

# **Remaking Controversy?**

*Three case studies of the changing reception of  
controversial films and their remakes*

by

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## **THESIS ABSTRACT**

This thesis offers an analysis of the British marketing and reviewing of three films from the 1970s which have been seen as controversial, through to their most recent DVD releases, as well as their more recent remakes, in relation to the changing public construction of cultural taste. The films are *Straw Dogs* (Peckinpah, 1971/Lurie, 2011), *Last House on the Left* (Craven, 1972/Iliadis, 2009) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974)/*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Nispel, 2003). The methodological design of the thesis is based firmly in traditions of historical reception studies, following Barbara Klinger (1994), Janet Staiger (1992, 2000) and Kate Egan (2007), and employs methods of analysis primarily drawn from Lisa Kernan (2004) and Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1998). By employing a historical reception studies approach to the material, the thesis resists the tendency to treat film remakes as inherently 'inferior' to authentic originals. The public construction of taste in relation to these films is figured in relation to Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, cultural distinction, and developments of these, such as Sarah Thornton's notion of subcultural capital (1995). Through such an analysis a discrepancy emerges between the two sorts of material under scrutiny, whereby a sense of 'the generic' is figured as either positive in marketing or negative in reviewing, suggesting difference conceptions of an imagined audience. Overwhelmingly, the remakes are positioned negatively by critics in relation to the original films and these negative appraisals are often asserted through the discourses which have rehabilitated the original films from their own negative reception during the 1970s and 1980s.

**DECLARATION**

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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**STATEMENT 1**

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where **\*correction services** have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis considers the British reception of three films that were controversial on their first release, and a consideration of the reception of their recent remakes. In particular, the thesis is concerned with the change in status of these films from controversial to mainstream, with the remakes having caused little or no controversy at all. While my thesis might not be able to uncover precisely why this is, the change in the films' reception will be traced from original film through to remake, which will serve to illuminate the differences and the continuities and connections in the reception of both sets of films. The title of this thesis refers to 'controversial films'. There is no easy or straight-forward definition of what I mean by 'controversial film' other than it is a film which has caused a degree of public controversy. Any sort of film might become controversial, be it through the depiction of violence, or sex, or any number of social vices. Controversy is often figured in relation to a broader 'real-world' context, eg. the socio-sexual debates of the first decades of the twentieth century, or the various, related, social transgressions of post-World War One USA, as depicted in classical exploitation films. As Annette Kuhn notes, films "do not reflect a 'real' world outside the text, nor even [...] any discursively constructed social formation" but rather that "films are themselves actively instrumental in discursive constructions" of particular social debates.<sup>1</sup>

The 'controversy' may stem from the public's response to the film, or through the press response, or through censorship decisions. Controversy can also arise from a group of films emerging together and sparking debate, e.g. the video nasties or the 'new brutalism' of the early 90s. The debate itself might then spark controversy in relation to particular titles, that is to say, as films are discussed in a public forum, a snowball effect may occur. Controversy is, of course, not equal – while the video nasties press campaign constituted a moral panic, discussion surrounding films such as *Reservoir Dogs* caused a sort of positive commercial outcome, boosting the films' publicity. As Annette Hill notes, the different sort of talk that might circulate around a film that discusses it as controversial – positively or negatively – can result in a film becoming "a cultural phenomenon in itself" and not just a media object.<sup>2</sup> Although films may court controversy for a variety of reasons, all three of the original case

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<sup>1</sup> Kuhn, 1988, 108

<sup>2</sup> Hill, 1997, 21

study films in this thesis became controversial due to their perceived 'extreme' content. The initial negative response to *Straw Dogs*, for example, came most prominently from the vocal press, while *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was controversial due to its outright ban by the British Board of Film Classification. These particular films came at a time in which many films were challenging the established expectations of film in the UK, alongside other titles such as *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Devils* and *Last Tango in Paris*. Stevie Simkin describes the BBFC's response, at the time, as "panicky,"<sup>3</sup> which is further reflected by the subsequent 'video nasties' controversy. *Last House on the Left* became controversial in the UK primarily via its association with the video nasties, which again was thanks to the press response to a certain set of films available unregulated on VHS. Additionally, moral campaigners, such as Mary Whitehouse, and members of Parliament such as Graham Bright, contributed to the panic around unregulated home video. The response to the three original films which comprise my case studies demonstrates an intersection between journalistic controversy and policymaker controversy.

Although I refer to these films as 'controversial' rather than as 'horror films', there is an emphasis upon the horror genre, and changing conceptions of it as a genre, in this thesis. I do not wish to suggest that 'horror' and 'controversial' might be used interchangeably, however, in the case of these three particular films, and their remakes, horror is a particularly relevant genre and context. This is particularly true when bearing in mind the broad label of the 'horror remake', which was central to the inception of this thesis. Therefore while I won't be simplistically stating that 'these are horror films', horror as a genre and a discursive construct is a looming influence over the reception of my case studies and as such it must receive due attention in this thesis.

Words such as 'controversial', 'mainstream', 'unsafe' and 'niche' appear throughout this thesis and require a degree of clarification. When starting work on this thesis the words of this sort seemed to me to come in obvious binary pairs (controversial/mainstream, unsafe/safe), but this is evidently not the case. To characterise the original films as unsafe and niche, while characterising the remakes as safe and mainstream would be to wildly misrepresent the changing cultural status of the films overall, and such binaries do not therefore offer a useful starting point. The notion of a film being perceived to be 'unsafe' in

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<sup>3</sup> Simkin, 2011, 50

the context of this thesis stems from a similar notion which I will often refer to, that of 'harm'. Although not limited to its use in censorship decisions, harm is a key concept in the decision making of the BBFC, particularly in relation to films that might be refused a certificate. Though 'harm' only became a written part of the BBFC guidelines in 1994, it has "always been at the heart of BBFC policy."<sup>4</sup> What these guidelines made plain was that the BBFC was to pay particular attention "to any harm that may be caused to potential viewers or, through their behaviour, to society,"<sup>5</sup> particularly in relation to the depiction of violent or criminal acts. The guidelines emphasise the possible harm in depictions of such "behaviour or activity likely to stimulate or encourage it."<sup>6</sup> The same rhetoric of harm is used by the press, pressure groups, politicians, etc. when identifying the subject of a moral panic, such as, for example, in the case of the video nasties in the early to mid-1980s and during the Bulger case in the early 1990s. This rhetorical use of the notion of harm relies heavily on the implication of a particular sort of viewer who might be harmed, or cause harm, after engaging with a particular film or media text. The high profile defence of the video nasties by the likes of Martin Barker<sup>7</sup> and Julian Petley,<sup>8</sup> and more broad work on the censorship of media, often hinges on the dismissal of the notion of harm as "not just false," but ranging from "the daft to the mischievous".<sup>9</sup> Films deemed unsafe or harmful then would seem to tend toward being niche texts, such as horror films or extreme cinema, but this is not always the case. Mainstream films can be deemed 'unsafe' in various ways, and 'niche' films can become mainstream over time and through shifts in reception. My own use of the word 'mainstream' is in relation to the relative availability and visibility of a film. While mainstream might be used to mean an "amalgam of corporate power, lower-middle-class conformity and prudishness"<sup>10</sup> or simply 'popular', I do not necessarily mean to imply this of my case study films. Rather, their availability and visibility – for example, in high street shops or supermarkets rather than illegally in car boot sales or magazine listings – may be considered as 'mainstream' as opposed to niche or restricted. It certainly isn't the case that all niche films have in some way been deemed unsafe or controversial. By

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<sup>4</sup> Harewood, cited in Petley, 2012, 128

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Petley, 2012, 128

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Particularly in *The Video Nasties*, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> See Petley, 1989; 1984; 1984i

<sup>9</sup> Barker & Petley, 2001, 1

<sup>10</sup> Jancovich et al., 2003, 2



analysing the reception materials of these two particular groups of films with a historical reception studies approach, any given reputation that has been associated with the films at different times and in different contexts can be interrogated. My use of the word 'unsafe' always refers to these constructed reputations that have been attached to these films at different points, rather than my own assessment of them.

I have approached these films and this sort of filmmaking from the position of being a fan of such films. I enjoy watching and actively seek out films which are generally considered horror films or controversial films. My work in this thesis is not presented specifically as the work of an aca-fan nor a scholar-fan,<sup>11</sup> however, my own position as a fan of the films that constitute my study is important to address. My position as a fan of horror films is what inspired the project, from seeing the number of remakes being produced in a short space of time. In particular, in this project I will resist my 'fan' position of inherently tending to dislike remakes of these films (though there are horror remakes that I have enjoyed). I do not wish to distance myself from this position in order to demonstrate that I might be "exempt from the domains of fan culture and/or popular culture."<sup>12</sup> Rather, the emphasis in my work is on, loosely, 'professional' writing on these films rather than my own response to them. That being said, it is crucial that I acknowledge the increasingly blurred line – if there remains a line at all – between 'fan' and 'professional', both in the context of journalistic writing on films and in academia. Very little work – either academic or journalistic - in the corpus that I examine approaches the horror remake explicitly as an object of fandom, nor as an object of anti-fandom.

This thesis will specifically consider the *British* reception context of these films. Several reasons for this stem from convenience, particularly in relation to the sourcing and accessing of materials. The primary reason relates to the existing reputation of the 1970s and 1980s as a time for very strong critical responses to films with particular content in Britain. The existing body of academic knowledge regarding censorship decisions from the early 1970s through to the video nasties provides the historical backdrop for my research. Not only will my own work consider the ways in which my original case study films were marketed and reviewed upon their earliest releases, in the midst of this history, but also the

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of these terms, see Hills, 2012, 15-17

<sup>12</sup> Hills, 2007, 33

changes and consistencies which have occurred as they've been re-released on several occasions up to the present day. The case study remakes have each emerged in a different cultural context, and provide both a point of comparison and continuity when approaching issues of taste and film culture. By utilising a case study approach, rather than a broader analysis of contemporary horror remaking, my research is able to offer an extremely detailed account of three particularly examples I believe to be important in relation to the broader cycle. The relationship between both sets of case study films is productive in approaching remakes as a broad film category. The tendency to simplistically compare and contrast different versions of a film text in public critical discourse, as well as in academic work, is prominent, and leans toward the comparison of an 'authentic' original with an inferior remake. As I have highlighted, my approach in this thesis seeks to resist this tendency, and considering the remakes as potential continuations of an original film's reception trajectory is one means to achieve this.

The arenas in which I will be seeking out the majority of my research materials are British newspapers and magazines. British newspapers might be broadly categorised into two types, broadsheets and tabloids, and aligned with either right- or left-wing politics. Tabloid newspapers, such as *The Sun*, *The Mirror*, *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail* are known for sensationalist coverage of major news items as well as an emphasis on gossip and personal scandals. In terms of politics, "tabloids are very selective in their inclusion of political [...] information," and tend toward covering such information in a "sensational fashion."<sup>13</sup> The broadsheets, such as *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, or *The Guardian*, have a stronger emphasis on political news and current affairs, although they also provide populist content as well. Although British newspapers might be categorised in this way, both broadsheets and tabloids are often owned by the same individuals or conglomerate companies, and indeed often share political affiliations. This divide also relates to the "polarized" class appeal of tabloids to lower classes and broadsheets to middle- and upper classes.<sup>14</sup> These newspapers often provide specific coverage of culture – predominantly film, music, television, and books – in supplements to the main paper, often at the weekend. Particular film critics become associated with specific publications, such as Alexander

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<sup>13</sup> Conboy, 2006, 10

<sup>14</sup> Tunstall, 1996, 12

Walker writing for the *Evening Standard*, or Peter Bradshaw writing for *The Guardian*.

Walker in particular might have been considered “one of the most widely known critics in the [UK]”,<sup>15</sup> and his reputation was in part due to his vocal part in a range of film controversies, such as his support for *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971), his dislike for *Crash* (Cronenberg, 1996), and, of course, his disgust in relation to *Straw Dogs*. Walker authored several books about cinema too, adding an additional layer of authority to his work. In terms of magazines, my main sources are widely distributed film magazines such as *Empire* and *Total Film*, as well as more niche genre magazines such as *Dark Side* or *SFX*. These magazines have a variety of different publication models – from titles that are part of a larger publication house to titles which are independently distributed. They are all titles which are, or have been, readily available to buy in high street shops, as opposed to fanzines. I write in more detail about this in chapter two.

My research is centrally focused on the British reception of American remakes of American films. An important aspect of the recent cycle of American horror remakes that will therefore be missing from my research is the key strand of American remakes of East Asian horror cinema, particularly Japanese, South Korean and Thai horror. Films such as *Ring* (‘Ringu’, Nakata, 1998), *Ju-On: The Grudge* (‘Ju-On’, Shimizu, 2002), *Dark Water* (‘Honogurai mizu no soko kara’, Nakata, 2002), *A Tale of Two Sisters* (‘Janghwa, Hongryeon’, Kim, 2003), and *Shutter* (Pisanthanakun and Wongpoom, 2004) tend to focus on supernatural elements, and in particular upon ghosts. These films are perhaps best characterised by their common images of long-haired female ghosts, a common type of supernatural entity in East Asia, but relatively unfamiliar to Western audiences, at least prior to the release of the remakes of these films. Although I identify the release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in 2003 as an important turning point in the cycle of contemporary horror remaking, the release of Gore Verbinski’s *The Ring* (2002) earlier in that same year is also important. At the height of the remake production cycle, horror remakes were as likely to be versions of East Asian horror films as they were American classics. Remakes that followed *The Ring* include *The Grudge* (Shimizu, 2004), *Dark Water* (Salles, 2005), *The Eye* (Moreu and Palud, 2008), and *Mirrors* (Aja, 2008); there have also been sequels to *The Ring* and *The Grudge*. The directors of the originals have had some involvement with these remakes, with Nakata directing the sequel

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<sup>15</sup> Malcolm, 2003

*The Ring 2* (2005) and Shimizu directing both *The Grudge* and its first sequel. Masayuki Ochiai, who directed the remake of Thai film *Shutter*, has directed several horror films in Japan. Directors of European horror cinema have also directed remakes of East Asian horror, with Palud and Moreau directing *The Eye*, having made *Them* ('Ils', 2006), and Alexandre Aja directing *Mirrors*.<sup>16</sup> The cycle of East Asian horror remakes<sup>17</sup> therefore differs in this respect from the American remakes, in terms of their directors, as many contemporary American remakes of American films tend to be directed by first-timers who have previously worked in advertising or music videos.

The tendency to remake East Asian horror films has not been as prevalent in more recent years, seemingly ending with *The Uninvited* (The Guard Brothers, 2010),<sup>18</sup> while the remakes of American classics continue to be produced, albeit not as frequently as in the preceding years. I am not including these East Asian remakes in my research simply because of the additional considerations that must be made when approaching cross-cultural remaking. These considerations, for the most part, tend to be textual, however as to date there is not much pre-existing work on the reception of horror remakes, to further consider the cross-cultural implications involved in the UK reception of American remakes of East Asian horror films would further bulk out the already large scope of this project. There is also already a strong body of work on the contemporary remaking of East Asian horror cinema, while contemporary American remakes of American horror films have been slightly less rigorously explored. Additionally, these East Asian remakes aren't of films originally made in the key horror era of the 1970s and early 1980s. Instead, focusing the project on American remakes of American films allows for an initial exploration of the reception of remakes and particularly on the potential role played by notion of taste and cultural distinction. Of the remakes of East Asian films, few of the originals have been 'controversial', either in Asia or in the USA or UK. More extreme or controversial East Asian films such as *Audition* (Miike,

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<sup>16</sup> Aja is particularly interesting, as following the success of his extremely gory French hit *Switchblade Romance* ('Haute Tension', 2003) he directed three American horror remakes, *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), *Mirrors* and *Piranha 3D* (2010).

<sup>17</sup> Heffernan refers to this as the 'J-Horror remake cycle' (2014, 62), which although reflective of the reductive way in which the films are commonly thought of, formally erases the other East Asian nations which made films that have been remade, such as South Korea or Thailand.

<sup>18</sup> *Oldboy* (Spike Lee, 2013) is a very recent example which seems quite removed from the films I've cited here as it is not a supernatural film.

1999) or *Suicide Club* (Sono, 2002) have tended not to be remade in the West, with the recent *Oldboy* (Lee, 2013) being the sole exception.

Remakes of East Asian horror films are not the only distinct 'type' of recent remake that is beyond the scope of my thesis. Although my research will be more broadly applicable than solely to my case studies, the research conducted considers a particular sort of American horror remake. Of the contemporary cycle of remaking, the films I consider represent a 'mainstream' element of it. As discussed above, first and foremost, they are not cross-cultural remakes. Further, the remakes I consider are all American productions, and specifically films which have received wide theatrical releases, distributed by major companies. Therefore remakes of other controversial films such as *I Spit on Your Grave* (Monroe, 2010), *Stalker* (Kemp, 2010)<sup>19</sup> or *Maniac* (Khalfoun, 2012) do not quite fit into this loose category of 'mainstream' horror remake as they are independent productions which mostly received festival screenings or limited theatrical releases prior to DVD release. I do not make this differentiation in order to suggest that there is a simple straightforward divide between 'mainstream' and 'independent' remakes, nor that films within those categories can be uniformly compared. Within the 'mainstream' American horror remakes there is, for example, something of a distinction between gorier films and 'PG-13'-horror. This does not necessarily translate in the same way in the UK context, with 'PG-13' rated films normally receiving a seemingly harsher 15-certificate from the BBFC (such as *Prom Night* or *Carrie*), and the 'R' equivalent of 18 being stricter still. Within the American production contexts of these films, productions aiming for a PG-13 certificate are likely to be significantly different to R-rated productions with regards to issues such as the depiction of violence and gore. Again, films which fall under the banners of 'PG-13 horror' are not likely to be based on previously controversial films, unless they significantly change the film they adapt in terms of the way in which violence is depicted and in some instances aspects of their thematic concerns.

### *The Films*

The six films that comprise my case studies are *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971), *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974),

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<sup>19</sup> A remake of *Exposé*, also known as *The House on Straw Hill* (Clarke, 1976)

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003), *Last House on the Left* (Dennis Illiadis, 2009) and *Straw Dogs* (Rod Lurie, 2011). In this section I will provide brief synopses of each film as well as overviews of their release histories. I present the plot synopses and release histories here so that adequate background about the film texts is established prior to presenting my own research findings and analysis, which entirely deals with the marketing and reviewing of these films. Additionally, by providing these synopses and histories here, I am able to tease out key issues that may be pertinent to my own exploration of their marketing and reviewing.

### *Straw Dogs (1971 / 2011)*

Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* is an adaptation of Gordon William's novel *The Siege of Trencher's Farm*. The film follows American mathematician David (Dustin Hoffman) as he moves to the familial home of his English wife, Amy (Susan George). David antagonises the local men, in particular Amy's ex-boyfriend Charlie Venner (Del Henney), and as tensions escalate the situation becomes increasingly violent. While David is tricked into going hunting, Charlie visits Amy at home and forces himself on her, and, at gunpoint, also allows one of his associates, Norman Scutt (Ken Hutchison) to rape her. Amy does not tell David of her assault, and the couple are increasingly alienated from each other. When David harbours local simpleton Henry Niles (David Warner), suspected of murdering a local girl, Venner and other local men attack his home with violent and devastating results.

*Straw Dogs* was released in British cinemas on Thursday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1971. Reviews of the film were to be found at the time in almost all of the major national newspapers and in key British film publications. Following a mixed critical reception, with the negative reviews being particularly vitriolic, thirteen newspaper film critics signed a letter to *The Times* in December of 1971, wherein they decried the BBFC's decision to pass the film at all, particularly in comparison to its refusal of a certificate for *Trash* (Warhol, 1970). The critics' letter is simply headed 'film censorship,' a heading indicative of its main concern. As Charles Barr<sup>20</sup> and Julian Petley<sup>21</sup> have argued, *Straw Dogs* acted as a catalyst here for a group of critics to position themselves as a superior group of public tastemakers and moral guardians than those appointed to be so at the BBFC. The letter describes the use of violence in *Straw*

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<sup>20</sup> Barr, 1972

<sup>21</sup> Petley, 2002

*Dogs* as “dubious in its intention, excessive in its effect and likely to contribute to the concern expressed from time to time by many critics over films which exploit the very violence which they make a show of condemning.”<sup>22</sup> This demonstrates the critics’ relying on an argument based on a discourse of presumed harm. Between 1980 and 1985, *Straw Dogs* received three home media releases, on VHS, Betamax and on Laserdisc. Following the introduction of the Video Recordings Act 1984 (VRA), the film was effectively banned, when it was rejected from receiving a video certificate in 1986.<sup>23</sup> Due to the practicalities of recalling uncertified videos, *Straw Dogs* was potentially available to rent or buy without a certificate up until March 1988, the cut off point for films being circulated which had previously been granted cinema certificates by the BBFC between 1970 and 1974.<sup>24</sup> In 1995 the British Film Institute (BFI) were given an 18 cinema rating for the pre-cut American version of the film so that they could screen the film.<sup>25</sup> According to Stevie Simkin, the BFI had submitted the pre-cut version in error, and so the version which had originally been awarded an X by the Board still remained unavailable.<sup>26</sup> Despite this error, that the BFI decided to screen the film suggests a shift in the film’s cultural reputation. While previously rejected by the critical film establishment, here an important film institution made efforts to allow the film to be seen. During this time the film is primarily positioned, in the UK, as a Peckinpah film and as a point of topical discussion regarding violence in film.<sup>27</sup>

Further submissions were made to the BBFC by home video companies, both of the American pre-cut version and the uncut version of the film, but each time the film was either denied a certificate or the company submitting it lost the rights to distribute the film. It wasn’t until 2002 that the uncut version of *Straw Dogs* was finally given an 18 certificate, following the introduction of new BBFC guidelines and extensive consultation with clinical psychologists regarding the potentially harmful nature of the film. In 2003 the film received its first television broadcast on Channel 4. To coincide with the television broadcast a lengthy documentary was put together by Mark Kermode for the channel, which was

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<sup>22</sup> Cashin et al., 1971. The “dubious in intention, excessive in its effect” element of the letter demonstrates the implicit notion of film’s potential to cause harm, as outlined earlier in the chapter, and which will emerge again throughout this thesis.

<sup>23</sup> Simkin, 2011, 56

<sup>24</sup> ‘Case Study: *Straw Dogs*’

<sup>25</sup> Simkin, 2011, 58

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the debate held at the NFT which coincided with its brief theatrical release in 1995.

broadcast on the same night. *Mantrap: Straw Dogs, The Final Cut* features extensive interviews with various cast and crew members. Following another DVD release in 2004, this time with no extra features, *Straw Dogs* was broadcast on Channel 4 again in 2008. On 24<sup>th</sup> October 2011, the film was released on DVD and Blu-ray as an 'ultimate' edition. The *Total Film* review of this release makes no mention of its initial censorship issues, other than to mention that it was once banned on video. Instead the review focusses on the film's production, and on its nihilistic attitude, attributed to Peckinpah's helming.

The remake very closely follows the narrative of the original film, though the setting is changed, necessitating some alterations in certain plot points. The story is now entirely set in the USA. David (James Marsden) is a screenwriter, who moves, with his wife Amy (Kate Bosworth), to her familial home in the American deep south, where the same confrontations with the local men, in particular Charlie (Alexander Skarsgard), escalate to a lethal conclusion. The main difference between the two films is that the remake is distinctly less ambiguous about events that take place, in particular the rape of Amy. Any previous implication that Amy might have 'enjoyed' her assault in the original film is no longer present in the remake. The film was released in the UK on November 4, 2011, on a limited number of screens, compared to other releases the same week, grossing only £41,912 in its opening weekend.<sup>28</sup> The film's only DVD release to date followed in March 2012.

#### *The Last House on the Left (1972 / 2009)*

*Last House on the Left* started life as a hardcore exploitation picture, produced by Sean S. Cunningham and directed by Wes Craven.<sup>29</sup> The final product eschews hardcore elements, instead offering a tale of violence and revenge ostensibly inspired by Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*, itself an adaptation of a medieval Swedish poem. It is Mari Collingwood's (Sandra Cassel) 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, and to celebrate she hopes to attend a concert with her apparently wayward friend Phyllis (Lucy Grantham). While the girls leave for the night, Mari's parents (Gaylord St James and Cynthia Carr) prepare a surprise birthday party for her return. On their way to the concert, Phyllis and Mari attempt to buy some cannabis, approaching a young man, Junior (Marc Sheffler), who leads them into a bedsit where his criminal gang-leader father Krug (David Hess) is hiding with gang members Weasel (Fred

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<sup>28</sup> Gant, 2011

<sup>29</sup> Szulkin, 2000, 34-37



Lincoln) and Sadie (Jeramie Raine). The gang kidnap the girls and subject them to lengthy psychological, physical and sexual torture. Phyllis is killed first, as she provides a distraction to let Mari have a chance at escape. Krug re-captures Mari, rapes her, and then kills her. The gang is forced to take shelter when their car breaks down, and they unwittingly find themselves in the Collingwood home. During the night Mrs. Collingwood discovers their identity, and Mari's parents plan and execute a lethal revenge on Krug and his gang. The incompetent police force, who have failed throughout the film to track down the gang, arrive just in time to witness the culmination of the Collingwoods' revenge.

In 1974 Oppidan UK Ltd. submitted *Last House on the Left* to the BBFC for theatrical certification; the film was rejected outright. In 1980 Replay distributed the film on video and Betamax. Not many original reviews of *Last House on the Left* seem to exist, at least not in the same sorts of publications as *Straw Dogs* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Much talk about the film appeared instead in newspaper articles about the video nasties, as the film was cited as a prominent example, and became an official 'video nasty' in 1983. This lack of reviews is undoubtedly the result of the film being released on VHS rather than in cinemas, particularly at this time, when video was a relatively new and still emergent medium. From looking through newspapers from 1982, when the VHS was released, it's evident that VHS reviews were not a regular feature of the national presses. It is worth noting, however, that the sole review of the film from 1982, although appearing in a specialist film magazine, is written by Kim Newman, who increasingly became known for his reviews and books on genre films, in particular horror films. This specialism marks Newman out from other critics as a particularly relevant tastemaker in relation to films such as *Last House on the Left*. By 1983, the film was effectively already banned from release in the UK, featuring on the Director of Public Prosecution's (DPP) 'video nasty' list and being seized by police before the introduction of the VRA in 1984. Despite the ban, *Last House on the Left* was screened at the National Film Theatre (NFT) in 1988, as part of a retrospective of Wes Craven's work. The NFT programme describes it here as "one of the most controversial films ever made,"<sup>30</sup> seemingly due to its "unrelenting brutality and scenes of ferocious violence."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Drew, 1988, 29

<sup>31</sup> Unknown, 1988, 29

In 2002 Blue Underground submitted the film to the BBFC, who offered a certificate to the film with 16 seconds of cuts. When distributor Carl Daft challenged the decision, a Video Appeals Committee (VAC) hearing demanded 31 seconds of cuts – Blue Underground rejected the cuts and did not distribute the film at all.<sup>32</sup> Kermode, who had testified in favour of the film to the VAC, wrote in *The Independent* about the decision. In doing so, he was highly critical of the BBFC and the VAC, in particular in the inconsistency demonstrated by the BBFC over what should be cut from the film. In opposition he applauds Daft and Blue Underground, who refused to cut the film in order to gain a certificate. In a similar way to the BFI's release of *Straw Dogs* in 1995, this battle over the uncut release of *Last House on the Left* goes some way to shift the film's cultural reputation. Again, Kermode is here a prominent voice in the debate, as with *Straw Dogs*, which highlights his position as a key alternative tastemaker, like Newman, at the time. Despite this, Daft's spirited defence of the film in the name of his niche video label is not on a par with the respectable BFI's decision to seek certification for, and screen, *Straw Dogs*. In May 2003 Anchor Bay distributed a pre-cut version of the film, having been granted an 18 certificate by the BBFC, on VHS and DVD. *Last House on the Left* is often foregrounded in features on the video nasties (as one of the 'nastiest') or on lists of "most xxxtreme moments in movie history."<sup>33</sup> Xan Brooks in *The Guardian* in 2007 lists the film, amongst others, as part of a "history of misogynist violence in film".<sup>34</sup> Another edition of this cut version of the film was released on DVD in 2006. In 2008, the film was finally passed 18 uncut by the BBFC, and released on DVD by Metrodome, as a '3 disc ultimate edition'. *Last House on the Left* has never screened on UK television. In 2009, a vanilla disc of the uncut film was released by In2Film.

The remake of *Last House on the Left* was produced and released in 2009. The narrative once again broadly follows that of the original film, though there are some key changes. The house in question is now the Collingwoods' holiday home. Mari (Sara Paxton) survives her ordeal, in part due to her background as a school swimming champion, which is established early in the film. Junior is now Justin (Spencer Treat Clark), who also survives the film. His escape from his father's gang with the Collingwoods is implicitly linked to a backstory about Mari's dead brother. The revenge enacted by the Collingwoods (Tony Goldwyn and Monica

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<sup>32</sup> For a full account of this process, see Petley, 2011, 173-196

<sup>33</sup> Smith, 2007, 12

<sup>34</sup> Brooks, 2007, 5

Potter) is also more elaborately explicit, and the film ends with a greater sense of hope than the original, as they rush Mari to a hospital. The girls' ordeal at the hands of Krug (Garret Dillahunt), Francis (Aaron Paul) and Sadie (Riki Linhome) remains, but much of the torture seen in the original film is no longer present. After its theatrical release in June 2009, the film was released on DVD in October 2009, now as an 'extended edition' of the film.

### *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (1974 / 2003)*

Made in 1974 in a gruelling shoot in Texas, Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* depicts a group of teens who fall foul of a cannibal family. Sally Hardesty (Marilyn Burns), her brother Franklin (Paul A. Partain) and their friends are travelling to visit the Hardesty family grave, after hearing rumours of vandalism. On their way they pick up The Hitchhiker (Edwin Neal), whose frightening and violent behaviour gets him kicked out of their van. They stop at a gas station only to be told that there is no fuel left, but they continue travelling regardless. Forced to stop, Sally's friends wander off to go swimming, and come across a house. Entering the house to look for fuel, they are both killed by a lumbering, masked man, Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen). As night falls; Sally and Franklin search for their friends. Franklin is attacked and killed, and Sally finds herself facing a lengthy ordeal in the house at the hands of Leatherface and his deranged family, including a torturous 'dinner' where the family's 'grandpa' attempts to kill her. At the film's close a bloodied and screaming Sally manages to escape the clutches of the family by jumping through a window and into the back of a passing truck.

In 1975 *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was rejected by the BBFC for theatrical release. In response, three newspaper critics, all of whom had reviewed *Straw Dogs* - Alexander Walker, Derek Malcolm and Nigel Andrews - chose the film for a 'critic's corner' screening at the London Film Festival of that same year. The critical response to the film itself was mixed, though even some of the more negative responses called for people to have the right to see the film. In 1976 the GLC decided to over-ride the BBFC decision and granted the film a certificate. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* screened in Scene 1 and 2 in Leicester Square in November and December of that year.

The film was first released on VHS in 1979 and then in several different video versions before falling out of distribution following the introduction of the VRA and the refusal of the

BBFC to grant a video certificate to the film. In 1998 the Camden council granted the film a local-only 18 certificate, and after screenings in Camden in early 1999, the BBFC finally passed the film uncut, and Blue Dolphin distributed the film on VHS and DVD a year later. In 2000 *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was broadcast on television twice, once on Film4 and once on Channel 4. Channel 4 broadcast the film in 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2008. The film was released in 2003 and 2004 on DVD by Universal, and in 2009 on DVD and on Blu-ray by Second Sight Films. This 2009 release was marketed as 'the seriously ultimate edition', following vanilla releases in 2006 and earlier in 2009. In 2014, a new 4K remastering of the film received global film festival screenings as well as a Blu-ray release.

The remake shares the same basic premise as the original film: Erin (Jessica Biel), her boyfriend Kemper (Eric Balfour), and her friends journey across Texas, now to go to a concert. They too find themselves at the mercy of Leatherface and his family. Key changes include the Hitchhiker, who is no longer an apparent madman but a traumatised young woman who forewarns the group of upcoming danger before killing herself, the inclusion of the character of the Sheriff (R. Lee Ermey), a member of the family who thwarts the group's attempts to escape, and the elaborate escape accomplished by Erin, including a subplot which involves her rescuing a baby. The film was released in cinemas in the UK on October 31st, 2003, followed by a DVD release in March 2004. A prequel, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* was released in 2006, which was also produced by Platinum Dunes, producers of the remake. In 2013 a direct sequel to the original film was produced by Twisted Pictures, *Texas Chainsaw 3D*. Although both these films are more recent instalments of the franchise than the remake, as they are not strictly remakes I will not be directly considering them within my research.

In order to decide upon the above films as the most suitable case studies, I began from the remakes. As I wanted to particularly focus my research on remakes of previously high-profile, controversial films, this narrowed my field of possible case studies. Once I decided on the films, I was then able to work back to the originals, in order to solidify their representative usefulness for my study. Choosing the remakes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* became starting points primarily due to two factors: their release dates, and their relatively high-profile production and distribution. The three films cover almost a decade: from the very early beginnings of what might be

termed the recent horror remake cycle, through to its arguable demise. Likewise, the original films cover a period of over a decade, when considering both their production and their British releases: from *Straw Dogs* in 1971, through to *Last House on the Left*'s UK VHS release in 1984.

My work specifically considers each original film's releases on home media, in addition to their original releases. The time period covered here is naturally broad, but these particular films' relationships to outside bodies, such as the BBFC, make them particularly notable in terms of reflecting changes in critical and public film reception and in film culture. The uncut release of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, in 1999, for example, following *The Exorcist*'s release in 1998, marks a shift in the BBFC's relationship, following the departure of James Ferman, to films previously deemed dangerous or harmful. This contributes to the relative mainstreaming of these films, insofar that they are no longer restricted for an adult audience. A development of this occurs in 2001, with the uncut release of *Straw Dogs*. This release was coupled with strong journalistic coverage of the decision, particularly from Mark Kermode. The then-recent launch of television channel Film4 allowed for television screenings of the film (as with *The Exorcist* on Channel 4), as well as the production and broadcast of the documentary *Mantrap*, hosted by Kermode. *Last House on the Left* followed a rougher path to its uncut release. In 2002, Mark Kermode was again involved with attempts to certify the film uncut, this time through testifying during Carl Daft's appeal of the BBFC's decision to cut the film. As Daft refused to release the film with cuts, the film received its first DVD release by Anchor Bay, who accepted the cuts, and therefore in relation to films such as *Straw Dogs*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* or *The Exorcist*, it remained a dangerous film which required restrictions.

*Last House on the Left* was finally released uncut in the UK in 2008. For the purposes of my research, this is particularly interesting as it is a decision made *after* the rise of the modern horror remake cycle, in 2003, as well as after other modern horror cycles such as 'torture porn'. The crossing-over of the reception trajectories of the originals and the remakes potentially allows, therefore, for a comparison between the reception of both sets of films with the particular UK context and across the same period of time.

### *The Research Project*

Although my research project has its early roots in my own general dislike of recent horror remakes, it is by no means a straight-forward, comparative textual study of original and remake. Indeed, by taking a historical and reception studies approach I seek to resist the common preconception of 'authentic' original and 'inferior' remake. Comparing the film texts alone does not allow for any consideration of the way in which the original films have been publically framed and reframed, and thus changed cultural status and meaning over time. A textual analysis alone would mean that these films would be approached in something of a historical and cultural vacuum, without due consideration to how something that may have once been seen as unsafe no longer holds such value. Tracing the reception of the original films through the decades since their original release allows for a more culturally nuanced consideration of the shocking or controversial nature of the films in question. It also allows for the remakes to be considered alongside and as part of this circulation history, rather than distinct from it. This is especially important when considering the public construction of taste in relation to these films, and more so given that 'controversy' tends to relate to particular kinds of taste formations in historical context. Previous studies of remakes which are non-textual tend to concern themselves with films' production contexts, rather than with what occurs just prior to or directly after a film's release. Neither notions of taste nor notions of 'controversy' exist within a historical vacuum, therefore, by approaching the reception materials which circulate around these films, rather than primarily the film texts themselves, a more historically informed and nuanced picture of cultural change, and its impact on these films' cultural status, is able to emerge.

The first two chapters in this thesis work alongside each other to establish and critically evaluate the relevant academic background to my own research. In chapter one I will outline and identify some of the most important contextualising debates relating to my case studies. This will provide and assess relevant background on the films in terms of how they have previously been written about, critically and academically. The chapter identifies and is organised in relation to four key organising contexts: genre, authorship, censorship and culture. The sections on genre in particular address the relevant issues surrounding defining 'horror' and other related categories such as exploitation. Alongside considerations of genre will be consideration of some of the ways in which notions of art and entertainment have

been thought about and discussed in relation to my case study films. The sections on authorship consider the various individuals most commonly associated with the films that comprise my case studies. Although these are primarily directors, other individuals also prove important. Censorship is a key issue when considering films which are or have been controversial, and in this section I particularly consider the changing relationship between the British Board of Film Classification and my case study films. I also outline the relevance of previous academic work on the role of the press and other institutions in censorship processes. In the chapter's final section I briefly outline some of the socio-political contexts that have been associated with the films. In chapter two I will outline the main academic traditions and debates that frame and critically and methodologically inform my thesis. In particular I will outline and assess the existing academic work on the film remake, especially in relation to notions of cultural taste, as well as the tradition of reception studies in which my thesis is broadly situated, theoretically and methodologically. These two sections in combination specify the very particular mode of filmmaking with which my thesis is occupied, and the particular traditions of research which will inform my analysis of the changing cultural status of said films. The final part of the chapter then further outlines and expands on my main methodological approaches to the research.

Chapters three and four are also linked, as they outline and present the findings of my research. Both chapters present analyses of the marketing and the reviewing of the case study films. Chapter three does so in relation to the original films, and therefore considers a much broader range of releases than those contained in chapter four, which considers the marketing and reviewing of the remakes. The separate presentation of the reception analyses of these two sets of films allows for the findings to be brought together, compared and contrasted in chapter five. This is important, as although the release timelines of each original and its remake are mostly separate, there is in fact some crossover in terms of their circulation history. Therefore the work of comparing the marketing and reception of the two sets of films is presented in chapter five, allowing space in chapters three and four for a full reception analysis of both sets of films before fully considering their relationships to each other. Crucially, chapter five's consideration of both sets of films does not wholly rely on a straight-forward comparison of the reception analyses of the originals and the remakes, but rather provides space for historical narratives of changes and consistencies to emerge. This

chapter will therefore seek to directly address the key research questions that shape the thesis. My first question – ‘how have notions of taste and cultural distinction been publically expressed in relation to controversial films and their remakes in the UK?’ – is perhaps the one which is most central to my thesis. My next question – ‘in what ways have controversial films been publically rehabilitated in the UK, and how might these relate to different conceptions of controversy, authenticity, legitimacy and respectability?’ – relates directly to the changing public status of the original films. The remainder of the questions apply to both sets of films, and in particular the way both sets of films relate to each other: ‘does the cultural status and reputation of the original films play a part in the marketing and reception of the remake, and, if so, how?’, ‘To what extent can the marketing and reception of both the original films and their remakes be seen to be informed by the UK reception context?’, ‘What sorts of generic labelling and iconography seem to contribute to the reception of these films and their remakes (e.g. cult, exploitation, horror), and how do these shift and change over time?’ and ‘What sorts of rhetoric and discourses are evident in the marketing and reviewing of the original films and their remakes?’ The answers to these questions that will emerge at the end of this thesis will be more broadly applicable to the study of contemporary American horror remakes and to the study of contemporary American film genres, as well as to considerations of what can be charted and revealed via a nationally-specific film reception study.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Literature Review: Contextualising the Original Films**

In order to fully explore the relationship between the reception of a group of films and their remakes, it is vital to outline the specific social and industrial contexts from which they have emerged, and how these contexts have changed throughout their release histories. As my research tracks the changes in the formation of taste cultures around these two sets of films, through an analysis of marketing and critical reception, a thorough exploration of the meanings associated with these films at various points in history is necessary. These contexts are not only relevant to the films themselves, but to the reception materials I analyse; that is, film marketing and journalistic reviewing is also subject to broader cultural contexts. In addition to the social and industrial contexts in which the films are located, this chapter will outline the existing scholarly responses to these films, in a way that complements the more detailed methodological approaches outlined in chapter two. This chapter will also clarify the place of my own work in relation to existing critical accounts of my chosen films. Although my own work focusses very much on the British reception of these films, some of the broad topics in this chapter will, naturally, be from different cultural contexts, namely that of the USA. All of the films in question were either entirely or partially produced in the USA. By considering these different cultural contexts here, a more detailed historical picture of informing cultural contexts will emerge. This is important as my own analyses will focus almost exclusively on the British reception of the films, and by establishing the background history here the analyses in chapters three and four will focus on the British reception context with little need for explanatory repetition (except where critical debates raised here are pertinent and relevant to this analysis).

In order to engage with the industrial, social and critical contextualisation of these films more closely, this chapter will be divided into four sections, each dedicated to outlining a key aspect of existing scholarly work on the two sets of films under scrutiny in this research. Each topic addresses an element of the films that has been deemed as contributing to the films' reception as legitimate or illegitimate, in relation to artistic, and therefore cultural, legitimacy. Barbara Klinger views the critical reception of a film text as a key arena for

cultural distinctions to be made, which reflect and construct “broader cultural attitudes”<sup>35</sup> to these films and to related discourses. This sense of distinction between the legitimate and illegitimate is often complex, in that both negative and positive accounts of these films might focus on the same element of their construction in order to put forward an argument. Also important, and as emphasised by Klinger, is that this ambiguity can emerge from the shifting nature of attitudes toward a given film text during “given historical periods”<sup>36</sup> as well as the agendas of different publications at a given time. This idea of contextual change is a centrally important consideration in my own work.

The first section of this chapter will outline the critical connections made between my case study films and the context of genre, in which I will detail the frequent imprecision with which these films are generically categorised. This will primarily relate to horror and exploitation genres, as well as the nature of what constitutes a ‘genre’ in the first place. Related to the concept of genre, I will also consider the way in which the films have been associated with either art or entertainment, what these categorisations might mean, and whether or not they are relevant to the way in which cultural taste is constructed around these films. This aspect in particular relates to the ‘American’ nature of the films, informed, in particular, by the work of Richard Maltby on changing critical discourses relating to the Americanisation of culture.<sup>37</sup> The second context will be that of the *auteur* and the importance of this concept in terms of the way in which these films have broadly been received. Although traditionally the concept of an *auteur* is associated with a film’s director, I use the term here more broadly, particularly in relation to a film’s producer(s). Thirdly, I will consider the critical connections made between these films and censorship and controversy: vital contexts that inform all the films’ reception histories, specifically in relation to discussions of scenes of sexual violence and figurations of the vulnerable audience. Fourthly, I will consider the specific cultural and political contexts that have been seen to inform the films’ productions and the cultures into which they have been released, and at various points in their circulation history. Finally there is a fifth context which will pervade the other four, rather than comprise its own section, and that is the context of gender representation, and the role it has played in critical accounts of the films. Broadly,

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<sup>35</sup> Klinger, 70

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Maltby, 1998, 104-115

these five contexts are the main, repeated concerns of positive and negative scholarly and academic accounts of these films. While naturally my focus is upon traditional academic work, there exists a body of work about films such as these in niche publications, such as the output of FAB Press (London) or in specialist film magazines, which I will also draw upon here. Additionally, this chapter aims to consider the chronology of these accounts, to chart the ways in which the films' scholarly receptions have changed, if they've changed at all.

*Genre: Art, Entertainment, Exploitation*

The generic labelling of films is a process that is an inherent part of many areas of film culture, from producing films, to marketing films, to watching films, to buying films, to selling films – and so on. The study of specific film genres, and of the concept of genre itself, is well-established and particularly complex. Rick Altman outlines many of these complexities in his comprehensive and ground-breaking study *Film/Genre* (1999). While the study of film genre began with a consideration of its roots in literary theory, it has since developed into its own distinct field of knowledge.<sup>38</sup> While genre might most immediately be thought of as a way of textually categorising a film, Altman identifies four functions of genre, including production, structure, distribution and exhibition while also considering genre in terms of 'contract' – that is, "the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience."<sup>39</sup> These uses of genre as a concept, though complex themselves, are somewhat simpler to define than particular individual genres. Genre might be defined textually, through what Altman terms the semantics and the syntax of genre,<sup>40</sup> yet it might also be defined according to the way in which it is talked about, particularly by film critics, the most famous example of which undoubtedly being the retrospectively-termed *film noir*.<sup>41</sup> The materials that circulate around a film also contribute to the transhistorical nature of genre, as films are subject to "regenification" by critics<sup>42</sup> and through marketing.<sup>43</sup> In this section I will outline the different ways in which my case study films have been critically thought about in relation to genre. The generic status of the original films has changed over time and has often been ambiguous. This is important to bear in mind when considering the influence

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<sup>38</sup> Altman, 1999, 13

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 87-90

<sup>41</sup> See Langford, 2005, 210-232; Naremore, 1998, 11-26

<sup>42</sup> Altman, 1999, 81

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 78

generic status may have on a film's reception and cultural status, which also changes with time. In this chapter I will mostly consider academic accounts of these films, rather than journalistic ones, which will be addressed in chapters three and four, and comprise an important part of my analyses therein. Some cross-over has emerged between these accounts, particularly in relation to the more recent films, as much of the generic labelling of the films, and others from the same period, have occurred in the work of fans and online journalists.

The generic ambiguity of the films is not only relevant to my own study in terms of attempting to identify the films' pertinent generic contexts, but forms a key element of the critical work which exists around these texts. The films do not easily lend themselves to straight-forward 'labelling', however the strongest critical commonality between each of the original films and their remakes is that they have all been written about in relation to the horror film. The original *Straw Dogs* (1971) problematizes this assertion somewhat, as it is a film that has only retrospectively been critically thought of in relation to horror and this tendency is stronger in fan or journalistic work rather than in academic accounts of the film.<sup>44</sup> *Last House on the Left* (1972) is more often included in considerations of the horror film,<sup>45</sup> although others have argued against this particular categorisation.<sup>46</sup> *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) has most consistently been labelled a horror film, particularly in its critical position as a prominent example of the post-classical horror film that emerged in the 1970s and would introduce "pioneering changes to the genre".<sup>47</sup> That all of the original films in question have been associated with the horror genre in some way suggests both that the definition of this genre is ever-changing, and that the 1970s was an era where horror films were seen to complicate notions of genre through narrative, themes, and aesthetic changes and innovations.

Many scholars have interrogated the 1970s as a particular turning point in the history of the horror film. Most of this work focusses on American filmmaking, both based in Hollywood and independent from it, and my research will mostly do the same. Additionally, horror

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, the entry on the British Horror Films website, which states "it's clear for us all to see - *Straw Dogs* is *not* a horror film" – and yet the author goes on to review the film regardless.

<sup>45</sup> See Clover, 1992; Creed, 1993

<sup>46</sup> See Read, 2000

<sup>47</sup> Crane, 2002, 166. Crane also credits *Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on Your Grave*, amongst other films, as being part of this 'pioneering' group of films.

filmmaking in Britain, Canada, Italy and elsewhere was influential upon the changes manifesting in the USA at this time, and this is an important point to remember, particularly in relation to the notion that this cross-national influence, emerging in the 1970s, heralds the increase in transnational horror production within Hollywood and in independent American productions. One of the most significant theorisations of this period of horror filmmaking undoubtedly comes from Robin Wood. Wood's outline of the main thematic concerns of American horror in the 1970s, drawing on both psychoanalytic and Marxist concepts and perspectives, has since become a cornerstone of horror film theory. Wood identifies in classical horror the role of the monster as representative of all that is repressed in patriarchal society, from the feminine to the foreign to the proletariat. For him, the traditional 'monster' figure most often emerges in these films from a place of Otherness, and is safely destroyed at the film's close, allowing for a return to the accepted, repressed state of heterosexual coupling, family and the institutions of law and religion. In horror of the late 1960s onward, however, Wood identifies a change in how the repressed is represented: the monster is no longer an 'alien', invading force that disrupts the eventually reasserted norm, but very much emerges from *within* the repressive confines of bourgeois society, and is not necessarily safely overcome at the film's close.<sup>48</sup> This is a particularly persuasive view of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, with the cannibal family unit making an effective mockery of normative ideas regarding the family as a functional construct. For Wood, *Last House on the Left* demonstrates the destabilisation of the family unit, not only through the assault and death of Mari, but through the horrific revenge enacted by her parents. The film additionally undermines the law as authority, with its sketches of police incompetence dotted throughout the film. Although not explicitly referenced by Wood, *Straw Dogs* can also easily be considered in these terms. *Straw Dogs*, to some degree, undermines any sense of authority, with both religion and law subverted by the gang of local thugs, and by David himself.

In the late 1980s Andrew Tudor developed Wood's conceptions of 1970s horror with his own distinction between 'secure horror' and 'paranoid horror'. For Tudor, classical American horror is predominantly 'secure', given its "stress on effective expertise, on clear boundaries between known and unknown," and its emphasis on the desirability of the

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<sup>48</sup> Wood, 1986

existing paternalistic order and authority.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the new sort of horror, which Tudor identifies as primarily emerging in the 1960s and which he labels 'paranoid', relies primarily on the doubting of all that was formerly 'secure,' and a focus on abnormality from within the individual, the everyday, and the familiar.<sup>50</sup> More recently, Peter Hutchings has written of the importance of the 1970s as an era of innovation, in his broad critical overview of the history of academic debates around the horror genre. Expanding on Wood's work, Hutchings does not schematically label modern horror as 'progressive' and classical horror as 'reactionary' as, for him, to do so tends to overlook nuances in the films that characterise horror's historical development. Hutchings here criticises Wood's assertion that horror films which are progressive necessarily question and problematize dominant, repressive ideology. Through a brief analysis of *It's Alive* (Cohen, 1974) and *Death Line* (Sherman, 1972), Hutchings argues that Wood's notions of horror depend wholly on the assumption that the viewer desires to overcome the "inherently repressive categories of Otherness" which relate to real-life equivalent ideologies. The notion that a progressive horror film must exist only in relation to repressive ideologies is, according to Hutchings, in its very nature supportive of the "anti-horror film," because, in this sense, in a perfect world without repression, there would be no horror.<sup>51</sup> This is an important point to consider in my own research, given as it considers the shifting cultural status of various film texts. The rehabilitative meanings that have been ascribed to these films that invoke such ideological connections are worth considering in relation to Hutchings' claim that they essentially result in a negating of the horror film as a cultural category. It will remain to be seen if the remakes can be considered 'progressive' or 'reactionary', as per Wood, or if they position themselves, or are positioned by others, in relation to social ideology at all. Hutchings also criticises Wood's conception of the horror film as always ideologically driven – be it progressively or in terms of the reactionary – in that this does not account for where viewer pleasure is found in the horror film; that is, whether pleasure in the horror film might alternatively be found in purely entertaining, spectacle, or character-driven narratives.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Tudor, 1989, 215

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Hutchings, 2004, 185

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 183-184

In fact, the opposite is the case with the film remakes, which have not frequently been considered in relation to the ideological meaning or significance of their narratives. Adam Lowenstein comments, for instance, in an analysis of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Bayer, 2010), that the remake doesn't attempt to recreate or update the social commentary seen in the original film.<sup>53</sup> The implication here is that the narrative is remade, the filmmaking techniques are remade, but the ideological drive of the original film is not preserved as part of this process. Many of the titles that form the recent wave of horror remaking are referred to in work on the 'post-9/11' horror film (see below). The recent 'torture porn' cycle is most often cited in relation to this, with the apparent meaninglessness of the capture and torture of a variety of characters reflecting the apparently nihilistic violence committed by members of the real world American military.<sup>54</sup> This, of course, is most applicable in relation to horror made in the USA, and the degree to which this is reflected in the films' reception outside of the USA has not been addressed yet. Even so, contemporary mainstream horror – that is to say horror films which receive a relatively wide theatrical release - is often dismissed for its lack of engagement with explicit ideological issues. This argument is often made in the press and popular discussions of 'torture porn',<sup>55</sup> with directors attempting to distance themselves from the term,<sup>56</sup> and even horror websites and publications adopting the term as a pejorative one.<sup>57</sup> While several contemporary horror remakes have been released straight to DVD, a significant number have received theatrical releases and may be seen as part of modern 'mainstream' horror filmmaking. In terms of their position as entertainment, then, this implies that the remakes conform to the expectation that entertainment offers non-confrontational depictions of morality or ideology. This does not necessarily result in favourable reviews, particularly as 'entertainment' is often interchangeable with not only 'popular culture' but 'mass culture', and is therefore commonly denigrated by comparison with its apparent binary opposite, 'art'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Lowenstein, 2010, 18-22

<sup>54</sup> See Wetmore, 2012, 95-115

<sup>55</sup> Jones, 2013, 33

<sup>56</sup> See Wan in Bernard, 159, 2014

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 50-52

<sup>58</sup> Maltby, 1998, 106

Hutchings' criticism of Wood's apparent refusal of the 'fun' in horror stems from Wood's admitted shock at a rowdy audience at a screening of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.<sup>59</sup> For Hutchings, Wood's work not only finds the film to be symptomatic of 1970s American society, but the audience too, which he sees as "condemning itself".<sup>60</sup> The importance of the viewing context of these films points to another generic label applied by scholars to the original films – although not as frequently in the case of *Straw Dogs* – that is, the exploitation film. While the term 'exploitation film' has changed meaning historically, as with most generic labels, generally speaking exploitation cinema refers to films made cheaply and featuring titillating content both in terms of sex and violence - that is, content that mainstream Hollywood cinema would not feature. Eric Schaefer is careful to differentiate early or classical exploitation cinema with what has come to be known as exploitation cinema. For Schaefer, the films originally referred to as 'exploitation' were populated by "unashamed nudists, high-flying hop heads, brazen strippers, vicious vice lords, and high school girls who found themselves 'in trouble'"<sup>61</sup> By the 1960s, the term exploitation was associated with "cheap genre pictures directed at the teen market,"<sup>62</sup> but given Schaefer's explanation of 'exploitation' as a term emerging from the lurid marketing practices of the films' producers,<sup>63</sup> it is of little surprise that the term should have been appropriated by producers of 'cheap genre pictures'. By the 1970s, similar marketing techniques were being employed. *Last House on the Left's* famous 'It's only a movie' tagline was previously used in exploitation films from the 1960s, including Herschel Gordon Lewis' *Colour Me Blood Red* (1965).<sup>64</sup> The adoption of such marketing techniques for a somewhat – though not entirely - different sort of film demonstrates the shifting nature of such a categorisation. Schaefer himself outlines the shift in the reception of classical exploitation films, describing the re-release of *Reefer Madness* (Gasnier, 1936) during the 1970s, where the film became popular not due to its supposed anti-marijuana message but for its camp appeal.<sup>65</sup> Films which were often originally meant as titillation, though thinly-veiled as

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<sup>59</sup> Wetmore, 2012, 185-186

<sup>60</sup> Wood, cited in Hutchings, 2004, 82-83

<sup>61</sup> Schaefer, 1999, 2

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>64</sup> Szulkin, 2000, 132. Some accounts, such as recounted by producer Sean Cunningham on the DVD documentary *Celluloid Crime of the Century*, claim that the tagline was conceived by advertising man Lee Willis when he watched the film with his wife and had to keep reminding her 'it's only a movie'. (26:30-28:00)

<sup>65</sup> Schaefer, 1999, 2



informative or educational, were later appreciated instead for their quaint camp appeal and humour, rather than for being risqué. Arguably, a different sort of re-appropriation has occurred with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left*. For example, a special screening took place following the classification of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* by the BBFC, which paired the film with the then-banned *Last House on the Left*, following local city council approval, because “both films are indisputably art”.<sup>66</sup> This is a different sort of re-appropriation to that of *Reefer Madness*, granted, however, this is an apt demonstration of legitimate value being ascribed, in recent times, to a supposedly institutionally and culturally illegitimate product. Schaefer associates classical exploitation with classical Hollywood cinema, with the success of classical exploitation production systems rising and falling alongside the Hollywood studio system.<sup>67</sup> As such, films such as *Last House on the Left* might be termed ‘new exploitation’, in keeping with Schaefer’s idea that exploitation exists in parallel with Hollywood filmmaking. This conception of exploitation cinema refers predominantly to American exploitation cinema, as exploitation cinemas elsewhere – such as in Britain, Italy, or Hong Kong – emerged during the late-1960s onwards. These films would also have screened within a US context.

The industrial influence of exploitation filmmaking is not confined to the horror film. The 1970s is seen as a key decade in American filmmaking in relation to shifts and changes in industrial infrastructure, as much as in terms of innovative formal and narrative techniques. Following the fall of the studio system and the production code, independent filmmaking in and outside Hollywood was able to garner greater critical and public attention, through content which would previously have been censored and because of increased space for theatrical exhibition. Much of the work on this era of filmmaking focusses on the influence of the European art cinema movement of the 1950s and 1960s on young American directors.<sup>68</sup> Exploitation cinema of the 1950s and 1960s also proved influential on the young directors who would make the films associated with the ‘New Hollywood’. Therefore, much as the physical spaces in which art and exploitation cinemas were screened shared similarities, or indeed overlapped, at this time,<sup>69</sup> so there existed this shared influence on

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<sup>66</sup> Alderson Smith, 2000

<sup>67</sup> Schaefer, 1999, 326

<sup>68</sup> See Schatz, 1993; King, 2002

<sup>69</sup> See Hawkins, 2000, 3-32; Wilinsky, 2001, 124-125

the progression of Hollywood cinema as an institution and a mode of filmmaking. The best known of the 'low-budget genre pictures' of the 1950s and 60s, mentioned by Schaefer above, are undoubtedly those produced by American International Pictures and Roger Corman. Notably, some of the *auteurs* who would become most closely associated with the sort of filmmaking that 'New Hollywood' was praised for began their careers under the wing of Corman. Both Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese made early directorial ventures for Corman, in the forms of *Dementia 13* (1963) and *Boxcar Bertha* (1972) respectively. This area of convergence between filmmaking practices in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s would seem to imply that to treat such films as simply either 'generic' or 'artistic' would be an incredibly limited approach.

If exploitation films gain their name from the marketing techniques employed to sell them, then an alternative label for some of these films would be the drive-in movie, which takes its name from the exhibition space. Drive-in theatres in the USA were significant purveyors of the B-movie, or the low-budget movie due to a difficulty in being able to exhibit "quality products".<sup>70</sup> In this context, Steven Jay Schneider describes *Last House on the Left* as remarkable due to its position as a drive-in movie that was seen by the middle-classes, given its release into suburban cinemas by distributor Hallmark Releasing.<sup>71</sup> The exploitation-inspired marketing campaign associated with *Last House on the Left* would go on to successfully incorporate many of the complaints levelled at the film by much of this surprised audience, with the addition of the mock-warning: 'not recommended for those over 30!' implying a generational divide as well as a class divide, which is in-keeping with one of Schaefer's defining elements of the post-classical exploitation film. Schneider broadly claims that the older middle-class viewers who saw the film were at this time fearful that the film's unflinching portrayal of violence would debase their children, who were the film's target demographic. This younger audience did respond positively to the film, according to Schneider, precisely because of the disturbing content that so angered their parents.<sup>72</sup> This appeal to the "youth market" was found in the 'New Hollywood' cinema, as well as in exploitation filmmaking, further demonstrating a link between the two filmmaking

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<sup>70</sup> Schneider, 2003, 2

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 80

<sup>72</sup> Schneider, 2003, 86-90

traditions.<sup>73</sup> This particular appeal might be best described through what Jonathan L. Crane identifies, in the horror cinema of 1970s America, as being a “negative viewing experience” insofar as it does not offer any ‘feel-good’ experiences to the spectator, particularly in its refusal of safe resolutions of narratives.<sup>74</sup> This, in turn, is in line with the shift in perceptions of exploitation filmmaking as discussed by Schaefer and with Tudor’s arguments about paranoid horror. While the classical exploitation film, as Schaefer terms it, might subsequently be appreciated for its camp appeal, the later films associated with the term ‘exploitation’ are therefore better understood in terms of Crane’s negative viewing experience. Crane sees this negative experience as crucial to many of these exploitation films’ rejection by some critics, journalists and moral campaigners,<sup>75</sup> just as the same negative experience is a crucial element of many critics’ and fans’ appreciation and defence of these films. The same “sense of doom”<sup>76</sup> has also been identified in the ‘New Hollywood’ canon, which raises issues of cultural taste and distinction with regards to the overwhelmingly positive critical response to New Hollywood filmmaking, in comparison to the contemporaneous critical response to exploitation filmmaking.

Whether or not true ‘exploitation’ cinema still exists today is debatable. Arguably much of the marketing ballyhoo associated with exploitation cinema is now incorporated into most genre film marketing campaigns. A great deal of nostalgia around the exploitation film now exists within genre-related film cultures, with modern titles such as *Grindhouse* (Tarantino & Rodriguez, 2007), *Machete* (Rodriguez, 2010), *Hobo with a Shotgun* (Eisener, 2011), *Dear God No!* (Bickert, 2011) and *Bring Me the Head of Machine Gun Woman* (Espinoza, 2012) evoking a nostalgic version of ‘exploitation’ filmmaking – dubbed ‘rewindhouse’ by some online critics and fans.<sup>77</sup> Although the work of the ‘splat pack’ (see below) is also inspired by exploitation filmmaking, they do not emulate the visual style of such films, in particular the physical degradation of the film stock on which exploitation films might have been

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<sup>73</sup> King, 2002, 30

<sup>74</sup> Crane, 2002, 166

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> King, 2002, 18

<sup>77</sup> For example see O’Shea, 2012. This term might also be seen to emphasise the importance of VHS as a viewing platform for these films, once physical grindhouse cinemas were in decline. However, I do not wish to over-state the extent to which the term might be used.

commonly viewed.<sup>78</sup> This reproduction or homage to a particular aesthetic is very much reflected in the way 'rewindhouse' films are marketed, with posters for the films often featuring hand-drawn images, unlike the more prevalent use of photography in other contemporary film marketing. There has not been much academic work about the position of these films in relation to broader debates about genre. Whether or not these films can be deemed to be exploitation themselves, or rather exploitation homages or parodies, is something that requires further research. Although some academic work on the 'neo-grindhouse' has been produced, for the likes of Sarah Wharton this term encompasses a much wider definition than simply films which emulate a grindhouse aesthetic. For Wharton, films like *Machete* and *Hobo With a Shotgun* demonstrate that "for some, grindhouse nostalgia is very much in vogue,"<sup>79</sup> however, she sees hillbilly horror, rape-revenge films, horror remakes and torture porn as all part of this nostalgia, rather than as distinct or "disparate trends."<sup>80</sup> If such a thing as a 'neo-exploitation' film exists, then, it might be received in an entirely different setting to the 'grindhouse' cinemas of 1970s exploitation filmmaking. Now, the notion of new filmmaking which might be considered as 'exploitation' is more likely to be seen at home on the small screen, either on DVD or via VOD platforms. As Caetlin Benson-Allott notes, although neo-grindhouse films recreate the aesthetic of original 'grindhouse' films, they cannot "reproduce a prior viewing practice."<sup>81</sup> These shifting conceptions of exploitation cinema are an illuminating context for my own considerations of the changing reception of my case study films. This is potentially particularly relevant in terms of similarly 'nostalgic' re-workings of existing films.

Outlining the difficulties in taking horror or exploitation seriously does not allow for much consideration of *Straw Dogs* in relation to genre. Richard Maltby, however, has claimed that the film was not well-received by the British press upon its release due to its perceived uneasy status as neither art nor entertainment, its content problematizing its easy categorisation, due to its complex excesses and its lack of "an allegorical setting".<sup>82</sup> Maltby

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<sup>78</sup> Even when viewed on VHS or DVD, the film's original print quality – faded colour, scratches etc. – might be replicated on video or digitally.

<sup>79</sup> Wharton, 2013, 200

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>81</sup> Benson-Allott, 2013, 132

<sup>82</sup> Maltby, 1998, 111

attributes part of this unease to “anti-American cultural concerns”<sup>83</sup> at the time of the film’s release. He argues that *Straw Dogs* is not a conspicuously artistic film, and as such was considered by critics to be unsuitably dissonant. For British film and cultural critics, according to Maltby, art may deal with ambiguous depictions of moral issues, sex or violence, but an ostensibly entertaining film may not, an attitude Maltby attributes to the historical development of critical trends and attitudes beyond that of this particular film.<sup>84</sup> From this perspective, Maltby sees the association of *Straw Dogs* as an American film in a British critical context as significant, the critical expectation being that as an American, and ostensibly popular or mainstream, film its status should unambiguously be that of ‘entertainment’. Instead, *Straw Dogs* offers highly ambiguous depictions of morality while at the same time making use of genre – that is, ‘entertainment’ – conventions, therefore seemingly attempting to be an ‘art film’ too.<sup>85</sup> This is in line with Charles Barr’s famous defence of *Straw Dogs*, in which he compares it to the more conspicuously artistic *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971), a film more favourably received by critics.<sup>86</sup> Barr argues against the critics’ view that a distanced representation of violence – such as Kubrick’s choreographed, artistic set-pieces – is more effective at provoking the viewer to consider the nature of violence than the more visceral, unflinching representation found in *Straw Dogs*. This is the reverse of the traditional conceptions of art/entertainment, whereby the ostensible ‘entertainment’ film is here seen to offer the more ambiguous and challenging depiction of violence.

By contrast, the remakes of these three films are almost uniformly discussed in terms of entertainment, or at least, they are never considered in relation to film as ‘art’. Remaking film as a practice is more often than not associated with its necessary relation to the concept of property, as will be outlined in greater depth in chapter two. More casually, remakes are often associated with creative poverty, particularly in the case of the release of many remakes in a short space of time, as with the recent cycle of horror remakes.<sup>87</sup> Although the titles are referred to in broader academic analyses of contemporary horror

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Maltby, 1998, 111. Maltby cites Orwell’s 1946 essay *Decline of the English Murder* as an example.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 106

<sup>86</sup> See Barr, 1972, 17-31

<sup>87</sup> Kermode, 2003, 12-16

filmmaking, they are most often referred to as examples of the current state of the genre, and normally alongside non-remakes, rather than as 'remakes'.

The horror and exploitation film more broadly has received a great deal of attention from feminist critics, and understandably the rape-revenge subgenre has, in particular, been given attention, due to its often graphic depictions of violence against women. Carol Clover has outlined the development of the rape-revenge film, beginning with *Straw Dogs* (Peckinpah, 1971), *Frenzy* (Hitchcock, 1972) and *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1972). In the cases of *Straw Dogs* and *Frenzy*, Clover identifies the act of rape being used as a male character's punishment of a woman who has teased or embarrassed him. Clover also sees these films as encouraging a degree of spectatorial identification with the attacker, rather than the victim. Clover identifies *Last House on the Left* as a transitional rape-revenge film, due to Mari's parents avenging her death, rather than Mari enacting her own revenge. Partly in response to the lack of clarity in Clover's definition, Jacinda Read argues against the idea of 'rape-revenge' as a subgenre of horror, outlining that films that do include rape and revenge in their plots conform to a narrative structure rather than a subgeneric category.<sup>88</sup> Read does not, however, take into account any examination of how the term rape-revenge might be used by critics, journalists or fans which could impact upon the phrase's status as a generic term.<sup>89</sup> Ultimately Read's definition of 'rape-revenge' results in her broadly considering any film which includes rape as an important narrative event, rather than considering 'rape-revenge' as a broadly identified and acknowledged subgenre or cycle.

The depiction of sexual violence in *Straw Dogs* and *The Last House on the Left* is, as I will outline in greater depth below, one of the most central points of contention with regard to these films. *Straw Dogs'* ambiguous depiction of the assault on Amy has resulted in accusations of misogyny<sup>90</sup> – exacerbated by Peckinpah's own reported attitudes toward her character<sup>91</sup> – while *Last House on the Left's* lengthy depiction of the assault and murder of Mari and Phyllis has seen the film accused of gratuity. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre's* Sally Hardesty is often seen as a pre-cursor to Clover's famous final girl, though more recently Richard Nowell has questioned the validity in thinking of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* as a

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<sup>88</sup> Read, 2000, 25

<sup>89</sup> Altman, 1999, 77-82

<sup>90</sup> For a summary of some of these responses in context, see Simkin, 2011, 86-98

<sup>91</sup> Prince, 1998, 126-127

pre-cursor to the slasher film as consistently as it has been.<sup>92</sup> The final girl is often reductively seen as something of a proto-feminist triumph, however Clover herself clearly characterises the final girl as being particularly masculinised, especially in her usually 'phallic' triumph over the villain.

Although the horror film is predominantly considered in terms of its representation of women, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* also offers an interesting representation of masculinity in its depiction of Leatherface and his family. However, this is more often than not addressed as a class issue than an issue of gender representation. Leatherface's family are former slaughterhouse workers who have lost their trade thanks to the introduction of machinery. This element has been figured as informing the depiction of an abandoned and vengeful working class, rather than being related to that of emasculation. Robin Wood characterises the lack of a woman in Leatherface's family as depriving "the family of its social sense and social meaning,"<sup>93</sup> which doesn't touch on the potential importance of the inherent emasculation of the all-male family unit. *Last House on the Left* features two depictions of masculinity which are more often tied in to issues of class. On the one hand Krug (and to a lesser extent Weasel and Junior) is a working class character, and this position is made explicit in that he is allowed a scene in the film to vent his frustrations at class difference. This is aimed at the Collingwoods, presumably in particular Dr. Collingwood, who is a former military man and, seemingly, the ultimate patriarch. Both these men's positions can be figured as emasculated throughout the film; Krug is emasculated due to his lack of capital, while Dr. Collingwood is emasculated due to his inability to protect his daughter.<sup>94</sup> His military background is only effective in revenging her abuse and death, which is ultimately presented as unsatisfying and devoid of sense or meaning. The depiction of women, or rather the 'treatment' of women in the film tends to overshadow such exploration of the male characters in relation to gender as opposed to class – just as the female characters are more often explored in relation to gender rather than class. *Straw Dogs'* David provides an interesting comparison point, however; his

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<sup>92</sup> Nowell, 2011, 58-62

<sup>93</sup> Wood, 2003, 82

<sup>94</sup> It is not just Mari Collingwood who dies, of course, but Phyllis's death goes entirely unremarked upon by the Collingwoods or Krug and co. Phyllis is also characterised as being 'working class', with Mari's parents being suspicious of her social standing, and Phyllis herself making a joke that her parents are in the iron and steel industry: 'my mother irons and my father steals.' If any character in the film represents a forgotten underclass, it might be her, but this seems to be relatively unexplored, and is a topic for another thesis entirely.

apparent emasculation by Charlie and the local men has its roots in his position of being of a better class status than they are. Although David can be considered as something of an anti-hero, he remains the protagonist, making Charlie and his cohorts the ostensible 'villains' – and they are clearly presented as members of a hyper-masculine working class, similar to Krug or Leatherface.

