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Adapting to the Dark

Reflections of Local Culture in Recent New Zealand Horror Cinema.

A Thesis in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Media Studies
at Massey University

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Massey University
2011

Abstract

The use of Hollywood genres to package our films for overseas consumption has been an historic feature of the New Zealand film industry. The horror genre has been an important platform for many local film directors, equipping them with sufficient technical skills to create a 'calling card' for entry into Hollywood. But in working with the genre locally, these directors have introduced variations that are culturally specific to New Zealand, a process of assimilation known as 'indigenisation.' This relies upon a shared understanding of ethnic and cultural identity, and in some cases has given rise to a perceptible New Zealand film brand. While government policy may assist to promote certain features in the interest of creating and sustaining a commercially viable 'National Cinema,' real and sometimes problematic aspects of our contemporary society, such as the increasing influence of Pacific Island culture or the position of Maori in respect of the mainstream may be downplayed or omitted altogether.

This thesis examines the extent to which indigenisation has occurred in some recent examples of New Zealand horror films. It considers the theory of National Cinema and the influence of government policy on cinema practice, and examines the image of the nation that has been constructed thus far. It also outlines the theory of genres and how they are interpreted and transformed over time, and identifies the distinguishing characteristics of the horror genre. The analysis of the case studies, which include recent examples of mainstream and Pacific Island-influenced films, addresses the question of how the horror genre is culturally inflected and what images of the nation prevail. It concludes that our films may not even admit alternative local constructs of the nation, and that as we become more inundated in the streams of foreign influence and capital, there is an increasing amount of attention being given to how identity and culture is formed rather than to describing the specific cultural features of a given nation. This is reflected in the rise of generic hybridity and multi-vocalic texts, whose voices may simply express a desire to navigate the cross-currents of global consumer culture.

Acknowledgement

My thanks are due to Dr Ian Huffer for the completion of this thesis. His judicious and enthusiastic reading of drafts helped to revitalise my concentration at critical times. I am also greatly indebted to my wife, Nada, and daughters, Victoria and Olivia, who for a period of two years or so have had to endure more grumpiness than usual.

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1. Introduction

The extent of the influence of Hollywood genres on the New Zealand film industry has been recently revisited by Barry Grant (2008). Building on the assertion by O'Regan (1996,1) that national cinemas "must carve a space locally and internationally for themselves in the face of the dominant international cinema, Hollywood", Grant argues for the need for national cinemas to work within the genre system, because that is primarily how the dominant Hollywood cinema works. Doing so enables local filmmakers to reach out to a wider audience which is already familiar with Hollywood's generic conventions, and thereby gain access to overseas distribution channels and the commercial success that they purvey.

Grant also observes that the need to appeal to such a generic framework is particularly strong in small countries such as New Zealand, which do not have the audience numbers to sustain an indigenous film industry. He cites Lealand's 1988 study, which found that American films have counted for more than 50 per cent of films screened in New Zealand every year since 1929: "The mythologies of Hollywood became 'naturalised' in the absence of any more powerful propositions, integral to the ways of 'reading' the world for New Zealanders" (Grant 2008,20). While there is a risk that adopting Hollywood norms will inhibit the development of our own distinctive forms of cinematic expression, it also presents a challenge for filmmakers to re-invent the main generic trends or to inflect them with the contemporary colours of the local fabric, a tendency described by O'Regan (1996,1) as "indigenizing" genres.

The purpose of my thesis is to explore the extent of this indigenisation in-so-far-as it specifically relates to the Horror genre. This thesis will identify how New Zealand horror film-makers have articulated our culture for international consumption, and in particular the ways in which they have distinguished themselves and their work, however subtly, from their Hollywood models. Central to this thesis is an exploration of the mechanics of differentiation. As Susan Hayward (1997, x) has stated: "film... textualises the nation and subsequently constructs a series of relations around the concepts, first, of state and citizen, then of state, citizen and other... a 'national' cinema is ineluctably 'reduced' to a series of enunciations that reverberate around two fundamental concepts: identity and difference".

The most rigorous test of a state's coherence occurs when the state is under siege, and the usefulness of the horror genre as a platform for understanding identity is that it provides a given premise of conflict between the nation, as represented by the dominant imagination expressed through the film, and the assailing outsider or Other, although this Other may be a competing or outdated version of the nation. Thus the horror genre forms an effective backdrop for the examination of the boundary-marking practices that underlie the concept of national cinema. As the genre has proved to be a popular vehicle for adaptation by New Zealand filmmakers over the two past decades, and has achieved some recognition by overseas critics for its distinctive

contributions, notably those of Peter Jackson, it now contains a body of films which is large enough to suggest that it has significant potential for exploration from a genre studies perspective.

The concept of the nation whose culture is articulated through these distinctions is a complex one. Ernest Gellner (2005) argues that the idea of the nation is an outcome of large scale industrialisation. The basis of Gellner's argument is that the mass mobilisation of resources that industrialism brought about fractured the bonds provided by traditional organisational influences such as kinship, church and fealty, necessitating the emergence of a new ideology to provide social coherence and industrial efficiency. An ideology of national culture, reflecting shared ethnicities, behaviours and values, was thus closely aligned to the advancement of commercial and political state interests.

The constructed nature of such ideologies is emphasised by Benedict Anderson who, in his much-quoted text, *Imagined Communities* (1983), provides his definition of a nation as "an imagined political community" (1983,6). A particular point that Anderson makes is that 'invention' in regards to nationalism is not synonymous with 'fabrication', an equivalence he accuses Gellner of drawing. He argues that Gellner therefore implies the existence of a 'true' community outside the invented nation, and that in fact all communities, with the possible exception of those small enough to exist by face to face contact alone, are creatively imagined. Gellner's emphasis on nationalism as a creator of ideological nation states is therefore succeeded by Anderson's emphasis on 'imagination' as a sustainer of ideologically inflected but nonetheless living national communities. Both, however, are criticised by Schlesinger (2000,22-23) for their treatment of the national community as a self-contained socio-cultural space, acting primarily as a cordon for the collective consciousness rather than as a membrane that admits commerce with other nations in such a way as to shape that consciousness. This means that their interests are confined to the 'internal processes of nation-formation.' Examination of the use of the horror genre by New Zealand filmmakers entails consideration of constructions of the nation that look inwards and outwards. One of the key questions that presents itself in respect of the interface of New Zealand culture with the cultures of other international communities is the extent to which the need to establish an internationally marketable identity and the need to maintain a close collective consciousness create tension or even disparity in the cultures that each of them propogates. The advent of international co-funding arrangements is a feature of the recent New Zealand industry, riding off the back of its Hollywood success with *The Lord of the Rings* cycle, and as two of the case studies selected for inclusion in this analysis strongly exhibit the influence of their overseas sponsorship, I will look at how this tension manifests itself within their narratives.

Gellner and Anderson's modernist view of nationalism as something essentially constructed in the twentieth century in response to industrialisation is further questioned by Smith (1991) who

sees nationalism as an ethnic identity created by shared collective myths and memories. While he admits these may not be historically authentic they nonetheless provide the sub-strata for the invention of nations:

What these elitist and presentist perspectives so often omit is an analysis of the content and tone of the nationalist message. That message is certainly addressed to the imagination of the elite, but even more to the moral will, the emotions and the shared memories of the masses. (2000,47)

We thus need to take into consideration Hobsbawm's view of nation-building as a matter requiring analysis from the bottom up and top down:

Nations...are, in my view, dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist. (1990,10)

I will consequently analyse my chosen films from both perspectives, considering how they may articulate the assumptions, hopes, needs and fears of their audiences and examining their relationship to the state's projection of the nation, as embodied through government policy. In doing so, I will consider the way such hopes and fears and government policy have shaped and been shaped by the historical particularities of New Zealand as a nation and collection of peoples. Of course given that films are a commercial product, there is also a need to consider how the processes of global consumption feature in the way our films are shaped for export and whether the cultural images we present to the world are consistent with how we see ourselves, and therefore I will conclude by offering some observations of the effects of globalisation on the packaging of local specificity.

How then might we position national cinema in relation to this concept of the nation? In "National cinema: a theoretical assessment" (2000), Ian Jarvie examines the nature and strength of what he considers to be the three logically tenable arguments for supporting national cinema. These are the economic protectionist argument, the cultural defence argument, and the argument from nation-building. The first is concerned with the protection of local industry and its workers by the introduction of tariffs, quotas and other restraints on free trade between competing nations.¹ The argument as a whole, he concludes is 'culturally indifferent' as the measures of its success are economic ones.

The cultural defence argument is driven by inherent insecurity about the effects of the incursion of foreign culture and language. These may warrant defending against where the effects are

¹ Jarvie notes that the economic defence argument (movies are vital to defence) has not been invoked in advancing claims for national cinema.

clearly deleterious, such as the depiction of wanton violence, but this is not clear in many cases and there is a danger in being prescriptive. In the same way that language has become enriched by cross-fertilisation, there are also possibilities for cultural enrichment. Jarvie therefore condemns the logic of arguments based purely on premises that difference is bad.

The argument from nation-building adopts Gellner's distinction between nations and cultures. Unlike cultures, nations are invented and the establishment of national cinemas is often a part of that activity, although it is neither necessary nor sufficient. The activity itself is characterised as "a project to socialise newly emancipated populations away from radicalism and towards acceptance of the *mores*, outlook, and continuing hegemony of the governing and cultural elites" (Jarvie 2000,81). As it is assumed that cultures are not necessarily co-extensive with nations, the need for national cinema in multi-cultural nations arises from the desire to paste over the cracks between the cultures with a common render, which for Gellner would be administered by state education. Its corollary impulse is to prevent the perceived strength of the render from being undermined by the appearance of alternative forms of cultural binding which do not employ 'purificatory nationalisms.'

Jarvie's analysis concludes with his approbation of the protectionist argument and the cautionary statement in respect of the other two that "In both, proponents are looking to movies to create a particular kind of nation-culture marriage, one which homogenises internal differences, (86). This cautionary statement is problematised, though, by the introduction to the collection of essays in which Jarvie's analysis appears. In it, the editors maintain that the key difference between the cultural defence and nation-building arguments is that whilst the latter "insists upon internal cohesion through processes of strong centralisation at the expense of regional and other forms of differentiation" (Hjort and McKenzie 2000, 8), the former rejects the intrusion of foreign culture on behalf of potentially heterogenous cultures from within the nation.

The New Zealand Government can be seen to employ all three arguments through its policy on film, and in doing so reveals the potential for heterogeneity afforded by the cultural defence position. At the same, though, their policy also points towards the need to build a nation for export, granting international audiences a key role in shaping the scope and degree of this heterogeneity. Furthermore, this emphasis on export points towards the potential attractiveness of genre as a way of mediating New Zealand specific content to an international audience. The degree to which this is in tension with a cultural defence and nation-building position is something I will explore through my case studies, in particular *Perfect Creature* (Standing, 2006), which is liminal both in terms of its genre positioning and its status as a New Zealand film.

The government's policy objectives for screen funding can be extrapolated from various government policy papers, most recently the Ministry for Culture and Heritage's 2004 *Review of*

Government Screen Funding Arrangements Discussion Paper and to a lesser extent its *New Zealand Screen Production Incentive Fund – Outline of 22 May 2008*². The first of these lists the following objectives of government support:

- the intrinsic cultural and national identity value of New Zealanders telling our own stories and interpreting our national experience, within which is a special place for the protection and enhancement of Māori culture and language;
- the economic benefits a successful domestic screen-production industry can generate through the foreign-exchange earnings from the international sale of its products and intellectual property; the use of New Zealand locations and technical services by foreign productions, and the spill-over of high technology advances from screen production to other creative sectors and the wider New Zealand industry and training scene; and
- the successful marketing abroad of screen productions so as to project a distinctive New Zealand identity and to build perceptions of this country as a desirable place to work and invest in, and to visit. (para. 3.1)

While these strongly suggest that there is an element of economic protection for an industry with perceived export value, there is a requirement in Section 18 of the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) Act 1978 for the NZFC, the primary funding mechanism, to consider funding only for productions that it is satisfied have, or will have, significant New Zealand content as described in the Act³. This ensures that purely economic considerations, which would be neutral as to content, are not the sole determinant of funding. As Waller notes of the arguments leading up to the establishment of the Act, “The most constant refrain ... was that film, and more precisely, a local feature film industry – significantly contributes to national identity” (2008,20).

As to why national identity is important, one can hear a strain of the cultural defence argument in the provision “within which is a special place for the protection and enhancement of Māori culture and language”, and the emphasis on “the intrinsic cultural and national identity value of New Zealanders telling our own stories and interpreting our national experience” would appear to confirm that the Act has been written out of aspirations whose realisation depends upon the active defence of our culture.

Such an argument was more openly expressed in 2000 by the then Prime Minister, Helen Clark⁴, in respect of public television:

² For a detailed discussion of the history of the interaction of government policy and film funding see Waller (2008).

³ The Commission must have regard to matters such as the subject of the film, the production locations, nationalities and residences of persons involved in the making or financing of the film, and the ownership and location of technical equipment used.

⁴ Prime Ministerial lecture 'Arts, Culture and Public Policy.' A lecture in the Winter Lecture Series on the State of the Arts at Maidment Theatre, University of Auckland. Available at www.beehive.govt.nz/node/8266

Without a strong commitment to local content, we are subjected to the cultural influences of others without sufficient reinforcement from our own. Yet we are not a suburb of Sydney, Los Angeles, or London. We are a unique nation, building a future on a foundation of biculturalism with the values and heritage of many peoples contributing to that future. We have our own stories to tell and our own perspectives on events. Our creative people across all artistic and cultural media have a big role to play in defining our nation in the twenty-first century.

A subsequent address by the Prime Minister to the Innovation Conference in Christchurch on 7 March 2002 put these aspirations into more directly commercial terms:

We will be working with the private sector to develop a consistent brand of New Zealand across all our industry sectors, so that we add smart to the clean and green image! Currently we are also investing millions of dollars in leveraging benefit for New Zealand off the release of the Lord of the Rings – filmed in New Zealand and made by New Zealanders, and the second defence - by New Zealanders - of yachting's premier trophy, the America's Cup. Both events can help promote New Zealand as technologically advanced, creative, and successful – and our many other innovators can leverage off that brand.⁵

The authors of the article from which this quote is taken observe that:

The New Zealand government's recent "discovery" of the screen production industry thus owes more to dawning awareness of cross-sectoral economic opportunities than to strictly aesthetic, protectionist, or cultural nationalist concerns (2005,124)

Indeed, there is scope under the NZFC Act and NZFC policy for New Zealand filmmakers to explore or reproduce other cultures that exist outside of New Zealand using NZFC funds, so long as they are perceived to meet the 'significant New Zealand content' proviso⁶ and can contribute to the economy or industry infrastructure.

The economic importance of a having a product in the first place to sell to the world has been acknowledged in documents such as the NZFC's *1988/89 Priorities*:

'New Zealandness' is, however, not a sufficient criterion in itself. New Zealand films have to be strong enough to overcome the power of international publicity. And furthermore, New Zealand audiences are not large enough to support a local film industry. Overseas audiences must also want to see our films.

⁵ Clark,18. Quoted in Lawn and Beatty (2005,122).

⁶ See excerpt from the NZFC Act at appendix 1.

If, as Beatty and Lawn 2005 (133) contend, “the language of branding initiatives often approximates cultural nationalist rhetoric,” then the affirmation of “traditional notions of the link between culture and nation”⁷ may give more weight to the commercial aspects of our international export trade than any monolithic nationalist project.

It has to be said that the NZFC does not appear to have participated in any discernable programme of cultural or commercial unitisation, but has supported a wide range of films, over various genres and presenting various ethnic, gender, and class perspectives, a level of dispassion that is commended by Waller (2008,30). Included in those films is Peter Jackson’s *Braindead A.K.A. Dead Alive* (1992), of which the director has commented: “The subversive streak in me gets an incredible kick that somehow in my career I essentially got the New Zealand government, through the film commission, to finance these incredibly gory films...I’m sure they’re the only government in the world that’s ever financed splatter films.”⁸ While Cameron (2010,57) notes the tentative approach by the NZFC to funding the post-production of Jackson’s *Bad Taste* (1987), there is little to suggest that the values expressed in these or any other of the films that have been assisted have been influenced by the need to fulfil a state prescription for a national brand.

On the whole it seems that as far as government funding policy is concerned, we are free to be ourselves so long as others will buy it. The question of what they are more likely to buy – a genre product that is already familiar or a product that distinguishes itself as something new and territorially or culturally different – depends upon prevailing market conditions and preferences. The successful expression of ourselves on film, the articulation of our brand, depends therefore upon our continuing ability to anticipate the expectations and appetites of others and to accommodate these within our visions of the contemporary nation.

Of course, given New Zealand’s long history of avid Hollywood consumption, the expectations and appetites of others are already embedded, in part, within the nation’s tastes. As Lealand (1988,101) asserts “It is hopelessly utopian (and arrogant) to expect New Zealand film-makers to create unique, unprecedented films. As in other areas of cultural production, recognisably New Zealand films result from the re-invention or reinterpretation of long-standing conventions; a New Zealand ‘sub-text’ is created from an international ‘super-text’.”

Despite this, attempts have been made to identify the defining features of this ‘sub-text’. Roger Horrocks (1999) has identified the outstanding image of mainstream cinema as the ‘Kiwi Bloke’, who along with his alter-ego, the ‘Man Alone,’ is typically rugged, inventive, unsettled, resistant to authority, and emotionally reticent. Horrocks also notes the influence on critics overseas of

⁷ (Wevers and Williams 2002, 16)

⁸ Johnston, Andrew (2001). “Not So Long Ago, ‘a New Zealand Film’ Didn’t Even Exist.” *New York Times*, February 4.

