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An analysis of the psychology behind the appeal
of aggressive behaviour and gore as entertainment in relation
to the splatter genre; taking the work of Herschell Gordon Lewis
as a basis for the analysis.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Art History and Design
and Complementary Studies, in candidacy for the Bachelor of Design
in Visual Communications.

by

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March 1991

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my special thanks and appreciation to Gerry Walker of The National College of Art and Design, who gave generously of his time and whose whose insight and tuition proved invaluable.

Grateful thanks the staff of West Coast Videos, West Cullum Ave, Chicago, Illinois, for their help in providing much of the hard - to - find visual material required for this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

With the exception of certain rodents, no other vertebrate habitually destroys members of its own species. No other animal takes positive pleasure in the exercise of cruelty upon another of its own kind. The extremes of 'brutal' behaviour are confined to man; and there is no parallel in nature to our savage treatment of each other. Although we may recoil in horror when we read in newspapers of the atrocities committed by man upon man, we know in our hearts that each one of us harbours within himself those same impulses which lead to murder, to torture and to war.
(Storr, 1968, p.9)

In 1964, director Herschell Gordon Lewis came to produce a sales device for his films, which otherwise had all the elements which contributed to them being termed 'bad movies'. What sold these films was their depiction of aggressive behaviour and gore, and many of them were a big success.

Gore and aggressive behaviour as entertainment is not a new phenomenon in man's history. What concerns this analysis is the psychology behind the appeal of aggressive behaviour and gore as entertainment. The work of Herschell Gordon Lewis will feature only as a basis for this analysis by giving examples of how gore and aggressive behaviour is featured in the splatter genre. I will be concentrating on Herschell Gordon Lewis's *The Wizard of Gore* which will lead as a basis for my analysis on the appeal of gore.

This analysis will look at aggression and its roots in order to establish its nature and in turn analyse audience psychology in respect to different categories of response from the human mind to the appeal of aggressive behaviour and gore.

Finally I will cover the issues of controversy and censorship laws relating to this type of genre and in doing so determine the directions which this genre may be forced to follow.

Chapter 1.

The Splatter Genre

The splatter movie is a wildly demented sub-genre of the horror film. They aim not necessarily to scare audiences or drive them off the edges of their seats in suspense, but mortify them with scenes of explicit gore. In splatter movies mutilation and decapitation are in many cases the only message of this genre.

Plots are openly derivative or non-existent, gore not drama is the main attraction and their minimal plots are only a method of getting from one gory episode to the next. In the pursuit of perfect gore, splatter movies also dispense with any kind of plausibility and minor details in particular are seldom even considered. Splatter movies are not concerned with logic or consistency, their aim primarily is to astonish us with the perfection of their gory special effects.

The era of the 1960's to early in relation to the splatter movie is largely neglected by the film-criticism establishment. Most splatter movies test the limits of contemporary middle class cultural acceptability mainly because they do not meet certain 'standards' utilised in evaluating direction, acting, dialogue, sets, continuity and technical cinematography. Many of these films are overtly low-class in content and art direction, but then again, splatter movies are about making money and not about winning Oscars.

The value of these low-budget films is that they can be transcendent expressions of a single person's individual vision and quirky individuality. Splatter movies after the 1970's lost the low-budget individual touch and in its place a chain of command now regulates each step of production, with no one person allowed a free rein. Gone are the days of unfettered creativity by directors such as Herschell Gordon Lewis, and in its place meetings with layers, accountants and corporate boards- this has now become the stuff that Hollywood films are now made of.

Chapter 2.

Herschell Gordon Lewis:
A Pioneer in the World of Gore.

Herschell Gordon Lewis is often referred to as the 'Godfather of Gore'. This Chicago based independent producer/director holds a prominent position as the man who brought the splatter movie into full being - literally he was the first. Before Lewis became involved in the splatter movie business, splatter movies had but inched toward becoming a full blown film genre. (Fig 1.)

Lewis began his career in film in the late 1950's and as a previous owner of a chain of movie theatres and an advertising agency he had good foundations for his new career. Together with partner Dave Friedman he formed Mid - Continent Films and in 1960 produced his first low budget feature film, *The Prime Time* (of which prints no longer exist). His second venture, *Living Venus* (1961) deals with a 'girlie magazine' publisher patterned after *Playboy's* Hugh Hefner, and was likewise unsuccessful. After making his second movie he came to realise that if he was to survive in the film-making business and if he was to compete with Hollywood's bigger budgeted, classier and far more professional looking productions, then he would have to develop some kind of gimmick that would pull audiences in - something they could not get elsewhere, even from Hollywood. Nude films became Lewis' new gimmick, with *Lucky Pierre* (1961) as his first. Shot in four days with Dave Friedman acting as producer and soundman, and Lewis as writer - director and cameraman, the film starred a local Chicago comedian, Billy Falbo along with six ugly and very obese girls. When the film earned back its costs, Lewis and his partner knew they were on the right track. They abandoned the idea of making serious films and instead became makers of exploitation films.