What many academic accounts of these films outline then is that their initial negative critical receptions were informed to some degree by their generic status. Wood, in his defence of *Last House on the Left*, usefully argues that generic labels such as 'art' or 'exploitation' can insulate the spectator from any broader implications raised by the film. Wood argues that what these two signifiers convey to the spectator is that 'Art' defines seriousness in aesthetic terms, while Exploitation denies seriousness altogether. This is in some ways problematic, perhaps, as it assumes that a spectator cannot find sensationalism and seriousness in the same text, however, Wood goes on to rightly argue that "it is the work of the best movies in either medium to transcend, or transgress, these limitations – to break through the spectator's insulation."<sup>95</sup> This implies, to some degree, that films which aren't the 'best' in terms of apparent artistry or subversive content are not as worthy of attention, however, what Wood's argument demands is that a film be considered as potentially culturally and aesthetically significant and worthwhile, regardless of its ostensible generic categorisation. Wood's assertion that ideas regarding the categorisation of films restrict engagement with film texts is in line with Theresa Cronin's ideas regarding the function of moral censorship as limiting to audience engagement with a text.<sup>96</sup> This correlation would seem to imply that the use of categorisations such as 'art' and 'exploitation', terms Wood sees as ideologically driven, contribute, in some way, to the broader moral censorship of a film text.

#### *Auteurs and authorship*

Since its inception in the 1960s, *auteur* theory and the academic study of film authorship has shifted somewhat in terms of emphasis. Although originally a means of valorising particular individual film directors and canonising their bodies of work, more recent work considers other aspects of film culture which contribute to the changing notion of '*auteur*'.

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<sup>95</sup> Wood, 1980, 26

<sup>96</sup> Cronin, 2009, 15-18



While scholars and academics may have generally moved away from the stricter, even out-dated *auteur* theory, the relatively simplistic concept of the director-*auteur* is still used industrially, such as in the marketing or categorisation of films. *Auteur* theory was consolidated through with the work of the writers of *Cahiers du Cinema*, and sought to attribute artistic vision and agency to the director of a film. While the likes of Andre Bazin were already arguing against film analysis relying too heavily on the “cult of personality,”<sup>97</sup> *auteur* theory was readily adapted by critics in the USA, via the work of Andrew Sarris.<sup>98</sup> An auteurist approach to film was useful, but also restrictive. The formation of canons of filmmakers – those directors whom the proponents of *auteur* theory legitimised – resulted in other filmmakers being overlooked. The decline of the popularity of *auteur* theory as a scholarly approach to film emerged in particular through arguments against the valorisation of one individual in a collaborative medium.<sup>99</sup> Despite the decline in popularity of using *auteur* theory alone as a scholarly approach to film, auteurist approaches to film are still very much used popularly. The use of the word ‘*auteur*’ might now be used more loosely, as a means of denoting any notable individual involved with the making of a film, regardless of their artistic role. Certainly the criteria as originally outlined by Truffaut – in terms of an *auteur* writing the films they directed and so on – are hardly considered essential. This looser model of authorship also allows for other individuals, aside from directors, to be emphasised as the most important member of a filmmaking team, such as producers or writers,<sup>100</sup> as well as reframing the director’s position in relationship to the film text.<sup>101</sup>

A retrospective mode of rehabilitation for the original case study films has come through the consideration of these films as works of individual *auteurs*. In reworking the films as specific works from an *auteur*’s body of work, they become part of a broader critical argument. Of all the directors under consideration in my work, Sam Peckinpah is perhaps most widely recognised, in film studies and film culture, as an *auteur*. Many books have been written considering his work as a whole, or focusing on his Western films, which

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<sup>97</sup> Bazin, *De La Politique des Auteurs*, 26

<sup>98</sup> Sarris, *Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962*

<sup>99</sup> For examples see Petrie, *Alternatives to Auteurs*; Schatz, *The Genius of the System*

<sup>100</sup> For example, see Spicer, McKenna & Meir’s recent edited collection *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies*

<sup>101</sup> For example, see Leon Hunt’s work on directors Quentin Tarantino and Luc Besson acting as gatekeepers for films from East Asia, as well as incorporating elements of East Asian action cinema in their own work (2008, 220-236).

suggests a coherency to his body of work. The importance of the Western to conceptions of auteurist theory – in terms of key directors identified by the writers of *Cahiers du Cinema* being renowned for Westerns, such as John Ford – may influence this association. Jim Kitses goes as far as to argue that the Western is crucial to Peckinpah’s entire *oeuvre*, something Kitses sees as “self-evident” in Peckinpah’s work.<sup>102</sup> Some critics were discussing Peckinpah’s work in auteurist terms as early as 1975, with critic Mark Miller defending Peckinpah’s films – and his use of violence to “worry his audience” – in relation to the negative critical response to *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974).<sup>103</sup> In relation to *Straw Dogs*, Stephen Prince, Michael Bliss and Charles Barr have all argued that the film’s ostensible hero – mild-mannered David, who is pushed into violence through supposed provocation – is in fact the villain of the film, a claim supported by Peckinpah himself.<sup>104</sup> Prince argues that Peckinpah’s more controversial and incendiary comments about the film – for instance, his claim, in an interview with *Playboy Magazine*, that Amy is not a woman but “pussy” - influenced the negative critical responses to the film, with Peckinpah’s comment apparently supporting the idea that *Straw Dogs* must be a misogynistic film. As per Prince, this does not take into account Peckinpah’s own play with the press, and other, less sensationalist comments made by the director with regard to characterisation in the film.<sup>105</sup> This is quite different in terms of dominant approaches to the other two films, presumably because neither Craven nor Hooper has previously had such a strong directorial persona. Thus Peckinpah’s own persona contributes to the reinforcement of readings of the film as misogynistic. Peckinpah’s own promotional bluster aside, Bliss states that *Straw Dogs* is predominantly about “prototypical male ideas and responses involving the assertion of power and dominance in heterosexual relationships”.<sup>106</sup> Bliss assumes that this results in the film speaking “especially to the audience’s male members,”<sup>107</sup> which is a somewhat reductive account of audience appreciation of the film, however, it does demonstrate a degree of unity between interpretations of Peckinpah’s body of work and his own, quite likely performed or exaggerated, authorial persona. These two elements – the text and the persona – here reinforce each other, strengthening Peckinpah’s authorial status.

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<sup>102</sup> Kitses, 2004, 240

<sup>103</sup> Miller, 1975, 2

<sup>104</sup> Prince, 1998; Bliss, 1993; Barr, 1972

<sup>105</sup> Prince, 1998, 126-127

<sup>106</sup> Bliss, 1993, 142

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

If Peckinpah might be considered a more traditional *auteur*, by conforming to the criteria outlined by the likes of Truffaut and Sarris, another type of film authorship is also pertinent here. Peter Hutchings identifies the 1970s as a period in which the ‘horror auteur’ emerged.<sup>108</sup> As I have already outlined, the 1970s were seen, by a number of critics and academics, as a period which saw a significant change in the way in which American horror films were constructed, and this is often attributed to the people who made them. Both Wes Craven and Tobe Hooper would become highly influential horror directors subsequent to the releases of *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, respectively. Although Tobe Hooper has not since replicated the same critical success as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the influence of the film has ensured that he has continued to figure as an important horror director.<sup>109</sup> Wes Craven’s work can best be claimed as the corpus of a horror *auteur*, given the comparative frequency with which critical accounts of his work since *Last House on the Left* refer to a number of his films in relation to each other<sup>110</sup>. The most well-regarded of his later films continue themes established in *Last House on the Left*. *The Hills Have Eyes*, released in 1977, again features an assaulted family forced to commit violence, this time to defend themselves. This breakdown of the family unit is further explored in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), wherein a group of teenagers uncover the dark secret of their community which has resulted in their terrorisation by dream demon Freddy Kruger.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, academic accounts of *Last House on the Left* frequently invoke its relationship with Ingmar Bergman’s *The Virgin Spring* as a means of legitimisation, which undoubtedly relies on Bergman’s position as an established art cinema *auteur*.<sup>112</sup> For Crane, *The Virgin Spring* gives *Last House on the Left* a degree of pedigree, though the later film reconfigures “Bergman’s troubling meditation on the profound difficulty of following

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<sup>108</sup> Hutchings, 2004, 180-182

<sup>109</sup> See Newman, 1988, 53-54. Although *Poltergeist* (1982) is a beloved horror film, Newman here refers to rumours that Hooper was merely the “remote control creature” of the film’s writer/producer Steven Spielberg.

<sup>110</sup> For example, even the first UK review of the film that I have found (Newman, 1982) considers *Last House on the Left* alongside *The Hills Have Eyes*. See also Hutchings, 2004, 123, 181; even when Wood is entirely critical of Craven, he considers his body of work as a whole: “Wes Craven’s career has achieved a certain consistency, in that each of his films since *Last House on the Left* has been worse than the one before.” (2003, 168)

<sup>111</sup> See Williams, 1996, 228-236. That the name of one of the most famous horror villains of all time is ‘Kruger’ is no mistake, but a direct reference to *Last House on the Left*’s Krug Stillo – a further link to previous work in the director’s canon.

<sup>112</sup> See Brashinsky, 1998, for a confused account of *Last House on the Left* as remake of *The Virgin Spring* – Brashinsky seems content to out-do Ebert’s supposed “critical inaccuracy” and “smart-assery,” (Wood, 1980, 26) while simultaneously crediting Craven’s film with an effective update and transfer of Bergman’s narrative. Interestingly, Brashinsky never once refers to the ballad on which *The Virgin Spring* is itself based.

God's will into a bleak, horrorshow void."<sup>113</sup> This implies a degree of secularity to Craven's reworking of Bergman's version of a literary narrative,<sup>114</sup> supported by Craven's preoccupation with questioning the authority of the family, rather than the church. Adam Lowenstein has more recently criticised Wood's early dismissal of the link between *Last House on the Left* and *The Virgin Spring* – though also praising his blurring of the distinction between 'art' and 'exploitation' – and shrewdly notes that a comparison between the two films helps support the breaking down of restrictive generic boundaries. Lowenstein goes as far as to claim that "Craven's film reminds us that its 'legitimate' art film counterpart [...] received a somewhat mixed critical reception due to its shocking violence."<sup>115</sup>

The horror auteurs who established themselves in the 1970s still seem to be the ones who are predominantly discussed today in terms of horror and authorship. Although these filmmakers – amongst others from the same period – no longer make films of the same 'quality' – subjective as that is – as those which made them famous, they are still frequently written about and discussed, both academically and critically, in terms of authorship within horror cinema. This seems to strongly suggest that the idea of the 'horror *auteur*' has fallen out of academic favour as the idea of the '*auteur*'. These established *auteurs* often act as producers on the recent remakes, including Hooper and Kim Henkel on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and Craven and Cunningham on *Last House on the Left*. Though it is unclear as to the degree of input the original filmmakers might have in the production of the remakes, their association with these productions is an additional link between two eras of filmmaking. The remakes, to some degree, remain products of these auteurs, through these individuals' new positions as producers and through marketing discourse.

This link back to the 1970s seems to suggest that no clear inheritors to these *auteurs* have emerged. The group of directors recently branded the 'splat pack' might be seen as modern horror *auteurs*; however, the rewarding of this status seems to have been short-lived. The phrase was originally coined by journalist Alan Jones, who used 'splat pack' to refer to a specific group of contemporary filmmakers: Eli Roth, Greg McLean, Alexandre Aja, Neil

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<sup>113</sup> Crane, 2002, 170

<sup>114</sup> Bergman's film reworks a 14<sup>th</sup> century Swedish ballad, entitled *Tore's Daughter in Vange* (see Szulkin, Appendix III).

<sup>115</sup> Lowenstein, 2005, 137

Marshall and Rob Zombie.<sup>116</sup> These filmmakers often cite films and filmmakers from the 1970s as direct influences on their own work.<sup>117</sup> However, by the time the American press began using the term ‘splat pack’, the filmmakers most often included changed, the non-American directors (McLean, Aja and Marshall) replaced by James Wan, Leigh Whannell (the only non-director of the pack) and Darren Lynn Bousman, all of whom were responsible for the early, and most successful, instalments of the *Saw* franchise.<sup>118</sup> The filmmakers associated with the splat pack are most well-known for their films being thought-of as ‘torture porn’ films. If *auteurs* earn their status through the repetition of thematic concerns and visual style in their films, the coherency of the ‘splat pack’ already seems to have run its course. For example, James Wan no longer makes gory thrillers like *Saw*, and has recently declared that he is moving away from horror,<sup>119</sup> while the likes of McLean and Bousman have continued to make films, but not to the same degree of mainstream success – nor in the same style – as their films dubbed ‘torture porn’.<sup>120</sup> Members of the splat pack have also been associated with the recent cycle of horror remaking. Rob Zombie ventured into remaking with *Halloween* (2007) and *Halloween II* (2009), while Alexandre Aja helmed remakes of *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), *Mirrors* (2008) and *Piranha* (2010). Of the ‘splat pack’ Eli Roth may be the group’s remaining *auteur*, both as a director – following *Hostel* (2005) with the well-regarded *Hostel: Part II* (2007) and *The Green Inferno* (2013) – and as a producer of films such as *The Last Exorcism* (Stamm, 2010) and *The Man with the Iron Fists* (RZA, 2012). Steve Jones states that “other filmmakers have [...] distanced themselves from ‘torture porn’ and ‘the splat pack,’”<sup>121</sup> but the ‘torture porn’ label has still been attributed to their films and since persisted as a sub-generic label. Much of the academic work on ‘torture porn’ tends to focus on the most prominent and mainstream examples of the cycle, which gives the impression that the cycle is ‘over’,<sup>122</sup> however, this disregards the films of directors such as *Saw* franchise alumnus Marcus Dunstan (*The Collector* [2009], *The Collection*

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<sup>116</sup> Jones, 2006, 104

<sup>117</sup> Bernard, 2014, 14-16. Aja in fact cites all three of my case study original films as influences upon his breakthrough film, *Haute Tension* (2003).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>119</sup> See Knolle, 2013

<sup>120</sup> This move away from the label has been noted popularly, too, for example, an article on the website *Den of Geek* says of the splat pack, “Well, they’re still making movies. But they’re not making the same kind of movies” (Dobbs, 2013).

<sup>121</sup> Jones, 2013, 42

<sup>122</sup> For example see Middleton, 2010

[2012]), and John Stockwell (*Turistas* [2006]), or even British filmmakers such as Tom Shankland (*W4Z* [2007]) and Steven Sheil (*Mum & Dad* [2008]). Although the phrase torture porn is used often and freely, its greatest success was in line with the prominence of the splat pack and their filmmaking roughly between 2005 and 2007; a similar period of time has also been identified by some as the height of the contemporary horror remake cycle.<sup>123</sup> These 'splat pack' filmmakers have also been identified as being strongly influenced by the exploitation cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. Mathijs and Sexton outline the particularly self-conscious manner in which Roth and Zombie revisit and reference "older exploitation pictures" in order to culturally validate and solidify their own authorial voices.<sup>124</sup> For Mathijs and Sexton this appeals to the cult value of the original films. In a similar way, the 'rewindhouse' trend's recreation of the 'degraded' aesthetic and excessive content of exploitation films can be seen as seeking to tap into part of the cult appeal of those films.

Some difficulty emerges as one begins to look more closely at niche presses with regard to horror auteurs, particularly online, as the boundaries between scholarship, journalism and fan work blur, and the line between *auteur* and 'popular' (within that niche) might also blur. The work of filmmakers such as Ti West and Adam Wingard are often greatly anticipated by fans, bloggers, websites and magazines. West, Wingard and their other collaborators might then be seen as something of a potential group of inheritors to the 'splat pack', should more mainstream press and commentators begin to acknowledge their success. An interview with West in *Screen Daily* already refers to the group as "a horror brat-pack, if you will"; presumably the interviewer is unaware that the play on words has previously been made with the splat-pack.<sup>125</sup> In a review Kim Newman favourably compares the more recent group of directors to "the retro-grindhouse gang [...] who are their immediate elders in the field,"<sup>126</sup> citing Zombie and Roth as part of this 'gang'. His use of the term 'retro-grindhouse' strongly associates them with a particular sort of filmmaking, as I outlined in the previous section. Had Newman used the term 'splat-pack' he may have been more closely aligning the filmmakers with torture porn, which in turn may have undermined his claim that this

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<sup>123</sup> This is particularly noted by Middleton (2010), who identifies *Hostel* (2005) and *Hostel II* (2007) as bookends of the subgenre.

<sup>124</sup> Mathijs & Sexton, 2011, 152

<sup>125</sup> Sandwell, 'Ti West: The Sacrament' 2013

<sup>126</sup> Newman, 'V/H/S' 2012

new group of “filmmakers are more ambitious thematically and technically”<sup>127</sup> than their predecessors. Newman’s own currency as an expert reviewer in the field of horror and exploitation cinema makes his use of particular comparisons and terminology all the more distinct and authoritative. Newman’s position of relative authority in the field is also an important contributing factor to the subsequent establishment of this new wave of horror auteurs. A very recent and lengthy profile of this group of filmmakers and their collaborators appears on EW.com, which dubs their work ‘mumblecore’, due to some of the artists’ association with the mumblecore movement, namely via Joe Swanberg.<sup>128</sup> It remains to be seen whether or not the ‘mumblecore’ group have a greater longevity than their predecessors, now that more mainstream presses are paying attention to their body of work. That niche attention might raise the status of these filmmakers to that of *auteur*, at least in the broadest sense of the word, might reflect back on the longevity of the high status of the original horror *auteurs* too. The same fan-writers and scholars maintain Craven and Hooper’s status as significant horror *auteurs* and pioneers within contemporary work on post-1960s horror, while also elevating the likes of West and Wingard who themselves claim to be inspired by filmmakers such as Craven<sup>129</sup> or Carpenter.<sup>130</sup>

Aside from directors who have already established themselves in horror – such as Aja or Zombie – the vast majority of recent horror remakes are directed by first-time feature directors. If Universal and Hammer are the best known names associated with classical horror cinema, then perhaps the recent remake era sees a return to the studio and the producer as *auteur*, which is reflected in the credits of the likes of Eli Roth, as stated above, but also in the contemporary cycle of horror remaking. The production companies Platinum Dunes and Sony Screen Gems are closely associated with some of the most prominent horror remakes, as well as branching out into original films of similar style and themes to their remake output, such as *The Purge* (DeMonaco, 2013) or *The Roommate* (Christiansen, 2011). Platinum Dunes in particular might have gained particular attention due to Michael Bay’s involvement, someone who is already considered to be something of an *auteur* via his work as a director of action films. Outside of remakes, a figure such as Oren Peli has

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Collis, ‘You’re Next’ 2013

<sup>129</sup> See Collis, 2013

<sup>130</sup> See Hanley, 2013

received journalistic attention for his success as producer of the *Paranormal Activity* franchise (2007-present), as well as his work with established filmmakers, such as James Wan on *Insidious* (2010) and *Insidious: Chapter 2* (2013), Rob Zombie for *The Lords of Salem* (2012), and Barry Levinson on *The Bay* (2012). All in all this rise of the horror producer (although prominent examples have existed previously, not least of all Sean S. Cunningham) might point to the looseness of the concept of *auteur* when applied to the modern horror genre. Classical horror points of reference exist for the consideration of the producer-as-auteur, in particular that of Val Lewton. Lewton worked as producer (and often uncredited screenwriter) for a string of successful low-budget horror films for RKO in the 1940s. For Matthew Bernstein, Lewton is as close as any producer gets to fulfilling the traditional criteria of *auteurship*, insofar as he displayed a “discernible pattern of meaning and style”<sup>131</sup> in his horror films as well as contributing to writing the films he produced. Ultimately, however, Bernstein concludes that producers cannot be considered as *auteurs*, but rather they “help to facilitate the contemporary *auteurs*’ work”.<sup>132</sup> When considering the remakes that comprise my case studies, the most notable producers involved have also been directors, either of the original films – Hooper, Craven and Cunningham – or in the case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, a director of his own films, Michael Bay. This suggests that the ‘authors’ of these films are still rooted in more traditional ideas of *auteurship*, even if they are accessed via the production teams and not the directors of the remakes themselves. Andrew Spicer has used British producer Michael Klinger as a means of challenging “the idea of the *auteur* director as the central explanatory trope in film studies.”<sup>133</sup> While this is a crucial approach to film history, it is also important, when analysing materials such as reviews or marketing, to bear in mind the continued prevalence of more traditional director-focused conceptions of *auteurism* in popular film discourse, no matter how removed it might be from ‘pure’ *auteur* theory. Therefore while an *auteur* study is not my chosen method of exploring my research questions, conceptions of authorship remain integral to the sorts of materials under analysis in this thesis.

### *Censorship, Sexual Violence, and the Vulnerable Audience*

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<sup>131</sup> Bernstein, 2008, 183

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 188

<sup>133</sup> Spicer, 2010, 310



Key to my research on the changing cultural status of the case study films is their position as texts which have caused censorship debates, or as remakes of texts which caused such debates. Importantly, my approach to censorship conforms to Annette Kuhn's assertion that discussions of censorship should not be restricted to condemning the process as a prohibitive, institutional force, but rather should consider ways in which discourses of censorship can also be culturally revealing and productive.<sup>134</sup> The productive nature of censorship can be seen in terms of creativity – filmmakers and distribution companies working around censorship restrictions – and also in terms of the longevity of the cultural reputation of certain films. The 'video nasties' are a prime example of this, as various types of film fan continue to use a phrase originally meant to condemn the films in question as a means of appreciating them, with said appreciation realising the "subcultural [...] potential of the nasties category."<sup>135</sup> Without a reputation as a previously banned or censored work, certain films might otherwise have faded into complete obscurity. Additionally, Kuhn makes a valid distinction between different sorts of censorship that impact upon film works. According to Kuhn, institutional accounts of censorship are more common, and often ignore the moral and critical forms of censorship that occur.<sup>136</sup> My research into the reception of my case study films will inevitably encounter debates around the critical and moral censorship of these films which in turn impacts upon the institutional censorship of films of these sorts. This thesis does not directly analyse the BBFC or its decisions, yet the board and its actions constitute an important part of the culture that the reception of my case study films is situated within.

*Straw Dogs* serves as a prime example of this cyclical function of censorship. As an American film shot in Britain, the production was able to interact with the BBFC, with advice being offered on the film's editing, in order to ensure BBFC certification.<sup>137</sup> The critical response to the film deemed its violence to be overwhelmingly "gratuitous,"<sup>138</sup> with thirteen newspaper critics signing a joint letter to *The Times* denouncing the film as "dubious in its intention, excessive in its effect" which, for Maltby, contributed to the critical moral construction of

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<sup>134</sup> See Kuhn, 1988, 2-7

<sup>135</sup> Egan, 2007, 10

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>137</sup> Barber, 2009, 350-351

<sup>138</sup> Maltby, 1998, 111

the film's reception, which would in turn impact upon the public perception of the film.<sup>139</sup> Presumably, this in turn impacted upon the later decision of BBFC director James Ferman to deny the film a video certificate, despite the original BBFC examiners' report having been so positive in response to the film.<sup>140</sup> This demonstrates the interplay between different spheres of censorship. Mark Kermode describes the BBFC's attitude toward horror films as pandering to the sensibilities of "the tabloid hacks,"<sup>141</sup> which although a fair assessment of the particular era he discusses – the video nasties debate and the introduction and clarification of the VRA during the 1980s and 1990s – does not wholly consider the censorial impact of the activities of non-tabloid presses, as evidenced by the case of *Straw Dogs*, and indeed the video nasties too.

Sian Barber's account of this era in the BBFC's history, during which *Straw Dogs* was made and initially certified by the BBFC, is in line with Kuhn's arguments about approaches to censorship. Barber outlines the interventions made by the BBFC in productions in the 1970s not as necessarily negative – as might be the case with *Straw Dogs*<sup>142</sup> – but rather demonstrating the way in which some filmmakers would actively collaborate with the body to ensure their film would not be cut when submitted for certification.<sup>143</sup> In some cases, Barber cites filmmakers asking for a more restrictive certificate for the purposes of publicity, providing a good example of censorship functioning in a way that is not simply prohibitive. It's worth noting that these films were usually lurid horror productions, and were allowed a degree more leniency by the BBFC due to their fantastic nature. Somewhat in line with this, Tom Dewe Mathews has contrasted the responses of James Ferman – director of the BBFC – to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as "the pornography of terror"<sup>144</sup> with his fairly liberal attitude toward gratuitous slashers such as *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (Cunningham, 1980). By Ferman's own account, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* was so ridiculous it became 'fantasy', and therefore unbelievable, whereas the problem with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was that it was too good at depicting or evoking real terror.<sup>145</sup> This attitude seems to connect with Barr's argument that certain critics responded negatively to *Straw Dogs* because they were

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<sup>139</sup> Cited in Maltby, 1998, 111

<sup>140</sup> Barber, 2009, 352

<sup>141</sup> Kermode, 1997, 160

<sup>142</sup> Mathews, 1994, 200-202

<sup>143</sup> Barber, 2009, 349-353

<sup>144</sup> Cited in Mathews, 253

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 228

affected by the film. This, once more, refers back to the generic ambiguity of the film, wherein this attitude toward *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* implies that it is too well-made to be exploitation, but too violent to be art. Not only did the BBFC refuse *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* a video certificate, it was not granted a theatrical certificate until its re-release in the 1990s. In further alignment with Kuhn's argument that censorship occurs elsewhere in addition to within institutional bodies, it has been outlined in various accounts that the discomfort of actress Susan George with Peckinpah's original vision for the filming of *Straw Dogs*' rape scene unexpectedly impacted on how Peckinpah eventually filmed it.<sup>146</sup> In effect, George's refusal to film the scene as Peckinpah had initially envisioned it constitutes, essentially, a pre-production censorship of the film. This implies that such mythic accounts of a film's censorship contribute to the fan consumption of them, which is reflected in a focus on censorship context in DVD documentaries, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Shocking Truth* (2000), or in books that straddle fan and academic discourse, such as David A. Szulkin's *Last House on the Left: The Making of a Cult Classic*.

An important factor when considering the importance of censorship to the cultural status and reputation of these films is the video nasties debate. All three of the original films under consideration here were a central focus of the moral panic that emerged following the introduction of home video technology in the UK. The campaign, arguably, was a success, leading to the creation of the 1984 Video Recordings Act (VRA), which enabled the regulation of the video industry in the UK, and as a result, the essential banning of certain films from legal circulation, through the implicit and explicit refusal of certification. Although the film never appeared on the official DPP list of 'banned films', *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was part of the debate during the 1980s, along with, more officially, *The Last House on the Left*. An important part of this press campaign's success was the marked emphasis upon the notion of 'harm' – that watching video nasties could somehow make the viewer violent or dangerous.

The notion of harm, which is key to British censorship decisions in more recent decades, is inherent in the critical response to these films. That response has been disputed by Martin Barker since the height of the nasties debacle. In 1984 Barker succinctly summed up the

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<sup>146</sup> See Barker, 2006

video nasties campaign, by describing it as “a campaign of pure adjectival horror.”<sup>147</sup> In Barker’s contemporaneous work on the films, he sought to counter the piling of “adjective upon adjective”<sup>148</sup> by instead seeking to “open a debate”<sup>149</sup> about the films. Sexual violence is, by today, a particularly contentious censorship issue in the UK, whereby if BBFC examiners judge that a scene involving sex alongside violence might in any way arouse the audience, a cut will be made. This attitude finds its roots in the 1970s, particularly with the 1977 Obscene Publications Act (OPA), which brought film works into its remit, requiring that films be judged as whole works, rather than in relation to individual scenes.<sup>150</sup> Although superficially a positive development, it also meant that the BBFC was now under closer legal scrutiny and it was necessary to be stricter in its rulings. These changes that occurred as a result of the OPA were greatly influenced by media effects studies, laboratory-based studies which claim that viewer behaviour can be directly influenced by the media they consume. Despite the lack of infallible evidence on which to base these claims, Cronin notes that bodies such as the BBFC have and continue to rely on the assumptions such studies serve to support.<sup>151</sup> The researchers of this tradition employ an interpretative framework that insists that the ‘correct’ response to these films is to be offended, and as a result any differing opinion is taken as evidence that ‘harm’ has occurred.<sup>152</sup> Theresa Cronin has importantly noted that the BBFC has, since the 1970s, focused on the film spectator, as opposed to the film text, in order to censor difficult works. Specifically, Cronin argues that the ‘subject-spectator’ is very specifically characterised by media-effects research as both gendered and constructed. According to Cronin, debates about the regulation of controversial films are then more concerned with the definition of appropriate spectatorial responses, as opposed to the explicitness of content.<sup>153</sup> For British censorship scholars, such as Martin Barker, the moral concerns which emerged as part of the video nasties debate centred on the idea of the vulnerable spectator, figured either as a child or child-like, and passively subject to the supposed effects of fictional, on-screen actions. As Cronin outlines, this is still the case with today’s certification decisions at the BBFC, with her drawing on the debates around *Wolf*

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<sup>147</sup> Barker, 1984, 104

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. Barker mimics the style of the press at the time, describing the films as “disgusting exercises in sadism,” but even then avoids the temptation to “pile adjective upon adjective”.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Cronin, 2009, 6

<sup>151</sup> Cronin, 2009, 4; 9-12

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 4; 7

*Creek* (McLean, 2005), a film closely associated with the torture porn cycle, as her primary example of this approach to certification.<sup>154</sup> As outlined above in relation to *Straw Dogs*, this sort of invocation of censorship becomes cyclical: media-effects research determines the 'appropriate' response to a text, which is enforced by the press, which in turn limits the supposedly 'acceptable' ways in which the spectator can engage with a film text.<sup>155</sup> The cycle of censorship can work in the other direction too, with media outrage at particular types of film texts informing media effects research, which in turn influences censorship or certification decisions. This notion of harm, the vulnerable spectator and appropriate responses will inform my research into my case study films and their reception, given their more recent considerations in relation to censorship debates, as I've outlined. Somewhat in line with the scholarly preoccupation with the depiction and representation of women in horror films, particularly violence against women in such films, over the representation of men, accordingly so the notion of the vulnerable spectator has been seen by scholars such as Cronin to be gendered. The vulnerable spectator who may be 'harmed' by a film, that is to say they might become 'dangerous' and harmful to others, is more often than not figured as being both young and male.

Although the concept of the 'vulnerable' spectator meant that anyone from filmmakers to video sellers to fans of horror films might have earned, at least, bad reputations, or at worst criminal records thanks to the DPP, to think of the video nasties debacle as a wholly negative historical event is problematic at best. Although the campaign itself was a negative and, at times, a would-be destructive one - in that individuals faced legal prosecution and moral stigmatisation for the distribution and enjoyment of films that would subsequently become banned - as an event in the history of film distribution and reception in the UK, the video nasties panic has ensured a particular group of films a lasting resonance not only in a UK context, but worldwide, with horror fans able to use the official DPP list of banned films as a collector's check list. Kuhn's important assertion of the possibility of considering censorship as a productive process as well as a restrictive tool, in particular when considering censorship as a discourse used not only by industrial bodies but by other bodies, groups and individuals too, is vital to a consideration of the video nasties era.<sup>156</sup> Many of the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 13-19

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>156</sup> Kuhn, 1988, 7

films listed as 'video nasties' or otherwise caught up with the controversy are popular amongst horror fans, and one wonders whether many of them would be so culturally familiar within Britain were they *not* part of the video nasties campaign. The context of the video nasties debate allows for a cultural framework to be applied to these films not only by fans, but also amongst critics and academics. Kate Egan usefully explores the function of the video nasties context to the continued popularity amongst fans of these formerly banned films in the form of DVD re-releases, which in turn contributes to their cultural visibility. As Egan outlines, these re-releases focus on "a recognisable cultural event" and are associated with a "familiar commercial identity,"<sup>157</sup> which appeals to fans of the films as well as maintaining the public visibility of the debates that surround that particular commercial identity. Most crucially of all, perhaps, Egan identifies two clear ways in which the video nasties context is not only a negative - that is to say, prohibitive - one. The first is the way in which fans and distributors are able to make use of "the subcultural or commercial potential of the nasties category"<sup>158</sup>; and the second concerns the shifting nature of the films' position as either trash or art-house filmmaking, this fluidity "enhanced during the course of the history of their critical reception and exhibition in different venues through time."<sup>159</sup> For Egan, these films' association with the video nasties context has resulted in wildly differing films, in terms of their associations with the horror genre and art cinema, to be "retrospectively grouped together" in such a way as to make them "interchangeable".<sup>160</sup> Thus the historical context of the films' initial UK distribution and reception is as important to their classification as any traditional notions of textually-defined genres.

Much has changed in the way in which films are censored or classified in the UK since the 1970s onward, at the very least structurally. Harm, however, still remains a central consideration in the certifying of film works, either for theatrical or home release. The British Board of Film Censors became the British Board of Film Classification in 1984, in light of its new role in certifying home media releases for distribution.<sup>161</sup> Up until 30<sup>th</sup> July 2012 the BBFC provided age certification for video games in the UK,<sup>162</sup> and as of 2<sup>nd</sup> September

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<sup>157</sup> Egan, 2007, 5-6

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>159</sup> Egan, 2007, 233

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> 'Video Ratings'

<sup>162</sup> 'Video Games'

2013, the board has been appointed to provide age certification for mobile content.<sup>163</sup> These changes in responsibilities at the BBFC reflect the changing nature of film and video distribution in an increasingly digital age. The BBFC guidelines have been amended and changed on several occasions, most recently in 2013. These guidelines outline the legal contexts within which the BBFC must work, but also the specific content guidelines for each age certificate, including the special R18 certificate for pornographic material. In relation to the VRA, notably in 2010 the act was repealed and reinstated by the UK government when it emerged that the original act was unenforceable due to the fact that the European Commission had not been notified of the act when it was introduced in 1984. In 2009 an amendment to Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 was enforced, criminalising the possession of ‘extreme pornography’, a category with some DPP guidelines but ultimately defined by the judge and juries of particular criminal cases. Although Section 63 does not apply to BBFC-classified works, it *does* apply to any sections of classified works when removed from the context of a work as a whole.<sup>164</sup> This galvanises the BBFC’s commitment to paying particularly close attention to the certification of home media precisely because “of the increased possibility of [...] works being replayed or viewed out of context.”<sup>165</sup> Much of this sort of legislation, therefore, depends upon an unclear and apparently subjective definition of ‘harm’ or ‘obscenity.’

Notably much of the BBFC’s guideline revisions and new research continues to focus on issues of sexual violence, most recently with research carried out by Ipsos MORI,<sup>166</sup> and the board’s subsequent commitment to adjusting their policies in response.<sup>167</sup> Although the BBFC appear to have become a more ‘liberal’ organisation, the board still cuts films and refuses certificates for films from time to time. Recent cases such as *A Serbian Film* (Spasodovich, 2010), *The Human Centipede 2: Full Sequence* (Six, 2011) and *The Bunny Game* (Rehmeier, 2011) feature extreme depictions of violence and sexual violence. Both *A Serbian Film* and *The Human Centipede 2* were certified with 18 certificates, for home and theatrical releases, following very extensive cuts. *The Human Centipede 2* was initially banned outright, until the distributor appealed and agreed to cuts totalling almost three

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<sup>163</sup> ‘BBFC replaces the Independent Mobile Classification Board...’, 2013

<sup>164</sup> ‘Extreme Pornography’, 2013

<sup>165</sup> BBFC Guidelines, 2009, 11

<sup>166</sup> IPSOS MORI, 2012

<sup>167</sup> ‘BBFC is to adjust sexual and sadistic violence policy...’, 2012

minutes. *The Bunny Game* was banned out-right, because the film's extreme content "pervades [the film] in a potentially harmful manner".<sup>168</sup>

Although the BBFC still enforces cuts to films and sometimes refuses a film a certificate, a moral panic on the same scale as that which emerged around the video nasties has not since manifested in relation to fictional films. This may be due in part to changes in viewing technologies, namely the internet, and the resultant ease of access to violent pornography and recordings of real-life crime. The manner in which consensual pornography and recordings of criminal acts have been conflated in the press and by campaigners suggests extreme moral policing inherent to such a panic, similar to that of the video nasties. The press reportage of a recent high profile criminal provides an important example of easily accessible child pornography being the primary concern of moral campaigners. It was widely reported during the trial of Mark Bridger for the murder of April Jones that a recording of *The Last House on the Left* (2009) was found in his home by police, paused during a sexually violent scene. The difference between the frequency with which this was immediately reported on online news stories, compared to the much reduced presence of the fact in the print stories the next day (from the same outlets) suggests that other concerns were of greater importance to the press. The online reporting of the fact is also, in several cases, implicitly downplayed – or at least, not sensationalised – as major newspaper websites simply reproduced the story as reported by the Press Association.<sup>169</sup> When the reporting of this fact is included in longer reports about the case, it is often a relatively throw away element of the story. For example, a much lengthier story on the *Daily Mail* website features the headline 'Revealed: Killer Mark Bridger watched violent slasher film rape scene before April's murder and was obsessed with child porn'<sup>170</sup> The main text, however, only features six lines recounting the detail about *Last House on the Left*, while in the next day's print edition there is no mention of the film at all, in several pages worth of coverage. This comparative lack of 'danger' attributed to this film remake, and by extension, similar films,

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<sup>168</sup> Cooke, 'The Director's Commentary', 176. Although the films which face heavy cuts or an outright ban by the BBFC are more often than not ones which contain graphic depictions of extreme acts of violence, this is not always the case. This was recently demonstrated by the cuts demanded of Axelle Carolyn's supernatural drama *Soulmate* (2014), which featured a contentious scene of suicide. See Edwards-Behi, 2014 and Bussey, 2014 for detail.

<sup>169</sup> Including *The Sun*, *The Mirror* and *The Independent* (all May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013), which reproduce the PA story in its entirety and offer no further reportage.

<sup>170</sup> Robinson, 30 May 2013



impacts upon any consideration of the films' marketing and reception. If, as suggested, other issues are of more concern when broadly considering notions of media 'harm' – namely the internet and, in particular, child pornography – then the remakes of formerly controversial horror films no longer appear to occupy the same 'dangerous' space as their predecessors. If this is the case, then part of what my research can reveal is how this might impact upon the way in which the remake case study films might be marketed, and in particular, the way in which they are reviewed and talked about – that is, whether or not they are still made into cultural scapegoats in any way.

### *Political and Cultural Contexts*

In addition to exploring the artistic and production contexts that inform a film and its promotion and reception, historical cultural contexts have also been seen to contribute to the critical rehabilitation of controversial texts.<sup>171</sup> While dismissed as gratuitous or debasing on initial release, more recent accounts of the original case study films have seen important correlations between the films' narratives and important historical events. It's unsurprising that the Vietnam War has been identified a central informing context, in particular in relation to the undermining of traditional institutions of authority in these films. Due to the real life prevalence of images of violence from the conflict appearing in news media, there was an increased degree of immediacy with the realities of conflict, resulting in the usual jingoism and propaganda of war less convincing. More recently, the conflicts in the Middle East seem to have functioned in a similar manner, and have in turn been seen to influence the character of more recent horror cinema.

At the time of the film's release, *Last House on the Left* had few defenders: influential film critic Roger Ebert was an exception to the norm, while Robin Wood claimed the film as one of his 'neglected nightmares'. Wood here argues that although *Last House on the Left* makes no direct reference to the Vietnam War, the film can be seen as a consideration of the nature of violence in a particularly violent time.<sup>172</sup> Much of *Last House on the Left's* critical rehabilitation thereafter has arisen due to its perceived position as a work of social commentary. Adam Lowenstein has effectively argued, more recently, that the film is a work directly responding to the war in Vietnam, and reflects the national trauma that came

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<sup>171</sup> See Egan, 2007; Mathijs, 2005

<sup>172</sup> Wood, 1980, 27

as a result of the conflict. Lowenstein pin-points the crucial central figure of the film, which he particularly sees in the film's marketing, of the terrorised, teenage female body. Comparing the images found on the film's posters to that of Vietnam War photography and, in particular, an image of teen protestor Mary Vecchio at the Kent State University massacre, Lowenstein argues that the teenage victims in the film become representative of the vulnerable, feminised nation. Importantly, for Lowenstein, the criminal gang, although repulsive, are not out-right villains, but victims of social order. Krug, the gang-leader, commits the greatest acts of violence, and yet is given the space to voice class indignation when confronted with the bourgeois family home. The importance of the film's equal treatment of violence, with the gang's attack on the girls and the parents' attack on the gang presented as stylistically similar – and thus equally as deplorable - has also been noted as key to the film's importance as a social comment.<sup>173</sup>

Somewhat secondary to invocations of the conflict in Vietnam, but clearly related, Tony Williams' focus on the undermining of the 'love generation' that *Last House on the Left* embodies in Mari Collingwood. For him, this is illustrated by the fact that although she wears her parents' gift of a peace-symbol necklace, she goes into town with Phyllis to see a violent rock group called 'Bloodlust'.<sup>174</sup> This exposé of the darker side of the hippie generation has also been associated with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which might be seen to less directly invoke Vietnam.<sup>175</sup> Tony Williams, for instance, sees the character of the Hitchhiker as subversively embodying "the dark aspect of hippie youth culture" by invoking potential comparisons with Charles Manson.<sup>176</sup> What these arguments imply is that these films do not so much criticise their youthful characters – Mari and Phyllis, Sally and her friends – but rather that the films expose the futility of such a youth movement in its claims for non-violence in such violent times.

More recently a period of political unrest has again been seen as an influence upon horror filmmaking. While the Vietnam War is broadly seen as a single, monolithic conflict, although it ties in to the politics of the broader Cold War era, there are several conflicts and events

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<sup>173</sup> See Lowenstein, 2005, 118; and Crane, 2002, 176

<sup>174</sup> See Williams, 1996, 137-138

<sup>175</sup> Wood leaves reference to Vietnam in a footnote, wherein he questions that the violence committed by formerly useful workers might comment on the return of soldiers, trained to kill, from the conflict. (83)

<sup>176</sup> Williams, 1996, 190

that have been seen to be reflected in or exert an influence upon modern American horror filmmaking. The broad term for this period is 'post-9/11', the date marking the terror attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the USA. Two major conflicts directly followed the attacks, the war in Afghanistan and the Second Gulf War, but post-9/11 also refers to broader tensions between the USA, and its allies, and various Middle Eastern countries, and the resultant increase in surveillance, paranoia and fear. That the current 'cycle' of horror remaking seemed to emerge and boom in 2003 would seem to place it very firmly within this political 'era' of filmmaking. The particular element of the political period that is most commonly associated with horror filmmaking is the revelations of torture and mistreatment as committed by American and allied troops. The most high-profile example of this emerged from Abu Ghraib prison, where members of the American armed forces tortured, abused and killed prisoners. Photos of the mistreatment of prisoners were widely distributed and published in newspapers and it has been argued that this particular aspect of the post-9/11 culture has been reflected in the controversial 'torture porn' cycle of films. As Jason Middleton notes, the height of the cycle's popularity is relatively contained to the period 2005-2007,<sup>177</sup> however, as noted earlier, films are still referred to as 'torture porn' in the press, and there are still a great number of films released directly to DVD which conform to the key textual components of the cycle. Middleton's piece prioritises theatrical releases, which results in a somewhat reductive view of horror filmmaking, much of which does not receive a theatrical release. Middleton's article focusses in particular on *Hostel* (Roth, 2005) and *Hostel II* (Roth, 2007), treating them as bookends to the torture porn cycle proper. He aligns the fall of the popularity of the torture porn cycle with the end of the Bush administration, claiming that torture porn was popular only during the time when "the extent and nature of the American use of torture was unclear to the public,"<sup>178</sup> something which changed with the Obama administration. The extent to which this is true is highly debatable, especially given the on-going controversies surrounding American involvement with torture and unlawful surveillance, but also due to the continued presence of torture porn both as a filmic category and as an active genre. Mark Bernard has recently outlined the importance of the DVD format to the success of the

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<sup>177</sup> Middleton, 2010, 2

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 3

'splat pack' filmmakers,<sup>179</sup> and given the increasing use of online streaming platforms of home viewing, those films which are not released into theatres are arguably even more likely to be seen as users browse online platforms where little differentiation is made between films which have been released theatrically and those which have not.

The torture porn cycle is controversial in two ways: its violent content and its definition. While some argue that torture porn doesn't exist, others refer to it as a subgenre or a cycle. As outlined above, members of the 'splat pack' are most commonly associated with the more high-profile titles of this cycle, however, many examples made by other filmmakers exist. Although the torture porn cycle is primarily associated with the USA, one of the cycle's most prominent titles, *Wolf Creek*, is an Australian film, while later high profile films which may not technically be part of the cycle proper, but which are discussed in relation to torture porn, are also from outside the USA, such as *Martyrs* (France), *A Serbian Film* (Serbia) and *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)* (Netherlands/UK). French films such as *Martyrs* and *Frontiers* (Gens, 2007) have also been associated with the 'New French Extremity', another term coined by a journalist, James Quandt, initially to refer to films more associated with art cinema but that incorporate 'genre' elements, namely explicit depictions of violence.<sup>180</sup> This would seem to further point toward a blurring of boundaries between 'art' and 'entertainment', should 'horror' be seen as traditionally considered as entertainment by dint of being 'not art'. This somewhat problematizes the easy correlation of torture porn with an American cultural context, however, it also points to the difficulty in thinking of 'torture porn' as a coherent body of work. The range of films associated with the cycle might also reflect back upon the global implications of 'post-9/11' culture.

Others, such as Sarah Wharton, have questioned the validity of 'torture porn' and instead consider the films often included in the cycle as part and parcel of 'neo-grindhouse', because the films can be seen to share "characteristics of the style of films exhibited in grindhouse theatres."<sup>181</sup> The torture porn cycle has been one of the most prominent features of modern horror filmmaking, and as such it is into such discourses that the remade case study films emerge. Considering that many of the splat pack profess an admiration for

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<sup>179</sup> Bernard, 2014, 6; also in greater detail 27-47 and 70-95

<sup>180</sup> Quandt, 2004. Quandt refers to films such as Bruno Dumont's *Twentynine Palms* and Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day*.

<sup>181</sup> Wharton, 2013, 198

the 'classic' horror films of the 1970s, it seems to be little wonder that so many of these same titles have been remade in the past decade. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake was released three years prior to the first uses of the term 'torture porn', but as a label it has been used retrospectively in discussion of films such as *Wolf Creek* and *Dog Soldiers*. The extent to which the remakes have been labelled 'torture porn' will become clear in my analysis in chapter four; however, clearly and significantly, the rise of the contemporary horror remaking cycle correlates, in many respects, to the rise (and debatably the fall) of the torture porn cycle.

### *Conclusion*

For Wood, because the horror genre is considered 'entertainment', rather than 'art', it can be "far more radical and fundamentally undermining" than more traditional social-realist or artistic 'message' films.<sup>182</sup> The idea that the value ascribed to a particular film – whether as legitimate art or as illegitimate trash – impacts upon the way in which it is seen to be able to put forward meaning or messages is crucial to an understanding of how the film is then received by different audiences. Central to my own interest in the shifting status of a historically circulating text is the relationship between the different stages of value ascription, meaning making, and further value ascription. What my research will particularly focus on is how these shifting statuses are transferred, if at all, to the films' remakes.

In relation to the four broad topics I have outlined above, the original case study films under analysis have all seen a change in their reception, both in the UK and beyond, publically, critically and academically. In relation to genre, this rehabilitation has occurred through the increased recognition in film studies and film criticism of blurred boundaries between art and trash, or art and entertainment. Although the directors of these films were once decried for their gratuitousness or their intention to harm, they have since been considered, in varying ways, to be authors of their work. Although not necessarily *auteurs* in the strictest sense of the word - that is to say, conforming to any traditionalist conceptions of film *auteurism* – each director has been utilised, at different moments, as a tool of legitimisation. Academic debates around censorship have informed more recent accounts of the original case study films; particularly accounts which attempt to consider the films'

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<sup>182</sup> Wood, 1986, 78

public circulation within particular historical contexts. Crucially, such debates do not only consider censorship to be institutional or restrictive, but also critical and moral, as well as constructive. These films can be seen as key examples of texts that have been discussed in relation to debates regarding the 'vulnerable' film audience, an audience figured both by censorship bodies and by the press. Contextualisations of the films within the broader cultural and historical climate in which they were made has allowed for shifting types of meaning making in relation to these texts. Similarly, the films have been reframed as feminist works, or discussed as part of the inherent patriarchy of narrative filmmaking. The remakes of these films have not had the same lengthy release histories, however, and as outlined above, issues of genre, authorship, censorship and cultural and political contexts are all crucial considerations to their promotion and reception. Perhaps the most crucial context for the remakes is, of course, the original films. While a great deal of discussion of horror remakes focuses on textual comparisons with the source films, my project seeks to outline and explore the full range of key discourses that inform the promotional and reception histories of all these films.

Much of this chapter establishes and identifies a particular set of historical meanings for the original films. The remakes in turn interplay with the original texts in varying ways. For example, they can interplay in terms of production contexts, narrative, themes or aesthetics. What I will particularly focus on, in the chapters that follow, is the interplay between the marketing of the remakes in relation to, not only the marketing of the originals, but in relation to the contexts and debates that surround and have become associated with the original films as well. In my analyses of the reception of each remake, I will seek out references to the contexts which have informed existing debates on the original films. This will allow for the potential to uncover correlations made between the contexts of the originals and the contexts of the remakes, and whether comparisons are drawn in order to inform positive or negative responses to the remakes. Therefore my own work must be placed at a cross-section in relation to these various critical accounts of these films. Although my research considers marketing and press responses to the films, such critical work also contributes to the existing reputations of the films. Through analysing the materials with these contexts in mind, my own work might confirm existing critical conceptions of the films, or it will highlight areas which have not previously been

considered. The existing contexts, as outlined in this chapter, will provide a focus for my own analysis of these materials. Though genre, authorship, censorship and politics are not the main influences upon the questions that initiated my research, they emerge as key discourses in the material under examination in chapters three and four. In the next chapter, I will outline the methodology I will employ in approaching various marketing and reception materials, as well as define and outline existing academic literature relating to the remake as a type of filmmaking.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review: Methodology**

In the previous chapter I sought to outline the specific contexts of each of the individual case studies that are the focus of my research. The critical debates initiated by my six case study films provide a broad view of the sorts of concepts and discourses that informed the emergent and lively discussions that took place across a range of fora in the UK in the 1970s, discussions that persist today. Broadly, these constitute the nature of film and filmmakers' responsibilities towards the 'average' viewer's wants and well-being, and the regulation of those films and filmmakers who are seen to overstep the boundaries of what, at any given time, are seen as acceptable depictions - morally and aesthetically - within a film. Although my chosen original case study films are far from isolated cases, they are all films which remain prominent in film culture and critical consciousness today, to varying degrees, and each have been reassessed and reanalysed over the course of their histories of public circulation. The shifts in the films' receptions, as identified in the last chapter, point to changes in the culture that receives them. This shifting cultural history, and its impact on the status of these films, provides the legacy into which the recent remakes emerge. The remakes must therefore not only be positioned in relation to the contexts of genre and contemporary Hollywood, but also the history of their precedents' conception and production, and the key contexts that have informed the films they remake.

My main interest lies in the cultural status of the film remakes and, as such, the reception history of the original films becomes important in contributing to an understanding of the remakes' production and reception. Through a comparative analysis of contextual materials from the marketing and reviewing of the original case study films, greater light can be shed on the formations of taste constructed around the newer texts, both as genre films and as remakes. Given the proliferation of remakes in Hollywood over the last decade or so, most of which are genre films (be they broadly horror films, or thrillers or action franchises), my case studies should provide points of analysis and reference that are more broadly applicable to the contemporary reception of remakes and their status in relation to taste and cultural value. In this chapter, I will outline the main theoretical works which underpin my thesis, primarily in relation to the formation of taste but also in relation to conceptions of the film remake. The primary aim of this literature review is to outline the way in which



existing work informs and shapes my research questions as well as the aims of my thesis. In order to appropriately answer these questions, my work must therefore also be firmly rooted in existing investigations into the reception of films and taste judgements made of them. This chapter therefore outlines existing work and traditions in which my thesis is situated, relating to the broad concerns and methods of my research questions, being predominantly taste and cultural distinction, controversy and cultural rehabilitation, film remaking, and genre. Analysing film remakes through a reception studies approach offers a relatively under-explored consideration of the changing cultural reception of remade films and their originary texts through different eras, as well as considering remakes in a way that is not primarily based on textual comparison, as a great deal of remake studies tend to be.

In this chapter I will, first, outline the existing literature on film remakes, particularly in relation to concepts of taste. My thesis considers remakes as a specific mode of filmmaking, similar in some respects to literary adaptations or sequels, and as a result of this specificity, it's important to outline what scholars have seen to be the particular qualities that remakes offer that contribute to their reception, and the public formation of taste around them. Secondly, I will consider key scholarly work on the formation and function of taste in relation to cultural objects, and the ways in which the concept of taste has informed film reception studies. It is within the tradition of these works of film reception that my own work is placed, and such earlier investigations will underpin and inform my methodological approaches to the analysis of the promotion and reception of my case studies. Thirdly, and drawing on the first two sections of the chapter, I will provide an account of my methodological approaches to the materials that will inform the thesis' theoretical map of the promotion and reception of the case study films.

Pierre Bourdieu's treatise on taste, resulting from a decade of ethnographic research and as outlined in the 1970s in *Distinction*, is one of the central theoretical works that underpins my research and its aims. Although Bourdieu's work in *Distinction* is easily criticised and problematized due to his disregard for contextual issues such as gender and race, in favour of an obsessive preoccupation with class issues, his primary theoretical concepts are incredibly useful and applicable means of addressing the public formation of taste in relation to film, and have been influential in this regard. Bourdieu roots his work in Marxist philosophy; the Frankfurt School, which produced key works by the likes of Theodor Adorno,

were influential on Bourdieu's later work. Across this chapter, I will particularly address and consider Bourdieu's work in relation to the tradition of film reception studies.

### *Taste and the Film Remake*

Sociological work on matters of taste, such as the work of Bourdieu, often seeks to uncover issues relating to ideology, or the ideological stances of particular individuals or institutions. My own research does not primarily aim to seek out the ideological positions of either specific marketers or reviewers, nor their respective companies or publications, but rather to uncover the way in which they go about exerting formations of taste in dialogue with pertinent cultural contexts, and how that process itself has changed. The ideological implications of such processes and the changes which occur to them come afterwards, and as such stripping Bourdieu's work down to his ideological positions seems appropriate in order to uncover useful and rigorous theories of social and cultural power asserted through his definitions of and approaches to art and taste.

In addition to Bourdieu's work, the work of the Marxist philosopher, Walter Benjamin, can be applied to analyses of film remaking. In his famous essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, which emerged in response to the rise of film art and its political use, Benjamin claims that any work of art made by man can be made again. Though not the main thrust of the essay's argument, this statement is particularly applicable in considering processes of film remaking, particularly because of the way in which Benjamin details how remaking art takes place. Benjamin outlines three circumstances in the historical remaking of works of art, these being pupils copying masters, masters copying themselves to achieve wider circulation, and anyone copying anyone as a means to make money.<sup>183</sup> All three of these circumstances outlined by Benjamin are potentially applicable to film remakes and offer interesting ways in which to read the process of film remaking. To apply Benjamin's work as a whole to the film remake would require a more textually-orientated approach than mine, however, his notion of the loss of 'aura' of an original art work when it is reproduced clearly has relevance in relation to the idea of a dichotomy in remaking: the authentic original and the inauthentic remake. While Benjamin's arguments are drawn on in remake studies less frequently than might be assumed, his work is alluded to in Craig Frost's

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<sup>183</sup> Benjamin, 2008, 3

article on the process of remaking *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, in which Frost references Anne Friedberg's claim that the loss caused by mechanical reproduction is not only that of aura, but of the moment of exhibition.<sup>184</sup> Frost uses this claim in order to argue that the remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* does not replicate the post-Vietnam 'aura' of the original.<sup>185</sup>

Thomas Leitch writes specifically about the function of the cinematic remake and in some ways reflects Benjamin's claims in his own. For Leitch, film remaking is an inherently destructive practice, in that the remake seeks to replace the original film. In some cases this is literally true – sound remakes of silent films by the same production studio, for example, who in not archiving the original, silent version of the film, lose its prints entirely, leaving only the remake – but Leitch extends that literal intention to the industrial practice of remaking as a whole. The way in which the remake seeks to replace the original lies in its paradoxical appeal as being the same as, only better than, the original, and Leitch sees the concept of disavowal as key to this paradox.<sup>186</sup> In essence, though, Leitch's formulation of film remakes as destructive corresponds to Benjamin's idea that mechanical reproduction in some way destroys the aura of an original work of art. However, central to Leitch's ideas is the concept of property, and a film's position as legally owned by the rights holder, in addition to an adaptation's legal use of property legally owned by another party.<sup>187</sup> This differs, in essence, to the work of Bourdieu and Benjamin, in that in order to consider the processes of film remaking Leitch considers film as legal property, as opposed to pure art or cultural form.<sup>188</sup>

From this perspective, Leitch proposes a triangular relationship between the film remake, the original film on which it is based, and the original property on which both films are based. In Leitch's work he focuses on what he terms 'archival remakes', which are newer

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<sup>184</sup> Friedberg in Frost, 2009, 72

<sup>185</sup> Friedberg's claim that the loss of the moment of exhibition is as important as that of the loss of aura is also relevant to discussion of grindhouse cinema, as outlined in the previous chapter, whereby scholars such as David Church and Sarah Wharton have asserted that contemporary films which attempt to pay homage to grindhouse filmmaking can never truly do so as they cannot replicate the exhibition space of the 'grindhouse' cinema.

<sup>186</sup> Leitch, 2002, 44

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 38

<sup>188</sup> Admittedly, neither Benjamin nor Bourdieu seems to explicitly consider film as an art form, at the time of writing *The Work of Art...* and *Distinction* respectively, but I mean to say that I apply their theories to film under the assumption that film is, by and large, today considered an art form.

adaptations of earlier properties from a different medium such as novels or plays, in order to illustrate more broadly the rhetorical problems posed and faced by remakes.<sup>189</sup> One point of this triangular relationship is arguably less important in my own research, as my focus is not on archival remakes, and so the shared property being adapted is normally the script of the original film. Two of my case studies arguably have a third point to consider. The original *Last House on the Left* is well-known as an adaptation of sorts of Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*, however, it does not explicitly credit the earlier property.<sup>190</sup> Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* is an adaptation of Gordon Williams' novel *The Siege of Trencher's Farm*, while the remake credits both the novel, and Peckinpah and David Zelag Goodman's earlier screenplay. However, these instances do not conform to Leitch's idea of the archival remake because they essentially remake two previous properties. Further, the concept of the archival remake might not take into account real-life influences, such as the influence of the serial killer Ed Gein on *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, and the further influence of meanings associated with that historical figure that may be exerted on the remake.

As Leitch rightly asserts, his specific analysis of archival remakes illuminates the broader rhetorical processes applicable to film remakes. In this respect his concept of disavowal is central to understanding the processes involved in the various relationships between remake and original film. Leitch primarily employs a textual analysis of archival remakes in order to demonstrate issues such as disavowal in the films themselves, however, disavowal as a technique involved in the process of remaking can clearly also be found elsewhere, such as in marketing materials. Similarly, instances of disavowal in reviews of remakes contribute to the way in which remakes are critically understood – for example, through whether or not comparison with the original film is the primary way in which particular remakes are assessed. As Leitch importantly notes, disavowal can occur both through the claim of a remake's superiority to an original film, or, perhaps more interestingly, through recollection and valorisation of the original film.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Leitch, 2002, 38-39

<sup>190</sup> *Last House on the Left* certainly doesn't credit the original source that *The Virgin Spring* adapts, the anonymous 13<sup>th</sup> century Swedish poem 'Torë's Daughters in Vänge'.

<sup>191</sup> Leitch, 2002, 54

As I have mentioned, Leitch's work focuses on films he terms 'archival remakes'. He also outlines an "exhaustive, albeit extremely simplified, taxonomy of the remake,"<sup>192</sup> comprising four categories of remake: readaptations, updates, homages and true remakes. Given the apparent difficulty in pinning down a definition of a 'remake', it is vital that I clearly outline precisely what I mean in this thesis when I refer to the term 'remake'. A term as debatable in its definition as 'genre', I here use it to mean a very specific sort of filmmaking, and within a specific context. Recent academic work on the cinematic remake has sought to define the term, resulting in the crossover of particular topics of consideration, although no agreed-upon definition seems to have emerged. Particular considerations include a film's textual features, as well as various extra-textual features such as a film's production context, economic considerations and the terms in which it is discussed by reviewers and commentators. In the past decade or so several books have been published on the film remake, offering broad overviews of the practice and more specific analyses of filmic examples. Two edited collections – *Play it Again, Sam*, edited by Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. Dougal and *Dead Ringers*, edited by Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos – published in 1998 and 2002 respectively, include a wide range of essays dealing with various aspects of film remaking. Importantly, the sorts of films being discussed in these volumes vary greatly, from straight-forward remakes (*Nosferatu* [Murnau, 1922/Herzog, 1979]), to multiple film versions of a folk tale (*Robin Hood* films), to cross-media adaptations (Robert Altman's *MASH* [1970] and the 1972 television series). This highlights the broad scope of texts that the term 'remake' can encompass. More specific works on the film remake include Lucy Mazdon's work on Hollywood remakes of French cinema, *Encore Hollywood*, and Scott A. Lukas and John Marmysz's edited collection *Fear, Cultural Anxiety and Transformation*, which collects essays specifically on horror, science-fiction and fantasy remakes. A recent collection edited by Kathleen Loock and Constantine Verevis includes essays on fan reproductions alongside those on re-adaptations and on remakes, as there has been "ample discussion devoted to [...] adaptations and remakes, sequels, and series,"<sup>193</sup> and therefore there is room for discussion of "fan-films, fanvids, and mash-up or recut trailers".<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Loock & Verevis, 2012, 3

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

What all these volumes have in common is an assertion that the study of the film remake is a means to achieve a greater understanding of film history, film culture, and the social functions of film. It is the social and cultural function of film that is central to my thesis, that is to say the way in which film is used as foci for the formation of public notions of taste, and as such this will focus my use of existing literature on remakes. However, the usefulness of analysing remakes in relation to film culture and history is also important to outline here, given that my study specifically compares the remakes with the original films. The way in which remakes relate to changes in film history and culture are vital to a thorough investigation of their social functions. Although I will here primarily be outlining academic investigations into the remake, it is worth noting that a great deal of talk regarding the remake has also emerged in non-academic sources in recent years, including in film magazines, newspapers and by fan-journalists online, which points to the growing profile of film remaking as a topic of public discussion, particularly as an activity which is often contentious or derided.

An important distinction must be made in that my study is concerned with the contemporary Hollywood practice of film remaking. The processes that are involved with film remaking change with their contexts, and as such historical accounts of the remake may involve a focus on different processes. However, these processes can be revealing in establishing a theoretical framework for the study of the film remake. Koos and Forrest, in the introduction to their collection on the remake, outline the different production contexts that have been important factors in different historical periods of remaking films. They draw particular attention to the practise of making 'dupes', that is, identical copies of earlier silent films made with sound,<sup>195</sup> which is, naturally, an entirely different context of remaking than, for example, the post-sound era recycling of copyrighted materials by studios to produce many versions of the same narrative. Forrest provides a detailed account of the context of remaking pre-1906, in which issues regarding copyright are not only central to contentions regarding the legality of remaking, but to the very foundation of cinema as its own art form.<sup>196</sup> In the USA, legal challenges were made against companies duping or copying earlier films during this period. The emphasis in these cases was on the copying of

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<sup>195</sup> Forrest & Koos, 2002, 3

<sup>196</sup> Forrest, 2002, 90

mechanical techniques as the most important legal issue, rather than the copying of narrative or style. Such challenges changed the way in which motion pictures were copyrighted, insofar as the mechanical processes of filmmaking were the copyrightable elements, over content or narrative. This, in turn, impacted upon and influenced the changing form of early cinema, notably in relation to the recognition of a unique film language, in that the mechanical processes being copyrighted were unique to cinema and the identification and recognition of early genres.<sup>197</sup> As Forrest asserts, her analysis of this early remaking highlights the importance of considering historical and industrial context to the practice of remaking, perhaps particularly in the case of American remaking, as the American film industry appears to have most readily embraced the practice. If contemporary Hollywood cinema is to be characterised as commerce- and brand-led (see Grainge, below), then this relates to the argument put forward by Leitch and others that the notion of film as property is central to processes of remaking, even above and beyond the notions of technological property, and in a commercialised system film is property before it is art. Arguably, then, Hollywood remaking has always been predominantly a commercial process.

Forrest outlines many early filmmakers' attitudes toward copying as emerging from cinema's carnival and vaudeville roots, in which performers would often take others' ideas for their own. As cinema increasingly moved away from these roots toward a tradition of literary and theatrical adaptation and copyrighting of film as property, issues of authorship became more pronounced.<sup>198</sup> This highlights an important defining point of the remake, that is, its differentiation from other forms of film adaptation. As my above outline of the main academic work published recently on the film remake demonstrates, much academic writing considers different sorts of adaptation processes as remake (several reworkings of literary properties, for example). The practice of remaking that I will be considering is one that entirely concerns new film versions of earlier film texts. As I have outlined, the original *Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* problematize this, to a degree, given as both are adaptations themselves. Some academics consider a film which only takes some inspiration, and not necessarily the specific narrative structure from another film, as a remake. For

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 90-91

<sup>198</sup> Forrest, 2002, 96

example, Anat Zanger, in his consideration of *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960; and Van Sant, 1998), cites both *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween* as 'pastiche' of the Hitchcock film, which he considers a form of remaking.<sup>199</sup> This somewhat marginalises a generic consideration of these films, with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween* demonstrating the evolution of generic traits of the horror film and *Psycho*'s influence on those developments. In my own research this might be extended to a consideration of the way in which genre films released in the time between the release of the original film and its remake, and genre films contemporary to the remake, might have impacted on the marketing and reception of such generically similar films. Zanger's claim also fails to adequately address the role of the real-life serial killer Ed Gein as inspiration for elements of both *Psycho* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which denies authorial intent and agency to Robert Bloch and Hitchcock, and Tobe Hooper and Kim Henkel, in that each may have taken separate distinct inspiration from real life cases.<sup>200</sup> Others consider allusion as a form of remaking, as well as pastiche, and Hitchcock is a filmmaker frequently cited as a persistent self-remaker, as much for his self-allusion as his own remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Hitchcock, 1934/1956).<sup>201</sup> If remaking is considered as a broad industrial practise that encompasses moments of allusion and pastiche in individual films then more specific terminology becomes necessary to differentiate between remade 'moments' and entire films.

Constantine Verevis provides a broad overview of scholarly debates on film remaking in *Film Remakes*. Verevis outlines work carried out by earlier writers Michael B. Druxman and Harvey Roy Greenberg for the purpose of providing more specific categories in relation to the film remake. Druxman posits three categories: the disguised remake, the direct remake and the non-remake. The disguised remake makes significant changes to the original narrative, such as setting or genre, while the non-remake adopts the title of a previous film but does not replicate its narrative in any way; the direct remake, by contrast, does not hide that it is a version of an earlier film.<sup>202</sup> Druxman's categories are developed by Greenberg, who outlines his own three types of film remake: the acknowledged, closed remake; the

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<sup>199</sup> Zanger, 2006, 9-10

<sup>200</sup> It's also worth noting that Gein does in fact emerge as an important reference point in the reviewing of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, which will be discussed in chapter three.

<sup>201</sup> For example see Zanger, 2006, 9; Leitch, 2002, 39; Verevis, 2006, 60-61

<sup>202</sup> Verevis, 2006, 7



acknowledged, transformed remake; and the unacknowledged, disguised remake. These categories slightly reduced the overlap of Druxman's definitions, whereby an acknowledged, close remake is relatively synonymous with the direct remake, while the acknowledged, transformed remake is a film that may make substantial changes to an original property while providing varying degrees of acknowledgement; and the unacknowledged, disguised remake allows for any degree of change or no change from the original film, but does not inform the audience of the earlier property on which it is based.<sup>203</sup> The slight differences in categorisation highlights a key consideration for Verevis, and that is, again, the notion of 'property,' here intellectual and artistic property in relation to scripts or film works, rather than mechanical processes. The acknowledgement or lack of acknowledgement of an original source becomes vital not only to definitions of remake, as far as copyright and economy is concerned, but to the films' own cultural status, as a 'remake' rather than an 'original'. This recalls Forrest's identification of copyright ownership as key to early remaking and its cultural status. This concept of property also draws attention again to what constitutes a remake insofar as some definitions of remakes consider repeated adaptations of literary sources as remakes, or film adaptations from other media – stage plays, television programmes, computer games – as remaking. This thesis does not seek to redefine the remake; however, in order to clearly set the terms for my work I must specify that in the confines of this study I do not consider cross-media adaptations as strict remakes.

A great deal of existing literature on cinematic remakes focuses on cross-cultural remakes, in particular the remaking of French and East Asian films in Hollywood. This has allowed for a focus on the cultural significance of Hollywood's apparent hegemony in relation to a specific nation's filmmaking. My own research purposefully will not be taking this into account, given as my case studies are American remakes of American films. *Straw Dogs* problematizes this to a degree, given its position as an American film made in the UK, with a predominantly British cast. However, the film is at least partly an American production, and most considerations of cross-cultural remakes analyse films remade in English from other languages, which does not apply in the case of *Straw Dogs*. Additionally, as I outlined in chapter one, *Straw Dogs* was arguably rejected by much of the British critical establishment, and, it has been argued, that this was due to its particularly American generic approach.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 9

However, the existing literature on cross-cultural remaking provides interesting points to consider in terms of the different historical context the remakes emerge from, in comparison to my focus on the original context of 1970s America, as well as in relation to the differing national context of British critics reviewing American films, from the 1970s through to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, Koos and Forrest note that often cross-cultural remaking is considered in light of arguments regarding art versus entertainment, with original French or European films being considered artistic while their Hollywood remakes are considered as watered-down entertainment films.<sup>204</sup> This issue can, to a certain degree, also be applied to the cross-cultural nature of the British reception context for American films –as with *Straw Dogs* – and also in a consideration of the role nostalgia has to play in considering a group of films from the 1970s. The role of nostalgia in reappraisals of a body of work is detailed in Barbara Klinger’s work on the changing reception of the films of Douglas Sirk, which I further outline below.