Cinema of Unease: A Personal Journey (Neill and Rymer, 1995), a documentary exploration of the nature of New Zealand cinema, which presents the idea that a brooding unease with the landscape reflects our unsettled colonial psyche. However, this tendency of Pakeha filmmakers to depict characters who are at odds with the landscape has been scathingly referred to as the 'white neurosis', by Maori film-maker Merata Mita who contends that Maori films quite differently are "driven by identity, resolution and survival" (1992, 47). She thus reveals the problematic nature of attempts to define national cinema in such monolithic terms.

Horrocks (1999) also highlights the way in which the structural features of the New Zealand film industry continually act to force its filmmakers to look outwards. He argues that our national film culture, has, because of its small size, been shaped by our vulnerability to talent raiding by Hollywood and uncertain economic conditions which lead actors and directors to look for overseas opportunities or to fall back upon their own resourcefulness. These uncertain conditions may in fact heavily influence the way in which directors seek to show off their skills, with established genres providing clear backdrops for displaying the tricks of the trade. The horror genre is additionally attractive for the reason that nonetheless scary films can be made on a shoestring budget, and this may be why the genre appears to have been so popular with filmmakers in this country, with some 12 films being produced in the last decade compared with 13 in the two decades prior. Directors such as David Blyth and Glenn Standring, not to mention of course Peter Jackson, have had the opportunity to apply the skills acquired in making local horror films to the direction of mainstream Hollywood fare.⁹

In respect of this relationship with other film nations, Mark Williams (2008) sees New Zealand cinema as being similar to Indian cinema in that it does not take a hostile stance towards foreign films but reworks them to produce new forms which are not simply pastiche but are truly hybrid in nature. But while Indian cinema is large enough to support its own products, and so can be considered as one that largely ignores the taste of US audiences, this is not true of New Zealand cinema, which remains heavily reliant on exchange with the US and so is more sensitive to its appetites. One of the most successful export films to date, *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori, 1999) is a Maori film according to Barry Barclay's reductive definition of a Maori film as "one being made by a Maori"¹⁰, yet both Williams and Horrocks note the film's dilution of the Maori critique of the myth of harmonious race relations that was contained in its source novel. Horrocks notes too that the film was criticised for importing the gangland environment of films such as John Singleton's 1991 *Boyz n the Hood* but comments that "Ironically, this American style may have helped the film to be accepted by some young viewers within New Zealand" (133). In a more detailed analysis of *Once Were Warriors*, Michelle Keown writes that the

⁹ David Blyth's foreign credits include the Canadian-backed *Red Blooded American Girl* (1990), *Red Blooded American Girl II* (1997) and the US television series *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* (1993). In addition to *Perfect Creature* (2006), Standring directed the US television series *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* (2010). Jackson has directed *The Frighteners* (1996), *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1991-1993), *King Kong* (2005), *The Lovely Bones* (2009) and is currently at work on *The Hobbit* (to be released).

¹⁰ Barclay (1990, 20).

director, Lee Tamahori, tried to downplay the American influence by including music composed by Maori artists and having some of the characters speak in Maori, but nonetheless wanted the 'Hollywood veneer' to ensure a wide audience (2008, 205).

As revealed earlier, Maori culture is central to constructions of New Zealand national cinema, promoted through the terms of a cultural defence argument in government film policy. The example of *Once Were Warriors*, however, reveals some of the potential limitations when this culture is articulated in a commercially driven environment that places a high degree of importance on its export to other countries. Such questions surrounding the intersection of ethnic, national and global culture are not only pertinent to the continuing representations of Maori and Pakeha, but also hold significance for the representations of the country's increasing Pasifika and Asian populations. Regarding Pasifika cinema, Conrich and Murray talk of a "possible third new wave" of films that have surfaced since 2005 and note: "There is here a wave within a wave, with this cultural surge partly powered by the confidence on-screen of a young generation of Pacific island voices. The biggest producer of fiction films within Polynesia is New Zealand" (2007, 8).

They go on to comment on the "refreshing stories of humour, warmth, life and community" that films such as *Sione's Wedding* (Graham, 2006) and *No. 2* (Fraser, 2006) have introduced, which "works against the view of New Zealand as a space of dark fantasy or the Gothic that has dominated screen production." Such films offer a representation of New Zealand in keeping with the Clark era's emphasis on New Zealand's desirability as a 'place to work, and invest in, and to visit'¹¹, forming a corrective to a Pakeha 'cinema of unease' and the troubling experiences of Maori depicted in *Once Were Warriors*. What place is there for horror, though, within this context, and how are New Zealand's diverse ethnicities positioned through it? This is something I will address in my thesis. Indeed, together my case studies highlight the complexities of contemporary New Zealand film production, and the shifting and diverse conception of the nation that is consequently produced.

¹¹ Ministry for Culture and Heritage's 2004 *Review of Government Screen Funding Arrangements Discussion Paper*

2. Genre and generic transformation

Definition and uses of genre

A key problem with debates about genre theory has always been the question of definition. According to Berry (2004,208) one of the reasons why debates about genre definition occur is because different people are using genres for a different purpose, as “vehicles for the circulation of films in industrial, critical and popular discourses.” This gives rise to three main sites of critical focus – the generic text, the industry, and the receiving audience

Textual analyses typically treat genres as sets of social and aesthetic codes that mirror our cultural ethos. Like literary texts, film texts may be read structurally and ideologically, but, because film is a pictorial medium, iconography assumes a primary importance. Both Neale (2000) and Berry (2004) acknowledge Lawrence Alloway’s early appropriation of art historian Erwin Panofsky’s ideas of iconography and iconology to film studies¹². Essentially, iconography is the identification and description of certain recurrent visual motifs and images, but is also used to refer to the motifs or images themselves, or even to particular events. The determination of what they mean belongs to the related field of iconology, which, although distinguished by Panofsky, has for the most part become subsumed into iconography in film genre studies. Neale has suggested this may be because Alloway tended to use a descriptive rather than an interpretative approach in practice, and in any case a stable iconographic vocabulary is lacking in all but the most established genres. In respect of how the dynamics of the semiotic process work, Barbara Klinger elaborates:

Genres play an essential role in demonstrating and supporting the principles of this [classical narrative] system, which “allow for (regulated) forms of excess and (regulated) forms of display of its process: part of the very function of genres is precisely to display a variety of possibilities of the semiotic processes of mainstream narrative cinema while containing them simultaneously as genre” (1986, 88).

Ryall (1975, 12) questions whether ‘classificatory exercises’ should properly constitute the theoretical foundation of genre and argues that while these may assist in sorting films into genres, a more general conceptual framework is needed which enables genres themselves to be arranged into a rubric of conventions and audience expectations which better interrogates the process of ‘reading’ film. Nonetheless iconography has proved useful as a formal tool for charting genres as Buscombe (Grant 1986,15) explains:

All these things operate as formal elements... Obviously the formal structure is looser than that of a sonnet; not all the elements need be present. But if we say that a western

¹² See Alloway, L. “On the Iconography of the Movies”, *Movie 7*: 4-6 and Panofsky, I. [1938] (1970). “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art.” In *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

is a film that includes at least one of them (and of course the list is by no means exhaustive) then we are saying something both intelligible and useful. The visual conventions provide a framework within which the story can be told.

The limitations of this are obvious when applied to a hybrid genre film such as *Perfect Creature*. Moreover, not all genres have a well recognised field of semantic elements, and even when they do, as in the western, the individual signs are not necessarily exclusive to that genre or are sufficiently ambiguous that they may take on alternative meanings when transferred to a different context. Maltby (2003, 88) observes that this is particularly the case with gestural codes. There is a tendency, too, for exercises in iconographic classification to adopt an artificial distinction between form and content, a tendency that Buscombe (Grant 1986) adopts from Wellek and Warren, whose *Theory of Literature* (1949) treats the answer to the problem of discovering genre's 'scheme of reference' as a matter of separating outer form from inner form.

The search for a deeper mythical foundation characterises structural approaches to genre. Structural analysis applies a taxonomic approach to generic structures and derives from the work in semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure¹³ and structural anthropology. These ideas have been imported into film genre studies from literary theory. The work of literary critic E.D. Hirsch is one particular source cited by Neale (2000,23). They have also entered via the work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss whose analyses of social ritual emphasised the close relationship between semiotics and ethnology. In particular, his examination of the incest taboo in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969) considered the fundamental binary opposition of nature and culture and how symbolic order is established by socially-imposed rules which mark the boundary between the two¹⁴. Thus the key structuralist genre study texts¹⁵ employ binary oppositions as referents for their analyses of how genres generate meaning. Studies of the Western, for example, have yielded such fundamental binaries as wilderness/civilisation and individuality/community, which in the horror genre transpose into the conflict between civilised social man and his solitary inner beast. The importance of such structures is that they reveal the patterns of myth and social ritual that underlie particular genres. According to Thomas Schatz: "the genre film's plot traces the intensification of some cultural opposition which is eventually resolved in a predictable fashion" (1981,30). The process of resolution is important as it represents the ritualisation that conveys the spirit of our culture, whose continuity with our past culture it is the genre film's function to establish and preserve. One of the key concerns therefore from a critical point of view is "the relationship between narrative strategy and social function." Importantly, Schatz makes the point that genre films question the status quo even as they reaffirm it so that "the genre's fundamental impulse is to continually *renegotiate* the tenets of American ideology" (ibid. 35). Judith Hess Wright's exemplary essay "Genre Films and the

¹³ See Silverman (1983,4-14) for a summary of de Saussure's thinking.

¹⁴ See Silverman (ibid. 178-180).

¹⁵ Berry (op. cit.:214) cites Jim Kitses (*Horizons West*, 1969), Will Wright (*Sixguns and Society*, 1975), and Thomas Schatz (*Hollywood Genres*, 1981)

Status Quo" (1986) argues that genre films "serve the interest of the ruling class by assisting in the maintenance of the status quo, and they throw a sop to oppressed groups who, because they are unorganized and therefore afraid to act, eagerly accept the genre films' absurd solutions to economic and social conflicts." (41). The reason for their popularity is that "viewers are encouraged to cease examining themselves and their surroundings and to take refuge in fantasy from their only real alternative [to the insoluble ambiguities surrounding them] – to rise up against the injustices perpetrated by the present system upon its members" (49).

Will Wright's *Sixguns and Society* (1975) applies a more ritualistic methodological approach based on the approach pioneered by the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. (1968)¹⁶ He argues that "myth in modern societies retains only one of its conceptual functions, but it is a crucial one. Myth reproduces the conditions and concerns of the present in the past: the past no longer simply causes the present, it is also *like* the present and becomes a conceptual model of contemporary social consciousness". The efficacy of this way of reading is that "The past explains the problems of the present: and to the degree the past is *like* the present, it also explains how to solve those problems." (212) He thereby reduces his study's popular subject westerns to schemes of different character types and narrative functions which reveal 'mythical' patterns and subtexts.

According to Altman, the key distinction between the 'ritual and ideological camps' is that "the ritual approach considers that audiences are the ultimate creators of genres, which function to justify and organize a virtually timeless society," whereas the ideological approach examines systems engaged in "imaging narrative texts as the vehicle for a government's address to its citizens/subjects or an industry's appeal to its clients." The latter is more interested in narrative structure as it "attributes greater importance to discursive concerns" (1999,27). Both forms of structural method assume that film audiences share a common experience of generic structures and respond to them in the same way. Neale (2000) rejects this assumption, citing the research of Roberts (1990) which concludes that there are multiple ways in which readers respond to genre texts depending, among other things, on their level of competency in decoding conventions. The scope for different responses arises from the fact that "The reader is reading not the text but the genre by means of the text" (63). By this he means that each spectator constructs their own version of the genre from their experience and understanding of how textual clues fit together, and of course the greater the range of genre films a spectator has previously seen, the greater their sensitivity and ability to respond to loaded textual formations. The success of the wave of slasher movies in the 1980s,¹⁷ for example, depended upon the audience's foreknowledge of their sub-generic conventions. Closer to home, audiences may decode a film such as *Black Sheep* (King, 2006) differently according to the level of their previous exposure both to splatter films generally and to the 'kiwi splatter' films of Peter Jackson

¹⁶ First published in Russian in 1928, Propp's analysis identified 7 *dramatis personae* and 31 narrative units which form the basic structuring units of the folktale.

¹⁷ Generally regarded as beginning with *Halloween* (Carpenter,1978).

in particular. The part of audience expectations in reading practices is a key focus of audience reception theory. Using terms of colonialist exploration and appropriation, Altman (1999) bemoans the lack of critical attention to the audience's role in the construction of meaning:

...critics have never taken seriously the ability of audiences to generate their own texts and thus become intenders, mappers and owners in their own right... With each cycle, the nomadic poachers become property owners, and thus authors, map-makers and intenders, thereby establishing the capital that attracts still others' poaching activity (212).

In order to synthesise the valuable contributions made by the iconographic and structural approaches, as well as to attempt to account for the different readings that may be given to generic codes and structures by audiences over time. Altman (1999) has proposed a semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach, which builds upon an earlier, more structurally focused version.¹⁸ In the earlier version he acknowledged that it is often difficult to make a clear distinction at the constituent unit border between semantics and syntax (how, for example, should music be categorised?), and that they are not mutually exclusive. He also argued that a genre begins with a group of associated semantic elements but only truly achieves a settled status when this is supported by a recognisable syntax. This syntax could run the length of a film, such as the journey from without to within the community in the Western, or could be a shorter structuring paradigm, such as the gunfight sequence. New genres may form quickly by appropriating syntactical components that are already in use by existing genres, and the model therefore provides for intergeneric influence. It also helps to explain why some genres are less easily classifiable than others, due to their using a range of syntaxes.

Structuralist approaches have been criticised by Buscombe (See Grant 1986,15-16) for not being able to deal with forms of conflict that do not sit easily within the bounds of established genres and because these will more likely determine the form of a film rather than the other way around. This is echoed by Neale (2000,223) who notes that many new genres which arise as the result of overlap and hybridisation will not fit existing assigned structures, nor can their socio-cultural issues be "neatly parcelled out among and between different genres." Again, *Perfect Creature* springs to mind as an example of a film that presents this challenge.

While hybridity across genres within Hollywood is not a new phenomenon¹⁹ Berry (2009, 220) notes the hybridity that is now occurring due to the melding of Hollywood and other national cinemas, such that the social perspectives of some foreign generic forms, for example postwar Japanese melodrama, need to be interpreted in the light of their own political historical background. She adds that the multi-vocality of cultural expression and its persistent

¹⁸ Proposed as a semantic/syntactic approach in Altman (1984).

¹⁹ Neale (2000,249-251) argues that hybridity is "as common in old Hollywood as it is in the New Hollywood."

contestation of meaning, captured in Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia,"²⁰ applies to the reception of genres, so that they are not simply a categorical means by which audiences can be marked out for their consumptive habits and invited to consume, but are the manifestation of particular historical patterns of relationships and incidence which carry across national boundaries. Berry therefore suggests that "The object of genre analysis should thus be the social constitution of their uses: they way they organize texts, identify them with certain modes of rhetoric and of discourse, and thus suggest the kind of reception and significance they should have" (2009, 219).

Another criticism of structuralist approaches is that they concentrate upon *how* meaning is constructed rather than *why*. This is to say that their focus is the nature of the relationships between structuring units as fixed systems. This makes them, according to Neale: "immune to empirical argument, political nuance, and the actualities of socio-cultural change" (200,28). Barbara Klinger's work highlights the weaknesses of treating genres purely as structure. Her 1994 analysis of Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1956) reveals that despite the film's apparently subversive portrayal of the family, the surface glamour of its décor was emphasised in publicity shots in order to appeal to female viewers as a source of ideas for their own interior design aspirations. It thus highlights the complex negotiations that are inherent in generic conventions. For this reason her work generally has emphasised the need to examine how films interact with their audiences and the different meanings they can have not only over time but also at a specific historical juncture.

Critical attention from an industry perspective generally focuses on how genres, as vehicles for sales and marketing strategies, do interact with audience expectations and film consumption. Maltby (1995) describes how the production industry used the notion of "story type" to classify and plan its production from 1905 onwards, but notes that production groupings arranged around cycles and sequels are not synonymous with critically recognised genres, and may be defined in layers according to budget or precise audience characteristics. Moreover, films may be publicised differently depending on what production groupings or genres are perceived to be attracting the greatest audiences at any particular time. Neale (2000,253) adds that the evidence "suggests that star-genre formulations, star-formula combinations, production trends, cyclic formulae, generic formulae, generic hybrids, and traditionally defined genres were and are important [factors in the planning of productions] as well."

In my case study analysis I will attempt to take into account an understanding of the development of genre theory, identifying semantic and syntactic conventions where possible and exploring the potential for hybridity. I also recognise the potential differences between my use of genre and that employed by the state, the film industry, audiences, and/or other critics.

²⁰ For a detailed explanation of this concept see Holquist, Michael. (1990). *Dialogism*. London: Routledge.

However, by locating my case study films in relation to textual precedents and their discursive positioning by critics, the state and/or industry, I also hope to show the broader relevance of the genre readings that I offer.