Natures Playmates (1962), *Daughters of the Sun* (1962), *B-O-I-N-N-G!* (1962), and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (1963), followed in quick succession, but in 1963 the tame nudity which he had been using to sell his films, had begun to creep into Hollywood. Lewis and Friedman quickly perceived that a relaxation of censorship laws toward sex and nudity on the screen would soon deprive them of their competitive edge. Cued not only by the success of Hammer's horror productions and of Hitchcock's *Psycho* but by his own marketing instincts, Lewis decided to move in an entirely different direction - he replaced nudity and sex with gore.

In 1963 Lewis produced, directed, photographed and scored his first splatter movie. Filmed in only nine days on location in Miami for well under \$70,000. *Blood Feast* (1963), (Fig 2.) affirmed that he had taken the right path with his career. *Blood Feast* holds a distinction, however dubious, of being cinema's first fully fledged splatter movie.

The plot of *Blood Feast* touches on that of Hammer's Frankenstein films by dealing

with the revivacation of a long - dead Egyptian princess by a lunatic who thinks he is a sort of modern Dr. Frankenstein. Lewis's madman collects the pieces of anatomy that he needs; not from the morgue or graveyard but from a number of young women who are still very much alive. In medium shot and without editing for the most part, it is revealed how to rip a girl's tongue out of her head. Another vivid scene shows a girl's brains being torn out. The film continues with the ripping of limbs and the scooping out of internal organs along with other gruesome mutilations of young girls throughout. (Fig 3.)

As Lewis intended, *Blood Feast* was a mindless, virtually plotless but high - spirited orgy of gore for gore's sake. Upon it's initial release, *Blood Feast* managed to gain much attention as it's special effects had never been seen before in commercial feature films. Although critically condemned, *Blood Feast* was a huge success for Lewis.

In 1964 Lewis released *2000 Maniacs* (Fig. 4.), which had a bigger budget and was a more serious effort on Lewis's part. *2000 Maniacs* tells of a Southern town ravaged by Yankee troops during Civil War that claims it's revenge a hundred years later when it's citizens kill and mutilate a group of visiting Northern tourists. Here the basic plot deals with revenge that breaks the barriers of time; an excellent uncomplicated base for many mindless scenes of mutilation. (Fig. 5,6,7) With *200 Maniacs*, Lewis drew inspiration from Rod Serling's television series *The Twilight Zone*, in the way he blended a science fiction theme with a supernatural one.

In promoting *2000 Maniacs*, Lewis wrote a novelization of his screenplay which he published to tie in with the films release. The public did not respond to *2000 Maniacs* to the extent they did to *Blood Feast*. For *Blood Feast*, Lewis used the sales device of giving people 'sick bags' in connection with the film, which drew curiosity in people as they were passing cinemas.

It was not until 1968 and the release of *She - Devils on Wheels*, (Fig. 8.) that Lewis had a box office hit with his depictions of gore. *She - Devils on Wheels* seemed quite out of character in relation to other splatter movies as this movie involves an all - girl gang of mototcyclists who decapitate and mutilate men only. (Fig. 9, 10.)

Due to budgetry limitations, Lewis was frequently forced to shoot many of his sequences silently, adding music or voluminous quantities of narration later to cover the lack of sound. Lighting for night scenes was often accomplished using



Fig 1. Herschell Gordon Lewis



Fig. 2. A girl's brains have been torn out in *Blood Feast*.