Furthermore Zanger, for example, speaks of the original *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as a mainstream film,<sup>205</sup> however the implication that this claim brings with it can only be made retrospectively, given its identification here as a key influence on the development of the horror genre. It would be more difficult to assert that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was a mainstream film at the time of its release, however, due to its production context, budget, the channels through which it was released and the controversy associated with it. Although there is a degree of crossover between ‘the mainstream’ and ‘low budget’ or ‘exploitation’ filmmaking, and none of these terms can be seen as clearly distinct from each other, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* can be seen as becoming increasingly mainstreamed as it has received re-releases and reassessments in the years following its initial release. As outlined in the previous chapter, much of the rehabilitation of these films – which contributes, to a degree, to their partial mainstreaming – relies on a recollection of them as significant due to their position as counter-mainstream and reflecting an era of counter-cultural change and tumult. Nostalgia is therefore also an important aspect of remaking, insofar as part of the appeal of a remake lies in the memory of the original film, to those who are familiar with it. This familiarity need not necessarily be an in-depth knowledge of the film, or even

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<sup>204</sup> Koos & Forrest, 2002, 6-7

<sup>205</sup> Zanger, 2006, 10

familiarity from having seen it once, but can include knowledge of the film's existence, its title, its reputation. This can be seen in the apparent motivation for remaking *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which, after initial market research, emerged as being a familiar name and topic of controversy to the target audience of 18-35 year old males, but with a very small percentage of those surveyed having actually seen the film.<sup>206</sup>

Remaking the horror film is an area that has increasingly received more attention, both academically and critically. Although horror cinema has persistently remade itself, the past fifteen years has seen a significant increase in the sheer number of horror films being remade in Hollywood.<sup>207</sup> Although my work cannot seek to answer the question of why this might be, it can identify and address some of the processes involved in modern horror remaking and the public discourses formed around such films. As I have outlined in the previous chapter, although the films my research focuses on are not strictly horror films, if at all, their varying association with the genre allows them to be considered as part of this wave of horror remaking. The analysis of the marketing of the films will also determine the degree to which the remakes are being promoted as horror films and even as part of a specific wave of horror remaking. This might be revealing in terms of the historically changing conceptions of the horror genre, whereby original exploitation films such as *Last House on the Left*, or auteurist dramas such as *Straw Dogs*, are assimilated into the genre through authorship, reception, exhibition and even the act of remaking itself. This differs from existing accounts of remakes that tend to focus on how debates around remaking relate to issues of art and entertainment, particularly - as I've outlined - in the case of cross-cultural remakes, or the authenticity of the original films. What my approach offers is a different reading of the process, whereby the act of remaking itself contributes to the mainstreaming, if not necessarily the critical valorisation, of the original film.

As noted previously, accounts of contemporary horror remaking – as with remaking more generally - often focus on solely textual comparisons of two versions of the same narrative, and often rely on the assumption that the remake is an inferior film to the original. For example, Adam Lowenstein compares *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Bayer, 2010) to the

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<sup>206</sup> Kermode, 2003, 14

<sup>207</sup> According to a 'remake catalogue' by Francis (2013, 183-192) the number is 75, although there are many erroneous or apparent 'development hell' entries in the appendix, making the number unreliable.

original 1984 Wes Craven film. In doing so, and as noted in the previous chapter, he argues that the remake does not provide the same degree of political or social commentary as is visible in the original. He notes this particularly in relation to the film's failure to effectively pass comment on the disintegration of community and the family unit, a theme present in the original film, as well as the missed opportunity to incorporate the function of digital technologies within this concept of community. For Lowenstein, this is demonstrative of a trend in many recent examples of horror remakes that replicate the form of the original horror film but do not do the same for its cultural and social significance.<sup>208</sup> Other textual accounts of recent remakes have used textual analysis in order to compare cultural changes that occur when remakes cross cultural boundaries. For example, Valerie Wee compares *Ringu* (Nakata, 1998) and *The Ring* (Verbinski, 2002), and identifies the films' individual cultural conventions through this comparison. Specifically, Wee analyses the use of video images in each film that are vital to the central conceit of the films' narrative, the cursed video cassette.<sup>209</sup> Likewise, Jankowiak compares ostensibly 'cult' films with their recent remakes in order to demonstrate a loss of subversive content in the remakes. Although these remakes do not traverse any geographical or cultural boundaries, Jankowiak argues that the remakes reflect the changed production cultures from original film to remake, which therefore "assume the status of regional cinema in the context of" contemporary filmmaking, insofar as they are films with non-mainstream production contexts remade through a more mainstream production process.<sup>210</sup> Indeed, in his monograph *Making and Remaking Horror in the 1970s and 2000s*, David Roche explicitly seeks to answer the question "why are the American blockbuster horror remakes of the 2000s less 'disturbing' than the independent American horror movies of the 1970s?"<sup>211</sup> Even non-academic accounts, such as James Francis Jr's ostensibly scholarly monograph *Remaking Horror*, more or less entirely consist of simplistic 'comparisons' of its case studies, but do not do so in a critically informed capacity. Indeed, in *Remaking Horror* Francis seems to focus more on the history and textual analysis of the original films than he does on the remakes themselves, which illustrates this unquestioned assumption about the superiority of the original films.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Lowenstein, 2010

<sup>209</sup> Wee, 2011

<sup>210</sup> Jankowiak, 2009, 31

<sup>211</sup> Roche, 2014, 1

<sup>212</sup> Francis, 2013

Roche explicitly refers to himself as both “an academic and a fan of the genre”<sup>213</sup> in the opening pages of his book. Francis refers to himself as “a fan of innovative horror movies”<sup>214</sup> in the conclusion to his book, and indeed states that “working on this book has been an exhilarating experience for the horror fan within as well as the academic.”<sup>215</sup> Neither author spends much time on the nature of the difference, if any, between being both a ‘fan’ and ‘academic’ of horror films. Francis somewhat belies a separation between the two parts of himself when he refers to “the horror fan within,”<sup>216</sup> suggesting that his primary mode, at least in approaching his work, is as an academic. Though seemingly then resisting this fan position, much of the comparative work he offers in the book centres on comparing two sets of films, with very little analytical detail. Roche, on the other hand, does offer more detail in his analysis, and is more forthcoming in admitting his “initial dislike of the remakes.”<sup>217</sup> His analytical approach, employing Laurent Jullier’s organising criteria of subjective assessments of film quality, resists his own bias toward the films. His approach still relies on comparative textual analysis of the films, and even by his own admission his work, despite “rigorous internal and external analyses”<sup>218</sup> of the films, inherently retains a degree of his “own subjectivity.”<sup>219</sup> Matt Hills, and other scholars such as Lincoln Geraghty, suggest a more self-reflexive approach to objects of study, particularly if the author – academic or not – is a consumer in some way of said object.<sup>220</sup> As I briefly touched upon in the introduction, and as elaborated somewhat upon above, none of the academic work on the horror remake that I have studied has taken such a self-reflexive approach. Roche’s brief consideration of his own fandom in the introduction to his book is the most explicit example of this taking place. In this thesis, I aim to resist my own fan position. My main reason for this is not as an avoidance of a direct consideration or analysis of my own fandom. Rather, use of a reception studies tradition of analysis is both justification of and means to resist my own subjectivity. If my project involved analyses of the films themselves, my subjective position as a fan of the originals, and my generally negative opinion of recent remakes, would become a far more important element of the analysis to consider. I am employing a

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<sup>213</sup> Roche, 2015, 3

<sup>214</sup> Francis, 2013, 175

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 176

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Roche, 2015, 7

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> See Hills, 2007 44-47

reception studies approach to these films, and as such am only analysing other representations, assessments and analyses of the films. Although my opinion of each film may still subjectively impact upon my work (if, say, I strongly disagree with a reviewer), it is far less relevant to the objects of my analysis, that is, marketing materials and reviews of the films in question.

While many of these analyses do address contextual issues and refer to the reception of these films, this is not often the main avenue of investigation that is pursued. My own analysis of the marketing and reception of horror remakes begins to fill a gap in the existing work on film remakes. Significantly, my approach is not informed by any assumption that a film remake is invariably culturally or aesthetically inferior, due in part to the difficulty of making such an assertion when approaching the marketing and reception of the films rather than the film texts themselves.

By positioning my work in the tradition of film reception studies, my work also contributes to the increasing industrial approach to the study of horror, due to my analysis of film marketing and to a lesser extent film reviewing. Recent work by Richard Nowell and Mark Bernard exemplifies this new tradition. Nowell's monograph *Blood Money* offers a revisionist account of the much-analysed teen slasher film through an industrial analysis of the rise and fall of the cycle. While Bernard's study *Selling the Splat Pack* concerns a very recent era of horror filmmaking, through a particular focus on DVD as a means of promoting the 'splat pack' group of filmmakers. By approaching remakes with a reception studies approach in mind, rather than a textual comparative approach, my work is not only aligned with this move away from solely text-based analysis of horror, it also offers a new approach to the analysis of horror remakes. Although industrial considerations of the remake have been written about in relation to American remaking (see, for example, Forrest, above), analytical accounts of contemporary American remaking often rely on textual comparison. Additionally, existing industrial work on the remake, or the horror remake in particular, tends to focus on production rather than reception. By extending this industrial consideration to the marketing and reception of my case study films, my research seeks to contribute to the broadening range of approaches to the film remake and to the horror film more broadly.

What existing literature on the remake centrally informs in my own work is a consideration of the ways in which the newer films are seen to remake the originals and the ways in which such remakes are presented and justified, in relation to the original film; drawing on the work of Leitch in particular, these considerations are manifest in issues of property and of disavowal. This includes questions such as who remade the film, and when and where was it made, as well as questioning what type of remake it might be considered to be in relation to existing categories as discussed by others such as Druxman or Leitch. This sort of questioning of the films relates, in the context of my research, to the sorts of features that might be emphasised within marketing materials and the sorts of talk that may then appear in reviewing of the film. In particular, one imagines that reviews will likely draw attention to the newer film's position as a remake, whereas marketing may seek to mask this status, although these presumptions could vary when considering the contexts which centrally inform each particular remake.

Although these considerations emerge specifically in relation to the remakes, similar sorts of questions must be asked of the materials associated with the originals. Therefore, the questions of who made the film, when and where it was made and questions of categorisation can also all be productively considered in terms of the way these are addressed in materials associated with a given film and the film's changing reception. These are particularly pertinent to a study of controversial films and their cultural status, in terms of the way in which such questions regarding their controversial status are raised by the films themselves – both originals and remakes - and by critical talk about them. This is particularly true in the case of questions about a film's authorship or ownership, in so far as public moral condemnations of such films may seek a responsible party for the supposed moral or artistic decline that these films have been seen to represent. In relation to this, and to Kuhn's arguments about the productiveness of censorship debates as outlined in the previous chapter, marketing materials may publicise the film in such a way as to reflect such talk and use it as a selling point of the film.

### *Theories of Taste and Reception Studies*

Pierre Bourdieu's case studies in *Distinction* are broad in their scope, in so far as he considers all types of artistic work – from painting, to architecture, to fashion, to cuisine –

but specific in their context: the French public of the 1960s-1970s; furthermore, as with all ethnographic research, Bourdieu's conclusions are drawn based on a specific sample of data, collected from specific areas of France: "Paris, Lille and a small provincial town".<sup>221</sup> There are two, interrelated, concepts from Bourdieu's work that, in particular, underpin my research and are of particular relevance to my research questions. The first of these concepts is that of cultural capital. Evidencing his Marxist perspective on class, Bourdieu outlines cultural capital as the sorts of knowledge required about an art's form, and secondarily, its function, that are influenced by class and its institutional advantages of the family background, education, and religion.<sup>222</sup> Cultural capital becomes the means through which the *bourgeois* and the upper class are able to differentiate themselves from the lower classes, and in such a manner so as to keep such a class system in place. For Bourdieu, the process is somewhat cyclical, whereby the advantages of a higher social class ensure an individual has greater cultural capital, and so that greater cultural capital ensures an individual a place within a higher social class. Integral to the accumulation of cultural capital for Bourdieu is education, both through upbringing and through schooling, to which the financially and culturally advantaged have greater access. To remove the class issue is to reveal the bare bones of Bourdieu's concept, whereby cultural capital becomes a tool for asserting cultural and social power. Relating to the concept of cultural capital, then, is Bourdieu's assertion that "all determination is negation", by which taste is always defined in opposition to the taste of others.<sup>223</sup> Thus, cultural capital is made use of in order to define one's own taste against another's, that other being seen as lacking in a particular, legitimate cultural capital. Bourdieu claims a degree of falseness in the *petite bourgeois*; insofar as they are 'middle-brow' – they strive to appear high-brow, yet in doing so, reveal themselves to be middle-brow.<sup>224</sup> As result, for Bourdieu, this reflects an individual's class status, whereby only the upper classes can be high-brow (due to the particular way in which they appreciate works of art, and the sorts of art that they consume). Again, here the determination of one's taste in opposition to another's becomes an assertion of power.

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<sup>221</sup> Bourdieu, 2010, 503

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-14

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 49

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 8



Crucially, although my work is rooted in Bourdieu's theory of social distinction, it is also subject to the many criticisms and developments of his work since the publication of *Distinction*. At the core of this criticism, and particularly relevant to my own work, is Bourdieu's restrictive emphasis on class as the ruling factor in individuals' appreciation and relationship to cultural forms, and the particular specificity of Bourdieu's work to his area of research in France in the 1960s.

Several authors since Bourdieu have noted some of these additional influences, being gender, age, race<sup>225</sup> and ethnicity.<sup>226</sup> I would add to these sexuality as a potentially influential feature on an individual's relationship to culture. For John Fiske, these additional influences, or forces, need to be additional axes of consideration to Bourdieu's model. In my own work here, I do not address the taste or talk of individuals (as 'independent' of a particular role as cultural critic, that is), therefore these considerations do not particularly come into play in my own analysis. Where they may emerge in my research is as key concepts within the talk of film critics, who, as cultural gatekeepers, contribute toward the cultural field in such a way that places imagined individuals – the 'audience' of the film - along such axes of the cultural field.

Milly Williamson, in her work on vampire fandom, criticises Bourdieu's lack of emphasis on "the production and consumption of the ordinary public."<sup>227</sup> Bourdieu's work instead "concentrates on regressive (or elitist) aspects of the cultural pole's opposition to economic cultural values."<sup>228</sup> This emphasis on elitist taste undermines, for Williamson, "one of the most innovative and original aspects" of Bourdieu's work, which is his "emphasis on the two principles of legitimacy,"<sup>229</sup> that is, that "there is no single homogenous 'dominant culture' or 'mainstream'."<sup>230</sup> This emphasis is reflected in the way in which Bourdieu's work has often been misrepresented when used by other scholars since. Williamson, particularly focusing on fan studies, takes to task several of the most prominent academics to have used Bourdieu's work in this context, such as Fiske and Sarah Thornton, for not paying due attention to Bourdieu's notion of struggle within the field of cultural production, and as a

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<sup>225</sup> Gans, 9; Fiske, 32

<sup>226</sup> Bennett et al., 12

<sup>227</sup> Williamson, 2005, 109

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

result positing “a homogenous ‘mainstream’ culture,”<sup>231</sup> usually one which fans are said to place themselves in opposition to.

Williamson astutely notes the way in which such fan scholars reduce the two poles of dominant culture – symbolic or economic – to one pole, normally economic.<sup>232</sup> There are many ways in which this reduction of dominant culture can be termed, such as ‘mainstream’ or ‘official culture’, as per Fiske and Henry Jenkins, or ‘patriarchal culture’, as per Camille Bacon-Smith or Constance Penley, or even ‘mundania’, used by fans and Jenkins alike.<sup>233</sup> As Williamson notes, for Bourdieu, the ‘dominant culture’ (or rather cultures) “are in a process of continual conflict.”<sup>234</sup> In my own research, this sense of ‘continual conflict’ will emerge via my diachronic approach to my case studies. Rather than taking ‘original film’ to mean a fixed point in time of a film’s initial release, charting each case study film’s various releases up to the present day will illuminate the changing cultural landscape in the reception of these films.

An important development of Bourdieu’s work, in light of *Distinction* paying “little attention to popular culture, and particularly not to mass-mediated culture,”<sup>235</sup> is that of subcultural capital. Developed by Sarah Thornton in her work on the club scene, subcultural capital seeks to address the existence of “hierarchies *within* popular culture.”<sup>236</sup> While popular culture, or mass culture, had often figured in opposition to art, or high-brow culture, when writing in 1995, Thornton sought instead to apply Bourdieu’s model of cultural distinction within a particular subculture. Thus, she developed the notion of subcultural capital, in which “capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder.”<sup>237</sup>

Therefore someone who is a fan of a particular cultural object accrues subcultural capital, both ‘symbolically’ – appreciation and knowledge of the object in question – but also ‘economically’, through ownership of books, merchandise and memorabilia. Thornton emphasises Bourdieu’s notion of social capital as contributing to subcultural capital as a

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<sup>231</sup> Williamson, 2005, 110

<sup>232</sup> Williamson, 2005, 110-111

<sup>233</sup> Williamson, 2005, 110

<sup>234</sup> Williamson, 2005, 109

<sup>235</sup> Bennett et al., 12

<sup>236</sup> Thornton, 1995, 7

<sup>237</sup> Thornton, 1995, 11

whole, meaning that “connections in the form of friends, relations, associates and acquaintances can all bestow status.”<sup>238</sup>

Where Thornton differs from Bourdieu is in the importance she places on the media for the circulation of subcultural capital.<sup>239</sup> For Bourdieu media such as films or newspapers are cultural goods or particular markers of distinction, while for Thornton the media form “a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge.”<sup>240</sup> This notion is central to my research, in so far that a large part of my work analyses the writing of print film critics. For Greg Urban, film critics are “metacultural experts,”<sup>241</sup> that is, “people who make it their business to become intimately familiar with classes of cultural objects”.<sup>242</sup> Their role is to “insure that culture is, indeed, carried over from one object to another,”<sup>243</sup> and in order for this to happen “the judgments of experts get encoded in mass-disseminated forms”<sup>244</sup> such as newspapers or magazines. This reflects, then, Thornton’s insistence that mass-media is a crucial part of how cultural – or at least ‘subcultural’ – knowledge is distributed.

Thornton’s use of Bourdieu is also criticised by Williamson for its simplification of dominant culture. According to Williamson, Thornton “collapses together the concept of the ‘mainstream’ and the concept of ‘commercial culture’.”<sup>245</sup> Both Williamson and Hills have noted that Thornton, as a result, interprets Bourdieu in a way which is similar to “those she is challenging,”<sup>246</sup> which, for Hills, is demonstrative of “academic imagined subjectivity.”<sup>247</sup> While taking these criticisms into account, Thornton’s notion of subcultural capital is an important and useful concept when applying Bourdieu’s theory to subcultural, mass-produced or popular culture.

My application of Bourdieu’s work relates particularly to the ways in which taste is formed *publically*. My primary concern is neither with a film text itself (whether or not it is

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<sup>238</sup> Thornton, 1995, 10

<sup>239</sup> Thornton, 1995, 13

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Urban, 235

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Williamson, 112

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Hills, 53

narratively or formally 'tasteful'), nor with individual viewers (and their individualised tastes), but rather with two processes through which formations of taste – as a public conception – are offered to the public: film marketing, and film reviewing. Both are institutionalised processes; marketing relating to the micro-institution of the filmmaker or production company, and reviewing relating to the micro-institution of the publication or site the review appears in, as well as the individual reviewer themselves. Film marketing, and the broader institution of film reviewing in general, functions through offering appeals to particular taste publics, and the plurality of this appeal is, for Thomas Austin (2002), and as outlined below, central to the way in which contemporary Hollywood cinema functions. Marketing might also appeal to the specific cultural capital associated with certain taste publics. In the case of a remake, for instance, this might emerge through reference to the original film's marketing, which would indicate an appeal to those who are familiar with the original film. Film reviewing, on the other hand, might appeal to the same kind of cultural capital, but with a negative connotation, whereby a negative comparison is drawn with the original film. Most importantly, and as Klinger and Austin argue, film reviewing can exist as an important site of delineation of 'acceptable' tastes in relation to film and film culture. This, in some cases, can rely both on the negation of individuals who might associate with a particular film, and, through this, on the assertion of superior cultural capital. Naturally, dependent on the forum, for example specialist magazines, the reverse might be true, with superior cultural capital being demonstrated via a direct appeal to individuals who enjoy a particular film.

Bourdieu's concepts provide an important theoretical framework for a significant amount of work in the field of film reception studies. In seeking to address the imbalance in the institutional favour of textually determined approaches to film within film studies, reception studies analyses the arenas in which conceptions of taste are publically formed. Along with ethnographic and audience studies work, reception studies is not primarily concerned with the formal construction of a film and the meanings that might seem inherent to a film text, but rather with the various, but finite, ways in which a film can be interpreted, by individual viewers as well as groups and communities. Taste need not be the focus of analysis in reception studies, but concepts associated with taste and cultural distinctions inform all interpretative processes, consciously and unconsciously.

Thomas Austin's 2002 study of contemporary Hollywood and its audiences provides a crucial methodological reference point for my own work, as he combines the analysis of marketing, reception and audiences in order to determine the functions of hype and consumption of contemporary event films. Austin draws a great deal from Bourdieu, particularly his conception of 'taste publics', loosely arranged groups who share similar cultural capital.<sup>248</sup> Bourdieu's conceptions of taste strongly inform Austin's multi-pronged approach to contemporary Hollywood film. His several avenues of investigation allow for an analysis of the significance of popular film in contemporary British society, as well as an analysis of the issues of social and cultural power in relation to a film's production, circulation and the actual experiences of its viewers.<sup>249</sup> This includes "the opportunity to address questions around sexuality, gender, age and taste,"<sup>250</sup> and the possibility that "individual and collective identities [are] asserted and (re)produced through film viewing."<sup>251</sup> Importantly, Austin notes that although the productive activity of film viewers is his focus, viewers are not free from the influence of textual mechanisms or institutional practice.<sup>252</sup>

One of Austin's most important claims is that contemporary Hollywood's "commercial logic" results in individual films being made to appeal to multiple audiences, through demographics, territories or taste formations.<sup>253</sup> Austin bases much of his motivation for investigating actual audiences in the lack of significant audience-based research into contemporary Hollywood, and his multiple sites of analysis reflect his assertion that the "object of study, then, is no longer the single discrete text but the film(s) as situated in specific contexts of production, circulation and reception".<sup>254</sup> My own research does not offer such an encounter with actual viewers, but bears in mind their importance as agents who may or may not conform to or interact with the contexts prefigured by my two avenues of investigation: marketing and reviewing. My primary concern is with the sorts of meanings that are offered by these two arenas to potential audiences, rather than the audience or viewer's actual interaction with them. Significantly, both marketing and reviewing offer

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<sup>248</sup> Austin, 2002, 20

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 14

their own conceptions of the audiences they appeal to – be it to a specific kind of film audience or a specific kind of readership.

Janet Staiger, in her pioneering work *Interpreting Films*, outlines the three primary research traditions that have informed film reception studies: contemporary linguistics, cognitive psychology and British cultural studies.<sup>255</sup> Work which approaches film spectatorship through contemporary linguistics draws heavily upon the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, particularly in its development by Christian Metz. This approach relies on semiotic readings of films, often informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis.<sup>256</sup> The cognitive psychological approach was established by David Bordwell, who, rather than ascribing unconscious behaviours to viewers as the more psychoanalytically-informed semiotic approach tended toward, introduced the notions of active, schematic viewing habits in viewers.<sup>257</sup> The third approach emerged from the British cultural studies tradition. Rooted in notions of ideology as established by Louis Althusser, scholars such as David Morley and Stuart Hall positioned viewer response in relation to dominant ideology. Therefore, in their early work in this tradition, viewers were seen to behave in a way that is preferred, oppositional or negotiated in relation to the intended meaning of the text or author, with the textual or authorial ‘intent’ being seen as in line with the dominant ideology of a given culture or industry.<sup>258</sup> The British cultural studies approach to film reception, as outlined by Staiger, relates to Bourdieu’s work, as he outlines the way in which texts are inherently ideological in their function as well as their content. Althusser outlines the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) which function to keep dominant state ideology in place, including institutions of education, the family and culture.<sup>259</sup> These are in line with the arenas in which Bourdieu claims each individual can acquire cultural capital. In following Althusser and Bourdieu, and the tradition of British cultural studies, an assertion of taste is then arguably an assertion of ideology, if not necessarily the dominant ideology. Steve Jankowiak has argued that the contemporary American film industry itself is an Althusserian ISA,<sup>260</sup> and goes on to relate this to cult film remakes losing the subversive political significance of the original films (his examples are

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<sup>255</sup> Staiger, 1992, 57-78

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 59-63

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 63-68

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 68-78

<sup>259</sup> In Staiger, 1992, 69-70

<sup>260</sup> Jankowiak, 2009, 30

*Rollerball* [Jewison, 1975/McTiernan, 2002] and *Dawn of the Dead* [Romero, 1978/Snyder 2004]), with, for him, the remakes made within the American film industry conforming to and promoting the dominant ideology. Within this academic tradition, film then is a field in which public assertions of taste can be seen as not only contributing to conceptions of film culture, but to the assertion of a broader cultural ideology, such as the broader implications of hegemonic, conglomerate-based filmmaking, of which film and other cultural objects are just one part.

Staiger's extensive work in the field of reception studies asserts a historical-materialist approach to cinema, in which she claims that meaning is made independent of the text. This moves on from earlier approaches to film reception, exemplified by the first two traditions discussed above, which conceives of the viewer as having limited ability to make meanings from texts and which makes ideological assumptions about the viewer regarding their cultural background or their relationship to a film. For Staiger, it is the "identities and interpretive strategies and tactics" inherent to the viewer when watching a film that matter more than a film's "modes of address and exhibition."<sup>261</sup> Although Staiger's claim considers a film viewer as an individual, if not entirely independent, viewer of a film, a similar claim can be made for film critics. The critic is an individual, only their 'interpretative strategies' are influenced by the publication for which they write, in addition to general cultural influences such as race, gender or age. For Staiger, these strategies and identities are historically determined, which she demonstrates with the example of how audience behaviour changed – or did not change – with the introduction of synchronised sound to cinema. While previous, textually determined research seems to conclude that behaviours did change (such as in Tom Gunning's work), Staiger argues that through an analysis of reception materials – such as reviews – such a conclusion becomes problematic. The reception of a text is constantly changing in relation to factors beyond the text itself, in much the same way that its generic categorisation can shift. In the previous chapter I clarified some of these changes specific to my case studies, stopping short of considering how remaking the films becomes part of this process.

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<sup>261</sup> Staiger, 2000, 23

For Staiger, “reception studies considers the process of producing interpretations rather than providing them.”<sup>262</sup> In the case of analysing the changing cultural contexts that inform the meanings of a film or films, then, a reception studies approach seems a particularly productive one to adopt, as it allows the researcher to uncover the different ways in which a text is interpreted by different critics or viewers during different periods in its circulation. In terms of analysing a group of texts in relation to constructions of taste and value using a reception studies approach, Staiger’s assertion that such an approach allows for greater knowledge of “the consumption of cultural products”<sup>263</sup> seems particularly pertinent. Staiger does, however, question the usefulness of reception studies in relation to answering “philosophical questions about the nature and function of cultural products,” even if such an approach can purposefully and constructively question “common assumptions.”<sup>264</sup> One of the primary assumptions made both in critical writing and in film marketing concerns the audience. A reception studies approach to such materials purposefully questions such assumptions about audiences – who they are, what they want – which a more textually determined approach would be aligned with. Although an analysis of reception materials is potentially as subjective as an analysis of a film text, as the interpretation of marketing materials or review texts still takes place, a reception studies approach seeks to outline the variety of ways in which a viewer, or a critic, might interpret a film during a particular moment in its circulation.

In *Perverse Spectators*, Staiger outlines a four-step approach to gathering and analysing reception materials. The process begins with the identification of an object to be analysed, such as a film. Then, traces of that “event”<sup>265</sup> are located: in reviews, in marketing materials, in merchandise, and so on. Next, the located traces are analysed, both culturally and textually. For example, analysing a review requires a discursive analysis of the review itself, in addition to a consideration of the review’s position as a cultural artefact. Finally, the range of readings that this analysis reveals is surveyed in order to determine not only what seems possible at that given historical moment, but also to determine what sort of readings aren’t considered. In applying such a structure to my own work, several ‘objects’ and

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<sup>262</sup> Staiger, 1992, 9

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Staiger, 2000, 163. The term ‘event’ better expresses the importance of time and historical placement in such an analysis, compared to ‘object’.



'events' contribute to the overall meaning to be interpreted. Through an analysis of a selection of materials a broader sense of a cultural era may emerge, in terms of the sorts of ideological attitudes raised within, with comparative questions asked of the critical materials allowing for considerations regarding genre construction, as well as conceptions of a given audience. The notion of an 'event' is complicated somewhat by my investigation into film remakes, given as an earlier event – the original film – is integral to my research of the remakes. While the remakes are very much their own 'events', and the materials relating to them that I will analyse are traces of them, in the broader analysis of the way in which taste construction changes over time, the remakes might themselves be considered as traces of the original films too. This underlines the importance of Staiger's approach, in particular her emphasis upon understanding "why distinctive interpretative and affective experiences circulate historically in specific social formations."<sup>266</sup>

A short time after Staiger began writing on film reception, Barbara Klinger's equally pioneering work into film reception, *Melodrama and Meaning* was published. Using Douglas Sirk as an authorial case study, Klinger analyses several conditions and systems which contribute to the meaning making around a particular body of film work. Klinger's work is informed by Staiger's historical-materialist approach to film, as she argues that "film form is inextricably bound to the historical agencies"<sup>267</sup> around it, and as such she considers Sirk's body of work in a trans-historical and trans-contextual manner. This develops to some degree Staiger's work, which is more concerned with specific historical moments and individual spheres of circulation. Klinger's investigation into the reception of Sirk's films considers their original releases in the 1950s, and their subsequent revival in the 1970s, and in various arenas of reception: from academia, to marketing, to reviewing, to the films' appropriation as camp.

As with Staiger and Austin, Klinger's work on film reception is not implemented in such a way as to offer particular historical spheres as the only determinants of audience interaction with the film text.<sup>268</sup> Rather, they provide the means to reconstruct the environment in which an audience encountered a text, and reveal the "discourses at work in the process of

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<sup>266</sup> Staiger, 2000, 163

<sup>267</sup> Klinger, 1994, xiv

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., xix

reception.”<sup>269</sup> For Klinger, an historical analysis of Sirk’s films provides a means to challenge established ideas about him, or any director, and such an analysis can provide the means to challenge preconceived ideas about any body of work, be it arranged in relation to authorship or other features. As Klinger claims, this sort of trans-historical approach is “crucial to recognising the role external social and historical factors play in negotiating the cultural politics of a body of films.”<sup>270</sup> In tracing and tracking the historical changes and consistencies in a film’s reception, the “lived ideologies” of a film are made apparent, that is, the “ideological values attained as a result of particular social contingencies.”<sup>271</sup>

In the context of my own research, this is a crucial claim, and a vital starting point in approaching the reception of contemporary film remaking. As previously stated in relation to Staiger’s work, I will consider the remakes, in some respects, as ‘traces’ of the original film event. As such, this consideration will be reliant upon a trans-historical account of the original film’s public history. In relation to this function in terms of ideology, I do not so much intend to uncover the ideological stance of a film as identified and interpreted within its reception contexts, but rather the way in which the film itself might be ideologically used within those contexts. That is to say, my concern is not primarily with interpretations of the film’s ‘message’, but with the way in which the film can be implemented to enforce a wider message or agenda within its reception contexts. Klinger’s work on Sirk considers both reviewing and marketing as spheres of meaning-making. When approaching film reviews as material to be analysed, she notes that “the critic distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate art and proper from improper modes of aesthetic appropriation,” which positions the critic as “public tastemaker.”<sup>272</sup> Here Klinger draws on Bourdieu’s work in *Distinction*, and through approaching Sirk’s body of work historically, is able to outline the way in which such conceptions of legitimate and illegitimate taste change and impact on the changing reception of his work.

In her investigation of film reviewing, Klinger compares the ways in which the melodramas for which Sirk was best known were reviewed on their initial release in the 1950s, with the re-release of many of these films during the 1970s. This analysis Klinger discovers that the

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., xx

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., xii

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., xiv

<sup>272</sup> Klinger, 1994, 70

reception shifts broadly from derision to reverence. While critics in the 1950s disliked Sirk's melodramas for their apparently tasteless excesses, critics of the 1970s reframed the films as subversive. As Sirk's films did not conform to the established stylistic conventions associated with legitimate culture in the 1950s, they were rejected as unrealistic and excessive. Even in the 1950s, critics in *Cahiers du Cinema* praised this excessive style even when responding negatively to the film overall,<sup>273</sup> which certainly suggests a Bourdieuan high-brow response to the films' form over their function. When in the 1970s, Sirk's melodramas received retrospective screenings at cinemas for "an urban cognoscente,"<sup>274</sup> not only had their exhibition context changed, but the receiving film culture had progressed. With the instillation of *auteur* theory in American journalistic film criticism, Sirk was reconfigured as an *auteur*, his previously 'excessive' style praised for its subversion of dominant 1950s social and cultural conventions. Klinger's comparison with an earlier era of film criticism allows her to determine that the retrospective accounts of Sirk's films demonstrate a degree of "relandscaping the past,"<sup>275</sup> insofar as they provide reframed accounts of the 1950s, which enable Sirk's films to appear subversive rather than conformist. As Klinger notes, this is reflective of "the overall thrust toward nostalgia that marked public discourse and popular culture during the 1970s."<sup>276</sup> Thus key discourses that characterise the cultural climate of an era are here reflected in the reception of an earlier historical product.

Since Staiger and Klinger's pioneering work into film reception, other scholars, alongside Austin, have developed their implementation of this approach to explore various aspects of film and film culture. Ernest Mathijs, writing in 2003, considers the reception of David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) in relation to critics' references to topical subjects as a means of making the act of film criticism further culturally relevant. Dividing such practise into two, Mathijs outlines the way in which topical practise links a film text with a specific cultural issue, while rhetorical practise further binds and connects the arguments made about a film in order to increase its cultural relevance.<sup>277</sup> In the specific case of *The Fly*, Mathijs uses this framework to identify and explore the development of a link made by critics between the

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 7-8

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 84

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 85

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 85

<sup>277</sup> Mathijs, 2003, 30

film and the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. Mathijs argues that the inclusion of references to AIDS and talk about AIDS in criticism of *The Fly* – and furthermore in later appraisals of Cronenberg’s work – adds cultural relevance and status to the films. In this respect, a topical analysis of a film’s reception uncovers the way in which film critics seek to legitimise a film text or a body of work. In my own analysis I will not be directly focusing on my interpretation of any topical allusions in the films themselves, but, through consideration of film reviews, the topical interpretation of the films, if any, by the reviewers will become apparent. Although, for Mathijs, previous work by Cronenberg which displayed a similar compounding of violence, sex and bodily breakdown – such as in *Shivers* (1976) – was not so critically well-received, and instead appropriated as cult,<sup>278</sup> the topicality associated with *The Fly* allowed for a reassessment of Cronenberg’s work in relation to a more mainstream relevance. What this once more reveals, in relation to Bourdieu, are the various spheres in which meaning is offered, and the various ways in which it is made, outside of the class-based institutions he prioritised in the 1970s. While for the most part for Bourdieu the church or the state might define legitimate culture, film critics also act as such gatekeepers of “legitimate classifications”<sup>279</sup> as well as the appropriate discourses which circulate “accompanying any artistic enjoyment worth of the name.”<sup>280</sup> In Mathijs’ study of the reviewing of Cronenberg’s films, critics determine the legitimacy of a film text through topical debates.

A more recent work that develops this consideration of the changing historical reception of a group of films is Kate Egan’s 2007 study into the video nasty phenomenon. In *Trash or Treasure?*, Egan, through an analysis of a wide array of reception materials, traces the reception of this particular group of films from the specific social and political climate of the UK in the 1980s, through to their contemporary reception as collectibles and re-releases. In order to do so, her investigation considers the ways in which the films have been talked about by the press and the ways in which they have been marketed. As with Austin’s work, Egan employs a small-scale audience study in order to provide a fuller account of the ways in which video nasties create meaning for those who enjoy them. It is within this tradition of work, as established by Staiger and Klinger and more recently developed, that my own

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<sup>278</sup>See Mathijs, 2003, 109-126

<sup>279</sup> Bourdieu, 2010, 20

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

thesis can be placed, in employing a reception studies approach to a group of films that have been both controversial and rehabilitated and in order to more broadly reveal the processes at work in taste-formations relating to film remakes.

The concept of public taste formation is important to consider in relation to the film remake. This is particularly true if the process of contemporary remaking is predominantly considered, critically and academically, to prioritise financial gain over 'artistic' merit. In Bourdieuan terms, art for financial gain prioritises its function and is therefore low-brow, while the emphasis on artistic merit – film form – rather than commercial gain is seen to be highbrow. If this is assumed to be true, then presumably remade films, even when remaking previously controversial texts such as those which comprise my case studies, would be produced with an emphasis on financial gain. By focusing on a film that was not publically acceptable – be that through financial failure, censorship issues, or negative reviewing - the way in which it historically persists, through public circulation and through remaking, therefore becomes an indicator of changes in public taste formation and the shifting cultural status of an artistic object. Additionally, and as I've touched upon, the relationship between original and remake contributes to the nature of appeals within the arenas of marketing and reception to cultural capital, and the cultural distinctions and taste formations that might characterise those who are familiar with the original film and those who are not.

### *Methodology*

Although a major part of critical reception studies considers a film's viewers, or groups of viewers, or critical attitudes, an analysis of materials which pre-figure a film reveal similar historical cultural constructions and assumptions. In the same way a critic might make assumptions about particular audiences, so too does the marketing of a film assume the preferences and desires of its target audience. Such processes can contribute to the construction of a particular film's generic status, as well as determine the frames of reference that are available to viewers – including critics - about a film before the act of viewing.

The two primary sorts of film marketing available for the analysis of my case studies are posters and trailers. I denote these as 'primary' due to their comparatively widespread use:

in cinemas, posters are displayed in lobbies and trailers are shown before other films, as well as, in a contemporary context, circulating online and included on DVDs. They are often the *only* contact a viewer might have with a particular film, having assumed from such publicity that they do not want to see the film itself.<sup>281</sup> In online publicity, on news websites and blogs, poster and trailer announcements are often the first sorts of contact potential viewers will have with a film, and often result in speculation on what the film will be like. Trailers in particular provide a sense of expectation for a viewer seeing a film (if they've seen the trailer), and whether or not that expectation is met may impact upon a viewer's response to the film, negatively or positively. Through textual analysis of such materials, the researcher can examine the sorts of assumptions made about the audience by the producers of a film and how this in turn impacts upon the way in which a film is circulated in public and critical discourse.

After a film's release, trailers and posters are often the minimum extra-feature provided on DVD copies of the film. This might be attributed to the tradition of special features available on the laserdisc format, particularly, as outlined by Mark Parker and Deborah Parker, as established by the output of The Criterion Collection.<sup>282</sup> Although it has been argued that the rise of online streaming and downloading of films has resulted in a lesser degree of importance being placed on 'extra features' for a film release,<sup>283</sup> trailers and TV spots are also accessible online and made available for download, therefore their importance as marketing materials remains a relevant consideration in terms of the circulation of meanings relating to a particular film. Although the medium through which the promotional material is accessed may vary, the materials are still accessible to viewers and potential viewers. This is reflected in the change in extra features that are available on DVD releases, with trailers increasingly not included on DVD releases of films, presumably because they are so readily available to view online. A further result of this, as argued by Parker and Parker, is that as more home viewing is done via VOD and streaming platforms, the DVD (and, presumably, Blu-ray) format will return to "boutique, high-end, cinephile distribution"<sup>284</sup> as exemplified by The Criterion Collection, or even, within genre filmmaking,

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<sup>281</sup> Gray, 2010, 26

<sup>282</sup> Parker & Parker, 2011, 141

<sup>283</sup> Dean, 2007, 122

<sup>284</sup> Parker & Parker, 2011, 46

a distributor such as Anchor Bay<sup>285</sup> or Arrow Video. One result of the academic focus on 'special editions' and DVD extra features is that the vast majority of 'vanilla' DVD releases are under-analysed.<sup>286</sup> While special edition packages of the original case study films have all been released in the past few years, the DVD (and Blu-ray) releases of the remakes have usually been single-disc packages with very few, if any, extra features. It is also worth noting that online platforms such as Netflix or LoveFilm use DVD covers as the sole image on a film's page on their sites. Presumably this relates to the version of the film on the site, with regards to the distributor and the rights holders, however information regarding this is particularly difficult to come by and superficially confusing (see below).

Based on my own observations, publicity images which are released prior to a film being made public are often connected to the imagery used in posters and trailers. Thus, publicity stills may be taken from scenes included in trailers, or publicity images photographed in a studio might be similar to such images as are used on posters. Merchandise that emerges prior and during a film's release may also be considered as marketing tools,<sup>287</sup> as they become products that promote the film but are desirable in and of themselves. My case study films, however, have very little direct merchandise associated with them, therefore considerations of merchandising will not be made in my study. Some DVD editions themselves serve as complicated marketing devices. Re-releases of the original films, for example, are timed in such a way that they coincide with, or precede, the release of the remake. In this regard the marketing for both that release and the remake itself crossover somewhat: the DVD re-release markets itself as well as the upcoming remake, but it also might be seen as 'hijacking' the marketing or publicity for the remake too. Again, the changing nature of the home distribution of films problematizes this somewhat, with postal rental services dispensing "with the original DVD packaging and distribu[ting] individual discs in generic packaging."<sup>288</sup> However, imagery is still used to promote the films online, and likewise for the (legal) online streaming of films. While in most cases this would be straightforward, when there are films with multiple DVD editions, it is unclear whether the

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<sup>285</sup> Bernard, 2014, 58

<sup>286</sup> Keith M. Johnston has very recently written on the subject, choosing to particularly focus on "the ephemera of home video: packaging, cover art, linear notes rhetoric and onscreen menus," much of which is central to my approach to the materials relating to my case studies. See Johnston, 2014

<sup>287</sup> Gray, 2010, 8

<sup>288</sup> Dean, 2007, 122

DVD cover image used on websites such LoveFilm or Netflix correspond to the digital 'print' of the film on offer. By way of example, a search for the original *Last House on the Left* on Amazon Instant Video brings up two listings, one uncut and the other presumably cut. The cut version makes use of an image that hasn't been associated with any UK VHS or DVD release of the film, while the uncut version is illustrated with the cover for the Anchor Bay 2003 DVD edition of the film (which was cut), and *both* versions have Metrodome listed as distributor. This disrupts any reductive account of the difference between online home distribution platforms and DVD/Blu-ray.

I will be considering marketing materials from two very different and distinct eras of cinema exhibition and marketing practices. While the remakes may have several trailers, the originals likely only had one. The remade films may have a greater array of 'TV spots', shorter trailers edited specifically for television broadcast, while the original films would additionally have had radio spots made, audio-only version of trailers which were broadcast on radio stations to promote screenings of the films. These two sorts of materials are much more difficult to obtain in comparison to trailers, due to the more ephemeral nature of their broadcast: television and radio. However, some DVD releases of films include such materials, where available, as extra features. The mode of exhibition varies for each of the films I will be analysing. The original films have all received different releases, cinematically and in the home, which results in a large range of related publicity materials. Thus magazine advertisements publicising video or DVD releases of the original films will become as important as theatrical posters in order to determine the changes and consistencies in all the films' pre-figuration. The remakes, meanwhile, received a much broader initial release into mainstream cinemas than some of the originals, generating a different sort of publicity. Even *Straw Dogs'* (2011) limited UK theatrical release of 109 screens<sup>289</sup> makes it a more widespread film – in comparison to its original release, at least – than, say, *The Last House on the Left* (1972). The sort of word of mouth publicity that exploitation films received, that led to lengthy runs at grindhouse cinemas, is not as central to the sort of multiplex releases the remakes have received, where, if they do not perform well financially in the first week of release, films are often dropped from screens immediately as a result. The pre-figuring of the remakes in some ways becomes increasingly important, where a strong opening box

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<sup>289</sup> Gant, 2011



office is required to ensure greater cinematic longevity. Video, DVD and Blu-ray covers themselves can also be approached as marketing materials, as although they are likely to use similar imagery and text as the film posters, there are variations that may be exclusive to particular home-viewing releases that bear analysing.

I situate my work in the tradition of reception studies, however, more recently the emergence of the study of paratexts somewhat complicates and broadens previous ways of thinking about promotional materials than that found in the reception studies tradition. Where terms such as ‘epiphenomena’ and ‘ancillary materials’ might imply a degree of subjugation of these materials to the main ‘text’, the employment of the term paratext instead situates the materials alongside a film, or TV programme, etc.<sup>290</sup> Jonathan Gray distinguishes between “entryway paratexts” – materials which prepare us for a text – and “in media res paratexts” – those which occur ‘during’ the experience of a text – but notes that terms such as these are analytically useful, but that they are always “constitutive parts of the text itself”.<sup>291</sup> As I have previously touched upon, Gray concisely provides the reasoning for studying these sorts of materials when he states that “precisely because paratexts help us decide which texts to consume, we often know many texts only at the paratextual level.”<sup>292</sup> The construction of relevant taste formations or reputation-making occurs through these paratexts, outside of the ‘text’ proper. For example, if we think of the video nasties campaign, many of the campaigners only knew the films at a paratextual level, having not seen the films in question. As Egan has argued, the films’ distributors were well aware of the importance of paratextual engagement, as they ensured that posters and VHS covers were appealing to a particular audience (therefore unappealing to another) in and of themselves, regardless of whether or not they appropriately reflected the film itself.<sup>293</sup> Marketing and reception materials – that is, ‘entryway paratexts’ - therefore provide an impression of a film regardless of whether or not an individual then goes on to see the film. That individual might still talk about the film, informed by their impression of it based only on such paratextual materials. This is in-line with the market research conducted by Platinum Dunes in advance of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre’s* production, as I outlined in

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<sup>290</sup> Gray, 2010, 6

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>292</sup> Ibid. 26

<sup>293</sup> Egan, 2007, 52-55

chapter one, which revealed that the majority of the target demographic had *heard of* the original film, but had not *seen* it.

Gray carefully distinguishes between paratexts and intertexts, stating that “intertextuality often refers to the instance wherein one or more bona fide shows frame another show, whereas paratextuality refers to the instance wherein a textual fragment or ‘peripheral’ frames a show.”<sup>294</sup> By this definition, film remakes are inherently intertextual, but also render the original film a paratext, and vice versa. To what degree this nomenclature is practically useful in my research is unclear. What Gray does not seem to do is place his own work on paratexts – borrowing the term from Genette’s work in the 1970s – within the broader framework of film reception studies. So, while Gray refers to Klinger on several occasions in relation to her work on DVD, he barely makes any reference to her very significant work on promotional materials. This suggests that Gray considers the study of paratexts as separate to, or perhaps a development of, traditional reception studies.

Lisa Kernan’s work offers an incredibly useful approach to the analysis of film trailers, insofar as it is an approach that may be applied to other sorts of marketing materials, particularly film posters. Kernan describes trailers as paratexts, that is, elements that “emerge from and impart significance” to a text but aren’t integral to the text itself.<sup>295</sup> This differs somewhat to Gray’s assertion that paratexts are “constitutive parts of the text itself”.<sup>296</sup> Although, for Kernan, a trailer is a short text in and of itself, it is primarily a means of promoting another text, by “asserting its excellence”<sup>297</sup> in various aspects, be it the film’s formal construction, its genre or its personnel. Although the term ‘paratext’ importantly avoids considering such materials as ‘peripheral’, as argued by Gray,<sup>298</sup> to treat all paratexts in a similar way, as Gray does, is not always helpful. The sheer scope of materials that Gray describes as paratexts – from trailers to merchandise to fan videos – differs from Kernan’s approach which specifically aligns the ways in which trailers function with Gunning’s concept of a pre-narrative cinema of attractions, whereby trailers are constructed in such a way that attracts “the spectator’s attention” rather than “sustaining narrative

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<sup>294</sup> Gray, 2010, 117

<sup>295</sup> Kernan, 2004, 7

<sup>296</sup> Gray, 2010, 35

<sup>297</sup> Kernan, 2004, 1

<sup>298</sup> Gray, 2010, 6

coherence”.<sup>299</sup> However, as mentioned, there is a relationship between trailer and film, and it is in this relationship between attraction and cinematic narrative that Kernan finds the characteristics of trailer rhetoric. Through her study of hundreds of trailers, Kernan outlines three primary modes of rhetorical address which are to be found in trailers: genre rhetoric, story rhetoric and star rhetoric. Kernan acknowledges that employing a rhetorical approach to analysis roots her work in structuralist and semiotic traditions; however, she positions trailers historically and employs her methodology to facilitate ideological critique.<sup>300</sup>

Kernan’s study of trailers seeks to reveal more about the “hypothetical spectator” as posited by the rhetorical appeals of trailers, rather than analysing actual audiences of these texts.<sup>301</sup> This sort of investigation seeks to reveal the ways in which film producers envision its ideal audience, an audience that cannot exist as such unity in response is impossible. Each sort of rhetoric emphasises a different sort of audience desire which is appealed. In the case of stars, a trailer will emphasise the attributes of a particular star in the film which makes them popular in the first place. Story rhetoric emphasises the sort of narrative events that an assumed audience want to see in a film. Genre rhetoric appeals to the generic traits that are assumed to constitute a film fulfilling particular generic expectations. Kernan stresses the importance of ensuring an analysis of trailers takes into account the affective ‘gaps’ that are included to leave space for the viewers’ “expected emotional, physical, aesthetic or other responses”.<sup>302</sup> So, although the viewer themselves must experience and respond to the cues provided by trailers, the cues are present in the text of the trailer. These ‘gaps’ are characterised as enthymemes by Kernan, which are “deliberately incomplete syllogisms,” whereby the viewer must draw on particular kinds of knowledge to fill the gap.<sup>303</sup> Therefore identifying the enthymemes employed by trailers is revealing of the sorts of assumptions made by film/trailer producers with regard to the sort of knowledge the audience they are appealing to should have. This relates to issues of cultural capital and disavowal, insofar as such a process assumes not only the knowledge an audience might have, but also the sort of knowledge trailers aim to emphasise.

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<sup>299</sup> Kernan, 2004, 7

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 40

It is the rhetoric of genre and story that are most applicable to the sorts of trailers I will be analysing; however, I would argue that the rhetoric of stardom can be applied in a similar way not to film stars, as such, but to iconic film characters and images within trailers. Kernan notes that the use of stars in trailers is not a simple case of emphasising their sexual appeal, but rather that they “evoke intertextual associations,”<sup>304</sup> and similarly this function can be seen in the use of iconic film characters, such as Leatherface in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. In relation to genre rhetoric, Kernan outlines four techniques employed in trailers to appeal to viewers: iconography, hyperbole, generalisation and repetition. These moves emphasise the paradox of genre – which is similar to the paradox of film remakes - that the film being promoted is both the same as films seen before, and better than prior films. This relates to Leitch’s similar assertion regarding the film remake. For Kernan and within the employment of genre rhetoric in trailers, iconography and generalisation appeal primarily to the desire of more of the same, repetition appeals both to the desire for sameness and to a desire of newness through abundance, while hyperbole appeals to spectatorial desire for a better film than what has come before.<sup>305</sup> It is important, then, for my analyses to bear in mind that such appeals are made not only because of the films’ status as remakes, but also as genre films, and as Hollywood films.

Austin notes the appeals to different audiences found in contemporary Hollywood film marketing and publicity, through the arrangement of audiences into “‘knowable’ taste formations”.<sup>306</sup> The remakes have three inherent audiences to which marketing might appeal: those who have seen the original film, those who have heard of the original film, and those who are unfamiliar with the original film. The way in which the marketing of the remakes might recall iconic or memorable imagery from the original film serves to demonstrate the various audience appeals in relation to their status as remakes of earlier film texts. Austin notes the way in which the publicity and marketing of *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (Coppola, 1992) was aimed at a female audience, not normally considered the audience for a horror film, through the appeal of stars and of romantic narrative emphasised through publicity in the press and marketing texts such as trailer or posters. An alternative audience targeted by the film’s publicity was that of a youth market, the

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<sup>304</sup> Kernan, 2004, 62

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 47-48

<sup>306</sup> Austin, 2002, 3

supposedly MTV generation of film viewers.<sup>307</sup> This focus on the targeting of particular audience segments complements Kernan's approach to uncovering imagined audiences, which are assumed to exist by film producers, through an analysis of film marketing materials.

Keith M. Johnston has criticised Kernan's work, amongst others, for treating trailers solely in relation to the feature film that they promote, as opposed to the "innovative short film format" he posits.<sup>308</sup> This is in-line with Gray's assertion that paratexts sit independently of the texts they promote or relate to. Johnston offers trailers as a point of analysis, as short film text, that unifies text and context, film analysis and film history.<sup>309</sup> Despite this criticism, Kernan's approach is still wholly valuable, and particularly applicable and relevant to my research; as she outlines, her use of rhetoric to analyse trailers is in order to facilitate "ideological critique within a social-historical framework".<sup>310</sup> This function of marketing analysis is central to my thesis, as my investigation considers a range of historical contexts as well as inherently ideological questions about the formation of taste and associated cultural capital. Additionally, Kernan's method of seeking out the use of iconography and enthymematic moves can also be applied to film posters and other promotional texts. My analysis will seek out the coherencies and inconsistencies between marketing materials, through the imagery and design used. This includes online advertising, where access to such materials might be available, where once more similar imagery and design might be used across official websites and online advertising. Although the materials differ, Kernan's theoretical approach of employing rhetorical analysis is applicable across the range of materials under scrutiny.

This sense of coherency and the importance of iconography in the marketing of a remake relates to an over-riding factor that can inform the analysis of a range of marketing materials, which is branding. Paul Grainge has extensively outlined the rise of branding in relation to Hollywood cinema, which he demarcates as occurring prominently during the period 1995 to 2003. To me, this is a crucial demarcation, ending at 2003, a year which saw the release of two particular remakes in the UK: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *The*

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 122

<sup>308</sup> Johnston, 2009, 9

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>310</sup> Kernan, 2004, 5

*Ring* (Verbinski). In a simple count of horror remakes, these two films clearly mark the beginning of the recent wave of horror remaking, heralding an unprecedentedly high number of prominent and mainstream horror remakes being produced and released in a relatively short amount of time. *The Ring* is important as the first of several American remakes of East Asian horror films, including *The Grudge* (Shimizu, 2004), *Dark Water* (Salles, 2005) and *The Eye* (Moreau & Palud, 2008). The importance of remaking Asian horror to the recent wave of remakes is undeniable; however they are not films that will be considered at any great length in my work. It is in this respect that 2003 is an important year in relation to the release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Although other important American horror remakes had emerged in the few years prior, notably Gus van Sant's *Psycho* in 1998, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake was a specifically modern re-telling of the film, although its setting was still the 1970s. While Gus van Sant offered a near-identical homage to *Psycho*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remakes the narrative of the original film through the use of similar set pieces, only with significantly more graphic violence, and can therefore be perceived to be aesthetically and technologically modern through its employment of elaborate special effects, particularly digital effects.

Grainge's identification of specific periods in American film history in which the nature of marketing and branding have changed are important to note in relation to the comparison of materials from two very different eras of filmmaking. The original films emerge from a pre-blockbuster era and were very resolutely outside of a new sort of studio 'system' that could facilitate such filmmaking. The remakes, on the other hand, are very much the products of a post-blockbuster film industry. Although not traditional blockbuster films themselves, insofar as they are comparatively low-budget and made independently of major studios, they arguably reflect a post-blockbuster, high concept type of filmmaking, aesthetically and commercially. Justin Wyatt outlines the rise of the 'high concept' film in the 1970s, and particularly relates high concept films to the desire for an easily marketable and targeted product.<sup>311</sup> The high concept film treads similar ground to genre filmmaking, insofar as it offers audience appeal based on familiarity and repetition, but also on difference. I would argue that the contemporary horror remake is inherently high concept, in that it takes advantage of familiarity with a pre-sold product in order to appeal to

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<sup>311</sup> Wyatt, 2000

viewers. Within the arena of horror remakes, by way of example, *Prom Night* (McCormick, 2008) is a remake of *Prom Night* (Lynch, 1980) in title and concept alone – teens at a prom are picked off by a masked killer. This exemplifies not only the idea of high concept filmmaking, but the way in which remaking can become the ultimate high concept process. Wyatt outlines critical attitudes toward high concept filmmaking that might also be true for the sorts of debates around film remaking: that Hollywood is “crassly privileging business over any consideration of creativity or artistic expression”.<sup>312</sup> Wyatt argues that marketing concerns are central to high concept, and that a film’s visual style must lend itself to the marketing campaign, positing that advertising style has become inherent to the high concept film.<sup>313</sup> This is not so apparent in the remakes central to my research; however, I would argue they remain high concept insofar as they update the genuinely grimy, low-budget aesthetic of the original films to offer a glossy, modern version of a particular exploitation aesthetic. A thorough analysis of marketing materials, particularly a comparative analysis of the marketing of original and remake, will reveal the way in which visual style and its emphasis in marketing materials has not only changed, but directly relates to the position of a film within a particular sort of filmmaking, and, crucially, within a particular taste formation.

To return to the concept of branding, although Grainge focuses on the likes of a brand such as Disney, that asserts brand control over not only film property but multiple other properties such as music, television, theme parks, on a much smaller scale the remakes of these particular films can be seen to function as branded products, particularly in relation to the original film texts. This is most apparent in the case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, as a film with several sequels prior to its remake. As such, the remake enters into a relationship with several earlier film texts, as well as secondary materials, such as graphic novels, as well as other genre films released in the years between original and remake. Arguably the film franchise becomes the brand to be sustained and taken advantage of, and indeed since the 2003 remake and its own prequel, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Liebesman, 2006), another instalment of the franchise has been released, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3D* (Luessenhop, 2012), which is a sequel to the original 1974 film,

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 26

bypassing all the films that have come since, and a prequel, *Leatherface* (Bustillo and Maury, 2016) is forthcoming. Branding is a concept that remains relevant to the other films considered in my research, albeit in a more peripheral manner. As a remake, *Straw Dogs* does not have a particular brand to promote, as arguably the most productive possible way to brand the original film is as a Sam Peckinpah film. This authorial branding would arguably undermine the remake, rather than promote it, due to the lack of authorial status associated with Rod Lurie. However, the recollection of Peckinpah might work to promote the remake, through raising curiosity amongst viewers as to how a 'Peckinpah film' is remade by another filmmaker. In the case of *Last House on the Left* cultural contexts become a sort of brand image. Kate Egan has noted in relation to various re-releases of the video nasties that distributors market these films in such a way as to associate them "with a recognisable cultural event" and therefore give them a "familiar commercial identity."<sup>314</sup> *Last House on the Left* was a key film on the video nasties list, because of its prominence in press campaign materials at the time, and as such the marketing of its remake may recall this cultural event in order to associate the film with a controversial identity. Through employing Leitch's conceptions of recollection and disavowal, this sort of cultural brand identity may be uncovered in film marketing materials. Indeed, the idea of the contemporary 'horror remake' might be a brand unto itself. Contemporary American horror remaking is perhaps a little too long-lived to be considered a true 'cycle', as per Richard Nowell's model based on the 1980s teen slasher cycle.<sup>315</sup> However, Nowell does underscore the importance of approaching historical 'moments' of horror filmmaking, particularly those moments since the late 1970s, with a focus on industry in addition to more traditional text-focussed means of analysis such as psychoanalysis.<sup>316</sup>

My research was divided into three clear stages: the gathering of materials, the organisation of materials, and the analysis of materials. My findings will be presented chronologically, rather than arranged by marketing and reviewing, because the reception of the original films' various releases may impact upon the marketing of the remakes. Thus chapter three will consider the marketing and reviewing of the original films, across their release histories, and chapter four will consider the marketing and reviewing of the remakes. Chapter five will

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<sup>314</sup> Egan, 2007, 6

<sup>315</sup> Nowell, 2011, 41-46

<sup>316</sup> Ibid. 4



go on to compare, contrast and consider the reception of both sets of films, leading to my concluding chapter.

Several libraries and archives provided the access I needed to the various materials I sought out. The British Newspaper Library provided the vast majority of material, primarily newspaper film reviews and newspaper advertising. The British Library and the BFI Library both provided access to magazine reviews and advertising that I was unable to access in either the National Library of Wales or the Hugh Owen Library, Aberystwyth University. Through the BFI archives I was also able to gain access to some publicity materials such as still images and press packs. I also gathered material from private collections and through eBay, which was particularly useful for items such as VHS tapes and theatrical posters. Additional to these physical archives and stores, a great deal of material – particularly material related to the remakes – is readily available online. This is particularly true of newspaper and magazine reviews, trailers and posters. Where possible, I also sought physical copies of these materials – for example, although the posters for each of the remakes can be viewed as image files online, I purchased physical quad posters, and in the cases where a review was available on, for example, EmpireOnline, I sought out the printed review as well.

Trailers proved to be somewhat difficult to obtain, as will be outlined in more detail in chapters three and four. I had assumed that the films' trailers would be available on the DVD copies of the films, however this was not always the case, and therefore I accessed the trailers via official websites, or other sources including YouTube. A further problem was posed by the trailers for the original films, in that it was incredibly difficult to determine whether or not there were UK-specific trailers for each film. As I was unable to find any trailers that differed from the ones which most frequently appeared as special features on 'definitive' DVD releases of the films, and on official online channels, I have assumed in my work that the same trailer would have been used in the UK and the US. I additionally enquired through various fan fora and received no anecdotal evidence of UK-specific trailers existing for the original films. Following the collection of the various materials I identified imbalances in terms of the amount of materials for each film. Naturally, I have gathered a larger amount of material in relation to the original films, in total, due to the greater number of releases they've received since their first releases. I also collected a greater

amount of materials relating to the original *Straw Dogs* than any other film, due to its relatively wider original release, its subsequent initial controversy, and then its various re-releases. Although these apparent imbalances initially concerned me, they inherently contribute to my overall analysis of the materials, with any lack of materials potentially emerging as significant in comparison to the presence of other materials.

A difficulty emerged in attempting to gather the marketing materials relating to the remakes. I found no newspaper advertisements for the theatrical releases for either *Last House on the Left* or *Straw Dogs*. There was also a lack of print material for the DVD release of *Straw Dogs*. The lack of print advertisements for *Straw Dogs* is a difficulty in terms of my investigation. I contacted the publicity firm for Sony Pictures Home Releasing, DnAPR, but received no responses to my requests for information. It is therefore impossible for me to speculate about what sorts of audiences the DVD was being aimed at, if it was being aimed at a particular audience at all. I have, however, been fortunate enough to have had contact with Universal Pictures UK regarding their DVD release of the *Last House on the Left* remake, which has provided me with some additional insight into its marketing. All of the print advertisements for the release which I have access to feature an image of the DVD alone, and each advertisement is presented as being in conjunction with various supermarkets. The advertisements I have access to appeared in the *Daily Star*,<sup>317</sup> *Sunday Star*,<sup>318</sup> and *The Sun*.<sup>319</sup> The DVD was also advertised in publications that I did not set out to research, namely 'lads' mags' (*Nuts*, *Zoo*) and music magazines (*NME*, *Kerrang*). There is some alignment here between the tabloid newspapers in which the DVD was advertised with, particularly, lads' mags, as all of these publication feature prominent images of topless women. This suggests that the marketing of the DVD release has become more specific, in that it is more specifically targeted at a particular audience. The information provided by Universal makes this clearer. Their primary audience for the release was 'male, 15-24' and it seems that the marketing has been targeted accordingly. Interestingly they also include 'fans of horror/the original' as part of their target audience, however this does not seem to have played as important a role in their publicity strategy, or, perhaps they believe that 'fans of horror/the original' are more likely to be 15-24 year old males. Although this might

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<sup>317</sup> 19 Oct., 2009

<sup>318</sup> 18 Oct., 2009

<sup>319</sup> 19 Oct., 2009

be true of a proportion of 'fans of horror', it seems less likely to be true of 'fans of the original'.

Another possible reason for the relative lack of print marketing material for the remakes is that advertisements for these particular films might have been more likely to appear as sidebar and banner advertisements on relevant websites. However, it has been incredibly difficult to verify this, due in part to the lack of relevant website archiving services. Searches via the British Library's website archiving project as well as Archive.org's WayBack Machine proved fruitless. In the former case the sorts of websites adverts might appear on simply haven't been archived, while in the latter the same is true, with the additional issue that adverts do not appear to be archived with the webpages. This might be due to the way in which advertisements on websites work, in that they seem to work on rotation and therefore might not be archive-able in the same way a regular image file might be. This again relates, I suspect, to the high cost of advertising and the very specific targeting possible with advertising online. However, without any evidence of which websites may (or may not!) have featured advertisements for these films, it is impossible to draw any sorts of conclusions of this nature.

The publications from which I draw my materials for analysis are predominantly national newspapers, film magazines, and some niche magazines. This posed something of a problem when approaching some VHS and DVD releases. VHS/DVD reviews are scarce in newspapers, but tend to be given much more space in film magazines. Of course, film magazines are limited to reviews of films released on DVD, when film DVDs only account for a certain, albeit large, proportion of DVD releases. Accordingly, several specialist DVD review magazines emerged with the introduction of the new technology. Publications such as *DVD Monthly* and *DVD Review* (later *DVD and Blu-ray Review*) allowed for a far greater range of releases to be reviewed. A publication such as *DVD World* (later *DVD and Blu-ray World*) offered an even more specialist view, claiming to be "the UK's top home entertainment mag for those who like their viewing to have a bit of a cult flavour."<sup>320</sup> The magazine featured reviews of genre releases, both new and old, as well as adult releases, often reflected on the cover of the magazine. What's interesting about this particular sort of magazine is that many of the most prominent – those which launched with the emergence of DVD in the UK

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<sup>320</sup> 'Current Issue', 2010

– have long since been discontinued. These are not publications that I have included in my own research, primarily in order to attempt to maintain a sense of consistency, where possible, between the reviews of theatrical and home releases, within my dataset.

The matter of home-media magazines draws attention to an interesting contrast between printed media and online media, an important methodological consideration. While ultimately I have not included professional online-only reviews in my analyses, I do believe that online reviews would provide interesting material. The reason for these home-media magazines folding might relate to the way in which they did or did not embrace an online presence for the magazine. Several DVD magazines as well as niche film or genre magazines (*Starburst*, *Shivers* etc.) ceased publication from the mid-2000s onwards. Two of the most enduring film magazines in the UK, *Empire* and *Total Film*, for example, have a very strong online presence, through websites which feature their reviews, interviews and daily news updates, and social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter etc. Likewise, *SFX*, the most prominent specialist genre magazine for sci-fi, fantasy, and some horror, also has a strong online presence. It's also worth noting that both *Total Film* and *SFX* are published by Future Plc., and *Empire* by Bauer Media UK, two of the largest media companies in the UK. Future Plc also published the now defunct *DVD and Blu-ray Review*. Given the slight cross-over with its other title, *Total Film*, and the increase in *Total Film's* online content – including home media reviews – the ceasing of publication of DVD and Blu-ray reviews makes some sense. By comparison, *DVD Monthly's* publisher, Jazz Publications, does not feature any other film- or media-related titles, therefore dropping the publication allows the smaller publisher to focus on more specialist titles which do not have the same sort of cross-over with larger publications.<sup>321</sup> Similarly, the decline in more specialist genre magazines – with titles such as *Shivers* and *Gorezone* no longer publishing – indicates that more specialist interests might now be more present in online content. Those publications which do boast a strong online presence are able to interact with their magazine readers, or, perhaps more crucially, with those who are not yet readers. Not only does this occur through official social media accounts of the publication, but also through the online presence of publication staff. For example, *Empire* magazine's news editor Chris Hewitt, has a large following on Twitter in

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<sup>321</sup> Jazz Publications currently publishes a range of tattoo magazines and various vehicle magazines. ('Our Brands, 2012)

addition to the magazine's following. In a similar vein, the re-launched *Dark Side* magazine's Facebook page is administrated by the magazine's long-time editor Allan Bryce, who updates the page with personal news as well as news relating directly to the magazine. This sort of use of online spaces, which are reflections of prominent editorial voices in print, continue the publication's position as a platform for defining taste. In the case of *Dark Side*, Bryce is able to particularly continue to assert himself as a figure with high subcultural capital on a platform addition to his magazine, which further authenticates his role as editor of an influential niche UK publication. In 2008 *Sight and Sound's* editor, Nick James, wrote that "there's a welcome increase in access to free writing about film, but the consequence has been a drop in status of the professional film reviewer."<sup>322</sup> In cases such as Bryce or Hewitt, embracing similar platforms as those 'amateur' writers on the internet has allowed for an underscoring of their position as professional cultural gatekeepers.

This brings into question the validity of relying entirely on traditional press sources to provide the materials for a study such as mine. If the assumption that print media – especially such specialist print media – is declining due to the increased use of the internet for reviews and so on is correct, then perhaps it is with online 'press' that such a study should concern itself. However, given that my work is concerned with the way in which such material creates a public conception of taste, it is unclear as to the degree to which online reviews contribute to such constructions, particularly outside of fan or niche audiences. Research into user generated reviews on sites such as IMDB.com and Rotten Tomatoes concludes that they do not influence filmgoers in the same way that press reviews do,<sup>323</sup> however, this is not necessarily applicable to review websites who feature regular reviewer-critics such as TwitchFilm or BloodyDisgusting.com. Nascent work is being done in the area of consumer online reviews, however, they do not seem to consider these sorts of websites in their work. Research by Ilona K.E. de Jong and Christian Burgers, for example, seeks to map the differences in language use by 'professional' and 'consumer' film critics, defining professionals as critics "who get paid for writing their reviews".<sup>324</sup> De Jong and Burgers' work is a specific genre analysis of different types of reviews, and so, as an analysis of certain differences in reviews, the work is useful. The limitation of 'professional' to,

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<sup>322</sup> Cited in de Valck, 2010, 135

<sup>323</sup> Kerrigan and Yalkin, 2009, 169-186

<sup>324</sup> De Jong and Burgers, 2013, 77

essentially, newspaper reviews, is quite restrictive when considering online-only sources as well. Similarly Kerrigan and Yalkin's focus on 'user-generated' reviews and their contribution to "electronic word of mouth"<sup>325</sup> again limits somewhat the focus on the different sorts of reviews that might be accessed online. There are a great number of online-only websites and blogs whose reviewers or critics might be considered professional in ways other than financial. For example, quotes from reviews on such websites are often used in film publicity. Therefore the marketing of the film essentially legitimises such websites through their use of reviews as film marketing. Similarly, that such reviewers are invited to press screenings or sent review copies of films suggests that they are considered, at least by the distributors of films, as 'professional' reviewers. In order to include online-only materials in addition to print would be to undertake the task of further analysing, outlining and attempting to define these various spheres of 'professional'. There seems to be a need for much more work to be done in this area, which is unfortunately somewhat beyond the scope of my thesis. It seems interesting to note that much of the work in this area thus far has been undertaken by marketing and business scholars, rather than those working more closely in the field of film studies.

Additionally, drawing on online-only review websites in this research also complicate the notion of a national case study – whereas newspapers or magazines might be more easily located in a particular national context, this is not necessarily so easy with websites. For example, genre review website BrutalHell's content is written by writers from the UK and the USA, as well as being accessed from a broad variety of other countries. Quotes from reviews from this site have appeared on American and British marketing campaigns, yet the writers for the website are not 'professional' because they are not paid to be film critics. It might also be that American websites are more frequently accessed or read by UK-based fans or consumers than UK-based ones. There are print publications which complicate this too, particularly *Fangoria*. *Fangoria* is an American magazine, in terms of its place of publication and its content, however it is sold relatively widely in the UK (and presumably other countries). I chose not to include it in my analysis because of the fact that its content is US-based, insofar as release dates for films would be different, and potentially marketing of the films would be different too. A similar issue is raised by Canadian horror magazine

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<sup>325</sup> Kerrigan and Yalkin, 2009, 173-176

*Rue Morgue*, though I suspect it is not as widely available in the UK as *Fangoria*.<sup>326</sup> This is also in-line then with my decision not to include online reviews in my analyses, in order to present these films' reception in the UK context as clearly as possible.

