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ABSTRACT

This article explores the anticlimactic suspense sequence, a phrase used to describe the use of mise-en-scène to build suspense and tease the killer, within a recent cycle of slasher film remakes. Despite the ubiquity of these scenes in the horror genre, there has been little attention paid to them. Their function as a formulaic device used to tease the climax and provide suspenseful interludes between exposition renders them analytically unattractive. However, these scenes often answer some of the most basic questions one can ask of the horror genre: What is used to frighten the audience? How is the audience frightened? Why are certain elements or objects of a film’s mise-en-scène used in these scenes? How these scenes then inform questions of horror pleasure is obvious, but what is more apropos to this study is the question of how these scenes supplement the ideology of the films. Under this interpretation, the seemingly apolitical nature of the sequences as a result of their formulaic necessity is complicated by analyzing these sequences and their mise-en-scène as ideologically constructed. I argue the anticlimactic suspense sequences serve one of two purposes: they supplement the film’s narrative to create a cohesive ideology or they provide an ideology to the inchoate or ambiguous horror text. As such, these sequences are essential to analyzing the horror genre and the goal is to illuminate the ideological vitality of such an analysis. Furthermore, the article refines existing methods for conducting class analysis and expands the role of mise-en-scène.

A young nubile teen girl hears an ominous noise and creeps through the darkness to find what lurks within it. Fearful of a notorious killer, the girl carefully inspects her surroundings until she – and the audience with her – is startled by an innocuous object: the family cat, a fallen tree branch, a malfunctioning appliance. The climatic confrontation of the killer and the final girl still awaits, as this suspenseful sequence is designed to scare the audience, construct and maintain atmosphere and tone, and tease the willing audience of what it is certain to come. For the horror fan, these moments of suspense are a quotidian part of the horror film experience yet are unquestionably one of the genre’s diverse sources of pleasure. The active horror fan, inured to the genre’s formula, can attempt to decode the film’s form and composition to anticipate how, when, and what will compose the film’s suspense, while the passive viewer may surrender to the film’s most basic pleasures.

Despite the ubiquity of these scenes in the horror genre, there has been little attention afforded to them. Their function as a formulaic device used to tease the climax and provide suspenseful interludes between narrative driven scenes presumably renders them analytically unattractive. Beyond their tacit inclusion in the contentious dialectic revolving around the pleasures of the genre, the anticlimactic suspense sequence is discarded as nonessential. However, these scenes and their mise-en-scène often answer some of the most basic questions one can ask of the horror genre: What is used to frighten the audience? How is the audience frightened? Why are certain elements or objects of a film’s mise-en-scène used in these scenes? These sequences inform questions of horror’s pleasure, but what is more apropos to this study is the question of how these scenes supplement the ideology of the films. Under this interpretation, the seemingly apolitical and formulaic nature of the sequences is complicated by recognizing these
sequences as ideologically constructed through art direction and composition. I argue the anticlimactic suspense sequence serves one of two purposes: to supplement the film’s narrative to create a cohesive ideology, or to provide an ideology to the inchoate or ambiguous horror text. As such, these sequences are essential to analyzing the horror genre, and the goal of this article is to illuminate the ideological vitality of such an analysis.

**DEFINING THE FAILED GENRE CYCLE**

Because this approach to the genre is largely unexplored, the body of texts to choose from is immense and formidable. The selection of a remake cycle which took place in the 2000s is far from arbitrary but is, at least partially, the result of gravitating towards films which have been dismissed by scholars (and panned by critics). The inclination towards spurned horror texts severely and obligingly limits analytical options; horror scholars ubiquitous lamenting of the genre’s dismissal by the academy broadly belies the immense attention actually paid to the genre. Horror films which have reached canonical status within the slasher subgenre (*Halloween* [1978] and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* [1974] without question) have garnered such attention that any analysis of their suspense sequences would merely provide superfluous corroboration to widely accepted claims about class in most cases. Likewise, the remakes of these canonical films have drawn significant negative attention, their adaptations charged for failing to maintain the politics of their originals. In *Making and Remaking Horror in the 1970s and 2000s: Why Don’t They Do It Like They Used To?*, David Roche laments that remakes cling “to patriarchal attitudes their 1970s counterparts sought to question” (93). Roche’s analysis of the films’ politics treats the films’ class ideology as a whole where their sequences of suspense are implicitly included despite their exclusion from direct analysis. Therefore, Roche’s claim that Haddonfield, the setting of *Halloween*, is a synecdoche for white middle-class patriarchal suburban America applies equally to the anticlimactic sequences of suspense despite their omission from Roche’s analysis. What can be gained from approaching these sequences in canonical films (and their sequels and remakes) is validation of scholars’ narrative analysis. To approach films without an extant body of analysis, such as what will be considered below, allows for the potential of this approach to be wholly demonstrated. Establishing this approach with disdained and ignored films should provide a model for application to films which have attracted considerable attention.