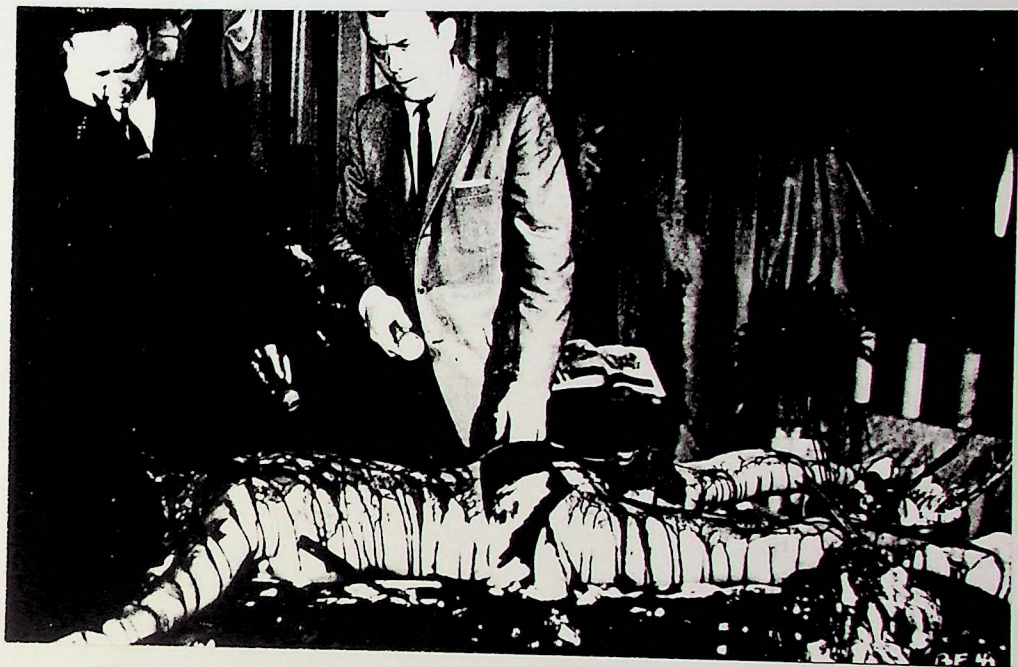


Fig. 3. The remains of a victim in *Blood Feast*.

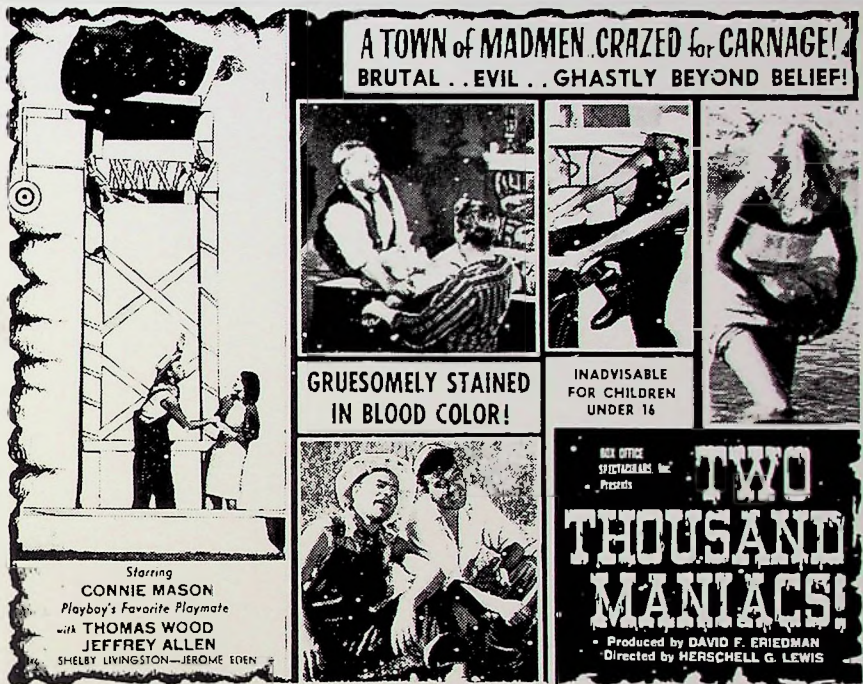


Fig. 4. The original poster advertising *2000 Maniacs*.



Fig. 5,6,7. Typical mutilation scenes from *2000 Maniacs*

**GUTS AS HARD AS THE
STEEL OF THEIR "HOGS"!**

SHE-DEVILS ON WHEELS

Starring

BETTY CONNELL
NANCY LEE NOBLE



In Blinding Color!

A MAYFLOWER PICTURES, INC., PRODUCTION

Fig. 8. The original poster advertising *She - Devils on Wheels*.



Fig. 9 & 10. Typical scenes from *She - Devils on Wheels*

one or possibly two floodlights. He was seldom able use any exciting camera movements and often sound effects that were used were post - synchronized onto the track later and were occasionally over - amplified, sometimes a sound effect was even left out. *Monster - A - Go - Go* (1965) bears a good example of this, where at one point an army soldier scrambles to answer a phone which is not even ringing. *Monster - A - Go - Go* stands as Lewis's big failure in gore cinema, as at on stage does it attempt to lift itself out of the realms of banality.