Genre lifecycles

The movement from the conception of genre as a set of boundary conditions to genre as cultural discourse has been accompanied by an acknowledgement that their formation is dynamic and ever-changing. They change as cultures change, and the shifting topography is both a chief cause of critical disagreement and the very feature that makes them such a ready vehicle for the conveyance of political and commercial ideologies.

Because genres are dynamic, interrogating them in any meaningful way must be carried out with an awareness of how that change occurs and the prevalent characteristics of genres at the various stages of their development. Even reading them as a non-critical activity requires awareness of their history and of the interplay between the texts they have presented over time. Jauss (1982,88) explains how this works in practice:

The relationship between the individual text and the series of texts formative of a genre presents itself as a process of the continual founding and altering of horizons. The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and 'rules of the game' familiar to him from earlier texts, which as such can then be varied, extended, corrected, but also transformed, crossed out, or simply reproduced.

Buscombe (Grant1986) suggests that through the use of iconography innovation is introduced by pairing the strange with the familiar conventions of genre, thereby foregrounding questions about our acceptance of the conventions. Citing Jauss, Neale (2000, 217) warns against overemphasising the variations introduced by particularly innovative texts at the expense of missing the more subtle variations that every text imports to the genre. He also emphasises that any such variations introduced eventually become exhausted as a set of generic possibilities.

To describe the process by which genres evolve, Thomas Schatz (1981,37) invokes the lifecycle schema proposed by Henri Focillon in his *Life of Forms in Art*.²¹ This consists of distinct experimental, classic, refined, and baroque (mannerist or self-reflexive) phases, which constitute a journey from "straightforward storytelling to self-conscious formalism" (38). In its 'classic phase' there is a point at which a genre reaches a point of 'saturation' with its audience, and becomes opaque so that the manipulation of form starts to dominate its employment.

It needs to be noted that this lifecycle exegesis is put forward in the context of a general structural analysis of genre, and so reflects simplifying assumptions about the relative continuity

²¹ 1942. New York: George Wittenborn, Inc.

of genres. Neale (ibid.224) provides examples of how a sudden shift in the cultural or political landscape may attenuate the 'normal' pattern. In practice it may be very difficult to distinguish, for example, the mannerist stage of an existing genre from the experimental stage of a new sub-genre or hybrid genre. Our own Peter Jackson is a case in point, and one might ask whether, in the expression of his most visceral splendour, he is merely riding a global mannerist wave or has, much more radically, assisted at the birth of the so-called 'splatstick' sub-genre.

John Cawelti (1986,183) turns to the question of how genres transform and eventually exhaust themselves without assuming their decline must follow an orderly pattern. In fact he observes that 'most films that employ one of these modes are likely to use another at some point.' (ibid.199). The four 'modes of generic transformation' he identifies are the 'humorous burlesque, evocation of nostalgia, demythologization of generic myth, and the reaffirmation of myth as myth.' What they have in common is that they rely upon an underlying mythology, but also a feeling that 'the cultural myths they embodied are no longer fully adequate to the imaginative needs of our time' (ibid. 200). Despite the potential for cross-over between these modes in Cawelti's analysis, he nonetheless envisages they fall within a lifecycle of the kind posited by Schatz:

One can almost make out a lifecycle characteristic of genres as they move from an initial period of articulation and discovery, through a phase of conscious self-awareness on the part of both creators and audiences, to a time when the generic patterns have become so well-known that people become tired of their predictability' (ibid.200).

One problem with thinking of genres as bodies with ordained lifecycles is that the films that constitute a genre at one point in time are not necessary the same ones that make it up at another point, so the bodies themselves are not inherently stable. As Barbara Klinger (1994) has demonstrated, films may well slip in and out of particular genres in the course of their viewing life, as the champions of different taste formations use their influence on audiences to lay out the field of aesthetic or cultural value.

Moreover, the idea of a 'classical' phase presupposes that there are some absolute qualitative criteria by which a film's maturity within a genre might be judged. This is evident in André Bazin's analysis of *Stagecoach* (Ford,1939), a film which he describes as "the ideal example of the maturity of a style brought to classic perfection" and whose possible successors he characterises as "superwesterns" whose aesthetic will draw upon "some quality extrinsic to the genre" (1971,149ff.). This is obviously a problematic concept if it is accepted that the way in which genres are constituted itself changes over time, subject to the evaluative agreement of audiences. Tag Gallagher (1986) adds that "A superficial glance at film history suggests cyclism rather than evolution" (208).

Nevertheless, if we grant that the genre lifestyle prognosis is true of particular historical genre formations, with the proviso that a lifecycle may not always be linear and particular formations may recur, then the study of specific genres is a way into reading cultural development. One should be able to see the semantic/syntactic/pragmatic shifts in genres as markers of the changes in the discourse that constitutes our cultural expression and therefore also in the make-up of our national identity. The main practical difficulty with doing this is being able to isolate those variations that are specifically derived from a particular set of historical cultural circumstances or values. Nonetheless I will endeavour to draw attention in the case studies to those variations that I regard as constituting evidence of cultural evolution.

3. The Attraction of the Horror Genre

While a long-established literary genre, horror has traditionally attracted little attention as a legitimate film genre. Its serious treatment in a series of essays in the late 1970s by the prominent British-born film critic Robin Wood, however, appears to have marked its acceptance into the arena of serious academic film study. Nonetheless many critics continue to see it as a vulgar art form.

Wu (2003) explains why this is so, citing Bourdieu's work on essential distinctions of taste: "Tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ("sick-making") of the tastes of others" (Bordieu in Wu 2003,86).

Wu observes that various scholars have argued that horror occupies the second-lowest rung in the genre ladder, only above pornography, and argues that because it is the very objective of horror films to excite emotions related to visceral intolerance, they are parenthesised by an aesthetic of bad taste: "With 'good taste' located in the act of rejecting that which produces corporeal sensations of disgust and precisely horror, it becomes clear why the horror genre is always-already 'low'" (86).

The apparent attraction of New Zealand film directors to the horror genre can perhaps, in addition to the need to operate on limited budgets, be attributed to a spirit of outré behaviour which is a product of the country's "Man Alone" heritage. But in the same way that comparisons of this behaviour with more 'civilised' forms of behaviour is unlikely to be fruitful, the discussion of the relative aesthetic merits of genres is unlikely to assist in clarifying the features of the horror genre compared to other genres, because these arguments (as Wu observes) can be traced back to questions of culture and who decides its pantheon of values.

There are various structuralist accounts of the differences between the horror and other genres which set out to define horror by empirically demonstrating what it is not, in accordance with the established structuralist principle that signs produce meaning by way of their differences from other signs.²² Bruce Kawin's comparison of *The Thing* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is a good example of this approach, in which he argues that horror films force us to temporarily confront our own weaknesses so that the rift between our true selves and the selves we project can be resolved. Science fiction, on the other hand, is purported to effect permanent openings, by way of new possibilities or challenges. It "opens the field of inquiry, the range of possible subjects, and leaves us open" (249).

²² Ferdinand de Saussure (see note 13 supra.) demonstrated that there is no necessary eidetic relationship between the signifier or sign and its referent (the signified). Signs primarily acquire meaning through habit of usage and because we are able to distinguish them from other signs. Therefore language itself consists of a system of differences, and the nature of difference determines meaning.

Vivian Sobchack (2001,34), in her own comparison of the science fiction and horror genres echoes this essentially moral view of the horror film:

If the traditional horror film is about anything it is about Man's fall from grace, his expulsion from Eden, his dependence on the potentially redemptive power of love. Thus the horror film presents us with a world which remains ever constant in its values, a world which is predestined to find Man struggling with evil, a world which accepts the inevitability of evil and Man's susceptibility to it, a world graced by lovers who are not lustful, and menaced by protean outcasts who have been denied Eden and the hope of heavenly forgiveness because they lust.

These comparative exercises, struggle, however, to identify features that uniquely identify films as horror films, without being overly reductive or merely stating an opinion about which body of films at that time should be seen to constitute the horror genre. Sobchack herself (2001,43), although knowledgeably forthright about the proper concerns of horror, acknowledges "a limbo of films" which exists between the horror and science fiction genres. And as already discussed, changes in genre reception may mean such views differ over time or between different audiences. Statistical attempts to chart the characteristics of the genre which purport to overcome such reductive tendencies themselves suffer from the problem of what Andrew Tudor (1989,3) calls 'revelatory reading,' whereby the terms of the explanatory framework used dictate the nature of the concealed significances that are exposed. To overcome this, his own statistical history of the genre supposedly applies a 'practical consciousness' approach which organises its explanatory terms according to a genre audience's normally unarticulated 'pragmatic understanding of a genre's functioning' (p.4). While he does admit the problems of gaining access to this understanding, particularly as it relates to past audiences, it does not deter his proceeding with his own assumed construction based on its underlying foundation - our fascination with fear and death: "In the horror movie – its universe and our involvement founded on both the fascination and the fear of violence – there is finally a Hobbesian state of nature: 'continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'" (1989,129).

Structuralist attempts to discover essential features which explain this fascination have given rise to explanatory models such as Robin Wood's extremely influential "return of the repressed" hypothesis²³. Based on Freudian psychoanalytical theory, it proposes that the horror film narrative is a struggle for predominance between the normal "Repressed" and the monstrous "Other", and that it is "the relationship between normality and the monster that constitutes the essential subject of the horror film." Wood's model describes the "Other" in explicitly political terms: "Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but

²³This was first presented in a *Film Comment* essay "The Return of the Repressed" (1978) and later expanded upon in *The American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film* (1979).

must deal with...in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself" (1978,73).

In his list of 'others' Wood includes women, children, other ethnicities, other cultures, the proletariat, different ideologies or political systems, and deviations from sexual norms²⁴, of which he argues that the release of sexuality in the horror film is always presented as monstrous, perverted and excessive, but necessarily so, as the excess and the perversion are a direct consequence of repression.

The otherness of sexuality forms the foundation of James B Twitchell's psychoanalytical account of the fascination of the horror film as deriving from "the transition from individual and isolated sexuality to pairing and reproductive sexuality" (1985,104). Twitchell argues that this is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the genre's spectators are an adolescent "ripening audience" for whom sex "is a concern fraught with inarticulated anxiety." The hairiness of the werewolf and the sexual voracity of the vampire are natural expressions of adolescent transformations. He attributes the genre's appeal to adults, on the other hand, to "the elder's need to inform" adolescents about the social implications of their choices so that there is "a crucial conversation between generations." The perceived social efficacy of this dialogue is, for Twitchell, unequivocal: "Just as fairy tales articulate a continuous range of future alternatives that deal with resolving the anxieties of separation, so horror tales announce the whys and wherefores of sexual reproduction and then attempt to solve some of the alternatives. Horror art is not escapist fantasy; it is social history" (ibid.). While probably an apt description of many films aimed at the adolescent market, Twitchell's account does not explain why those who are not preoccupied with the concerns of adolescence also enjoy the horror genre.

Another psychoanalytical attempt to explain our attraction to horror films is Gixti's (1989) 'beast within' approach, which has as its fundamental premise, the proposition that human beings are 'rotten to the core' and spectators seek to engage with horror in order to activate a catharsis of their own bestiality. Tudor (1997) rejects this as an adequate explanation, noting that if all people have a 'beast within' then there must be some other explanation for why only certain people are attracted to horror. He also says of theories like the 'return of the repressed' that "one might argue that bringing things to the surface is likely to be far from pleasurable. Freud himself recognises that the uncanny as experienced in reality (as opposed to fictions) is a matter for fear, and to understand it as a source of pleasure when induced through fiction requires further elaboration" (449).

²⁴ Preface to *Horror Films and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare*, edited by Steven Jay Schneider. Cambridge University Press 2003.

Michael Levine (2004) criticises this claim on the basis that emotions such as fear are not inherently unpleasant, as the enjoyment of spectatorship at films, sports and other events which induce fear and similar emotions such as disgust clearly demonstrates. He also points out that while psychoanalytical explanations are necessary to understanding the attraction of horror, horror films need not be psychoanalytically interpreted. This is particularly so where horror films fail to evoke fearful fascination (because they are bad or are peripheral to the genre) or do not exhibit perversions such as voyeurism, fetishism and sadism that need to be explained in psychoanalytical terms.

Perhaps the most concerted philosophical attempt to explain horror films in terms of our emotional response to them is Noel Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror Or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990). The two central paradoxes Carroll attempts to resolve are "1) how can anyone be frightened by what they know does not exist, and 2) why would anyone ever be interested in horror, since being horrified is so unpleasant?" (8). Carroll argues that it is the mere thought that a monster might exist and wreak harm that provokes fear and disgust and that these feelings are made pleasurable by our aesthetic appreciation of an underlying well-constructed fictive text. The resultant emotion of 'art-horror' is a consequence of our cognitive and emotive faculties working together, the one arousing curiosity, the other repulsion.

While sophisticated and influential, Carroll's argument does not satisfactorily account for the pleasure of horror films whose characters are more real than conceptual, a point made by Daniel Shaw (2001) in respect of films "peopled by psychos, slashers and sociopaths." Shaw believes that much of the pleasure we derive from such films is "1) Identifying with the horrifying force, and vicariously enjoying the havoc that it wreaks; and 2) Sharing in the triumph that the human protagonists usually achieve over that force." The underlying philosophical platform for his argument, as Shaw acknowledges, is Nietzsche's idea that pleasure is obtained by an increase in the feeling of power. But once again its application is limited, as it may only be applied to those types of horror that feature a recognisable power struggle.

Julia Kristeva's Influential feminist explanation of our fascination for the abject²⁵, in common with these ideas, has Freud's notion of the uncanny as a basis. The uncanny is essentially related to repression as it is the manifestation of what should be hidden but which nevertheless surfaces. There are many critical essays that explain how individual films operate to repress one 'Other' or another, using the sorts of categories that Wood has listed. It is important to note, though, Wood's own acknowledgement that theories of repression are not the whole answer to the success of the genre:

²⁵ See p.71 below.

That the "return of the repressed" formula does not exhaustively explain all horror movies was demonstrated already in the '70s/'80s by what seems now in retrospect the period's greatest achievement, George Romero's *Living Dead* trilogy. It has not, I think, been sufficiently recognized that the meaning and function of the zombies changes radically from film to film. It is consistent, in fact, in only one way, that the zombies constitute a challenge to the humans, not merely to survive but to *change*. But the nature of the challenge differs from film to film. (Preface to Scheider, 2004)

Wood's interpretation of modern horror films as critiques of the bourgeois American family was the first recognition of the social criticism function of horror films and an acknowledgement that the evolution of genres goes hand in hand with cultural and political drivers. This is borne out by investigations such as Mark Jankovich's (1992) tracing of the development of horror to the ascendance of bourgeois culture, where a stalwart horror icon such as Dracula is seen to be a representation of monopolist capital, threatening the bourgeois household.

Finally, there are some reception studies which have looked at audience responses to contemporary horror, such as Thomas Austin's *Hollywood, hype and audiences* (2002). In one of the constituent case studies, Austin surveyed audience responses to *Bram Stokers Dracula* (Coppola, 1992) and found that the personal viewing experiences and expectations of audience members, including their awareness of those aspects flagged by the film's marketing, significantly shaped their perceptions about the film's generic status, whether as a horror, spectacle, or star-vehicle. Perhaps most telling was the main reported complaint that the film was not frightening, which suggests that whatever else may attend the definition of a horror film, fear remains a necessary ingredient.

The case study chapters will explore some of the more important features I have described here - in particular the notion of 'the Other', 'the beast within', and the 'challenge to change' – as well as discussing the extent to which these are manifested in nationally specific variations of genre.

4. Introduction to Case Studies

In his history of New Zealand film Bruce Babington (2007) asks the question of what constitutes a New Zealand film. He notes the legal criteria used to guide the New Zealand Film Commission's (NZFC) decisions about funding which are contained in section 18 of the New Zealand Film Commission Act 1978. The Act does not allow the Commission to provide funding to a film project unless it is satisfied it has "significant New Zealand content," a term which is defined in Appendix 1.

Babington argues that "the abstract geography of New Zealand cinema can best be envisaged as a series of concentric circles, spreading from wide inner circles occupied by the majority of films fulfilling most of the criteria above uncontentionally, to narrower ones occupied at the furthest extremes by films that perhaps fulfil only one or two..." (17).

This is a necessarily wide interpretation for Babington's purposes, but in order to avoid any possible taint of analytical circularity, whereby the boundaries of the subject become demarcated by the films chosen for descriptive analysis, I have chosen for my case studies films that clearly fall within (a) to (c) of subsection 2, that is, films which have a New Zealand subject, shooting location/s, or feature New Zealand nationals as directors and/or actors. These criteria appear to me to be those that are more likely to describe the cultural features that resonate with a local viewing audience, although one might argue that *Perfect Creature* resonates somewhat less than the others because of the way it incorporates these. Of course they also all meet criteria (d) in that they have been funded or co-funded by the NZFC, something I will comment on in more detail.

Each of the three films I have chosen as case studies has been directed by a normally-resident director. Each uses New Zealand actors, although *Perfect Creature* stars Hollywood actors Dougray Scott and Saffron Burrows, and *The Tattooist* (Burger, 2007) stars Hollywood actor Jason Behr. Each is primarily filmed on location in New Zealand, notwithstanding that the Nuova Zelanda of *Perfect Creature* is a hybrid local landscape which combines futuristic features with pseudo-Victorian architecture, and each has primarily New Zealand content, with *The Tattooist* also featuring local Samoan culture.