The cluster of remakes considered in this study were released starting in 2006 and includes films whose original iteration were released during what Richard Nowell identifies as the original slasher cycle. Nowell’s intentions are ambitiously revisionist, aiming to challenge the widely accepted belief that the horror films marketed their violence to appeal to male audiences. Nowell shows how teen slashers were disproportionately attracting young girls and how levels of violence were influenced entirely by the MPAA, an assertion which contradicts the massively influential work of Carol Clover among others (36). Part of Nowell’s process is to develop an industrial context for the development of the slasher film in which he employs the terminology “cycle,” jettisoning misleading labels such as fad, stalker, cluster and genre (45). Developing a rather intuitive set of labels (Pioneer Productions, Trailblazing Hits, Cash-In Productions, Failures), Nowell creates a way for understanding how genre cycles develop and eventually fail; this approach lends itself well to other genres, but also has value in narrative analysis. As such, what follows is not a consideration of a contemporary cycle, but of one that failed to materialize, with a particular emphasis on the films which were failures. My designation of a film as a failure is not based on box office returns, but whether the film garnered a sequel. In a genre where sequels are so rampant, it substitutes as an de facto sign of success. The inability to generate a sequel is more apt to describe why *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), for instance, was a failure despite its profitable box-office receipts. Moreover, the legacy of failing to generate an immediate sequel (inside of seven years) aligns with the remakes of the films considered here: *When a Stranger Calls*, *Sorority Row* (2009), *Prom Night* (2008) and *Friday the 13th* (2009). Fixating on films which were critical and largely commercial failures accentuates their class ideology and how those ideologies manifest in the films’ form of suspense and horror.

