This sort of national integrity in which a physical object that can contain an identity by hailing its audience to identify with those who had viewed it before struck me as quite similar to the way in which Americans consume film. Perhaps, I posited, films and television series shared some sort of rhetorical potential to shape American-ness through a shared viewing of synecdochally embodied characters. As a result, I argue that film and television would be better considered as what I call a *cinemascope*, as these films and series as a whole are capable of portraying a nation's anxieties, values, and desires. Just as land becomes *landscape* when it is "assigned the role of symbol" (9), cinema becomes *cinemascope* when it is "shared in public discourse or...public experience – [it does] the rhetorical work of symbolizing a common home and, thus, a common identity" (9). In the same way that landscapes constitute the American material body, so does the cinemascope constitute a nation's symbolic identity.

The American cinemascope is littered with bodies along the full spectrum of embodiment, from individuals to nation. The extent to which death, dying, dismemberment, and decay permeates that cinemascope begs the question as to what rhetorical purpose is served by the unending parade of corpses that fill American screens. Rhetorics of integrity can help us to untangle these complex appeals, by examining what and who is dismembered and destroyed, and who is left intact, and to juxtapose this observation with the moral value that is culturally assigned to integrity and wholeness.

However, this dissertation is more than a simple body count. In it I consider each death or dismemberment in my case studies as a specific rhetorical choice that betrays a particular raced, gendered, or abled worldview. By incorporating narrative film and television into mainstream rhetorical scholarship, the discipline of rhetoric can better address the tension between embodied and social identity. To demonstrate this, I approach fiction film and television as a rhetorical act that seeks not to persuade audiences to act, but to invite them

to identify with a particular embodied identity. This approach is pioneered by Maurice Charland's "Constitutive Rhetoric," which focuses on how national identities are constructed by a process of interpellation. Charland argues that simply using the term "*people québécois*" in political discourse "legitimizes the constitution of a sovereign Quebec state" (134). In this dissertation, I operate on the understanding that if words can constitute a people, then the moving image is (possibly even more) capable of the same rhetorical moves. The constitutive rhetoric of fictional film and television provides the aesthetic and discursive constitution for raced, gendered, and abled identity.

The primary contribution that this dissertation makes to the field of rhetoric is an understanding that film and television are relatively unexplored types of public constitutive rhetoric. They are rhetoric in that they push audiences toward identification, and they are public in the sense that the identifications film and television propose through embodying ideal national identities in their characters are integral components of the constitution of a public. In short, film and television function as constitutive rhetoric of the American public by simply portraying that public's most desirable traits in characters whose material bodies remain whole. The effectiveness of appeals that focus on the desire to remain whole is best articulated by Julia Kristeva's question, "how can I be without border?" (4), expressing a desire for the human bodily border to remain fixed in order to contain whatever identity is housed within it by tying ontology to a physical manifestation of identity. However, this border is negotiable as demonstrated by Kenneth Burke's meditation on the paradox of substance, which undermines wholeness by suggesting that the whole is a matter of circumference, a positional phenomenon that considers boundaries (including bodily boundaries) to be drawn in the terms that best suit the rhetorical situation (*GoM* 22). In doing so, Burke exposes the frailty of even our most revered border by focusing on its inconsistencies and permeability. By playing to these border anxieties, film and television use

materially determined bodily traits such as sex, race, and ability to pronounce upon the ideal composition of the symbolic construct of the nation. In the preceding case studies, I demonstrate that the characters most likely to remain whole are largely white, male, and abled, and this portrayal reflects and perpetuates a widely held American view that such perceived wholeness –and in turn, white masculinity – constitutes the representative traits of the ur-American citizen.

The way in which we consume film and television makes it particularly ripe for its inclusion as public rhetoric. Film is especially unique in that audiences go *together* to sit in a theater and experience it, much in the way that Gregory Clark suggests we travel to American landscapes. The rise of streaming video has yet to replace the theater as a place of communal viewing⁷², which suggests that there is still some value in sitting in the dark with strangers and experiencing the same cultural text. Even as Netflix, HBO, and Amazon vie for viewers, the series and films they produce still generate a sense of communal belonging through the discourse that has sprung up around them. The urge to occupy a common space – either physically or symbolically – and have our gaze directed is a powerful one, as Clark notes in *Rhetorical Landscape in America*, driven by a desire to construct a coherent American experience across a nation that is physically, symbolically, and temporally vast and diverse. A viewer in New York has the same cinematic experience as a viewer in Butte, Montana (theater amenities notwithstanding), allowing for an ontological flattening of American national identity; that is to say individual difference is a casualty of the cinematic experience if the content of the film and television allows it to be. So films such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *Independence Day* reinforce a white male perspective through the widespread homogenization of American culture, enabled by metonymic and literal portrayals of the imperiled American national body as predominantly white and male. This brings fictional

⁷² MPAA data shows a continuous increase in box office revenue since 1995. (MPAA)

narrative film and television into the realm of public rhetoric because they wield the power to disseminate a message of who is included in that public and what that public should look like. The power to decide who is and is not considered to be American is too great for rhetoric scholars to continue to ignore, and our responsibility to interrogate discrimination with our students cannot possibly be fulfilled unless we start to consider a wider range of texts.⁷³ That is to say, if we as rhetoric scholars want to teach and research public rhetoric, we can no longer safely ignore the ways in which those publics are constituted, even if it means becoming more comfortable in the realm of fiction.