In deciding whether these properly constitute horror films, I have given due regard to the NZFC's own genre classification system, as this tends to be the basis of the marketing for the films that it funds, and therefore the intended trigger in terms of audience genre recognition. Respectively it tags *Black Sheep*, *Perfect Creature*, and *The Tattooist* as "horror/comedy," "sci-fi thriller," and "supernatural thriller."²⁶ The NZFC does not publish explanations of its genre

²⁶ See NZFC's film catalogue at <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/>.

classifications and the term “thriller” appears to be used in preference to “horror” perhaps to widen the potential appeal of some films. Given that *Perfect Creature* features vampirism I have treated it as belonging in the horror genre although I accept that is a liminal film at the boundary between science fiction and horror, a point I will discuss further in the case study.

In fact the categorisation of all three films is far from settled. Tudor (1986) raises the problem of circularity inherent in using sets of prescribed features to demarcate genres for the purpose of descriptive analysis which has as its goal the mapping of the boundaries and connections between those genres. His response as to how they are constituted was: “Genre notions – except in the case of arbitrary definition – are not critics’ classifications made for special purposes; they are sets of cultural conventions. Genre is what we collectively believe it to be.” (ibid.:7). As it seems to be the prevailing opinion of reviewers of *The Tattooist* that it is a horror film,²⁷ and in light of its supernatural content, I have regarded it as such. In designating all three of these films as horror films, I have given considerable weight to the most common genre descriptions used by reviewers.

Most importantly these three films constitute a corpus that exemplifies the following:

1. The generational change in settler culture (*Black Sheep*).
2. An expression of recent New Zealand immigrant culture (*The Tattooist*)
3. The absence of obvious markers of New Zealandness within a Hollywood production model (*Perfect Creature*)

The ethnicities presented in two of these films in particular are diverse, from the pakeha/bi-cultural background of *Black Sheep* to the Asian influence and focus on Samoan culture in *The Tattooist*, and thus are likely to reflect at least some of the heterogeneity evident in modern New Zealand. My analysis of cultural features in these films is therefore likely to traverse as wide a range as practicable, within its scope, of the ethnic and contextual conditions that give rise to the creative expression of national identity.

²⁷ The website for NZ Film Videos (<http://www.nzvideos.org/tattooist.html>) provides links to a number of reviews.

5. Case Study – Black Sheep

Background

The 2006 horror-comedy *Black Sheep*, directed by New Zealander Jonathon King, describes Henry Oldfield's return to his family farm after a self-imposed absence of fifteen years, during which time his brother, Angus, has been conducting genetic experiments to create a new breed of sheep. The unwitting release of a mutant sheep by a pair of new age environmental activists who recklessly steal a flask of laboratory waste, leads to the infection of the flock and a murderous onslaught which forces Henry to confront his true self and reassume his rightful place as patriarch.

One of the strengths of the film, and the main reason why I have chosen it as a case-study, is that it attempts to capture our culture without compromise. Despite its being pitched to a stereotype of New Zealand held by overseas audiences, there are few concessions in respect of language, and it is studded with Kiwi classic idioms such as “rattle your dags” and “bugger me.” The confidence of its New Zealandness I think reflects national pride in the success of New Zealand horror cinema overseas which has already largely been received as a carnival of splatter and comic-grotesque bad taste off the back of Peter Jackson's *Bad Taste* (1988), *Meet the Feebles* (1990) and *Braindead*. It has even been argued that he has created an attendant national image: “When the squarely Hollywood-centric trade paper *Variety* explicitly labels Jackson ‘kiwi’, the rhetorical gesture brands not only the director but also New Zealand itself as ‘gore-meisters’ in the imaginations of industry insiders, critics, and consumers” (Wu 2003, 90).

In terms of its generic type, *Black Sheep* is a horror pastiche in the vein of zombie comedy-horrors that runs through *The Evil Dead* (Raimi, 1981), *Reanimator* (Gordon, 1985), *Braindead* (Jackson, 1992) and *Shaun of the Dead* (Wright, 2004) but bears traces of the influence of films as widely disparate as *The Birds* (Hitchcock, 1963)²⁸, and *Night of the Lepus* (Claxton, 1972). Its marketing claims it to be a “A new breed of comedy-horror”, and indeed its hybrid were-sheep, which has the rapacious appetite of the zombie, but a human heart, does introduce a new direction in monstrous hybridity, creating greater opportunity for the employment of pastiche by opening up the field of potential reference. In addition to its zombie heritage it is also able to draw from the were-wolf sub-genre, with its syntax of metamorphosis, for example, mimicking the special effects magic of films like *The Howling* (Dante, 1981) and *An American Werewolf in London* (Landis, 1981). Some other features of its generic syntax can be traced into previous films. Its were-sheep hunt as a collective, and such colony behaviour has been previously explored in *The Howling*. Also, the transmission of lycanthropy by infection, rather than the

²⁸ Ridley (2007) notes the borrowing of the escape scene, which is one of the most well-known scenes in *The Birds*. This shows Mitch, Melanie and others treading carefully among thousands of quiet birds in an attempt to escape. In *Black Sheep* Henry creeps carefully through the flesh-eating flock disguised as a sheep.

conventional genetic inheritance of the condition has a precedent in *Ginger Snaps* (Fawcett, 2000).

In respect of its generic maturity, both its humorous intent and the way in which it is employed are characteristic of generic transformations of the type described by Cawelti (1986,192) as 'humorous burlesque.' The features of this type include the "two primary techniques ... the breaking of convention by the intrusion of reality and the inversion of expected implications." The first of these techniques appears through the periodic rupturing of scenes of bucolic innocence, for example the slaughter of Henry's pet lamb, while the second is reflected in inversions such as the uprising of killer sheep. The film also exhibits a particular strain of the second technique in the character of Henry, whose reformation enacts the "the device of turning a character who shows all the hallmarks of a hero into a coward, or vice versa." Given Henry's journey is central to the plot, I will discuss it in more detail later in this chapter.

The plot of the film is similar to that of *Death Warmred Up* (Blyth 1984), arguably the first horror film made by a New Zealand director in New Zealand. In this film the villain, Dr Howell, creates zombie mutants by performing secret brain experiments. This film is notable for initiating the New Zealand splatter horror style. Duncan Petrie (2007) considers that its splatter effects and precocious visual style foreshadow the techniques used most famously by Peter Jackson:

Other techniques [in addition to the use of a Steadicam] include a plethora of extreme angles and distorting wide-angled lenses, utilised to heighten the sense of terror and foreboding, and the use of coloured lighting such as blues in night sequences, sickly yellow/green and amber, which provide a suitably anti-naturalist ambience to many of the scenes. This combination of techniques creates an appropriately frenetic and edgy visual style, which clearly anticipates the early films of Peter Jackson such as *Bad Taste* and *Braindead*." (70).

The brand loyalty in *Black Sheep* extends to the use of the same shaky handheld camera techniques used in *Death Warmred Up* and the liberal use of lurid red food colouring and syrup, a concoction reportedly invented during the shooting of *Braindead*. True to the 'splatstick' spirit, *Black Sheep* disperses its blood and guts by the bucket. Gory images of sheep dining on human limbs parenthesis the reversal of the food chain. In several places there are abrupt edits to images of domestic food preparation - of the housekeeper disgorging the innards of a rabbit, of piles of offal and intestine-like spaghetti in pans. While it pays its regards to the bloody excess of its genre, at the same time its re-use of offal, as in the housekeeper's making of haggis, expresses a semiotics of the recycling of waste which is characteristic of post-modern pastiche.²⁹ It also expresses New Zealand's pragmatic colonialist ethic which holds that nothing

²⁹ Hoesterey (2001, 47) cites an analysis of *Blade Runner* by Giuliana Bruno which treats the film as "a representation of the system of waste and recycling that marks an accelerated postindustrialism; pastiche is but a semiotics of recycling."

should be wasted and virtually anything can be fashioned or fixed using nothing more than a length of “No 8 wire.” The strength of this faith in improvisation is itself satirised in another prominent scene in which a bottle of mint sauce, an essential NZ accompaniment to a meal of roast lamb, is used to fight off a were-sheep. Faithful to the aesthetic of pastiche, it re-enacts a prominent scene in *The Howling* in which the were-wolf is splashed from a bottle of holy water whose contents burn into its flesh.

On the other hand, a very real attitude to improvisation is displayed in the characteristic old-fashioned approach to special effects, employing puppets and animatronic constructions rather than digital effects. In his commentary on the film³⁰ the director explained that his choice here was deliberate, as he felt that the resultant anti-naturalistic effect actually enhances the audience’s sense of events occurring in the here and now. His comments, and the previous use by New Zealand horror films of these types of effects suggest that they have come to be seen as a distinguishing characteristic.

The premise of science run amok is of course a staple of horror movies with a history going back at least as far as *The Island of Lost Souls* (Kenton 1933) which adapts H. G. Wells’ novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1898). Andrew Tudor’s (1989) statistical survey of almost a thousand films shows that between 1931 and 1984 mad scientists rank second in the order of the incidence of monsters in horror movies with 169 cases (first was psychotics with 271 cases, while vampires came in fourth with 101 cases). At the same time scientific threats represented the most common source of horror movie threat. However, cataloguing the incidence of monsters appearing in New Zealand thriller/horror films in the thirty years 1980 -2010, using Tudor’s taxonomy, reveals the following indicative statistics (refer to the full list of films in the appendix):

Psychotics	9
Supernatural spirits	8
Vampires	4
Zombies	3
Were-sheep	1
Aliens	1
TOTAL	26

Psychotic characters feature strongly, appearing in 9 or more films between 1992 and 2007 while supernatural spirits also feature strongly. In respect of the latter, films such as *Mr Wrong* (Preston 1985) and *Hidden* (McLachlan 2006) imitate successful Hollywood models,

³⁰ Included in the Icon DVD version.

respectively the possessed car of *Christine* (Carpenter 1983) and the haunting world of *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick & Sanchez 1999).

There are, of course, various issues with cataloguing monster types. One could question, for example, whether the monster of *Black Sheep* belongs to the werewolf, zombie or mad science categories, if using Tudor's taxonomy. This aside, there appears to be in our cinematic history a low incidence of spectacular monsters of the Hollywood kind, as opposed to monsters in the form of deranged humans or that inhabit the form of everyday objects, which perhaps simply reflects the constraints presented to New Zealand directors historically by the high costs of achieving credible special effects³¹. There does not appear to be any intrinsic reason why this is the case.

As I have mentioned earlier, *Black Sheep* differs from films like *Braindead* in that it makes greater use of pastiche for its comic-horror effects, and its references to other films are not confined to the horror genre but borrow too from mainstream entertainment. The film's idyllic pictures of sheep grazing on the landscape and then pouring down from the hills, for example, echo the grazing and stampede scenes in *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1993)³², while the assault by the foetal sheep on the character of Grant copies the "Killer Rabbit of Caerbannog" scene from the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam, 1975), in the same way confusing our expectations about the correlation between cuddliness and good temper. Boundaries are crossed when Angus is caught smoking with his trousers down after sex with his prize sheep (he says to Henry "you wouldn't understand"), and the obvious figure of reference here is Gene Wilder in Woody Allen's 1972 *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid to Ask)*. The confusion of boundaries, of course, is the basis of the moral crisis that distinguishes the horror film, and the morality of genetic tampering is the key theme. This reflects contemporary international ethical concerns about the dangers of uncontrolled genetic engineering which have manifested themselves in the recent trend of "eco-horror", where fiction is eschewed in favour of documentary as the planet itself turns malevolently on mankind in response to his abuse of it.³³ Other non-Hollywood examples are Korea's *The Host* (Yoon-ho 2006) which tells the story of the savaging of a community by a water beast that has been created by the dumping of formaldehyde into the local river and Ireland's *Isolation* (O'Brien 2005) in which cows are infected by bacteria created by a bio-genetics firm.

³¹ A considerable amount of set design and prosthetics work was carried out for *Black Sheep* by the Weta Workshop in Wellington, whose special effects success has come about as a result of the *Lord of the Rings* projects.

³² In response to a 2007 email interview from movie website *Screenjabber* the director cited *Evil Dead*, *Braindead*, *American Werewolf in London*, *Shaun of the Dead*, *Jaws*, *The Birds*, and *Jurassic Park* as influences. See http://www.screenjabber.com/jonathanking_interview [accessed 15 march 2011].

³³ This trend has been led by films such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim 2006) and the more dour *11th Hour* (Connors Peterson & Connors 2007)

Cultural context

While the pastiche is ubiquitous, it hangs upon a strong central vein of cultural parody whose target is the bucolic myth of New Zealand pakeha farming culture. In the social hierarchy of this cultural realm, whose generations of fecund settlement are suggested by its inhabitants' name Oldfield, the golden child is the one who bears the Golden Shears, a national trophy marking the pinnacle of sheep-shearing athleticism. Although he has not won them in contest, his father's Golden Shears are handed on to Angus by the housekeeper, as a symbolic gesture of the assumption of his authority over the farm and its livestock, and he goes on to wield them as a potent weapon.

The conferral of fighting qualities on a domestic object has a local film precedent with the prolifically murderous hover-mower in *Braindead*, but here the colour gold exaggerates its mythological significance. The suffusion of the landscape in a gold light at the film's beginning emphasises its status as a pastoral paradise, and the name of the farm, GlenOlden, is of course a contraction (Glen + Olden + Golden). Henry's status is acknowledged by Angus who calls him "Golden boy" when he threatens to take back the farm. This heavy-handedness of mythologizing mocks the aggrandisement of the pastoral tradition by the pakeha land-owning farmer, and in particular the great tradition of animal husbandry, whose continual genetic engineering by way of targeted breeding programmes provides just cause for a bloody revolt. As the films' promotional trailer proclaims: "There are 40 million sheep in New Zealand and they're pissed off!"

To put the film in its historical context, the depiction of the raid on the laboratory building by the film's two inept environmental activists, Grant and Experience, might well have evolved from the events described in Nicky Hager's *Seeds of Distrust: The Story of a GE Cover-up*, a controversial study which was released in July 2002 in the course of a general election and catapulted the issue of genetically modified organisms onto centre-stage. Its legacy has been a general disquiet about the effectiveness of New Zealand's biosecurity regime, which taps deep into the psychology of New Zealand's historical role as a supplier of agricultural and horticultural products to the world. A producer nation, New Zealand is heavily dependent on chemicals, especially phosphates and urea, which are used to fertilise pastures, a fact that conspicuously enters the film through Angus's preferred mode of transport, a top-dressing plane. As Angus says, "Don't talk about nature. Man made sheep what they are today." While the raid may have seemed hackneyed as a plot device to some reviewers³⁴, it has a local resonance which enhances the film's thematic authenticity.

³⁴ Richard Schieb's online *Moria* review of *Black Sheep* at www.moria.co.nz comments: "And the plot device of environmental protestors breaking into a genetic research laboratory and accidentally unleashing a monstrous menace well and truly belongs in the book of groan-worthy genre clichés." An example of an earlier use of this device is *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002)

The film's villain, Angus, is portrayed as a 'sheep-shagger', whose bestial predilection is a standard, almost obligatory, subject of NZ rural humour. Not that this type of humour is specific to New Zealand; by coincidence the preview for the film *Hot Tamale* (Damien, 2006) which appears on the Icon DVD edition of *Black Sheep* has Jason Priestly quipping: "Wyoming, where the men are men and the sheep are nervous." The sexual exigency that is elsewhere dismissed in such throwaway lines is displaced in *Black Sheep* by a ridiculous affection that is intended to stir up our moral senses. It suggests the excessive romanticised attachment we can have for our rural traditions and the boundary-crossing that can occur if it is indulged. It is so ingrained that when they are first under attack Henry exclaims, "Fuck the sheep," and Tucker responds half-seriously, "No time for that bro."

The enduring nature of the romance between a farmer and his sheep, as a metaphor for his perverse attachment to the mythologised landscape, is captured in Angus's rehearsal of his speech to an imaginary crowd in which he waxes lyrical about the heritage of breeding: "Merino, Romney, Drysdale, these names are whispered in the wind that caresses the rugged hills... these are the names young men recite as they take themselves off at night." Like many myths, however, this pastoral paradise conceals an abomination. As Angus chillingly notes at one point that "that's the thing about farms, accidents happen." His father's death is an accident that he has caused by tampering with the brakes of the farm's Land-rover. Unlike his mythical archetype, Oedipus, Angus is fully aware of his crime from the moment of its commissioning, but he is tainted with the weakness of moral blindness, a by-product of his single-minded pursuit to improve on the natural state of affairs that cruelly afflicted him with polio as a child. The question of fitness for place strongly drives the narrative of the film, with the housekeeper and Tucker providing touchstones for the other main characters, and stems from what is almost a tenet of our colonial heritage: that there is no room for weakness in the rural environment.

The taint of Otherness

As the slow panning of the camera caresses the landscape in *Black Sheep's* opening shots, a discordant note is struck by the scenic isolation of Angus who jealously watches the mustering from above. As he turns and limps away, we see his lower leg encased in a polio brace, the stigma of a cripple. His taking an axe to Henry's pet lamb, Dudley, quickly alienates him from the audience, as does his ambush of Henry in the barn, and his donning of the slaughtered lamb's pelt identifies him as the veritable wolf in sheep's clothing.

Angus's cruel disregard for Henry's feelings highlights the weakness of Henry, whose active part in the running of the farm as a youngster would have otherwise ensured his election to the position of heir and golden child. His fleeing to the city some years later does seem a somewhat excessive response to the fright of his ambush by Angus particularly given the likelihood in a farming situation of his having been accustomed to seeing the slaughter of sheep. Nevertheless we cannot help but see the duplex moral nature of the situation, where the awful sight of

Angus's slaughter of Dudley stirs up a sense of outrage despite the fact that butchered lamb is a cornerstone of our national cuisine.