Despite this apparently broad move to online platforms for more specialist content, more recently specialist print magazines that had ceased publication have been re-launched, such as *Starburst* and *The Dark Side*. Both magazines folded in 2009 only to re-launch in 2011. In the case of *Starburst*, the magazine first re-launched as an online magazine before returning to print in 2012. There are also regular *Starburst* podcasts, which are available freely on the magazine's website, covering specialist topics such as soundtracks and horror. In 2012, *The Dark Side* launched an online magazine published bi-monthly to alternate with its bi-monthly print edition. This increased online presence might indicate a reason for their re-launch successes (the circulation figures are unavailable at this time). Having said this, two new horror publications also launched in 2010, *Shock Horror* and *Scream*, and continue to be published today. Although neither publication has a regularly updated website in the same vein as, say, *SFX* (with relevant daily news updates etc.), both magazines have a strong Facebook and Twitter presence, where the magazine is seen to regularly interact with its readers (or potential readers) via social media. This suggests an interesting convergence between new media – social networks – and old media – print publishing. Once again, further investigation into this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Organising the materials once they were collected was a potentially cumbersome task. In Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath (2000), reviews are organised using a nine-cell table, through which reviews are marked in various combinations of liking or disliking the film and approving of and disapproving of the film.<sup>327</sup> Although I initially considered adopting this approach, I decided to avoid any categorisation of reviews in terms of positive or negative appraisal (although their approach does allow for the nuance of approving/disapproving appraisal). Therefore the simple physical organisation of review materials as chronological was adopted, leading to the implementation of a discourse analysis of the texts.

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<sup>326</sup> Once again, I don't have circulation figures for either of the magazines – figures complicated by the fact that they are imported.

<sup>327</sup> Barker et al., 2001, 157

Discourse analysis is an extremely broad field, according to Martin Barker, “one of the most pervasive and multifarious academic fields.”<sup>328</sup> As an analytical tool it is used across a wide range of disciplines, including linguistics, psychology and media studies. As such, there is a broad range of discursive approaches available to the researcher when approaching an object of study. Discourse analysis seemed to particularly ‘boom’ as an academic method in the 1980s<sup>329</sup> and the work that has come since encapsulates a large range and field of disciplines. In my research I primarily follow the work of Martin Barker, primarily in *Knowing Audiences: Judge Dredd: Its Friends, Fans and Foes*, with Kate Brooks, as well as *The Crash Controversy*, with Jane Arthurs and Ramaswami Harindranath.

Barker’s work takes influences from a variety of other theorists. In *Knowing Audiences*, Barker and Brooks set out a brief summary of the theorisation and development of discourse analysis and its uses. Noting the structuralist roots of discourse analysis in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Barker and Brooks identify the work of Gunther Kress and his associates as beginning what would become known as ‘critical discourse analysis’.<sup>330</sup> Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, “takes consideration of the context of language use to be crucial”<sup>331</sup> and sees “language as social practice.”<sup>332</sup> Kress particularly emphasises “the ‘political economy’ of representational media”<sup>333</sup> as well as attempting “to understand the formation of the individual human being as a social individual in response to available ‘representational resources’.”<sup>334</sup> Around the same time in the 1960s and 70s, another strand of discourse analysis emerged, known as ‘conversation analysis’, which was primarily concerned with “the micro-processes of social interaction” but tended to do so “irrespective of the content of the conversation”.<sup>335</sup> One of the primary criticisms of CDA, from the perspective of conversation analysis is that “CDA is an ideological interpretation and therefore not an analysis,”<sup>336</sup> and indeed that in order to perform CDA, a conversation analysis must be “carried out first”<sup>337</sup> in order to avoid being “merely ideological.”<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Barker, 2008, 151

<sup>329</sup> Barker, 2008, 151-154

<sup>330</sup> Barker and Brooks, 1998, 111

<sup>331</sup> Wodak, 2002, 1

<sup>332</sup> Fairclough, in Wodak, 2002, 1

<sup>333</sup> Wodak, 2002, 6

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Barker and Brooks, 1998, 111

<sup>336</sup> Wodak, 2002, 17

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.



Dissatisfaction with the developments of Marxist theory, after Althusser, in the 60s and 70s saw a move to 'discourse' from the Marxist 'ideology', as part of the dismissal of Marxism's apparent claim to a 'grand historical narrative'.<sup>339</sup> Primary amongst post-Marxist thinkers in the field of discourse analysis was Michel Foucault. His theorisations of social processes saw society as "a swirl of overlapping but separately evolving discourses" rather than emphasising "class and capitalism".<sup>340</sup> In Foucault's work, 'discourse' is "not purely a 'linguistic' concept,"<sup>341</sup> but is instead about "language *and* practice."<sup>342</sup> A Foucauldian approach to discourse is less concerned with direct linguistic moves and more with "the availability of discursive resources within a culture [...] and its implications for those who live within it."<sup>343</sup> Foucauldian discourse analysis is particularly "concerned with the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power."<sup>344</sup>

My application of discursive analyses, then, follow the Foucauldian approach of considering discourse in terms of its wider social implications and, in particular, how these might relate to taste-making. For *Knowing Audiences*, Barker and Brooks conducted an audience study of viewers of *Judge Dredd* (Cannon, 1995), an adaptation of the strip featured in British comic *2000AD* since 1977. In their study, Barker and Brooks outline the patterns of assumptions and discourses to be looked for in the talk collected from young audience members through focus groups. Barker and Brooks' work in *Knowing Audiences* is an analysis of specific talk from interviews with teenagers about the film *Judge Dredd*. This corpus of material under analysis is significantly different to mine, being the talk of published film writers and critics in relation to six particular films. Their approach to the analysis of discourse, which incorporates a variety of analytical traditions, is appropriate for my purpose: "the structured investigation of people's language-uses with a view to analysing the ways in which they contain, embody, or otherwise refer to wider social processes, conceptualisations, assumptions, ways of thinking and talking."<sup>345</sup> These patterns can be applied to other sorts of talk, specifically, in the case of my own work, critical reviews of films. The patterns

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Barker and Brooks, 1998, 111

<sup>340</sup> Barker and Brooks, 1998, 113 & alsos

<sup>341</sup> Hall, 2005, 72

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Willig, 2003, 171

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Barker and Brooks, 1998, 115

outlined by Barker and Brooks are repetitions, connections, distinctions, implications, key concepts, modalities of talk and puzzles.<sup>346</sup> The most relevant to my work are the first five categories. The first category, repetitions, requires the identification of “discursive features which recur”<sup>347</sup> in talk, and particularly the repetition of such features in different contexts, which suggests an “independent force” at play.<sup>348</sup> In the context of my implementation of these features, this would mean that across varying reviews on films, similar terms may be repeated and therefore emerge as important discursive elements in reviewing these sort of films. The second category, connections, seeks out features that are connected or combined by those writing, with the intention of identifying the nature of the linking.<sup>349</sup> In the case of talk around controversial films, for example, this might be the linking of violent content to violent behaviour in viewers, an assumption that may well appear in reviews of such films. The third category, distinctions, seeks out ways in which the viewer or the critic distinguishes him or herself from others, or distinguishes a type of film from another, or a director from another, and so on.<sup>350</sup> This approach is implicitly employed in Klinger’s work, and is informed by Bourdieu’s work. This allows for the identification of “distinguishable operative categories” being used by the writer. Fourthly, implications, is a category that seeks out the implicit structures being used in particular talk, and therefore the enthymematic ways of thinking. The fifth category, key concepts, seeks to identify the ideas expressed in talk that appear to organise the way in which the viewer or critic makes sense of a film.<sup>351</sup> According to Barker and Brooks these five categories organise the discourse analysis of a given text, and allow for an analysis of many different texts in a way that may reveal commonalities in the cultural discourses being drawn upon.

According to Barker and Brooks, discourse analysis makes possible the identification of “processes of persuasion, and of ideological transmission: in short, power at work in language.”<sup>352</sup> In my own research, the ‘power’ I am seeking out is that of taste-making, which in marketing materials emerges in the persuasiveness of a trailer or a poster, whereas in critical talk, reviewers hold the potential power to dictate what is culturally tasteful and

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<sup>346</sup> Barker & Brooks, 1998, 52

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Barker & Brooks, 1998, 52

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 109

what exceeds the boundaries that they establish. Dominant formations of taste are constantly shifting, as is the cultural impact of a given review or critique of a film. Certain reviewers may hold more discursive power than others, dependent upon factors such as the outlet for which they write, the kind of readership they address, or their prominence as a cultural figure. I would argue that particular personality critics or associated sorts of publications present their reviews with distinct sorts of cultural positions – so, speculatively, a *Daily Mail* reviewer might criticise a horror remake for being morally irresponsible in its depiction of graphic violence, while a critic for *The Guardian* might criticise its lack of artistic credibility. The sort of cultural capital and values that each institutionalised reviewer has differs, which impacts upon their judgement of a given film. The critic offers his or her knowledge of moral rightness or artistic integrity, lending to their review an authority that contributes to the construction of public spheres of taste formations.

In 1996 Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath employed discourse analysis in a project partly focused on the British press' response to *Crash* (Cronenberg, 1996). The film was controversial due to its supposedly violent and explicit sexual content, and the newspaper the *Daily Mail* started a relatively high-profile campaign against the certification and distribution of the film. *The Crash Controversy* project sought to answer particular questions about the press response, such as 'why *Crash*?', through an analysis of the critical reviews and commentary pieces that were published following its release in the UK. For Barker et al. discourse analysis functions as a "set of procedures for analysing the social organisation of talk,"<sup>353</sup> an assertion that is in line with the conception of discourse analysis as revealing ideology as social structure in talk about a given topic. The sorts of questions posed by the *Crash* project are, in their more general form, worth applying to the films under analysis in my research. Primarily, the questions 'why was this film deemed so provocative?' (potentially only relevant in relation to the original films) and 'where is the "viewer" in all this?' are particularly important to apply to the materials I gather. These two questions incisively seek out two important features that contribute to taste-making: identification and evaluation of content and audience. On the one hand, a consideration must be made of what it is about a text that is seen to make it good or bad, wrong or right, while on the other

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<sup>353</sup> Barker et al., 1998, 160

hand assumptions are made about the sort of people who choose to watch (or not to watch) such content.

### *Conclusion*

In choosing to investigate the issue of the cultural status of film remakes through a reception studies approach, I am placing my work within a rich tradition which contributes to the further understanding of the uses of film as a powerful cultural object and social tool. At the core of the processes I wish to uncover and explore is the issue of the exertion of cultural, and in turn social, power, and rooting my thesis in the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu is therefore vital. Bourdieu's conceptions of cultural capital and taste construction are central to the way in which film can be constructed as a central pivot for broader public debates regarding moral, ethical or social issues, as well as a pivot for examining the cultural and commercial issues that inform their marketing and reviewing. Cultural capital is a tool employed both by filmmakers and producers and by film reviewers in order to portray a film in a particular way. While marketers appeal to what they assume to be different audiences' varying types of cultural capital in order to sell a film, reviewers appeal to cultural capital as a means to express an institutionalised judgement of a film. Through analysing these arenas of film reception in relation to three case studies, a broad sense of the historical changes that have occurred in the receiving culture in relation to the depiction of controversial content in films can be achieved. In light of film remaking, this is also true: the act of remaking is another part of the on-going process of the reception of the original film as well as creating a new text in its own right. Bourdieu argues that the use of cultural objects – or 'art', in its many debatable forms - and the assertion of particular tastes or judgements are powerful ideological tools. With this in mind, and by approaching film remakes through a reception studies approach, I also avoid any reductive textual comparison between original film and remake.

Chapters one and two have laid the groundwork for the analyses that will come in the next part of my thesis. In chapter one I set out the pertinent historical and social contexts that have informed the cultural identity of my case study films, as well as outlining the main academic discourses which have circulated in relation to them. In this chapter I have outlined existing academic debates around taste, remakes and reception studies, as well as

outlining how such debates inform my methodology. In the next two chapters I will analyse the marketing and reviewing of my case study films. Chapter Three focuses on the marketing and reception of the original films, and in order to do so manageably it is split into two parts: the films' original releases, and their re-releases. In doing so, the chapter paints a picture of changing reception and rehabilitation. Chapter Four analyses the marketing and reception of the remakes. Being more recent films, they do not have the same lengthy histories as their predecessors and therefore the chapter does not have the same split in its structure as chapter three.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Original Films

In this chapter I will outline and discursively analyse the sorts of marketing and reviewing associated with the original versions of *Straw Dogs*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left*. In order to explore the materials and the issues they raise, this chapter will be structured chronologically. The first section will discuss the marketing and reviewing of the first British releases of my case study films.<sup>354</sup> The second section will then consider the marketing and reviewing of subsequent theatrical and home media releases of these films. Rather than organise the analysis in this chapter by film, this broad chronological approach will allow for a clearer sense of how these films are rehabilitated as time passes. Similarly, I will approach the materials as a whole rather than per individual film, in order to fully explore the sorts of discourses that emerge broadly across the public presentation and reception of the three examples that constitute my study. The three case studies presented in this chapter have been chosen according to, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the remade films. Even so, the original films on which those remakes are based also represent a particular era of British film history, starting with the censorship issues of 1971, of which *Straw Dogs* was a notable part, through to the introduction of the VRA as a result of the campaigning of the press, politicians and self-appointed moral guardians against unregulated home video. The reception of their first releases therefore covers just over a decade, before beginning to approach the subsequent releases since this time.

My main analytical approach to the marketing materials associated with these films is informed by Kernan's concept of trailer rhetoric. Although Kernan conceives of trailer rhetoric predominantly in relation to trailers for Hollywood films, her work is still relevant and applicable, dealing as it does with an appeal to a particular imagined audience. The core idea of seeking out the rhetorical appeals of trailers can be more broadly applied across a variety of marketing materials, as it takes a semiotic approach to analysis that can be easily transferred to posters, print advertisements and so on. Of course, there are distinct differences between trailers and other marketing materials, primarily their form as either moving or still image. Kernan refers to trailers as paratexts, elements related to a text that

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<sup>354</sup> The first release is not necessarily theatrical in each case; *Last House on the Left* first became available in the UK on VHS.

are not integral to the text itself.<sup>355</sup> If paratexts are “texts that prepare us for other texts”<sup>356</sup> then marketing materials might be the most visible and prominent paratext in relation to film, insofar as they are displayed in cinemas as well as widely distributed online on television and on home media. So, although a trailer is a text unto itself (“unique short films”<sup>357</sup> as Keith M. Johnston would prefer to think of them), I am analysing them as a means to consider the cultural and commercial construction of the film they are promoting. A trailer is primarily a means of promoting another text, by “asserting its excellence”<sup>358</sup> in various ways. Kernan outlines three modes of rhetorical address found in trailers, these being genre rhetoric, story rhetoric and star rhetoric. Kernan’s work is predominantly structuralist and semiotic in its approach, but she crucially employs her methodology to facilitate ideological critique.<sup>359</sup> This is primarily through her focus on the “hypothetical spectator” that trailers try to appeal to.<sup>360</sup> In relation to my thesis, this is an important consideration, as such assumptions not only tell us things about the ‘hypothetical audience’, but also about the desirability of this hypothetical audience for marketers, or the acceptability of that audience as interpreted by critics. In this regard, notions of cultural or subcultural capital come into play, as marketers attempt to appeal to certain kinds of audience knowledge. This notion emerges again in relation to review material that relates to my case study films, whereby critics align themselves with a certain imagined audience which may be based on a specific sort of cultural or subcultural capital that this audience is presumed to have.

The other sorts of marketing materials I will be considering are primarily posters, and advertisements in newspapers and magazines. The same rhetorical appeals as outlined in Kernan’s work – the appeals to genre, story and stars - are identifiable across a range of film marketing materials, including her focus, trailers. Jonathan Gray writes that posters are “rarely as densely packed”<sup>361</sup> as trailers, in terms of “meaning”, however even so, Gray concedes that “they still play a key role in outlining”<sup>362</sup> the nature of a media text. The focus

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<sup>355</sup> Kernan, 2004, 7

<sup>356</sup> Gray, 2010, 25

<sup>357</sup> Johnston, 2009, 9

<sup>358</sup> Kernan, 2004, 1

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>361</sup> Gray, 2010, 52

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

of this particular chapter, on the original case study films, means that posters and print-advertisements constitute a large proportion of my materials, as they are more readily available than trailer or television advertisements. There are not necessarily new trailers produced each time a film is re-released or released on a different format. As such, there's an imbalance, in some senses, between the kinds of materials under scrutiny, in so far as I have collected more print marketing than other types of marketing in relation to my original case study films. However, in employing the same methodology across these types of materials, this apparent 'imbalance' should not cause any analytical difficulties.

Reviews are also paratexts, in that they are ideally read prior to seeing a film and offer guidance as to a film's content and quality. Rhetoric and enthymemic moves are in some ways important to keep in mind when approaching reviews, although they are a very different sort of material to trailers or posters. Rhetorical and enthymemic writing in reviews is a crucial way of expressing particular values or opinions regarding a film or its audience – so, for example, a reviewer might write that 'only a particular sort of person will enjoy this film', rather than 'anyone who likes this film is potentially dangerous'. In approaching the reviews of these films I will primarily be utilising Martin Barker and Kate Brooks's "discursive features"<sup>363</sup> as a mode of analysis. Barker and Brooks outline six categories, these being repetitions, connections, distinctions, implications, key concepts and modalities of talk, in relation to their research into the audience for *Judge Dredd* (Cannon, 1995). I will apply these discursive approaches to the reviews, and other press materials I have collected in relation to each film, in order to determine the sorts of discourses that are most often informing the critics' responses to them. In particular, I will be looking for words or phrases that are repeatedly used in reviews across a variety of publications and in different contexts, that is, in relation to all three films. The reviews I have analysed come from a wide variety of publications, in terms of their type (from national newspaper to specialist magazine) as well as political inclination (left- or right-leaning). If certain discursive moves emerge across these reviews then an "independent force"<sup>364</sup> must be at work. This approach is important here particularly in trying to establish the ways in which reviewers and critics define or categorise these films, and how these definitions and categories

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<sup>363</sup> Barker & Brooks, 1998, 52

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.



change. Given that the films are fairly different in content and production context, as well as being subject to very different sorts of releases, seeking out common discourses is an important step in strengthening the argument for considering the films as texts that might be grouped together from a particular historical period due to thematic similarities, and similar receptions, a link further strengthened by their later remakes.

It's important to stress from the outset the very different types of releases that each film received in the UK, and the ways in which this has impacted upon the sort of materials that I have been able to access. *Straw Dogs* had a wide cinematic release and many subsequent releases, both theatrically and on VHS and DVD. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* received a festival screening and a limited theatrical release before its VHS releases and further DVD releases. *Last House on the Left* first appeared in the UK on VHS, and has only received a few specialist theatrical screenings since,<sup>365</sup> before several DVD releases. This impacts a great deal on the materials available for each film, primarily in the case of *Last House on the Left* – as national presses were not reviewing individual VHS releases in the early 1980s, there are very few reviews of the film available that associate with its initial release. This may seem to create an imbalance compared with the wealth of review material available for *Straw Dogs*, but the lack of materials is significant in and of itself, as I will explore. In a previous chapter I have outlined a more detailed release history for each film, but it is important to note that these histories share a degree of commonality. Each of the films was released on VHS in the early 1980s, following varying sizes of theatrical release. Each then disappeared from circulation, either through seizure by the DPP, or as a result of the introduction of the Video Recordings Act in 1984. Each film has now been certified '18' in the UK in an uncut form, as well as receiving extensive 'ultimate edition'-type DVD releases. These final, most recent releases of the films each offer a sense of finality, in the sense that as 'ultimate' editions, these previously hard-to-find, incomplete films are now available uncut and with extensive extra features. These releases might therefore be considered the final 'trace'<sup>366</sup> of the original film in the UK before the production of the remakes.

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<sup>365</sup> As far as I can ascertain, these being NFT London in 1988, Phoenix Square, Leicester in 2000 and Dancehouse, Manchester in 2013; as well as a UK tour of a 35mm print in 2014.

<sup>366</sup> Here I mean 'traces' as per Staiger (2000, 163). For Staiger, any "object of analysis" is an "event", and therefore any materials related too but directly outside the 'event' are 'traces'. Therefore marketing materials, reviews, DVD releases, and even the remakes might be thought of as 'traces'.

### *Marketing and reviewing the first releases*

In this section, I will analyse the marketing and reviewing of the first releases in the UK of *Straw Dogs*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left*, covering a period between 1971 and 1982. In order to present the discourses found in the materials I have gathered, I have grouped the primary discourses surrounding the films into four broad categories. They are the discourses of personality, genre, censorship and audiences. These are the main discourses that repeatedly appear across review and marketing materials for these films in particular. In this part of the chapter I will outline the way in which each discourse becomes apparent in the materials I have gathered, and in particular in relation to the interaction between marketing and reviewing, and the reflection and perpetuation of taste cultures within the materials and the discourses. Though these discourses are ones I have identified as the most prominent in my specific case studies, it is possible that they are more widely true of films of a similar type as well. This is not to say that these are the only discourses at work. As will become clearer in the second half of this chapter, these are the most prominent discourses across the entire release histories of the films, although certain changes do occur across these histories.

#### *Personalities*

Although in much of my work I am relying on Kernan's rhetoric of genre in approaching trailers and marketing material, she also puts forward the rhetoric of stardom as a prominent kind of appeal in trailers.<sup>367</sup> I have purposefully avoided using 'stardom' to describe one of the main discourses I have found, in that 'personality' best suits the variety of individuals who are emphasised and focused upon in the marketing and reviewing of these films. For the most part, these are individuals who are involved in the film's production, so a director, or an actor, or a producer. Additionally, there is particular attention paid in these materials to individuals who have influenced the film in a more indirect way, such as the authors of earlier works that feed into these films, or, in one instance, a historical figure. This second sort of personality is more frequently featured in review materials than marketing materials. While the marketing of films will use names and faces as a means of appealing to an audience familiar with such individuals, review material

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<sup>367</sup> Kernan, 2004, 62-77

invokes names as a means of evaluation, specifically and more broadly.

In the marketing of these films the discourse of personality appears in two different ways, either through name alone, or through imagery. It is only *Straw Dogs* that makes use of both of these techniques. The most prominent name on print advertisements for *Straw Dogs* is that of Dustin Hoffman, his name printed in the same font, size and colour (red) as the film's title on the main poster<sup>368</sup> and in subsequent press use of the same imagery. The only other wording that appears in red in these materials is 'Susan George as Amy'. Although her credit is much smaller and appears at the bottom of the poster, it is significantly also bordered in red, thus drawing attention to it. With two major successes in recent memory, in the form of *The Graduate* and *Midnight Cowboy*, it's natural that Hoffman's name features prominently. Susan George, as an up-and-coming actress, had already appeared in one film in 1971, Pete Walker's thriller *Die Screaming Marianne*. Her previous film work included sex comedies and horror films as well as television appearances. If her name was recognisable to people seeing the poster, then they therefore might have associated her with risqué films. George is also credited on-screen during the trailer for *Straw Dogs*, although further attention is not drawn to her name as with the red box on the poster. The prominence of her credit on the poster not only suggests her potential as a star, but also emphasises the importance of a notable or significant actress playing Amy; that is, it indicates the importance of Amy as a character within the narrative of the film. The images employed further support this. The main image used in the poster and print advertising for *Straw Dogs* is that of a woman's chest. Presumably, this is Amy, as she wears a similar jumper to the one she wears in the film, however, her hair is shorter and we do not see her face, so there is a possibility that this is another actress or model standing in for Susan George, for imagery used specifically for publicity purposes. On the day of *Straw Dogs*' release, a half page advert appeared in the *Evening Standard*, using the same imagery, but this time the credit text is overlaid over the imagery, making the background image of Amy's chest significantly larger and more prominent than in previous advertisements.

The two images which appear most frequently in the marketing for the film are Amy's chest, and the image of David wielding a shot gun. Although Amy's chest forms the background for most of this marketing of the film, it is arguably the most striking image, even when overlaid

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<sup>368</sup> See fig. 1, appendix.

with others. This is primarily due to its relative size and so dominance of the space of the whole poster or advertisement. Although there are further implications in the use of this particular image, which I will outline below, it places Amy – and by extension George – in a position of importance in the film’s marketing. Images of David are also used in the marketing, primarily the image of him holding a shot gun, taken from the end of the film. In most cases this image overlays the image of Amy, while in some small newspaper adverts it is the only image used.<sup>369</sup> This particular image not only appeals in a generic sense – more below – but also in the sense that this is Dustin Hoffman, but playing a character perhaps quite different to those he was best known for. Although for most of the film Hoffman plays David as a mild-mannered academic, perhaps more in-keeping with his previous roles in dramas such as *John and Mary* (Yates, 1969) and, famously, *The Graduate* (Nichols, 1967), the marketing very specifically draws attention to the more violent aspects of David’s character. The trailer for *Straw Dogs* is very similar, in that the focus of the text and of the voiceover is entirely on David/Hoffman, but much of the imagery is centred on Amy/George, in particular the establishing shot that focuses on her breasts (much like the poster), and also a great deal of footage taken from the rape scene. The voiceover for the trailer however emphasises that “this is David Sumner [...] he took his wife and fled”, thus ensuring that any focus on Amy is de facto also about David. This is further evident when shots from the rape scene are intercut with some of David’s most famous dialogue: “I care. This is where I live. I will not allow violence against this house.” The effect is that Amy’s scenes essentially ‘illustrate’ the narrative driven by David. George’s name credit appears much later in the trailer, compared to Hoffman, despite the prominence of Amy in the trailer visually, which again suggests the element of subordination of the character.

The individual who is highlighted by the publicity for *Last House on the Left*’s video release is that of producer Sean S. Cunningham. As might be expected for a crew member, this is done in writing alone. The video cover itself constitutes the main advertising used for this release, featuring the words ‘The director of Friday the 13th is going to scare the hell out of you...again.’<sup>370</sup> This is reflective of the delayed release of the film in the UK, as *Friday the*

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<sup>369</sup> See fig. 2, appendix. This is in marked contrast to the US poster for the film (fig. 3), which features a close up of Hoffman’s face, and the broken spectacles he wears. This poster is arguably the more generally famous and iconic image, but it’s notable that George’s importance is emphasised in the UK, given her nationality.

<sup>370</sup> See fig. 4, appendix.

*13<sup>th</sup>* was made several years after *Last House on the Left*. This particular focus on Cunningham, particularly in his role as a popular director (rather than producer) is tellingly used as a means to exploit the huge success of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, and significantly places the film in a very specific historical context – that is, prior to the release of Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in 1984. Indeed, Craven’s name does not appear in either advertisement for the video release, nor on the video cover itself. The use of Cunningham in the advertising here somewhat confuses straight-forward notions of authorship as being restricted to an individual creative role within the filmmaking process, as Cunningham is invoked here for his work as a director, but doing so promotes a film he has produced only.

Conversely, the advertisements for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* make no direct reference to anyone involved in the making of the film. There is, however, emphasis on a different kind of individual in the poster and publicity artwork for the film, which comes in the form of the character of Leatherface. Only minimal promotional imagery was used for the film’s London Film Festival (LFF) release. The image illustrating the film’s listing page in the National Film Theatre (NFT) festival guide is the most unusual, as it is a photo of the ‘family’, this being Leatherface, Hitchhiker (Edwin Neal) and Old Man (Jim Siedow). The image is a promotional shot rather than a still from the film, the actors posed, sitting on the steps of the house from the film and looking directly into the camera. Despite the shot featuring three characters, Leatherface appears most prominent as he is the most centrally framed, and sits above the other characters. All other associated imagery for the LFF screening and the limited cinema release a year later features Leatherface alone. A small halftone image accompanies a listing for the screening in *Time Out*, which is the only publication to illustrate its coverage of the LFF screening, despite many publications making reference to the screening in articles about the festival programme. A quad poster for the film was then used to promote London screenings of the film on its very limited release at the end of 1976.<sup>371</sup> The image on the poster consists entirely of a still image from the end of the film, of Leatherface part-silhouetted against an orange-yellow skyline, swinging his chainsaw above his head. The same image is used in an advertisement for the film in the *Evening*

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<sup>371</sup> See fig. 5, appendix. I do not have personal access to a copy of this poster. It is available to buy in reproduction on eBay.co.uk, and I have anecdotal evidence of its legitimacy. The very same poster was used on the film re-release in 1999, with the only difference being the film’s certificate (from ‘X’ to ‘18’) – copies of this poster are available on eBay.co.uk and kino-art.de, and sell for well over £100.

*Standard*<sup>372</sup> and a similar image accompanies a review of the film in the same edition of the paper.

Leatherface, in particular Leatherface and his chainsaw, therefore becomes the only image associated with the film in the press, becoming somewhat emblematic of a film that was relatively difficult to see. This ties in with the film's sensationalist title – the 'chain saw' of the title made iconic via the marketing imagery. Likewise, the title reflects on the image, in that, if Leatherface is wielding the chainsaw, then he must be a character involved with the massacre. This is also reflected in the film's trailer, which is almost entirely constructed around the character of Leatherface. Although the trailer shows the faces of Sally and Pam more than anyone else, most of the trailer is constructed around brief excerpts of sequences in which Leatherface either kills, captures or pursues one of the young people. Crucially the sequences stop short of clearly showing Leatherface or the moment of a murder, which effectively renders Leatherface the main focus of the trailer through his absence as much as by any shots that do reveal him.

The individuals highlighted in each film's initial marketing do not always correspond with the way in which individuals become central to review material. Although there are some crossovers, the individuals who are most frequently discussed in review materials are distinct from those focused on the marketing. Once more, there is also some difference between each film with regard to the type of individual referred to.

Reviews of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* offer perhaps the most interesting of these. Although individuals involved with the film are mentioned, they are often mentioned in passing as might be expected in a film review ('Tobe Hooper's film...' etc.), but there is a spectral individual who emerges in an interesting way in several reviews. That individual is Ed Gein. Although not one of the reviews makes a *direct* reference, there are eight instances of either 'a real life crime'<sup>373</sup> being referred to, or alternatively references are made to *Psycho*, a film very famously inspired by Gein. References are also made to other 'real life' crimes or criminals, in the form of Charles Manson and the Nazi regime. As I will outline

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<sup>372</sup> Nov 18<sup>th</sup> 1976, 17

<sup>373</sup> That is to say, references such as 'a mass murder in 1957', rather than references to the way in which the film itself more vaguely claims to be a 'true story' – the number would be higher if I included these, but these references are not quite so strongly linked to Gein.

later in this chapter, Gein re-emerges as a focal point of review material, so the manner in which he is referenced in these early reviews begs the question: why is he not named? That the Gein case was relatively recent, fewer than twenty years prior to the UK release of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, might imply that Gein's infamy as a well-known cultural figure was yet to be established, particularly outside of the USA. I explore this in greater detail below in the second half of the chapter.

I only have one review of *Last House on the Left* from its original release, almost certainly due to the manner of its release on VHS and the lack, at that time, of newspaper reviews of VHS releases. It's significant then that the one review I have obtained is by Kim Newman, who is known for reviewing genre films, particularly those which do not necessarily receive wide releases. Newman's review is almost entirely centred on the figure of Wes Craven, particularly in relating *Last House on the Left* to his work since the production of this film. This illustrates that an individual such as Newman, and by extension the publication he writes for, here *Monthly Film Bulletin*, draws on knowledge beyond that which was widely disseminated, at this point, in the UK, in order to assess the film, particularly his emphasis on Craven as a promising director. This is primarily achieved through comparing *The Last House on the Left* with *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), a film Newman deems Craven's best because of its "fiercely intelligent, visceral grip".<sup>374</sup> Newman also identifies that the theme of class conflict runs throughout Craven's work, for which *Last House on the Left* "draws battle lines."<sup>375</sup> In concluding the review, Newman identifies the film as a progenitor of an "uncommonly interesting sub-genre"<sup>376</sup> in which he includes *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes*. Interestingly, and in contrast to the film's marketing, Newman states that "regrettably, [the sub-genre] is all too quickly degenerated into the empty spiralling of the current slew of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* imitations."<sup>377</sup> Although Newman does not directly criticise *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* – nor does he make reference to it as a film directed by Sean S. Cunningham – the implication remains that *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* is the progenitor of inferior horror films. This aptly demonstrates the different aims of marketing and reviewing; the marketing aims to sell the film, via the popularity of another film, by making reference

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<sup>374</sup> Newman, 1982, 178

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

to Cunningham. The review, conversely, evaluates the film through the thematic vision of its director, Craven, and does so through negative comparison with and distinction from other, more popular, horror films, including *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. Through this distinction Newman is able to use his position as a reviewer to police the boundary between worthwhile horror – Craven – and the ‘regrettable’ “current slew” of poor imitations. Newman’s role here as both film critic and horror expert, and indeed horror fan, is one which polices the boundaries of authentic and quality genre filmmaking.

Reviews of *Straw Dogs* unsurprisingly centre on the figure of Sam Peckinpah, although both Hoffman and George are frequently referred to as well, and occasional references are made to other actors, particularly David Warner. Peckinpah emerges as the more prominent reference point as he is almost always referred to as the party responsible for the film. This particularly emerges in negative accounts of the film, especially those which argue that violence itself in film is not abhorrent, but the manner in which it is portrayed has the potential to be. Peckinpah, then, is frequently figured as responsible,<sup>378</sup> in initial reviews, for the abhorrent representation of violence found in the film. This interrelates with other discourses, as I will outline below, particularly that of genre. Peckinpah’s reputation for making violent films is often established –“if violence is your game then Sam Peckinpah is your man,”<sup>379</sup> “[his] penchant for violence was however already manifest in *The Wild Bunch*,”<sup>380</sup> “Sam, a great one for violence,”<sup>381</sup> – before a more detailed account of the film is offered. Through establishing this pre-existing reputation, reviews then set *Straw Dogs* apart as exceeding it. When Hoffman or George (or other actors) are referenced, it is often in relation to the acts they commit or those they’re subjected to, the implication therefore seems to be that they are tools of Peckinpah: “Miss George suffers impressive agonies,”<sup>382</sup> “Hoffman has little to do,”<sup>383</sup> “this assault on Susan George.”<sup>384</sup> Another individual who is frequently referenced is Gordon Williams, author of *The Siege of Trencher’s Farm*. Williams is almost always referred to as being in opposition to Peckinpah, which serves to clearly

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<sup>378</sup> That is to say, Peckinpah is responsible for the film itself. As I will outline below, ‘the censor’ was often found responsible for allowing the film to be released at all.

<sup>379</sup> Christie, 1971

<sup>380</sup> Robinson, 1971

<sup>381</sup> Cashin, 1971

<sup>382</sup> Wilson, 1971

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Walker, 1971, 21



demarcate the film as being Peckinpah's doing – "although taken from a well-thought-of little novel by Gordon M. Williams set in rural Cornwall [...] the story, as re-written partly by the director himself, comes out as ridiculous, pretentious and very nasty indeed."<sup>385</sup> For the most part, most references to individuals somehow involved in the film reinforce Peckinpah himself as the main focus of attention and evaluation. The notions that emerge of his 'responsibility' for the film, and the way in which the actors are subject to 'his' film tie in with the idea of the *auteur's* total control of a film, but the negative connotation here is that this control is detrimental to the film in a variety of ways, through, for example, his thematic obsession with violence or his forceful treatment of his actors.

The variety of individuals that are repeatedly singled out in reviews and marketing suggests that the type of film being discussed is an important factor here. *Straw Dogs* is dominated by its well-established director as well as its main stars both established (Hoffman) and rising (George). *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was made by unknowns and featured no stars, but in its main villain, Leatherface, boasted not only a highly iconic character with which to publicise the film, but also a gateway to the real-life inspiration behind the film, Ed Gein. *The Last House on the Left*, due to the way in which it was released in the UK through specialist networks, is publicised and discussed in light of its two *auteurs*, Cunningham and Craven, in retrospect of their successes in the horror genre since *The Last House on the Left*.

### *Genre*

Genre is broadly another key discourse which emerges across the materials I have collected. Once again, comparing the use of genre in the marketing and the reviewing reveals a degree of difference in what is being presented by the marketing, and what is being interpreted or re-presented by the critics. If anything, there is a sense of generic confusion across the board, which implies a degree of fluidity in the cultural status of these particular films and in the nature of genre itself. As I have outlined in previous chapters, all three films share some generic features in that they are, broadly speaking, often thought of as horror films. In examining the films' marketing, techniques associated with the exploitation film seem most prominent, but in the reviewing of these films horror, or variations of horror, tends to be a more consistent framework employed to assess these films.

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<sup>385</sup> Gibbs, 1971

The marketing of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* might be the most overtly horror-related, in the repeated use of Leatherface and his chainsaw as an iconic figure. This is underlined in newspaper advertising, which features a ‘blood splatter’ design behind the film’s title which is not present on the poster.<sup>386</sup> Both trailers for the film further emphasise this via the use of voice overs. The Bryanston trailer refers to the film as “terrifying”, while the New Line trailer makes the most explicit claim that “this is the horror movie to end them all.” New Line released the film in 1983, therefore almost a decade had passed in order for the film to develop this sense of status within the genre. In the context of the film’s UK release, its 1976 festival screening would have secured a relatively small audience, while its VHS releases between 1979 and 1983 would have been more widely accessible. The interim period would have allowed for the film’s notoriety and reputation as the ultimate horror film to cement itself. There is no direct use of the word ‘horror’ in any of the print marketing during this period, the closest to it being the use of a quote from Felix Barker’s review which refers to the film as a “shocker”.<sup>387</sup>

The marketing of *Straw Dogs* relies more heavily on a sensationalist or exploitative approach, primarily through the prominent image of Susan George’s breasts. As I outlined above, on the one hand this image, combined with other elements of the poster at least, draws attention to the importance of Amy as a character within the narrative, however, it’s also clearly a titillating image. The focus on Amy’s breasts might play into George’s nascent star persona, given the sorts of roles she previously played,<sup>388</sup> however, it’s more likely that the focus is on ‘breasts’ rather than ‘Susan George’s breasts’. This is most apparent in the fact that her face does not appear as part of this main image, and it is only *after* seeing the film that we might associate the image with the character of Amy (in relation to costume). The sensationalist use of Amy/George is also present in the trailer, in particular in the way audio is used of her crying and moaning, both corresponding with shots from the sequences from which the audio is taken, but also over shots from different sequences entirely. This emphasises the sexualised and sexually victimised nature of her character.

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<sup>386</sup> See fig. 6, appendix.

<sup>387</sup> Full page advertisement, publication unknown

<sup>388</sup> George played sexualised under-age girls in *The Strange Affair* (Greene, 1967) and *Twinky* (Donner, 1970), as well as featuring in the sex comedy *All Neat in Black Stockings* (Morahan, 1969), as well as the aforementioned horror films *Die Screaming Marianne* and *Fright*.

The trailer also focuses on the violent aspects of the film, with the climax of the trailer featuring many intercut shots from the siege sequence. The sense of violent, rather than sexual, sensationalism is reflected in the poster tagline, which once more is a realisation that can only be made after seeing the film. The tagline, when used, is positioned over the image of Amy's breasts, and reads 'The knock at the door meant the birth of a man and the death of seven others.'<sup>389</sup> Although vaguely reflecting the film's climax, it also exaggerates the violence of the film – claiming that there are seven deaths, when there are only five. It's difficult to judge whether this is simply inaccuracy on the part of the marketing company, or if it is a deliberate exaggeration of the action. For it to be deliberate exaggeration would not be surprising, given that exaggeration had been the mainstay of exploitation marketing and publicity, which Schaefer traces back to the employment of 'ballyhoo' – that is, the "hyperbolic excess of words and images that sparked the imagination".<sup>390</sup> The *Straw Dogs* tagline, then, is exactly hyperbolic, serving to underline the violent ending of the film, as well as set-up a 'one-man-versus-the-world' scenario. Combined with the other image on the poster (all images of violence or threat), the marketing is overall relatively sensationalist. This sort of 'erroneous' marketing may indeed play into the exaggeration and inaccuracies that emerge in some of the review materials.

The marketing for *Last House on the Left* is the most overtly in line with the traditions of marketing exploitation films. The trailer follows a structure and style common to exploitation films of the period, including the repeated stating of the title in the voice over and the use of key scenes of narrative turning points in the trailer. While the trailer for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* stops short of revealing death scenes or key narrative high points, the trailer for *Last House on the Left* includes many, such as Mari in the lake about to be shot, and the Collingwood parents' revenge. Rather than teasing or hinting at the film's content, then, the trailer for *Last House on the Left* seems to more explicitly present its content as a means to appeal. As the film did not receive any theatrical release in the UK prior to its VHS release, the advertisements for the VHS provide the most relevant material for analysis, as no UK posters exist.<sup>391</sup> The famous tagline 'to avoid fainting, keep repeating:

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<sup>389</sup> This, again, underlines the emphasis on David's active role in the narrative, while objectifying the subordinate Amy.

<sup>390</sup> Schaefer, 1999, 103

<sup>391</sup> I have searched for any alternatives to the US posters and none have emerged. Anecdotally, others have

it's only a movie...only a movie...' and vivid warning - 'due to the specific nature of the horrific and violent scenes in this film the front cover is not illustrated to avoid offense' – used on the video cover and the marketing serve to underline the extreme nature of the images in the film. The 'it's only a movie...' tagline is inspired by older exploitation films, with similar lines used to promote *Colour Me Blood Red* (Lewis, 1965) and *Strait-Jacket* (Castle, 1964).<sup>392</sup> The trailer for the film is primarily focussed on the film's title, its tagline, and the hyperbolic voiceover which reads the lengthier tagline used on American publicity for the film, "it rests on 13 acres of earth over the very centre of hell!" This tagline further exemplifies the traditional 'ballyhoo' of exploitation cinema, as it bears no relation to the plot of the film.

An advertisement that appeared in *Video Trade Weekly* in May 1982 does offer an array of garish stills from the film, overlaid with an image of the video's understated cover. Six stills from the film form the background of the advertisement: Mari in the lake, Krug bloodied and about to throw a chair, Mari with 'Krug' carved on her chest, a close up of Mari on the forest floor, Mr. Collingwood with the chainsaw, and an image of the three criminals, with Krug pointing a knife off-camera.<sup>393</sup> These same stills are used on the back of the VHS sleeve, and all of the images are from violent scenes in the film, or show the detail of the pain endured by victims of this violence. This underlines the tactical fallacy of the unillustrated front cover, as detail of the 'horrific and violent scenes' are readily available on the back cover and in some advertising. The plain cover not only utilises exploitation marketing techniques for the sake of appealing to genre enthusiasts, but likely for practical reasons too. In 1981 the British Videogram Association and Advertising Standards Authority had received complaints regarding the advertising of several VHS titles, including those for which the ASA upheld the complaints: *Driller Killer*, *SS Experiment Camp* and *Cannibal Holocaust*. The rumblings of the video nasties press campaign that would soon escalate were already present in the tabloids. Therefore, the plain packaging could also be seen as a means of protecting the release and its marketing from complaint and from prosecution.<sup>394</sup>

The reviews of the films offer a much more varied account of these films' relationship to

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confirmed that there was no 'UK poster' for the film.

<sup>392</sup> Szulkin, 2000, 132

<sup>393</sup> See fig. 7, appendix.

<sup>394</sup> Egan, 2007, 65-66

genre. Across reviews of *Straw Dogs* and of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, a number of different genres are referenced. In particular, the *grand guignol* is frequently referenced in relation to both films, recalling a particular type of horror film, such as the lurid gothic horror of Hammer Studios. *Straw Dogs* is even specifically compared to Hammer horror films, as well as referred to as a suspense thriller and a western. *Last House on the Left* is very clearly referred to as a horror film, placed as it is within a broader body of work and of influence. For Richard Maltby, the critics' interpreted the features of the Western in *Straw Dogs* as a "transgression of national cultural boundaries"<sup>395</sup> within the British setting of *Straw Dogs*. Maltby finds that the critics of *Straw Dogs* based much of their criticism in relation to issues of genre, and briefly mentions the references to Hammer and *grand guignol*. Maltby focusses instead on the issue of the Western, in keeping with his arguments regarding critical resistance to American culture. Given the range of genres referenced in reviews of *Straw Dogs*, it seems restrictive to dwell solely on the Western and a simple reflection on generic issues as being symptomatic of issues of nationhood.

Julian Petley has noted the tendency in British film criticism to reject or dismiss particular horror films, a tendency he relates back to the critical rejection of Gothic literature. A historical precedent exists, then, for the rejection of a film deemed too 'horrific', however this complicates notions of the 'American' nature of the films that provoke such a response, given the British institution of Hammer. *Straw Dogs* is referred to by critics as a horror film more often than it is a Western – directly through the words 'horror' and 'horrific' and indirectly through comparisons with Hammer or *grand guignol*. These sorts of comparisons or invocations of other sorts of films act as forms of dismissive shorthand when referring to *Straw Dogs*. This is particularly evident when considering that generally negative response to the film then corresponds to the British critical reception of British horror films. The vitriol with which *Straw Dogs* was met may well have been exacerbated by the "critical anti-Americanism"<sup>396</sup> identified by Maltby, but its root very much lies in the historical rejection of any work deemed 'horrific'. Petley outlines that this rejection of 'horror' is very much a reflection of the critical differentiation between 'horror' and 'terror', which is itself linked to notions of quality. Both Petley and Maltby recall Charles Barr's comparison point for *Straw*

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<sup>395</sup> Maltby, 1998, 111

<sup>396</sup> Maltby, 1998, 112

*Dogs'* reception, *A Clockwork Orange*. Barr extensively outlines the critics' different responses to the "detached"<sup>397</sup> style of *A Clockwork Orange*<sup>398</sup> and the "visceral" style of *Straw Dogs*. Maltby appears to equate this to a distinction between art and entertainment, and by extension British/European and American, whereby for the critics *Straw Dogs* was an example of entertainment failing to offer a clear moral standpoint, and therefore seen as "a form of cultural debasement".<sup>399</sup> Both Barr and Maltby's readings seem to correlate with Petley's identification of a preference for terror over horror amongst British film critics as well as their literary predecessors.<sup>400</sup>

Given the strong association between horror and *Straw Dogs* in the reviews, Petley's account of British film criticism in relation to the horror film becomes increasingly relevant. There is little to suggest that this tendency, as identified by Petley, is the result of any national boundary policing, but rather that it is predominantly associated with notions of genre and quality. This identification of what constitutes 'quality' is strongly linked to issues of taste. Barr, Maltby and Petley all, in different ways, identify binaries in what is acceptable to the critics. For Barr, or rather for the critics Barr analyses, the distinction is between the 'visceral' and the 'detached' styles of filmmaking; for Maltby this relates to an anti-American sentiment, which is symptomatic of the preference of 'art' over 'entertainment'. For Petley, the distinction is a historical and national one, relating back to the distinction made between terror and horror by critics of Gothic novels. Whatever the specific reference points of each analysis, each identifies that critics are making their own stand point clear by distinguishing themselves from films they categorise in a particular way, and by extension people who enjoy or appreciate such films. The emphasis between the 'visceral' and 'detached', 'horror' and 'terror' or even 'art' and 'entertainment', offers distinctions in such a way that would seem to conform to traditional dominant cultural tastes as per Bourdieu's notions of high and low-brow. The critics' response to *Straw Dogs*, then, would seem to overtly seek to maintain the dominant cultural boundaries of acceptable taste.

Petley overtly refers to *Straw Dogs* as a horror film. To apply the same sort of analysis to reviews of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* renders a similar reading. The reception of the

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<sup>397</sup> Barr, 1972, 18

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Maltby, 1998, 111

<sup>400</sup> Petley, 2002, 34

film in terms of genre is much more clear cut, with most reviews referring to the film as 'horror', or otherwise a 'shocker', and many comparisons to other types of horror works or characters being made, such as *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, the Newgate Calendar, Sweeney Todd and the 'old dark house'. While *Straw Dogs* was criticised for being visceral and gratuitous – that is, for using elements of the horror film in what is ostensibly seen to be a drama - reviews of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* take a similar stance, only more often than not offense has become simple disgust or humour. This is often coupled with an exaggeration of the film's content, most blatantly by Russell Davies in the Observer, when he writes of the film that "the gore is so over-done as to be ludicrous".<sup>401</sup> Of course, the film itself contains in fact very little gore, yet it is once again being "criticised for being too explicit in [its] description of physical details".<sup>402</sup> It would seem to me that, in making inaccurate judgements such as this, the critics are in fact conforming to a standardised response to a film they see as being 'horror'. This becomes increasingly evident when in many publications the review is often grouped with reviews of two other releases that same week: *Schizo* (Walker, 1976) and *Death Weekend* (Fruet, 1976). If reviewers are here performing their duty as cultural gatekeepers, their dismissiveness of horror results in the misrepresentation, or at least over-statement, of the content of the film in question in order to do so.

Debates regarding *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* can be found outside of reviews in the form of programme notes for its London Film Festival screening. The film's programme notes were written by Alexander Walker, in which he praises *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* for being "a film of skill and horror",<sup>403</sup> and in particular in that it "does not attempt to interpret it or distance it aesthetically"<sup>404</sup>. This particular claim seems to contradict Barr's assessment of British critics as favouring "that magic device, 'distancing', keeping the effects within 'tolerable' limits."<sup>405</sup> Walker makes his claims about the film "without necessarily committing [his] colleagues,"<sup>406</sup> who also took part in the LFF screening, to them. Derek

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<sup>401</sup> Davies, 1971

<sup>402</sup> Petley, 2002, 34

<sup>403</sup> Walker, 1975

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Barr, 1972, 27

<sup>406</sup> Walker, 1975

Malcolm curiously describes the film as a “formidable piece of directorial artifice,”<sup>407</sup> while at the same time states that “nobody could seriously call it a work of art.”<sup>408</sup> Nigel Andrews writes that, because the film is directed with such “ferocious intensity,”<sup>409</sup> which praises a lack of distancing once again, that it belongs in a “different class from its catchpenny rivals of the week”.<sup>410</sup> For Andrews, it is because of Hooper’s talent that the film would “deter impressionable filmgoers [rather] than to encourage imitation”.<sup>411</sup> Robinson seems to come to a similar conclusion but in much less positive terms, concisely stating that “the fact that [the film] is rather efficiently and effectively done only makes the film more unpalatable,”<sup>412</sup> though he does not outline how the film is efficient or effective, claiming instead that the less said about it, the better.<sup>413</sup> It would seem, then, that for these particular critics (Robinson excepted) the visceral nature of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is what, in fact, makes it praise-worthy, referring to it as “intemperately bloodthirsty”<sup>414</sup> and “sweat-inducing,”<sup>415</sup> whereas the opposite had been true of *Straw Dogs*.

The range of generic features or frameworks drawn upon in these materials suggests fluidity in the films’ generic status from their very first releases. It also demonstrates the difference in intention, as to be expected, between marketing materials and review materials. Further, it highlights that a film being marketed with the techniques associated with a particular generic status does not necessarily mean that it will be critically received on the same terms. While *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left* do broadly match in this regard, the marketing for *Straw Dogs* very much employs exploitation techniques, rather than drawing, more specifically, on imagery and ideas associated with horror, and yet its critics do not always refer to this in their evaluations of the film.

### *Censorship and the Censor*

Given one of the central concerns of this study is that of controversy, it is unsurprising that censorship is such a primary discourse in the reception of the particular films under scrutiny.

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<sup>407</sup> Malcolm, 1976

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Andrews, 1976

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Robinson, 1976

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Andrews, 1976

<sup>415</sup> Malcolm, 1976



Horror and exploitation films are of course not the only sort of films to face censorship issues, however they do, due to their content, more easily run that risk. Generally a censorship discourse is not as prominent in the marketing of these films as it is in the reviewing, however, as will be made clear in the second part of this chapter, this does change. I will approach this particular discourse in a sort of back-to-front fashion, by considering the review materials first, before considering how and if the discourse is also apparent in the films' marketing.

The reception of *Straw Dogs* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, in relation to issues of censorship, can very usefully be compared and contrasted. First, both have different histories with the BBFC. While changes were suggested during the production and post-production of *Straw Dogs*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was made entirely without consultation. Primarily this is, naturally, due to its context of production – an independent production made in America is presumably unlikely to receive or to seek out any BBFC consultation during its production, while the British-made *Straw Dogs* was in a different position. It's also important to bear in mind the difference in management at the BBFC at the given times the films were made – James Ferman and Stephen Murphy may have both approached *Straw Dogs* differently at the production stage, for example, as while Murphy believed it to be a “serious film about violence”<sup>416</sup> and advised changes during the production, Ferman outright refused the film its video certificate and may have been more stringent as “one of the most conservative BBFC Secretaries.”<sup>417</sup> *Straw Dogs* was granted an X certificate by the BBFC, but *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was rejected outright. These decisions by the BBFC are crucial and contribute heavily to the second point of comparison: the critical response to the films. The films received very different responses from the critics, and in particular from Alexander Walker. While on the one hand critics condemned the BBFC for certifying *Straw Dogs*, some of the same critics disagreed entirely with the board's decision to reject *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

Walker appears to be the most vocal of critics in both instances, and the apparently different response to each film bears a closer scrutiny. Walker's review of *Straw Dogs* begins with his indictment of the BBFC's decision to certify the film for exhibition, in which he

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<sup>416</sup> Cited in Barber, 353, 2009

<sup>417</sup> Barber, 352, 2009

famously accuses the board of “a dereliction of duty”.<sup>418</sup> As a whole, the review offers an almost blow-by-blow account of the narrative and its most offending moments – the rape scene, which for Walker doesn’t fall “far short of obscenity,”<sup>419</sup> and the climactic siege, or, “amateur night at the abattoir”.<sup>420</sup> Walker then spends some time on the performances, which, for him, don’t “help much.”<sup>421</sup> By comparison, his review of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (coinciding with its London release) gives only a vague account of its narrative, but does conclude that “ultimately, it goes way over the top with suggestions of necrophilia, even cannibalism.”<sup>422</sup> Despite this, it would seem that the film’s “Gothic realism” is enough for the film to be defensible.<sup>423</sup> Almost half of Walker’s review is dedicated to admonishing the film’s distributor, Hemdale, for apparently cutting the film after it received a certificate from the Greater London Council, an action which, for Walker, was “contrary to the spirit of the support which I and others gave for the public exhibition of a film the censor banned”.<sup>424</sup> This admonishment seems to be an attempt at re-stating Walker’s own position as an important critic, and therefore an important cultural gatekeeper, as though to say, ‘remember, it’s thanks to my support that you were able to release the film’. A year previously in 1975 Walker included *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in his end of year round up, in which he describes BBFC Secretary James Ferman as claiming “that it was all right for middle-class intellectuals [...] to see such horrors but it wouldn’t do for the workers”.<sup>425</sup> For Walker, this “patronising example of moral superiority”<sup>426</sup> was, as mentioned previously, the “most distasteful thing [he] saw inside a cinema in 1975”.<sup>427</sup> It seems difficult to reconcile Walker’s own ‘moral superiority’ in relation to *Straw Dogs* with his response to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is an entirely American production, rooted very firmly in a real life American crime which is also often referred to in reviews of the film. In this regard the critical response to the BBFC’s rejection of the film is in fact quite ambivalent, quite different to the response to *Straw Dogs*. Even fairly negative accounts of

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<sup>418</sup> Walker, 1971, 21

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Walker, 1976, 21

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Walker, 1975, 14

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

the film do not reach anywhere near the same level of vitriol that was to be found in some reviews of *Straw Dogs*. John Coleman, for example, who found himself “sick to [his] stomach”<sup>428</sup> watching the film, ends his review with the fairly ambivalent instruction to the reader: “Use your own censorship: stay away. Or go. Whatever turns you on.”<sup>429</sup> Eric Shorter, although negatively appraising the film, defends the LFF screening, asking “if millions of Americans want such rubbish, why should the British be spared?”<sup>430</sup>

Additional press material, that is not strictly review material, circulated regarding the issues of censorship that these films faced. This highlights their importance as films whose reception prominently contributed to broader debates regarding censorship during this period. In relation to *Straw Dogs* this is most prominently represented by the famous letter to *The Times*, signed by thirteen film critics. The letter sees the critics position themselves as a superior group of public tastemakers and moral guardians than those appointed to be so at the BBFC. In doing so, the signatories indirectly but clearly outline that tastemaking and moral guardianship should be the primary function of the BBFC. The letter describes the use of violence in *Straw Dogs* as being “dubious in its intention, excessive in its effect,”<sup>431</sup> partially reflecting the general consensus found in reviews of the film. What the statement achieves is a positioning of the critics as superior both to censor and spectator, claiming as they do to understand both the intention of the filmmaker and the effect that the film will supposedly have. The letter goes on to criticise the censor, by means of comparison, for the rejection of Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey’s film *Trash*, a film the signatories consider more morally acceptable for the way in which it depicts drug-taking. In this regard, Maltby’s work might be recalled once more. *Trash* is very much an art film which, although American, in its style and its content, is firmly situated within the avant-garde. If the British film critics otherwise displayed an anti-American sentiment then their notion of ‘American’ must equate with ‘entertainment’. This is clearly not the case with *Trash*, which makes it defensible, particularly when contrasted with *Straw Dogs*. The critics called for a response from the BBFC, who duly responded in kind with a letter signed by Lord Harlech, President of the BBFC, and Murphy. Their letter is somewhat dismissive of the critics’ complaint,

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<sup>428</sup> Coleman, 1976

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> Shorter, 1975

<sup>431</sup> Cashin et al., 1971

identifying certain inaccuracies and fallacies in their letter. The response from Harlech and Murphy agrees that the BBFC's responsibility is to the public (rather than to critics!), which suggests that the two bodies – that is, the critics and the censors - have different conceptions of 'the public'. Harlech and Murphy also highlight that focus group screenings of *Straw Dogs* did not reveal any moral objections by members of the public, while by contrast the rejection of *Trash* was rooted in concerns raised by the public at screenings of the film. Something of a discrepancy appears here, then, in just who the 'public' seems to be, though this discrepancy also highlights that both the BBFC and the film critics are negotiating the appropriate concerns about a film for the public who will see it and I'll further explore this sense of the public – or the 'audience' – below. This debate between critic and censor may well have been fleshed out during the LFF screenings of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Unfortunately, record of this debate has not been kept,<sup>432</sup> and therefore it's impossible to say which "critics and censors"<sup>433</sup> went to the screening to "defend or attack the film".<sup>434</sup>

A third intersection emerges in relation to issues of censorship, in addition to the perspectives of critic and censor, and that is the distributor. The NFT programme listing of the LFF screenings of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* also invites "the British distributors Hemdale"<sup>435</sup> to take part in its debate. Film distributors were perhaps most centrally involved in the censorship debate in the early 1980s, in the midst of the 'video nasty' outrage. It is in these sorts of press materials – rather than strictly review material – that *Last House on the Left* is predominantly talked about at this time. Newman's review of its original video release in fact makes no mention of the film's position as uncertified by the BBFC nor offers any discussion of it in relation to the burgeoning press campaign. A mere year or so after the film's release, the *Daily Mail* lists *Last House on the Left* as being on the DPP's list of "video 'masters' which they advise police to act against under the Obscene Publications Act".<sup>436</sup> The press campaign against video nasties was so preoccupied with the idea that these films and their circulation in the UK could cause real life harm that it was their video distributors who therefore became legally responsible for them in this context.

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<sup>432</sup> I confirmed this through email correspondence with the BFI.

<sup>433</sup> Wlaschin, 1975, 52

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Miles, 1983, 2

In light of its release only on VHS, the marketing for *Last House on the Left* most obviously reflects issues of censorship within it. The 'plain' VHS cover can be seen as an act of self-censorship by the distributor, to simultaneously protect itself against potential complaint and prosecution, while at the same time emphasising the film's extreme content. Likewise a 'starburst' design declares 'warning! Not recommended for persons under 18', which can clearly be conceived as a form of self-certification. *Last House on the Left* had no BBFC certificate at this point, and the medium on which it was distributed, VHS, was not under any legal regulation at the time. Kate Egan attributes this practise to the distributors seeking to maintain an "appearance of responsibility"<sup>437</sup> in addition to the continued use of exploitation marketing techniques. Egan outlines that these warning 'labels', on video nasty covers of the time, normally contained some sort of description of the film's content "with the frequent use of adjectives like 'graphic' and 'extreme'",<sup>438</sup> which is not strictly the case with *Last House on the Left*. Its additional tagline – "due to the specific nature of the horrific and violent scenes in this film the front cover is not illustrated to avoid offense" – seems to function in a similar way, as a "powerful commercial beacon".<sup>439</sup> The tagline also appears to directly, though subtly, make reference to the growing unease over horror videos, the attempt to 'avoid offence' referring to the fact that other video releases had recently caused a great deal of offense, to members of the public and the press. Egan outlines the effectiveness of this approach, through noting that, through the lack of illustration, the distributor is implying that "it would be impossible to illustrate the cover in *any way*"<sup>440</sup> without causing offense. As Egan also notes, any sense of attempts at warning appear "disingenuous"<sup>441</sup> as the back cover of the VHS, as well as its trade advertisements, are illustrated with gory stills from the film. This sort of tactic is also demonstrative of Kernan's concept of enthymemic moves in rhetorical film marketing, whereby the audience 'fills in the gap' and understands that the film being advertised is not just violent, but especially violent and potentially offensive. Regardless of the intent, such marketing tactics display an awareness of the threat of censorship of the film, and thus frame the film within these associations and discourses.

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<sup>437</sup> Egan, 2007, 63

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid. 66

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 75

The original poster for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* offers a similar warning, although this time it appears on a poster for a film which has received certification, at least at a local level if not from the BBFC. This then seems to even more overtly imply that this warning is being used to draw in the viewer who might enjoy such a film, alongside the draw of an official 'X' certificate. The trailer for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* uses a similar technique to *Last House on the Left*'s plain VHS cover. The trailer consists of the film's most violent sections but with crucial cuts to the flash of a camera bulb at the moment of exact violence. This gives the impression that the action that is hidden by these cut-aways is more violent than it actually is, and also that the trailer is hiding this violence from anyone who might inadvertently see the trailer. The marketing for *Straw Dogs* displays no such acknowledgement of censorship issues, clearly due to the fact that any issues or debate about the censorship of the film came *after* its release. There doesn't seem to be, as far as I can tell, any later modification of the marketing, during this initial release, to reflect this either. Even when the same imagery is used for its double-billing with *Soldier Blue* in 1975 at the Carlton Cinema, Haymarket, no addition has been made to marketing materials in order to reflect the censorship debate around the film (nor, it seems, to the publicity for *Soldier Blue* either). The debate around the British censorship of films with extreme content such as these seemed to increasingly escalate from *Straw Dogs* (and other films released that year, such as *The Devils*) through *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* to the first release of *Last House on the Left*.<sup>442</sup> This escalation then seems to lead to a greater reflection of issues regarding censorship in the marketing of *Last House on the Left*, particularly in comparison with the older films, as well as this film becoming central as an object to broader debates about censorship, but without receiving much direct attention in review columns at this time.

### *Audiences*

Both types of materials under scrutiny in this thesis appeal to a particular audience. In a way, they appeal to, or are directed at, the same audience, that is, an imagined, homogenous mass of people. Of course in reality this is not the case, as there are potentially a great many different 'audiences' for a particular film. As Kernan asserts in her work, the conceptualised audience, as constructed by marketing materials, is in itself worth studying and is revealing of the attitudes held by the individuals and groups who conceptualise this

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<sup>442</sup> Simkin, 2012, 72-80

audience.<sup>443</sup> Different types of materials, including reviews, appeal to this conceptualised audience in different ways. These appeals are also generally revealing of the self-identified ‘function’ of each type of material. Despite this, in both types of materials, in these cases, appeals to the audience are almost intrinsically linked with the above issues of censorship.

The marketing for *Straw Dogs* stands out in terms of direct appeal or reference to the audience, in that there is almost none to be found. Its tagline relates exclusively to the film’s narrative, and none of the imagery or other text directly addresses the audience. The UK quad for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, on the other hand, absolutely and directly addresses the audience with its tagline: ‘can you survive...’ The tagline challenges the audience while establishing the film as an extreme experience. The film’s trailer has a similar direct audience address in its voice over. The Bryanston trailer voice over ends with “after you stop screaming, you’ll start talking about it”. This implies that not only will the audience be so frightened by the film that they’ll scream, but that there is something about the film – presumably the same thing that will make them scream – that will make them talk about it at length and that this will make the film culturally noteworthy. By the time the film was circulated in the UK, it was already culturally noteworthy in the USA, and the trailer, although potentially not UK-specific, reflects that. This certainly demonstrates Peter Hutchings’ assertion, in response to Robin Wood’s work, that horror is often presented as spectacle, rather than as a social commentary.<sup>444</sup> The tagline for *Last House on the Left* functions in a similar way, and is used both in the trailer and on its VHS advertisements: ‘to avoid fainting, keep repeating...it’s only a movie...only a movie’. This again offers a sort of challenge to the audience, with the implication that without the ‘only a movie’ mantra, the viewer will indeed faint; and again, due to the extreme nature of the film, and its potential status as an experience that could go beyond just watching a film, that it is primarily an experience that must be ‘survived’. As outlined in the section above, both films’ marketing also feature a ‘warning’ label. While ostensibly directly addressing the audience through the warning, such devices are arguably being used to appeal to a particular audience that enjoys films with extreme content, or an audience that is familiar with this ‘sort’ of film and its marketing – whether they themselves consider such films to be ‘horror’ or ‘exploitation’ or

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<sup>443</sup> Kernan, 2004, 3

<sup>444</sup> See Hutchings, 2004, 83

something else.

Review material addresses the audience in a different way. At times this address is direct, and for the most part makes an assumption about how the audience will receive the film. For example, Ian Christie concludes his review of *Straw Dogs* with “you might not like the message of the film but I’ll bet it will shatter you.”<sup>445</sup> With this, Christie assumes that it is likely the reader of his review will dislike the ‘message’ of the film (that is to say, ‘the film’!), while at the same time considering himself knowledgeable and insightful enough to predict that the film will also ‘shatter’ the audience, by implication noting the fact that the film is effective, in its ability to shatter the audience. This is similar, in its prediction of audience behaviour, to the marketing of the film, which suggests that “after you stop screaming, you’ll start talking about it”. Interestingly, many of the other reviews of *Straw Dogs* are very heavily personalised to the reviewer, suggesting they did not like the film’s lack of distancing and the fact that they were drawn into the film as a result, and don’t feature much direct audience address. When reviewers do directly address the audience, this tends to be in positive reviews of the film. In more negative reviews, there is more likely to be a great deal of use of the personal pronoun – “I lost my temper,”<sup>446</sup> “unbelievable and, I insist, unnecessary,”<sup>447</sup> “I was angry.”<sup>448</sup> This does still address the audience in some way, however. In this context, the critic is in a position of authority in relation to the film, therefore, in offering such a highly personalised opinion, the critic is here encouraging the reader to think in the same way. It also demonstrates the affective nature of the film, implying that if the critic was moved in such a way by the film that the reader may be too. Much of this indirect appeal to the presumably sympathetic reader – that is, the reader who already favours the publication for which the critic is writing – ties in with issues of censorship as outlined above. In this case, the audience for a film is addressed negatively, differentiating the critic – and presumably the reader – from the audience of the film. When John Coleman writes: “I was sick to my stomach. Use your own censorship: stay away. Or go.” the implication might be that if you were to go see the film, then you are not like Coleman, the authoritative critic, but rather you are a troublesome sort of audience. Direct

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<sup>445</sup> Christie, 1971

<sup>446</sup> Coleman, 1971

<sup>447</sup> Taylor, 1971, 3

<sup>448</sup> Thirkell, 1971



reference to an 'other' audience is often framed highly negatively. Virginia Dignam refers to "the more vulnerable"<sup>449</sup> who will be "emotionally convinced that such distortions of values are factual,"<sup>450</sup> drawing implicitly on discourses of harm, while Ian Christie seems to believe that "if your stomach is strong, your mind weak and your personality twisted"<sup>451</sup> that you might enjoy *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Christie's review assumes there is already a corrupted audience for the film, in contrast to Dignam's conception of a vulnerable and potentially corruptible audience. Even positive accounts of the same film imply that a film has the potential to have an undesirable effect on potentially corruptible kinds of audiences, such as when Nigel Andrews writes that *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is "more likely to alarm and deter impressionable filmgoers than to encourage imitation".<sup>452</sup> Andrews seems, therefore, in his relatively positive account of the film, to acknowledge the discourse of harm by disavowing it, in that he believes that *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* will deter rather than encourage an 'impressionable' audience. This suggests that it is the negative responses to the films which demonstrate and conclude that harm might occur to audiences of the film. It is through writing like this that Bourdieu's claim that in matters of taste "all determination is negation"<sup>453</sup> is at its most evident, as the critic distinguishes him or herself from a particular sort of film viewer. By suggesting that this sort of viewer might either be harmed or harmful, the matter of taste in relation to these films is something that comments upon the real-world implications of particular taste-positions.

The discourses of personalities, genres, censorship and the audience, and particularly in the case of reviews of some of the films, associated discourses of harm, emerge in the materials relating to these three films, all of which were highly controversial, but in a variety of different ways. That there is a degree of unity in the sorts of discourses that emerge and are prominent in the initial framing and evaluation of these films suggests that they are suitable for comparison, and also that the response to these films and associated discourses such as genre, reflects certain historical moments in UK film culture, relating to marketing, distribution, exhibition, censorship and reception contexts. Even so, and as I have outlined above, there are nuances within these discourses that suggest that factors such as genre

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<sup>449</sup> Dignam, 1976, 2

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Christie, 1976

<sup>452</sup> Andrews, 1976

<sup>453</sup> Bourdieu, 2010, 49

and country of production impact upon the receptions of the individual films.

### **Marketing and reviewing re-releases**

Performing the same sort of analysis of the materials associated with subsequent releases of these films reveals changes in the employment of these discourses, as well as some consistencies. The sorts of re-releases and home entertainment releases that these films have received are different, and occur at different times. It is through these releases that the films become rehabilitated, and, while still approached as relatively niche texts, not nearly so reviled. The sort of cultural distinctions made in relation to these films on their first releases change, and while not necessarily demonstrative of a straight-forward, uncomplicated shift from 'disapproving' to 'approving', there is a marked change in the way in which the films are talked about. This occurs in both the marketing and the reviewing for the films. Again I have identified the broad discourses at work in the films' re-release marketing and reception, some of which have not changed: personalities, genre, audience and legacy. The change from 'censorship' to 'legacy' reflects changes in the way in which the films' formerly censored status is talked about between their earliest home releases and their most recent ones.