To remain whole is to remain unchanging in an uncertain world, to be comfortably predictable and reassuringly consistent. But making a case for wholeness as an unimpeachable good belies the constructedness of integrity, particularly the way that integrity has concretized over the millennia around masculinity and whiteness. As a result, femininity and non-whiteness have taken on the subject positions of fragmentation and incompleteness, coupled with the power imbalance that dismemberment implies. At the conclusion of this dissertation, I believe that embracing the rhetorical nature of embodiment has provided privileged social groups a brutally efficient tool for enforcing the gendered and racial expectations of a white male dominated United States, but also yields innumerable sites of resistance for subject groups using the same methods, enabling these groups to use embodiment's flexibility to their own ends. The portrayal of whole and humanized

⁷³ The argument that disciplinary boundaries should prevent rhetoric scholars from interrogating and teaching film and television is a prime example of stasiating an argument using what Richard Derrin calls "The Fourth Stasis." If we can agree that narrative fiction film and television and television are public rhetoric (fact) and rises to the level of constitutive rhetoric (definition), and that constitutive rhetoric sometimes yields discriminatory attitudes that are harmful to individuals in our society (quality), then the only questions left are whether rhetoric scholars are the right people, whether this is the right time, or whether we can effectively counter this phenomenon (policy). If we fancy ourselves as experts on rhetorical analysis, identity construction, and multimodal composition, then we are obligated to make space in our discipline for those who would pursue it as a research agenda and pedagogy.

marginalized individuals can be considered an attempt to interpellate a more diverse America by simply imagining it on the screen.

In Chapter 1, I explore the connection between film as public rhetoric and the deployment of rhetorics of integrity to determine how the dismembered human body constitutes the nation. *Saving Private Ryan (SPR)* looms large in the American cinemascapes, deploying the dismembered, bleeding, dying white male as a way to express anxiety about the perils of performative gender in the late twentieth century; the added use of Cpl. Timothy Upham in the role of what Carol Clover calls the Final Girl reinforces the gendered violence at work in *SPR*. When Clover states that “a figure does not cry and cower because she is a woman; she is a woman because she cries and cowers” (13), she argues that a character’s gender does not inhere to its bodily accommodations; instead, Upham’s cowardice, tears, empathy, and general unwillingness to do violence set him apart from the rest of the squad as feminized regardless of his male body. As he picks up a gun and kills Steamboat Willie in the film’s final act, Upham fulfills the destiny of the Final Girl, masculinizing and purifying himself through the alignment of his gender and body. In *Ravenous*, Captain Boyd follows a similar arc through his ordeal with the cannibals intent on converting him and his outpost. However, Boyd does not relent; he resists masculinization by refusing to eat the meat and refusing to perform the masculinizing violence that Upham succumbs to in *SPR*. Both *SPR* and *Ravenous* posit the disconnect between their Final Girls bodies and genders as problematic, demonstrating that rhetorics of integrity can span embodied and symbolic spaces. The films argue that sexualized bodies must in some way correspond to gendered actions, and a failure to provide a sense of gender continuity or integrity demands violent resolution. While *SPR* demands the masculinization of Upham through his ultimate act of violence, *Ravenous* presents the alternative of self-annihilation, as Boyd resists the patriarchal pressure to align his body and gender by luring the masculine antagonist into a

trap that kills them both. Considering that transgender individuals - whose bodies do not conform to their genders - report having attempted suicide at a rate that is ten times higher than the rate for cisgender Americans, the impulse to self-annihilation in the face of an irreconcilable difference between a body's sex and gender is an all too familiar story. The argument seems to be that without integrity - a continuity between body and action - how can we *be*?