**CLASS AND THE HORROR FILM**

The work on class in horror film pales in comparison to other identity politics, particularly gender and sexual identity. It is this relative neglect combined with how explicit the films’ narratives engage with tenets of capitalism which motivates a focus on class in the suspenseful sequences. Robin Wood’s work on class has become
highly influential despite the fact that it has failed to garner adequate replication within horror studies. In part, this could be due to Wood’s explicit critique of capitalism, a position which claims capitalism features methods of suppression which maintain the allure of freedom while offering consumerism as comfort. Wood approaches horror films, particularly slashers, from both a Marxist and psychoanalytic methodology wherein he identifies forms of repression which transforms people into “monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists” (64). This article focuses on how sequences of horror frame “bourgeois patriarchal capitalism,” particularly through imagery of consumerism. While Wood’s approach is broader and more theoretical than textual, his tenet that normality is threatened by a monster is retained and expanded to include both what is meant to be terrifying beyond the monster, and what form the monster’s terror takes (71). This analysis will also complicate how repression manifests in slasher films, identifying how it is capitalism and consumerism itself which is shown as the monstrous. Wood is quick to praise the genre for its ideology and foregrounding of the repressed, but he may even underestimate the cynicism towards capitalism inherent in the horror genre. Matt Hills notes horror “restores the repressed and reconfirms the surmounted” (53), but this cannot be accomplished without implying other aspects of repression, and a close analysis of the form of horror shows what the monster may in fact imply is the state of repression itself. Yet, how this conversation has shifted from representations of middle-class identity in the original slasher cycle to images of wealth and high-class consumption in many 21st century remakes has largely been a task of mise-en-scène. Furthermore, Newitz and Wood establish a Marxist perspective on the genre as much as they do a textual methodology, which invites diverse approaches to texts which adopt such a class perspective. Newitz’s investigation of The Stepfather (2009) importantly outlines how her methods anticipate my own and demonstrates how a focus on the anteclimactic suspense sequence supplements traditional class analysis. Providing an interesting interpretation of The Stepfather’s narrative, Newitz posits it is the free market which allows for the killer to individuate himself and continue his serial behaviour; moreover, David’s (the film’s titular killer played by Dylan Walsh) murderous frustration becomes overwhelming when he is faced with his failure to organize the family by economic principles (28). A consideration of the suspenseful sequences only accentuates what Newitz articulates about the film and what Wood states about the genre’s emphasis on the family. Unlike a number of films in this article, nearly every suspenseful scene’s mise-en-scène involves David: he is what is horrifying. So the question shifts from what is scary to what is the context of the horror, and does it inform the film’s class ideology? David’s quest for patriarchal bliss — serving as patriarch to a broken household — is constantly challenged by tropes of domestic life: the nosy and meddlesome neighbour, the distrusting friends of his wife, the defensive and combatant ex-husband. David’s homicidal eradication of these forces speaks to the difficulty of adhering to patriarchal ideals, but their suspicions of him are frequently economic. A friend of David’s doomed fiancé Susan (Sela Ward) revokes her initial endorsement of him when he mysteriously quits a realty job when prompted to fill out paperwork. His brief success as a realtor, notably another form of façade, then undermines his ability to reasonably evade his economic duties of paying taxes. So, while Newitz is right to claim it is free market capitalism which enables David’s serial killing, David’s carnage is equally the result of the burden of the expectations of capitalist society. It may be the imperfections of suburban life that David is eradicating, but the relation of some of these imperfections with capitalism suggests it is capitalism’s horrors which produce a monster like him. Suburban life and its underpinnings are not merely narrative fodder, but the horrific substance of the film’s seemingly innocuous art direction.

THE HORRORS OF CONSUMPTION: WHEN A STRANGER CALLS AND SORORITY ROW

The value of investigating the form of suspense and horror is demonstrated in the ideologically aimless When a Stranger Calls. Boldly expanding the infamous opening sequence of the original to a full-length feature, the film’s narrative meandering is to be expected. With the most basic of character development, the film’s protagonist, Jill (Camilla Belle), is forced to spend the evening...
babysitting in order to pay back her father for the cellphone bills fees she accrued after having gone over her minute allotment. This lapse in judgment is the result of talking with her boyfriend about his infidelity with one of Jill’s friends, Tiffany (Katie Cassidy). The brief setup gives way to Jill being terrorized by a mysterious caller while babysitting. Although the narrative is remarkably rudimentary, the setup does plainly entertain the genre’s tropes: Jill is punished for a consumptive act. While not sexual or illegal in nature, Jill’s phone overage fees are presented as the reason for her punishment; the fact that it takes an unexpected and murderous form illuminates, rather than distorts, the relationship between her consumptive act and its subsequent punishment. As simplistic as the narrative is, it should not be surprising that the film or its similarly vacuous original has failed to garner significant textual analysis; however, the remake’s form of suspense supports the narrative’s commentary on consumption.

Jill’s consumptive behaviour demands her punishment, but it also directly leads to her being mysteriously terrorized; therefore, consumption invites terror. Remarkably, the film’s form consistently corroborates the relationship between terror and consumption. The film’s opening scene adheres to this dynamic as a murder takes place in a house outside of a carnival, a spectacle of conspicuous and superfluous consumption. As the murder takes place, it is quick cuts to Ferris wheels, carousels, and other rides – paced by violent orchestration determined to cue expectations of the lurid – rather than the murder itself which is displayed to the audience. An aerial shot of the vacated carnival precedes the arrival of a detective at the scene of the crime the following morning. The message of the opening sequence could not be clearer: murder is a spectacle akin to carnival attractions.

Jill’s wasteful consumption seems destined for the same punishment, but first she is tormented through a series of suspenseful sequences in which her employer’s conspicuous consumption is a form of terror. The menace of conspicuous consumption, if not wealth altogether, is introduced as Jill’s father drops her off at the mansion where she is to babysit, eerie music indicating the terror which lurks at the sight of the enormous house. The horror of the house itself is made clear as its abundant luxuries torment Jill before and to a much greater extent than the mysterious man who subsequently calls her (Fig. 1).