### *Personalities*

Only minor change has occurred in the use of particular personalities in the marketing of these films. The first VHS releases of *Straw Dogs* (1980) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1979) use similar imagery as employed in the publicity for their theatrical releases. Various IFS pre-cert VHS releases of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* use variations on the image and text of the theatrical quad poster, however they are now printed in a much simpler 'silhouette' design, presumably for the practical reason of printing onto a video box or sleeve. The back of the VHS is unillustrated. One release by IFS in 1983 stands out, however, by featuring a completely different cover. It still focuses entirely on Leatherface, although this time he is hand-drawn, which suggests that the distributor may have considered illustrating the cover with a film still to have been courting censure. This release marks the first time the film is also presented as 'Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*'.<sup>454</sup> The *Straw Dogs* VHS releases by Guild Home Video feature different sleeve art work to the

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<sup>454</sup> See fig. 8, appendix.

theatrical poster, but the images used are still primarily of Amy and David. Amy is still predominant, the top half of the video sleeve is taken up by an image of Amy holding a shotgun, and the bottom half of the sleeve features an image of Amy and David.<sup>455</sup> Once again, the move away from the prominent image of Amy's breasts, as used in the theatrical marketing of *Straw Dogs*, suggests that the video distributor wishes to avoid censure. Any mention of Peckinpah is now missing from this cover image, instead the only cast or crew information comes in the form of 'starring Dustin Hoffman and Susan George'. An advertisement for the release in *Photoplay* reduces Peckinpah to a mention within a plot synopsis.<sup>456</sup> This suggests an emphasis instead on star appeal, perhaps as a mean to appeal more widely than to a cine-literate audience who would be most familiar with Peckinpah. As with *Last House on the Left*, I have not been able to find any reviews of these VHS releases. All three films disappeared from circulation following the introduction and enforcement of the VRA.

The releases of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in 1998 (certified by Camden Council) and 1999 (certified by the BBFC) used more or less the same marketing as its 1976 release: the quad poster artwork modified for the VHS cover. A two-page advertisement for the release in *Video Entertainment Weekly* primarily consists of large text in addition to a large image of the video cover, which appears to be 'impaled' onto the image of a hook, presumably making reference to Pam's death in the film – or, simply adding some violence to the image. There is now greater reference to Tobe Hooper in the advert, his name appearing on the VHS sleeve and in the strapline "Tobe Hooper's original uncut notorious 1974 shocker". This suggests that Hooper's reputation as a key horror director or *auteur* has solidified by this time. The same imagery is used to publicise the 2000 VHS and DVD release from the same distributor, Blue Dolphin. The advertisement, in specialist magazines, for *Straw Dogs* in its first release post-certification continues to focus on images of Amy and David, but now David has become more prominent. A large image of him holding a shotgun is central on the DVD cover (and related adverts), while either side are smaller images of Amy.<sup>457</sup> Sam Peckinpah is emphasised considerably less by comparison to the film's theatrical advertising. Susan George's name is now missing from the publicity too, although her image still

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<sup>455</sup> See fig. 9, appendix.

<sup>456</sup> See fig. 10, appendix.

<sup>457</sup> See fig. 11, appendix.

appears, which is almost certainly attributable to Hoffman being the generally more recognisable star due to his continued fame through the 1990s. The biggest change occurs in the publicity for *The Last House on the Left*'s first post-certification release in 2003, where Wes Craven is now a prominent name associated with the film. The DVD cover is once again plain, although this time bright blue, with the title in large lettering, and in smaller lettering 'written and directed by Wes Craven'.<sup>458</sup> Sean Cunningham is now only referred to in the long list of special features available on the DVD. This change reflects the more well-known personality – by this point Craven was not only known for *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, but also the more recent success of *Scream* (1996) and its sequels.

Craven's increased popularity is reflected in what appears to be *Last House on the Left*'s first theatrical screening in the UK, which was part of a retrospective of Craven's work at the NFT in 1988, while the film was still uncertified. The listing for the screening in the NFT programme makes no mention at all of Cunningham's involvement. Considering the nature of the event, as a retrospective focussed on a particular director, the focus on Craven is reflected in coverage of the event in *Time Out*. In later review material Craven's name is more often than not the only name associated with the film. This once more relates to his success after *Last House on the Left*, and therefore the potential ways in which this might feed into the film's rehabilitation, but also relates to the relative lack of popular success of other cast and crew members. Similarly, although Cunningham was financially successful with *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, and the franchise is long-running, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* was a film rejected by the film establishment as "sleazy, artless, formulaic horror"<sup>459</sup> while presumably sympathetic trash film fans dismiss the film as "mainstream".<sup>460</sup> As a counter-point, *Nightmare on Elm Street* has been "recuperated by academic criticism via the 'originality' of auteur Wes Craven,"<sup>461</sup> which explains the focus on Craven more generally. This suggests that authentic horror is being delineated by the film's marketing, through emphasising Craven's involvement, and by association, his reputation as a horror auteur. *Last House on the Left* therefore is authentic, rather than populist or formulaic like *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. Given *Last House on the Left*'s reputation as a video nasty, this use of an auteurist discourse in the

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<sup>458</sup> See fig. 12, appendix.

<sup>459</sup> Hills, 2007, 236

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 226

marketing is a step toward rehabilitating the film's public reputation. Only one review refers to Cunningham as well as Craven, and that review in particular is more summary than evaluation, in which the reviewer includes a brief summary of Cunningham and Craven's work post-*Last House on the Left*.<sup>462</sup>

Later reviews of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* see more references to Tobe Hooper, with several referring to him having directed *Poltergeist* (1982), though "nothing since of comparable interest".<sup>463</sup> Developing from the earlier reviews of the film, several direct references are made to Ed Gein. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, reviews of the theatrical release of the film made vague references to a real life crime, without any further specificity. The majority of reviews for later releases of the film frame it as being inspired by or "loosely based on"<sup>464</sup> the crimes of Ed Gein. References to Gein are not necessarily presented in great detail, either, the assumption being that Gein's case is so well known that no further explanation is necessary. That Gein has developed from a vague historical reference in previous reviews to a more specific point of reference in later reviews implies that the history of Gein himself as a cultural figure must have changed. It is unclear at which point Gein's name became known as a sort of modern 'mythical' figure, particularly outside of the USA, but it seems fair to assume that, by the time *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was being released and re-released on home media, Gein was better known as a broad cultural figure. Gein is often referenced in such reviews alongside other films that take inspiration from his crimes, such as *Psycho* and *Deranged* (Gillen and Ormsby, 1974).<sup>465</sup> That increasing number of films took inspiration from Gein after *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (such as *The Silence of the Lambs* [Demme, 1991] and *Ed Gein* [Parello, 2000]) likely contributed to his growing cultural profile. A result of this cultural profile then feeds back into references to Gein in relevant film reviews, where he provides a 'real world' anchor for the film narrative.

Review material for *Straw Dogs* continues to focus on Peckinpah, in contrast to re-release marketing, particularly in relation to his position as *auteur* of the film. In addition to reference to Peckinpah in relation to a direct assessment of the film itself, the re-release of the film seems to also allow for a reflection on his life, with articles appearing discussing his

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<sup>462</sup> Walsh, 2008, 39

<sup>463</sup> French, 1998, 6

<sup>464</sup> Brooks, 1998, 9

<sup>465</sup> Jones, 1999, 36

personal life and character as well as the film itself. It is perhaps for a similar reason that another individual emerges prominently in reviews as well as in additional press material – Susan George. Both George and Hoffman feature prominently in reviews of the film, in relation to their performances, but George stands out from these appraisals due to additional discussion of the impact the film may or may not have had on her own life. This is particularly apparent in the press coverage of the film’s classification, first home release and first television broadcast. In contrast to the marketing, almost all of the articles or reviews are illustrated with images of George, or Amy. Some of the reporting is specifically about George, as though the film is simply a catalyst for writing a ‘celebrity’ piece. One article from the *Evening Standard* is highly speculative about the impact the film had on her, even seeming to contradict the actress. The article implies that the film had a regrettably negative effect on her life, that “the stigma of unfettered sexuality has clung to her,”<sup>466</sup> while George herself says – quoted in the same article – “it was a fantastic experience for me.”<sup>467</sup> This article seems to seek to promote a discourse of harm in relation to the film but here it is entirely focused on George’s life and career. There are several reasons for this focus on George. First, having not sustained a notable or popular career after *Straw Dogs*, she might be more willing or more able to spend time talking about the film, and it is also the key film for which she’s known. Second, she is most easily accessible, being British, while Hoffman is based in America and Peckinpah had died in 1984. The third reason, which I will explore in greater depth below, relates to the fact that it is George, and not Hoffman, who features in the scene now identified by critics as the most contentious.

In later re-releases of the films however almost all sense of individual personalities standing out has gone. The DVD imagery, and related marketing material, is reduced to iconic items removed from any particular context, in the case of both *Straw Dogs* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. The 40th anniversary DVD release of *Straw Dogs* features a plain black sleeve, red title, and a computer-generated image of a broken pair of glasses,<sup>468</sup> while the 2003 release of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* features a plain black sleeve, a red title, and a computer generated image of a bloodied chainsaw.<sup>469</sup> Arguably, then, the films have

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<sup>466</sup> Norman, 2002, 34

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> See fig. 13, appendix.

<sup>469</sup> See fig. 14, appendix.

become so well-known that they can be reduced to such simple imagery, rather than using a particular individual to sell the film. The 2008 'ultimate' DVD editions of *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* both use film stills on their covers and marketing. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* release uses a still very similar to the original imagery used to promote the film, that is, an image of Leatherface wielding his chainsaw against a sunset.<sup>470</sup> *The Last House on the Left* release is illustrated for the first time, but although it uses images of Mari and of Krug, neither the sleeve nor the adverts for it draw attention to any particular individual – not even Craven.<sup>471</sup> Again, it seems to be that there is no need to draw attention to an individual, as the film has become so well-known in its own right. This is reflected in reviews of the films too. These reviews often become shorter, and at times assume an existing knowledge of the film: "The granddaddy. The big kahuna. The ultimate exercise in terror."<sup>472</sup> This might imply that all the coverage of the films that has come previously is now familiar to the public to the point that there's no more left to be said, that is to say, that the films have reached the ostensible 'end' of their reception trajectory.<sup>473</sup>

### *Genre*

In reference to the variety of generic terms and features that were evident in the films' original releases, the use of genre becomes increasingly unified across the materials for all three films as their histories progress. In the marketing materials, this becomes evident predominantly in the use of colours commonly associated with horror – mainly red, black and white/neutral – but also through direct reference. So, *Last House on the Left* is promoted as a "horror milestone,"<sup>474</sup> explicitly placing it within the genre and its history. The use of particular phrases and slogans also contributes to the generic classification of the films. Each film has been advertised with a slogan declaring it uncut: 'Tobe Hooper's original uncut version,'<sup>475</sup> 'Wes Craven's masterpiece uncut in the UK for the 1st time,' and 'now unleashed uncut'.<sup>476</sup> The implication that the films were formerly censored links the films implicitly to the horror genre, through the promise of violent content. Very little direct

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<sup>470</sup> See fig. 15, appendix.

<sup>471</sup> See fig. 16, appendix.

<sup>472</sup> 'MD', 2003, 152. This sort of quote also illustrates the ways in which the film has grown in cultural stature (at least in relation to the horror genre), which is a point I will return to below.

<sup>473</sup> Mathijs, 2005, 452

<sup>474</sup> Empire, 2008, 195

<sup>475</sup> Empire, 2004, 35

<sup>476</sup> Empire, 2002, 126

reference to a particular genre is made in the advertising material, unless references are made in quoted review material. This suggests that the films' status as uncut – that is to say, as formerly cut or unavailable in the UK – becomes their defining feature. This seems to extend upon the marketing techniques of exploitation films as well as of the video nasties,<sup>477</sup> with the notion of 'uncut' implicitly indicating that the film features content once deemed necessary to be cut. This now works to solely address and appeal to the viewer, as the lack of a 'warning' now indicates that the marketing is not pretending to toe the line in terms of moral responsibility. Of course, these films no longer need to provide mock self-regulation when they have been certified by the BBFC. Although some certified releases continue to use such techniques, such as the now defunct distributor Vipco's 'previously banned' logo on its nasties releases, designed in such a way as to resemble an 'X' rating,<sup>478</sup> it's likely that the notoriety of these particular titles and their now uncut status is enough of a draw alone. Specific marketing techniques employed also might relate, however, to the distributors themselves. For example, when Blue Dolphin distributed *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* on VHS and DVD in 2000, the imagery was mostly the same as that employed in the marketing for the original release. The warning box was no longer a part of the cover or adverts, but the 'can you survive' tagline remained, along with additional press quotes. Blue Dolphin is an independent distributor, with a relatively small catalogue of films. Three years later, Universal became the distributor of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* on DVD. In their marketing materials, the only stylistic consistency with previous releases was the colour and font of the title. The imagery used on the DVD cover and its advertising now mostly consisted of a non-specific, computer-generated chainsaw, along with an equally as non-specific tagline, '....tools of the trade.'<sup>479</sup> Universal is a much bigger company, and although known for horror, a larger, multimedia company would presumably be less likely to directly refer back to its original marketing to create a sense of 'authenticity,' but rather seek to create a more broadly appealing image. Its distribution by Universal, as well as its potentially broadly appealing marketing suggests the film moved from relatively 'niche' releases to a more mainstream one. The computer-generated image of a bloodied chainsaw is a more 'non-specific' horror image, and thus might appeal to people completely

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<sup>477</sup> Egan, 2007, 193-202

<sup>478</sup> Egan, 2007, 195-196

<sup>479</sup> Empire, 2003, 40



unfamiliar with the film.

The sense of grouping these films together via their status as notorious or controversial becomes clearer in their re-release reviews. Sometimes they are grouped with other, similarly notorious films, such as *Straw Dogs* often being grouped with *A Clockwork Orange*,<sup>480</sup> as might be expected given the earlier association, or, in one instance, a reviewer combines their thoughts on the ‘ultimate edition’ releases of both *The Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in one review piece.<sup>481</sup> The sub-heading of this review refers to both films as horror films, but in the review itself *The Last House on the Left* is referred to as “exploitation”<sup>482</sup> and as a “rape-revenger”.<sup>483</sup> These more specific references to *Last House on the Left* and genre are more in-line with other re-release reviews of the films. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is more often than not referred to as a horror film, or occasionally as a “shocker,”<sup>484</sup> which may or may not knowingly reference Felix Barker’s review quote as used in the film’s original marketing. The ‘horror’ of the film is, as I outlined above, often associated with Ed Gein. Indeed, the many references to Gein in review material, particularly when in association with reference to other films, implies the ‘cannibal serial killer film’ might have emerged as a specific subgenre of horror in the time between releases of the film and that *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is also being evaluated here in relation to this subgenre as well as horror in general. Prior to the earlier 1970s the majority of cannibal films would have been situated in relation to ‘exotic’ cannibalism, such as with the Mondo film,<sup>485</sup> but with the use of Gein as inspiration – and particularly bearing in mind the fairly sensationalist embellishment of the extremity of Gein’s cannibalism – cannibalism is very much brought to the homestead in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Given the relatively recent occurrences of Gein’s crimes, and that his trial had been even more recent<sup>486</sup> the then unfamiliar crime of cannibalism was perhaps too fresh in the mind-set for Gein to have quickly become an internationally-known figure. This attitude might even be reflected in Walker’s original review of the film, where he writes that the film goes

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<sup>480</sup> See Perry, 1995, 54; Newman, 2002, 146

<sup>481</sup> Fletcher, 2008, 143

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> Billson, 1998, 11; Quinn, 1998, 10; King, 1998, 9

<sup>485</sup> See Brottman, 1997, 75-81

<sup>486</sup> It was 1968 before doctors deemed Gein sane enough to stand trial, when after a week he was found guilty of first degree murder.

“way over the top with the suggestion of necrophilia, even cannibalism,”<sup>487</sup> when one might expect that necrophilia would be the more shocking of the two crimes. As an increasing number of cultural works drew inspiration from Gein, so too the idea of the cannibal serial killer becomes a generic trope and familiar character type within re-release review material.

Another label applied to all the films is that of ‘video nasties’. This particular label is interesting because only *Last House on the Left* was ever an official ‘video nasty’, that is, the only film of my three case studies that appeared on the DPP list of films to be removed from sale. All three films are associated with the ‘video nasties’ in review materials of their later releases. This implies that the term ‘video nasty’ or ‘video nasties’ becomes a convenient short hand to refer to any films that faced censorship issues in the early 1980s, particularly in terms of VHS release. Some reviews are even quite erroneous with their use of the term, such as when claiming that *Straw Dogs* was “one of the first victims of the video nasty scare.”<sup>488</sup> Some of the same specific terms are used to refer to the films as were employed in early reviews of the film. *Straw Dogs* is still referred to as a “Western”<sup>489</sup> or variations thereof such as “oater”<sup>490</sup> but the term is no longer employed in a derogatory sense, perhaps reflecting the now elevated cultural status of the genre, within film studies and film criticism. Terms such as *grand guignol*<sup>491</sup> and ‘old dark house’<sup>492</sup> are still used to refer to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* but not as frequently as during its first release. It emerges then that specific events relating to the film’s release and reception – rather than its narrative – seem to be more prominent (in terms of framing, approaching and assessing these films) in re-release review press material. A new element that begins to be drawn upon in relation to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* specifically is that of humour. Several reviews refer to the use of dark humour in the film, as well as its scares, an element that does not appear at all in reviews of its first release. It seems a little difficult to speculate upon the reason for this, but older reviews do instead seem to find the film laughable<sup>493</sup> rather than intentionally “funny”.<sup>494</sup> This might be attributed to the greater familiarity with this type of horror film,

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<sup>487</sup> Walker, 1976

<sup>488</sup> Charity, 1995, 65; see also Norman, 2002, 34

<sup>489</sup> Howlett, 2008, 53

<sup>490</sup> Charity, 1995, 65

<sup>491</sup> McNab, 2000, 191

<sup>492</sup> Brooks, 1998, 9; Unknown, Nov 2010, 64

<sup>493</sup> Hutchinson, 1976

<sup>494</sup> Unknown, Nov 2010, 64

such as Craven's films *New Nightmare* or, famously, *Scream*, by the time *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is being released again, whereas upon its first release it remained new and shocking.

Perhaps unusually, the label 'cult' is very rarely used in relation to these films, and therefore does not emerge as a significant discourse in their rehabilitation. All three films might be thought of as cult films, *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in particular, due to their association with exploitation filmmaking and exhibition practices, as well as their direct and indirect connection to the video nasties. Mathijs and Sexton have aligned both *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* with "the cult of horror,"<sup>495</sup> which itself emerges from a particular period in horror filmmaking through the 1960s and 1970s, a period of films which "presented themselves as radical, political, and independent-minded."<sup>496</sup> *Straw Dogs*, although not from the same filmmaking context as these films, is a cult film in so far as it has received a "noisy" reception<sup>497</sup> due to the "outrage and controversies"<sup>498</sup> it also caused. In all the materials I have gathered, reference to these films as 'cult' occurs only four times: twice in relation to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and twice in relation to *Straw Dogs*. Two of these instances – one for each film – come from *Video Home Entertainment*, and in both instances the films are referred to, separately, as a "cult classic."<sup>499</sup> It is not insignificant that *Video Home Entertainment* is a trade publication, suggesting that 'cult' as a generic label has more currency to a trade audience, indicative of the label being "increasingly used by commercial bodies to sell products".<sup>500</sup> My sample of reviews is ultimately too small to draw any significant conclusion in relation to this, particularly as none of the other publications I have used are trade publications. Although cult is not directly invoked as a major discourse, arguably references to other generic terms and categories means that the cult nature of the film in question "is hinted at in language that evokes cult".<sup>501</sup>

As far as specific generic labelling is concerned, though, by the time the most recent

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<sup>495</sup> Mathijs and Sexton, 2011, 196

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 202

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Unknown, 1999 (I) and Unknown, 1999 (III)

<sup>500</sup> Mathijs and Sexton, 2011, 242

<sup>501</sup> Mathijs and Sexton, 2011, 239

editions of each film emerge they are all being referred to in some way as horror films, directly and indirectly, in both marketing and review material. Although the previously broader range of generic terms being used in relation to the films might seem to point to a degree of fluidity in terms of their generic designation, I would argue that the predominance of the term 'horror' continues to reflect that broad range of terms, if not further reflecting a sense of generic fluidity in relation to the films. Modern horror has itself become a much broader category than it might have been previously, both industrially, critically and academically, and such terms as 'exploitation' or 'psychological thriller' appear to have become more readily subsumed to the label of 'horror'.

### *Audience*

There is significantly less emphasis placed on the reviewer directly addressing the audience in more recent reviews of these films, but the change in the discourse of audiences drawn upon is significant. Although the reviewer is still addressing his review to a particular audience, the manner in which he or she does so is not as prominent as previously. This relates to the decreasing relevance of censorship to these reviews, as will be outlined below. If anything, recent reviews tend to address the audience by making reference to a past audience's experience of navigating the BBFC's rejections. Adam Smith effectively identifies the reason for this in the case of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in his review, stating that "the majority of today's audience who have never seen it rely on the hazy memories of those who did."<sup>502</sup> This establishes a strong sense of then-and-now in that, in its unavailability, "word of mouth"<sup>503</sup> has ensured its position as "legendary".<sup>504</sup> In reviews of *Straw Dogs*, this address to the audience via its censorship, or rather, via the BBFC and its decisions as a public body, is further underlined. If initial reviews of the film were highly personalised, and in being so gave a sense of the critic as a blatant figure of cultural authority, then the way in which reviews of the film are written has changed. Reviews either describe the film's potential interpretation of 'effect' in an entirely de-personalised way, or they are personal in a way that unites critic and reader. So, in 1995 "*Straw Dogs* retains a ferocious bite,"<sup>505</sup> when perhaps the same review in 1971 might have phrased such a claim

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<sup>502</sup> Smith, 1999, 146

<sup>503</sup> Dinning, 2000, 119

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Brown, 1995, 37

differently – perhaps, ‘*Straw Dogs* ferociously bit me.’ More telling, however, is the way in which the critic now positions him or herself with the spectator, rather than positioning themselves as an authority over the spectator. This is evident in the use of ‘we’ and ‘us’ when talking about the film. Now, “we haven’t become as ‘desensitised’ as some have suggested,”<sup>506</sup> and “we know and understand (if not like) all the characters.”<sup>507</sup> This suggests that not only has the status of these films changed, but film criticism itself changed, the critic no longer blatantly positioning him or herself as a lofty and knowledgeable individual, separate from the ‘average’ spectator, but rather that the critic is ‘one of us’. This may not be so evident in reviews of new films and nostalgia may play a big part in this particular style of reviewing. This is perhaps most clearly evident in the combined review in *Total Film* of the ‘ultimate’ DVD releases of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left*, with the reviewer, Rosie Fletcher, quoting Craven as saying that “There are certain truths so painful, so ugly, people don’t like to be shown them.”<sup>508</sup> Fletcher then simply states that “he and Tobe Hooper showed us anyway.”<sup>509</sup> Not only does this unite critic and spectator as a single ‘us’, it also implicitly attacks the censor’s attempts to *not* show us Craven and Hooper’s work. There is another element to bear in mind, however, and that is the publication in which this review appeared. Although true across the board, more distinct examples such as Fletcher’s come from modern film magazines. Particularly in an age when these magazines operate extensively online as well as in print, the supposed ‘gap’ between spectator and critic is significantly smaller, and as a result, the manner of writing has changed accordingly. Through engagement with readers via social media, email, podcasts and so on, the critic is now more ‘accessible’ and, accordingly and arguably, his or her writing can be seen to reflect this.

The marketing for the re-releases of the films, in some ways, conforms to this unification of spectator and critic, through appeals to a particular type of spectator, the ‘collector’. This seems to be an emergent or new sort of spectator,<sup>510</sup> given as upon initial release the films in question would not have held such an appeal. Across the board, advertisements for DVD releases of all three films feature a lot of text, even when the advertisements are smaller

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<sup>506</sup> Charity, 1995, 65

<sup>507</sup> Newman, 2002, 146

<sup>508</sup> Craven quoted in Fletcher, 2008, 143

<sup>509</sup> Fletcher, 2008, 143

<sup>510</sup> Klinger, 2006, 55

than full-page. This text includes taglines and general information about the film, but the majority of the text is given over to the cataloguing of the comprehensive special features available on each edition of the DVD. These normally appear in boxes at the bottom of a full-page advert, so that they do not obscure the main image of the advertisement. This information is least prominent on the advertisement for *Straw Dogs*' first home release, the emphasis remaining instead on the images of David and Amy, and a large red banner declaring its status as uncut.<sup>511</sup> Similarly, the advert for the first release of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* places its emphasis on the image of Leatherface, and review quotes that establish the advert's claim that the film is the 'greatest horror film ever made'.<sup>512</sup> The film's release again in 2003 uses an entirely different image, and the relatively plain background emphasises the 'special edition features', although they still take up less than a quarter of the page.<sup>513</sup>

While the emphasis on special features might be in-line with the Criterion Collection tradition of extra features selling a DVD release,<sup>514</sup> the nature of some of the marketing uses very specific subcultural appeals as a means of promoting the release. There is some implicit appeal to these films' cult status through the appeal to the knowledgeable collector; however, the word cult does not directly appear in any of the marketing material I collected. If reviews of *Last House on the Left* tend to still be brief and do not feature much by way of a direct appeal to the audience, then its marketing certainly does. The advertisement for its first DVD release lists the special features alongside the main image of the DVD set, highlighted by a plain background box against the main background image. While the nature of reviews of *Last House on the Left* seem to imply that it is still considered the 'less worthy' of the three films (see more below), the marketing of the film is far more extensive and reflective of the supposedly comprehensive nature of the release. In this sense, the marketing appeals to a certain, specialist spectator. While adverts for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*'s first release broadly state "at long last you can own the greatest horror film ever made,"<sup>515</sup> *Last House on the Left* makes no such claim, and instead appeals to a specific existing knowledge of the film. This knowledge may stem solely from the film's title, or the

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<sup>511</sup> Empire, Nov 2002, 126

<sup>512</sup> Empire, Jul 2000, 115

<sup>513</sup> Empire, Apr 2003, 40

<sup>514</sup> Parker & Parker, 2011, 141

<sup>515</sup> Empire, Jul 2000, 115

use of the 'only a movie' tagline, or it might be through previously having seen or owned the film. If this knowledge is specialist and appreciative, then the extensive special features included with the release are more significant, and more of a selling point. This is even more evident with the advertising for the 2008 DVD release. A half-page advert for the release features more text than it does imagery.<sup>516</sup> A third of the advert is taken up by an image of the DVD cover, while the rest is entirely text. The largest text emphasises that this is the uncut version of the film, available for the first time in the UK. The rest of the text emphasises the special features, only now they are not listed, as previously, but instead hyperbolically advertised as the "incredible special features". There is also a greater sense of specific appeal to collectors or knowledgeable spectators, likely informed by the knowledge that the film was previously collected, in its banned pre-cert form, by video nasty fans and collectors. So when the types of special features are listed, they include "vintage promotional material" rather than just 'promotional material'. The use of the word vintage seems significant, in that it suggests that old material associated with the film is being included to appeal to potential buyers of the DVD, and thus works to historicise the film and give it an historical context. The most specific appeal to a knowledgeable spectator comes in the singling out of a specific special feature: "go behind the original ban – exclusive interview with Carl Daft of Blue Underground". This not only requires knowledge of the specialist DVD label Blue Underground – who refused to release the film with cuts – and the history of the film's censorship in the UK, but also knowledge that Carl Daft was one of the label's directors and that he vocally advocated for the film to be released uncut. While this, on the one hand, appeals to a cult fan or collector's sensibility, it might also be seen as an example of the commodification of such a position. Regardless of the motivation behind the appeal to such an audience – to make more money or to please a collector's desire for extra features – the sense of directing this marketing at a particular audience becomes clear through the emphasis of such features.

### *Notoriety/Legacy*

Perhaps unexpectedly, one major change that occurs as each film receives more and more releases is the decreasing attention paid to the film's previous censorship issues. Censorship does not disappear entirely as a point of reference, however, it becomes part of a

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<sup>516</sup> Empire, Nov 2008, 195; See fig. 17, appendix.

somewhat broader discourse, that of notoriety and legacy. On the one hand the films' status as 'notorious' is often referenced, but it is not always elaborated upon. More often, reviews of the films will pay particular attention to the influence they've had on other films, or of their relevance to current issues or debates. Conversely, the marketing of the films places heavy emphasis on the films as 'uncut' or 'previously banned'.

Having said this, censorship is prominent as a focus for individual articles, or, in reviews and news items relating to releases that are specifically associated with censorship. For example, the screenings of *Straw Dogs* in 1995 at the NFT was timed "as heated debate over on-screen violence resurface[d] in the wake of *Reservoir Dogs*, *Natural Born Killers* et al."<sup>517</sup> Significantly, the film was still unavailable for home viewing at the time of these screenings, and the NFT screening came only a year after the 1994 amendment to the VRA, which further tightened the regulations for home viewing releases. Reviews relating to this particular screening heavily focus upon *Straw Dogs*' censorship issues, or its status as controversial. Philip French in the *Observer* indirectly criticises the BBFC in his claim that "it is ludicrous that such a key work by one of America's greatest directors should be refused a video certificate in this country,"<sup>518</sup> which demonstrates a change in critical attitudes to Peckinpah, while George Perry offers another indirect criticism, by stating that "the British Film Institute should be commended for letting us see it."<sup>519</sup> Similarly, when *The Last House on the Left* was rejected in 2001, two articles about the film and its history with the BBFC were published, one in *Sight and Sound*<sup>520</sup> and one in *The Independent*.<sup>521</sup> Through these articles, Kermode becomes a clear figurehead for the passionate, yet professional, fan of such a film, and is able to use such a platform to rally for the defence of the film. A review of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*'s 1998 Camden release states that the film is "still without nationwide certification from the BBFC,"<sup>522</sup> but also incorrectly refers to it as "one of the original 'video nasties'."<sup>523</sup> As mentioned above, this 'misremembering' indicates that the term 'video nasties' is being used in a broader and imprecise way, to refer to films which faced censorship issues at the particular historical moment of the introduction of VHS

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<sup>517</sup> Smith, 1995, 30

<sup>518</sup> French. 1995, 9

<sup>519</sup> Perry, 1995, 54

<sup>520</sup> Kermode, 2001, 26

<sup>521</sup> Kermode, 2002, 14-15

<sup>522</sup> Porter, 1998, 5

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.



technology and the enactment of the VRA.

There is, in fact, a great deal of misremembering or misrepresentation which occurs in line with the portrayal of these films as 'notorious'. One of the most prominent ways in which this occurs is the attribution of the previous controversy around *Straw Dogs* as being entirely centred on the rape scene, when in reality critics of the time took greater umbrage to the violent siege that ends the film. Neil Norman's impressively erroneous article in the *Evening Standard* states outright that the film's climax "was – incredibly enough – the less controversial of the two sequences that caused offense."<sup>524</sup> That the rape scene becomes the focal point of the film's notoriety seems in line with two other factors. The first, as outlined above, relates to the increased focus on Susan George. Focus on the rape scene allows for a focus on George, or, provides an 'excuse' to focus on George. The second fact that might impact upon this shift in focus is the shift in censorship regulations in the UK. While the censor did have some issues with the rape scene initially, it did not affect the film's theatrical classification by the BBFC once changes were made during post-production. For the film's video certification, over ten years later, issues of sexual violence were of much greater concern to the BBFC, and they've continued to be a focus of concern with this and other controversial films (such as *Last House on the Left*). It's this decision by the BBFC that has therefore become the 'main' point of significance in the film's censorship history. Therefore, *Straw Dogs* is "perhaps the most infamous of all 'banned' movies"<sup>525</sup> because of "a nasty rape scene that kept it locked in the British Board of Film Classification's dungeons."<sup>526</sup> What this achieves is a greater alignment of *Straw Dogs* with the 'video nasty' period, by essentially disregarding its theatrical release history, and in particular the critics' contribution to the film's original censorship. Re-release reviews of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* are similar, despite the film's initially positive critical response, with no mention at all of the film's championing at the LFF in 1975 nor its Camden release in 1976. Once more, this seems to erase the film's history prior to its VHS release and refusal of video certificate. In doing so, these films, and similar films, are easier to group together, and their histories become simplified. This constructs the past in a particular way, in a way that then reflects on the present. If the past is a homogenised history of straight-forward censorship, then the

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<sup>524</sup> Norman, 2002, 34

<sup>525</sup> Newman, 2002, 146

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

present becomes a more enlightened time.<sup>527</sup> *The Last House on the Left*, of course, represents exactly this history – the VHS release, the banning, and several failed attempts at certification. It is significant, then, that *The Last House on the Left*'s eventual certification does not receive the same sort of attention as *Straw Dogs* or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, despite its release history being more authentically like the histories broadly outlined for the other two films. This might imply that the rehabilitation of *Last House on the Left* is somehow more difficult than that of *Straw Dogs* or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* precisely because its release history is more closely related to the video nasties campaign and because it perhaps, broadly, remains a less well-known film in the public sphere more generally. The review that appears in *Empire* magazine of the film's first DVD release is a mere thirty-three words long,<sup>528</sup> and is given a small, narrow column of space on the page. This attention is significantly less when compared with the half-page review given to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*<sup>529</sup> and the two-page review given to *Straw Dogs*<sup>530</sup> in the same publication. *Empire*'s position as a specific film magazine means it can rely on its readers' presumed knowledge of such films, if they are already interested in them, while also dedicating more page space to films editorially deemed more prominent. The size of this review indicates that, at this time, *Last House on the Left*'s release is not considered so ground breaking as with the release of *Straw Dogs* or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, even in a specialist magazine. The likely reasoning for this is in its release being still cut, while both the other films were released uncut from the outset.

This idea is supported by the fact that *Last House on the Left* is treated with a degree more seriousness as it receives more releases. This is seen mostly through evaluating the film as reflecting “the social conflicts of its troubled time.”<sup>531</sup> This mostly frames the film in a foreign ‘past’ which no longer exists, however, reviews also state that the film is still “provocative”<sup>532</sup> today. The sense of modern-day impact is much more marked with *Straw Dogs* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. As mentioned above *Straw Dogs* was discussed in relation to a broader censorship debate in 1995. The other films mentioned most often in

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<sup>527</sup> Klinger, 1994, 85-89

<sup>528</sup> Another fifty-six words review/list the DVD extras included with this edition. ‘JB’, 2003, 144

<sup>529</sup> Smith, 1999, 146

<sup>530</sup> Newman, 2002, 146-147

<sup>531</sup> French, 2003, 9

<sup>532</sup> Simmons, 2008, 78

this context are *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino, 1992) and *Natural Born Killers* (Stone, 1995). Walker is perhaps most concise in this regard, as he notes that it's "interesting to trace the origins of the Tarantino-Stone bloodfests to our own bit of England".<sup>533</sup> This is particularly interesting when bearing in mind Walker's original and damning appraisal of the film in 1971.<sup>534</sup> Rather than reject the film on the grounds of its 'Americanness', as Maltby or Barr might claim or imply, Walker is now almost claiming the film as English, and as a progenitor of current American films. It's interesting to bear in mind that just a year or so after this, Walker would find himself embroiled in another censorship campaign, against *Crash* (Cronenberg, 1996).<sup>535</sup> Derek Malcolm, another critic who reviewed the film originally, positively appraises *Straw Dogs* in light of the films it has since inspired, stating that Peckinpah makes most modern directors "seem entirely dishonest."<sup>536</sup> The film's intensity and directness is now seen, in contrast to original assessments of it, as authentic and honest, particularly in contrast to contemporary films. Malcolm also succinctly asks "would anyone dare to make such a film today? I doubt it,"<sup>537</sup> which implies that *Straw Dogs* remains the more challenging film when being compared to modern works. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is frequently compared to a variety of more recent horror films. Xan Brooks claims that the film seems "hackneyed"<sup>538</sup> in light of more recent horror films such as *Halloween* and *Scream*, a reversal of Malcolm's approach, but he goes on to lengthily elaborate on why the film "still rank[s] as one of the horror genre's most terrifying creatures."<sup>539</sup> Favourable comparisons of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* to more recent films are not always made directly, as Walker finds that the film shows "integrity"<sup>540</sup> compared to "today's corrupt and calculated violence".<sup>541</sup> Here, 'today's films' are lumped together into an indiscriminate, generic mass, in contrast to the singular films of the past

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<sup>533</sup> Walker, 1995, 36

<sup>534</sup> Walker also states that the film "caused 13 film critics to sign a letter to *The Times* protesting against oppressive censorship" (1995, 36). This entirely misrepresents the letter, given as in relation to *Straw Dogs* the critics wanted stronger censorship, and Walker does not see fit to mention that *he* was one of those 13 film critics to sign the letter!

<sup>535</sup> In this instance, Walker was perhaps the instigator but by no means the leader of the press campaign against the film, which was more prominent in the *Daily Mail* and from the pen of Christopher Tookey. See Barker, Arthurs & Harindranath, 2001, 12-13; 140-41

<sup>536</sup> Malcolm, 1995, 8

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Brooks, 1998, 9

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

<sup>540</sup> Walker, 1998, 31

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

such as *Straw Dogs* or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Rather than invoking the problems these films have faced themselves with regard to debates about censorship of violence, what this comparative discourse achieves is to render the films as culturally acceptable, and particularly as coming from a past place, where ‘the way we did it then’ is superior to, and more authentic than, modern comparisons.

As noted, the films’ re-release marketing does not feature the emphasis upon a legacy, but rather solely on the films’ notoriety. This is achieved through the continued use of particular techniques to position the film as formerly dangerous, and using this as a means to make the film appealing. Phrases such as “previously banned”<sup>542</sup> and ‘uncut’ appear prominently in adverts. The most blatant use of a film’s notoriety to advertise it is occurs with the first certified release of *Straw Dogs*. Beneath the main image of the advert is a red box, almost the same width as the page itself, with bold white text that reads: “The most notorious film in British movie history/Banned for 18 years – now unleashed uncut!”<sup>543</sup> Of course in the space of the advert there is no room for elaboration on the ‘notorious’ nature of the film, but the claim is clearly used as a feature of the film that is appealing, in terms of the film’s importance, in this regard, to film history. The use of the word ‘unleashed’ is significant. Although the film is historically ‘notorious’, there’s a sense of dynamism in the word that implies that the reasons for this notoriety might still persist and have an impact of some sort. At the same time, the implication that the film had been previously ‘leashed’ conveys a sense of unfairness. Also, whether intentional or not, the idea of the word ‘unleashed’ being used to promote a film with the word ‘dogs’ in the title seems particularly apt.

### *Conclusion*

In the marketing of the most recent releases of these films a further particularly relevant discourse emerges, and that is the discourse of the remake. While on the one hand the films are advertised on their own merits, they are frequently explicitly described as the ‘original’ or ‘authentic’ ‘version’ of the film, an authenticating rhetoric that particularly refers back to these films’ statuses as previously cut or banned. Without at all directly referring to a ‘remake’ of the film in question, the marketing regardless does two things. First, it differentiates the original film from the remake through an implicit assumption the remake

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<sup>542</sup> Empire, 2003, 9

<sup>543</sup> Empire, 2002, 126

will be an inferior product. Secondly, it attempts to gain some exposure for the original film via the remake. Re-releases of the film have often been timed to coincide or very briefly precede the release of the remake into cinemas. By doing this, the re-release marketers have less work to do, because the remake is also being publicised, either in similar publications to the originals, or online.

Two advertisements for the original films refer to the existence of a remake. A full page advert for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* on DVD in 2004, a month or so after the release of the remake on DVD, features similar artwork to the 2003 release. However, there are two significant additions. The first is the sole quote on the advert, taken from the *Evening Standard*, which states that the film is “astonishingly stylish and well put together. The remake has none of these sensibilities.” This directly positions the remake as an inferior film, through an employment of a contemporary review, and this is further underlined by a red ‘stamp’ design featuring the words ‘the original and best’. This strategy therefore works to explicitly acknowledge the existence of a remake, and seems to essentially ‘disown’ it. The same can be seen, although much more indirectly and subtly, in an advert for *Straw Dogs* in 2011, a month after the DVD’s release date, but during the same month as the remake’s release in cinemas. The half-page advert features an image of the DVD cover, a generic image of a man looking at a house as the background, and two taglines. The first is taken from the DVD cover, and is entirely new: “Every man has a breaking point.”<sup>544</sup> This is almost identical to the tagline of the remake - ‘everyone has a breaking point’. Given the timing of this DVD edition’s release, it’s very unlikely that this is a coincidence. The now plain cover – rid of all elements recognisable from previous publicity for the film in the UK – features a computer-generated image of broken spectacles. This image however recalls the film’s original American poster, which is also mimicked in the poster imagery for the remake (see chapter four). This strategy therefore closely associates this release with the release of the remake, and may betray the extent to which this release hopes to capitalise on the release of the remake and the surrounding publicity. However, more explicit yet still indirect is the additional strap line used on the advert: “Sam Peckinpah’s fully restored classic is the authentic *Straw Dogs*.” Not only does this now promote the film as a ‘classic’ (rather than ‘notorious’ or ‘banned’) but it also indirectly rejects the remake as an inauthentic version of

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<sup>544</sup> Total Film, 2011, 87; see fig. 18, appendix.

the original. The reference to the film's previous status as censored might be found implicitly in words such as 'authentic', however the explicit recollection of a censorship history or the film's notoriety seems to disappear.

The naming of *Straw Dogs* as a 'classic' in its publicity (having already been referred to as a "key work of one of America's greatest directors"<sup>545</sup> as far back as 1995), represents perhaps the starkest example of rehabilitation of any of these films. If this is not seen quite so directly with *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *The Last House on the Left*, then the mere placement of their marketing suggests rehabilitation or at least cultural acceptability. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* appears in general DVD store adverts alongside Oscar-nominated films such as *Talk to Her* and *Monster's Ball*<sup>546</sup> and next to Blu-rays as varied as *Deep Impact* and *Casablanca*.<sup>547</sup> Additionally, an advert for *Last House on the Left* shares a page with an advertisement for the complete series of children's television programme *Thunderbirds*.

In the next chapter I will perform a discursive analysis of the marketing and review materials associated with the remakes. In much the same way as I have done here, I will outline the various discourses that emerge around these films in these contexts, and in particular the way in which they interact with the discourses and materials outlined in this chapter.

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<sup>545</sup> French, 1995, 9

<sup>546</sup> Empire, 2003, 47

<sup>547</sup> Empire, 2010, 17

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **The Remakes**

By way of introduction to this chapter, it is important to outline some of the most significant changes that have occurred in film culture in the UK since the release of the original films. Although some of these are also relevant to re-releases of the original films, I outline them here as a means of contextualising the remakes further to my broad contextualisation of the films in chapter one. The two main areas I wish to focus on are genre and censorship, as they relate to the particular film cultural context of these films as remakes of formerly controversial films. I will be especially aiming to highlight important changes, differences and events that have occurred since the first releases of the original films, in terms of the receiving culture and in comparison to the releases of the original films.

Although notions of 'exploitation' cinema are key to cultural framing of the original films' releases, and remain so to the remakes, it's fair to say that by the early 2000s the nature of what might be termed 'exploitation cinema' had changed considerably since the 1970s. Although an emphasis on salacious content persists as a defining feature of exploitation cinema, the former grindhouse-element of 1970s exploitation has all but disappeared, in its original and specific sense. The literal 'grindhouses' no longer exist as an exhibition space as they once did, but this is not to say that exploitation filmmaking hasn't continued to circulate and to flourish. If anything, through VHS technology, and onward to DVD, Blu-ray and online platforms, exploitation films, from all eras, have had a greater potential to reach not only an audience already familiar with exploitation cinema, but audiences previously unfamiliar with the genre as well.<sup>548</sup> Circulation on VHS, of course, presented its own problems in a UK context, which relate to key changes in censorship, including the introduction of the Video Recordings Act and the introduction of the 12 and 12A certificates. Even if 'straight to video/DVD' content is restricted by certification in the UK, this is only the case in a legal and official capacity. For those willing to flout the laws regarding home media, VHS, DVD and increasingly the internet offer the perfect means for sharing and tracking down what might be broadly termed exploitation films, from classical exploitation to modern iterations of the genre. The internet in particular is increasingly used in order to share and find otherwise unavailable – possibly uncertified – films, through online streaming

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<sup>548</sup> Klinger, 2008, 23

and file-sharing. The internet also allows those wanting films on physical media to buy them online and import them to the UK (at the risk of items being seized by customs). The internet has also allowed for a greater discussion of exploitation films, and other related films, amongst those who enjoy them. Although this sort of discussion previously took place by means of zines, magazines and, in some cases, fan conventions and festivals, the internet has facilitated a greater ease of access to such discussions as well as the ability to take part and contribute. That is not to say that the internet is a simplistically accessible nor an unproblematically free and democratic platform for such discussion – cultural gatekeepers and hierarchies still exist and can be literally stricter online<sup>549</sup> and the Internet remains to a degree “a resource for the Western educated middle-classes”<sup>550</sup> – however, the fact that such discussion might take place across a range of online platforms moves towards making the enjoyment of exploitation or horror, past and contemporary, more visible. Platforms include private forums and email lists, more public message boards and social media sites, as well as traditional print platforms.

As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, horror filmmaking in the 1990s seemed to hit something of a nadir in terms of popularity<sup>551</sup> and in terms of cultural standing. If the release of *Scream* in 1996 can be seen as having revitalised the genre, then the film’s postmodern approach is particularly important. Although not the first overtly postmodern horror film – Craven’s own *New Nightmare* in 1994 is a notable forerunner – *Scream* marked a prominent turn in the genre. As many scholars have argued, this highly intertextual film self-consciously drew attention to the formulaic nature of much horror filmmaking.<sup>552</sup> This move in the genre to particularly self-parodying postmodernism is part of what some fans rallied against, preferring a more ‘authentic’, nostalgic version of decades previous.<sup>553</sup> I’ve previously identified the releases of *The Ring* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in 2002/2003 as turning points in the horror genre, in relation to the cycle of remaking which was at its most predominant in the 2000s. Both films also represent forerunners of the trends or cycles which characterise contemporary mainstream American horror filmmaking,

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<sup>549</sup> For example, it is only possible to join the ‘Cinamageddon’ file-sharing website, which describes itself as “home of the finest (ahem) rare, obscure and of course trashy horror, martial arts, gore, exploitation and action flicks,” via an invite from an existing member.

<sup>550</sup> Williamson, 2005, 99

<sup>551</sup> See Hantke, 2010, vii-xxiv

<sup>552</sup> See Tudor, 2002, 110-116; Hutchings, 2004, 211-216; Jones, 2014, 19-21

<sup>553</sup> See for example Jancovich, 2002, 469-480



being found footage films, such as *Paranormal Activity*, supernatural horror such as *Insidious*, and torture porn, such as *Hostel* or *Saw*. My case studies most frequently cross-over, in terms of their marketing and reception, with the final category, torture porn, however they remain most notable, both for me and as will become clearer, in their reception, as remakes of American films from the 1970s which were controversial upon their first release and have been central to debates regarding film violence since.

Changes to the context of genre that informs these remake films most prominently is not the only significant cultural change that's important, when approaching an analysis of the marketing and reviewing of my case study film remakes. Again, as I have previously outlined in greater detail, the certification and censorship of films for their circulation in the UK has changed since the 1970s. New certificates – such as the 12A and R18 – were introduced in order to better prepare potential viewers as to the content of the film they might watch. While allowing younger children to see ostensibly more violent content and certifying hardcore pornography superficially seems to demonstrate a more liberal BBFC at work, the notion of films as 'harmful' is still central to their decision making, along with an emphasis upon prioritising the opinions and needs of parents and children when conducting their own research into attitudes towards particular film content. These changes in film culture form the backdrop of my analysis of the marketing and reviewing of the remakes of my case study films. This chapter focusses entirely upon the analysis of these materials, with the next chapter bringing together the analyses of both sets of films in order to examine and reveal the consistencies and differences between them, and the implication of these to broader conceptions of taste culture and to film reception practices.

### ***Marketing the Remakes***

In this section, I will be analysing the marketing of both theatrical and home releases of these films. While the original case study films have received several re-releases, the theatrical and home releases are the only releases the remakes have received to date. This is primarily due to the films being relatively recent, but also I would speculate that they are unlikely to receive as many re-releases as the originals, if any, precisely because they were so easily accessible upon their first releases theatrically and on home media. In being easily accessible – in cinemas, and as home releases - there is no 'need' for further releases of the

films. Additionally, none of the horror remakes made since 1999 have received more than one home release.<sup>554</sup> This seems to suggest that such films are unlikely to receive further releases unless they are retrospectively reappraised at some point in the future. This assumption is supported by the tendency to release 'unrated' editions of the films in the US not long after 'rated' DVDs, as well as many home media releases in the UK now being released uncut as default. This is because the films rarely face censorship problems, as will be outlined, and their production contexts make them unlikely to have future 'director's cut' releases. Mark Bernard has outlined the way in which the releases of 'director's cut' or 'unrated' DVDs helped cement the reputation of the 'splat pack' directors,<sup>555</sup> however, as I will outline in this chapter, the remakes do not boast clear authorial figures in the same way. This section will therefore be divided into two, where I will first provide a detailed account of the posters and print marketing for all three films, followed by a close reading of their trailers and related television advertising. As with the materials and the analysis outlined in chapter three, I will approach these materials primarily using Lisa Kernan's rhetorical approach to film marketing. I will here provide a detailed analysis of these materials in order to clearly demonstrate the very similar style and structure of the materials from film to film.

The UK quad poster for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is mostly entirely black with a distorted image of a face taking up much of the right hand side of the poster, the edges distorted and faded in with the black background. The face is in hues of brown and yellow, with an eye and a nose the only recognisable facial features. There is scarring/stitching visible on the face, most prominently above the eye.<sup>556</sup> The face is unnatural and menacing, as it is obscured, unclear, and disfigured. It also plays on familiarity with the character of Leatherface, his human skin-mask being an iconic part of his costume design. The image does not make specific reference to the character from the original film, therefore the image being perceived as representing a reference back to the original Leatherface relies on pre-existing viewer knowledge. Without such knowledge, the image is a more generic eerie or sinister face. The most prominent text on the poster is the film title, in large capital

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<sup>554</sup> That is to say, releases with new/additional material to their initial home release. Several remakes have been included in box-sets, but the discs themselves do not contain any material different to their individual releases.

<sup>555</sup> Bernard, 2014

<sup>556</sup> See fig. 19, appendix.

letters in a yellow-tinged white font. Above it is text in smaller font, which reads ‘inspired by a true story’. Two review quotes appear in the top left corner, one from the *Daily Mail*, stating that “scary movies are back” and another from *Total Film*, noting that the film is “absolutely bloody terrifying”. The *Daily Mail* quote certainly positions the film as a return to form for the genre, both in the way in which it is being promoted and, as it is a review quote, the way in which it has been received. That this particular quote comes from the *Daily Mail* is particularly interesting. While on the one hand it appears to mainstream the film through its apparent endorsement, as a popular tabloid paper, but it also suggests that if the *Daily Mail* writes about “scary movies” then they might well mean the type of film that they’re known for criticising. Considering the latter interpretation, the use of the quote therefore seems to appeal to fans of horror specifically, in addition to a mainstream audience. The same imagery is used in newspaper adverts, as featured in *Time Out*,<sup>557</sup> *The Sun*,<sup>558</sup> *Evening Standard*,<sup>559</sup> and *Daily Mirror*.<sup>560</sup> The advertisement takes up a full page in *Time Out* and the *Daily Mirror*, and includes a banner at the top of the page declaring it to be ‘The US No.1 Box Office Hit,’ which appears in white, and ‘The film that shocked America!’ which appears in red, reflecting similar colours used in later re-release marketing for the original film. The only other addition is information at the bottom of the page which details which cinemas in London are showing the film. The dedication of a full page advertisement for the film suggests that it is a significant release for that week. Smaller advertisements (side bar sized) in *The Sun* and *Evening Standard* feature the ‘US No.1 Box Office Hit’ strapline but not the ‘...shocked America!’ detail. Presumably this is because the advertisements are smaller, but this also suggests that the film’s box office success in the USA is being prioritised, over its potential ability to shock. All of the advertisements bar the one featured in *Time Out* feature an additional review quote of ‘Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid’, which is taken from *Premiere*, an American film magazine.<sup>561</sup>

The quad poster for *Last House on the Left* features a predominantly black and dark blue background. Most prominent here is the film’s title, in large capital letters, in the centre of the poster. The title is entirely white except for the word ‘house’, which appears in red,

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<sup>557</sup> 29 Oct – 3 Nov 2003, 93

<sup>558</sup> 31 Oct 2003, 12

<sup>559</sup> 31 Oct 2003, 55

<sup>560</sup> ‘The Ticket’ supplement, 31 Oct 2003, 4

<sup>561</sup> It is also a reference to the famous line of dialogue from David Cronenberg’s *The Fly* (1986).

accompanied by a blood-splatter design across the middle of the word. Below the title is the only image on the poster, that of an anonymous looking house, surrounded by trees and back-lit by a sort of light-blue mist. The house is in shades of blue and white, with much of its detail hidden by black and blue shadows.<sup>562</sup> The combination of the dark, looming image of the house and the bloodily highlighted word in the title works to imply that something is bad or wrong in or about that house, through the invocation of a generic image of 'haunted house' type marketing iconography, such as the sort used for the remake of *The Haunting*, or even *Insidious*.<sup>563</sup> Beneath the image of the house is the tagline: 'If bad people hurt someone you love, how far would you go to hurt them back?' This suggests the revenge aspect of the narrative, but does not necessarily make clear the nature and narrative role of the house without previous familiarity with the film or with the narrative. Given the imagery used, it might, when taken alone, imply a ghost story, for example. The way in which the tagline and the imagery work together is to entirely focus on and initiate curiosity about the nature of the 'house' and the events that might take place there. There is no direct reference to the film's status as a remake on the poster, nor any reference to specific characters or locations that might appeal to any prior knowledge of the earlier film. Only familiarity with the title would alert the viewer to the film's status as a remake.

The UK quad poster for *Straw Dogs* again features a black background. The entire right-hand third of the poster is taken up by an extreme close-up of half of James Marsden's face, the lens of his spectacles is cracked, and reflected in the lens is Alexander Skarsgard's face. The image relies heavily on computer editing and is mostly black and white, and again the image fades into the black background.<sup>564</sup> This image is a direct reference to the American poster for the original *Straw Dogs*. Of the materials associated with my case study films, this poster represents the most direct reference to the film's status as a remake, however, the reference still relies heavily on prior viewer knowledge of the original marketing for the film, and specifically the American marketing. The rest of the poster features large text. The largest text, in red, is the tagline 'everyone has a breaking point'. Beneath this are the names of the three main cast members (Marsden, Bosworth and Skarsgard), beneath which is the film title in bold white. The middle section of the letter 'o' in *Dogs* is the silhouette of

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<sup>562</sup> See fig. 20, appendix.

<sup>563</sup> See fig. 21, appendix.

<sup>564</sup> See fig. 22, appendix.

a man. Again, the tagline seems to inform our interpretation of the image. Marsden's face is sweaty, his eye behind the glasses wide and wild. By contrast, the reflection of Skarsgard seems calm and determined. The implication is then that one of these men meets their 'breaking point' (presumably Marsden), which is caused by the other (presumably Skarsgard). Notably, Bosworth's character is entirely absent from this presentation of the narrative. Of the three remakes, the *Straw Dogs* poster is the only one to feature its cast's names as part of the poster design (as opposed to in the credits block). It is also the only film to feature relatively well-known actors at the time of its release, with Marsden having appeared in the *X-Men* franchise, as well as comedies *Enchanted* (Lima, 2007) and *Hairspray* (Shankman, 2007), Skarsgard known for the television series *True Blood*, and Bosworth known as the new Lois Lane from *Superman Returns* (Singer, 2006). This casting choice might seem to reflect the original's distinct status, particularly as, in the context of my work, it too was the only original film with well-known stars in the cast.

The posters for all three films are remarkably similar in design.<sup>565</sup> They depict a single image on a dark background, a tagline, and the film's title. The image chosen in each case is arguably the most iconic or, in the case of *Last House on the Left*, the most potentially iconic element of the film, as the sort of imagery being used is not associated with the iconography of the original film. The prominence of Leatherface or David Sumner's broken glasses suggests that the marketing is here making use of images with iconic status in order to refer back to the original film. By using imagery such as this, the marketing appeals to those familiar with the original films in a way which does not alienate those who are not. In the case of *Last House on the Left*, neither its story nor the original film's marketing offers a recognisably iconic image, except, perhaps, for particularly graphic imagery, such as Krug's name carved on Mari's chest,<sup>566</sup> and so the title itself suggests the 'house' as the focal point. Additionally, this gives a greater degree of relevance to the title in relation to the film. The producers presumably kept the title in order to capitalise on its notoriety, however, given the original film's original release in grindhouse cinemas in the US,<sup>567</sup> the title itself doesn't

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<sup>565</sup> Given that the same imagery is used in other print advertisements as on the poster in the case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, I will not be considering those instances separately here.

<sup>566</sup> It is worth noting that the marketing does not make reference to the US poster for the original film, unlike the *Straw Dogs* poster's allusion to the original's US poster.

<sup>567</sup> Szulkin, 2000, 127-134. The film was seen under various titles in the US, including Krug and Company, but it was when it was released as *Last House on the Left* that it started to become a comparative success.

make all that much sense, in that it does not refer to anything that occurs or appears in the film's narrative. This is also addressed in the remake's narrative, with the father instructing Mari that their summer house is 'the last house on the left' (dialogue which is also emphasised in the trailer). The previously iconic tagline – "to avoid fainting, keep repeating: it's only a movie...only a movie" – would not necessarily be appropriate for a modern and mainstream film, given the tagline's exploitation roots and unfamiliar mode of address. Although many exploitation marketing tactics have been more generally adopted in mainstream filmmaking – particularly genre or blockbuster productions, that is, 'spectacular' filmmaking – taglines more often than not relate directly to the content of the film itself, reflecting, perhaps, notions of high concept marketing. The tagline for the original *Last House on the Left* implies the impact of the film through direct audience address and instruction, a technique which is much less commonly used now, and is particularly meta-textual, in drawing attention to the artifice of the film. The tagline for the remake does still offer a degree of audience address, as it takes the form of a question: '...how far would you go to hurt them back?'<sup>568</sup> Even so, the question still relates to the narrative of the film, rather than the experience of watching the film itself, distinguishing the tagline from previous exploitation techniques.

The use of iconography in such a prominent way in these posters conforms to the more general use of iconography in order to market genre films.<sup>569</sup> Although genre iconography has long been used as a marketing tool, the specific imagery used in contemporary horror marketing has become increasingly generic. In particular, the use of computer-generated imagery and digital editing mean that details such as colour schemes become increasingly homogenised. This is particularly evident across the posters for Platinum Dunes' horror remakes. After *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the posters for the remakes of *The Amityville Horror*, *Friday the 13th*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* each feature a lone shadowy figure against a backlit and dark background.<sup>570</sup> The details vary: both *The Amityville Horror* and *Friday the 13th* show the figures in full, while *A Nightmare on Elm Street* shows Freddy Kruger in a close-up; only the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* poster is almost completely filled

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<sup>568</sup> Interestingly, some American marketing for the original film used a similarly worded question, but again it referred to the film as fiction, rather than the narrative: 'can a movie go too far?' (see illustrations in Szulkin, 2000, 102, 135 and 137)

<sup>569</sup> Kernan, 2004, 47-48

<sup>570</sup> See fig. 23, appendix.

by the image of Freddy, while the other two feature a lot of blank, dark space; and the figure on the *Amityville Horror* poster is entirely silhouetted while more detail is seen on Jason and Freddy, though they are both obscured to some degree. All feature an iconic image of a character from the film, digitally altered to be obscured through shadows, and in muted colour tones against black backgrounds. Similar digital manipulation and muted colour tones can be seen in posters for the remake of *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Orphan*, *Sinister*, and the remake of *The Evil Dead*, all of which feature either obscured figures of people or close-ups of faces.<sup>571</sup> This visual homogeneity appears to be a means to appeal to the audience of people who pays to see these films in the cinema. Such uniform styling of the particular images on each poster becomes a shorthand for the generic nature of the films themselves, which acts as a means of appealing to those audience members looking for more of the same genre. If, as per Kernan, iconography is crucial marketing shorthand for genre films,<sup>572</sup> then the relatively uniform style of these posters (and indeed the trailer, as will be outlined below), becomes iconographic in and of itself.

With regards to the print marketing for the DVD releases of the films, only *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remains the same. The same advertisement for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* appears in both *Total Film*<sup>573</sup> and *Empire*.<sup>574</sup> The full-page advertisement features an orange background, and several images of DVDs. The top half of the page is taken up by *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'s DVD cover and the slogan 'a cut above the rest' in large letters. The cover of the DVD employs exactly the marketing images as used theatrically, only with a slightly different layout. The 'cut above the rest' slogan is obviously intended to promote the film as being better than other films, but also playfully uses an idiom that also refers to the 'chainsaw' aspect of the film. The bottom half of the advert features four other DVDs and information on the release date. These other titles are perhaps the most interesting aspect of the advert, given as they are quite a wide range of films – *The Sleeping Dictionary* (a period drama), *It Takes Two* (a comedy vehicle for the Olsen twins), *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (a critically-acclaimed drama) and *Run Ronnie Run* (a TV spin-off comedy). The range of films being advertised is broad, in terms of the films' genres, the

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<sup>571</sup> See fig. 24, appendix.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Apr 2004, 104

<sup>574</sup> Apr 2004, 141

audience appeal, and even when they were made (both *It Takes Two* and *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* are from the early 1990s). Instead of this marketing appealing to any particular audience, then, the advert is simply one for a range of titles from the same company – the logo for Entertainment in Video<sup>575</sup> appears at the bottom of the advert. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is presumably the main focus of the advertisement because it was the most commercially successful of the more recent films used in the advertisement. It might therefore be used to draw attention to the other titles being advertised as a result of its higher profile, as well as advertising itself. This might also relate to the film's release at a relatively early point during DVD's adoption as a home entertainment medium, with the advertising focusing on back-catalogue titles as well as new titles. The mix of genres promoted within one advertisement also suggests that horror, or at least this kind of horror film, based on a now culturally familiar and well-regarded original film, is no longer considered an immediately unappealing genre to a 'general' audience. This sort of multi-title advertisement is common when promoting home releases in magazines, as it allows for the DVD label to promote several of its titles at once (including back-catalogue titles) while paying for a single page (or half page) of print space. These multi-title advertisements are also often placed by DVD merchants, such as Virgin or HMV, providing the opportunity to promote special deals and new releases.

The marketing of the DVD release of both *The Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* changes the imagery that was used for each film's theatrical release. The imagery used for *Straw Dogs* is completely different. I have not been able to find any specific print marketing for the home release of *Straw Dogs*, however, it seems fair to assume that any print or online marketing would not have varied radically from the artwork used on the DVD cover itself, given that this is the case for the other two films. This also seems likely because the artwork has changed since the film's theatrical release, and much more drastically than in the case of *Last House on the Left*, which I will outline below. Therefore, the DVD cover itself is the primary focus on my analysis in relation to marketing material I have for the *Straw Dogs* remake's home release.<sup>576</sup> *Straw Dogs* under-performed at the box office,<sup>577</sup> therefore

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<sup>575</sup> The home entertainment branch of Entertainment Film Distributors.

<sup>576</sup> See fig. 25, appendix.



the desire to make it 'stand out' on DVD would be imperative to the distributor.<sup>578</sup> This highlights the importance of DVD and Blu-ray sales not only to successful blockbuster films which have very large budgets to recoup, but also to films which are not initially successful at the box office.<sup>579</sup> The film's title appears in bold red letters at the top of the image, below which is the most prominent aspect of the cover, headshots of the three lead characters. Amy is now placed centrally, looking away, while to each side of her Charlie and David look straight ahead. Amy's central position on the DVD cover is in marked contrast to her absence from the theatrical marketing of the film. Their images appear in a sort of sepia tone, which allows for easier blending into the bottom image of a building on fire, with five men stood in front of it, two of whom hold guns. The change in the artwork used means there's no longer any reference back to the original. Instead, it seems that the new artwork now places much more focus on the appeal of its three main stars. Both Skarsgard and Marsden look determined, while Bosworth's expression is one of slight concern. This quite subtly (perhaps too subtly!) reflects the nature of the film's narrative and also the condensed version of that narrative as represented in the theatrical trailer and TV spot – the conflict between the two men. The image of a burning building is dramatic, which implies the scale of violence that might take place in the film. Any reference to the narrative in the images used, however, is quite subtle, and the cover rather seems to sell the film on the merit of its attractive cast and the dramatic nature of a burning building and men with guns. The iconography of the original marketing – referring to the American poster for the original film – is replaced with a more generic iconography (that might imply thriller or action film as much as it does 'horror'), and the use of stars is more prominent than the use of iconography relating to genre. Although none of the leads in the film are necessarily 'A-list' stars or instantly recognisable, they are all associated with other high-profile film or television projects. Arguably this use of the lead actors from the film is unrelated to concepts of the use of 'star rhetoric', as outlined by Kernan,<sup>580</sup> simply because none of the actors are quite famous enough to have a particularly clear star persona. Perhaps the most

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<sup>577</sup> On its opening weekend the film only made approx. £42,000 (\$67,218) on 109 screens, dropping to just 11 screens and making approx. £1400 (\$2293). The figures in GBP are estimations based on website approximations of exchange rates at the time.

<sup>578</sup> It's worth noting that the DVD case is itself made of red plastic, which also adds to the sense of needing to 'stand out', in terms of its placement in shops.

<sup>579</sup> Klinger, 2008, 39; Grant, 2008, 106

<sup>580</sup> Kernan, 2004, 62-77

‘useful’ star on the cover, in relation to a generic context, is Skarsgard, due to his role on television as Erik in vampire drama *True Blood*. Not only is Erik a popular character, but there is an element of similarity between the two texts, as both are set in southern USA. The character of Erik is both villain and romantic interest, which plays into Skarsgard’s particular role as Charlie in *Straw Dogs*. The move from specific reference to the original film in the theatrical marketing of the film to entirely generic marketing for its home release suggests something of a paradox – that in order to successfully stand out, the film must look as much like its generic peers as possible. Individual elements being used in the promotional material, particularly its stars, serves the purpose of promoting a general sense of genre, rather than any specific sense of the individual film, its characterisation or narrative premise, or indeed the cultural connotations associated with the original film on which it’s based.

A similar sense of the generic can be found in the marketing for the DVD release of *Last House on the Left*. Again, the DVD cover artwork is central to the advertisements, and it is somewhat similar to the artwork from the theatrical poster. As noted in the release information from Universal, the artwork has been changed in order to “stand-out”.<sup>581</sup> The background image of a mysterious house and title design are the same as used in the theatrical artwork, however additional layers of images have been added.<sup>582</sup> The shadowy outlines of four people appear in some mist in front of the house, while a tree takes up the left hand side of the image, bearing the ‘lake ends in the road’ sign from the film. This is a heavily manipulated version of a still publicity image that correlates with a particular scene in the film, but it is subtly different from the way in which the scene plays out in the film itself. In the film, when Krug and his companions approach the Collingwood’s house they are scattered and injured – Sadie walks ahead of the men and Justin trails behind. The still image, however, has the four characters walking side by side. Rather than the fractured group of individuals of the film, the still image – and subsequently the DVD cover – presents the figures as a united, threatening, front. That these figures appear almost silhouetted means they are anonymous, despite some indications of alignment, via costume, to the characters in the film. Although there is some visible costume detail to the figures, which

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<sup>581</sup> Hewitt, personal correspondence

<sup>582</sup> See fig. 26, appendix.

corresponds to particular characters, the manipulation of the original still image makes them dark to the point of being unrecognisable. This serves to genericise the four characters to the status of simply 'villains'. At the very foreground of the image is a girl lying down, her back towards us, her back visibly dirty and injured. Again, although this is presumably a representation of Mari, the image itself is relatively indistinct although the wound on her shoulder corresponds to the wound she receives in the film. The image itself is not a direct still from the film nor does it appear in any stills photography. The only other material in which it is also present is what appears to be an official promotional desktop wallpaper<sup>583</sup>. The image appears more fully in this wallpaper, and this confirms it is not a still from the film nor representative of a relevant or equivalent scene, as there is more costume visible, and it doesn't match Mari's film costume.<sup>584</sup> Again, then, even though this image features detail which reflects specific details within the film, overall it is a further generic element of the imagery included on the DVD cover as a whole. In addition, a layer of computer generated falling rain has been added over the entirety of the image, which on the one hand again reflects the film itself, in that it is raining when Krug and company arrive at the house, but also serves to make the cover appear more dramatic through the addition of vaguely foreboding and dynamic 'rain', much like the inclusion of the burning building on the *Straw Dogs* DVD cover. All of this additional imagery is heavily digitally edited, the process clearly being quicker and cheaper than taking new photography or completely overhauling the design.

Overall, the additional elements make the artwork more complex than the original theatrical poster, as there are more elements involved than simply an image of a house. The presence of the silhouetted gang implies a human threat in this film, rather than the fairly vague appearance of just a house on the quad poster. The image of Mari in the foreground emphasises the violent nature of the film and indicates who might be threatened by the gang in the film. In many ways this DVD artwork uses additional horror iconography, in order to more effectively sell the film. The rain, the sinister silhouettes, the injured woman are all iconographic elements not specific to the film or its narrative but to horror film

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<sup>583</sup> I say 'appears to be' as the wallpapers no longer appear on the Universal Pictures web page for the film. The image is used in a desktop wallpaper which is in the same style and format as several others, all of which bear official logos and the film's website address. I have not been able to find a way to verify the veracity of the particular wallpaper.

<sup>584</sup> It is possible that the image is indeed a still taken from a scene not used in the final film.

marketing, particularly more recently, as the DVD covers for contemporary horror release appear increasingly similar.<sup>585</sup> In addition, although this cover features imagery which suggests violent content in the film, it does not do so in a way that might specifically court controversy, but rather in a way that safely and conventionally aligns the film with a particular genre.

There are two additional graphic elements to the cover. The first is a 'blood splatter' and the text 'Extended Version too extreme for cinemas!' which is positioned on Mari's shoulder in the bottom right of the overall image. This additional aspect of the marketing harkens back to the 'ballyhoo' approach of classical exploitation marketing, in that it overstates a somewhat inaccurate account of the film within. The claim that the version on DVD was 'too extreme for cinemas' is questionable at best, as the version submitted to the BBFC in 2009 is listed as running at 109 minutes, while two video versions, submitted in 2010, run at 105 ('theatrical version') and 108 minutes ('extended version'). All three versions have received an 18 certificate from the BBFC. The 'too extreme for cinemas' claim implies that there was some outside force – say, the BBFC – stopping the 'extended version' from being released. Given that the BBFC passed all versions of the film uncut, the distributor seems to have evidently chosen to release the slightly shorter version theatrically. The 'extended version' then appeals to an audience who may have already seen the film and been dissatisfied, or to those who decided not to see it in the cinema, or to those who had not previously considered viewing it at all. This functions also in a way that is similar to the use of 'formerly banned!'-type claims on home releases of older films.<sup>586</sup> In essence, then, the marketing techniques here remake the techniques associated with the original film. What's interesting in this case is that the sense of a former 'banning' or 'cutting' is retrospectively and entirely fabricated, in order to market the home release of the film. The theatrical release of the film was not banned or cut, so the marketing of the DVD release not only appeals with the

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<sup>585</sup> Perhaps the best summary of how standardised much horror DVD cover art has become, in a broader context, is to be found in the use of a stock image of a woman crawling toward the camera on at least seven different horror DVD covers, as compiled by the blog Freddy in Space (Johnny, 2012). The same can also be said for the four DVD covers featuring a woman with a man's hand over her mouth (Johnny, 2010). A final example comes from BrutalasHell.com, highlighting the over-use of images of women with their backs to the camera on film covers (Bussey, 2013). Although not strictly comparable with my analysis here, it does point to the standardisation of horror cover art, as well as the apparently laziness about it.