Henry's resultant phobia and his need to constantly consult his therapist by telephone stain his character with a serious psychological weakness - a propensity for excessive emotional attachment. This is something more debilitating in the rural milieu than Angus's physical infirmity and opens up questions of rightful heredity. His return to the farm 15 years later to tidy up his affairs after their father's supposedly accidental death re-enacts the return of the prodigal son to take his rightful place in the family hierarchy, although the parable itself is turned inside out as the fatted beast turns on its slaughterers.

The treatment of mental illness here and also in *Braindead* reflects the sad historical attitude of New Zealand to its mentally infirm, seeing fit to lock them away indefinitely in institutions such as the infamous Lake Alice Hospital³⁵. In *Braindead*, the hoods who beat up Lionel in the graveyard justify their actions to themselves by shouting "a sicko, yeah mental", and the chivalrous rescue of Paquita by the butcher's delivery man is marked by the words "You know what they're saying about you, you've gone funny in the head, a real weirdo." In *Black Sheep* Henry has fled to Auckland to attend his psychologist, a wry comment on rural attitudes towards those that choose to live in big cities. While he does eventually return, there is no suggestion that this means he has been usefully rehabilitated, as his dread of sheep remains. The film in fact dwells upon his condition, notably in the scene when the taxi bringing him to the farm is held up in the middle of a flock of sheep and his incapacitation and humiliation are played off against the taxi driver's cheerful nonchalance. The eventual overcoming of his dread tellingly occurs during his defence of the ironically named Experience, whose new age naivety presents a condition of sensitivity which is even more debilitating than his own, and whose symptoms are comically displayed by the blundering errancy of her sidekick Grant. His tendency to exaggerate their mission is characterised by his conversion of a covert peaceful reconnaissance into a frontal military assault. The fact of their persistent interference in daily life is noted by the taxi driver who remarks: "Cannot have a cup of tea without some do-gooder starting a petition."

In its exploration of fitness-for-place the film enacts a dialogue between town and country, between new age metropolitanism represented by both Experience and the neurotic half of the fringe-dwelling Henry, and the rural pragmatism represented by Angus and his housekeeper. As a feature of his being a pragmatist, Angus has no truck with traditional farming methods: "Living in the past. That's what's wrong with these bloody farmers!" For Angus the creation of a new

³⁵ Lake Alice Hospital was a psychiatric facility with a Maximum Security unit operating near Bulls from 1950 to 1999. It became prominent through allegations by former patients of abuse during the 1970s, including sexual abuse, and the use of electroconvulsive therapy and paraldehyde injections as punishment. The New Zealand government was sued and paid out over NZ\$10 million in compensation to more than 150 former patients. Source: <http://www.lakealicehospital.com/history.html>

strain of sheep is a necessary economic advancement to satisfy the demands of overseas buyers, represented by an audience of businessmen.

The inability of metropolitan new age thinking to provide solutions to urgent rural problems is satirised by Experience's offer of a herbal stick-balm to Tucker as a salve for his mutated foot. Furthermore, surrounded by the still-pulsating remains of sheep in the offal pit, Henry finds himself having to repeat back to Experience her own chantra (a comic conflation of mantra and chant) in order to pacify her. In his momentarily rehabilitated hands the hilariously ineffectual aromatherapy candle is restored to its function as a useful instrument that lights their way to an escape exit. Even more so than Henry, Experience is dislocated, and is reliant on meetings with others to reach decisions and obtain direction.

The film does, however, acknowledge that alternative lifestyles may have their place. At one point Henry and Mrs Mac are visibly impressed by the "Ling gui ba fa" acupuncture technique with which Experience quickly subdues the transformed Grant, and her proposal to introduce organic farming in the closing scenes, while over-ruled, is at least briefly considered.

The comic interaction between city and urban dwellers in *Black Sheep* is a reminder of the more serious dichotomy of town and country in *The Locals*, where a recent (dead) settler has been dispossessed of his land, and the character Grant is set upon by a pair of the local living dead whose catch-cry (in a manner reminiscent of the graveyard beating of Lionel in *Braindead*) is "Beat up the city boy." Schieb (1999-2008) comments on this in a way which has some bearing on the humorous treatment of the tension between the two by *Black Sheep*:

Alas the whole Backwoods Brutality theme sits rather uneasily in rural New Zealand. You feel that Greg Page is more quoting American models than he is tapping into any resentment between urban sophistication and rural farming types that exists in the country. It does exist, but more as a joke that pokes fun at the self-important Auckland metropolitans made by the rest of the country than anything else. Certainly there is not the almost mythical belief, as you get in American exploitation cinema of the 1970s, that Otago sheep herding country might harbour something akin to psychotic Appalachian hillbillies or that the Manawatu bushland might fester with the equivalent of in-bred Cajuns seeking to hunt down wayward city folk. The 1970s Backwoods Brutality cycle was always about tearing open the placidity of middle-class assumption, the belief that the more one went out into the borderlands of the great American dream, the more that that illusion would fall apart and be rent asunder by the harsh brutality of the real world.

This articulates the challenge to NZ directors of importing particular generic models. In New Zealand, I would suggest, there is little likelihood of a mood of middle-class smugness being allowed to develop to a degree that it requires such a shocking corrective. With *Black Sheep*,

the subject of inbreeding that has produced a generation of memorable Hollywood backwoods monsters is presented in terms of its obvious NZ correlative, but is shot through with the knowing self-deprecation which is consistent with popular portrayals of our national character.³⁶ The melodramatic effects of the horror genre are also pilloried, most notably in the scene depicting the explosive dispatch of the killer sheep where the resourceful coupling of a butane lighter and volatile fog of sheep-farts lampoons the suspenseful bullet and oxygen cylinder ending of *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975). In fact the film's apparent attitude towards the eruption of monstrosity is that it is a temporary glitch that ought to be able to be sorted out in a day's work. Unlike the menace of Hollywood's naturally inbred monstrosity it does not reside in the land as a continual physical threat. This is not to say, however, that NZ horror does not employ the land in other ways as a harbourer of menace.

NZ Gothic

The menace of rural space is a distinctive feature of NZ Gothic. Gothic itself is a term that has been inherited from a well-documented literary tradition that flourished in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, beginning with Hugh Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Musha Kavka (2006,57) explains that "The Gothic is a term closely associated with the Old World and the detritus of its decaying aristocracies: mouldy castles on hilltops; gnarled gardens exposed to inclement weather; relatives going mad in attics while undead ones lurk in cellars." She notes in terms of urban space that while most New Zealand houses are 'nice villas' there is nonetheless a seepage of weather and decay into those houses which bears repressed memories that resurface and haunt us in a fashion that is captured by Freud's idea of the uncanny.

Ian Conrich (2005) considers that a key feature of Kiwi Gothic is that hitherto familiar aspects of the landscape threaten to overwhelm us with our own impotence and isolation. He argues that "Kiwi Gothic cinema has the tendency to present the instability of the domestic space, and the family as well, as dysfunctional" (122). This derives from our nation's relative newness, and its collective pakeha memory of settlement. Conrich cites William J. Schafer on the relationship of the landscape to the uncanny:

[t]he transition from unheimlich [unhomely] to heimlich [homely] is the process of nation building, of acculturation. We move from a sense of alienation and rootlessness – being separated and detached from the landscape around us-to a sense of being rooted in it, sprung from it, possessed and haunted by it" (1998,141).

Some commentators consider the preoccupation with the uncanny side of our history that is nursed by Kiwi Gothic has passed, and it no longer constitutes a distinctive feature of NZ culture. Andrew Paul Wood, in his 2006 review of the local compilation *Gothic NZ: The Darker Side of Kiwi Culture* comments:

³⁶ This self-mocking tendency is exemplified by characters such as Fred Dagg and the various comic incarnations of Billy T. James.

To an extent it makes sense to attribute gothic sensibilities to 19th-century New Zealand colonial society, but that hardly justifies taking it to the present day. Besides, the melodramatics of gothic were being mercilessly lampooned as early as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. (2007)

This is perhaps borne out by the optimistic outlook for community contained in recent mainstream successes such as *Sione's Wedding* (Graham, 2006), which may be in part because new immigration has brought with it a fundamentally different attitude to its adopted situation, one which sees dislocation and difference as an opportunity for economic and cultural growth. *Black Sheep* appears to endorse this new wave of optimism; it both mocks the excessive effects of Gothic and concludes with a promise of fruitful union between Henry and Experience, as representatives of this country's formative farming paradigm and the alternative influences it now accommodates.

The exaggeration of Gothic effects begins with the depiction of the farmhouse, whose interior is darkly lit and imprisoning. The camera's approach to it is emphatically melodramatic; our first view from the inside is of Henry's entry through the front door, compressed into a small square in the centre of a black screen, watched by a line of three sheep's heads mounted like gargoyles on a parallel wall while a particularly sinister head stares from the opposite wall. A heavy gothic tint is also applied to the barn, whose threshold is filmed as a strong diagonal contrast of black and white and whose interior, like the interior of the other farm buildings is murky, potentially harbouring all forms of creatures. The uncertain refuge offered by these structures is consistent with the ultimately flimsy protection given by the houses, hotels and malls in numerous other zombie films. It is also intensely claustrophobic. As Ben Hervey observes of *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968), which is an archetype: "*Night* will become inexorably more claustrophobic, squeezing its characters into smaller spaces (a house, a few boarded-up rooms, a windowless basement) and sweatier more frantically edited close-ups." (2008,30). Consistent with this generic closing-in effect, the shearing shed is partitioned in a way that drafts the fleeing Henry and Experience into one corner while another accentual shot places a sheep strategically inside the doorway of the farmhouse as if to bar any possible escape.

The Gothic effects are also engrained in the landscape. Conrich (2005,120) has noted that John Laing's *The Lost Tribe* offers "one of the few instances in New Zealand horror cinema in which caves or holes are used for gothic effect." But *Black Sheep* offers a memorable addition to the oeuvre with its offal pit, a literal swallowing up of the living by the land. The pit's latent menace is activated as Henry and Experience struggle to squeeze through a narrow aperture with an infected sheep snapping at their heels. This is a turning point for Henry as in the company of the ineptitude of Experience he is forced to confront fear and make decisions, and neatly fits into the underworld journey paradigm of the horror film described by Kawin:

A good horror film takes you down to into the depths and shows you something about the landscape; it might be compared to Charon, and the horror experience to a visit to the land of the dead, with the difference that this Charon will eventually take you home, or at least drop you off at the borders of the underworld. The seeker, who is often the survivor, confronts his or her own fallibility, vulnerability, and culpability as an aspect of confronting the horror object, and either matures or dies. (1986, 237-238).

For Kawin “Matures” means the adult act of making peace with the discrepancy between self and self-image, and this has a loud resonance in *Black Sheep*, as both Henry and Experience come to terms with the flaws in their natures and draw strength from one another.

Of course, we need to be mindful that the uncanny is not exclusive to the horror genre, with New Zealand films that are clearly not horror films such as *The Piano* (Campion, 1994), *Rain* (Jeffs, 2001), and *In My Father's Den* (McGann, 2004), considered by Kavka (2006) to be exemplary examples of Kiwi Gothic. It should also be borne in mind that more subtle distinctions about the Gothic can be made according to how it is deployed. Conrich (2005) gives as examples the female ‘Radcliffian mode’, ‘Small town New Zealand Gothic’, ‘Agricultural Gothic’, ‘Urban Gothic, the Gothic of the ‘institution-horror and asylum confines,’ and the Gothic of ‘vast open spaces.’ His observation that “Maori society and culture has been almost totally absent from the screen versions of the Kiwi Gothic,” is hardly surprising given Merata Mita’s view, quoted earlier, that preoccupation with the land is a ‘white neurosis.’

In *Black Sheep* white neurosis is a feature of Henry’s character, unlike the Māori farmhand, Tucker, who is portrayed as a pragmatic and enduring guardian of the land, and who is instrumental in its rehabilitation. His warrior heritage is depicted through his bearing of the rifle and then the drench gun, with which he rescues Henry from Angus. His lifelong mateship with Henry preserves a myth of pakeha-Māori relations, which in its balance of material and political power, appears to reflect the State’s past aspirations of integration³⁷ as reflected in the optimism and idealism of films such as *Broken Barrier* (O’Shea,1952). This is described by Duncan Petrie: “The ideology governing *Broken Barrier* is that of a benign biculturalism, embodied in the documentary images of agricultural processes such as sheep shearing, cattle herding, and timber logging with Maori and Pakeha working side by side...” (2007,16).

The relative status of the two reflects the criticism of bi-culturalism voiced by Giselle

³⁷ Officially, the policy of integration of a distinct Maori culture into the dominant Pakeha culture was signalled by the *Report on the Department of Maori Affairs* (Hunn, 1961) [known as The Hunn Report], which described the policy’s aim as “...to combine (not fuse) the Māori and Pakeha elements to form one nation wherein Māori culture remains distinct.” Cited in *Promoting Race Relations in New Zealand Schools: Me Mahi Tahī Tātou*, Ministry of Education Research Report by Mary Donn and Ruth Schick, 1995, p29.

Byrnes: "Biculturalism itself is a flawed notion. It has been described as a colonial construct because it posits Maori in a (junior) position with the Crown and assumes that the cultural and political constituencies of Maori and Pakeha are homogeneous."³⁸

Nonetheless the film does not contest the bi-cultural model. There is very little in Tucker's language that sets him apart, with his only utterance of Te Reo, "tai hoa, Bo Peep," being bracketed with a cultural inculcation of Western nursery rhymes. At the film's conclusion, he is consulted by Henry (who ironically calls him "Boss"), about the possibility of turning to organic farming. His reply, "Better stick to things the way we've always done it, eh" appears to be an affirmation of the myth's continuance.

The traditional family and motherhood

For Angus the land is simply a commercial proposition, and proprietary ties can be severed by simple gestures of commerce, such as the cheque that he writes out to be rid of Henry's interest in the farm. The commercial exploitation of the land by Angus is eagerly attended by foreign business people, predominantly Japanese and German, who appear to be the majority of the audience at his staged unveiling of the "Ubersheep". Somewhat redolent of the annual A&P shows that are a feature of provincial New Zealand life, the event portrays these people as eager consumers of our nation's economy, and Angus's multi-lingual introduction to the show suggests his mastery of the international situation. The camera's attitude towards them, though, is somewhat hostile, as it appears to revel in the scenes of their indiscriminate slaughter by rampant sheep. Angus's glib comment on the carnage, "The business community don't receive this kind of situation very well," sums up the dispassion that informs the ethics of commercial arrangements.

With its depiction of Motherhood, *Black Sheep* raises questions also about the nature of traditional relationships. The role of the mother is happily filled by the ancient housekeeper, whose days are spent preparing food and guarding the house like an androgynous stereotype of the farmer's wife. In historical terms she may be seen as a colonial keeper of Britain's South Pacific larder, whose duties are owed to an absent Mother England. A seasoned defender of the house, there is a nice parallel between her remorseless handling of a shotgun as she first accosts Henry and the inept flailing of the weapon by Experience when she confronts Henry and Tucker. This depiction seems tinged with an element of nostalgic admiration, unlike the monstrous depiction of the mother figure in *Braindead*, perhaps revealing a reflective distance from our colonial past that stems from a more self-assured feeling of independence.

The repeated fumbling of Experience can be read as her attempt to negotiate her position in the hierarchy of this place. Her final triumphant standing beside Henry, propositioning him on

³⁸ Speech for Dominion Status Symposium, 26 September 2007 at www.mch.govt.nz/dominion/index.html

organic and other forms of farming, signifies the reinstatement of proper familial order and natural methods of propagation. Their (hetero)sexuality, which is thus shown to be natural, is offset against the twisted relationship between Angus and his sheep which blurs the line between parent and offspring. Even as he offers himself up to be torn apart by his creations at the film's close, his ambivalent attitude to them wells up in his over-the-top exclamation, "My babies, have me again."

There is a strong emphasis on the dynamics of family in New Zealand horror and New Zealand Gothic film culture. The undead in *The Locals* (Page, 2003) are first observed engaging in a domestic argument that escalates into murder. The disturbing side of family is used as a trigger for psychotic behaviour in *Jack Be Nimble* (Maxwell, 1993) and in films such as *Sweetie* (Campion 1989) and *Crush* (McLean 1992), while the collective menace of the cult family is the subject of *The Irrefutable Truth About Demons* (Standing 2000).

Jonathon Rayner (2005) describes Australian Gothic's treatment of the family as "the inverted focus on the family as institution, as not redemptive or rehabilitative" (111). He notes its alignment with the "monstrous rurality" of contemporary American horror films including *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1972), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974), and *The Hills Have Eyes* (Craven, 1977) and imputes guilt about the introduction of imperfection by colonisation: "In its hybridized and self-conscious (in both filmic and cultural terms) approach, the Australian Gothic encapsulates a specific deployment of horror, in application and interpretation, attuned to post-colonial experience" (112).

Unlike *Braindead* (Jackson, 1992), which suggests its corrupt state of family affairs is part of the inheritance of our colonial past, *Black Sheep* does not attribute causation of its present corruptness to anyone other than Angus. The film's satire thus appears to be levelled at what we have made of our colonial institutions rather than at the institutions themselves, and so appears to reflect a new sense of independence, of a nation resolving the issues of the past. Moreover, the housekeeper's assisting Experience into womanhood, I would argue, is a reflection of the positive use of our heritage when it is teamed up with youthful energy and a willingness to contemplate new horizons.