In Chapter 2, I look at how *Game of Thrones* deploys rhetorical embodiment to turn traumatic dismemberment into character growth by suggesting that non-fatal bodily trauma prompts an existential crisis that brings out positive characteristics in its white male characters. The redemptive perspective of trauma espoused by HBO's *Game of Thrones* allows its white men to escape their altered bodies and retreat to their symbolic identities in an attempt to remain "whole." In the series, characters are systematically dismembered (Jaime loses a hand, Theon is castrated, Bran is paralyzed from the waist down), have a corresponding existential crisis in which they and those around them wish they were dead, and then process their trauma in ways that result in their becoming more powerful - such as Bran's newfound ability to time travel and control other people - or become much more sympathetic characters than they were before - such as Jaime and Theon's transitions from villains to protagonists or anti-heroes. The desire to wring some sort of redemptive narrative from the dregs of trauma is scattered throughout American history, from Pearl Harbor to 9/11. Political leaders fall back on the idea that physical trauma cannot touch the ethereal identity in response to physical national trauma whenever it happens. By situating American national trauma and redemption so closely together over a quarter century, American historians have created a sort of redemptive terministic screen through which the United States is encouraged to view all trauma. That is to say that Americans are so inured to American trauma and redemption that they see the phenomenon as uniquely American, to the

extent that international figures like Malala Yousafzi and Nelson Mandela become “honorary Americans.” Trauma and redemption are often coupled with the idea that unity is the salve for trauma, as if falling back within the newly defined borders of the self can somehow deny the effects of physical trauma on the self. But to completely dismiss trauma’s capacity to change us seems unsustainable. In response to the redemptive take on trauma, the television series *Hannibal* explores the close ties between embodiment and identity, noting physical trauma’s capacity to transform the individual literally - through the act of cannibalism - and metaphorically - through the darkening of Will Graham’s demeanor as a result of Hannibal Lecter’s manipulation which leads him to commit his own murders and mutilations.

Hannibal’s unredemptive take on trauma is distinctly at odds with American political trauma rhetoric, because it allows for trauma to force individuals on a path that heightens their less desirable traits instead of a transcendent “that which doesn’t kill me makes me stronger” attitude. *Hannibal* ultimately tells Americans what they already know, but “permanently thrust aside” in order to preserve a sense of American exceptionalism: that sometimes there is no redemption for trauma.

While *Game of Thrones* attempts to retain white male wholeness through escaping “damaged” bodies, Chapter 4 suggests that *Planet of the Apes* reinforces it by dramatizing the United States no longer under the control of those same white men. Where *Game of Thrones* allows the white male to retreat outward to an external ethereal individual identity, *Planet of the Apes* turns inward to a shared human or national identity. When filmmakers attempt to force the national lens of embodiment into focus on national or even species identity in the disaster epic and postapocalyptic genres, Black American filmmakers have begun to use embodiment’s flexibility to reframe the conversation around the individual Black body. This tension is most readily observed in the films and television series that dramatize the destruction of the American national body, where the Statue of Liberty, Washington

Monument, White House, Pentagon, and other readily recognizable American monuments and landmarks are destroyed to address American anxiety about the potential end of the nation or world. This world view, however, is tinged with white privilege because it asks audiences to set aside their individual identity markers in favor of defending an American or human shared identity. This ability to abandon a racialized embodiment is unique to whiteness, which George Yancy argues uses the white gaze to fix people of color within their racialized bodies. While white filmmakers are free to speculate on fantastical end of the world scenarios, Black filmmakers counter with the historical torture, dismemberment, and killing of Black bodies by white Americans using the historical narrative of slavery, segregation, and disproportionate use of police force. Black Death Spectacle film as a site of resistance to the white privilege of the disaster epic echoes Geoffrey Sirc's remarks at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2014. During the presentation, Sirc relayed the story of a man on a malfunctioning airplane, writing his last thoughts to his family. The man was "trusting his Moleskin to survive the crash in a way he obviously wasn't going to. That's writing, I think: 'Hello, it's me. I'm dying. Let me just try to set down these few words, capturing whatever profundity I can muster in the midst of this solemn, horrendous doom'" (Sirc). Sirc's take on writing (and by extension filmmaking) as a way of warding off an impending existential crisis is an apt characterization of the Black Death Spectacle film. That is to say, Black Death Spectacle film is potentially a way for African Americans to resist their deletion from the American cinemascapes at the hands of postapocalyptic and disaster epic filmmakers simply by demanding that audiences acknowledge their existence. As Yancy argues, this is an ontological struggle, an attempt to force white Americans to acknowledge Black existence. Americans find themselves at a moment in history in which there is intense pressure to "move on" from the American history

of racism, slavery, and segregation; Black filmmakers have responded recently with a cadre of films that scream, “Hello, it’s me. I’m dying.”

WHAT COMES NEXT

My dissertation can help guide further rhetorical inquiry along the lines of three main questions:

- How can proponents of new rhetorical theories – particularly those that focus on nonhuman agents – remain relevant to and respectful of marginalized human groups?