Jill’s exploration of the house leads to a number of suspenseful encounters with the specter of consumption. She is startled when her innocent attempt to work the television creates a cacophony of sound as she attempts an array of remotes which first trigger the fireplace and then a blaring opera track, evoking simultaneous connotations between horror and high culture. As she shuts everything off, she is momentarily alarmed by a Rodin-like statue at the top of the stairs, before calming her nerves as she snoops through jewelry, perfume, and dresses of the woman’s closet. As she holds a dress up to herself admiringly in the mirror, she is startled by a noise which she concludes was made from the live-in housekeeper feeding the birds in the aviary (Fig. 2).

Only a few moments pass before Jill is startled by the house alarm, of which she rationalizes as being accidentally tripped by the maid, and again – in one of the more effective jump scares – when the indoor sprinklers activate as Jill recognizes the maid’s mysterious absence. These early scenes assemble an assortment of bourgeois
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iconography: the opera track, the fine art and jewelry, the indoor garden, and the service staff. That it is these items which cause Jill’s terror serves as a cautionary tale to Jill whose frivolous consumption results in a terrorizing from bourgeois consumption itself, or more mundane forms of convenience such as the ice machine which distresses Jill. Simultaneously, Jill is othered as an outsider to bourgeois culture, horrified by its iconography, while fascinated by its conveniences and luxury. To return to Wood’s theory, Jill’s middle-class normality is threatened by the monster of bourgeois leisure and consumption.

Jill’s experience contrasts to Tiffany’s, who comes to visit in order to make amends, but is ultimately terrorized when she leaves the house. The form of Tiffany’s suspense involves trees outside of the house, cutting between her attempt to get to her car and the wind on the branches. The scene reaches its climax when a tree branch blocks Tiffany’s passage past the house gate; she decides to move the tree branch, and while her fate is not verified, her death is clearly implied. Tiffany’s punishment, in the wild of nature, matches her sin of betraying Jill. While Tiffany’s social infraction does not meet a social punishment in the way Jill’s consumptive sin amounts to a consumptive form of terror, the breaking of a social norm (confirmed through her desire to ransack the liquor cabinet of Jill’s stead) demands her punishment outside of society, as represented by the upscale home at the centre of the narrative. Both Jill and Tiffany are preoccupied with consumption and the film’s mise-en-scène uses this preoccupation to expose all forms of consumption as terrifying. Preoccupation with consumption – particularly sexual activity – is far from uncommon in the genre, but When A Stranger Calls’ mise-en-scène illuminates how the specter of consumption constantly looms as a terrifying force. As Jill’s phone tormentor becomes foregrounded in the narrative, the peril of consumption wanes; however, repeated uses of establishing shots of the house, the threat of the guest house, and the prominence of statues as sinister atmosphere maintain the consumptive subtext by visually focusing on wealth (Figs. 3 and 4).

Moreover, the way in which these consumptive elements figure into the climax cannot be mistaken. When on the run from the killer, Jill retreats to the indoor garden pool where she encounters the housekeeper’s dead body; she is figuratively made prey by the expectations of her bourgeois employer. When Jill is captured, pinned to the ground, and choked by the killer, she is able to escape his grasp by remotely turning on the fireplace which sets the him on fire. Her mastery of the fireplace remote, following her initial ineptitude with the array of remotes, demonstrates both the terror and power of bourgeois consumption. Despite its lack of a complex narrative, approaching When A Stranger Calls through an analysis of its form, particularly its suspenseful sequences, reveals how mise-en-scène provides a cohesive class critique which positions consumption as a sinister punishing and terrifying force to victim and assailant alike.