This appears to be an example of way in which changes in the lifecycle development of genres mark cultural variation and development. In *Braindead* we see a full-frontal assault on monstrous motherhood and its repressive tendencies, which targets our traditional dependence on Mother England, whose voracious appetite for annexing property is mocked in the opening declaration "I'm a New Zealand zoo official and this monkey is going to Newtown." Mary Almeny-Galway (2006) says "I see the zoologist as a colonial exploiter of the indigenous population of the island - a role New Zealand itself has sometimes played" and notes the film's references to footage of Queen Elizabeth II (who introduces it) and the playing of *God Save the Queen* on the soundtrack. This of course directly shapes the manifestation of the zombie

disease which becomes an excrescence of the colonial cultural circumstance. In *Black Sheep*, on the other hand, the source of Henry's repression, whose main symptom is his fear of sheep, is the necessary brutality of farming life. Here the focus is on the need to be self-sufficient and the figure of the mother is notably absent, although the housekeeper appears as a busy substitute. Where *Braindead's* disease is imported, *Black Sheep's* malignant infection, a transmissible genetic mutation, is manufactured locally and takes on a distinctively New Zealand form. Thus the evolution of the monster in each is influenced by particular cultural concerns. But while both films reflect on our colonial past, they do so at different removes: *Braindead* enacts a journey from dependence to selfhood, and *Black Sheep* a journey from selfhood to moral responsibility. Where *Braindead* presents its mother as a larger than life abject figure, consistent with her conventional genre treatment as a threat to the patriarchal Symbolic order³⁹, *Black Sheep* has her at a distance, as a background figure that is never mentioned.

We can also see that the genre itself has moved on. The mannerist attention to gory detail in *Braindead* is preserved in *Black Sheep*, but augmented by a greater use of pastiche for its horror effects. The invocation of the much admired transformation sequences from *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London* I think reflects confidence in the ability of a contemporary audience to decode generic markers, a skill they had been practising throughout the wave of self-referential stalker films of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The spirit of insurrection

One of the most recognisable character traits of the 'man alone' figure that dominates our cinematic past is its spirit of insurgency, its refusal to bow down to the dictates of officialdom and custom. This has entered our national psyche and made us receptive, I would suggest, to films and other media that share this spirit.

Part of the humour of *Black Sheep* is that this spirit is expressed by the sheep in their overturning of the custom of the Sunday roast. The NZFC Press Kit⁴⁰ states that "Black Sheep also plays on the anxieties of the organic age and the carnivore guilt – where *does* the Sunday roast come from?" This ritual, in its most formal observance, is deeply hierarchical, with designated places set at the table and the assignment of meat-carving responsibilities. The sheep of course normally occupies the roasting plate and the inversion of this state of affairs

³⁹ In terms of Kristeva's notion of the abject (see p.108), the Mother is characterised as an abject figure because she represents the epitome of ambiguity; her offspring subject is continuously threatened with effacement by being re-immersed into the amorphousness of their uterine relationship. Barbara Creed (1993,22) depicts the Mother as monstrous because she will not let her offspring go, but needs him as an object of recourse to the Symbolic order from which she has been ejected. The Mother thus encapsulates both the "terror of self-disintegration", and the "desire for nondifferentiation". In her role as the pre-phallic "monstrous feminine" bent on unconstrained reproduction, she generates fear through castration anxiety, because she threatens to overturn the patriarchal symbolic order.

⁴⁰ <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/FilmCatalogue/Films/BLACK-SHEEP.aspx?detail=About>

drives the carnival comedy. The inversion is signalled by the film's emphasis on food and its associated images. The camera lingers over the offal that Mrs Mac prepares, readying us for the images of our own transformation to food, and we are reminded of the national status that can be ascribed to particular dishes by Mrs Mac's recitation of Robert Burns's "Ode to a Haggis." At the "Ubersheep massacre", in which the limbs of victims are devoured as if they were joints of meat, Mrs Mac arrives exclaiming "Henry, just in time for dinner." When threatened by the metamorphosed Grant she says "Many's the meal I've made of wethers like you" and the point is accentuated by Henry's dousing the ovine Grant in mint sauce. The film in fact is explicit in its reference to revolution." At one point, Experience turns to Angus, and says "this is not science, the sheep are revolting" to which he glibly replies, "Aren't they". When order has been restored and Grant is the last of the infected sheep to be dosed, they joke that he is a fine bit of wool. When Tucker comments, "a bit toey, but", and Henry replies "make good eating, though," he expresses the farmer's normal response to an animal's rebellious behaviour. The return of proper gastronomic order then sees Experience unwittingly chewing on sheep's testicles, or 'mountain oysters' as they are colloquially known.

Of course one must appreciate the joke in the context of the ritual to fully enjoy the film's carnivalesque humour and this is perhaps a reason why the scope of its humour has been panned by some overseas reviews. Another reason may be that its humour is not always obvious. Petrie and Stuart (2008,111) report that a characteristic that New Zealand audiences see as being distinctive of New Zealand films is that they are "quirky, droll, and seldom go for obvious laughs." While the use of generic paradigms may assist to internationalise our humour, the local specificity of certain cultural features is nonetheless unlikely to travel well. For example, the full hilarity of the assault by the Mrs Mac (the housekeeper) and her shotgun-toting sidekick (Experience), using Mrs Mac's Morris 1100, relies upon our recognition of that car's heritage as a training vehicle for learner drivers and as a shopping cart for urban grannies, an association fully intended by the director⁴¹.

While I have considered how irreverence for the bucolic myth informs *Black Sheep*, the vision of the nation that the film articulates is more a revisioning than a rejection.

Its final confirmation of the family unit as a basis for future prosperity incorporates a privileged place for Māori, signified by Henry's consulting Tucker about organic farming, although it upholds a tacit subordination of both women and Māori within the dominant European farming culture. Experience's suggestions are momentarily entertained but not accepted. It thus largely reinstates the myth of the farming family that presumably would have existed prior to the death of Henry's father and disappearance of his mother (the film never says how), albeit there is a conciliation of urban and rural interests through the rehabilitation of Henry's cosmopolitan anxieties and the permanent coupling of Henry and Experience. It suggests, too, a future that,

⁴¹ Jonathon King confirms this in the audio commentary on the Icon DVD edition.

while not yet organic, is much less tolerant of the commercial exploitation of livestock by genetic engineering.

The place of those outside the family circle is left uncertain, and in this respect the updating of the myth fails to engage with the real ethnic tensions that are present in contemporary New Zealand. Its ideological 'other' is an alternative construct of the nation, one in which Angus is an anti-heroic man alone figure, Mrs Mac is a substitute wife who is married to her kitchen, and Tucker is a hired hand who knows little about what is actually going on with the administration of the land. The focus on the monstrosity of the internal 'other' is not unlike the in-bred monstrosity of the films of the Hollywood 'Backwoods Brutality cycle,' although the way in which it is presented differs in that it does not threaten to 'tear apart the placidity of middle-class assumption,' but instead gently pokes fun at the credibility of such constructs.

The use of the horror genre primarily enables *Black Sheep* to employ pastiche as a way of lighting itself up with internationally recognised images of threat to the nuclear family, and, as noted earlier, the use of a hybrid monster extends its reach within the genre. Its stylistic adherence, though, to recent New Zealand archetypes means that its international commercial success may be as much attributable to its use of a new local genre paradigm as to an existing Hollywood one, a paradigm whose brand is already familiar enough to be embraced by overseas genre enthusiasts.

6. Case Study – The Tattooist

Background

Earlier in this essay I suggested that the horror genre may mean something different depending upon whether the audience is Pakeha, Māori, Asian, or of Pacific Island descent. I also suggested that historical cultural references may not mean anything to more recent immigrants. This is particularly evident with NZ Polynesian youth culture which tends to look to America for its sounds and fashions, although, as Tomlinson cautions: “We have to be careful not to confuse mere cultural goods with the practice of culture itself – which involves the interpretation and appropriation of meanings in relation to such goods.”⁴² The expression of Polynesian youth culture through hip-hop and hoodies does, however, appear to be a deliberate positioning. Stephen Turner argues that “Precisely because Polynesian culture has always been performed as authentic and indigenous for white settlers and tourists, Polynesians are happy to speak American. It defies a will to be authentic, if not indigenous, that is more white than brown.”⁴³ He thus appears to differentiate Americans from the ‘white settlers,’ in a way that makes all Americans representative of the experiences of oppressed ‘brown’ people in the United States, in which local hip hop finds its roots.

As an explanation for this orientation, in the context of immigrant Pacific Island social history it has been argued⁴⁴ that distrust about the existing bi-cultural structure of society, stemming from the ‘dawn raids’ on illegal immigrants in the 1970s has polarised the Pacific peoples from the Papalagi⁴⁵ both in its marginalisation of immigrants and in its conflation of different island communities under the one Pacific islander umbrella. Furthermore many Pacific Islanders have also distanced themselves also from Māori, seeing them politically as ‘an indulged people.’⁴⁶

Polarization itself is a well recognised paradigm of globalisation. Goodman (Ritzer, 2007, 339) makes the point, however, that “The question to ask is whether this fragmentation and polarization constitutes a system of meaning, and in particular, whether polarizing struggles occur within a field of taken-for-granted goals.” By “taken for granted” goals he refers to a stable cultural tradition. This question is particularly relevant to *The Tattooist*, a film that represents immigrant Pacific Island culture, but is directed by a part-Maori New Zealander and funded as an official New Zealand/Singapore co-production⁴⁷, which is designed to showcase both cultures. On the surface it appears to be an attempt to bridge the desire to project the

⁴² Ritzer

⁴³ Docker (2005, 223).

⁴⁴ Perese, Simativa [online] ‘Pacific Vision International Conference – A Social History’ in Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. http://www.minpac.govt.nz/resources_pvc_statusreport_simitavaperese.htm [2 September, 2006]. Cited by Earl, E. “Brand New Zealanders: The Commodification of Polynesian Youth Identity in *bro’Town*.” [master’s thesis, University of Canterbury, 2008], 33.

⁴⁵ Word commonly used to denote non-Samoans of European descent.

⁴⁶ See Earl (2008, 33).

⁴⁷ It was filmed on locations in Central Auckland, South Auckland and Singapore.

particularity of local culture to the economic realities of international film production. The producer Robin Scholes has been reported as saying of *The Tattooist* and its sister co-production *Altar* (working title).⁴⁸ “both films used an Asian approach to the supernatural but were culturally specific... By combining our two cultures it gives us a point of difference in a competitive and crowded international market where film buyers are looking for something that is unique.”⁴⁹

Moreover, the appeal of a familiar genre, it is suggested can help to support the bridge. The NZFC Press Kit for *The Tattooist* states:”“Fear knows no boundaries. Fear is a common human emotion.” This idea is central to producer Robin Scholes’ approach to THE TATTOOIST and its seamless intermingling of cultural influences and financial resources...”⁵⁰

Genre is also invoked in its explanation of the benefits of NZ-Asian co-production:

“They love watching horror movies and *M Night Shyamalan* (*The Sixth Sense*) is very popular in Singapore, so with a mix of these two genres, we’re onto a winner.” He [Gerald Chew who plays Mr Lim] says it makes sense for New Zealand and Singaporean filmmakers to work together because the industry in Singapore can learn creative skills from New Zealand, and Singapore has better financing opportunities which may be helpful for New Zealand.

This acknowledgement of symbiotic benefit highlights the role of creative industries in international commerce, where cultural policy, as Lawn (2006, 232) notes, is pressed into the service of export substitution. The *Lord of the Rings* is a notable example of the wider export industry that can spring up around creative endeavour, and it has assisted New Zealand to develop a strong film-making infrastructure which it can offer in return for funding, while to countries such as Singapore it represents an opportunity for economic diversification. Instead of stifling individual artistic creativity, Lawn argues that “This conflation of branding with identity can advantage the arts to the extent that they raise or maintain national brand ‘profile’ and so justify state funding.” (p234)

The danger of such policy is that its branding may tend to homogenise cultural identity in the interests of the dominant political culture. In the context of the Indian subaltern, Spivak (1988) has drawn the fundamental distinction between ‘representation’ (the process of political agency), and ‘re-presentation’ (the selection of a mode of discourse) in warning about the

⁴⁸ *The Tattooist* and *Altar* were the first feature film co-productions resulting from the Singapore-New Zealand Films Co-Production Agreement that was signed in July 2004 during the second Ministerial review of the Agreement between New Zealand and Singapore on a Closer Economic Partnership (ANZSCEP).

⁴⁹ See http://www.nzherald.co.nz/movies/news/article.cfm?c_id=200&objectid=10387202 [accessed 19 February 2011]

⁵⁰ <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/FilmCatalogue/Films/THE-TATTOOIST.aspx?detail=About> [accessed 11 January 2011]

danger of perpetuating Western ethnocentrism, by attempting to ameliorate the condition of the Indian subaltern from outside. She argues that in attempting to give the subaltern an agency of collective expression, mistaken assumptions of solidarity about what is often a diasporic, heterogeneous, and tenuously connected community may override the genuine collective consciousness and give rise to its effective representation, and subjection, by the (Western) assuming voice. In fact, even in attempting to express its common cultural identity for itself using the conventions of this voice, there is a danger that the subaltern community will simply re-inscribe its own marginal status. There is a need therefore that “radical practice should attend to this double session of representations rather than reintroduce the individual subject through totalising concepts of power and desire” (279).

This is particularly relevant to *The Tattooist* given its status as a national export product and as a portrayal, albeit with expert advice from within, of a New Zealand diasporic ethnic community by an outsider from the dominant culture. The commercial imperative further complicates the ‘double session of representations’ in that it may anaesthetise particular cultural or generic features. For example, market considerations appear to have influenced the film’s editing, ensuring that any scenes depicting nudity were safely handled to avoid a more restrictive rating in the US market. Critic Richard Scheib⁵¹ describes its effect:

There’s a potentially erotic scene between Jason Behr and Mia Blake where his tattooing of her and her tracing of his tattoos becomes preamble to a love scene, but this is so tame that the film fades out the moment we get to seeing her bare back. Similarly, Victoria Cheong gets a pelvic tattoo, but the film cannot even show this or her in a shower after the tattoo has taken over her whole body beyond brief close-ups.

This is in accord with complaints by some other reviewers⁵² about the overly conservative approach taken with regard to censorship ratings, although it might also be seen as an example of positive resistance to the objectification of the female body that is a common feature of horror. Scheib, though, while acknowledging the care taken to ensure Samoan cultural authenticity⁵³ also registers his disappointment at the fact that the film appears to take no creative risks:

... *The Tattooist* feels like a film that has been made by a committee who have a market-researched idea about what a modern horror film is meant to be – the demographic it is aimed at, the need to import a US actor to appeal to American

⁵¹ <http://www.moria.co.nz/horror/tattooist.htm> [accessed 11 January 2011]

⁵² Stefan S, for example, accuses the director of bowing to the pressure of an NC16 box office release at <http://anutshellreview.blogspot.com/2007/11/tattooist.html> [accessed 22 February 2011]

⁵³ The production team included Samoan cultural adviser and orator chief Pa’u Tafaogalupe Mulitalo (Tafa), and Samoan master tattooist Tuifa’asisina Saofaga Letelemaaana (Tui), who was responsible for the design and hand-painting of all of the Samoan tatau used in the film.

audiences, the exact censorship level things can be taken to so as not to affect US sales.

The use of US actors as leads to appeal to the US Market is of course a well established New Zealand film industry practice.⁵⁴ This, and the care taken to ensure Samoan cultural authenticity, points to the benefits of such careful consideration of the audience not only in the marketing of a film but in all aspects of its production. Samoa, of course, has its own significant historical relevance to an American audience, which is likely to be receptive to the cultural homage represented by features such as the South Auckland hip hop of the King Kapisi soundtracks.

Given its overall commercial imperative and the need to satisfy both Singaporean and American audiences, one can see the potential for 'polarizing struggles' between the 'taken-for-granted' New Zealandness of the film's commercial positioning and the internal positioning of Samoan people within the text. In respect of the latter this includes both the way in which Samoan society is depicted with respect to other New Zealand communities and also the local and international representations of Asian and American identity. In the following discussion I will explore how this film portrays these relationships and their tensions, and the extent to which the use of genre assists to present, preserve or objectify ethnic specificity.

The representation of culture and ethnicity

The central theme of *The Tattooist* is the cultural significance of the Samoan practice of tatau (tattoo), which has endured after settlement in New Zealand. The lead character Jake (Jason Behr) is an itinerant tattoo huckster who plies his trade using claims that certain ethnic tattoo designs can cure conditions such as arthritis. He is called upon by a Mr Lim (Gerald Chew) to perform a life-saving decoration of his son but the youth dies soon after. In the interim Jake attends a tattoo exhibition, encounters a Samoan love interest, Sina (Mia Blake) and steals a tattoo instrument which, when he is accosted by an angry Mr Lim, he drops and in retrieving it gashes his palm. Its theft releases a murderous spirit which kills his clients by transforming their designs into leaking mosaics of ink and blood. The haunting is explained in the Press Kit (page 6) by chief Pa'u Tafaogalupe Mulitalo (Tafa):

"There's a term in Samoan called lama ave'a. When a person steals something from a tattooist like an implement, a design or a title or when a tattooist performs without the proper traditional Samoan cultural franchise, the term lama ave'a applies. It means that his art has been cursed. So because Jake steals a tool from the Samoan tattooist Alipati at the Singapore tattoo convention, every new work that he does becomes lama ave'a. The evil spirit, the ghost of the art of tattooing, has gone through the tool to make the recipients of Jake's tattoos the victims of the curse."