<sup>586</sup> Egan, 2007, 61-70

promise of content 'too extreme for cinemas', but also to the sort of exploitation aficionado familiar with such tactics and appeals.

The second additional graphic is a banner across the top of the cover, in red, with white writing that reads: 'From the creators of Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> and The Hills Have Eyes'. This refers to Wes Craven and Sean S. Cunningham, but only by implication. Someone reading the advertisement or cover would need prior knowledge of both titles, and of the original *Last House on the Left*, to make this connection, therefore it would seem the titles are in fact the more useful selling point in this particular piece of marketing, rather than the individuals' names. This relates to the sense of genericity of contemporary horror, however, it also reflects the original VHS of the original film. The individuals now involved with the remake are not as broadly generically coded as a film title might be. The titles 'Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>' and 'The Hills Have Eyes' might sound like horror films, even to those with no prior knowledge of the films. Although the claim could refer to either the originals or remakes of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* or *The Hills Have Eyes*, it seems more than likely that the remakes are the films being referred to particularly as there is no additional, explicit reference to Craven or Cunningham. Additionally, both of these films had been remade by the time *Last House on the Left's* remake was released, and to use *The Hills Have Eyes* to implicitly refer to Craven - rather than *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, his more famous film<sup>587</sup> - certainly implies that the publicity is attempting to appeal to an audience familiar with the remakes. Given the relative financial success of both the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and *The Hills Have Eyes* remakes, the reference seeks to associate *The Last House on the Left* with these successful films, a connection which was not explicitly made during its theatrical release.

All three films have only one trailer associated with them. Their availability varies, with none of the DVD releases featuring their trailers as extra features. A more extensive study of DVD extra features and online content would be needed to support any speculation that the easy access to trailers online might have impacted on their lack of inclusion on DVDs. In contrast to the original *Last House on the Left's* DVD special editions (as discussed in the last chapter), the lack of comprehensive extra features, such as trailers and other advertising, suggests that these DVD releases are not being aimed at collectors or a particular type of

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<sup>587</sup> *A Nightmare on Elm Street* was then remade in 2010.

completist horror fan. Also, as noted below, the different sorts of 'official' platform for now viewing the trailers online varies from film to film.

As with the print campaigns for these films, there is a great deal of similarity between the trailers for each film. This appears to be due to their conforming to what appears to be a standard format for many contemporary mainstream American film trailers for films of a particular genre. Each trailer begins by establishing a sense of safe and happy normalcy, which is then interrupted by a particular threat. This is usually indicated through a change in editing, and sound and music, as well as through images taken from the film itself. The nature of the threat is established through a montage that usually culminates with some sort of significant act or symbol, and through the use of intertitles. The end of each trailer consists of a rapidly edited montage of the film's most violent moments, and, in two instances, a violent 'coda' scene is included after the film's title card. This standardised construction of each trailer points to the mainstream nature of these films, or at least, the mainstream nature of their distribution. It also points to the similar generic framing established for all three films, in that they all are advertised in very similar ways. Below I will provide a close analysis of each of the films' trailers, in order to illustrate this clear sense of a formula being employed across the marketing of the three films. As I claimed in relation to the film posters above, the formula itself becomes iconographic, in line with Kernan's assertion that iconography is crucial to the rhetoric of genre in trailers.<sup>588</sup> Additionally, Kernan emphasises repetition as a convention frequently used in trailer employing the rhetoric of genre.<sup>589</sup> This is true within each individual trailer, with "refrains of return and repetition"<sup>590</sup> present, particularly through editing and sound. In addition, and more broadly, the repetition of similar forms and styles across the trailers points to the use of repetition to "connot[e] sameness (again and again) and newness (unprecedented abundance)"<sup>591</sup> in relation to the contemporary horror genre as a whole.

I have sourced *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre's* trailer from the distributor's website, and it appears to be exactly the same as the US trailer, aside from release and rating details. The trailer starts with a montage of the lead characters travelling, the romantic tone of the

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<sup>588</sup> Kernan, 2004, 47-48

<sup>589</sup> Ibid. 48-49

<sup>590</sup> Ibid. 48

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

montage enhanced by a female vocal-led piece of non-diegetic music playing over the images. This very much reflects the entire first scene of the film's narrative,<sup>592</sup> aside from the marked difference in music. The sequence in the film from which the images in the trailer are taken is instead soundtracked by Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Sweet Home Alabama*.<sup>593</sup> The sequence in the film establishes the characters, the relationships and dynamics between them, and that they're en route to a concert. The sequence is light-hearted, and underlines the carefree nature of the young characters. The music used in the montage of this sequence in the trailer is entirely different, *Song of the Siren*, by 'gothic dream pop'<sup>594</sup> group This Mortal Coil.<sup>595</sup> Although it doesn't entirely change the tone of the sequence, it does serve to decontextualize the film from its period setting, particularly in contrast to the film's use of a song from the 1970s. Although an intertitle is used to indicate the film's 'August 18 1973' setting, there is little in the imagery of the trailer to reflect this information. In addition, the costumes do not particularly reflect what might be considered 'typical' of the 1970s, though they are likewise not jarringly anachronistic. This seems to be in line with the well-publicised fact that the inspiration behind the film's production was that "although almost all of [the target demographic] have heard of the title, 90% of them have not seen the original film."<sup>596</sup> With this in mind, to decontextualize the period setting in the trailer would seem to be a further attempt to appeal to a 'young audience,' who might otherwise be uninterested in the period detail of the film – if the production company had found them to be interested, presumably simply re-releasing the original film would have been profitable enough.<sup>597</sup>

This sense of romance and light-heartedness is interrupted by some brief shots of the teens picking up the hitchhiker, at which point a 'stuck record' sound replaces the music. A montage of macabre images, such as an old doll and a skull, are edited with black fades between shots. Similar editing is used in a montage of the teens discovering a house and searching for help, then a loud off-screen noise heralds silence, and emphasises the next

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<sup>592</sup> That is to say, the first sequence to occur on 'August 18 1973', as opposed to the 'police footage' that opens the film.

<sup>593</sup> An anachronistic song choice, as it was first released in 1974.

<sup>594</sup> See Huey.

<sup>595</sup> Interestingly, this song was used prominently in David Lynch's *Lost Highway*.

<sup>596</sup> Andrew Form, executive producer of the film, quoted in its press pack.

<sup>597</sup> Jonathan Barnes' review of the film in *Sight and Sound* picks up on this too, in the characterisation of the teens in the film itself: "Despite the perfunctory period setting, these kids belong to a generation reared on *Buffy* and *Scream*." (2003, 55)

shot: Erin asking 'What the hell was that?' The next section of the trailer focusses on the teens noticing that there are other people around, and discovering more strange objects, and ends with the revelation of Monty, with the line 'what the hell are you doing in my house?' This then cuts to the hitchhiker once more, saying 'You're all going to die,' followed by a shot of a peephole, a door sliding open, and Erin and Andy screaming. This section of the trailer disrupts the reflection of the film's narrative progress somewhat, although the hitchhiker bookending the section functions in the same way. Her character disrupts the tone of the opening scene or sequence, both in the film and in the trailer. In the trailer, the scenes that appear in this section happen after the Hitchhiker has killed herself. These scenes are therefore used in the trailer to build suspense for the sequence that follows, while retaining the Hitchhiker as a herald of doom. This sense of establishing 'normalcy' during the opening section of a trailer, in particular an idealised idea of normalcy, can be seen as a common feature of horror trailers since the early 2000s. The formula is certainly used in trailers for other Platinum Dunes films, including *The Amityville Horror* (2005), *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (2009), *The Unborn* (2009) and *The Purge* (2013). Other trailers which feature this technique include the trailers for *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006) and *Sinister* (2012). The 'normalcy' section of these trailers does not necessarily come at the very start of the trailer (as is the case with the trailer for *The Hills Have Eyes*), nor does it always comprise a particularly lengthy section of the trailer (as is the case with the trailer for *The Unborn*), but the establishment of normalcy almost always leads to the introduction of the film's main threat as a disruptive force. This suggests that the films might conform to Tudor's idea of 'secure horror', where normal life is threatened by an outside force, however the film narratives themselves conform to the notion of paranoid horror, particularly in the case of my case study remakes, as the films they adapt are prime examples of paranoid horror, particularly in terms of everyday, proximate threats.<sup>598</sup>

The image of Erin and Andy screaming fades to white, accompanied by the noise of a camera flash. Several shots of characters – mostly Erin - running or screaming are edited together in this fashion, with the camera noise being the only audible sound. The frequency of cuts increases until the screen fades to black and an intertitle appears: 'From Producer Michael Bay'. The screen then remains dark and the only audio is the sound of screaming,

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<sup>598</sup> See Tudor, 1989, 211-224



heavy breathing, and some creaking. Another intertitle reads 'Inspired by a True Story'. A gasp on the soundtrack is followed by a sort of 'pause' where the screen is black and there is no audio at all, which serves to emphasise the following shot of a chainsaw breaking through a door and its diegetic sound.

There are three notable elements to this particular sequence. The first is the highlighting of Michael Bay as a producer in order to sell the film. Not known, at this point, for horror films, but rather for directing action blockbusters, the emphasis on Bay would seem to be aiming the film once more at the 18-25 year old male demographic. The second notable element of this section of the trailer is the 'inspired by a true story' intertitle. This links the film to a tradition of 'true story' horror filmmaking, including the original film, but at the same time, avoids making reference to the film explicitly as a remake. The trailer is therefore overtly advertising the film as being based on reality, rather than on a previous film. The third notable aspect of this sequence relates to this point, that the conceit of the 'camera flash' effect is a direct reference to the trailer and opening sequence of the original film. This point will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

Following this sequence is a rapidly edited montage of characters in peril, running and screaming, seemingly in no particular or chronological order. The music that now plays is a generic dramatic piece of string music. Three lines of dialogue are emphasised: a brief exchange between Erin and the Sheriff – "He's killing them!" / "Who's killing who?" – and then Erin, apparently captured, asking "What's wrong with you people?". The trailer ends on our only glimpse of Leatherface, who is quickly hidden behind a door as he slides it shut, in a subtle reference to a key scene in the original film. There is then a cut to the film's title, followed by credits and 'coming soon'. This sequence seems to follow the standard format for modern 'genre' trailers, whereby a rapidly edited montage teases the content of the film without allowing too much time to dwell on the detail. The montage significantly ends on the only clear shot of Leatherface. Given his prominence in the rest of the film's publicity, this brief view of him emphasises his iconic role in the remake. If the statistic that the majority of the film's target audience have heard of, but not seen, the original film, then presumably they might also have heard of Leatherface and have an idea of his appearance. This closing tease of the character serves to appeal to a viewer who might want to see more of Leatherface, and relatedly his actions in the film.

The trailer for *Last House on the Left* is not included as a DVD extra, nor on Universal UK's website or YouTube channel.<sup>599</sup> There appears to only be one trailer available for the film online, which will be the one I analyse here. I have not found any 'official' presence of the trailer online at all, neither via UK channels or US channels. The closest to an 'official source' for the trailer is perhaps the video as provided on IMDB.com, although content on IMDB can also be user-generated. This seems to imply that the title is not one that the distributor is particularly interested in continuing to promote past its original theatrical and home releases, but without direct information from the distributor this is only speculation.<sup>600</sup> The trailer opens with shots of Mari and her parents driving to their summer home, establishing a sense of normalcy. This is continued as Mari is allowed to borrow the car and to go and spend time with Paige. Shots are shown of Mari and Paige meeting Justin, and the use of an unremarkable but upbeat electronic piano soundtrack establishes that this is still part of the normalcy established from the outset. This sense is interrupted when Krug and company are first introduced, the soundtrack interrupted by a stinger. Further stingers, or a soundtrack that resembles the use of stingers, underline the threat they represent as they are introduced and established as criminals in a series of quick edits. This is followed by a sequence of rapidly edited scenes of violence against the girls. The sequence culminates with Mari jumping into the lake and Krug shooting at her. The sequence very much establishes that bad things will happen to the girls, but no details are dwelled upon. This sequence ends with the trailer's first intertitle, which reads 'it was a brutal crime,' which suggests an element of 'true crime' to the narrative, without directly invoking the 'based on a true story' element present in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. This intertitle provides the information which is not shown in detail from the montage that comes before it – that worse things happen to the girls in the film itself. The style of editing serves to emphasise this, as fades to black are inserted between the scenes in the sequence, as though the full extent of what's happening is being hidden from the viewer.

This is followed by a long shot from above of Mari floating in the lake. A brief sequence of the gang searching for shelter follows ending with a mid-shot of the door of the Collingwoods' home being opened and revealing Krug, Sadie, Francis and Justin. Another

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<sup>599</sup> Neither the 'Universal Pictures UK' channel nor the 'Universal Home Entertainment UK' channels host the trailer.

<sup>600</sup> My emails to Universal enquiring about this were unanswered.

intertitle appears, reading 'it was just a place to hide'. This intertitle seems to imply that we should be invested – not necessarily positively - in the criminals as much as in any other character, the idea of 'just a place to hide' implying that it will be 'more than a place to hide' in a way that underlines a sense of threat. Shots of Justin show him realising that they're in Mari's parents' house, which are followed by shots of the Collingwoods finding Mari. These shots are again accompanied by stingers on the soundtrack, emphasising the sense of shock and horror. The soundtrack begins to play an acoustic cover of *Sweet Child of Mine* as the Collingwoods prepare to defend themselves, with some emphasis on the dialogue: "What are we going to do?" / "Be ready to do anything." The song underlines the trailer's changed emphasis from the girls and the gang to the parents. The music used is of a very similar tone and style to the music in the trailer for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, as outlined above, which suggests a degree of formula to these trailers. In terms of the trailer overall, the same amount of time is dedicated to promoting the parents' revenge, in contrast to the DVD cover's emphasis on the gang and Mari, as is given over to the other aspects of the plot.

The next intertitle simply states 'from producer Wes Craven'. Again, similar to the use of Michael Bay's name in the trailer for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, reference is being made to the producer, rather than the director. Craven's name is the only one involved in the production that is evoked in the trailer (aside from in the credits). Craven's name might appeal in two ways – as a figure known for mainstream horror successes such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Scream*, or as the director of the original film. Although the trailer does not explicitly promote itself as a remake, the invocation of Craven's name would be a reminder to those familiar with his body of work that this is a remake of one of his previous films. The remainder of the trailer consists of various rapidly edited shots of the Collingwoods confronting and attacking the gang, with some very brief shots of the girls' ordeal. The montage is intercut with four intertitles 'This year/ If someone hurt someone you love/How far would you go/To hurt them back,' reflecting the tagline also used on the poster. The montage ends with Dr. Collingwood saying "I wanna hear you beg for your life," before cutting to the film's title card, which features an outline/silhouette of a house, similar to the poster. Again, this places emphasis on the parents' revenge as being the narrative focal point of the film. This is further underlined by an additional sequence that follows the title, which is a brief montage from the film's final scene, in which the

Collingwoods paralyse Krug and put his head in a microwave. There then follows a 'coming soon' intertitle, and credits.

This use of a coda is another technique commonly used in contemporary horror trailers, including *Hostel 2* (2007), *Orphan* (2009), *Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010), *Insidious* (2011), and *The Evil Dead* (2013). Though the most common coda is that of a 'jump' scare, this kind of coda can be used to tease a particularly anticipated element of the film. For example, the coda of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* trailer features a brief 'reveal' of Freddy Kruger's scarred face, as well as his voice, the only instance of either in the trailer. The coda might also provide an implication of a violent or gory moment (such as is the case with *Last House on the Left*) in order to draw in an intrigued viewer. Although the content of the coda varies, its function is largely the same, in that a final 'highlight' from the film is shown in isolation at the end of the trailer.

The trailer for *Straw Dogs* is available to view on the Sony Pictures Releasing UK YouTube channel, but not on the DVD nor on their website. A sticker on the front of the DVD copy that I own advertises the website [www.mymoviestras.co.uk](http://www.mymoviestras.co.uk), but this website does not feature a trailer for the film either. It is unclear whether or not the trailer for the film might have been on the website nearer the time of its release, and this 'dropping' of trailers from official channels once a film's release has passed is fairly common. The trailer begins with Amy watching television, and reacting to a knock at the door. The next shots show David going downstairs and looking through the door's peephole. A POV shot shows a man pointing a gun at the door and the sound of a gun cocking plays on the soundtrack. A gunshot plays over a shot of David recoiling, followed by a woman's (presumably Amy's) scream. David calls out for Amy on the soundtrack over a shot of Charlie holding the gun, which cuts to Amy and David crouched in their living room. There is then a cut to a close-up of a window being broken, Amy reacting, and further brief shots from the siege. On the soundtrack a phone dialling sound is heard, followed by a 911 operator responding. Some emphasis is placed on Amy's dialogue, "there are five men out there with guns," through the clarity of her voice on the soundtrack, which is followed by more brief shots of the siege. This sequence ends with a medium shot of David shooting a gun and then freezes on a close up of his face. A caption is overlaid on the image, which reads 'This is his end.' The image then fades to black. This sequence establishes Amy and David as a normal couple under

threat. Although we see Amy first and she's given a significant line of dialogue, the caption implies that the film is about David, first and foremost. This is *his* end, not *their* end. This is different from the previous two trailers, which directly begin with a sense of undisturbed normalcy.

Next, an intertitle appears, stating 'this was his beginning,' further emphasising the centrality of David. Upbeat country music now plays on the soundtrack as this section of the trailer consists of shots of David and Amy arriving in the new house and visiting the town, now establishing a sense of normalcy. Again, key lines of dialogue are emphasised, particularly Amy explaining that "we don't even lock our doors here". The sequence ends with Amy and David at home in bed, smiling at each other. Then a sort of 'stinger' plays on the soundtrack, over a strange edit of a mid-shot of Amy's face. The shot does not change but its duration is interrupted by rapidly edited black shots, creating a sort of 'flashing' effect. This is followed by a montage of Charlie introducing himself to David, explaining that he'll work on their roof, and shots of the men accompanying him. A similar effect/edit and soundtrack sting plays over a medium shot of Charlie. The next few shots show Charlie and his men at work, and David feebly confronting them over their early start. An intertitle then reads 'some people think they know you,' followed again by the 'flashing' edit over shots of the men fixing the mantrap. This section establishes Charlie as some sort of threat to Amy and David, while subtly linking Amy and Charlie via the editing, though no explicit reference is made here to their previous relationship.

The next section begins with shots of Amy running and being leered at by Charlie and his men. This is followed by Amy and David's confrontation about the incident, with Amy accusing David of being a coward. The 'flashing' edit is used on a mid-shot of David, which cuts to an intertitle that reads 'your loved ones think they know you'. This is followed by David agreeing to fire Charlie and handing him notice, and shots of Charlie and his men, intercut with shots of Amy, with the men's dialogue being subtly threatening: 'How much they gon' pay us?' / 'We'll all get what we deserve.' This section clearly establishes a sense of threat between Charlie (and his workers) and Amy. This is then linked to David's centrality to the narrative by the next sequence, which sees David confront Charlie after church, including the following exchange: "Hey Charlie, there is something in the Bible I believe. Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife." / "And what happens when thy

neighbour's wife covets you?" This serves to sublimate the previous section, focused on Amy, to David's story – her problem with Charlie is simply part of David's character arc, an arc implied by the '...think they know you' intertitles. This section ends with a mid-shot of Amy, a mid-shot of Charlie, and a shot of an American football match, with the 'flashing' edit.

The next section begins with a shorter montage of the siege as shown at the beginning of the trailer. The remainder of the trailer focuses on the siege. A shot of Charlie outside the house has him telling his men 'They're not gonna come out guys, so we have to get in.' Further shots show David boiling water and telling Amy "they get into this house, we're dead." This is followed by an intertitle, 'but once you're pushed to the limit' - similar to the 'how far would you go?' of the *Last House on the Left* poster - which leads to a long shot of Amy looking out through a window, then a mid-shot from outside looking in, as she is snatched away by a man attacking her. The soundtrack now plays generic dramatic string music, as the next shot shows a sweaty close up of David, which is followed by an intertitle that reads 'you'll know who you really are'. Again, this subsumes the things that happen to Amy as part of David's story or arc.

The rest of the trailer is a rapidly edited montage of the climactic siege, with some shots from the rest of the film, intercut with intertitles. David beats a man with a golf club, which cuts to a mid-shot of Charlie saying 'he's got some man in him after all', followed by another mid-shot of David. The shots that follow include Charlie running David off the road, David ducking a shot while deer hunting, a car driving into the house, Amy screaming, David throwing boiling water at someone, a girl being choked, Amy shooting and a car exploding, the house on fire, and ending on Charlie threatening Amy, who is crying, with the words 'Don't be scared.' The first intertitle reads 'this season', and the following intertitles appear one word at a time, reading 'Unleash your Rage'. The tagline here aligns the audience with David, as his character has been shown unleashing his own rage in the trailer. The 'this season' intertitle seems somewhat out of place – it's difficult to guess what 'season' it refers to. Presumably it refers to the film's release, but its release of November 4<sup>th</sup> doesn't seem to correspond to any particular 'season' (such as Christmas). It also seems to be an Americanism, which is perhaps unchanged from the American trailer.

This sequence ends with the film's title card. On the soundtrack we hear David say: 'This is my house. I will not allow violence against this house,' which is a significant reference to the original film, to those who are familiar with it, and there is then a cut to a close-up of David, and shots of him attacking a man with a nail gun. This then cuts to a 'coming soon' graphic. Again, this idea of a 'coda' at the end of the trailer seems to conform to a standard trailer 'template' for genre films. The final shot implies a greater degree of violence from David than the rest of the trailer, presumably because it seems graphic or extreme without much having to be shown. Significantly, there is very little emphasis on the main actors in the trailer, which differs to the print marketing. The trailer suggests that the film is very character driven – given that relationships between them are clearly established within the trailer – but there is no emphasis here on the stars who play the roles. This underlines, to an extent, the relatively generic nature of the actors who play the roles: young, attractive, and relatively interchangeable with other actors. Very few contemporary mainstream American horror films feature bona fide 'stars', invariably instead featuring casts of young television actors (Jessica Biel in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), character actors (R. Lee Ermey), or young actors who may have featured in prominent films previously (Kate Bosworth, James Marsden), but who aren't yet bankable A-List star names. Evidently, Bosworth, Marsden and Skarsgard have names that are recognisable enough to feature on the poster, but they don't have distinct enough star personae to be heavily emphasised in the film's trailer.

A TV spot for the theatrical release of *Straw Dogs* is available to view on the Sony Pictures UK YouTube channel. Of all the films under analysis in my thesis, this is the only instance I have come across of a UK-specific TV spot for a theatrical release. By UK specific, I mean that it is hosted online by the UK distributor, and also that the release date used in the advertisement is the UK release date. There tends to be only a week or so difference in release date, if there is a difference, between the US and the UK, however in the case of both *Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* the difference is greater (roughly 3 months and 2 months respectively). This suggests they are not titles that are as immediately bankable as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* – perhaps in part due to the level of recognisability of the titles themselves, as well as the films they remake, but also due to the strategies of the production companies themselves. A larger period between releases allows a distributor to assess a film's domestic (that is, US) performance before determining the nature of its

overseas releases. The 'UK specific' nature of the TV spot is not to say that the main body of the TV spot is any different from the American version of the same trail – in fact, the American voice over is kept the same, though this seems to simply conform to standard Hollywood advertising. Unfortunately, I have no information regarding when and where the TV spot might have been broadcast, and therefore cannot take into account any details such as during what type of programme or channel it was aired.

Given the standardised 30-second length of a TV spot, the film's narrative is reduced even further, in comparison to the trailer. Most of the scenes shown are also seen in the trailer, however some play out for a little longer than in the trailer, as they emphasise only one particular element of the narrative. The TV spot establishes Amy and David as a couple, Charlie as a threat to the stability of their relationship, and the escalating aggression between the characters. Familiar lines of dialogue are again emphasised as in the trailer, namely the 'thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife' / 'what happens when thy neighbour's wife covets you?' exchange between David and Charlie. Dialogue is used proportionally more in the TV spot, but to more explicitly establish relationships and themes in the short amount of time available. Therefore, Amy's dialogue introducing David as her husband is used in the TV spot ("This is my husband, David."), while their relationship has time to be established visually in the full trailer. The TV spot is entirely focussed on the triangular relationship between the characters, and includes information that is not at all referred to in the trailer: that Amy and Charlie used to be lovers. Although shots are used from the siege section in the TV spot, any sense of it being a 'siege' is missing, particularly Amy's line 'There are five men with guns outside,' which is heard twice in the trailer. The violence that is referred to in the TV spot then becomes a more generalised account of conflict between Charlie and David. This is also emphasised in the absence of Charlie's gang in the TV spot.

Another element of the TV spot which is absent from the trailer is the presence of a voice over. The words spoken do not correlate with the intertitles in the trailer, and seem to be fairly easily interchangeable with any number of other films: "Some desires cannot be denied. Some obsessions cannot be stopped. Straw Dogs." There are two immediate reasons for the inclusion of a voiceover in the TV spot when the trailer does not use one. The first relates again to the brief length of a TV spot – the voice over can play over images, while an intertitle would take up screen time. The second relates to the medium. A trailer



would either be viewed in the cinema – where the audience will watch and pay attention to a number of trailers<sup>601</sup> – or online, where again a viewer will choose to watch the trailer, and therefore will likely already have enough interest to sit through its duration. The TV spot, on the other hand, will play in the spaces during and in between particular programmes an audience has chosen to watch, and therefore must firstly be more concise in capturing a viewer’s attention, but also take into account that the viewer might leave the room, or simply have the television on in the background. The voice over then might be heard, even if the advert itself is not seen – this is most important in the voice over reading the film’s title, which also might explain the more generic nature of the rest of the voice over. Another matter to consider in thinking of TV spots and their brevity is that the distributor would, of course, be paying for the air time on television, whereas in the cinema the trailer would be attached to another film being distributed by the same company and shown by the exhibitors as obligated by contractual agreement. Therefore naturally TV advertisements for films need to be shorter than their cinematic trailers.

Two TV trails for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* were made by free-to-view satellite channel Film4 for a double-bill of the films on the channel. I do not have the exact dates of broadcast, but they were shown on consecutive evenings on the channel.<sup>602</sup> The trails, one at 20 seconds and one at 40 seconds are similar to each other, using imagery from both films combined. They differ to the theatrical trailer for the film because they have been put together especially for, or by, the channel, rather than the distributor, however, they are similar insofar as they focus on Leatherface as a central character. The theatrical trailer emphasises Leatherface in his absence, in that it ends on the briefest reveal of the character, in a similar way to the poster’s ‘distorted’ image of Leatherface, which both emphasises and hides him. The TV spots feature more sustained and prominent shots of Leatherface’s mask and his chainsaw, both being the most iconic aspects of the character. The longer advert includes snippets of dialogue that focus the action on Leatherface: ‘He’s no harm,’/‘He’s a bad man!’/‘He’s gonna kill all of us!’/‘You’re all gonna die.’ This focus on Leatherface is further underlined in

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<sup>601</sup> This is not strictly unproblematic, of course – audience members in a cinema auditorium might, for example, talk through the trailers, or be outside the auditorium at a concession stand before the film proper begins.

<sup>602</sup> I obtained copies of these television adverts directly through correspondence with Film4.

both adverts by the use of Johnny Cash's cover of the song *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* on the soundtrack. The use of the song is quite darkly humorous, given that it is a romantic ballad, but it also ties in to the double-bill being advertised, with both adverts featuring intertitles reading 'every ending/needs a beginning'. Film4 is a specialist film channel, which, while showcasing a broad range of films, has included special seasons of horror films or extreme cinema in its schedule, often with the involvement of personality-critics such as Mark Kermode. Although Film4 currently screens more mainstream films than in its early existence as a pay-channel, it retains a degree of specialty, particularly with associations with other organisations, including its current sponsorship of London's annual FrightFest horror festival. Film4's more specialist slant is emphasised when compared with other channels, such as SkyOne or ITV1, who offer much more family-orientated film trails. ITV's particular association with television screenings of the Harry Potter series of films, for example, encapsulates the tendency for broad-ranging but family-friendly content.

When considering the remakes as traces of the original films, it's evident that they only reflect their forebears in subtle or implicit ways. Aside from retaining the same titles as the originals, the marketing for the remakes do not explicitly announce the films as 'remakes'. Implicitly, the marketing does feature reference to memorable or famous textual elements from the original films, such as the 'camera flash' effect in the trailer for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which mimics the original film's trailer, the reference to Wes Craven in the trailer for *Last House on the Left*, and the use of a line of dialogue from the original film in the trailer for *Straw Dogs*. All of these references clearly require pre-existing familiarity with the original film, and suggests that the marketing is partially addressing this kind of audience. The theatrical print marketing for *Straw Dogs* also heavily references the American marketing for the original film, but, despite being glaringly obvious to anyone familiar with the original marketing, the reference is still only implicit to anyone with no prior knowledge of the original. That this was then changed for the DVD release supports the impression that the marketing of these remakes seeks to conform much more strongly with general trends in marketing other contemporary horror films than to making extensive reference to the films that they remake. This might imply, then, that the remakes are in fact only very tenuous traces of the originals. For Staiger, a 'trace' of a film event might be a trailer, a poster, or a review, some material which circulates in response to the film event. The film

remake certainly remains a trace of the original, by dint of its very existence, but it is not an 'open' trace in the same way as ancillary materials directly associated with the original film might be. The location of the marketing materials of the remakes is important too. That the DVDs of the remakes do not feature the trailers as extra features suggests two things. The first is that the trailers are so freely available to view elsewhere – that is, online – that there is not much need to include them on the DVD. The second is that the remakes are not being presented as particularly collectible items on DVD. Although brief 'making of' featurettes appear on the DVDs of the films, there is little other additional content present which would suggest that the films might be aimed at an audience which tends toward completism.

### ***Reviewing the remakes***

Approaching reviews of the remakes has involved some similar difficulties to approaching their marketing. The reviews in this section will almost entirely refer to reviews of the films' theatrical releases. I will go into more detail about the various reasons for an apparent lack of DVD reviews further below. This apparent lack does not entirely limit my analysis, however, as an abundance of theatrical reviews appeared. The relatively recent releases of the films made the collection of these materials somewhat easier than was the case with the original films. This section then will comprise of an analysis of the key discourses that emerge across all the review material I have found, followed by a consideration of the further issues faced when seeking DVD reviews. As with the previous chapter, I have employed a discourse analysis of the reviews following from the work of Barker and Brooks. Through employing their range of discursive features, the terms on which taste is delineated in relation to these films will become apparent. Again, as with the marketing, due to the short release history of the films, there is only one theatrical release and one home release for the films in the UK under analysis here, and therefore a relatively self-contained set of reviews to analyse. Before considering the sorts of discourses at work in the reviews, I will outline some detail regarding the manner in which the films are reviewed, in relation to their placement on the page as well as the attention afforded to the films prior to their release.

### ***Review Placement***

The placement of reviews in newspapers and magazines suggests, in advance of reading the content of the review, what sort of appraisal the publication might be offering. In newspapers, many reviews for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* either appear in an 'also showing' section or it's the last film to be reviewed, in-keeping with the traditional positioning of horror film reviews in the British press.<sup>603</sup> This placement suggests that the film is not seen as a particularly significant release that week, the review seeming to appear as an 'afterthought'. Only one paper truly leads with the film, this being the *Daily Star*. It is also the only paper to feature a promotional offer relating to the film, therefore it is possible that this bore some influence on the prominent placement of the film on the review pages. The film's promotional association with the *Daily Star* suggests a particular audience is being appealed to. The *Daily Star* is a tabloid newspaper which features sensationalist reporting of celebrity gossip, sport, television coverage and very little current affairs or political news. Furthermore, the paper features an image of a topless model in each edition, similar to *The Sun's* 'Page 3', which suggests its primary readership is male, while its emphasis on celebrity gossip suggests that it might particularly target a relatively young male readership too. By extension, then, this is in-line with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre's* '18-34' target demographic as outlined in its production notes.

Newspaper reviews for *Last House on the Left* also tend to appear further down the page, or in sections where it is combined with other films. In some cases the reviews are also very short. *Straw Dogs* is somewhat different, insofar as it appears as the most prominent review in *The Times*, *The Observer* and the *Daily Mail*. This would seem to relate to the position of the original film – and particularly its fraught history with the British press – than with anything particularly inherent in the remake, as I will explore in further detail below. The reviews of the films are often placed in close proximity to reviews of other genre titles released in the same week. For example, in the *Times2* supplement of *The Times*,<sup>604</sup> a full page of film reviews is taken up mostly by a review of *Looking for Eric*, while the bottom third of the page features reviews of *The Hangover* (a comedy), *The Last House on the Left* and *Doghouse* (a horror-comedy). In the *Daily Mail*,<sup>605</sup> *The Hangover* is afforded the most review space on the page, while *Last House on the Left* is grouped with martial arts film *Red*

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<sup>603</sup> Egan, 2007, 25-26 ; Hutchings, 1993, 4-11

<sup>604</sup> Christopher, 2009, 14

<sup>605</sup> Tookey, 2009, 54

*Cliff*. The two films are even linked, with the *Red Cliff* review following the review of *Last House on the Left*, and beginning with the words “just as violent in its way is Red Cliff...”<sup>606</sup>

Tookey’s lead review of *Straw Dogs*<sup>607</sup> is somewhat bizarrely paired with his review of *The Human Centipede 2: Full Sequence*. Narratively the films are far removed, as are their production contexts. This association seems to generically link the two, and this is again emphasised through the reviews themselves. Associations like this underline the *Straw Dogs* remake as a ‘horror remake’, although the narrative itself is not necessarily overtly thought of as a horror film. Throughout his review of *Straw Dogs*, Tookey compares the film to the original, and in doing so paints a negative picture of contemporary culture. The by-line of the review sums his attitude up neatly, “forty years on from the original *Straw Dogs*, this dumbed-down new version is just an excuse for mindless violence,”<sup>608</sup> which suggests, to a degree, that perhaps the violence of the original film was not mindless. Tookey’s review of *The Human Centipede 2*, which directly follows on from the review of *Straw Dogs* in terms of layout, opens thus: “an even more distressing sign of the times is that writer-director Tom Six has followed up his controversial *Human Centipede* movie...”<sup>609</sup> Once again, films are being generically linked by the review placement, as well as being associated by being positioned as negative examples of contemporary trends in popular filmmaking, and the link is made explicit in the tone of the reviews themselves.

The reviews of these films in film magazines are also a few pages into their review sections, however, all of the films are given comparatively lengthy reviews. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*’s release date of October 31<sup>st</sup> somewhat complicates its review placement in these magazines, as the film is older than other releases by the time it appears in monthly publications. Both *Empire* and *Total Film* afford the film its own ‘reviewed next issue’ paragraph in their November issues (so published in October, in advance of the film’s release), prior to a full review the month after. The films are likely given more space in film magazines because of the more specialist nature of the publication. Presumably if a reader is interested enough in film to be reading a film magazine, then they are likely to be interested in a broader range of films than more general readers (such as newspaper

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Tookey, 2011, 64

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 65

readers), but they might also be more interested in remakes generally, if only for their association with previous films. This is notable in the reviews themselves, which often spend quite some time on the position of each film as a remake. The placement or positioning of the reviews contributes not only to their assessment but to an articulation of their generic status as well, as similar types of films are grouped together in these 'afterthought' reviews. By simply not affording much space or time to these films, a presumption can already be made about not only the evaluation of the film therein, but also the film's relative importance as culturally (in)significant.

### *Previewing the remakes*

Magazine 'previews' of both *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Straw Dogs*, ahead of the films' releases, focus on their status as remake or not-a-remake. An interview in *Total Film* with Michael Bay and other crew members emphasises that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is a 're-imagining' rather than a remake, with director of photography Daniel Pearl going so far as to claim he would not have agreed to be involved with the film if it was a remake.<sup>610</sup> This sort of discussion seems to work to assuage any concerns that those who are familiar with the original might have ahead of seeing the film. It also implies that those who are familiar with the original film are normally dubious when approaching a 'remake'. This claim from Pearl is significant in identifying a certain 'authenticity' to the original film because Pearl was the director of photography of the original film as well. His comment might also be seen as an attempt to 'authenticate' the remake, because of his association with the original and his willingness to work on the 'reimagining'. An 'also released' paragraph in *Empire* questions whether the remake is necessary at all, while also stating that they remain optimistic that it will still be a scary film.<sup>611</sup> A feature in *Dark Side* does not take such an optimistic stance, seemingly using the remake as an excuse to go over the previous instalments in the franchise, as well as comparing *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* to *Psycho* and *Night of the Living Dead*, in terms of its longevity in producing spin-offs and the decreasing quality of the already existing sequels.<sup>612</sup> This lack of positive anticipation for the remake might primarily emerge from the nature of *Dark Side* as a publication. While *Empire*

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<sup>610</sup> *Total Film*, 2003, 20

<sup>611</sup> Nov 2003, 73

<sup>612</sup> McDonagh, 2003, 56-59

and *Total Film* are mainstream film magazines, *Dark Side* is a magazine for horror fans, and, particularly for collectors and purists. *Dark Side* first emerged in the early 1990s, and, as outlined by Kate Egan, was a crucial part of the community of horror collectors that centred around the video nasties and other hard to find horror VHS tapes. Notably, *Dark Side* differentiated itself from other horror publications, such as *Fangoria*,<sup>613</sup> therefore by extension other film magazines too. The negative preview of the remake evidences the sense that *Dark Side* is a magazine which positions itself not only as a cultural guardian but also a subcultural guardian, by anticipating that this 'new' horror film will not be as authentic as the original. *Dark Side's* use of an article outlining sequels in this particular franchise as well as others demonstrates the historical knowledge that, generally speaking, as more and more films in a franchise are made, the less likely they are to be worthy of praise. This underlines the mistrust of a forthcoming remake with a clear sense of subcultural capital – this magazine, and by extension its writers and its readers, already knows full well what happens when a franchise is taken too far. This further underlines the publication's inherent suspicion of remakes, in that the default position of a specialist horror magazine, such as *Dark Side*, is to criticise the very existence of the remake. Furthermore, that this occurs outside of a straight-forward 'review' draws special attention to this particular attitude. This also demonstrates the 'need' for Pearl's comment that the film isn't a remake, because of such a distrust of remakes amongst fans of the original film (as exemplified by *Dark Side's* commentary here).

Similar preview pieces exist for *Straw Dogs*, the main focus again being the film's position as a remake. In this instance, the fact that the film is a 'remake' is not called into question, but rather the nature of what is being remade. A piece in a 'horror preview' spread in *Empire* opens with the question "Why remake *Straw Dogs*, Sam Peckinpah's visceral, Cornwall-set follow-up to the *The Wild Bunch*?"<sup>614</sup> The question addresses two things. First, the now inherent assumption that remakes are generally 'redundant' (why remake *Straw Dogs* at all?), which is emphasised in the case of *Straw Dogs* due to the original's increased cultural status and respectability. Second, it figures *Straw Dogs* as a particularly important film by a particularly renowned auteurist figure ('Peckinpah's follow-up to *The Wild Bunch*').

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<sup>613</sup> Egan, 2007, 107

<sup>614</sup> Lurie, 2011, 40

The answer in that particular interview seems to be a matter of authorship too, with Lurie claiming that he “utterly reject[s]”<sup>615</sup> Peckinpah’s ideology that all people are capable of violence. This is reflected in another quote from Lurie used in two preview pieces in *Total Film*. Lurie claims that he is “remaking *Straw Dogs*, not Sam Peckinpah’s *Straw Dogs*.”<sup>616</sup> This again emphasises the strong authorial association between Peckinpah and the original film, and Lurie’s insistence that it is this element, and its association, for Lurie, with the notion that all people are capable of violence, which will be overhauled in his version of the film. As noted in *Total Film*, Lurie is remaking Peckinpah’s *Straw Dogs*, because “he’s not remaking Gordon Williams’ novel either.”<sup>617</sup> Lurie’s statement then, as with the references to a ‘reimagining’ in relation to the remake of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, seems to attempt to distance his film from the preconception that modern remakes simply ‘rehash’<sup>618</sup> the original film, but this also comes across as an attempt to negate Peckinpah’s authorship of the film so that he can present the remake as his own interpretation of the story.

A ‘preview’ piece relating to *Last House on the Left* goes against the grain, insofar as it seems to be comparatively optimistic about the remake. Appearing in *Death Ray*, a sci-fi and genre magazine, the preview appears under the heading ‘must see’, and opines that the remake is “surprisingly hard-edged and stylishly shot”.<sup>619</sup> Although the brief piece states that this is “the remake of Wes Craven’s unsavoury [...] film,”<sup>620</sup> his involvement as producer of the remake is not referenced. It’s unclear who has written the piece, but it comes under a broad heading of ‘The Rim – great stuff on the very edge of our vision...’ and it doesn’t include a star rating. However, the DVD review of the film in a later issue appears in the same section. This may be complicated by the nature of *Death Ray*’s publication as bimonthly rather than monthly, as with most similar magazines of its type. Therefore presumably its June/July issue was published in May, in which case the film had yet to be released and therefore the statements regarding the film are presumably based on a press screening or drawn from other sources. Another publication to give the film some significant

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid.

<sup>616</sup> *Total Film*, 2011, 82 and *Total Film*, 2011, 120

<sup>617</sup> *Total Film*, 2011, 82. Indeed, given the film itself credits both Williams’ novel and Peckinpah and Zelag Goodman’s screenplay, the film openly acknowledges its status as a remake of the film *and* an adaptation of the novel.

<sup>618</sup> A word often used derogatorily by reviewers of remakes.

<sup>619</sup> *Death Ray*, Jun/Jul 2011, 46

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.



attention, prior to its release, is *Gorezone*. The piece opens by stating “Remakes. Whether you love or hate them [...] they’re in demand.”<sup>621</sup> The piece then discusses the original film in relation to Craven and its censorship history before previewing the remake, predominantly through an interview with lead actress Sara Paxton. The agenda is set for the future appraisal of the film, by firmly establishing that the film is a remake of a film the magazine and its readers are very familiar with. The magazine erroneously lists the film’s release date as March 13 (which was the US release date, it was released in the UK on June 12), and the piece ends with the statement that “we’re looking forward to seeing how it turns out”.<sup>622</sup> The comparatively positive attitude towards the *Last House on the Left* remake might stem from the original film’s less well-regarded status, as suggested by the description of the film as ‘unsavoury’ in the *Death Ray* preview, in comparison with *Straw Dogs* or *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. This results in the remaking of *Last House on the Left* seeming to be less ‘redundant’, in theory, because opinion of the original film is, even amongst horror fans, “split down the middle”.<sup>623</sup>

#### *Remake as Genre?*

If preview articles of remakes focus on and foreground these films’ status as remakes, then this continues to be true in reviews proper. Above I have suggested that the placement of reviews implies an over-riding sense of genre in terms of how these films are positioned and thus approached in these reviews. Likewise, the nature of preview articles about the films suggests the same, as previews appear either in horror or genre magazines or in broader features discussing horror films. When genre is explicitly referred to in reviews of these films, a wide variety of terms is used – horror, shocker, nasty, thriller. The labels are very often simply used as adjectives, and not given much thought or elaboration. Rather, it seems that it is the idea of the films as being ‘remakes’ that is of greater interest to reviewers. Notably then, preview and review material for these films explicates on the very, very subtle promotion of the films as ‘remakes’. As outlined previously in this chapter, any reference to these films’ status as remakes in the marketing is, if it exists at all, subtle and wholly reliant upon previous viewer knowledge. The reviews make these subtle inferences

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<sup>621</sup> Cant, 2009, 46

<sup>622</sup> Ibid. 51

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

entirely explicit, signposting the films as remakes to their readers, that is, potential viewers of the films. More often than not, the idea of 'remake' is used pejoratively, thus placing the reviewer – and by extension, the reader – in a position of superiority to the films and those who might enjoy them.

The most overwhelmingly common organising concept across the board in reviews of the remakes is therefore their status or position as 'remake'. More often than not, a review will begin by stating – in variously explicit ways – that the film is a remake. Only seven reviews of the sixty-four that I collected begin by directly addressing the film itself on its own terms *before* remarking upon its position as a remake. The manner in which the films' 'remake' status is identified varies from review to review. The vast majority directly state that the film is a remake, usually combined with a value judgement of it, for example, Angie Errigo in the *Mail on Sunday* begins by stating that "*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is an unnecessary, repulsive but highly commercial remake of Tobe Hooper's 1974 shocker,"<sup>624</sup> while Henry Fitzherbert in the *Sunday Express* begins by simply stating that "*The Last House on the Left* is a redundant remake of Wes Craven's 1972 horror about a girl's parents taking revenge..."<sup>625</sup> Some of these initial statements demonstrate an ingrained negative expectation of remakes in general, thus Fitzherbert states that "There are two bits of good news about the remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* – it is much better than expected and is not as terrifying as the original."<sup>626</sup> Fitzherbert implies that generally, rather than personally, the film was not expected to be good. His second piece of 'good news' is further interesting as, presumably, some would not think of the remake being 'not as terrifying' to be good news. Between the release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left* scores of horror remakes had been released in the UK, and as such the tone of reviews changes from the individual expectation that remaking *Chainsaw* must be a bad thing, to remakes generally being seen as inherently disappointing - as stated in *The Sun*, "another horror remake, another dud."<sup>627</sup> Kim Newman is more specific in expressing this same sentiment: "The only reason this [remake of *Last House on the Left*] exists is that the 1972 original is on a list of horror films that retain name recognition generations on, and the industry – having mined

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<sup>624</sup> Errigo, 2003, 66

<sup>625</sup> Fitzherbert, 2009, 60

<sup>626</sup> Fitzherbert, 2003, 66

<sup>627</sup> Anon, 2009, 51

gold with redos like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes* – needs to tick this one off too.”<sup>628</sup> This sentiment appears in several reviews of the film. Caroline Jowett in the *Daily Express* sees the film as a continuation of “the inexplicable urge to remake Seventies shockers,”<sup>629</sup> while Rosie Fletcher in *Total Film* colourfully describes horror remakes more broadly as facial blemishes, “they mostly target teens and no one asks for them.”<sup>630</sup> James Christopher in *The Times* goes so far as to refer to *Last House on the Left* as “a dismal reminder of just how starved Hollywood studios are for good ideas.”<sup>631</sup> This implies that remaking, as a practise, is symptomatic of a broader creative poverty in Hollywood, even though, of course, Hollywood is not the only industry to remake films. These films’ status as remakes is generally commented on, in this way, before the individual films themselves are assessed.

Significantly, reviews of *Straw Dogs* are somewhat more indirect in the manner in which reviewers engage its position as remake. Reviewers very often begin by describing or discussing the original film entirely in isolation before broaching the remake. Jamie Graham’s review in *Total Film* dedicates a paragraph to concisely summarising the history of the original *Straw Dogs* in the UK before moving on to “Rod Lurie’s remake,”<sup>632</sup> while Jamie Russell’s DVD review begins by describing the original film as “harrowing, classic, controversial”.<sup>633</sup> Kate Muir, writing in *The Times*, summarises the original film via her personal experience of it, stating “I remember watching the original *Straw Dogs* a few years ago on a grainy, much-worn video,”<sup>634</sup> before addressing the remake. Nigel Andrews in the *Financial Times* is briefer in his engagement with the original films, and begins his review with the concise summary of the original film’s cultural reputations, stating that “Sam Peckinpah’s violent 1971 film earned brickbats and bouquets.”<sup>635</sup> The two lengthiest examples of this trend are from Chris Tookey in the *Daily Mail* and Phillip French in *The Observer*. Both Tookey and French take a personal approach to discussing the original film.

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<sup>628</sup> Newman, 2009, 54

<sup>629</sup> Jowett, 2009, 49

<sup>630</sup> Fletcher, 2009, 47

<sup>631</sup> Christopher, 2009, 14

<sup>632</sup> Graham, 2011, 58

<sup>633</sup> Russell, 2012, 128

<sup>634</sup> Muir, 2011, 10

<sup>635</sup> Andrews, 2011, 18

Tookey writes “I remember being shocked by two things”<sup>636</sup> and “I was gripped,”<sup>637</sup> while also discussing a broader response to the film that occurred at the time. French writes a lengthy four paragraphs on the original and his personal context of experiencing the original before passing comment on the remake. French is more detailed than Tookey, as he reminisces about his “main regular writing spot [...] a weekly page of general commentary on the arts for the *New Statesman*.” Such an emphasis on the original film indirectly underlines the status of the film being reviewed as a remake, and emphasises the markedly long shadow these critics see the original as casting over the remake. The personalised accounts of this particular film further emphasise a sense of cultural capital through their positions as critics. They possess capital in the form of knowledge of the film, but, particularly in French’s case, they additionally have capital relating to having ‘been there’ when the film was originally released.

While reviews of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Last House on the Left* are more likely to state, early on in the review, that ‘this is a remake of...’, by the time *Straw Dogs* is released these opening discussions of the original film are not preceded by such a statement, implying that the original film is so well known and has such a marked cultural history in the UK that it has become unnecessary to do so. The three reviews which dedicate most space to discussing the original first are the three which highlight *Straw Dogs* as the lead film of the week. This also may relate to the publications in which they appear. As papers or reviewers who have some history with the press response to the original film, they might be more likely to engage with the particular history preceding the film being remade, and its close association with the press in a UK context. No newspaper review refers explicitly to the press campaign against the film, or the particular publication’s involvement with it. In some ways then, the remake seems to offer some critics a reason (or excuse!) to talk about the original film, which is revealing of the continued significance, in the press, of the original film and the legacy of its reception.

### *The Redundancy of Remakes*

In the section above I have outlined the different ways in which each film’s status as a remake is explicitly and prominently addressed in theatrical release reviews, and, as

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<sup>636</sup> Tookey, 2011, 64

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

evidenced by some of the quotations included in the previous section, the most common way in which each 'remake' is described and approached is as inherently redundant or pointless. Words such as 'redundant', 'pointless', and 'unnecessary' are used again and again in initial assessments of these films. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is described using a variety of words and phrases: "redundant,"<sup>638</sup> "pointless"<sup>639</sup> "beside the point,"<sup>640</sup> "unnecessary"<sup>641</sup> and "hardly necessary."<sup>642</sup> *The Last House on the Left* is described as "redundant,"<sup>643</sup> and "pointless,"<sup>644</sup> while Peter Bradshaw asks, in a statement that seems to point to the original film's less elevated status, "wasn't the original movie enough?"<sup>645</sup> *Straw Dogs* is described as "redundant,"<sup>646</sup> "unnecessary"<sup>647</sup> and "pointless,"<sup>648</sup> while others are more oblique in their dismissal of the film. Bradshaw once more poses a question, asking "what's the point of rebooting *Straw Dogs* [...]?"<sup>649</sup> Jamie Russell neatly suggests that the film "swaps full-bodied Merlot for watered-down Ribena,"<sup>650</sup> pointing to the authenticity of the original in comparison to the remake, and calls the film "a straw remake,"<sup>651</sup> in reference to the saying which inspired the film's title. Likewise Keith Uhlich for *Time Out* states that Lurie "adds nothing new"<sup>652</sup> and describes the experience of watching the film as "being sold derivative goods."<sup>653</sup> Significantly, this review for *Time Out* is taken from *Time Out: New York*, or at least Uhlich writes from that particular edition of the publication. It may be that *Time Out* (London)'s regular reviewers were unable to view the film at that particular time, or, more likely, the existing review from an American edition was simply chosen for print.<sup>654</sup> That a new review was not written for this particular publication seems to further emphasise the critical attitude that the film is somehow pointless, redundant or even inconsequential. The emphasis in these reviews is therefore

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<sup>638</sup> Solomons, 2003, 7

<sup>639</sup> Hunter, 2003, 49; Floyd, 2003, 77

<sup>640</sup> Robey, 2003, 27

<sup>641</sup> Errigo, 2003, 66

<sup>642</sup> Anon., 2003, 7

<sup>643</sup> Fitzherbert, 2009, 60; 'NP', 2009, 159; Frank, 2009, 42

<sup>644</sup> Newman, 2009, 54; Fletcher, 2009, 47; Edwards, 2009, 3

<sup>645</sup> Bradshaw, 2009, 9

<sup>646</sup> Kermode, 2012, 26

<sup>647</sup> Anon., 2011, 9

<sup>648</sup> Bryce, 2012, 34; Rollings, 2011, 60

<sup>649</sup> Bradshaw, 2011, 11

<sup>650</sup> Russell, 2012, 128

<sup>651</sup> Ibid.

<sup>652</sup> Uhlich, 2011, 84

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

<sup>654</sup> *Straw Dogs* was released several months earlier in the USA.

broadly on the unoriginality of the remake, as an example of contemporary mainstream horror and particularly when contrasted with the original film. This is offered as a negative appraisal of the films in review material, however, the marketing material for these films emphasises the films' 'sameness' and genericity as a contemporary horror film, thus in some ways making 'unoriginality' their selling point. There is a difference then between what the marketers presume an audience finds appealing – generic product – and how reviewers appraise that aspect of the films.

What is most interesting about the over-abundant dismissal of these films as unnecessary is that this is sometimes a point made by reviewers who would otherwise recommend the film. For example, Grant Rollings refers to *Straw Dogs* as “a powerful, but pointless, remake.”<sup>655</sup> Elsewhere the film is described as “very impressive”<sup>656</sup> at the beginning of the review (although it is not clear what makes the film impressive, aside from the reviewer believing that the original “wasn't that great in the first place”<sup>657</sup>), but the author then closes by remarking that the film is “an unnecessary remake – most of them are – but not short of subtlety or excitement.”<sup>658</sup> *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is described as an “effective but pointless remake,”<sup>659</sup> although the reviewer does also seem dismissive in his recommendation that the film is “fine if you like this kind of thing,”<sup>660</sup> deeming the film “just another nasty shocker.”<sup>661</sup> This relates to the inherent paradox of the remake, that it must “be the same only better” than the original film.<sup>662</sup> If the film is not considered 'better' than the original, then it is simply efficiently similar, or (subjectively) worse. Notably the sense of redundancy may emerge then from the fact that these remakes are generally considered to be otherwise well and effectively made films, therefore the 'sameness' or 'watered down' nature of their adaptation of the original films becomes the over-riding impression a reviewer is left with. This is in contrast, once again, to the marketing, which seems to challenge the inherency of Leitch's paradox. In these cases, the marketing does not entirely disavow the original films, instead the overwhelming focus is on conforming to the generic

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<sup>655</sup> Rollings, 2011, 60

<sup>656</sup> Anon., 2011, 9

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> Hunter, 2003, 49

<sup>660</sup> Ibid. I will return to this aspect of the review below.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> Leitch, 2002

nature of contemporary mainstream horror, rather than either presenting the film as a remake or hiding its status as remake.

### *Violence and the Audience*

Some attention is drawn in the reviews to the level of violence to be found in these films. More often than not, this is done via a comparison with the original film. For example, Steve O'Brien in *SFX* establishes that "there's virtually no blood or gore"<sup>663</sup> in the original *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, in order to then go on to say that the remake "tries to be what most people feared the original was,"<sup>664</sup> that is to say, bloody and gory. Many reviews of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* refer to the scene in which the hitchhiker shoots herself in the teens' van, and the camera tracks through the gunshot wound in her head and through the rear window of the vehicle. The scene is usually described in colourful detail, and coupled with an evaluation. So, Jonathan Barnes thinks that "it seems too early [in the film] for so flamboyantly Grand Guignol a gambit,"<sup>665</sup> while Alan Frank refers to the same scene as not wasting "any time in plunging five ill-fated teenagers into a torrent of torment."<sup>666</sup> Interestingly, Tookey negatively compares the "repulsive, depressing, demeaning" scene to the original film, for its "gratuitous"<sup>667</sup> content, but also deems the original film to be "tasteless"<sup>668</sup> and "garbage."<sup>669</sup> The review appears to contradict the positive review quote from the *Daily Mail* used on some marketing of the film. Particular scenes of violence are focused on in reviews of *The Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* too, and it is perhaps no surprise that in both these cases it is the rape scene that is most often referred to. Christian Clayton describes the scene in the *Last House on the Left* remake as "extraordinarily horrible [...] and succeeds – of course! – in eliciting our revulsion,"<sup>670</sup> while Peter Bradshaw describes the scene as "very tough to take."<sup>671</sup> Notably these statements do not seem to refer to a particular vulnerable audience who might be harmed by such scenes, indicated by the use of inclusive words such as 'we'. Both of these assessments deem that the films effectively

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<sup>663</sup> O'Brien, 2004, 84

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> Barnes, 2003, 55

<sup>666</sup> Frank, 2003, 40

<sup>667</sup> Tookey, 2003, 53

<sup>668</sup> Ibid.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid.

<sup>670</sup> Clayton, 2009, 43

<sup>671</sup> Bradshaw, 2009, 9

portray violence as horrible. This seems to be a contradiction of the general attitude held in these reviews that the remakes are watered down, redundant version of the original films. In the case of *Straw Dogs*, it is often noted that the remake in fact ‘fixes’ the rape scene, compared to the ambiguous nature of the scene in the original film. So, Kate Muir states that “in the remake, Amy turns her head away in disgust; it’s highly unpleasant to watch,”<sup>672</sup> Bradshaw unequivocally describes the remake as “play[ing] the ambiguity down almost to zero.”<sup>673</sup> For Bradshaw, this is a negative aspect of the film, by rendering such a scene “marginally less offensive,”<sup>674</sup> he wonders “what’s the point of rebooting *Straw Dogs*?”<sup>675</sup> Bradshaw here seems to indicate that ambiguity of the original film, and by extension its apparent offensiveness, and its potential to court controversy, is what makes it distinctive.

A repeated point of reference in reviews of *The Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* is that of torture porn.<sup>676</sup> In relation to *Straw Dogs*, torture porn is often invoked to highlight the ineffective nature of its climactic violent set piece. Grant Rollings questions “violence is now ingrained in cinema [...] so where’s the shock in a remake?”<sup>677</sup> The references to torture porn are also indirect in relation to *Straw Dogs*; Chris Tookey writes that the film’s climax “fails to horrify because scores of ‘home invasion’ films have shown audiences so much outrageously vicious behaviour that one more man defending his home doesn’t amount to much.”<sup>678</sup> Torture porn is referred to differently in relation to *Last House on the Left*, in so far as the film is seen to reflect part of that cycle. Tim Robey describes particular moments of violence as “shameless sops to the torture-porn dollar,”<sup>679</sup> Christian Clayton hopes the film is “the last, convulsive gasp of the ‘torture porn’ subgenre,”<sup>680</sup> while elsewhere the film’s climax is described as a “torture-porn finale.”<sup>681</sup> Interestingly, Kim Newman goes completely against the grain to state that “the abuse and gore are mild compared with the old movie or recent horrors like the *Hostel* films.”<sup>682</sup> Newman’s

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<sup>672</sup> Muir, 2011, 10

<sup>673</sup> Bradshaw, 2011, 11

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid.

<sup>676</sup> *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*’s release pre-dates the emergence of ‘torture porn’ following *Hostel* and *Wolf Creek*, both 2005.

<sup>677</sup> Rollings, 2011, 60

<sup>678</sup> Tookey, 2011, 64

<sup>679</sup> Robey, 2009, 29

<sup>680</sup> Clayton, 2009, 43

<sup>681</sup> NP, 2009, 159

<sup>682</sup> Newman, 2009, 54



specialty, as a reviewer of horror and genre films, is evident here, as he in fact aligns ‘the old movie’ with a film ostensibly inspired by such films, like *Hostel*. Regardless of the specific nature of the comparisons being drawn, that torture porn is referenced in reviews of these films demonstrates their association with a particularly violent and modern cycle of filmmaking.

Many of the references that are made to the films’ violent content are descriptive, albeit at times hyperbolically so. Many reviews seem to adopt a ‘been there, done that’ attitude to the violence on display. Allan Hunter writes that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* “becomes just another nasty shocker.”<sup>683</sup> James Christopher describes *The Last House on the Left* as “an old fashioned slasher”<sup>684</sup> that is “totally indistinguishable from the usual slurry of studio tripe.”<sup>685</sup> David Edwards in *The Mirror* is perhaps the most indifferent to the film, asking “will you be shocked? Outraged? Appalled? No, just bored,”<sup>686</sup> and ends his review describing the film as “predictable, pointless and pathetic. To avoid yawning, keep repeating, ‘it’s only a movie.’”<sup>687</sup> This underscores the sense of redundancy of the films, where violence is used in such a way that it does not challenge the viewer in any particular distinctive manner. His subversion of the original film’s tagline – now we must avoid yawning, rather than fainting – further underlines this assessment. These statements suggest that, for these critics, the particular use of violence in the original films made them distinctive, rather than the idea that the violence was particularly explicit.

Many of the critics refer to the potential audiences of the films in their reviews. Tookey, for example, broadly refers to the audience when he states that “the difference [*Straw Dogs*] reveals in how our culture has changed over the past 40 years is far from encouraging.”<sup>688</sup> Other reviews offer a generalised view of a particular part of or type of audience. Of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Henry Fitzherbert writes “I don’t know why anyone would willingly watch something so unpleasant but it achieves its aim.”<sup>689</sup> Similarly, Hunter finds it

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<sup>683</sup> Hunter, 2003, 49

<sup>684</sup> Christopher, 2009, 14

<sup>685</sup> Ibid.

<sup>686</sup> Edwards, 2009, 3

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

<sup>688</sup> Tookey, 2011, 64

<sup>689</sup> Fitzherbert, 2003, 67

“hard to fathom the entertainment value of so much unpleasant violence”<sup>690</sup> in reference to *The Last House on the Left*. Other reviewers seem to have identified those who would ‘willingly watch’ these films. Alan Frank in the *Daily Star* describes *The Last House on the Left* as “nasty and strictly for horror buffs,”<sup>691</sup> while Matthew Bond writes of *Straw Dogs*: “mainstream audiences won’t warm to the levels of violence, but genre fans cannot fail to find things to admire.”<sup>692</sup> Not only do reviews such as these demonstrate the reviewer distancing themselves from the films, because they are for ‘genre fans’ or ‘horror buffs’, they do not address or acknowledge that genre fans themselves are often highly dubious of remakes, making them in fact more difficult to please. Indeed, the marketing of the remakes – particularly on DVD – seems to have a clearer sense of this, in that they don’t directly or explicitly seek to appeal to ‘horror buffs’. Other critics use a more direct address to their readers, so Hunter writes that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is “fine if you like this kind of thing but not my idea of a grand night out.”<sup>693</sup> Derek Malcolm, after describing the violence in *Last House on the Left* writes “I don’t know whether this will put you off seeing the film or encourage you to rush off and watch it.”<sup>694</sup> These are faintly damning of those that might want to watch, but both reviewers seem to assume that there might be people amongst their readership who would go out and enjoy these films. Malcolm is in fact quite positive about the film, but even so he ends hoping that he can avoid “any more movies like this for a spell,”<sup>695</sup> indicating the film’s ultimate status as generic and formulaic, rather than distinctive in any way. There are only two examples amongst all the reviews of explicit concern about an audience that enjoys these films. Angie Errigo claims “that people will pay just to gag at characters hung on meat hooks is a lot scarier than [The Texas Chainsaw Massacre],”<sup>696</sup> having been incredibly damning of the film itself. The second example comes from Matthew Bond, who believes that “The Last House on the Left is a slasher-thriller so nasty that it makes you worry about the sort of people who will go to see it.”<sup>697</sup> He doesn’t, however, elaborate on why he would worry about this ‘sort of people’, and this might imply that the regular reader – either of his writing or the publication - will or should know why. It

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<sup>690</sup> Hunter, 2009, 49

<sup>691</sup> Frank, 2009, 42

<sup>692</sup> Bond, 2011, 13

<sup>693</sup> Hunter, 2003, 49

<sup>694</sup> Malcolm, 2009, 32

<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

<sup>696</sup> Errigo, 2003, 66

<sup>697</sup> Bond, 2009, 15

might also imply a degree of laziness, a reliance upon an old stereotype of the harmful horror fan even though the overwhelming sense from these reviewers is that the violence is found to be boring.

### *Remakes and taste*

If the very status of these films as remakes is the most broadly prominent discursive framework employed in these reviews, and the attitude toward their violent nature relatively indifferent, then the way in which taste is being constructed in relation to the films is very specific. The issue then of the remake being 'redundant' – either for its generic use of violence or for its uninspired adaptation of the original films – becomes an important issue with regard to the construction of taste. If the remakes are redundant films, then the implication is that only viewers without prior knowledge of such films might enjoy them – that is to say, those without the relevant cultural capital. This reflects back upon the original films as the 'relevant' text, the 'authentic' version of a particular narrative. It will be in the next chapter that I consider whether or not this is in line with how the original films themselves are reviewed.

There is also another way in which taste is constructed or articulated in some of the reviews of these films, particularly the reviews found in specialist publications. The point relates to reviews of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* only, however, this point reflects upon the publications themselves rather than the film. There are three reviews which reference genre news and review website Ain't it Cool News (hereafter AICN). The only two publications which make direct reference to the 'cameo' of Harry Knowles' (founder of AICN) severed head in a scene during *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are *Starburst* and *Sight and Sound*. The fact that this occurs in these two particular publications is interesting as they are very different sorts of specialist film publication. *Starburst* is a science fiction/genre magazine, which includes reviews and features on films as well as for other media, particularly television and literature, while *Sight and Sound* is a film publication that tends towards a preferential focus on auteur and art house cinema. That these two quite different specialist publications both make reference to Knowles' cameo conforms to Joan Hawkins' argument that high- and low-brow culture often functions in the same way - both reviewers for *Starburst* and *Sight and Sound* identify Knowles as a recognisable figure to their presumed

readership. The kind of references made to the cameo are quite different, however. *Sight and Sound* uses the cameo as an example of the film's gross-out humour, albeit "an especially distracting"<sup>698</sup> example; presumably the cameo can only be 'especially distracting' due to Knowles recognisability. The *Starburst* reviewer refers to the cameo as a "huge mistake"<sup>699</sup> and "pandering in-joke."<sup>700</sup> The reviewer relates this weakness back to the original, stating that "Hooper never gave the appalled viewer a chance to dismiss the painful dread [...] as anything but real."<sup>701</sup> A third publication, *SFX* makes reference to AICN in a highly negative way, although not explicitly in relation to Knowles' prosthetic cameo in. The following paragraph closes their review of the film:

There are two real camps in the horror fan community; those that like horror because of its direction and those that just want a procession of severed limbs like an X-rated *Generation Game* conveyer belt. The new *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* falls in the latter category. It's a vile, ugly and cynical film, made by gorehounds for the thick Ain't It Cool crowd, the kind of film fans who use phrases like "this movie kicks ass" whose existence is no doubt causing Pauline Kael many tosses and turns in her grave.<sup>702</sup>

I wanted to provide this excerpt in full in order to fully provide the negative context within which AICN is referenced. There are also various issues to be pulled out from this excerpt. Not only does the reviewer seek to draw boundaries between different 'types' of horror fans ('two real camps') but he also aligns himself, and by association the publication, and even the reader, with a particular 'camp'. The implication is that the reviewer, the publication, and the reader are the opposite of the aspect of the horror community that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* represents and appeals to. So if the negative connotation is that the film and its fans are cynical and 'thick', then presumably the reviewer considers himself, and 'proper' horror fans, to be optimistic and intelligent. There seems to be a degree of national boundary drawing, with the reference to AICN (an American website) and the phrase 'this movie kicks ass' both being addressed negatively. If this is an issue of national pride, it's also generational, as the reviewer then goes on to invoke the name of Pauline Kael – an American critic – as a figure in opposition to the fans he has described. Kael

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<sup>698</sup> Barnes, 2003, 55

<sup>699</sup> Unknown, #304, 66

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid.

<sup>702</sup> O'Brien, 2004, 84

famously compiled several books worth of her film reviews, which then implies that those fans who want conveyer-belt horror, and read the website AICN, are less culturally knowledgeable because they don't have the degree of respect a notable critic like Kael might display for the art of filmmaking. Indeed, invoking Kael's name here seems to be an explicit demonstration of cultural – rather than subcultural – capital, as it invokes Kael's position as an authoritative, even canonised critic, as a means to differentiate the reviewer from the reviewers and writers of a website such as AICN, and indeed its readers. Whatever the distinction, it is particularly interesting that the most explicit and lengthy example of taste definition occurs in a specialist magazine, rather than a newspaper. The reference to AICN may also relate to some further points I raise below regarding the significant changes that have occurred in film writing as internet use has become more and more common. A site like AICN (and in this case AICN may just be symbolic), may have posed quite a threat to niche magazines such as *SFX* and *Starburst* (indeed, *Starburst* temporarily ceased publication in 2009 until its relaunch in 2011). On the other hand it seems unlikely that *Sight and Sound*, a publication with a much broader scope in terms of its content, would face such a threat from a website such as AICN.

### *Conclusion*

As I have already stated in this chapter, collecting both marketing and review materials for the remakes has posed an interesting methodological and analytical difficulty. I have found very little marketing or publicity for the home releases (that is, DVD releases) of any of these films. As I have outlined above, the only advertisements for the DVD release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* do not advertise just that particular title, but several from the distributor's catalogue. I have been incredibly fortunate to be in contact with Universal UK, allowing me to gain insight into the marketing of the home release of *The Last House on the Left* I would not otherwise have gained. The greatest difficulty in terms of my thesis is that I have found *no* marketing materials for the DVD release of *Straw Dogs*. This has resulted in quite an imbalance in the materials I have found - I have print advertisements for the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and TV spots for its screening on Film4, and for *Last House on the Left* I have print advertisements and some detailed information on the DVD publicity from the distributor. The lack of comparable sources for *Straw Dogs* is methodologically questionable, but something I hope to be able to address here. I managed to find very few

DVD reviews of the remakes, which is why I have chosen not to separate the reviews for the different releases in my analysis above. The DVD reviews I have succeeded in collecting have mostly come from more specialist publications such as film magazines. There appears to be two broad reasons for this. The first primarily relates to the release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and follows on from the difficulty, as outlined in the previous chapter, in finding VHS reviews of the original films. It appears that at the time, in 2004, regular reviews of DVDs did not appear in national newspapers. At this point both DVD and VHS were in circulation as rental and retail items. The period between 2003 and 2004 was in fact an important turning point in home entertainment. For the first time more units were sold rather than rented – combining both VHS and DVD sales.<sup>703</sup> That, up until this point, home media was generally rented rather than bought might be a reason that reviews of home media releases were not included in review sections of newspapers. The second reason for a lack of DVD reviews for these films, which relates more to *Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs*, is that by the time reviews of DVDs do regularly appear in newspapers, so many titles are released on a weekly basis that only a select few are reviewed and printed. There thus emerges something of a discrepancy within publications, for example, between the fairly prominent theatrical reviewing of *Straw Dogs* in *The Times*, to the complete lack of a DVD review in the same publication.