Sorority Row follows a more traditional slasher film formula with a superficial social critique involving the iniquitous and debased activities of the titular sorority. Like When a Stranger Calls, Sorority Row’s protagonist of sorority sisters faces punishment for an offense; after a revenge prank goes murderously wrong, resulting in the death of their sorority sister, the girls decide to cover-up the accident rather than going to the authorities. Importantly, the
girl’s sin was not murder (as it was genuinely an accident), but their decision to hide the body in order to ensure that the rest of their lives would not be ruined. More to the point, covering up the accident allows for a prolonging of the hedonistic sorority lifestyle to which they had become accustomed. The film’s denouement provides an indictment of this perspective by having the killer echo these sentiments, claiming everything he did was to preserve his and his girlfriend Cassidy’s (Briana Evigan) future; his status as valedictorian and using his gown as disguise as he goes on his rampage further demonstrates the relationship between the pursuit of economic success and evil. While the remake changes the target of the prank and supplies a more sympathetic motivation for its design, it retains the accidental murder and the rationale of the cover-up in a manner which belies Roche’s claims that remakes jettison the politics of the originals. In fact, this class commentary is far more salient, if less obvious, than the social critique of sororities which is patently contradicted in the film’s climax. The virtues of sorority sisters are beatified through their steadfast loyalty to one another in the film’s finale (an aspect left more ambiguous in the original), particularly demonstrated in the rescue of Cassidy. Cassidy’s survival is only possible through the efforts of the frantic Ellie (Rumer Willis) and through her fortuitous bracelet which breaks her deathly plummet, the bracelet bestowed upon the graduating sisters as a sign of their bond to one another.

What make the commentary on class and consumption far more cohesive is how these themes emerge in the anti-climatic suspense sequences. The consumptive lifestyle they protect by lying comes to define the nature of the terror they face. Chugs (Margo Harshman), the group’s most wanton member, is killed in her psychiatrist’s office after having agreed to exchange sex for drugs. As she waits for him, she takes to drinking from the bottle until the killer forces the bottle down her throat, before slitting her neck and leaving her for dead. Chugs’ murder cannot be severed from the consumptive lifestyles the sorority sisters attempted to preserve. These are illustrated via the wealth required for private psychiatrist care, the trade of sex for drugs, and the abusive drinking which itself becomes the murder weapon. The link between consumptive acts and a character’s murder is a trope of the genre, but seldom is the desire for the consumptive lifestyle itself so intricately linked to the aesthetics of the character’s murder. Even those outside the circle of the girls in cahoots are murdered for their infractions. When an underclassmen overhears Jessica (Leah Pipes) – the sorority’s most calculating and callous member – admit to being involved in the murder of Megan (Audrina Patridge), she is killed by the gown-adorned murderer. The initial suspense of the scene, though, involves whether or not Jessica or Claire (Jamie Chung), another sorority member involved in the tragic prank, will discover the underclassmen in the shower. The underclassmen’s desire for a more prestigious lifestyle, albeit the dubious honour of bathing in the senior shower, is what creates the suspense and what amounts to her fatal punishment. The following death, entrenched in another suspenseful sequence, continues the pattern. When Claire attempts to shut-off the house’s hot tub, which is mysteriously malfunctioning and has spewed bubbles across the lawn of the house, she is murdered off-camera, her body discovered by Cassidy and Ellie. The hot tub itself is iconography of leisure and wealth but it is further encoded with meaning as in an earlier scene. Jamie and Mickey (Maxx Hennard) had sex in the hot tub, an event instigated through Jamie’s striptease coercion of a somewhat reluctant Mickey. As such, the hot tub evokes this event and the promiscuous party lifestyle encapsulated in the scene. That Jamie’s murder is hidden by bubbles spreading across the yard, the same bubbles which hid her breasts (and presumably the off-screen sex act) from the audience, establishes a connection between a lavishly promiscuous lifestyle and murder. The mise-en-scène of the film allows the hot-tub to transcend its role as a narrative set piece and move towards being a sight of consumptive horror, through its low-key lighting a sense of connection with the killer is drawn (Fig.5).