⁵⁴ See Lealand 1988.

After the first of his nightmares involving the hammer Jake journeys to New Zealand to return it and is introduced to the cultural importance of tatau, including the *pe'a* rites in which boys become men. He is also shown the shame that has fallen on the Perenese house because their son has apparently fled from the pain of the rites before they could be completed.

While the film is ethnically specific in respect of the culture of tatau, it presents a hybrid, albeit compartmentalised, picture of the South Auckland landscape. The first image of New Zealand that the central character Jake encounters is a billboard poster of a Māori warrior with moko⁵⁵ at Mangere Airport, and when he extends the Samoan greeting “Talofa” to the taxi driver he is mildly rebuked with “it’s kia ora, some of us were born around here.” The Chinese constituency of South Auckland is represented by the characters of Victoria (Caroline Cheong) and her younger cousin Luke (Chen Bang Zhi), while the cockney accent of the character Crash (played by NZ veteran actor Michael Hurst), provides an exaggerated English flavour to the mix. Some touches of New Zealand authenticity are added by the guest appearances of former national rugby league star Matthew Ridge as an Italian-speaking tattoo parlour client and of the ubiquitous New Zealand actor John Bach⁵⁶ who plays Lazlo McFadyen, an old tattooed biker. These characters are chiefly contained around and about Bedlam, which unlike the dispersed Samoan houses appears to be located on a central city street. The use of well-known New Zealand Samoan actors provides an instantly recognisable ethnic branding.

The reaction of one New Zealand media reviewer to this blend was curious. In *The Herald*⁵⁷ Russell Baillie wrote: “It’s got plenty of local buzz but it’s neither as scary as it should be nor as culturally interesting as it thinks.” It is not clear from his review where the lack of cultural interest is seen to lie, but another local reviewer quipped: “I was interested to learn that everyone in Otago lives next to a power pylon...”⁵⁸

The images of power pylons are indeed pervasive, but their use appears to be symbolic, their connections suggesting the powerful network of community that exists in Polynesian South Auckland. In one scene as Mr Perenese contemplates a photo of himself with his son, the camera cuts to an image of a stand-alone monolithic pylon, emphasising its symbolic function and the isolation the Perenese family has suffered. The stand-alone pylon appears too in the scene in which Va’a literally cuts himself from the family line represented by his *pe’a*, because, as he is told by Mr Perenese, he no longer has the right to wear it. In the communal scenes that follow the pylons are again connected. Thus the pylons are not merely a physical feature but an

⁵⁵ Māori facial tattoo

⁵⁶ Television credits include roles as a regular in the long-running soap opera, *Close to Home* (1975-1983), the title role in the police crime series *Duggan* (1997-1999), and the mysterious Harry Sheridan in *This Is Not My Life* (2010). Film credits include *Utu*, *Carry Me Back*, *Goodbye Pork Pie*, *Old Scores* and *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*.

⁵⁷ Tuesday Sep 18, 2007.

⁵⁸ Andrew Hedley, <http://www.flicks.co.nz/movie/the-tattooist/#flicksreview> [accessed 20 January 2011]

image of psychological and historical attachment. There also appears to be a distinction being drawn between the form of communication that links diaspora peoples and the stable but shadowy centre of community that Bedlam offers.

The image of Samoan community that the film generally presents is one of simple but vibrant solidarity, with vivid scenes of the street market, the celebration of the completion of the pe'a, and the ceremonies of the church. Its self-enclosure appears, however, to create a cultural straitjacket for Sina, whose daytime work is to collect 40 years of South Auckland stories for her uncle. As she says to Jake, "I live with my uncle, his house is my house." This sets the film's depiction of community as a source of celebration against its power to constrict behaviour, a central theme which I will comment on further below.

The world of Singapore, on the other hand, is depicted as sophisticated, exciting and exotic. A Singaporean reviewer commented, "the first 20 minutes of this movie actually had a very sexy vibe to how night time Singapore is portrayed, with its beautiful skyline, and many shots that would have made the Singapore Tourism Board give it its stamp of approval."⁵⁹ Like Western constructions of Hong Kong, the city is portrayed as a melting pot "which is an ideal setting to accommodate different flows of western fantasies, a space especially for the projections of desires and anxiety."⁶⁰ As a former colony contested with Japan it, too, represents a junction of East and West which serves as a springboard to imaginary constructions of the Other, and is thus automatically inscribed by the orientalism Edward Said (1995 [1978]) has argued reinforces Europe's sense of itself as an exclusive referent. According to Said western discourses have imaginatively constructed and so dominated The Orient as the Other that, as an imaginative construct, it is already 'stamped with an otherness... of an essentialist character' (97). When confronted by the actual East the orientalist detects only those exotic features that constitute the image he has already preconceived.

Jake's exploitation of orientalist tendencies is exemplified by his appropriation of ethnic tattoo designs using claims that they can heal certain physical maladies. His trade thus caters to exotic fantasies about the tattooing traditions of marginal cultures. At the same time it is clear that he does not believe in such fantasies and this serves to emphasise his fundamental venality and embodiment of the white colonialising instinct. It also serves to explain his immediate attraction to Sina for whom he inexplicably travels across the world after one brief meeting. As bell hooks observes of the commoditisation of Otherness:

Within commodity culture ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture. Cultural taboos around sexuality and desire are

⁵⁹ Stefan S. at <http://anutshellreview.blogspot.com/2007/11/tattooist.html> [accessed 22 February 2011]

⁶⁰ See Thomas Y. T. Luk. (2002). "Hong Kong as City/Imaginary in *The World of Suzie Wong*, *Love is a Many Splendoured Thing*, and *Chinese Box*. *New Asia Academic Bulletin*. Vol.18, p77. At <http://sunzi.lib.hku.hk/hkjo/article.jsp?book=35&issue=350017> [Accessed 24 February 2011]

transgressed and made explicit as the media bombards folks with a message of difference no longer based on the white supremacist assumption that “blondes have more fun.” The “real fun” is to be had by bringing to the surface all those “nasty” unconscious fantasies and longings about contact with the Other embedded in the secret (not so secret) deep structure of white supremacy.” (2006, 366).

Bell hooks further suggests that looking to the Other as a source of enrichment is a response to the loss of (white) identity in mass culture, a characteristic that Jake strongly exhibits through his wanderlust and the writing of his own personal history through his tattoos.

The Chinese character, Mr Lim, on whose sick son Jake attends in Singapore is a stalwart of the inscrutable East. He is privately wealthy, conservative and superstitious, burning incense at his threshold. When it becomes clear to Jake that the boy is seriously ill, and he tells Mr Lim the boy needs a doctor, Mr Lim resolutely replies “He needs a tattoo!” In this scene Jake’s assumptions are shaken by the realisation that the culture of tattoo for some may indeed have an efficacy much greater than its totemic value. His “consumer cannibalism”⁶¹ has already removed tattoo from its cultural context and so immersed it in the world of exchange that it no longer seems possible that someone could actually hold him to his medicinal claims.

His constructions of the Other are similarly shaken by his confrontation with Victoria where he is at first uneasy with her flirtatious boldness. This turns to anger and rejection when she casually informs her parents that he is her lover.

Victoria’s penchant for shocking both Jake and her parents suggests she has little time for old customs and values. Her sexual aggressiveness fits the stereotype of the Asian Dragon Lady described by Owens Patton (2001, 250-252), an over-sexualised seductress who promises exotic delights. More particularly she seems to fit the mould of Suzie Wong in Richard Mason’s archetypal orientalisng novel *The World of Suzie Wong* (1994) in that she is “apotheosized in all her child-like simplicity, naturalness and unbridled sex appeal; she is the incarnation of something that the west has perhaps lost and can only find in the figure of the noble savage, and her peculiar sexual orientations: losing face if not sexually desired by Robert, and begging to be beaten so as to show off her wound.”⁶² She tells her cousin Luke to think of his tattooing as losing his virginity, feasts with her eyes on Jake as he works, and then provocatively requests a pelvic tattoo. For Victoria the tattoo is her wound signifying her conquest of Jake.

Unfortunately for Victoria, her playing of this stereotype is tainted by her westernisation⁶³. She trivialises tattoo, reducing it to a rite of teenage passage and her child-like attempts to be

⁶¹ Bell Hooks (Op. Cit., 373) argues that the difference pertaining to the Other is consumed in the process of exchange and appropriation and that as a concomitant of this process its historical significance is also denied.

⁶² Luk Op. Cit. 76.

⁶³ Luk Op. Cit. 118 argues that “Chinese women wearing Western clothes signal a cultural transgression that Western men seem unable or unwilling to tolerate.”

provocative are presented in a negative light. Flash, the parlour owner just tells her to “Fuck off,” and Jake desires an alternative female construct, the exotic submissive, as represented by Sina. She better fulfils his need to be “a white knight who rescues the non-white heroine from the excesses of her own culture while “finding” himself through this exotic sexual liaison.”⁶⁴ While Sina is also shown as similarly testing boundaries she does it in a way that responds to Jake’s imagination of the submissive temper, the relative modesty of her own tattooing in stark contrast with the vulgarity of Victoria’s.

Victoria’s subsumation into western culture is marked by her obviously regular frequentation of the Bedlam tattoo parlour. This is generically inscribed as a construction of the Wild West, which in addition to the origin of its star helps to cement the link between whiteness and American-ness. When Jake first enters Bedlam he is framed by a set of swinging saloon doors, and the reference is continued through a mock showdown in which he is accused of outrageous behaviour. Its additional function as a bar lends a dissolute character to the lives of its inhabitants, and the very name Bedlam imports connotations of disorder. The ease with which identity can be replaced in this culture is exemplified by the ease with which tattoos are added or rearranged. When Jake asks if he can find any space on Lazlo’s body for another tattoo Lazlo replies, “Well if you can’t just ask a couple of them to move over.” Not only is identity easily created but it is also easily lost. In Bedlam Jake is portrayed as if he were a rock star of the tattoo world, and the soundtrack that accompanies the scenes in Bedlam employs raucous rock music. As a comment on the ephemerality of his star status, Jake’s first encounter with Victoria has her comment, “Flash says you could be the next best thing,” to which he replies, “Actually I was last year’s next best thing.” The name Flash itself has the ephemeral connotations of ‘flash in the pan.’ Given this depiction of Western tattoo culture it is hardly surprising that when Jake finds the Samoans in a South Auckland market he is told “Every expert palagi wants to get down with the brown,” as if it is accepted that he, like others before him, is seeking some alternative touchstone of value.

In crossing her cultural boundaries to “hang with the palagi” Sina has become vulnerable to the evil spirit of the tatau. When she seeks help from her uncle he is unable to offer any and in answer to her question, “Uncle what am I supposed to do?” he coldly replies “the same as the rest of us, pray that God will save you.” Ultimately it is Jake who saves her by using the hammer on Va’a, thus rendering him up to the curse and diverting the demon. This represents an affirmation of the uncanny as a potentially liberating force where traditional methods and rationality fail. Earlier there is a generically remarkable episode of the same sort of affirmation when Jake persuades a doctor who has insisted on protocol to let him leave the hospital by appealing to his spiritual understanding. In the end the uncanny fracturing of Sina’s hibiscus

⁶⁴ Ford, Stacey and Singh Chanda, Geetanjali. (2002). “Portrayals of Gender and Generation, East and West: Suzie Wong in the Noble House. *New Asia Academic Bulletin*. Vol.18, p121. At <http://sunzi.lib.hku.hk/hkjo/article.jsp?book=35&issue=350017> [Accessed 24 February 2011]

tattoo (a tentative start to her departure from protocol) becomes an opportunity for Jake to truly make tattoo an art of healing. The inking of Sina's entire back then represents the completed transition in her identity, much in the same way as the completed pe'a marks the emergence into manhood.

Generic and international borders

The imaginative crossing of the ideological borders that contain the subject is, for Bhabha (1994), the appropriate strategy by which the subject can be reformed and instilled with new meaning and national identity. As a product of discursive processes the subject is always a project in 'performance' and this term becomes central to the development of new hybrid identities. The boundary is a point of disruption and disorientation, which Bhabha characterises, using Freud's writings on the subject, as *unheimlich* or 'uncanny'. At the border and beyond are 'incommensurable cultural temporalities' which are the 'unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present.' (12). As Sina observes in the film, the spirits may only be seen in the mirror, (that reflector of the boundary of self), and she informs Jake that in Samoa they cover their mirrors at night. The uncanny presence of such temporalities destabilises discourses (or identities) based upon binary logic and are therefore potentially liberating.

The downside of crossing boundaries of course is the potential for shame, and this provides an ideological bar to transgressions, something which is strongly emphasised as a protector of communities in the film. The house of shame stands as an exemplary memorial as, it is explained, "to live in shame in Samoa is a fate worse than death." As it turns out, it is the fear of being shamed because he has allowed the boy's tatau to become infected that provokes Va'a to murder the boy and conceal his body, and it also motivates the spirit of the boy to wreak revenge. When Lazlo is asked who has injured him the spirit replies "The shame that drives my fury." This emphasises the awful repercussions of transgression. Conversely, if we compare Sina with Victoria, we can see that the latter's greater freedom of expression exists because she has no sense of shame. It is not suggested, however, that the ideological power of shame is unique to the Samoan community, as in the opening scene of the film Jake's fundamentalist father says to the boy, "You shame me" as he cuts a pentagram tattoo from Jake's forearm. What this appears to say about shame as a cultural construct is that we should be wary of those practices where boundaries are so rigid that testing them may too easily make outcasts, or where the threat of censure may give rise to morally abhorrent actions to hide transgressive behaviour. Va'a's traditional codes of conduct are unyielding, and appear to be upheld rather more as an ideological necessity than an honestly held belief, unlike Alipati who is shown as a somewhat naïve adherent. When he says to Alipati, "You don't believe in those old stories do you?" Alipati's response is, "You told them to me." Alipati also tries to contain Sina within the bounds of tradition, fending off Jake with the statement, "She's a church girl and she doesn't date palagi..." His attempts to fence her off using their native language are comically met with derision in plain NZ-English, as she says, "Ali, don't be a dick."

The reluctance of the traditional cultural model to negotiate at the boundaries is captured in Va'a's delightful description of the adoption of the Christian church in Samoa: "Missionaries came with their concept of God... but it didn't last, the church became Samoan, not the other way around." His beliefs and obsessions with framing the stories of the past, as they have done to the Perenese house, threaten to make a living dead of the Samoan community in New Zealand. His defiance of colonisation, and the consequent wariness of white intruders that he has instilled in Alipati belie the unavoidable reality of the legacy of colonialism that inheres in the very technology used to bind the community – the electricity wires and the telephone with which he strikes Alipati when the latter attempts to restrain him from doing harm. The boy in a hoodie speaks prophetically when he says to Jake, "Just because you can't see no-one doesn't mean there's no-one there."

New world influences are evident in the cultural trappings outside Va'as house: fast cars, hip-hop music, hoodies, but they are shown as integrated, as if to demonstrate the potential fluidity of cultural identity. When Jake kicks over a rubbish bin one of the street kids says, "Bro haven't you ever heard of being a tidy kiwi" exhibiting his familiarity with the nation's characterisation of itself. The boy in a hoodie, who plays the role of a medium, moves effortlessly between both worlds, appearing at Sina's side as she works collecting the old stories, and equally at home in the street. He is also able to see the supernatural world, though he is unable to communicate with it until his tools of access, the supercharged car and boom-box stereo are 'taken to the line.' This appears to reflect a positive view of the effect on traditional values that the technological advancements of exchange bring. Jake himself also moves freely between different worlds; he is a peripatetic amalgam of different tattooing cultures, his body etched with examples of the art from all parts of the globe. He does not respect boundaries, which is evident from his rudely intrusive behaviour in the Perenese house. Notably, the scars of his father's attempted containment of him within a fundamentalist Christian culture are not covered over, as though the identity that has been skinned from him is awaiting a replacement.

The art of tattoo is very much bound up with notions of personal history and identity, and is therefore an ideal vehicle for exploring themes of cultural and national identity. With respect to the question of how national identities are constructed and maintained these aspects seem to very much endorse Schlesinger's view of nationhood⁶⁵ as being contained within a membrane that admits commerce with influences from other cultures rather than the self-contained cultural space that he observes in the constructs of Gellner and Anderson. But how the horror genre puts this to service is also an important consideration in terms of this thesis.

As a proposition explaining the attraction of horror, Julia Kristeva (1982) has argued that we have a natural fascination for the 'abject', described as "what disturbs identity, system, order.

⁶⁵ See p.71 supra.

What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Building upon Lacan's notion of the Real, Kristeva argues that the abject is the eruption of the Real into our quotidian lives. It is our response to a "primal repression" of the breakdown of meaning. The seepage that attends the abject, of blood, pus, and excrement literalises the puncturing of boundaries, and makes palpable the imminence of death. In her much-quoted opening sentence she describes its fascination:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful - a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflinchingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.