The quality of acting in Lewis's films is very poor; even Lewis was known to admit that solid acting was not one of the hallmarks of his work, as his casts were most often made up of friends, relatives, ex - Playboy bunnies, Playmates - of - the - Month and other non - professionals. Lewis himself even appears in a featured role in *A Taste of Blood* (1967). The simple fact that he made his films so cheaply, lends to an incredible amount of physical realism. Lewis's films appear more outrageous than either shocking or offensive, as Lewis imbues his films with an offbeat sense of the absurd; serving up dialogue that is intentionally ridiculous and situations that are so excessive in their bloodthirstiness that they seem too ridiculous. This sense of the absurd seems to diffuse these films of their psychological grimness, turning them into exercises in outrageousness and absurdity. John Mc Carthy, the author of *The Amazing Herschell Gordon Lewis and His World of Exploitation Films*, puts Lewis needlessly on a pedestal but believes:

'If it weren't for the sense of their own absurdity, Lewis's films would be little more than Nazi death camp films re - staged as entertainment'.

(Mc Carthy, 1984, p.53)

The next chapter will look deeper into a statement such as this one; as to the psychology behind why films which resemble Nazi death camp films provide audiences with entertainment. Since it has been established as to what the work of Herschell Gordon Lewis and the splatter scene as a whole incorporates, it is now important to concentrate on one of his films in order to provide a typical splatter movie for a basis for my analysis of the appeal of aggressive behaviour and gore as entertainment.

Lewis's film *The Wizard of Gore* (1968), satisfies all the criteria of a pure splatter movie. *The Wizard of Gore* defies all notions of logic, reason and restraint but stops at nothing to trap our attention with numerous horrific mutilations.

To synopsise the story, Montag is a magician whose ghastly speciality is the

violent dismemberment of female volunteers from the audience - sawing one in half with a chainsaw, hammering a railroad spike through the skull of another, blasting through another's thorax with an industrial press punch and finally forcing two more to swallow swords. Leaving the stage apparently intact, his volunteers always suffer delayed reactions after leaving the theatre - as in that Montag's illusions that he performs on stage become fatal realities.

In the audience is Sherry Carson, hostess to a daytime show, 'Housewives' Coffeebreak' and her sportswriter boyfriend, Jack. Sherry is naturally amazed by Montag's stage illusions, while Jack remains skeptical and unimpressed. After leaving the theatre, still arguing over Montag's plausibility, they come across a crowd gathering around a restaurant - a woman had just collapsed in a booth, her intestines spilling out onto the floor. The corpse's dangling hand brushes against Sherry, staining her hand with blood.

Later, Sherry returns to the theatre hoping to persuade Montag to appear on her show. At first he hastily refuses, but when he sees the bloodstain mysteriously re - appear on her hand, he relents. Attracted by the latest newspaper heading 'Psyco Murder in Restaurant', Jack recognises the victim as the woman Montag sawed in half with his chainsaw, and goes to the police with his suspicions. The police, unimaginative and conservative are of no help preventing Montag's subsequent volunteers meeting similar fates. Meanwhile for unexplained reasons Montag has been stealing the corpses of his victims and dumping them down a laundry chute which appears to be in a deserted cemetery.

When Montag appears on Sherry's T.V. show, he hypnotises not only those in the studio but everyone viewing the show!. Wisely Jack has averted his gaze - thus escaping being hypnotised. Frozen in trance, all of the audience within transmitter range of the studio develop the same bloody stain on their hands as the girl who died in the restaurant had. Montag's final illusion is revealed to be the immolation of his entire audience, then he proceeds to lead Sherry, the studio crew and all the viewers to their deaths in a flaming furnace. At the last instance, Jack bursts in to the studio and pushes Montag into the flames, seemingly breaking his evil spell.

As the film ends, Jack and Sherry are wondering just how Montag could have performed such hideous deeds, suddenly Jack peels off his mask, revealing himself to be Montag and proceeds to tear into Sherry with his bare hands. She however laughs in his face and announces to him that it was her illusion all along and transports him back to the beginning of the film, fating him to 'start his little charade all over again.....'.

The following chapter deals with mutilations such as the ones depicted in *The Wizard*

of Gore, in respect to the roots of their entertainment value in relation to content.

Chapter 3.

Entertainment and the Splatter Genre.

The act of viewing a movie enlists the individual into a symbiotic relationship with the movie itself, founded on the individual's willing suspension of disbelief. A 'good' movie is identified with verisimilitude - if we do not 'believe' then the movie was 'bad'. Bad movies are commonly qualified by one or more of the following components:

- 1) an actual element or elements which conflicts with the belief parameters of its audience.
- 2) a noticeable lack of funds.
- 3) 'bad' acting.