The locations of these deaths are also telling. Chug’s death in the industrial and sterile environment of her psychiatrist’s office, the underclassmen’s murder in the private senior bathrooms, and Claire’s amidst the bubbles of the house’s hot tub contrasts with the industrial site of the accident and the construction site of the house...
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renovations. Mickey is the only victim who is killed at such a site and his death is clearly an exceptional instance given the plenitude of suspenseful scenes which merely tease murder. As the lone male victim, the film suggests yet under-develops a subversive approach to gender in which female consumption is uniquely problematic. For instance, Ellie slowly traverses the house’s dark lurid basement – amidst typical horror aesthetics of a light bulb swaying – but what she finds is only the clue, of sorts, of the bloody coat which they buried with Megan’s body. Likewise, when they return to the site of the accident and burial, Cassidy is lowered into the well to find a message from the killer and discovers the absence of Megan’s corpse. Through these scenes, a juxtaposition is established which contrasts the dark settings where threats are teased and the comparably opulent settings, filled with luxury and consumption, where young girls are killed. It is this dynamic difference between the mise-en-scène that creates suspense and produces a class ideology.

Crucially, the girls that fail to survive the film’s narrative are not necessarily those who are more involved in the trick (Chugs and Jessica planned the revenge, but the others’ complicity made them all equals), but the ones who held most steadfast to protecting the potential for maintaining and achieving a particular lifestyle or who are conspicuously displayed enjoying such a lifestyle. In fact, when Jessica feels she has escaped the killer and Cassidy, yet again, attempts to persuade her to go to the police to confess their involvement, Jessica remains intransigent before being killed by Cassidy’s boyfriend, revealing the killer to the audience. That it is Cassidy’s boyfriend who is the killer illuminates how the crime of the sorority is the pursuit of a particular lifestyle enabled by the cover-up, rather than the prank itself. Cassidy was not privy to the prank and was the most resistant to the cover-up, but her capitulation to her sisters inspires her boyfriend to provide the ultimate concealment of her sin. When her boyfriend confesses that everything he did was to ensure their successful futures (an utterly unfulfilling denouement given the extreme nature of the murders), a congruence between the motivation of the sorority and the killer is made explicit. The lifestyles and futures the sorority so desperately want to protect is what murderously consumed them.

THE SUSPENSE OF A KNOWN KILLER

Slasher films which identify the film’s killer provide a different form of suspense than the mysterious contexts of When a Stranger Calls and Sorority Row. In these films, much like The Stepfather discussed above, the sequences of suspense are typically caused by the killer, but there remains value in understanding how the mise-en-scène of these scenes inform the film’s class ideology. Friday the 13th (2009) acts as both remake and sequel as the film attempts to simultaneously remake and sequel the series while imbuing the characters with knowledge of the events in the first film. As such, the characters are as aware of Jason Voorhees’s (Derek Mears) identity as the killer as the audience is – the suspense of the film is not who the killer is, but how and when he will kill each character. Therefore, the suspense of the film is rather abbreviated (the thrill is to witness the audacity of the murders, an anticipation of their style as opposed to a study in suspenseful form), but the circumstances of each murder – while temporarily sundered from the broader narrative – provide an ideological subtext which supplements the film’s ideology. While the film explicitly engages with gender scripts, particularly masculinity, and plays with the psychoanalytic legacy of the genre (Jason’s relationship with his mother is foregrounded), the film trades in a class ideology which is equally visible and persuasive.
The film’s lengthy opening sequence introduces five characters who are camping in the area of Crystal Lake Campground and who ultimately meet their demise at the hands of Jason (with the exception of Whitney [Amanda Righetti], who is taken prisoner). The narrative reasoning for their camping in the area is so that two of the men can steal as much marijuana as they can carry from a field. As such, their endangerment is the result of their greed, their drive for class advancement; the scenes of horror enforce this dynamic. Wandering into the field to relieve himself, Wade (Jonathan Sadowski) discovers the marijuana field and has an almost orgasmic reaction as he handles it and sniffs it; his earlier discussion of their potential to get rich from the marijuana suggests his excitement is entirely economic. Wade is killed by Jason shortly after his discovery and his partner in crime, Richie (Ben Feldman), is likewise murdered immediately after he too discovers the marijuana. Richie’s joy of stumbling onto the marijuana is interrupted by his immediate terror of finding Wade’s body, connecting their economic plans with death. Richie flees upon discovering Wade’s body only to find his abandoned girlfriend being burned alive just before he steps into a bear trap. These circumstances oppose those of Mike (Nick Mennell) and Whitney who trespass into Jason’s cabin, where the atmosphere of squalor creates a false sense of suspense as Jason murders the rest of their group. The wretchedness of Jason’s poverty is juxtaposed with the carnage he left behind at the campsite and marijuana fields. While Jason returns to his house and murders Mike, the opening introduces a discourse on class — particularly on class passing — which is reinforced in the film’s subsequent narrative. Rather than positioning consumptive activity as a source of danger and suspense, the film’s opening punishes those looking for a quick payment, not unlike the relationship between filmic gangsters and capitalism as described by Robert Warshow and expanded upon by countless others. Jason is not merely a representative of poverty murdering those with wealth, but a figure who targets those who fetishize their consumption and aspire for social mobility.