The rapid proliferation of nonhuman rhetorics during recent years threatens to leave behind marginalized groups who have fought hard to have their agency – and in some cases their existence – acknowledged. While it remains critically important to investigate these new lines of inquiry into nonhuman agency, doing so exclusively during an era in which women, people with disabilities, and people of color all face dangerous challenges to their hard fought positions threatens to brand nonhuman scholarship as a pursuit available only to those with white, male, abled privilege. It is crucial that nonhuman scholarship retain a sense of humanism in order to remain relevant and respectful of marginalized groups. Rhetorics of integrity can provide a foundation for this type of inquiry by providing a vocabulary for describing the interestedness inherent in the selection of any object of study.

- How can a rhetorical understanding of integrity help to promote interdisciplinary research?

Rhetorics of integrity are transportable to conversations about disciplinary boundaries.

Understanding the bodily origins of integrity can help scholars that bridge fields to better navigate between them by understanding that some resistance to interdisciplinary work is rooted in an anxiety about dissolving boundaries, prompting the crisis of *how can rhetoric/composition/literature be without border?* It is my hope that understanding

boundaries as eminently rhetorical can soothe interdisciplinary tensions such as those between literary and rhetorical studies, enabling previously siloed conversations to exchange methods and ideas to provide a better understanding of how texts and political life exchange influence.

- What value is there in understanding horror as a rhetorical strategy or mode of understanding?

As this project progressed, I found myself returning frequently to the concept of horror and its relevance to rhetorics of integrity. The two concepts at their core work with issues of boundary and identity, but the existing scholarly investigations of horror are often focused on horror as a genre and the subsequent rules for categorizing the films in it. Instead of looking at what horror *is*, *Rhetorics of Integrity* has given me a vocabulary to start to investigate what horror *does*. Working with horror as a mode of understanding opens up the catalogue of films and texts that would qualify for categorization as horror, and frees scholars from the constricting definitions that have splintered the horror genre into subgenres such as slashers, thrillers, torture-porn, ghost movies, and monster movies. Considering that the horror genre has seen a sort of renaissance, with movies and television series such as *The Babadook* (2014), *It Follows* (2015), *It* (2017), *Get Out* (2017), *The Walking Dead*, *American Horror Story*, and *Stranger Things* seeing significant financial and critical acclaim, it is clear that horror as a concept has significant cultural pull. From this renaissance I hope to develop a sense of how horror functions in the American cinemascapes. Horror's role in confronting human denial of the permeability of bodily boundaries is vital because it takes something conceptual like the inevitability of human death and materializes it, thus making it undeniable. Kristeva writes about the foreknowledge of death as something that must be "thrust aside" in order for humans to continue their symbolic practices, and horror seems to operate solely in ways that prohibit us from thrusting that knowledge aside. Rhetoric seems

uniquely suited to explore the ways in which horror is deployed as a political tool. As Jordan Peele's *Get Out* shows us, horror can work both metaphorically with simulated dismembered bodies, but can also serve as a vital spark to force other uncomfortable reckonings with other internal denials, such as the pervasiveness of white liberal racism. In this way, I hope to bring horror as a mode of understanding into the realm of rhetoric as one of the most effective tools with which we can cut through institutional denial of uncomfortable truths.

For scholars unwilling to engage with horror in its literary or filmic forms, *Rhetorics of Integrity* provides a way for them to see how a rhetorical theory of horror might be useful for understanding traditional public rhetoric as well. The bodily anxieties that drive *Rhetorics of Integrity* are not confined to fiction film, but are also readily present in nonfiction conversations about immigration, national identity, and gender and racial equality. A working understanding of the bodily appeals driving white masculinity should be useful to such scholars as they seek a more equitable understanding of the world around them.

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RHETORICS OF INTEGRITY: CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC IN AMERICAN CINEMA AND TELEVISION

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This dissertation addresses the ways in which Americans navigate between their gendered, raced, and national identities, and the role film and television play in that navigation. To do so, I draw from and build upon Maurice Charland's concept "constitutive rhetoric," which theorizes the construction of national identity as a process of interpellation, where a particular facet of identity is hailed as always already extant. But whereas Charland deals exclusively with symbolic identity, I argue that the premises for constitutive rhetoric also extend into the material world because identity is also a material, embodied phenomenon. As a result, I assert that scholars of rhetoric and culture can better conceptualize human bodies as *material* constructs, and material constructs (national monuments, statues) as *bodies*. Because identity is material, the calls to identification in constitutive rhetoric are simultaneously calls to embodiment, and a call to shift bodies is understandably often met with resistance. To explain this resistance, I develop a theory called "rhetorics of integrity," which are discursive and non-discursive appeals that privilege consistency and wholeness. Using this theory, I identify appeals to integrity in portrayals of raced, gendered, and national bodies in American cinema; in particular, I analyze how and why these bodies are destroyed and what interests are served by having certain bodies remain whole.