In reference to these criteria, *The Wizard of Gore*, among many, is therefore classified as a 'bad' movie. Mark Spainhower states that :

' What different groups or individuals believe to be 'true' always varies widely, but all film audiences want to believe in the movie they have come to see. When an audience is presented with a film outside the boundaries of their 'logic', the relationship between film and audience dissolves.' (Spainhower, 1986, p.175)

Splatter movies and in particular Lewis's *The Wizard of Gore* dispenses with all grips on reality and any type of plausibility. It is noticeably low - budget and contains ample displays of bad acting. So why therefore was there not a breakdown of the symbiotic relationship between audience and film as Mark Spainhower suggests?. The answer simply is that the audience did not originally go to see *The Wizard of Gore* for its plot, acting or drama content, but for its explicit depictions of mutilations and gore.

To gain an insight into the appeal of gore as entertainment we must first look at the relevant motives behind aggression and destructive behaviour. Since the entertainment value and appeal of gore changes from person to person, the analysis of a whole audience would therefore become a generalization; it is important to first state the nature of aggressive acts in the history of man's evolution, and later in *The Wizard of Gore* and in turn analyse audiences' psychology in respect to different categories of response from the human mind.

The first category of people who gain pleasure from the typical splatter movie - with which we can dispense with at an early stage, are those who basically enjoy

the technical endeavour of the special effects. Many of these people follow splatter movies in order to see one movies' special effects out - doing the latters and find the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis crude and the quality of his special effects deficient, absent are the sophisticated latex prosthetics of Tom Savini or Dick Smith, which they would prefer. Often the work of these two special effects masters appear slick and facile beside Lewis's fondness for portraying victims organs mangled with bare hands shown without clever editing and efficient camera work. The other categories of people gain pleasure from splatter movies on a deeper psychological level.

There is considerable dispute as to whether aggression is an inborn, instinctive drive, which, like the sexual instinct seeks spontaneous expression, or whether on the contrary, it is merely a response to adverse external circumstances and not instinctive at all. When Sigmund Freud began his research into the human mind towards the close of the Nineteenth Century, he paid little attention to aggression. Neither the word 'aggression' nor the word 'sadism' occur in the index to the *Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900 and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905, as Freud originally regarded aggression as a part - component of the sexual instinct, (as Freud was inclined to attribute neurotic disturbances exclusively to disorders of sexual development and to regard sex as the only prime mover of human conduct.) Freud eventually began to discover that perhaps aggression could exist away from the sexual instinct:

The sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness - a desire to subjugate; the biological significance seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing. Thus sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated, and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position.' (Freud, 1949, p.36)

The Wizard of Gore has strong sadistic elements which do not engage the libido as the driving force for the cruelty depicted, though as each shot delivers particular psychological stimuli; the 'seedy' atmosphere envelops many scenes (mainly due to low - budget filmmaking) can sub - consciously leave the audience in the belief of the presence of a strong sexually sadistic element.

Of the second category of people who gain pleasure and entertainment from the depiction of gore, a division can be made:

- a) those who gain pleasure on a basis of *sexually sadistic* elements which they draw from a movie or of which a movie contains.
- b) those who gain pleasure on a basis of *non - sexually based sadistic* elements which a movie contains.

First I will deal with category (a).

When anger is aroused in mammals, there is an increase in pulse rate and blood pressure, together with an increase in the peripheral circulation of the blood, and a rise in the level of blood glucose. The rate of breathing is accelerated and the muscles of the thorax and limbs become more tensely contracted and less liable to fatigue. The hypothalamus region of the brain which co - ordinates emotional responses and is under involuntary control is brought into action by the stimulus of threat, releases adrenaline, nor - adrenaline, cortisone and other hormones from adrenal glands. With Lewis's *The Wizard of Gore*, Montag's illusions are shown in a series of jump - cuts, alternating between two distinctly separate realities - the scene of the victim placidly enduring assault as though in trance, juxtaposed with the sight of the victim becoming gore. Such scenes in this film are of a very intense nature, and can put the viewer in the place of Montag - where one will find an increase in pulse rate and so on. Here, the fact that the state of the body in sexual arousal and in aggressive arousal are extremely similar, gives some insight into the feeling of well - being experienced when one has become 'involved' in a scene such as when Jack (Montag) disembowels Sherry with his bare hands.