Both marketing and reviews of the remakes position the films very broadly as horror. This is achieved through practical aspects of both materials, such as the structure of a trailer or the placement of a film review. The films are also referred to as horror through textual aspects too, such as poster design, or the naming of particular genres or subgenres in reviews. Although the films are broadly ‘horror’, they are also positioned as being the product of the Hollywood machine, and by extension relatively ‘mainstream’, or at least meant for mass consumption. Reviews for the films’ theatrical releases feature in national newspapers as well as specialist magazines, while the use of standard formulas in the trailers implies an appeal to as broad an audience as possible. This also suggests the relatively mainstream – in terms of accessibility – nature of these films.

The major difference between the marketing and the reviewing of the films clearly relates to the films’ statuses as remakes. The marketing for the films make no direct or explicit

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<sup>703</sup> ‘UK Film Council Statistical Yearbook’, 2003-2004, 61

reference to the original films. As previously noted, some iconic reference is made to the original films. The reviews, on the other hand repeatedly and overwhelmingly refer to the films as remakes, and assess them primarily in light of being remakes, rather than necessarily in their own right (except for the notable exception, in some instances, of the *Straw Dogs* remake). The marketing of the films as 'non-remakes' has no bearing on the films being reviewed as remakes. The films are promoted in such a way that it is very clear that these films are violent, in line with their promotion as genre films. The issue of violence is addressed in reviews, but often in either a descriptive or indifferent way. Although all three films are remakes of films well-known for their implied or explicit depiction of violent acts, the discussion and assessment of their position as remakes is more prominent in reviews than their position as 'violent films'.

In the next chapter I will be comparing my analyses of the marketing and reception of the original films and the remakes. It is with this comparison that differences and consistencies can be further analysed and considered, in light of how my aim to consider the marketing and reception of these films contribute to the construction of taste cultures around controversial titles.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Then and Now: Changes and Comparisons

In this chapter I will outline the points of reference and convergence, and differences and distinctions, between the marketing and reviewing of the original films and the remakes. As well as offering a comparative analysis of the findings in chapters three and four, this chapter will outline the ways in which the marketing and reviewing of the remakes interacts with the marketing and reviewing of the original films, and vice versa. The primary aim of the chapter is to respond to the central research questions of the thesis, as posed in chapter two. In the course of answering these questions, I will also be returning to the key informing discourses I identified in chapter one: genre, authorship, censorship, and culture/politics.

Here I will also reconsider the remakes as traces of the original films, in reference to Janet Staiger's work. Staiger outlines the five steps involved, for her, in applying a historical reception studies approach to a particular case study. For Staiger, the case study is not a film text but rather an event, that is to say "a set of interpretations"<sup>704</sup> of a text. In Staiger's own study, 'traces' of the event are "printed prose and images".<sup>705</sup> Staiger does not outline any restrictions on what might be considered a trace of an 'event'. The original films might be thought of as intertexts and paratexts to the remakes; here I will consider the remakes as traces of the originals, as well as considering their own status as events, in Staiger's terms. By considering the remakes themselves as another 'trace' of the original film event, they become part of the reception trajectory of the original 'unsafe' films, rather than being perceived simply or primarily as an entirely separate entity. As I will be outlining in this chapter, the reception of the original films each seems to reach a 'final moment',<sup>706</sup> however, by considering the remakes as traces of the original films, the 'final moment' of a film's reception is once again problematized or challenged.

For Ernest Mathijs, a 'final moment' in a film's reception consolidates its cultural meanings. These meanings may be amended or modified, but the "main consensus is seldom disturbed."<sup>707</sup> In thinking of remakes as traces of the original films not only is the 'final

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<sup>704</sup> Staiger, 2000, 163

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

<sup>706</sup> Mathijs, 2005, 453

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.



moment' of the original films' reception challenged simply by the very existence of a remake, but also through the interplay between the later releases of the original film – that would seem to consolidate its final moment – and the release of the remakes, which frequently occur side-by-side. By considering the remakes in this way, my work also avoids a simplified comparative analysis of both versions of a film, thereby avoiding a primary emphasis on authenticity or adaptation. While approaches to the relationship between original and remake that are comparative are worthwhile and valid, particularly as the discourse of authenticity that they often interrogate is prevalent in critical talk around these films, a historical reception study offers a different perspective on these films and their shifting cultural meanings.

Although the remakes' reception materials relate to distinct films in their own right, considering the remakes, and their marketing and reviewing, as traces of the original films therefore allows for the consideration of them as part of the original film's reception trajectory. This is important when approaching questions of historical and discursive change in relation to popular cinema and its cultural meanings. To compare synchronic analyses of 'the originals' and 'the remakes' would result in an ultimately simplistic account of change between two eras of filmmaking, however, by considering the reception trajectory of *Straw Dogs*, *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, in relation to both original and remake, a more historically nuanced account of discursive change can emerge. In focusing on three particular case studies, I have been able to trace in detail the receptions of two sets of films, original and remake. By choosing appropriate case studies from across the contemporary horror remaking cycle, the work in my thesis makes in-roads to the broader cultural standing of horror remakes in UK film culture. In particular, this approach makes it evident that many of the most prominent changes in promotional and critical discourse in the marketing and reviewing of the remakes can also be seen in the materials associated with the re-releases of the original films on home media formats. Considering the remakes as their own events is also important, however, particularly in identifying and addressing the key informing characteristics of the historical and industrial moment at which they emerge. Using both of these approaches in tandem therefore resists the simplistic correlation of remakes and creative poverty, but rather considers remakes as part of a broader

contemporary mode of filmmaking, marketing and reviewing, and of cultural and commercial meaning making.

That there is chronological over-lap between the re-releases and the remakes suggests that the remakes reflect the industrial practices of their time, rather than straight-forwardly offering 'watered down versions' of the original films. This is in-line with other trends in contemporary horror, such as Mark Bernard's claim that the rise of DVD, and in particular the American 'unrated' DVD, helped popularise the filmmaking of the splat pack, which has been commonly thought of as torture porn.<sup>708</sup> Although comparative textual or ideological analyses of the remakes and the originals might result in the remakes seeming to be less politically or ideologically driven,<sup>709</sup> to leave analysis of these films at that point might result in an overall reductive view of them. David Roche, in his book-length comparative study of horror films and their remakes, hopes to resist his own "personal nostalgia"<sup>710</sup> for horror films from the 1970s when approaching their remakes, but even he ends on an incredibly reductive note. Having analysed the films, he contends that it is with low budget independent filmmaking that contemporary horror may thrive, and that "there remains hope for intelligent and effective horror films [...] there remains hope for creativity."<sup>711</sup> This clearly suggests a certain inherency to the less 'effective' nature of remakes, and it also simplistically suggests that independent horror filmmaking is predominantly 'intelligent' and 'creative'. Adapting the original films in a certain way might result in the films being critiqued in a certain way, however, I would argue that the adaptation process that results in a more 'generic' film is not necessarily symptomatic of 'remaking' but of contemporary Hollywood filmmaking practices in general.

Indeed, by considering the remakes as traces of the original films, the paradox of the remake proposed by Leitch – that the remake is the same, only better, than the original<sup>712</sup> – is considerably problematized. Rather than seeking to be 'better than' the original, the films seem instead, and based on their marketing, to primarily seek to be better in commercial terms than their contemporaries, and the result of that aim is that remakes may relatively

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<sup>708</sup> Bernard, 2014, 6

<sup>709</sup> As suggested by Lowenstein (2010) of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010), for example.

<sup>710</sup> Roche, 2014, 8

<sup>711</sup> Ibid., 298

<sup>712</sup> Leitch, 2002, 44

faithfully adapt the narratives of the original films, but they also can significantly change the tone of the original film, in line with, or in response to, contemporary trends in genre filmmaking. This is highlighted by specifically considering the contemporary trend for horror remaking, and by considering *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) as one of the key films that ushered in this trend. In the years prior to the film's release, mainstream American horror cinema was not particularly gory nor particularly dark in tone. Although the use of gore is apparent in films such as *Final Destination* (2001) or *Ghost Ship* (2002), or the remakes *Thirteen Ghosts* (2001) and *House on Haunted Hill* (1999), the common factor across these films is that they all deal in supernatural horror, and often feature stylised depictions of ghosts and demons. When *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake was released, it therefore stood out from amongst its recent contemporaries, as a dark, violent and ostensibly 'realistic' horror film. By offering something different and invoking the title of a film that did so previously, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* therefore promises to be a superior or at least distinctive film in relation to its contemporaries. That American mainstream horror after 2003 becomes increasingly gory and violent, for a variety of reasons, further suggests the importance of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as a turning point in the development of contemporary horror remaking and contemporary horror filmmaking more broadly in the USA. The manner in which this process reflects back upon the original films and further authenticates them will be outlined below.

### ***Tracing change***

In this section, I will revisit the contexts I outlined in chapter one: genre, authorship, censorship, and culture/politics, which also relate to the discourses I identified in chapter three in my analysis of the reception of the original films: personality, genre, censorship/legacy and audiences. I will again be using these prominent discourses as organising categories for my analysis here. The four broad informing discourses I will outline below are censorship, authorship and personalities, audience and culture, and genre. As will become apparent, the discourse of genre becomes increasingly important. These organising categories emerged as central elements both of the rhetorical moves of the films' marketing and as major discourses in the reviewing of the films. Two of my research questions ask 'in what ways have controversial films been publically rehabilitated in the UK?' and 'does the cultural status and reputation of the original films play a part in the marketing and reception

of the remake?’ – this section will go some way toward offering answers to these questions, as well as taking in the additional consideration of how the remakes might in turn play a part in the marketing and reception of the original films.

### *Censorship*

The most obvious difference between the reception of the original films and the reception of the remakes – the difference that is at the core of my research - is quite simply that the remakes have not been in any way censored or banned. Even so, it has become evident that ‘censorship’ is still an important discourse in relation to the remakes, albeit not in the same way. While censorship is clearly a central concern in the receptions of the original films, particularly upon their releases prior to their bans as well as the releases directly after their subsequent certification, the issue of censorship indirectly relates to the public framing of the remakes. Indeed, it is via references to the originals that censorship remains a prominent discourse in relation to the remakes, particularly in review material. In this section I will therefore highlight the primary changes which have occurred between the receptions of the two sets of films with regard to censorship and related discourses.

A visible change between the releases of the original films and the remakes is the location of the advertising and promotion of the films. Of the original films, only *Straw Dogs* received significant press publicity, with promotional imagery appearing in the film listing pages of various newspapers, as well as in the main newspaper body. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left*, however, were advertised in specialist publications, mainly trade publications, such as *Video Trade Weekly*, and listings magazines, such as *Time Out*. In contrast, advertisements for the remakes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left* are readily found in newspapers and other publications. Newspaper adverts for the DVD release of *Last House on the Left* are also connected to particular supermarkets where the DVD is available to buy, suggesting the film is available to purchase in the most mainstream of retailers.<sup>713</sup> In complete contrast to the original film, no print marketing was traceable for the release of the remake of *Straw Dogs*. Rather than being a reflection of the film’s niche or unsafe status, this appears to reflect the relatively limited release of the film following its financially unsuccessful domestic release a month earlier in the USA. This

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<sup>713</sup> *Sunday Star*, 2009

discrepancy between the release publicity for the original and remake also suggests an increased reliance upon online promotion, which, given the earlier release in the USA, can allow for a relatively lengthy period of visible promotion. Of my case study remakes, this seems to particularly be the case with *Straw Dogs*, presumably due to its position as the most recently released. Online promotion would not have been so useful in the case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, for example, as its release in 2003 pre-dated networks such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter, and horror news and review websites were not yet as prominent as they are today. Although the use of the internet for film promotion has a history which dates back to the 1990s – *The Blair Witch Project* being one of the most notable examples<sup>714</sup> - as social networks became increasingly prevalent, along with the increasingly advanced technology of smart phones and tablets in addition to home computers, marketing of any sort would find an increased presence online. As online promotion can be inherently international, initial promotion of a film's earliest releases might be accessed and consumed by viewers in territories in which the film won't be released until months later. As I have outlined in previous chapters, this complicates the notion of a geographically limited reception study of the kind represented by my research, as does taking online review material into consideration in my study.

This move to more visible promotion of two of my case study remakes, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left* – that is, adaptations of films which were controversial upon their original release but which have since been rehabilitated – can be seen in the marketing of home releases of the original films. Each film has received an 'ultimate edition' home release, which might be seen as signalling each original film's 'final moment' in their reception trajectory. Although there is little evidence of these films being directly advertised in newspapers, these re-releases have been readily promoted in magazines. Once again, the lack of advertisements in newspapers does not necessarily suggest avoidance of controversy, but rather that so many films are now released on DVD that only the most culturally prominent and broadly commercially appealing are likely to be advertised in the national press due to the limitations of page space. These previously restricted films are readily advertised in mainstream arenas. This is true of re-release reviews as well, with the small amount of space dedicated to reviews in a national newspaper requiring a very

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<sup>714</sup> See Telotte, 2008, 263-274

selective review of weekly DVD releases. This therefore resembles the earlier lack of marketing or reviewing for early VHS releases in the national press when the original films were first released on the format, as the new medium was not yet seen as one that was significant enough to merit individual reviews at this point in time. The remakes are all widely reviewed upon their theatrical releases, but again newspaper reviews of their DVDs are far fewer. Specialist publications instead provide the space for such promotion and reviewing, with a very broad variety of films covered, while newspapers tend to review the 'major' releases in a given week. Although advertisements for DVD releases of the original *Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* tend to appear nearer the back of magazines such as *Empire* or *Total Film*, their position alongside advertisements for children's DVDs<sup>715</sup> and other uncontroversial titles strongly suggests the rehabilitation and mainstreaming of these films, as well as contributing to the same process. A central discourse used by those who campaigned in favour of video censorship in the 1980s and 1990s was to keep children safe from 'harm', yet a little over twenty-five years after the introduction of the VRA and one of the most prominent titles originally attacked by the campaign is found to be advertised next to *Thunderbirds*. In considering the remakes as the next trace after these, the accessible, out in the open advertising of these films is therefore perhaps unsurprising. For example, the 2003 special edition DVD release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was released mere months prior to the release of the remake. This DVD release received full-page advertisements in *Empire*, amongst other publications, and the remake's theatrical release was relatively widely advertised in national newspapers. The cultural rehabilitation of the original films appears therefore to result in the comparatively uncomplicated release of the remakes, and the remakes therefore continue that rehabilitative trajectory of the originals.

This change also means that the marketing of the remakes no longer requires such careful attempts to avoid the risk of controversy. The clearest example of this is the marketing campaigns for both versions of *Last House on the Left*. The original film's ultimate edition is the first release to clearly illustrate the front cover with violent imagery from the film. The film's original VHS release was famously plain, with attention being drawn to this in its marketing in order to 'avoid causing offense'. The film's first DVD release also features a plain outer cover, though the DVD cover within is illustrated with a generic image of a

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<sup>715</sup> *Empire*, 2008, 195

house, and a small image of Phyllis. Although Phyllis's face is anguished, there are no visible signs of violence on the cover. A 2009 release of the film by In2Film again features only a house on its cover. The theatrical marketing for the remake returned to this, its poster simply featuring a house, the film's title and its tagline. Following a disappointing box office performance, the same imagery is altered for the film's DVD release, which, amongst other additions, includes in the foreground the image of an injured woman's back, with an undetailed but clear gunshot wound to her shoulder. Although the DVD covers for the ultimate edition of the original film and the DVD release of the remake now feature images of the aftermath of violent acts, their impact is somewhat diminished through their presentation. The colour scheme of the ultimate edition cover is entirely dark red, cream and black. Therefore, the red of Mari's injuries matches the red of her top, Krug's silhouette and most of the text, rather than standing out as 'blood'. Part of her injury is also hidden by the image of Krug which is overlaid onto the image of Mari. Crucially, Krug hides the part of the image of Mari which would depict the violent act taking place, leaving only her wounds visible. The image on the DVD cover for the remake avoids the potential accusation of being too graphic because the colour is desaturated, and any detail is obscured by shadow. Therefore, although neither of these releases features a 'plain' cover, in order to avoid any controversy or potential legal repercussions the covers are still required to abide by the regulatory standards of the Video Packaging Review Committee (VPRC), and therefore reflect conscious image editing accordingly. The VPRC was established in 1987 as something of a hangover from the video nasties controversy, due in part, as Julian Petley notes, to the prominent influence the video and promotional art work for the nasty films had on their negative reception and the subsequent enactment of the VRA.<sup>716</sup> The presentation of these films in line with existing regulations itself contributes to their rehabilitation, as they are now films which – and indeed, must – conform to requirements made of them in order to be publically circulated in the UK.

As outlined previously, the original plain cover for the original *Last House on the Left* was not solely for the purpose of avoiding legal repercussions. The plain VHS cover has also been seen by Kate Egan<sup>717</sup> to be a marketing ploy in order to emphasise the extreme content of

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<sup>716</sup> Petley, 2011, 73

<sup>717</sup> Egan, 2007, 65-68

the film itself. Although no longer as evident in its re-releases, the marketing of a film as 'extreme' in order to appeal to viewers is clearly drawn upon in the marketing of the DVD of the remake. This is achieved through the labelling of the DVD release as an 'extended version – too extreme for cinemas!' As outlined in the previous chapter, this claim is something of a fallacy, given that the BBFC certified both versions of the film, but the distributor held back the longer version for DVD release. This demonstrates the understanding of the commercial power an 'extended version' might have in marketing a DVD release, and the 'too extreme for cinemas' label is demonstrative of marketing ballyhoo, with the DVD cover therefore 'remaking' this marketing technique along with the film. The 'extended edition' is an increasingly common release strategy, particularly since *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.<sup>718</sup> Often, these releases come after 'standard' first releases of particular films. In the case of contemporary horror remakes and contemporary horror films in general, the first and often only DVD release of the film is the 'extended' edition. These releases still play upon the same appeal as films re-released in extended formats, with the promise of more of whatever aspect of the film is particularly relevant and/or appealing. In the case of horror films, like the remake of *Last House on the Left*, this is more than likely to be the violent content of the film, which here is underscored by the 'too extreme for cinemas!' claim. By invoking an implied act of censorship on its theatrical release, the remake is positioned as a 'dangerous' film, via its DVD marketing, in order to attract an audience, without the film having actually been considered unsafe by relevant regulatory bodies. A legacy of the original films' censored past is therefore evident in the marketing of the remakes.

While this is not a new marketing technique – for instance, as Sian Barber has illustrated, horror film producers sometimes seek out harsher certificates in order to imply more extreme content than is actually present in the film concerned<sup>719</sup> – the particular way in which it manifests in the case of the marketing for the remake of *Last House on the Left* recalls a certain 'type' of dangerous film, namely the video nasties. It is also important to bear in mind that, as an American film, the 'extended' release of *Last House on the Left* reflects the American 'rated' and 'unrated' release system, whereby an MPAA-rated version

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<sup>718</sup> Gray, 2010, 83

<sup>719</sup> Barber, 2009, 358



of the film is released in cinemas while both the rated and unrated versions are available on DVD. Therefore, while such a technique reflects that process, the decision to release the 'rated' version of the film in cinemas despite the American-'unrated' version being certified by the BBFC, and using the 'extended edition' for the DVD release, suggests intentional use of the marketing discourse of invoking associations with censorship to sell the film on home formats. The American system of release therefore impacts upon the British context, in that two versions of the film exist, however the particular manner in which the DVD version is marketed – not just an 'extended cut' but 'too extreme for cinemas' – recalls the ballyhoo of exploitation cinema, and its employment in the video nasties era, to market such titles as the original *Last House on the Left*.

The discourses of censorship that circulated around the original films therefore continue to do so around the remakes, albeit in a very different way. Rather than serving to foreground urgent and/or vitriolic questions about the broader implications of the content of the films themselves, such discourses are now used to either promote or to disparage the remakes, with little reference to any broader social or legal impact these discourses might have. While the marketing - in cases such as the *Last House on the Left* remake - recalls such censorship as a means to draw in an audience, the films themselves do not court the controversy or the risk of censorship that the original films did. This is reflected in the reviews of the remakes, wherein critics, in most cases, unfavourably deem the remakes bland rather than dangerous. This suggests the productiveness of a comparative approach to the remakes that compares them to the originals in terms of their potential for controversy, with the controversy associated with the original films allowing for a 'safe' way of appealing to an association with censorship in some of the marketing for the remakes. At the same time, reviews of re-releases of the original films increasingly frame the films as authentic and challenging works, rather than dangerous or unsafe films, through disavowals of the original censorship decisions, negative comparisons with the remakes, and alignment of the films with social contexts and reappraisals of their formal or artistic qualities.

#### *Audiences and culture*

A significant change in the discourses that circulate around the remakes is that they are not often linked, in reviews and marketing, to a broader social or political context. The only

relative equivalent is when the films are aligned with the broader subgenre of torture porn, which has been consistently related to the broader cultural landscape, as I have outlined in previous chapters. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake predates the emergence of the torture porn cycle, though *Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* have been directly linked by reviewers to this broader cycle. Torture porn has been critically reviled for its extremely violent content, but it has also been analysed by academics in terms of reflecting a post-9/11 USA, particularly with regard to the war on terror. Just as references to broader socio-political contexts have all but disappeared, in reviews of the remake films references to an imagined, potentially dangerous audience are also no longer prominent. I've identified only two explicit references to a potentially dangerous audience across reviews of these films, with even the strongest – “[the film] is so nasty that it makes you worry about the sort of people who will go to see it”<sup>720</sup> – seeking no further action against the film or suggesting protection of its potential viewers in a way that suggests any potential danger. Although some of the old rhetoric is drawn upon here, the level of anger evident in the initial reception of the original films is no longer evident in comments like this, particularly in terms of calls for films to be banned or of any accusations of ‘dereliction of duty’ that these films have been certified.

If there is a connection made between these films and a broader cultural context, I would argue that it is no longer political but industrial. The remakes are not considered, in reviews, as reflections of a social or political framework, but rather they are “a dismal reminder of just how starved Hollywood studios are for good ideas.”<sup>721</sup> Of course, many of the critical accounts of the original films which relate them to the socio-political climates in which they were made occur after their original releases, particularly when the films are re-assessed upon re-release after being certified. This discourse is evidence of one of the most prominent ways in which the films have been rehabilitated publically, both in a journalistic context and in an academic context. That torture porn has also been related to broader cultural issues suggests an attempt to take that cycle seriously in a similar manner. The lack, therefore, of the same moves in relation to horror remakes might seem to suggest that they do not bear any relation to broader social contexts, or, that the way in which they have

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<sup>720</sup> Bond, 2009, 15

<sup>721</sup> Christopher, 2009, 14

been criticised is different. Rather than considered morally reprehensible in the way that torture porn has been, remakes are seen to signify creative poverty. Therefore, to take remakes seriously, or even to go some way to rehabilitate them, might instead require the same industrial approach, rather than a consideration of the film in relation to social contexts.

Because the original films are now seen as reflecting or taking inspiration from the political and social climate in which they were made and initially received (particularly in the case of *Straw Dogs*), the absence of these discourses in critical considerations of the remakes – either as continuations or modernisations of these films – is more evident. This is in line with Adam Lowenstein’s claim that the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* remake, and other remakes like it, lack the sense of “cultural and political urgency”<sup>722</sup> that can be found in the originals, and David Roche’s claim that remakes “make a fairly superficial and decorative use of contextual events” and “metaphorical associations do not necessarily grow out of the premise or the narrative, but are sometimes grafted on to the film.”<sup>723</sup> This is perhaps at its most blatant in relation to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, as it retains the period setting of the original film. While the original film is often characterised as reflecting the conflict in Vietnam with its depiction of senseless violence, the remake is not associated with this same context, despite being set in the 1970s. Notably, the film’s period setting is rarely commented upon by reviewers, suggesting the setting is, indeed, seen as a superficial element at best. Significantly, in reviews of the remakes, often the only references to broader cultural influences are in relation to the original films. This is particularly true in the case of *Straw Dogs*, where reviews of the remake often begin by re-visiting the controversy which surrounded the original film in the UK, as well as, to a lesser extent, the socio-political climates in which the film was made.<sup>724</sup> This does not then extend to identifying similar cultural influences on the remake under review. In contrast to the more industrial consideration of the remakes, whereby the films are thought of as part of a Hollywood machine, the harkening back to the cultural context of the original films therefore further authenticates these forebears. They are ‘of their time’ and related to their contexts, while,

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<sup>722</sup> Lowenstein, 2010, 18

<sup>723</sup> Roche, 2014, 35

<sup>724</sup> See, for example, Philip French’s review of the remake of *Straw Dogs*, which discusses the original at length, including relating his description that America at the time “was a time of great violence and [...] the cinema became part of this experience.” (French, 2011)

the remakes are simply part of a production line of films which are “fine if you like this kind of thing.”<sup>725</sup> When the original films were first released many reviewers dismissed them as yet another example of a genre they disliked, however, very few referred to them in such explicitly industrial terms as is the case with the reception of the remakes. Indeed, Newman’s review of the original *Last House on the Left* identifies and considers it as a progenitor of the more industrialised, churned out horror of the slasher subgenre.<sup>726</sup> The contrast, therefore, between these older, more socially-aware films and the commercialised remakes is a relatively shorthanded way of culturally distinguishing between original film and remake in reviews.

### *Personalities and Authorship*

The original films that comprise my case studies have come to be strongly associated with auteur figures, namely their directors, in terms of both a more traditional understanding of auteurism and a more genre-bound conception of the ‘horror auteur’. Real-life individuals were often referred to in reviews as well; however, this becomes far less evident in the re-releases of the original films, and almost entirely disappears in the reception of the remakes.

While the original films have been, at various points in their reception histories, marketed heavily through reference to their directors and producers, this is not as evident in the case of the remakes. The figure who receives the most attention in relation to the remakes, in both marketing and reviews, is Michael Bay, as producer of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Of all the trailers for the remakes, the trailer for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is the only one to feature the name of any individual associated with the production of the film. The promotion of the remakes is very reliant instead on title recognition, rather than offering any of the films as particularly auteurist or star-driven. This is particularly evident when contrasting both versions of *Straw Dogs*, as the original not only has a strong auteurist association, but is also, of the originals and the remakes, the only film to place any emphasis on the film’s actors. The original film’s marketing features a strong emphasis on the figure of Sam Peckinpah. Prior to *Straw Dogs*, Peckinpah already had an established reputation for making violent films, particularly westerns. His name is emphasised through bold text in the

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<sup>725</sup> Christopher, 2009, 14 - I will return to this aspect of the review below.

<sup>726</sup> Newman, 1982, 178

trailer for the original *Straw Dogs*, as well as on the UK quad poster. The names of directors and producers are also evident in text used in marketing materials for *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, but they are not as emphasised as in the case of *Straw Dogs*. *Straw Dogs* also strongly emphasises its two main stars, Dustin Hoffman and Susan George, while neither *Last House on the Left* or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* have any stars to promote. Not only are the names of Hoffman and George emphasised simply by appearing on the poster and the trailer, but they are visually emphasised too. Images of their characters comprise the poster as well as print advertisements. The trailer emphasises Hoffman's role as David in the film, notably through the first appearance of him in the trailer in a static medium shot of his face with his name written on the screen. George's character appears on screen several times before her name is credited. George's name is further emphasised on the posters, the text appearing in red and framed so that it stands out from the other credits (though after the names of Peckinpah and Hoffman, which appear in larger text). Both Hoffman and George were established stars at the time of *Straw Dogs*, and their presence in the film is therefore emphasised as a promotional discourse. The reviews emphasise these same three personalities, with George emerging as increasingly significant in review discourse as the film receives home media releases, due to her British nationality and her involvement in the key scene of sexual violence which would become the main focus of much subsequent debate around the film.

The remake of *Straw Dogs* is the only other film to name its stars. Though their names do not appear in the trailer, they do appear on the poster and on the DVD cover for the film. The use of their faces is perhaps more important, particularly when noting the change from the theatrical poster to the DVD cover. The DVD cover features the faces of all three characters, taking up around a third of the cover image, while their names appear in a relatively small font above. All the actors are young and attractive, and in the case of Marsden and Skarsgard, relatively interchangeable. With no knowledge of the plot, there is no clear distinction between the two men as 'protagonist' and 'antagonist', while Bosworth's face is positioned between them, suggesting that she may be the protagonist. This is a notable contrast to the poster for the original film. Hoffman is here positioned visually as a 'hero' figure, and there is no emphasis on the character of Charlie Venner (Skarsgard in the remake), which reflects the star dynamic of the original. Bosworth is

notably absent from the poster of the remake, which mimicked the American marketing for the original, whereas she is central to the DVD cover. This suggests that invoking the marketing imagery of the original film did not lead to a successful box office result, and that emphasising the attractive, but generic, lead actors was seen to potentially be more appealing to an audience who might buy the DVD. This therefore suggests that that DVD was primarily being targeted at those audiences not familiar with the original film.

The common individuals highlighted across the marketing of the three original films are the directors and producers. The names of Sam Peckinpah, Wes Craven, Sean S. Cunningham and Tobe Hooper frequently appear on DVD covers, and in marketing materials for the films. While some names – Peckinpah, Cunningham – have frequently appeared throughout the relevant film’s release history, others – Craven, Hooper – have emerged in re-releases, as their relative fame has increased. This seems to suggest that the emphasis on authorial individuals has been used increasingly through these films’ histories as an authenticating discourse. Often, this authorial claim is pitched in a way that suggests that the film belongs to the individual, eg. ‘Sam Peckinpah’s *Straw Dogs*’, ‘Tobe Hooper’s original uncut...’ or their involvement is stated outright: ‘written and directed by Wes Craven’. This remains the case through most home re-releases of the films, as well as being evident in reviews of the films as time went on. To use Hooper as an example, his name did appear in reviews of the film’s original release, but it was not emphasised in its marketing. By emphasising his authorial status, the reviews then impact upon the way in which the film is marketed via Hooper’s name in subsequent releases. The sense that a film ‘belongs’ to a particular individual is especially evident in the case of Peckinpah, in that he is often figured as personally responsible for the unsafe content of his film, because “if violence is your game then Sam Peckinpah is your man.”<sup>727</sup> This discourse is maintained by Rod Lurie when he distances his own adaptation of *Straw Dogs* from Peckinpah’s by claiming he “utterly reject[s]”<sup>728</sup> Peckinpah’s violent outlook.

The only remake to make reference to any director or producer in its marketing is *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Reference to Michael Bay is made in the film’s trailer alone, and his name does not appear in any print advertisements nor DVD covers. Instead, as previously

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<sup>727</sup> Christie, 1971

<sup>728</sup> Lurie, 2011, 40

outlined, the titles of other films become more important. As far as mapping the trajectory of this change, the DVD covers for the release of *Last House on the Left*, original and remake, provide succinct illustration. The original VHS release was advertised with Sean S. Cunningham's name, who was at the time of its release the more well-known name compared to Craven, as I've previously outlined. The film's first two DVD releases from Anchor Bay in 2003 and 2006 both feature the words 'written and directed by Wes Craven' on their covers. The 2008 'ultimate edition' does not feature any individual's name on the cover. The 2009 'vanilla' release of the film from In2Film, then features the following: "From Wes Craven, creator of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and Sean Cunningham, creator of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*." The remake was also released in 2009, and its DVD cover features the following: 'From the creators of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and *The Hills Have Eyes*.' There is therefore no longer, if this is taken as the most recent 'trace' in the reception trajectory of the original film, any reference to any individuals on the DVD front cover. The titles of the films referred to are now more recognisable and more likely to help promote the film, particularly to a general audience, than the names of the directors or producers. This is most evident in the use of *The Hills Have Eyes* as a representative Wes Craven film, as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* had yet to be remade. Therefore, the alignment of *Last House on the Left* is in fact to 'other recent horror remakes' rather than the originals. Even so, the back cover states that 'masters of horror Wes Craven and Sean Cunningham revisit their landmark film', though they act solely as producers for the film. The use of the word 'revisit' is particularly interesting, as it avoids directly labelling the film a remake or even a 'reboot', but rather it suggests that these original *auteurs* can 'visit' their film once again because of the ownership they can claim over it. The use of film titles only on the front cover of the DVD, that is, the outward facing cover which can be seen more immediately as 'publicity', suggests that the names themselves of these 'horror masters' are no longer the most useful way to attract a viewer, at least in terms of the remake. The apparent move from the discourse of authorship and even of stars to that of film titles and interchangeable actors suggests a generalised, indeed generic, promotional rhetoric in relation to the remakes. Although there seems to be this shift away from authorship as a useful marketing discourse, that the *auteurs* associated with the originals are still the names recalled in the marketing, and in the reviewing, of the remakes suggests that there are no heirs apparent to these 'horror masters', or at least not in relation to the remakes.

The reliance upon title-recognition alone is evident in reviews of the remakes, sometimes directly – Kim Newman claims of the *Last House on the Left* remake that “The only reason this exists is that the 1972 original is on a list of horror films that retain name recognition generations on, and the industry [...] needs to tick this one off too”<sup>729</sup> – but also in their emphasis upon the redundancy of remaking these films. The sense of redundancy partially suggests that no equivalent authorial figure has been identified in association with the remake. Therefore while Craven “forced audiences to reassess their attitudes to violence,”<sup>730</sup> Illiadis is merely “competent” and “impersonal,”<sup>731</sup> “dump[s]” elements of the original that are seen as positive and as “Craven’s.”<sup>732</sup> Newman’s suggestion that the industry merely “needs to tick off”<sup>733</sup> recognisable titles from a list implies a workmanlike, industrial approach to filmmaking. The majority of recent American remakes that have changed the title of the original film are remakes of non-English language films, however, these are often the same as the English-language titles of the original films, such as *The Ring*, *Dark Water* or *One Missed Call*. Examples of remakes such as *Black Christmas* and *Prom Night*, which are remakes in title and concept alone, demonstrate more than any others the importance of title recognition. Even if the title does not recall the original film, it might recall a broader sense of genre which also serves to promote the film in a particular way. The film reviewer, however, makes the linkages to the earlier film explicit in review material, while much of the marketing avoids such direct reference. This becomes a means to demonstrate cultural, or subcultural, capital, and also as a result suggests the rehabilitation of the former films. They are now invoked as important cultural milestones from the past as a means to critically – negatively – assess the remakes.

The emphasis in remake marketing on the titles of these films, rather than any particular individual involved with either the original or remake’s production, suggests the intentional placing of the film being advertised alongside other films of its genre – in this case the contemporary horror film. This is not the only way in which the marketing of the remakes reflects this. The marketing of the original films also reflected particular genres – horror, exploitation, thriller – however it becomes increasingly evident, through the original film’s

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<sup>729</sup> Newman, 2009, 54

<sup>730</sup> Ibid.

<sup>731</sup> Fletcher, 2009, 47

<sup>732</sup> Edwards, 2009, 3

<sup>733</sup> Newman, 2009, 54



re-releases to the marketing of the remakes, that the sense of 'genre' becomes increasingly 'generic'. Some print advertisements for DVD releases of the original films often feature computer generated imagery representative of an aspect of the film, such as a pair of broken spectacles, a chainsaw, a shadowy house. Although the 'ultimate' releases of both *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left* feature still images from the films themselves as part of their DVD cover designs, all other home releases of the films feature either computer generated imagery or stock images not taken from the specific films in question. This, however, isn't necessarily a contemporary phenomenon, as it reflects the need, since 1987, for all home releases in the UK to comply with the VPRC's guidelines regarding 'decency'.

Home releases of the original *Straw Dogs* reverse the trend seen with *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left*. Its first DVD release features several images taken from the film itself, its second release simply features the famous American poster image of David wearing broken spectacles, while the third and 'ultimate' DVD release features simply a computer generated image of broken glasses against a black background. This certainly suggests that broken glasses have become an iconographic representation of *Straw Dogs*, one which derives from its original US marketing rather than the UK marketing, and therefore distinguishing this process from the reviews of this remake, with many critics focusing on the specifically British reception of the original. Of my case studies, *Straw Dogs* is the latest to be remade, in 2011, almost a decade after the original was certified uncut and released on DVD. *Straw Dogs* is also the least obvious 'horror film' of my case studies, and yet the remake is very much positioned, through its marketing, as being part of the contemporary horror remake cycle. The cover of the ultimate edition of the original *Straw Dogs* is strikingly similar in its design to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre's* first home release: black background, iconic computer-generated image, and red text. This suggests that the ultimate edition here plays up the 'horror' aspect of its reputation, previous reception, and its forthcoming status as 'remade', in order to appeal to a wide audience. As I explore in greater depth below, re-releases of the original films often indirectly reference the marketing of the remakes in order to promote themselves, while in the same instance distinguishing themselves as 'authentic'. This technique is essentially the reverse of, as I outlined previously, the recollection of the controversy associated with the original film in

the marketing of the DVD release of the *Last House on the Left* remake. Reviews of the re-releases also increasingly approach the case study films as a unified group of classic or notorious horror films, which is further reflected in reviews of the remakes. The most obvious example of this is the pairing together of the ultimate edition releases of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left* for review in the magazine *Total Film*, wherein both are positioned as authentic horror experiences, because their auteurs show us “truths so painful, so ugly, people don’t like to be shown them.”<sup>734</sup>

### *Genre*

The central change which has occurred in the reception trajectory of these films clearly relates to genre, which is reflected in the changes to other discourses that circulate around the films. A cycle becomes apparent: the original films were controversial because of the way in which they stood out, for critics and cultural commentators, from a particular notion of genre or the generic, and their controversy in the UK ensured that they became memorable films. They have each been remade because of their memorable status, but, in being remade, they are now framed and received as far more generic than the originals ever were. While it would take a whole other thesis to argue this in relation to the content of the remake films themselves, the promotional and review discourses make this evident. The marketing of the remakes particularly emphasises their generic nature, in such a way as to align these films with a genre they might not otherwise textually conform to.

Although since rehabilitated to a degree, the original films remain memorable and prominent examples of filmmaking of a particular era partly due to their initial controversies and the *need* for subsequent rehabilitation. Although the process of rehabilitation renders the films ‘safer’ than upon their original releases, the very need for reappraisal requires that the films’ previously ‘unsafe’ status is referred to. Therefore despite significant rehabilitation of the films away from their previous controversies, that controversial status is inherent to their current reception as well. That new incarnations of these previously unsafe films have not courted the same controversy suggests that an emphasis on generic conformity is an effective technique to avoid a similar predicament to the one faced by the original films. Industrial and cultural shifts also contribute to this, including changes in

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<sup>734</sup> Craven quoted in Fletcher, 2008, 143

censorship guidelines and film reviewing practices. At the basic level of title alone, before taking into account other references to the earlier films, the remakes are able to recollect the prominence of the originals, as well as the particular nature and character of that prominence, in order to promote themselves in the context of the contemporary horror film, within which they are primarily situated through their marketing. This recollection is heavily reinforced by the reviews of the films. Even when negatively reviewing the remakes, the references to the original films indirectly recall their status as formerly unsafe, which by simple proximity suggests that this is seen as a pertinent form of assessment when reviewing the remake films.

Notably, direct references to the original films in the marketing of the remakes are few and far between, which suggests that detailed or faithful reproduction of the original films is not necessarily an effective promotional emphasis for the remakes. This is one point of commonality between the marketing and reviewing of the remakes, as reviews rarely assess the remakes in terms of their faithfulness to the original films. Subtle references in trailers, for instance lines of dialogue such as *Straw Dogs*' "I will not allow violence against this house," or the camera-flash sound effect of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, are subtle enough to appeal to a viewer very familiar with the original film, without being disruptive to a viewer unfamiliar with the originals.

The best evidence for the commercially ineffectual nature of direct reference to the originals in the marketing of the remakes might be found in the change between theatrical poster and home release artwork for the *Straw Dogs* remake. Of my three remake case studies, the change between the theatrical poster and the DVD cover for *Straw Dogs* is the most drastic. The DVD cover features no reference back to the original film nor its marketing, and instead offers a 'floating heads' design. Popularly, this sort of design has been noted as being a modern cliché of film posters in general.<sup>735</sup> Many reviews for the *Straw Dogs* remake pay extensive attention to the original film, however, there are very few reviews of the film upon its DVD release. Given the remake's relatively limited UK theatrical release, the prominence of the original film presumably contributed to the extent of its theatrical release coverage. Even so, the sheer amount of material for the original *Straw*

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<sup>735</sup> A sketch on the comedy website Funny or Die parodies this notion, in which a man is interviewed to discuss the process of being the designer of 'floating heads' movie posters. (Perez, 2008)

*Dogs* in comparison to its remake is noteworthy. There is much more written about the original due to the controversy it caused and the very specific nature of the controversy which emerged from the actions of the film critics themselves. There is also much more marketing material readily available from the time of the original film's release, however, this is in print only. As I have previously outlined, it is possible that a great deal more of the remake's marketing and promotion was to be found online, which is much more difficult to trace retrospectively. The difference in the amount of material for each film does suggest, however, that the generic nature of the remake provoked less 'talk' about the film in mainstream spheres and that conversely the association of Peckinpah with the original generated more talk in relation to that film.

### ***Owning controversy: authorship, authenticity and censorship***

The various discourses which circulate around the films often interact, and this is most evident in the establishment of a sense of authenticity in relation to authorship or censorship, or indeed to both. The word 'original' becomes an important marker of authenticity through the course of the original films' reception trajectories. Advertisements for the *Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs* re-releases refer to the films as the 'originals', and advertisements for an even earlier *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* home release uses a review quote which favourably distinguishes the original film from the remake, describing the film as "astonishingly stylish and well put together. The remake has none of these sensibilities."<sup>736</sup> In order to approach these materials truly diachronically, it's crucial to bear in mind the overlap between the rise of the contemporary horror remake and some home releases of the original films. Therefore references to the remakes can also be found in the discourses that circulate around these releases of the original films, and this highlights the importance of not approaching the promotion and reception of the remakes simplistically by only considering how the remakes might feed on the status of the originals, and not also the other way round.

Before embarking on my research, I identified *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre's* release in 2003 as a turning point in the contemporary remaking of horror films. Although others have

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<sup>736</sup> Empire, 2003, 47

identified *Psycho*, *The House on Haunted Hill*, and *The Haunting* as key turning points,<sup>737</sup> the release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* not only seems to pinpoint the moment that a concentration of horror remakes begin to be produced and released,<sup>738</sup> but it set a stylistic precedent that many further contemporary remakes have conformed to, both textually and, to a degree, in their marketing.<sup>739</sup> Of my three case studies, the original *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* has had by far the most DVD releases: *Straw Dogs* has only three, *Last House on the Left* has four, while *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* has six separate DVD releases. Two of these are 'vanilla' discs with no extra features, both of which were released after the remake. DVD releases of the film have always featured the words 'Tobe Hooper's original uncut' on their cover, except for, notably, the two most recent releases from 2008 and 2009. These releases are the 'seriously ultimate edition' release and one of the 'vanilla' releases. The 'tagline' has now changed to simply 'Tobe Hooper's original classic'. The omission of the word 'uncut' significantly changes the nature of the authenticity being promoted. While previously the emphasis was on the importance of the fact that the film was no longer being censored, the omission of the word 'uncut' now relates the 'originality' of the film in many respects to its status as having been remade, which contributes to the sense of a lack of controversy surrounding these remakes. This is underlined by comparing the quotes used on the covers of the two 'vanilla' releases of the film, in 2006 and 2009. The 2006 release has a quote from the *Daily Mail*: "If ever a film should be banned this is it,"<sup>740</sup> which emphasises the discourse of censorship, while the quote on the 2009 release, from *Empire*, states: "The most purely horrifying horror movie ever made," which emphasises originality and effectiveness as a horror film. This underscores an important element of what makes horror appealing to its audience, which is highlighted by Peter Hutchings's response to Robin Wood's assessment of the reception of horror films.<sup>741</sup> The 2006 release seems to coincide with the theatrical release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning*, a prequel to the remake, and the overall design of the release is similar to

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<sup>737</sup> Heffernan, 61-66, 2014

<sup>738</sup> See *Introduction* in this thesis for discussion of *The Ring* (2002) in relation to this.

<sup>739</sup> Although I don't have space to explore the matter further here, it could well be argued that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (along with *The Ring* a year previous) sets the precedent for the tone and style of contemporary American horror filmmaking for at least the five years or so that followed. (It might also be argued that it acts as a precursor to the torture porn cycle that seems to be dominate American horror cinema until the rise of found footage and supernatural horror, as exemplified by *Paranormal Activity*.)

<sup>740</sup> A quote from Margaret Hinxman in 1976

<sup>741</sup> Hutchings, 2004, 82-83

previous home releases; while the main background colour is red, rather than black, the same computer generated chainsaw image is used. The addition of the *Daily Mail* quote here emphasises the appeal of it being 'Tobe Hooper's *uncut* original' (my emphasis). Although the quote suggests the film is deserving of a ban, the DVD is offering the film uncut regardless. The cover of the 2009 release is very plain, featuring a 'stone' background which is manipulated to look dark and bloodied, with the film's title in large bold letters. The style is distinct from the other DVD releases of the film, and if anything is more aligned with the style of the remake's washed out colour, both in its promotional artwork and in the film's cinematography. The review quote used now emphasises the film's position as 'the most pure', which underlines a sense of authenticity, while the 'original classic' stamp further reinforces the promotion of the film as an authentic work within the horror genre.<sup>742</sup>

Comparing the DVD covers of different releases of the original films allows for discursive shifts like this to become evident, as well as their potential relation to adjacent remake releases. By looking at the DVD cover for another of the original films, it becomes evident that a similar technique is being used. The 2009 DVD release of *Last House on the Left* twice emphasises that this is the 'original' film. Firstly, in wording across the top of the cover: 'the original vision of terrifying revenge,' where the word 'original' is significantly larger than the others, and secondly in a 'blood splatter' design: 'uncut version of the original 1970s classic'.<sup>743</sup> Previous DVD releases have only featured the word 'uncut' or 'previously banned', therefore placing emphasis on the film's status as formerly 'unsafe'. On the 2009 release, however, the film is an uncut version of an 'original', the use of the word twice again underlining the film's position as authentic. Use of the word 'classic' further underlines the authentic and canonical nature of the film within the horror genre. Again, the 2009 release of this particular DVD version is significant, being released the same week as the remake was released in cinemas. The design of the DVD somewhat reflects the poster of the remake: a lone, shadowy house, beneath a looming title.

The interplay between original and remake becomes especially interesting when comparing the 2009 original DVD cover to the DVD cover of the remake. As well as the striking similarity between the design of the house and font used for the title, there are two further

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<sup>742</sup> See fig. 27, appendix.

<sup>743</sup> See fig. 28, appendix.

graphic elements which occur on both covers. As discussed previously, the ‘from the creators of...’ text appears on both, in subtly different ways. The other element is the ‘blood splatter’ emphasising the DVD release as either the ‘uncut version of the original’ or ‘extended version too extreme for cinemas’. Though emphasising different aspects of the film (‘authentic original’ versus ‘extreme horror’), both of these elements promote the film on the DVD as an authentic ‘version’ of the particular film. Marketing techniques are employed and function in a similar way here, then, but, in the case of the original, this is used in order to distinguish the film from other films, while the technique is used in relation to the remake to distinguish it only from itself (its theatrical version). Although the marketing of the original in this 2009 home release might seem to be disavowing the remake, it is important not to overlook the similarity of the main cover design – the house, the font – to the theatrical poster for the remake.

There is an indication here then that the distributors of the original film are hijacking the publicity of the remake in order to publicise their own DVD release, if only subtly. The same can be seen in an advertisement for the anniversary DVD edition of the original *Straw Dogs*. The advertisement uses a very similar tagline to the remake, “Every man has a breaking point,”<sup>744</sup> which also appears on the DVD cover itself. The advertisement also states that “Sam Peckinpah’s fully restored classic is the authentic *Straw Dogs*.” Again, this promotes the film as ‘authentic’ and ‘classic’, as well as being ‘fully restored’ rather than ‘uncut’, indirectly distinguishing it from the remake. This also serves to highlight the collectability of the film release, with the film transfer offering a ‘restoration’ of the original. However, the adoption of the tagline and the ‘broken spectacles’ cover design directly mimics the marketing of the remake, which, given the timing of the release, evidently seeks to take advantage of promotion of the remake in order to promote itself. The use of this discourse in the marketing of the ultimate edition of the film is an interesting parallel to the way in which the film was reviewed upon original release in 1971. Here critics positioned Peckinpah as ‘responsible’ for the violence in the film, as much an auteur as provocateur. In these reviews however, this was often seen as a negative thing, whereby the violence was the unsafe aspect of the film, which critics were strongly cautioning against. This same authorship, however, is used to promote the authentic nature of the film in its ultimate

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<sup>744</sup> Total Film, 2011, 87

edition on DVD. In the contemporary receiving culture, Peckinpah's violence is praiseworthy. The auteur figure of Peckinpah, as a rehabilitative tool for the film, may lead to this sort of authentication. The release of the remake is then also a contributing factor to the promotion of this release of the original film, particularly in relation to the fact that the remake has not been made by a recognised auteur.

If the reception of the original films leads to a 'final moment' in which they are rehabilitated from their past status as controversial or unsafe, then this interplay with the existence of their remakes becomes evidently part of that rehabilitative process. By contrast, and, to an extent, in line with Leitch's arguments, the marketing of the remakes disavows the existence of the original films, at least explicitly. Disavowal is also evident in the reviewing, in reverse, through the persistent references to the original films, which therefore cast incredibly long shadows over the remakes. Even when the remakes are deemed to be acceptably well-made - "very impressive"<sup>745</sup> - they are still deemed to, ultimately, be pointless, or they are negatively compared to the original version of the film - "wasn't the original movie enough?"<sup>746</sup> Even though the 'final moments' in the reception trajectory of *Straw Dogs* and *Last House on the Left* come before their remakes are released, the persistent comparison of original and remake hammers home their positions as 'authentic' and 'classic'.

The discourses that define the cultural status of the original films and the remakes are therefore broadly similar but have changed a great deal in terms of the uses to which they are put in the decades between releases. Censorship remains an important reference point, but it is no longer a vital issue that might directly threaten the release of the remake. The discourse is invoked in the marketing of the remakes, as well as in re-releases of the original films, and increasingly appears in reviews of both originals and remakes as a contextualising detail, rather than as an angry call for the protection of the public (or an approach designed, potentially, to initiate such a call). If that dangerous audience does still exist, then, for reviewers, it is no longer one that might primarily watch films such as these. The relative lack of invocation of the potentially 'unsafe' audience does not necessarily mean that such an audience isn't conceptualised elsewhere, in relation to other sorts of film or media. Indeed, that the audience likely is figured in relation to other sorts of materials – such as the

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<sup>745</sup> Unknown, 2011, 9

<sup>746</sup> Bradshaw, 2009, 9



internet – results in these films becoming talked about without accusations of being unsafe. In discussions of both the original films and the remakes, titles which were once dangerous, but are now safe, are invoked in order to promote almost authorless films, while the names of *auteurs* are used in order to demonstrate reviewer knowledge and authority about the original films and their relation to genre history. While the original films once stood out from their genres due to their extremity and their distinctive uses of violence, the remakes now conform to the markers of contemporary American horror filmmaking. Their unremarkable and relative safeness contributes to a surprisingly comfortable reception for gory horror.

### *Conclusion*

In order to answer my research questions a reception studies approach has been vital, in order to trace discursive change and the contextual specificities of the films' move from unsafe to mainstream. Analysing these films through their reception materials highlights the ways in which the history of controversial films is changed, along their reception trajectory, in order to present a tidier narrative of their controversy, and thus to absorb the specificities of such controversies into a tidier history of genre development as well. This is evident in the way in which *Straw Dogs* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* are often mis-remembered as video nasties in review material, or the way in which their pre-video releases are left out of recollections of their histories. This alignment of the films to a particular period in the UK, that of the mid- to late-1980s, allows for a neater re-telling to emerge, where the films were freely circulated before facing lengthy periods of censorship before being re-released to great praise. As outlined above, the remakes form part of the narrative, as they provide concise and useful demonstrations for reviewers of contemporary cinema's relative creative bankruptcy. But, while the original films are contrasted with these remakes in order to reassert their authenticity, which contributes to their rehabilitation, they also become increasingly generic themselves both in their promotion and in their positions as milestones of challenging cinema. There are several specific main ways in which the originally controversial films have been rehabilitated in the UK. Through a discourse of authorship, previously controversial filmmaking is increasingly reframed as the challenging work of an *auteur*. Relating the films, both broadly and through specific analysis, to social and cultural contexts is a means of authenticating and legitimising previously reviled and restricted films.

Particular cultural gatekeepers are able to use their platforms in order to champion these films as legitimately important film work, often via the discourses of authorship or social significance. It's important to bear in mind that changes to the broader cultural landscape impact upon the reception of films over time. Changes to cultural mores, to policy and even technological developments such as the internet also impact on a film's move from controversial to classic. Ultimately, there seems to be two particular strands of rehabilitation of the original films, whereby they are either seen to be increasingly mainstream (which is evident in the way in which they're marketed alongside other mainstream titles), or on the other hand they are rehabilitated in terms of an increasing sense of cultural legitimacy and authenticity. This is very often achieved through negative comparisons with the remake version of the films. The cultural status and reputation of the original films, as I have demonstrated, plays a huge role in the reception of the remakes, and appears to a much lesser extent in the marketing of the remakes. Crucially, though, the cultural status and reputation of the remakes also plays a part in the continued marketing and reception of the original films. It is only via a truly diachronic analysis of the marketing and reception of these films that this can be revealed.

## CONCLUSION

The film remake inescapably refers back to a previous film text, in varying degrees of explicitness. The remake films I have analysed can all be categorised as ‘contemporary American horror remakes’, as a distinct cycle of remaking. Many trends in contemporary American horror can be characterised by their self-reference, from the post-modern and sometimes parodic late-nineties slasher films to the more recent ‘neo-grindhouse’. The cycle of contemporary American horror remakes conforms to these trends, as a large proportion of the films remade are from the 1970s and early 1980s, the same era of American horror filmmaking referenced in or influencing films as apparently disparate as *Scream*, *Hostel* or *Machete*.<sup>747</sup> However, seemingly lacking in the remakes – particularly those which I have analysed in this thesis – is evidence of such referentiality in the promotion or the reception of the films. These films refer back to the originals through their very status as ‘remake’, and particularly through their titles and occasional subtle references within their marketing, and reviews persistently explicate the films’ status as remakes. These references, therefore, are primarily a result of the films’ inherent status as ‘remakes’, rather than in relation to a knowing recollection of a particular period of filmmaking.

Genre is an important aspect of both the promotion and reviewing of these films. The early 1970s was characterised by a significant change in the content of some films. Established generic conventions, such as those identified by Andrew Tudor in his conception of ‘secure’ horror films, were increasingly challenged by films which depicted horror as occurring much closer to home, in addition to the increasingly explicit, graphic or intense depictions of such horror, due to increasingly relaxed censorship rules. Films such as *Straw Dogs*, *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* challenged established norms through morally ambiguous depictions of explicit violence, and as a result challenged the receiving body of film critics who in general responded negatively. The combination of a highly negative critical response, a fraught censorship history, and challenging filmmaking resulted in these films becoming particularly memorable and distinctive, in terms of their cultural status in the UK. For the likes of Julian Petley, this is due to the policing of the acceptable

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<sup>747</sup> I am disregarding the subset of contemporary horror remaking that remakes East Asian horror films here, as I have throughout my thesis, because of the additional cross-cultural issues they engender. Naturally, they do not conform to my assertion here.

boundaries of art and entertainment, and is evidence of the British critical press's anti-American sentiment.<sup>748</sup> The processes of publically gatekeeping acceptable taste, through negative reviews and censorship, have in fact contributed to the longevity and visibility of the films. This becomes evident in the marketing of re-releases of the films as their status as 'uncut' or 'original' is emphasised, and in the reviewing of re-releases through criticism of previous restrictions upon the films. Contemporary horror filmmakers, such as members of the Splat Pack or the Mumblegore group, explicitly state their enjoyment of and influence from horror auteurs of the 1970s.<sup>749</sup> Some of their films have been and are considered to be challenging and exemplary of the contemporary genre – while in some cases again invoking the wrath of the affronted film critic, such as those who coined and solidified the phrase 'torture porn' in the first instance.<sup>750</sup> My case study remakes have at times been aligned with the torture porn cycle, in its broadest sense, however, evidence of their deliberately invoking the challenging filmmaking of the original films is not evident in their reception or their marketing. Both the marketing and the reception of these remakes instead suggest that they seek to conform, rather, to contemporary horror models outside of such referentiality, and, in particular, to the cycle of 'contemporary horror remake'.

The specific sort of 'contemporary horror remake' that I have analysed via my case studies tends to be marketed in a highly uniform fashion. Posters feature dark colours, lone images or close-ups obscured by shadow or digital effects, little text aside from the title and tagline, and, generally, almost no reference to the original film. The trailers depict a sense of normalcy which is disrupted, routinely leading to a rapidly edited sequence of violent highlights from the film, and often ending, after the reveal of the film's title, with a coda showcasing a particularly violent or frightening scene. This structure is so formulaic that it minimises any sense of these films as distinctive, within the context of the horror genre and more broadly. The marketing of these remakes therefore emphasises a film's relationship to this broader cycle of contemporary horror remaking as a means of promoting it to a potential audience. Reviews of the films, however, then highlight this sameness as a negative aspect, suggesting that the sameness of the marketing is also true of the film text itself. This is highlighted in frequent comparisons to the original film, leading to the remakes

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<sup>748</sup> Petley, 2002, 30-38

<sup>749</sup> Bernard, 2014, 14-16

<sup>750</sup> Edelstein, 2011

being seen as primarily 'redundant'. To invoke Walter Benjamin's notion of 'aura', as outlined in chapter two, here it would seem that, indeed, the 'reproduction' of the original films in these remakes does cause, for the film reviewers, a loss of the original's 'aura'.<sup>751</sup>

The contemporary horror remake is not commonly associated with a strong authorial voice, in the same way as other contemporary cycles, such as torture porn and its link with the Splat Pack. As noted above, the contemporary horror remake does not seem to promote or emphasise a strong sense of influence from the original filmmakers. My original case study films all have a strong sense of authorship associated with them, which varies and changes throughout their release histories. This is evident both in condemnations of the films, where a figurehead such as Peckinpah was identified by critics as being responsible for *Straw Dogs*' excessive violence,<sup>752</sup> and in their rehabilitation, with, for example, Craven's talent for reflecting the American culture around him in his later films being used retrospectively to appraise *Last House on the Left* as a product of the Vietnam War era.<sup>753</sup> Notably, neither Craven nor Hooper's involvement as producers of the remakes of their own films is referred to in this way. While reviews of re-releases of *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* recall Craven and Hooper as notable filmmakers of their era and their genre, their involvement with the remakes is either not mentioned or mentioned only factually, such as 'Wes Craven acts as producer...'<sup>754</sup> If there are 'authors' of the remakes, then they might be found in the form of producers and studios, such as Michael Bay and Platinum Dunes. Here the authorship is less artistic and more industrial and commercial.

A degree of what might be termed nostalgia is to be found in the way censorship decisions and the concept of a vulnerable audience is evoked in marketing and reviewing the remakes. While my original case study films were all at one point in their release histories unavailable in the UK, and have had releases which are cut, the remakes have all immediately been available uncensored and without any subsequent censorship problems on home media. A great deal of the reasoning behind the censorship of the original films involved the idea of a vulnerable spectator, someone who might view these violent films and become violent as a result, which is reflected in critical writing on the films as well. The

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<sup>751</sup> Benjamin, 2008, 5-8

<sup>752</sup> Chapter 3, this thesis, 7

<sup>753</sup> Hills, 2007, 226

<sup>754</sup> Fletcher, 2009, 47

remakes are arguably more graphically violent than the original films – they feature explicit and excessive scenes of gore – but they do not provoke the same response amongst critics. There is the occasional reference to the ‘sort of viewer’ who might watch and enjoy these films, but there is no particular call for these films’ censorship, nor that the ‘sort of viewer’ vaguely being referred to might be dangerous. Instead, these few references seem to represent a stock response to a horror film, rather than any committed criticism of a dangerous audience. Films which have caused some censorship issues in the UK in recent times have either been formally challenging films (*The Bunny Game*), or especially graphic in their depiction of sexual violence (*The Human Centipede 2*) and paedophilia (*A Serbian Film*).<sup>755</sup> It appears then that instead of a spectator seen to be negatively influenced by American horror cinema, the vulnerable audience now lies elsewhere, namely in relation to the internet, pornography, and child pornography.<sup>756</sup> It is notable that the films cut or banned recently by the BBFC all depict extreme violence against women and depictions of paedophilia, which is somewhat in-line with the more extreme press responses toward real life occurrences of these.

#### *Knowledge and methodology*

The questions that informed the inception of my thesis were firmly rooted in my non-academic engagement with horror and controversial films. As an avid fan of horror films I subjectively wondered *why* so many remakes were being produced and released in such a short space of time, in particular ones which seemed to offer little to no challenging content, thematically or aesthetically. As I approached the formation of my research questions it became apparent that ‘why’ would be a very difficult question to answer, without having to take in a great many areas of study, from film production through to audience. I was also very keen to avoid straight-forward comparative analyses of the film texts themselves, partly due to a keen awareness of my own bias in approaching such a comparison, and predominantly due to the fact that almost all approaches to these horror remakes rely upon such comparisons, or at least on textual analysis of the films. Studies

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<sup>755</sup> I only mean to provide examples of *horror* films which have been cut or banned; I am not considering films from other genres here. Additionally, the recent BBFC decision regarding *Soulmate*, as referred to in chapter four, is something of an exception.

<sup>756</sup> See Cadwalladr, 2013 for a journalist’s account of some of these attitudes, particularly in response to the publication of the academic journal *Porn Studies*.

such as David Roche's *Making and Remaking Horror in the 1970s and 2000s* use textual analysis of the films and tend toward "reinforcing the canon"<sup>757</sup> even while treating the remakes with a degree of seriousness. My non-academic interest in horror films led me to my chosen methodological approach of historical reception studies, having noticed that the advertising for the remake of *I Spit on Your Grave* pays direct homage to the iconic image of a woman used in the marketing of the original film. It therefore occurred to me that a reception studies approach to the issue of how these films are publically constructed, and in particular their relationship to the original films, would be potentially productive.<sup>758</sup> Given a particular personal interest in controversial films, I especially wanted to consider the changes that appeared to have occurred in the reception of the original films that tended to be remade, many of which were initially controversial, and the apparent lack of controversy surrounding the remakes. Therefore, while resisting my own fan position of negativity toward the remakes, the critical reception generally reflects this same attitude.

Notions of taste are central to highly negative reactions to films<sup>759</sup> and therefore Bourdieu's *Distinction* became a central theoretical framework for this study. There appears to be an easily presumed distinction when approaching a study such as this, of the authentic, challenging and artistic original film as clearly distinct from its cynical, watered down remake. The extent to which this ingrained attitude impacts upon the way the films are reviewed, and approached academically, should not be underestimated. This particular discourse of distinction is one which emerges time and time again in the reviews of the remakes, however, distinctions are made between the remakes and other contemporary films from the horror genre as well. On the one hand broadsheet reviewers might employ their cultural capital as a means of deriding the remakes – their prior experiences of *Straw Dogs* as an auteurist classic, for example – while writers for horror magazines might demonstrate their subcultural preference for other horror films. In both contexts, the original films and other contemporary horror films are often held as preferable to the remakes. When the original films were released they were often critically evaluated in

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<sup>757</sup> Roche, 2015, 273

<sup>758</sup> *I Spit on Your Grave* (2010) was originally one of my case study films, however, various reasons meant that I did not continue with the film. Primarily was the production and release context of the film, which was more limited and independent than the sort of 'mainstream' remake I have been primarily interested in, as well as the difficulty that became apparent, even in very early stages of the research, in obtaining materials pertaining to the original UK release of the original film.

<sup>759</sup> Egan, 2007, 30-40

relationship to other films. Here, they were not the 'authentic' film but rather illegitimate imposters: films which challenged accepted boundaries of genre. While *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* challenged generic norms with their intense and visceral depictions of violence and terror, *Straw Dogs'* apparent use of generic elements – *grand guignol* violence, a 'Western' narrative – were not readily acceptable in a film that ostensibly appeared to be a serious, auteurist drama.

The discourses which circulate around the original films have remained broadly the same, namely the discourses of genre and censorship, however their relationship to the films have changed. Films which were once deemed excessive and dangerous to the point that they were not publically available in the UK are now freely available and considered memorable and culturally important films. Publications which once provided the platform for condemnations of the level of violence depicted in these films, now feature reviews which criticise previous bans of the films and laud them as classics. Films once considered dangerous are readily available and openly sold and advertised alongside family-orientated or mainstream fare. As stated in the previous chapter, these are two distinct, but potentially reinforcing, kinds of rehabilitation that appear to centrally inform these shifts. Industrial changes have both directly and indirectly impacted upon this change. Censorship guidelines have changed, meaning previously banned films have been certified and released. Newer films with arguably more contentious content re-frame older films as more authentic in their depictions of violence, by comparison. Defences and re-appraisals of the original films by critics have contributed to the rehabilitation of these films as important cultural and artistic texts. This has particularly been achieved through an emphasis on authorial intent and an associated consideration of the cultural contexts reflected in the films. The remakes play a role in this process of rehabilitation. By providing modern, seemingly explicitly money-driven versions of these previous films, the original films are somewhat cemented as important and authentic originals. This can be seen in the shift in marketing of the original films as 'films which have been remade' rather than simply 'films which were formerly banned'. Reciprocally, the remakes use the 'formerly banned' discourse in their own promotion, both through simple title recollection and the use of censorship-related ballyhoo.



Rhetoric has been centrally important to the analysis of both marketing and reviewing films as well as the film remake itself. The rhetoric of genre which is outlined by Kernan<sup>760</sup> is supremely important to the marketing of all these films, as it is in the reviewing of them. The marketing of the horror remakes seeks to be primarily persuasive on the ground of representing the films as 'contemporary horror remakes'. For example, the clearly formulaic nature of marketing materials such as posters and trailers, as outlined previously, emphasises repetition and iconographic elements to promote the film as belonging to a particular genre in order to appeal to a particular audience. Reviews recall this same repetition as a negative characteristic of the films. The repeated discourse of redundancy in the reviews of the remakes seems in-line with the repeatedly emphasised genericity in the marketing of the remakes. The clear discrepancy between the two different 'imagined audiences' becomes clear: for the marketers, their imagined audience enjoys and appreciates a contemporary horror film, while for the reviewer, the imagined audience is disdainful of mainstream contemporary horror. The rhetoric of the remake plays directly into this dynamic, whereby if a remake seeks to be 'the same, only better'<sup>761</sup> than the film it adapts, for reviewers it might generally and inevitably be seen to be a failure because of the critical tendency to valorise the original film. This is not necessarily an assertion that is straightforwardly true of the marketing. While, for Leitch, a remake seeks to be the 'same, only better' than the original film, the marketing for my case studies suggests that the films seek simply to be the 'same' as their contemporary generic peers. If anything, it might be the films' status as remake that offers the 'only better' aspect within this context.

The remakes' disavowal of the original film is clear in the marketing of the remakes, in so far as very little direct reference is made to the originals, and any reference which is made relies upon prior knowledge of the original film. The reviews of the films go directly against this, declaring the film as a remake and assessing it through this framework almost always immediately. Indeed, 'preview' interviews with directors offer examples of direct disavowal, such as when Lurie clearly states that his approach to *Straw Dogs* is entirely different to Peckinpah's nihilistic film because he "utterly rejects" Peckinpah's belief that "all human beings have an instinct for violence".<sup>762</sup> For Leitch, disavowal might also occur through the

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<sup>760</sup> Kernan, 2004, 44-53

<sup>761</sup> Leitch, 2002, 44

<sup>762</sup> Lurie, in *Unknown*, 2011, 40

valorisation of the original film – the original film has to be good enough to be worth remaking in the first place<sup>763</sup> - which isn't as evident in the marketing materials associated with my case studies. Valorisation of the original certainly does occur in the reviews of the remakes; however, this more often than not is a means to negatively appraise the remake, rather than in order to disavow the original film.

The two sorts of rehabilitation of the original films which has occurred - through their mainstreaming and through their cultural authentication – chimes with previous academic work on such films, such as in *Trash or Treasure?* by Kate Egan. Egan's work on re-releases of the nasties, for example, focuses on VHS and DVD releases by companies which were already known for distributing such films, such as VIPCO. These specialist companies emphasise the films as 'retro products' and as particularly collectible.<sup>764</sup> This can be seen, in my own work, in releases such as Anchor Bay's early DVD releases of *Last House on the Left*. In this thesis I have traced the entire release histories in the UK of my case studies, all of which now are released by non-specialist distributors, and all of which have received plain 'vanilla' releases. Therefore while films such as these – both video nasties and others not directly linked to that particular term – can be and are marketed to a specialist audience, they are also now increasingly normalised and made to appeal more broadly. Similarly, Egan's analysis of specialist horror magazines and their cultural guardianship of the nasties (and by extension other controversial titles of a similar ilk) demonstrates the niche nature of a particular fan culture in relation to these films.<sup>765</sup> My own work demonstrates that while these niche appraisals of the films continue, with *Dark Side* magazine prevailing in this way, the same sort of cultural gatekeeping occurs in relation to these original films in the very mainstream reviews of my remake case studies, in national newspapers and general film magazines. Considering the remakes are part of the reception trajectory of the original films has therefore proved to be a crucial element to bear in mind when considering the marketing and reviewing of the original films. Indeed, the existence of the remakes strongly suggests additional meanings for discursive terms commonly associated with previous censorship issues and controversy, such as 'uncut' or 'original'.

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<sup>763</sup> Leitch, 2002, 44

<sup>764</sup> Egan, 2007, 185-228

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-127

Having considered and evaluated the role of taste construction in relation to the marketing and reviewing of controversial films, in their various releases, and their remakes, my thesis has avoided a straight forward textual comparative approach to these films. While there might be a tendency, or a temptation, to simply compare an 'authentic' original with a 'watered down' remake, a reception studies approach has allowed for an analysis of the films which considers the way in which constructions of these films change in relation to each other. Crucially, this relationship works two-ways, as specifically analysing re-releases of the original films must consider the influence of the remakes upon the way the original films are here reframed. In approaching my case studies in this way, my thesis makes a new contribution to recent industrial interrogations of the horror genre. Although primarily a traditional critical reception study, the findings of my work intersect with the "economic dimensions of Anglophone horror cinema,"<sup>766</sup> which is receiving increasing amounts of academic attention. Although my study has not directly considered the industry which produces my case study films, their marketing and reviewing is, as I have shown, intimately linked to the shifting structures and strategies employed by that industry. As Richard Nowell states, "an understanding of the ways in which industry decision-makers have viewed, responded to, and attempted to influence public perceptions of horror"<sup>767</sup> is crucial to an analysis of the genre which is industrially-sensitive. My emphasis on the British reception also offers a new line of enquiry in this growing area of research. The marketing and reception discourses of these films in the UK contributes both to the study of industry in relation to horror films, but also continues the work of scholars such as Andrew Tudor, Peter Hutchings and Kate Egan in analysing the changing historical status of horror films in the UK.<sup>768</sup>

In setting out upon this research my intention was not to specifically think about these films, particularly not the original films, specifically in terms of the context of horror cinema, however the reviews of these films themselves, both of original and remake, often frame the films in this way. The process of selecting my case studies emerged from the position of identifying contemporary horror remakes, but the reception of all of these films has demonstrated that horror is an essential discourse in the critical talk around all these films.