The subsequent group of teens are presented as obnoxious as they are wealthy. Introduced as they arrive at a gas station in a Cadillac Escalade, they retreat to alpha male Trent’s (Travis Van Winkle) swank cabin where they immediately complain about the lack of cell service, an apt reduction of the characters’ priorities as much as it is blatant foreshadowing (Fig. 6). Roche’s claims that remakes have largely abandoned the political radicalism of the original slasher cycle may apply somewhat to the narratives of this particular failed cycle, but the mise-en-scène, particularly the set direction, of the films is a political formation in itself.

The group spends the night playing drinking games and smoking marijuana, a symbol of economic opportunity in the opening sequence that transforms into a sign of leisure class prosperity. The meaning-laden aspect of marijuana appears tangentially when a man who is interviewed by Whitney’s investigating brother, Clay (Jared Padalecki), offers to sell to him and then is immediately killed by Jason in a sequence all but entirely devoid of suspense. Superficially, the frequent use of marijuana by Jason’s victims prior to his acts of murder may be confused as being akin to all the leisure and promiscuous activities which are routinely punished throughout the film (and the slasher film sub-genre of horror as a whole). In the opening sequence, Richie and his girlfriend are having sex in their tent before he wanders into the woods to find both marijuana and Wade’s body. Likewise, two of Trent’s guests, Chelsea (Willa Ford) and Nolan (Ryan Hansen), meet their end in a ludicrous topless wake-boarding scene, a moment which obscures the aspects of leisure with unambiguous promiscuity and sexual consumption. Yet, the death of another of Trent’s invitees, Chewie (Aaron Yoo), illustrates how intricately class is related to terror and, ultimately, death. Chewie is sent to Trent’s shed after he breaks a family heirloom and is tasked with fixing it. Arriving in the shed, Chewie rants about how the shed is as big as a house before raiding Trent’s family’s alcohol stash, sniffing it (like Wade and the marijuana) and commenting that it

Fig. 6 | A high-angle shot, nearly giving a bird’s eye view, once again shows the characters’ lack of power in Friday the 13th, 00:29:16. The camera does not adopt the killer’s point of view, but opts to show the luridness of ostentatious wealth. Paramount Pictures, 2009.
While the film explicitly engages with gender scripts, particularly masculinity, and plays with the psychoanalytic legacy of the genre (Jason's relationship with his mother is foregrounded), the film trades in a class ideology which is equally visible and persuasive.

“just smells like money” before meeting his demise. This sequence of horror demands that leisure and consumption cannot be severed from class, particularly in how class is emphasized immediately prior to a character’s demise at Jason’s hand. In fairness, the suspenseful sequences in the film’s climax fail to evoke any ideological consequences: Lawrence’s (Arlen Escarpeta) failed rescue of Chewy, Jason’s quick dispensing of Bree (Julianna Guill), a cop is brutally murdered as soon as he arrives, and in the finale Trent, Clay, Jenna (Danielle Panabaker), and Whitney combat Jason – Trent failing to survive – in a capacity more akin to action fare than the suspense of the horror genre. Nevertheless, while the frenzied climax of the film jettisons what had been a rather cohesive - if tangential - ideological commentary on leisure and class ambition, the failed film accentuates how these features are ubiquitous, despite not being as enticing as the palpable psychoanalytic and gender politics that are often the basis of scholarly enquiry in horror.