There are two concepts of the nature of Sadism, sometimes used separately, sometimes in combination. One concept is expressed in the term 'algolagnia' (algos, 'pain' ; lagnia, 'lust') coined by von Schrent Notzing at the beginning of the century. In this concept the essence of Sadism is seen in the desire to inflict pain, regardless of any particular sexual involvement.
(Fromm, 1973, p.374)

Category (a) combines algos and lagnia. Category (b) deals more intensely with algos.

Taking the same scene between Jack and Sherry, I will now look at the latter category: those who gain pleasure and entertainment purely non - sexually based sadistic elements.

To modern man the shedding of blood appears to be nothing but destructiveness, but with a concept of archaic history there may well be another conclusion. By shedding ones own blood or the blood of another, one feels in touch with the life force and this in itself can be an intoxicating experience. Deeply buried archaic experiences that often appear to the modern observer as proof of mans innate destructive acts, with closer analysis can show that while they result in destructiveness, their motivation is not the passion to destroy. One example is the passion to spill blood, often called blood lust. To shed a persons blood emans to kill them, so therefore both are synonymous. In an interview between Boyd Rice and Herschell Gordon Lewis, Rice asked if Lewis believed the public is bloodthirsty?

'More and more, yes. We are delving.....I think society is going back to the jungle. Everybody has a gun. It's macho to wound somebody and to carve somebody.....We have no regard for our fellow man, we are statistics.'
(Lewis, 1985)

Lewis's answer seems shallow in respect to this film genre, more fitting perhaps for a modern 'cops and robbers' thriller. Blood has always been equated with life and the life force and is one of the three sacred substances which emanate from the human body. In ancient Rome bloodletting was almost a national pastime. Blood is a symbol which everybody understands and in that there is power. In *The Wizard of Gore*, Montag declares during a stage performance:

'Torture and terror have always fascinated mankind.....perhaps what made your predecessors see the sadism of the Inquisition and the gore of the gladiators is the same thing that makes you stare at bloody highway accidents.....and thrill to the terror of death in the bullring.....'

Lewis has always been obliging in respect to what audiences want. The above quotation from Montag seems to be more of what motivated Lewis in the creativity behind his movies, as he knew how to sell gore to audiences.

Even in the past, the use of blood for religious reasons is well known. The priests of Hebrew temples spread blood from slaughtered animals as part of a service; the Aztec priests offered their Gods the palpitating hearts of their victims

and in many ritual customs, brotherhood is confirmed symbolically by mixing together the blood of the persons involved. Since blood is the 'juice of life', drawing blood is experienced in many instances as enhancing one's own life energy.

There are forms of ecstasis in which hate and destruction are the centre of the experience. One example of a self-induced can be seen with the trance-producing ceremonies in Bali. They are particularly interesting in relation to the phenomena of aggression because in one ceremonial dance, the participants use special kinds of daggers with which they stab themselves, for to be in this trance-like state was the highest accomplishment of the ritual. This rage is not directed toward an enemy or provided by any external threatening stimuli. It aims itself at a trance-like state which in this case is organised around an all pervasive feeling of rage, thus arriving at the experience of ecstasis (naturally there are other motives and ritualistic events, but here relevance to human aggression and the topic of ecstasis are my primary concern.) In this case the scene between Jack and Sherry provides category (b), who revel in the disembowelment as a trance-inducing scene. They view it in respect to controlling another human being and inflicting pain on the same.

'Sadism is one of the answers to the problem of being born human when better ones are not attainable. The experience of absolute control over another human being creates the illusion of transcending the limitations of human existence, particularly for one whose real life is deprived of productivity and joy.

(Fromm, 1973, p.386)

Such movies as *The Wizard of Gore* provide a catharsis for those who are actively seeking a vicarious release for pent up hostilities, where in this present social environment it is not socially acceptable to display intense aggression or overly violent acts.

'There is considerable evidence to be found from the study of animal behaviour which suggests that if an animal is prevented from engaging in an aggressive activity which is normal to it, it will seek out substitute stimuli to release its aggression, just as a man who is deprived of women will turn to other men or fantasy to release his sexuality' (Storr, 1968, p.34)

I am not stating that aggression and aggressive behaviour in relation to gore is inborn in man, but that over the centuries man has become accustomed to aggressive displays for various reasons already stated, and man suffering from the

awareness of his own powerlessness and inadequacy in society can try to overcome this by achieving escapism in the form of a trance - like state of ecstasy. To be involved in the tearing of intestines with bare hands, is an experience (or in the case of the viewer, 'second - hand' experience) may be said to be the natural prototype of complete concentration and momentary ecstasy.