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<sup>766</sup> Nowell, 2014, 1

<sup>767</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>768</sup> See Hutchings, 1993; Tudor, 1997; Egan, 2007

This in itself illuminates the way in which genre is thought about and drawn upon by the press, and recalls the importance of the role the press plays in the formation and definition of genre, as well as the “regenrification”<sup>769</sup> of films by critics. Existing work on the remake which considers industrial contexts predominantly considers films’ production, particularly in relation to how the adaptation of an earlier film is initiated and realised. Therefore work such as Jennifer Forrest’s investigation of ‘dupes’ in early cinema is entirely concerned with the industrial-production contexts of a very particular sort of remake,<sup>770</sup> while Constantine Verevis’s *Film Remakes* includes considerations of the reception of remakes as disparate as *The Italian Job* (Gray, 2003), *Far From Heaven* (Haynes, 2002) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967). My own work has focused on a specific type of remake in a specific industrial and cultural context, considering its reception prior to, during and following various releases. Employing Staiger’s notion of film ‘traces’<sup>771</sup> to consider the remakes as an extension of the original films neatly avoids a simplistic comparative approach to their reception. Instead of the remakes emerging in opposition to the static ‘controversial’ original films, they are instead part of the reception process of the original films, which is continually shifting and developing. Even when the films appear to reach a ‘final moment’<sup>772</sup> in their reception trajectory, they do so alongside or even after the release of their remake. Rather than the remake appearing in opposition to its authentic original film, it instead is therefore in dialogue with it. This is broadly applicable to the specific sort of remake that my thesis has explored, being the mainstream American horror remake, while further work would illuminate the possible further applicability of my findings here to other forms of contemporary remaking.

By approaching issues of contemporary American film remaking from a reception studies angle my thesis has contributed to the growing body of work on film remakes and in particular horror film remakes. Additionally, my thesis’s focus on the construction of taste in relation to these particular films means that my work makes a new contribution to the study of controversial films and censorship as well, with a particular focus on the changes that occur to a controversial film’s reception as time goes on. To trace the way in which the

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<sup>769</sup> Altman, 1999, 81

<sup>770</sup> Forrest, 2002

<sup>771</sup> Staiger, 2000, 163

<sup>772</sup> Mathijs, 2005, 453

original films all faced censorship issues which have since been rehabilitated is in line with Annette Kuhn's assertion that censorship is not an inherently detrimental process.<sup>773</sup> In particular, my employment of Staiger's notion of 'traces' in relation to a film 'event', in considering the remakes as traces of the original films as well as events in and of themselves, offers a new way of considering the long-term reception of a controversial film. Rather than treating the original and the remake as separate, static points, by considering the remakes as traces of the original a clearer picture of a changing reception in relation to popular forms of filmmaking can emerge. This challenges the triangular relationship, proposed by Leitch - in relation to archival remakes – between original film, remake, and the 'property' being adapted<sup>774</sup>, as in all of my case studies the original film is the property that is adapted by the remake.<sup>775</sup>

#### *Questions for further research*

An under-explored element of my research, which would be an interesting and useful contribution to reception studies, is the increasingly important role played by recent online film marketing.<sup>776</sup> My own research has mostly been heavily reliant upon finding materials in physical libraries, archives or personal collections. This was particularly important with regards to marketing material relating to the original versions of the films. It became apparent that the marketing for more recent releases – either theatrical or at home – was potentially much more likely to be advertised on websites via banner ads or floating ads. Finding evidence of this was particularly difficult. In an increasingly internet-reliant marketing sphere, analysis of such materials could prove vital and potentially crucial to research on the film marketing and reception of contemporary films. Due to the transitory nature of such advertising, however, unless they are specifically archived by a marketing company or distributor, they are very difficult to find retrospectively. While banner ads might be assumed to use the same or similar imagery as a film's poster or DVD cover, the potential for floating ads to do something else is worth investigating. Internet archives such as Archive.org offer archived webpages; however due to the nature of banner

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<sup>773</sup> Kuhn, 1988, 2-4

<sup>774</sup> Leitch, 2002, 39

<sup>775</sup> This is true even though both the original *Straw Dogs* and *Last House on the Left* are, in different ways, adaptations of other properties.

<sup>776</sup> J P Telotte has, for example, written of *The Blair Witch Project's* website and online marketing campaign when the film was released in 1999. (2008, 263-274)

advertisements' coding, they are not archived with the page they would have appeared on. It would seem that to investigate such advertising, close contact with a willing distributor or marketing company would be necessary.<sup>777</sup> Another avenue of further investigation, which relates to the increased use of the internet for marketing and indeed distribution, is VOD and streaming platforms. In particular, information regarding the figures for downloads and streams is incredibly difficult to come by. Although DVD sales figures are also difficult to find for individual films, it seems that currently distributors are even more tight-lipped regarding the figures for VOD and streaming services. As an increasing number of people are using online or streaming services, this makes gauging the success of films without theatrical releases, and thus the potential impact (or lack of impact) of their promotional framing, difficult to gauge, as well as gauging the success of a film on its home release. Again, without close contact with a distribution company these figures might remain unknown to the researcher.

My research considers a very specific sort of remake. It would require further research to explore the extent to which my findings here might be applicable to horror remakes which are not major American productions, or remakes which are cross-cultural. In particular, a consideration of the reception of contemporary remakes of non-American films would provide an interesting extension of my work here.<sup>778</sup> Although the original films that East Asian horror remakes adapt have not generally been controversial, a different sort of enquiry into notions of taste would be possible, namely the potential that the original films are now seen as preferable or authentic due to their position as 'foreign language films' or 'world cinema'. Additionally, the apparently generic marketing of the remakes suggests that an analysis of non-remake contemporary American horror film marketing could also prove to be revealing, particularly in relation to genre and taste construction. This is a line of interrogation that Mark Bernard has recently begun to explore, in his work in relation to the Splat Pack,<sup>779</sup> and, to a lesser degree, there is some exploration of marketing in Alexandra Heller-Nicholas' work on the found footage horror film.<sup>780</sup> Further research might also be revealing if it were to consider the online reception of these films (both in their re-release

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<sup>777</sup> My attempts to contact marketing companies via email proved unfruitful.

<sup>778</sup> An example of this can already be found in Matt Hills' work on the US fan readings of Japanese horror. (2005)

<sup>779</sup> See Bernard, 2014

<sup>780</sup> See Heller-Nicholas, 2014

and remake incarnations). This itself has several spheres of reception: online journalism, amateur blogs, and message boards or other discussion fora. By limiting my own research to print reviews, I have only been able to map out the relatively broad reception of the films I have considered. The niche or fan reception of these films might challenge, contribute to, or further confirm the findings that I have outlined in this study.

Beginning this project one of the questions I sought to answer was 'to what extent can the marketing and reception of both the original films and their remakes be seen to be informed by their UK reception context?' The primary way in which the specific context of the UK impacts upon the reception of these particular films is via the video nasties. This is not necessarily through direct reference to the nasties campaign or through lengthy recollection of the period. As re-releases of the films emerge both *Straw Dogs* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* become increasingly aligned with a 'video nasty' narrative of a lengthy VHS ban before subsequent certification. The history of *Last House on the Left* in the UK is the only film of my case studies which genuinely conforms to this narrative. It seems then that the video nasty narrative becomes a sort of shorthand cultural recollection in the continuing reception of these films. This particular history of the films comes into play with the overwhelming emphasis on the original films in the reception of the remakes. This is at its most blatant when the limited release of *Straw Dogs* resulted in headline film reviews, leading with recollections of the original before approaching the remake.

Another of my research questions was about the sort of generic labelling used in the marketing and reception of my case study films throughout their release histories. A range of generic labelling and iconography contributes to the reception of the original films and their remakes. Although these labels are not static, the overriding generic context for the films is that of horror. Both the reviewing and marketing of all six films refer to or promote the films as horror films. The marketing of the original films all reflected, to varying degrees, traditions of exploitation filmmaking, which becomes less and less evident as they are re-released. Types of exploitation ballyhoo become common-place in genre film marketing and so can be seen in some elements of contemporary horror marketing as well. Surprisingly, the 'cult' label is almost never used in relation to the original films; however, an indirect appeal to a cult collector is evident in re-releases of the films on home media. The remakes

are almost uniformly received as 'horror remakes' as a distinct category, while they are marketed in a way that heavily conforms to contemporary horror film marketing.

In chapters three and four I outlined the primary sorts of rhetoric and discourses that are evident in the marketing and reviewing of the original films and remakes. I arranged these chapters according to these discourses, and in chapter five brought the two sets of films together. In chapter five I sought to directly address the questions of how controversial films have been publically rehabilitated in the UK and how the cultural status and reputation of the original films play a part in the marketing and reception of the remakes.

The question I identified as of central concern to this thesis was, 'how have notions of taste and cultural distinction been publically expressed in relation to controversial films and their remakes in the UK?' In chapter three I analysed the original films, and the primary ways in which taste and cultural distinction were expressed in reviews of the films were through policing expectations of genre, authorial responsibility, and boundaries of national filmmaking contexts, and through the nebulous notion of potential 'harm'. The remakes are often positioned negatively in relation to these original films. I outlined in chapter five some of the ways the original films have been culturally rehabilitated, and as a result they have become objects of cultural and subcultural capital for critics of their remakes. This results in the claim that the remakes are redundant because they do not offer the same sort of authorial voices or social significance that the original films do – attributes which were not part of the original films' initial reception. Further, the remakes are then held as examples of the creative poverty of Hollywood, and the overtly industrial and commercialised state of such filmmaking. This is emphasised through comparison with the original films, based on the very discourses which have rehabilitated them over the decades since their initial receptions.



**APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIONS**

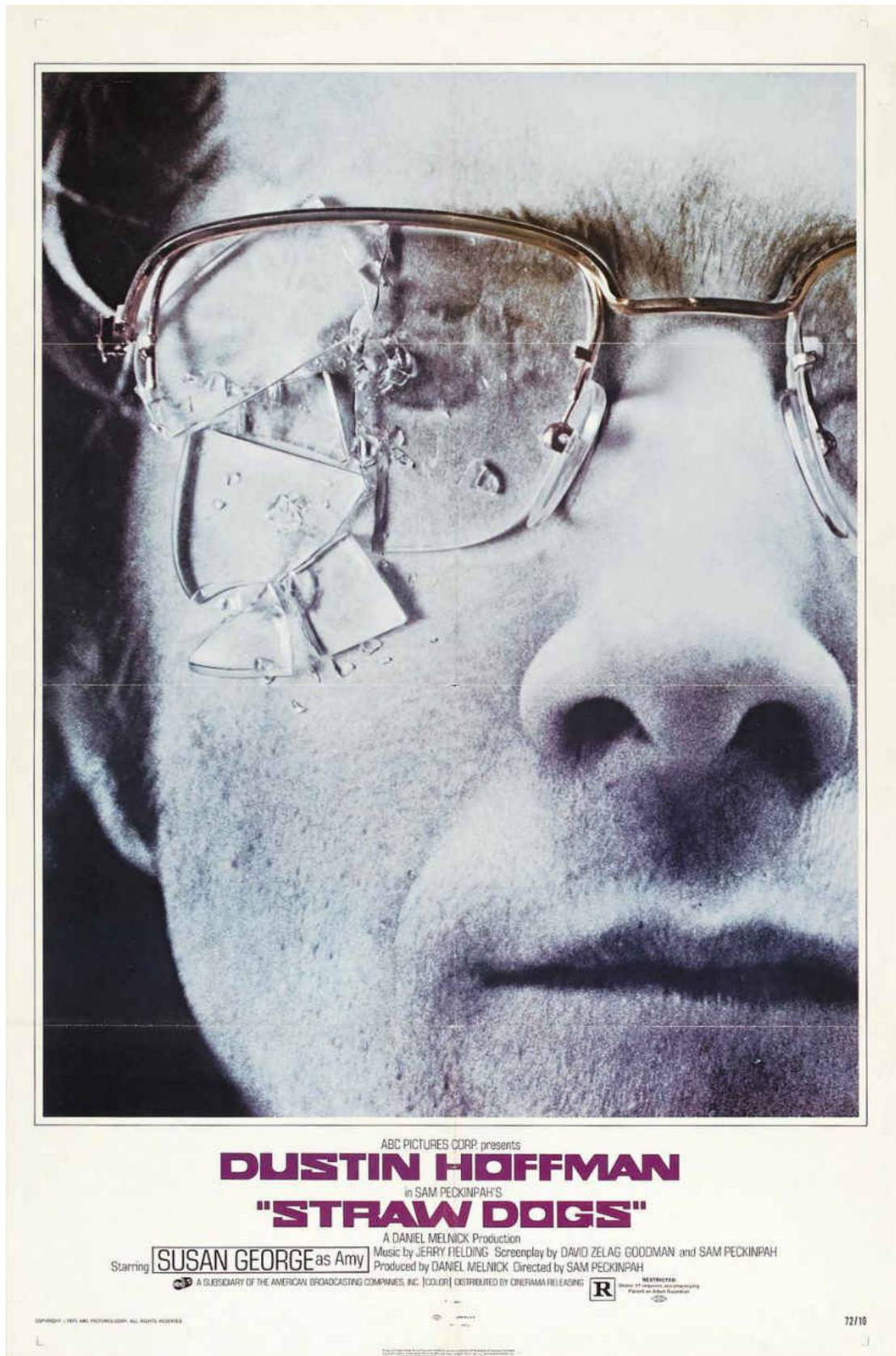
Figure 1: *Straw Dogs* UK theatrical quad poster



Figure 2: *Straw Dogs* theatrical newspaper advertisement (*Evening Standard*, Nov. 30<sup>th</sup> 1971)



Figure 3: Straw Dogs USA one-sheet poster



ABC PICTURES CORP. presents  
**DUSTIN HOFFMAN**  
in SAM PECKINPAH'S  
**"STRAW DOGS"**

Starring **SUSAN GEORGE** as Amy

A DANIEL MELNICK Production  
Music by JERRY FIELDING Screenplay by DAVID ZELAG GOODMAN and SAM PECKINPAH  
Produced by DANIEL MELNICK Directed by SAM PECKINPAH

A SUBSIDIARY OF THE AMERICAN BROADCASTING COMPANIES, INC. [COLOR] DISTRIBUTED BY CINEFAMA RELEASING



RESTRICTED  
Under 17 Requires Accompanying  
Parent or Adult Guardian

© 1974 ABC PICTURES CORP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

72/10



Figure 6: The Texas Chain Saw Massacre newspaper advertisement

**“This is without doubt the most  
frightening and macabre shocker  
I have ever seen.”**

Felix Barker, Evening News

**can you survive**



**The  
Texas  
Chain Saw  
Massacre**

**X (LONDON)**

**...it happened!**

THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE · A Film By TOBE HOOPER  
Starring MARILYN BURNS and GUNNAR HANSEN as "Leather face"  
Story & Screenplay by KIM HENKEL and TOBE HOOPER · Produced and Directed by TOBE HOOPER  
COLOUR Distributed by EXCALIBUR FILMS

**EXCALIBUR FILMS LIMITED** · 3 AUDLEY SQUARE, SOUTH AUDLEY STREET,  
LONDON W1Y 5DR Tel: 01 491 7491



Figure 7: Last House on the Left Replay Video VHS advertisement (Video Trade Weekly)

**REVENGE...that went too far**

**THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT**

TO AVOID  
FAINING  
KEEP REPEATING,  
IT'S ONLY A MOVIE  
..ONLY A MOVIE  
..ONLY A MOVIE  
..ONLY A MOVIE  
..ONLY A MOVIE  
..ONLY A MOVIE  
Daryl & Mervin

**MARI, SEVENTEEN, IS DYING, EVEN FOR HER  
THE WORST IS YET TO COME!**

**WARNING!**  
NOT RECOMMENDED  
FOR PERSONS  
UNDER 18!

**REPLAY**  
Video

Figure 8: *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* IFS 1983 VHS sleeve (front)

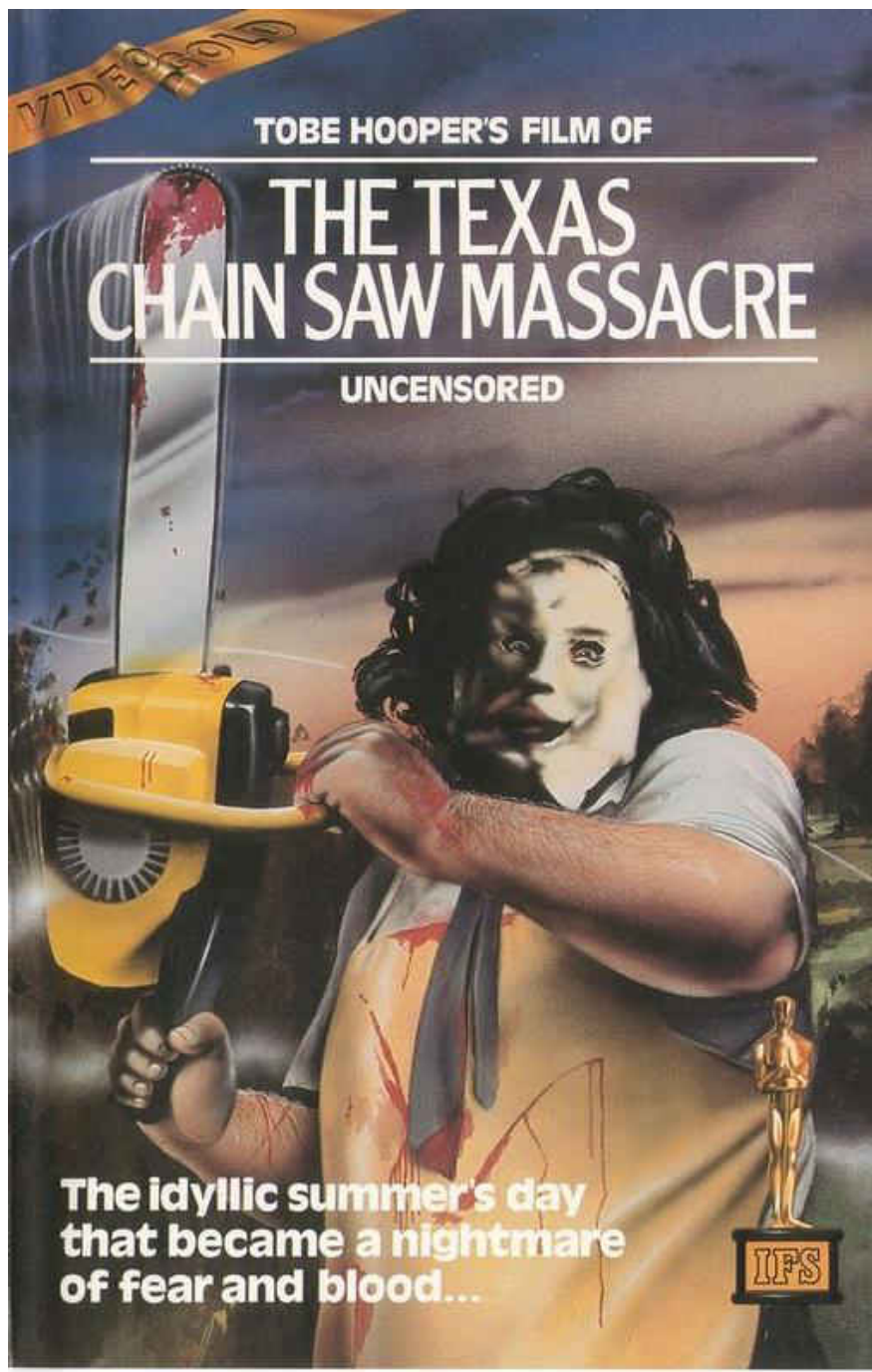




Figure 9: Straw Dogs Guild Home Video VHS sleeve



Figure 10: Straw Dogs Guild Home Video VHS advertisement (Photoplay)

# IF YOU'VE GOT THE NERVE

## We've got the Movie!



**STRAW DOGS**  
Starring  
**DUSTIN HOFFMAN** and **SUSAN GEORGE**  
David (Dustin Hoffman) moves with his wife Amy (Susan George) to the peace and solitude of Cornwall only to find a man cannot hide from life forever. He has always run away turning his back on trouble, involvement and confrontation... UNTIL NOW.  
**Sam Peckinpah unleashes the explosive, horrifying reality of one man's violent encounter with life.**  
Cert: R(=X) R/T: 1hr 53mins Colour

*STRAW DOGS - Available to rent or buy from your local video stockist*

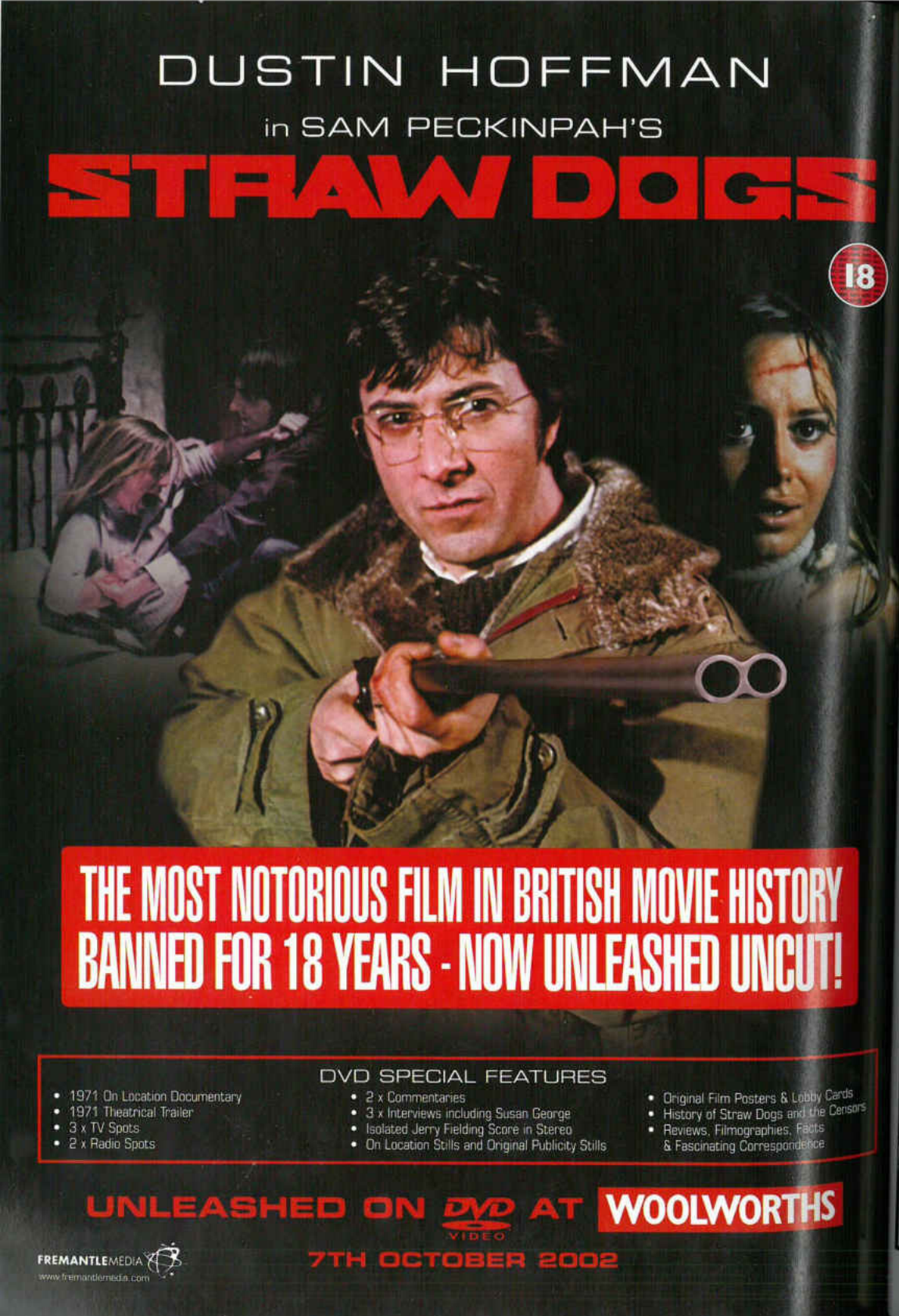
**GUILD HOME VIDEO LTD**  
Woodston House, Oundle Road, Peterborough PE2 9PZ.  
Telephone: (0733) 63122 Telex: 32659



Look for the Guild  
Gold Seal Reproduction Label  
— your guarantee of quality



Figure 11: *Straw Dogs* first DVD release advertisement (*Empire*)



DUSTIN HOFFMAN  
in SAM PECKINPAH'S  
**STRAW DOGS**

18

**THE MOST NOTORIOUS FILM IN BRITISH MOVIE HISTORY  
BANNED FOR 18 YEARS - NOW UNLEASHED UNCUT!**

**DVD SPECIAL FEATURES**

- 1971 On Location Documentary
- 1971 Theatrical Trailer
- 3 x TV Spots
- 2 x Radio Spots
- 2 x Commentaries
- 3 x Interviews including Susan George
- Isolated Jerry Fielding Score in Stereo
- On Location Stills and Original Publicity Stills
- Original Film Posters & Lobby Cards
- History of *Straw Dogs* and the Censors
- Reviews, Filmographies, Facts & Fascinating Correspondence

**UNLEASHED ON DVD AT WOOLWORTHS**

FREMANTLEMEDIA  
www.fremantlemedia.com

7TH OCTOBER 2002

Figure 12: Last House on the Left Anchor Bay DVD release cover

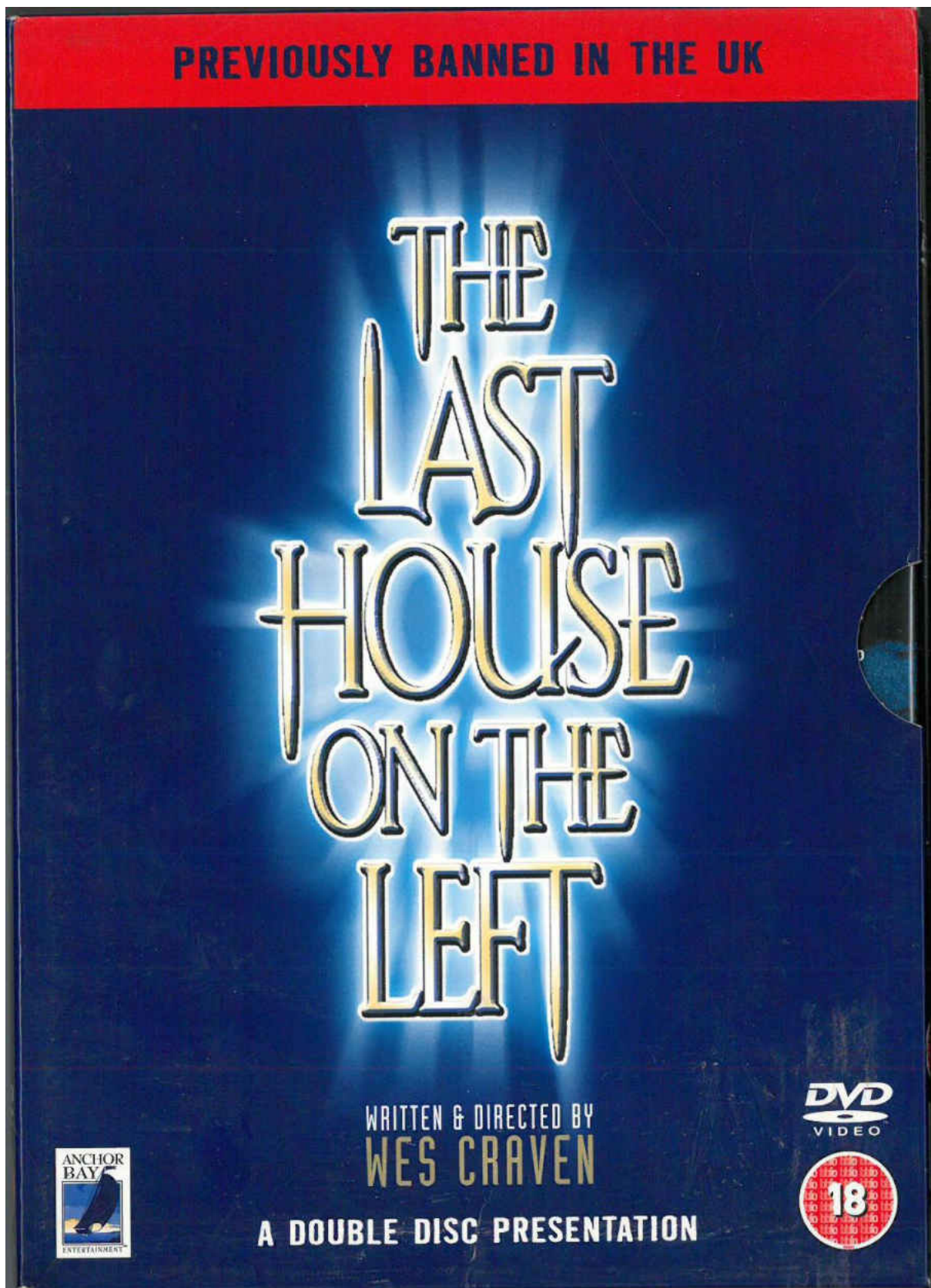




Figure 13: Straw Dogs 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition DVD sleeve (front)

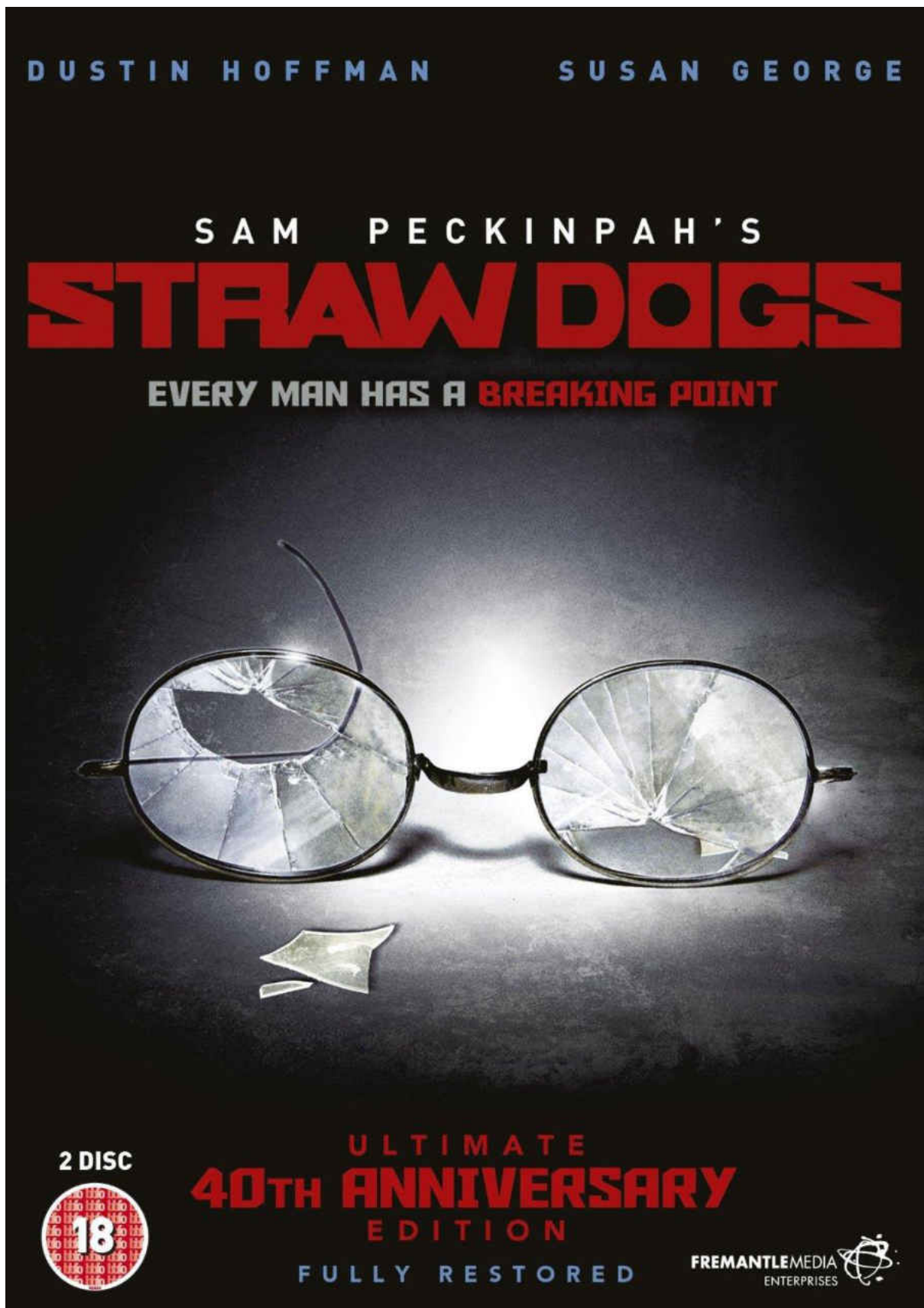


Figure 14: The Texas Chain Saw Massacre Blue Dolphin DVD sleeve (front)





Figure 15: The Texas Chain Saw Massacre Seriously Ultimate Edition DVD case (front)

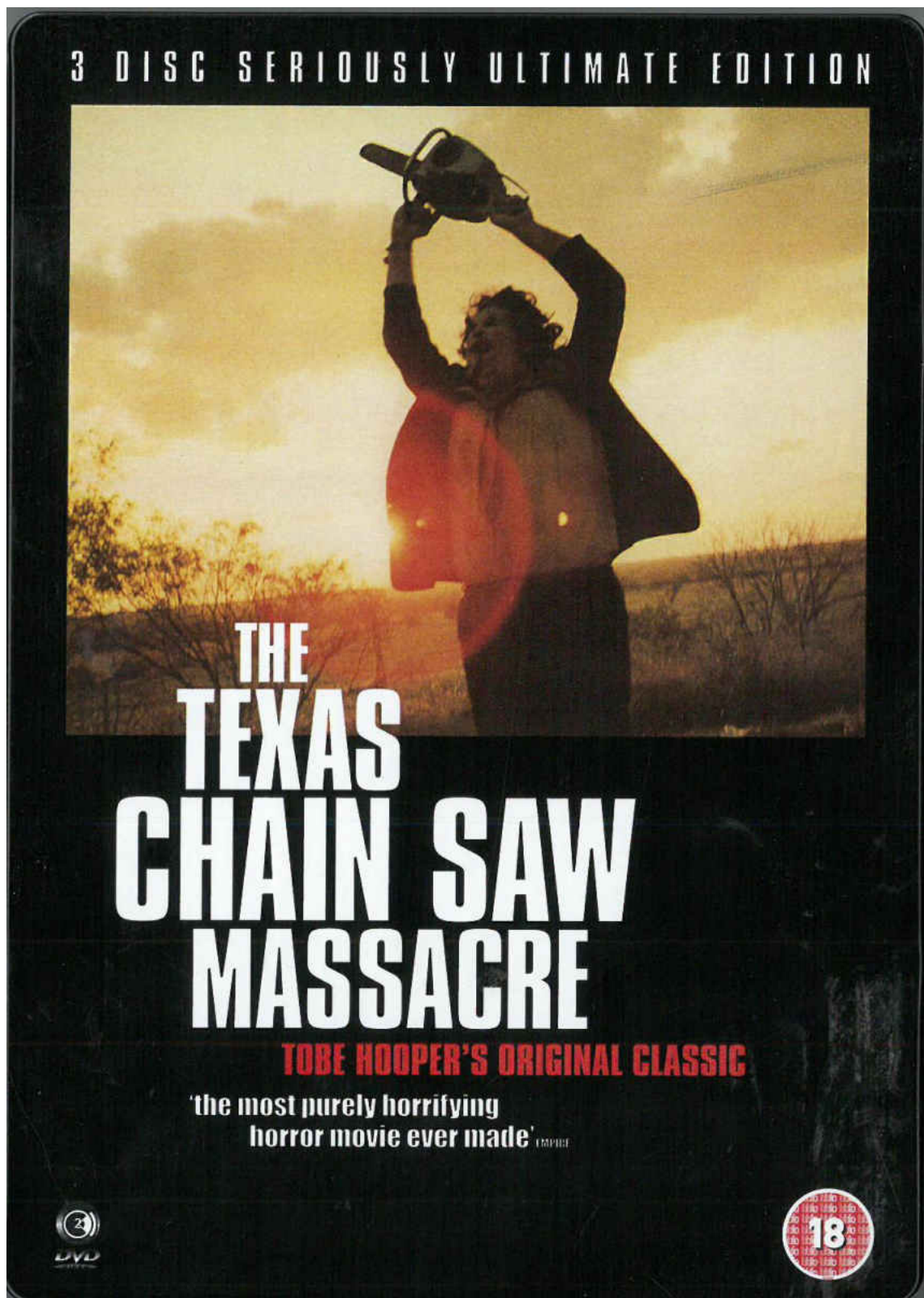


Figure 16: Last House on the Left Ultimate Edition DVD cover

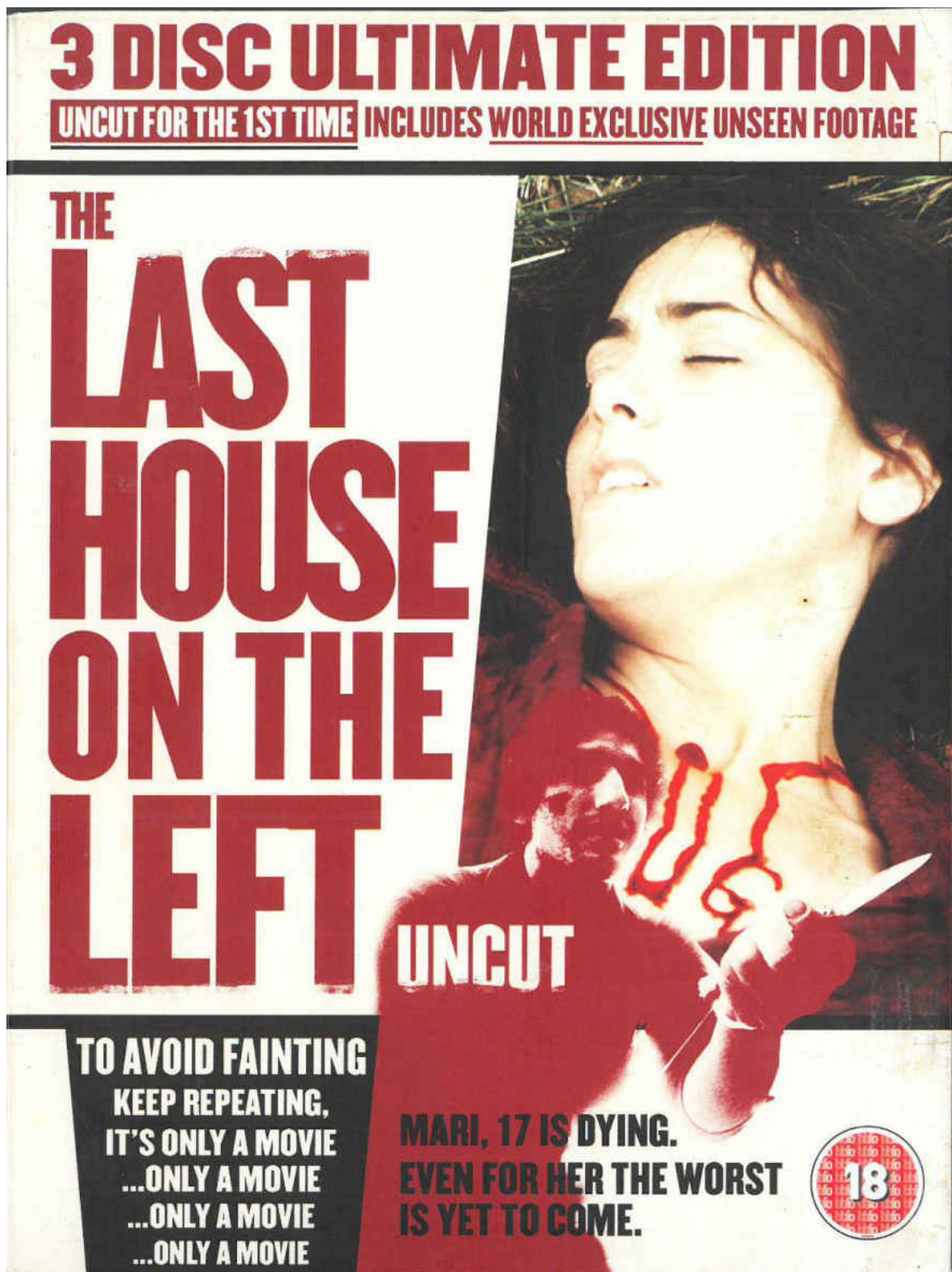




Figure 17: Last House on the Left Ultimate Edition DVD release advertisement (Empire)

**Thunderbirds**  
A GERRY ANDERSON PRODUCTION  
**Are Go on Blu-ray!**

OVER 27 HOURS OF ACTION!

The Complete Series - 6 disc set

DIGITALLY RESTORED - HIGH DEFINITION

6 DISC BOX SET

ALL 32 EPISODES IN GLORIOUS HIGH DEFINITION PLUS F.A.B EXTRAS

OUT NOW ON Blu-ray Disc

amazon.co.uk

---

**3 DISC ULTIMATE EDITION**  
UNCUT FOR THE 1ST TIME. INCLUDES WORLD EXCLUSIVE UNSEEN FOOTAGE

**THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT**

UNCUT

TO AVOID FAINTING  
KEEP REPEATING.  
IT'S ONLY A MOVIE  
...ONLY A MOVIE  
...ONLY A MOVIE  
...ONLY A MOVIE

MAKING IT DYING.  
EVEN FOR HER THE WORST  
IS YET TO COME.

FINALY, THE HORROR MILESTONE  
COMES HOME **UNCUT** FOR THE  
VERY 1<sup>ST</sup> TIME IN THE UK!  
INCLUDES WORLDWIDE EXCLUSIVE UNSEEN FOOTAGE!

THE DEFINITIVE EDITION OF THE ULTIMATE NIGHTMARE...

OVER 5 HOURS OF INCREDIBLE SPECIAL FEATURES INCLUDING COMMENTARIES, DOCUMENTARIES, INTERVIEWS & VINTAGE PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

THIS 3 DISC ULTIMATE EDITION ALSO INCLUDES:

- WORLD EXCLUSIVE UNSEEN FOOTAGE ONLY RECENTLY DISCOVERED
- GO BEHIND THE ORIGINAL BAN - EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH CARL DAFT OF BLUE UNDERGROUND

ALSO INCLUDES A 3<sup>RD</sup> DISC WITH THE FEATURE LENGTH DOCUMENTARY 'GOING TO PIECES: THE RISE & FALL OF THE SLASHER FILM'

**UNCUT AT LAST! ON DVD 13 OCT 2008**

hmv.com

Figure 18: *Straw Dogs* 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition DVD release advertisement (Total Film)

EVERY MAN HAS A BREAKING POINT

VIDEO £8

MARTIN HOFFMAN    SARAH BUCH

SAM PECKINPAH'S  
**STRAW DOGS**  
EVERY MAN HAS A BREAKING POINT

2 DISCS  
**PACKED**  
WITH EXTRAS

SAM PECKINPAH'S  
FULLY RESTORED CLASSIC  
IS THE AUTHENTIC  
STRAW DOGS

Available at **Sainsbury's**  
Selected stores only available. Also available online. Online prices may vary.

**OUT NOW**

2 DISC  
ULTIMATE  
40TH ANNIVERSARY  
EDITION  
FULLY RESTORED

18

The advertisement features a central image of a DVD case for the 40th Anniversary Edition of 'Straw Dogs'. The case is shown at an angle, revealing its spine and front cover. The front cover has a dark background with a pair of glasses in the center. Text on the case includes the title 'STRAW DOGS' in large, bold letters, the director's name 'SAM PECKINPAH'S', and the tagline 'EVERY MAN HAS A BREAKING POINT'. A '2 DISC' badge is in the top left corner, and a '40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION' badge is at the bottom. The background of the advertisement is a black and white photograph of a rural landscape with a fence and a silhouette of a person standing on the right. The overall aesthetic is gritty and classic.



Figure 19: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003) UK theatrical quad poster

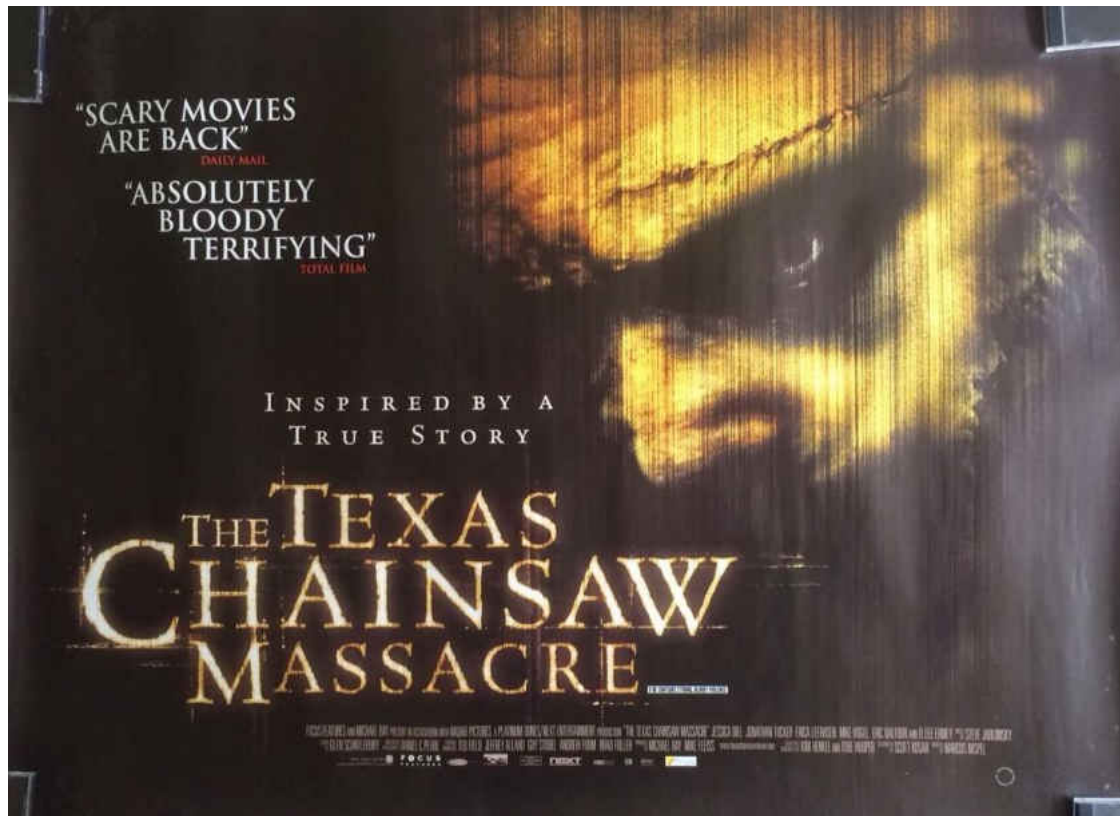


Figure 20: Last House on the Left (2009) UK theatrical quad poster

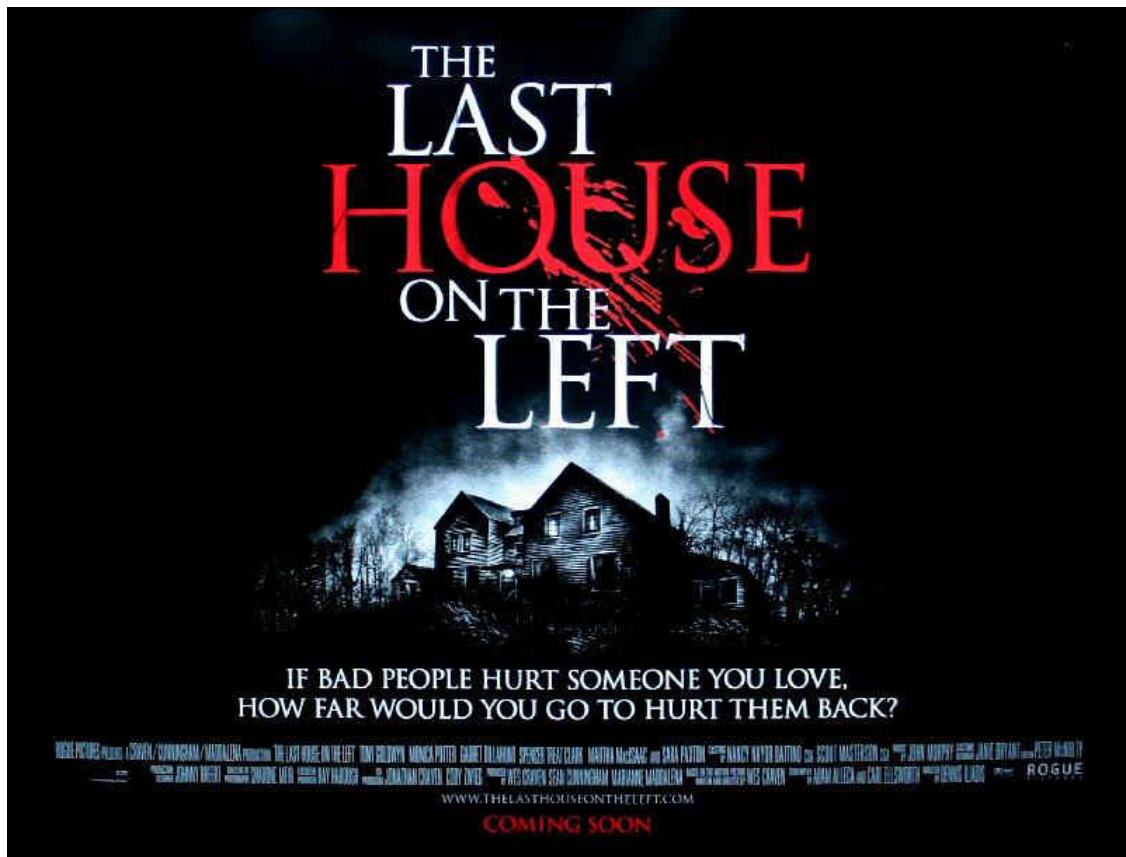




Figure 22: *Straw Dogs* (2011) UK theatrical quad poster

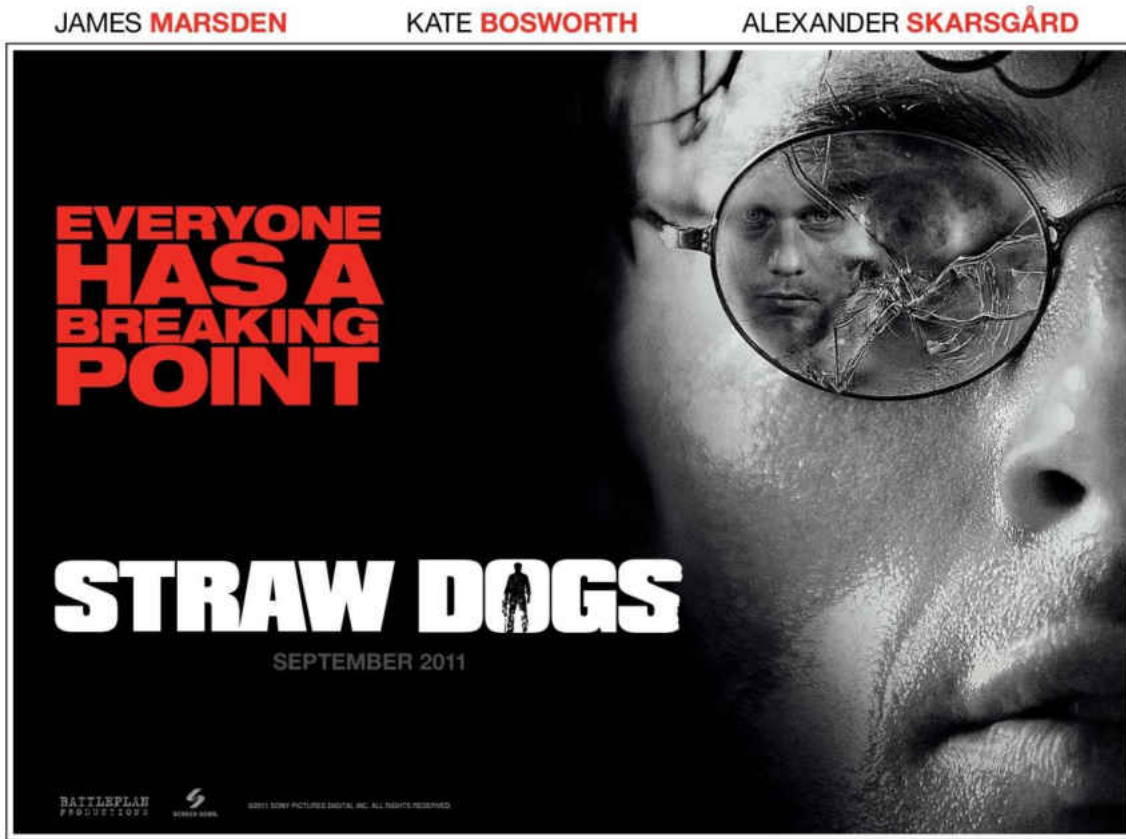


Figure 23: UK theatrical quad posters: *The Amityville Horror* (2005), *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (2009), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010)

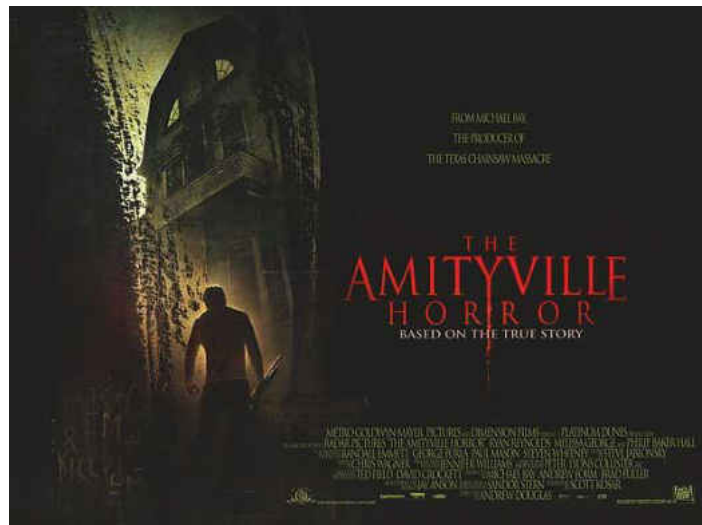




Figure 24: UK theatrical quad posters: *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), *Orphan* (2008), *Sinister* (2010), *The Evil Dead* (2013)



Figure 25: Straw Dogs (2011) UK DVD sleeve (front)

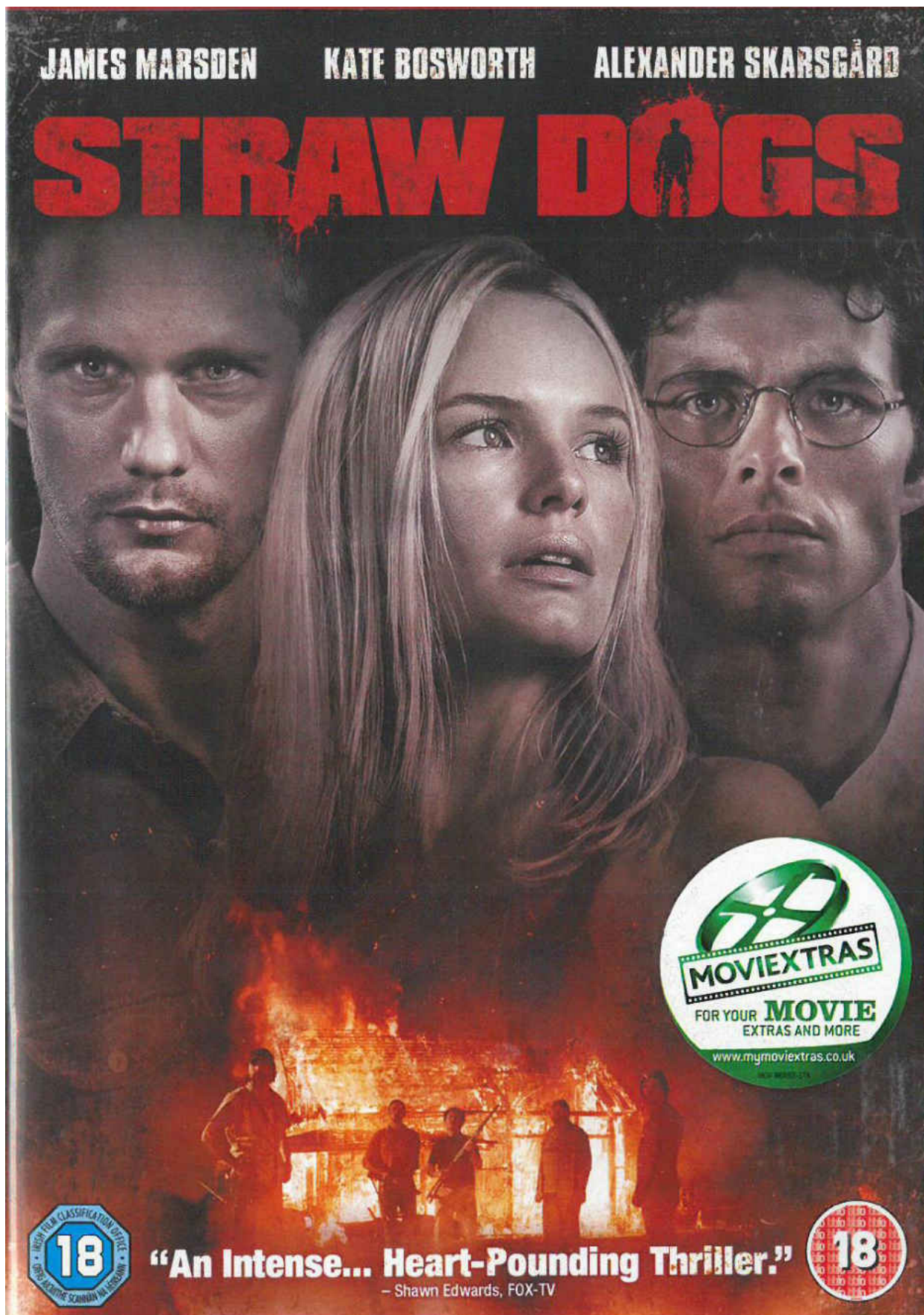




Figure 26: Last House on the Left (2009) UK DVD sleeve (front)

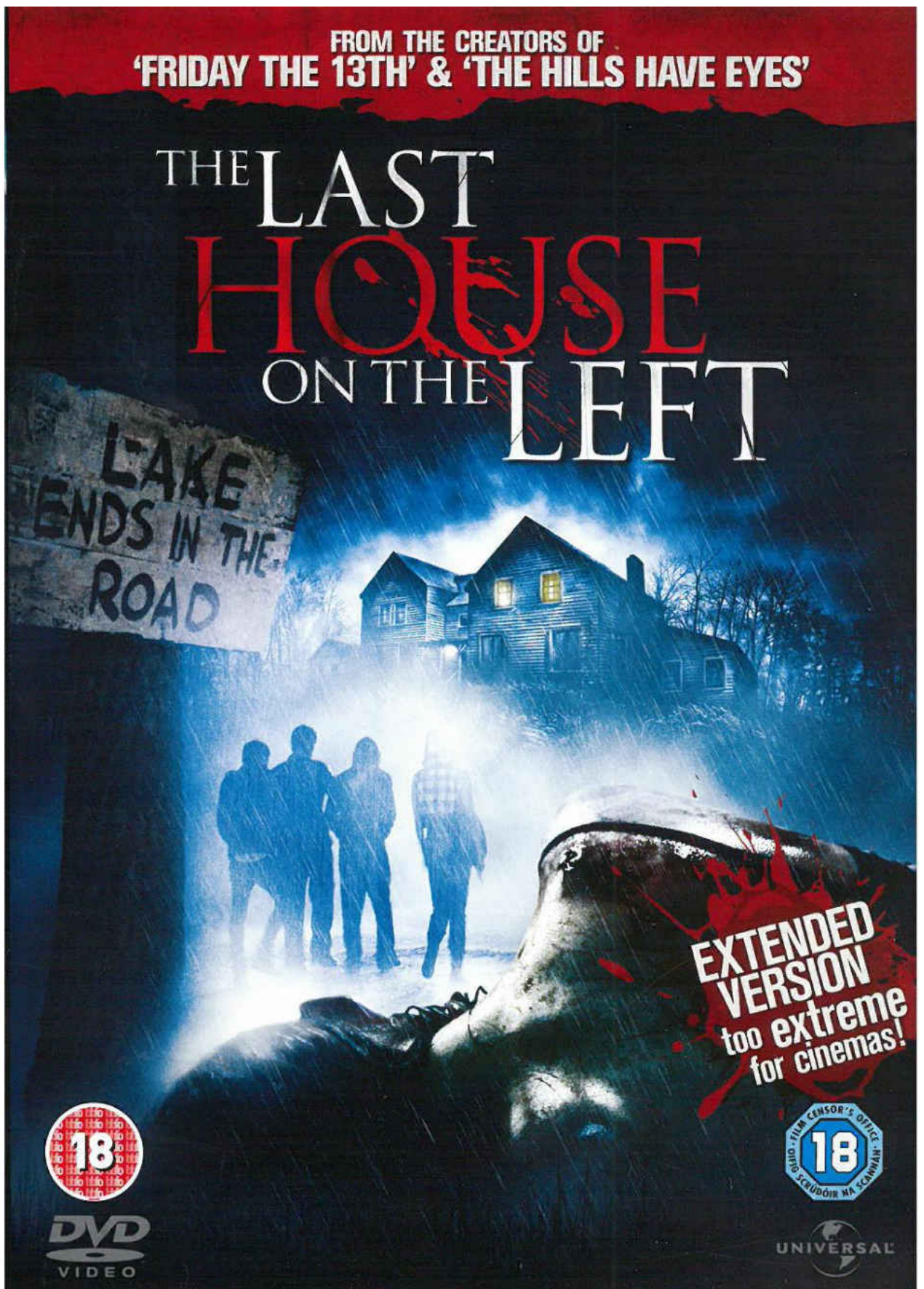




Figure 27: *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* In2Film UK DVD sleeve (front; 2009)

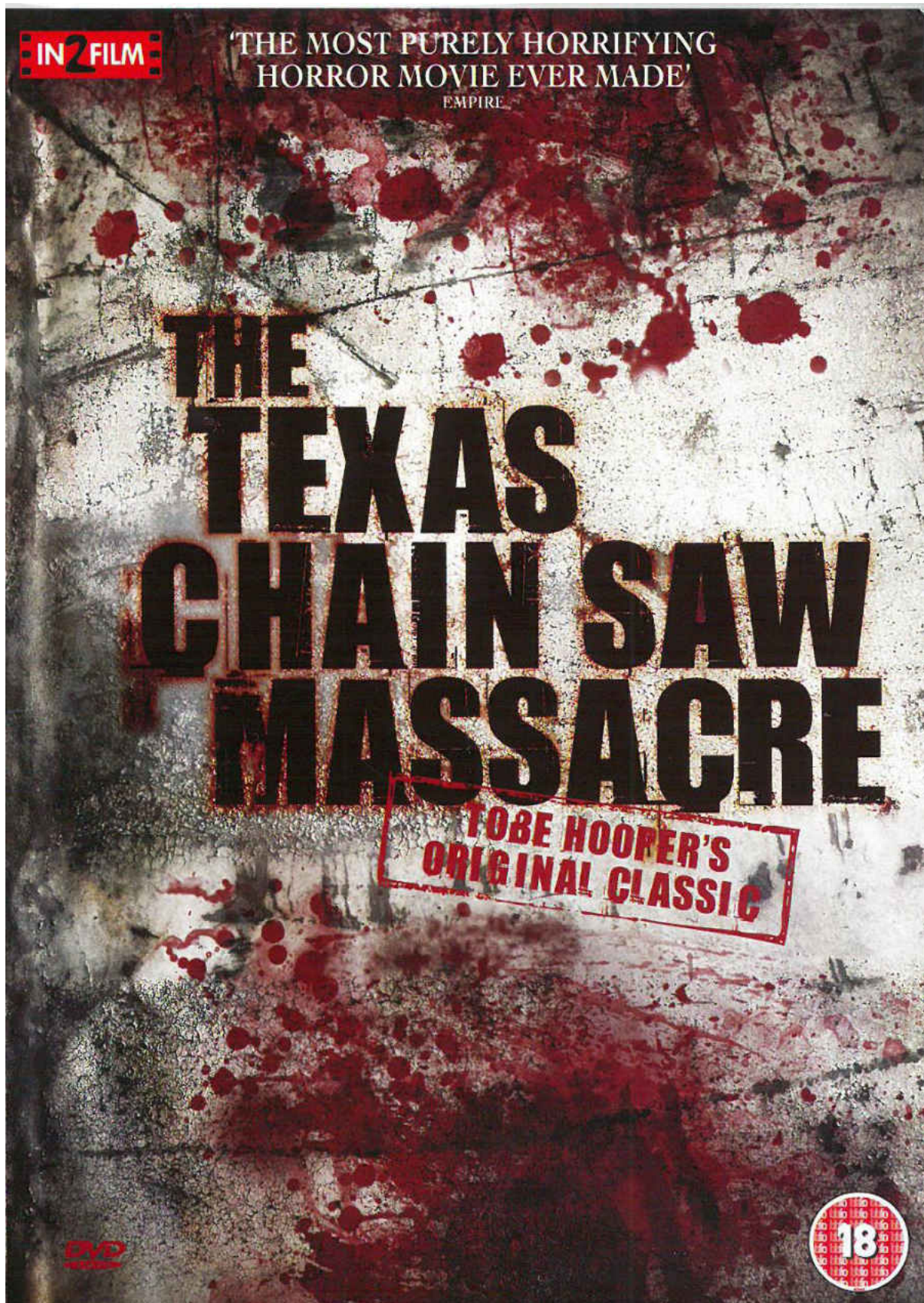
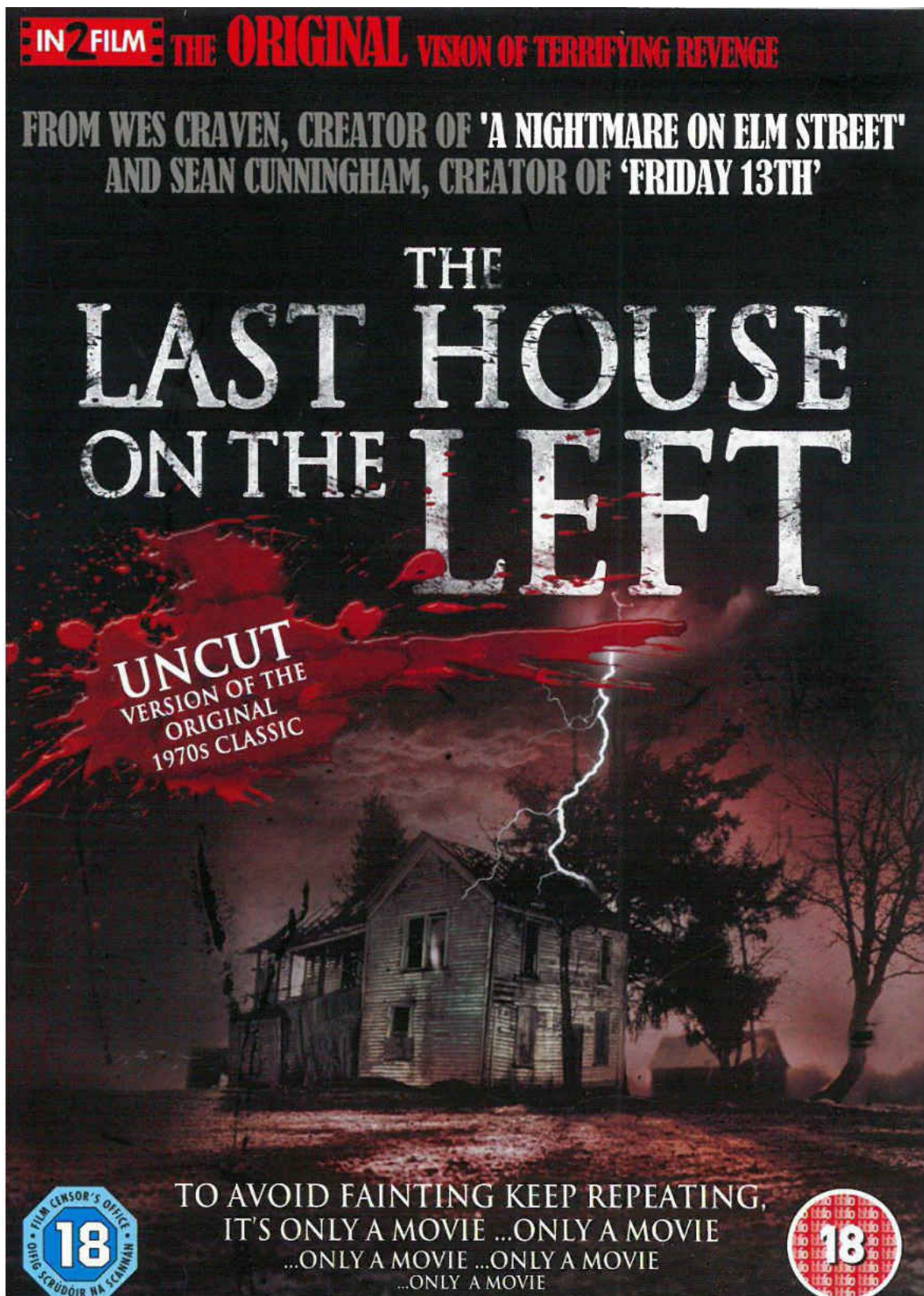




Figure 28: Last House on the Left In2Film UK DVD sleeve (front; 2009)



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- Bring Me the Head of Machine Gun Woman* (Ernesto Diaz Espinoza, 2012)
- Dear God No!* (James Bickert, 2011)
- Dog Soldiers* (Neil Marshall, 2002)
- Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (Marcus Nispel, 2009)
- Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980)
- Frontieres* (Xavier Gens, 2007)
- Grindhouse* (Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez, 2007)
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- Hostel II* (Eli Roth, 2007)
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- The Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1974)
- The Purge* (James de Monaco, 2013)
- The Ring* (Gore Verbinsky, 2002)
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