Prom Night (2008) retains the prom as the setting for murderous debauchery but alters the setup of its original significantly, replacing the victim’s cover-up of a crime with a troubled history involving a psychotic teacher (Fig. 8). This change removes any culpability on the killer’s targets and somewhat depoliticizes the film in the manner Roche laments with the iconic slasher cycle. Moreover, the mise-en-scène of the remake departs dramatically from its source material. Like Friday the 13th, Prom Night’s killer, Richard Fenton (Johnathon Schaech), is disclosed to the audience early in the film and much of the narrative follows his perspective (a rather bizarre narrative choice given that he conjures no sympathy nor is he an iconic figure). Analytically, Prom Night presents a challenge as so much of the film consists of what could only uncontrovertibly be considered narrative filler: the drive to the prom, numerous dance interludes while at the prom, and a plentiful reserve of teen romance melodrama. In part, the characters’ obsession with the prom lends itself to a class analysis but linking this is to a broader class narrative is a quixotic endeavor; beyond the most superficial engagement with gender scripts, Prom Night’s politics are arguably absent beyond its discourse on consumption. Importantly, the form of the suspense sequences constantly engages with consumption and luxury. Fenton’s murders almost always take place in the confines of luxurious hotel suites or final girl Donna’s (Brittany Snow) enormous family house, creating an aesthetic contrast of the ugliness of murder with the spectacle of luxury which is commiserate with its ideological relationship (Fig. 7).

The beauty and intrinsic wealth of Donna’s coastal town, her massive house, her dress, hair and corsage, and the limo they take to prom, the extravagance of which demands the audience’s suspension of disbelief, are all fetishized. This fetishization is akin to how the genre fetishizes the killings, but Prom Night relinquishes such fetishization in favor of quick, often off-camera, murders (at least partially the result of its PG-13 rating) which amount to a film obsessed with luxury but without a tangible ideological position. The murders in the original film take place in various locations within the high school hosting the prom; as such, the remake advances a more salient view on bourgeois consumption. Unlike Newitz’s theory that monsters or killers are the result of capitalist alienation, it is as much the false needs and consumptive desires of the victims which define the genre’s relationship with capitalism and class.

CONCLUSION: THE MONSTER AS CONSUMER AND CAPITALIST

When Robin Wood describes repression as what makes us into the “monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists”(71), he is interpreting the horror’s monsters as a vehicle which challenges that state of normality. The inevitability of the return of the monster (in sequels, but also in the reboots Wood all but anticipates) suggests that what is repressed is only a temporary state: confronting the repressed is an iterative process much the same as films sequels and genre cycles. Yet, Wood avoids how the monster often embodies the very state that repression
amounts to; that is to say, the monster is equal to being the “monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalist” as it is to being the manifestation of the repressed. Sure, Jason’s poverty and his relationship with his mother exemplifies Wood’s view of horror films as allowing the audience to explore their repressed desires and fears only to welcome their ultimate narrative suppression. Those features of his being, as well as his masked appearance, are intended to be terrifying, but the ideology of Jason’s horror extends beyond his aberrant appearance and behaviour and includes the context of his murders, which in turn encapsulate the horror of bourgeois, patriarchal capitalism. Likewise, the specter of bourgeois consumption is the true horror that plagues Jill in When a Stranger Calls. The killer at once provides the viewer a confrontation with what is repressed (violence, sex acts, grotesqueness, squalor), but also alternates between combining these features with hegemonic capitalist ideals or, at the least, includes those features in the form of its horror and in the passive indictment of his victims; the audience is left to be terrified of what we are: the killer’s rationale for killing no different than his victim’s for living.

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**Fig. 7** | The luxurious hotel suite, the site of several characters’ murders, is frequently filmed at a distance so that the characters are captured in symmetrical long shots that draws attention to the opulence in Prom Night, 00:29:17. Sony Pictures, 2008.

**Fig. 8** | The most memorable setting of the original Prom Night is the abandoned building, often framed at acute angles to complement its dilapidation, in which a childhood tragedy takes place, 00:00:28. Simcom Productions, 1980.

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**WORKS CITED**


Friday the 13th. Directed by Marcus Nispel, Paramount Pictures, 2009.