The last category are those who are desensitized by viewing gore movies to scenes of real carnage and violence. The mass carnage and destruction which followed the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 should have driven away the desire to see similar carnage displayed on the screen, but instead the opposite happened. In the late 1950's and early 1960's extra gore had to be added to movies which were being exported exclusively to Japan. The Japanese were using these movies to take the excessive horror out of the real images of destruction, giving them qualities of fantasy so they could become more palatable. Therefore today, possibly scenes of Montag's mutilations could ease the terror and realism of images of world violence which can be seen daily on newscasts, as never before have we had such accessibility to death and destruction.

Chapter 4.

Controversy, Censorship and
the Future of the Industry.

Naturally splatter movies have always been somewhat controversial due to their explicit gore content as well as their frequent reveling in morbid and even taboo themes. Herschell Gordon Lewis's *The Wizard of Gore* was found by the critics to be purely exploitative in it's mayhem, and worse still, extremely vicious in it's attitude toward women.

The Chicago Tribune film critic Gene Siskel together with the Pulitzer Prize winning critic Roger Ebert directed their anger at splatter cinema not just in respect to the basic blood and gore content, but more significantly at it's virulent attitude toward independent women. Splatter movies, they believe, aim most of their violence at female characters who are sexually liberated and who act independently of men. Those female characters who are chaste and chaste and rather more independent on men, Siskel and Ebert have maintained that this group of women come through relatively unscathed. They believe that there is an underlying message here and that it is not a very healthy one. Siskel and Ebert always maintained the grudge that when these independent women are finally 'dealt with' the camera often assumes the position and point of view of the pathological killer, thus placing the viewers in the shoes of the killer.

On a superficial level what they are saying is true but has more relevance to modern day splatter movies such as Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th*. *The Wizard of Gore* or *Blood Feast* seen in isolation to Herschell Gordon Lewis's other films would lead one to believe that Lewis holds a virulent attitude towards independent women but *She Devils on Wheels* (Fig 11.) shows a gang of female motorcyclists who decapitate and mutilate men only. Lewis did not believe totally in the use of females as victims but alternated between the sexes and he can not be referred to as a mysogynist in any way. His preoccupation lay with the depiction of gore and not with the gender of his victims.

Indiscriminating in their dislike, Siskel and Ebert are very critical of the whole splatter genre which they seem to look at as a disturbing new trend, as I have already established, the whole portrayal of gore as entertainment is far from a recent arrival.

What many critics have seemed to overlook is the fact that the anti - feminist viewpoint which they believe is rampant in this particular genre is, as far as I can see, non - existant, as splatter movies are not 'about' anti - feminism but concentrate alone on special effects and the graphic depiction of gore. They do not possess a dark, unhealthy underlying message in reference to changing attitudes toward women in society. Their plots are rarely new or inventive, as

creativity is reserved for special effects, and the plot of 'damsel in distress' is as old as the art of storytelling itself. This plot device is indispensable as gore must always have a victim. Finding the promotion of sexism in this genre is due to misreading, as everything, apart from the gore content is to a large degree superficial and in most cases these movies are empty-headed.

Another fear that critics harbour about splatter movies is that they might eventually seduce audiences into a craving for the real thing - snuff movies. Those who would prefer real murders on screen are of the more disaffected members of society and as splatter movies and snuff movies are not on a par on a psychological level, it is not likely that interest would be displayed in both. It is more likely that pornographic movies would lead a viewer into an interest in snuff movies.

Will splatter movies dwindle naturally in their popularity, be choked by censors and censorship laws or do they have a future. With renewed efforts on the part of the censors to toughen screen restrictions on graphic violence and gore, splatter movies may be faced with two paths which it can follow.

First the splatter movie could move underground and become less available to large audiences, due to its absence in cinemas, though movies would be available for private viewing through video and satellite channels. Its second option is in it altering its shape by absorbing additional genres into collective cinematic genre in order to keep regenerating itself - borrowing plots to disguise itself by keeping the essence of gore and special effects under the guise of plots of westerns and war films which can easily be used as vehicles of gore.

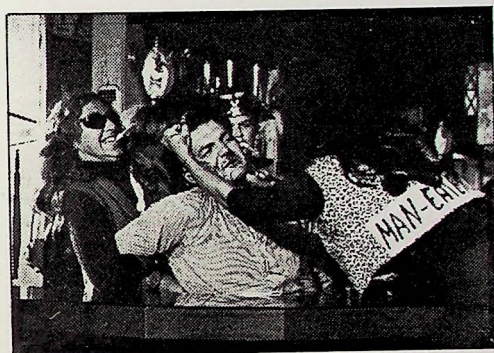


Fig. 11. An all - girl gang of motorcyclists in *She - Devils on Wheels*.

CONCLUSION

The images of gore, blood, mutilations and decapitations are very powerful ones as they touch on something inside every one of us. Whether it is in our hearts that each one of us harbours within himself, savage impulses which lead to murder, to torture and to war as Anthony Storr suggested, is a purely individual thing, of which we must look deep within ourselves to find an answer

Man will remain the only species which takes positive pleasure in the exercise of cruelty upon another of it's own kind and even though the days of bloodletting in Rome sink further into the past, somewhere in man there will always be the desire to experience the shedding of blood as a stimuli for momentary ecstasis, the complete control over another human being or for the provision of a catharsis for those seeking vicarious release for pent up hostilities. Many would reject the idea of mans desire to experience bloodletting due to living in a civilization which likes to think of itself as being far beyond the animals on an evolutionary scale.

There will always be a place for such minds like that of Herschell Gordon Lewis; as a provider of images that penetrate us deeper than just amazing us with special effects. Pure splatter cinema, the exclusive domain of the low - budget, independent and exploitation films, which to gain audiences, gave the public subjects that were not so intensely dealt with and often not even seen before in cinema, with realism that was blood - curdling.

Splatter movies lost their footing and popularity when films like Warner Bros.'s *The Exorcist* gave the genre 'respectability'. They became absorbed into Hollywood mainstream and the splatter genre has not been the same since. Herschell Gordon Lewis's *The Wizard of Gore* is French - style *Grand Guignol*, performed on an almost operatic scale, it's salient themes of pain and terror portray realism that no modern day horror movie with it's technical brilliance has been able to command so far.

Many believe that the work of Herschell Gordon Lewis and others of that era, was only a stepping stone for the development of the modern day horror movie and reject it's crudity and low - budget performances with the response that they are of 'bad taste'. The gore movie has served a purpose as a stepping stone but it is the era of Herschell Gordon Lewis that saw this genre reach it's full potential with all the aims that gore cinema is about. It was not just a stage of development, but a full blown genre upon itself - before it became perverted and taken over with technology, converted from being a stage show of gore to the present day stage show of special effects.

For good or for ill, splatter movies have had an inalterable effect on contemporary cinema by breaking the last taboo of the screen, they have changed the definition of realism in the movies forever and even for that reason alone perhaps, that we should pay heed to them.

Appendix of Movies

***Blood Feast* (1963)**

A Freidman - Lewis production (Box Office Spectulars) Colour/ 75 mins.

Producer: David F. Freidman

Director/Photographer: Herschell Gordon Lewis

Screenplay: Allison Louise Downe

Editing: Robert Sinise, Frank Romolo

Music: Herschell Gordon Lewis

Cast: Connie Mason, Thomas Wood, Mal Arnold,
Lyn Bolton, Scott H. Hall, Tony Calvert

***2000 Maniacs* (1964)**

A Freidman - Lewis production (Box Office Spectulars) Colour/ 75 mins.

Producer/Art Director: Dave F. Freidman

Director/Photographer/Writer: Herschell Gordon Lewis

Editing: Robert Sinise

Music: Larry Wellington and The Pleasant Valley Boys

Cast: Jeffery Allen, Ben Moore, Shelby Livingstone,
Vincent Santo, Gary Bakeman, Mark Douglas,
Michael Korb

***Monster - A - Go - Go* (1965)**

a.k.a. *Terror at Halfday*/B.I.&L.

Releasing Corp./B&W/70 mins.

Producer/ Additional Dialogue Writer: Sheldon Seymour (H. G. Lewis)

Director: Bill Rebane

Screenplay: Jeff Smith, Bill Rebane, Don Stanford

Photographer: Frank Pfeiffer

Cast: Phil Morton, June Travis, George Perry,

Lois Brooke, Henry Hite

***She Devils on Wheels* (1968)**

A Mayflower Production/Colour/83 mins.

Producer/Director: Herschell Gordon Lewis

Screenplay: Allison Louise Downe

Photographer: Ray Collodi

Editing: Robert Lewis, Sheldon Seymour, (H. G. Lewis)

Cast: Betty Connell, Pat Poston, Nancy Lee Nobble,

Christie Wagner, Rodney Bedell, Ruby Tuesday,

John Weyner.

***The Wizard of Gore* (1968)**

A Mayflower Production/Colour/96 mins.

Producer: Fred M. Sandy

Director: Herschell Gordon Lewis

Screenplay: Allen Kahn

Photographer/Editor: Eskandar Ameripoor

Music: Larry Wellington

Cast: Ray Sager, Judy Cler, Wayne Ratay,
Phil Laurensen, Jim Rau, John Elliot,
Don Alexander

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