In *The Tattooist* images of fluidity attend the tattoo subject. At the tattoo expo the various shots of tattooists plying their trade flow one into the other in open space whereas the space of the Samoans is conspicuously enclosed. Luke's death has him literally melting into the swimming pool, which is itself a symbol of the coalescence of bodies, and the rapidly expanding networks of ink that typically presage each victim's fatal letting of blood suggest the effacement of identity that attends uncontrolled exchange with the uncanny or Real. Prior to her death the most striking images of Victoria are of her in the shower, which she occupies in two separate scenes, the latter of which shows her blood seeping across the bathroom floor. In a death scene reminiscent of *Un Chien Andalou* (Buñuel, 1929), itself an exemplary treatment of the intrusion of the Real, Victoria's eyes leak blood as if slit by an invisible razor. She, like the transgressor Lazlo, literally dissolves in death. Unlike other films which have tattoos as an object of horror⁶⁶, *The Tattooist* treats them as enacting the process of abjection of the subject, whereby the clear outlines of contained design and identity are overwhelmed, dispersed and punctured. This constitutes a powerful marriage of generic and cultural processes.

Generic structure

One of the strongest generic features of *The Tattooist* in semiotic terms is the Perenese house which is very much a haunted house, replete with ghosts. Its function is that described by Curtis (2008, 10): "Ghosts and the dark places where they dwell have served as powerful metaphors for persistent themes of loss, memory, retribution and confrontation with unacknowledged and

⁶⁶ For example, *Tattoo* (Schwentke, 2002), in which the victims are killed for their tattoos and *Tattoo* (Brooks, 1981) in which the protagonist seeks to possess the victim of his desire by tattooing her.

unresolved histories.” There is one scene in which Jake’s eyes follow a line of portrait photographs down the wall and encounters the living face of Mr Perenese’s daughter, a pictorial conflation of the living and dead. Curtis (2008, 124) notes that “In haunted houses photographs of previous owners are often early signs that the house is still possessed by other subjectivities and narratives.” Jake’s intrusions there are suspenseful, due to the reticence of its inhabitants, its interior darkness and the camera’s cautious approach to the opening of doors. Along with the introductory scene in Jake’s father’s cellar, shot from behind the stairs, these set up expectations of a conventional treatment of location and violence. The discovery by Jake of a bloody roast and carving knife in the kitchen appears to confirm the semiotic status of the house. Unlike its archetype, however, nothing frightful has actually occurred in this house, and thereafter all of the violence occurs in peripheral buildings –, the swimming pool, the flat above the tattoo parlour, the hospital, Lazlo’s flat, and Va’a’s garden shed. There is in effect a de-centering of expectation which complements the theme of the questioning of inherited cultural values. At the end of the film the Perenese house is generically remarkable for being joyfully reinstated rather than simply abandoned or destroyed.⁶⁷

From a syntactic structuralist perspective *The Tattooist* is an example, as Richard Scheib notes⁶⁸, of a horror film about “the Man who Dabbles in Forbidden Matters and Unwittingly Unleashes Things They Shouldn’t.” The employment of this particular syntax is integral to the theme of cultural exploration and liberation. Rather than the typical resolution, which sees the re-enclosure of the offending demon/s⁶⁹, the supernatural spirit here is placated by the transfer of ‘the shame that drives my fury’ and vanishes. This catharsis means that Jake’s intervention can be seen as a positive example of dialogue with foreigners. Perhaps this reflects an attitude about the film industry itself, where the primacy of commercial interests does not necessarily mean that national culture cannot be enriched. But what is the picture of our culture that *The Tattooist* depicts? Obviously it portrays a culture in transition. The Samoan diaspora to New Zealand has given rise to a need for the young immigrants to reconcile themselves with new influences while the older generation struggle to maintain continuity with the past. It shows women testing the constraints that been historically placed upon them. Sina not only transgresses by her entertainment of a palagi, but she ventures into an exclusively male domain by having a tatau done. Her consequent enrichment is signaled in the colour that floods into her tatau from out of the scenes of the reinstatement of the Perenese house, colour that was earlier shown in the street scenes of Samoan community, with its vivid splashes of yellow, blue, green, and magenta. It is as if the rapprochement between houses is lending a brilliance quite unlike the monochrome of the traditional pe’a. In the last scene of the film, where Sina departs for America with Jake, the colour of Sina’s dress mimics the colour of the jacket and beanie worn by the boy with a hoodie, as if to say that she has achieved a similar facility to negotiate

⁶⁷ Curtis (Op. Cit.180) notes that “The haunted house is caught in a historical loop of repetition and irresolution...”

⁶⁸ <http://www.moria.co.nz/horror/tattooist.htm> [accessed 23 January,2011]

⁶⁹ *Hellraiser* (Barker,1987) and *The Mummy* (Sommers,1999) are examples.

between worlds. This is a version of community behaviour that seems far more attractive and balanced than the constrictive traditional one whose excesses have threatened familial destruction, with Va'a's assault on Jake with a machete being redolent of the images of Jack Torrance turning on his family in *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980).

Local absences

Notably, in this South Auckland construct, with the exception of the billboard poster and taxi driver at the airport, Māori are absent. This seems to support the view that Polynesia has polarized itself. Moreover there is a suggestion in the retort "It's kia ora, some of us were born around here" of Maori also distancing themselves from Polynesians. Of further note is the fact that the western world that has been constructed around the Bedlam tattoo parlour is not one that is distinctively New Zealand in character but, with its semiotics of the West, rather seems to present a generalised picture of dissolute western civilisation, meaning that the specific pakeha culture of New Zealand is also absent. Indeed the farewell scene could be seen to represent a tableau of the exclusive alignment between Polynesian culture and American culture, first signaled by Sina's taking an immediate liking to Jake despite his deplorable behaviour in stealing the tatau hammer.

This does seem somewhat different from other cinematic portrayals of Polynesian culture we have seen in recent years, in that while it similarly advocates the importance of ethnic and cultural exchange as a basis of thriving community, it eschews other local cultures as a source of enrichment, and suggests that fruitful exchange is best achieved by traveling beyond New Zealand. Its dichotomous indifferent portrayal of South Auckland seems a world apart from the unabashed romantic treatment of Grey Lynn and Mount Roskill respectively in *Sione's Wedding* and *No.2*. This attitude is surprising given it shares with these films prominent Samoan actors David Fane and Robbie Magasiva, but when one considers how they are used here to depict the corruption of family, the question arises as to what extent *The Tattooist* represents a genuine revision of the aspirations of contemporary New Zealand Samoan culture as opposed to a cultural superimposition of perceived longings by the pakeha writers and director.

7. Case Study – Perfect Creature

Background

The traditional vampire as portrayed by the screen images of Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee is very much a creature of the past. From the arrival of the teenage punk rock vampires of *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher 1987), the vampire has adapted to express the outward appearance and sensibilities of its audience, and *Perfect Creature* continues this trend of assimilation. Richard Scheib notes its similarities to *The Breed* (Mastandrea, 2001) and various post-1998 vampire films that are heavily influenced by the graphic novel and the series spawned from *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999). In these films, Scheib argues, “the emphasis is not so much on classic images of the vampire rending apart decent society or acting as a metaphor of sexual repression but a series of action movie and Gothique poses and stories that feature wars between vampire factions or the relationship between humanity and vampire-kind, which is usually inimical.”⁷⁰

What is notable about this ‘post-1998’ trend is the cross-over of the horror genre into the science fiction genre. Stephen Neale’s (2000) analysis of genre reveals a key element of the science fiction genre as argued by Thomas Schatz is ‘contested space’ between ‘the human community’ and an ‘alien or monstrous force’ while Telotte, taking his lead from Malmgren and Jancovich, regards its essence as the issue of ‘humanness,’ which is brought into focus by “a growing fascination with the technological and its potential for reshaping the human” (p.102). He also notes Sobchack’s (2001) extensive analysis of the science fiction genre which argues that where in the 1950s space had been “semantically inscribed as “deep” and time as accelerating and urgent,” for the films released in the period 1968-1977 “space became semantically inscribed as inescapably domestic and crowded” and “time lost its urgency - statically stretching forward toward an impoverished and unwelcome future worse than a bad present” (p.103). The first of these is evident in *Perfect Creature*, whose architecture is cramped – there are no shots of open spaces and space, primarily dead-end alleyways, corridors and air conditioning ducts, is consistently presented as closed in. The second feature is also evident but is contested by the film, as I will argue.

While *Perfect Creature* certainly also possesses some of the features of the films cited by Scheib above, it is by no means an action movie, as the only sustained violence occurs in its final confrontation scene. Its generally quiet pacing and attention to sensory perception, which are distinctive, give it a lingering contemplative feel. This aligns it with a slightly older vein of science fiction dating from the late 70s and 80s which, according to Sobchack, has replaced a “cool, detached, and scientific vision” with a playful “jouissance” which she describes as “holding

⁷⁰ <http://www.moria.co.nz/horror/perfectcreature.htm> [accessed 31 January 2011]

the moment to sensually engage its surfaces, to embrace its material collections as “happenings” and collage” (2001,228).

Given the degree of its alignment with the science fiction genre, *Perfect Creature* is clearly a genre hybrid. Its Brothers are unmistakably modelled on the horror genre’s vampire (they are referred to as Nosferatu) and the narrative sets out a revision of that myth. This in itself is not remarkable, as the two genres are generally considered to be contiguous, with many films falling into the liminal territory between them. I do not intend therefore to attempt to corral the film to the one or the other any more than I have done in selecting the film in the first place for analysis from a horror genre perspective. The more important questions for my purposes are how the catalysis between the respective markers of the two genres works to revise the horror genre itself, and what the nature of their offspring construct of society is. The following analysis will look to answer these questions.

With a budget of \$20,000,000⁷¹ *Perfect Creature* is the third most expensive New Zealand film made. It is a UK co-production funded by the New Zealand Film Production Fund, the New Zealand Film Commission, Movision, Roc Media and the Royal Bank of Scotland, and received its New Zealand release at the Dunedin International Film Festival in July 2007. It was the first New Zealand film to be picked up for distribution by a major Hollywood studio, the rights to the film having been acquired by Twentieth Century Fox at Cannes in 2005. It did not, however, receive a general cinema release, and went straight to DVD, also in 2007⁷². The press kit which accompanies the NZ Film Commission data on the film⁷³ notes the economic accommodations that had to be made to satisfy the terms of its funding:

As an official UK/NZ co-production, the production had to find a balance of creative and economic elements on the film. “It became apparent early on that principal cast would need to come from the UK,” explains Sanders. “We then sat down and drew up our wish lists and to our astonishment and delight, both Dougray Scott and Saffron Burrows liked the project from the very start.”

There are constraints from the beginning, therefore, on the ability of the director to express and explore nationality, which is most obviously represented through the naming of the futuristic landscape - Nuova Zelandia - and the use of New Zealand actors in secondary roles. The film tells the story of a group of human vampires now known as The Brotherhood whose advanced culture, since its emergence 300 years ago as a result of genetic experimentation, has existed peacefully alongside that of humans. One of their kind, Edgar (Leo Gregory), has been

⁷¹ Per *Herald on Sunday* report: “Dunedin vampire movie NZ’s biggest film deal” by David Fisher, 15 May, 2005.

⁷² Its DVD premiere was in The Netherlands in March 2007, and it was released on DVD in the U.S. in July 2007.

⁷³ See <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/FilmCatalogue/Films/PERFECT-CREATURE.aspx?detail=About>

conducting genetic experiments to try to create a female vampire, but has contracted a form of madness as a result and is now on a rampage in the slums of Jamestown trying to infect all humans with his blood. Concerned to preserve the status quo, in which no human had ever been killed by a brother, his brother, Silus (Dougray Scott), works for the police to track him down, but Edgar abducts the lead detective, Lilly (Saffron Burrows), who is bitten by Edgar as Silus springs a trap to capture him.

The film has been much admired for its production design and cinematography, which anachronistically combines different historical periods, their technology and fashion in a style known as “steampunk.” The feel of Victorian England, in particular the slums stalked by Jack the Ripper, is effected by filming in sepia tones against a background of brick and Oamaru stone⁷⁴ replete with horse-drawn carriages, bowler hats and dirty, teeming rain. The opening scene presents a dirigible passing through the sky overhead, and we see the later collision of a steam-powered automobile with a carriage, 1930s black police cars, and retro-fitted props such as copper-encased computers. One well-known local reviewer has commented: “If its genre-mashing set-up outstrips its storytelling, at least *Perfect Creature*’s atmosphere and production design sure give good gothic.”⁷⁵ Leon Narbey, its New Zealand cinematographer, describes it as ‘darker than anything I have done. It’s noir-esque in a German sense in terms of darkness and shadow. But we were also looking at models like *The Godfather* and *Blade Runner*.’ (Petrie 2007, 282). This suggests the importance of thinking about *Perfect Creature* in the context of its international antecedents.

The decay of place and values

The collapse of period distinctions assists to create a sense of societal breakdown. I have already mentioned, in my analysis of *Black Sheep*, the cultural aesthetic of waste⁷⁶ associated with post-modern films such as *Blade Runner*, a film that is also commonly cited in reviewer discussions of the cinematographic style of *Perfect Creature*. Of this post-modern style Vivian Sobchack writes:

The space of films like *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter 1981), *Blade Runner*, *Blue Thunder* (John Badham, 1983), and *Dune* “collects” material culture as a value “in itself.” It rescues cultural artefacts from their overdetermination by time and function through its power to accumulate, save, transform recycle...No-thing is lost in these films; everything remains. And “remaindered” things begin to look both shabby and newly strange, begin to serve new functions, to adhere together in new combinations and take on a new “style.” (2001, 263)

⁷⁴ It was filmed locally, in Oamaru, Dunedin and Auckland.

⁷⁵ Russell Baillie, NZ Herald Review 18 October 2007, at http://www.nzherald.co.nz/movies/news/article.cfm?c_id=200&objectid=10470563

⁷⁶ Note 57 supra.

Notably, the body of films employing this aesthetic is dominated by examples of science fiction. In *Perfect Creature* this aesthetic is also ubiquitous, albeit much less cluttered with detail than the films cited by Sobchack. But the visual strangeness of what is there is emphasised – the eeriness of the labyrinthine underground world of steam piping whose purpose is a mystery, the juxtaposition of the horse and carriage with motorised transport, and a television that, but for the peculiarity of a circular screen, resembles an old radiogram. Importantly, the latter's image quality is rudimentary, emphasising surface detail over functionality⁷⁷.

Such a style supports the depiction of Nuova Zelandia as a murky, worn and dysfunctional world. Unlike Victorian England its inhabitants' pessimism about the future smothers and displaces any trace of a modernist optimism based on dreams of a functional Utopia. There is no hint anywhere of the regenerative powers of nature, and each day in the city simply brings new crimes in the slums and new diseases. The poor line the streets attempting to sell their worldly goods, and while a woman lays dying untended, her landlord, a symbol of acquisitive power, literally sits on the vaccine that could save her life because on the black market it has a much greater value. The *carpe diem* values of this society have enabled the traditional place of the church to be assumed by the Brotherhood, whose fundamental purpose is to assist the survival of mankind, and who employ the sombre Catholic trappings typically associated with the horror genre – the dark robes, secret councils, gothic church interiors, and mysterious rituals. The Brotherhood's adoption of the foundation of the church radically upends the generic aversion of vampires to the cross and other Christian symbols.

The film in fact is quite overt about the flouting of the myth's conventions in other ways. Contrary to the commonplace concepts that vampires do not cast reflections and are destroyed by sunlight, it emphatically frames Silus's reflection in a puddle, and most of its action occurs during the daytime, following on from films such as *Blade* (Norrington, 1998), whose eponymous hero is also able to endure the sun. The traditional figure of the vampire has always propagated by feeding upon and thereby transforming humans, so the introduction of the perfect creature of the title, both as a female Brother and as an ostensibly human child, problematises the traditional theme of confrontation with the Other.

Most, importantly, however, the vampire's relationship with man is depicted as symbiotic, rather than antagonistic. By the end of the film, this has changed, but the confirmation of our convictions that vampires are a threat to humankind arises not from our knowledge of their monstrous inclinations but rather because our own nature is reflected in their vicious endeavour to be more like us. The advent of Edgar's madness invests the vampire with a condition that makes him humanly vulnerable and dangerous, and his threat to poison the town's water supply with his own blood seems a step removed from the animal impulses that normally motivate the

⁷⁷ Sobchack (ibid.) cites Ridley Scott as saying that as part of his method of emphasising detail, "The television monitors that have replaced traffic signals provide deliberately poor pictures."

vampire's murderous actions. The vampire sub-genre's dangerous 'other' is thus inverted, so that Edgar's actions are framed in the context of his acting out man's inherent capacity for evil. While this innovation does not lend itself particularly to any local inflection, it does focus attention on the theme of crossing frontiers and on issues of identity.

The moral thread

Earlier in this essay I referred to the common theme of man's struggle with his own susceptibility to evil, 'the beast within', which critics such as Gixti (1989) believe is a defining feature of the horror genre. This is clearly inscribed in *Black Sheep*, in which the consequences of tampering with nature through genetic manipulation present a monstrous threat to the survival of humankind.

By contrast *Perfect Creature* introduces a situation where the products of genetic engineering have already existed peaceably alongside humans for some 300 years. This is consistent with the recent re-interpretation of the vampire as a genetically superior species⁷⁸, rather than a feared and despised carrier of an ancient supernatural curse. His relationship with man in this film is one of co-dependence. He feeds on blood which is willingly proffered and in return for his cures is allowed to live undisturbed. In what seems a wry comment on the blind faith many have in genetic engineering he has in fact taken over the stewardship of Man's most sacred institution – the church. This daring inversion of the traditional generic roles of the vampire and church creates a slightly disturbing moral background. At the beginning we even hear one of the priests indoctrinating children with the idea that the Brotherhood was sent by God to save humankind. One reviewer has commented: "The very Catholic trappings of the brotherhood and the way in which human congregations submit to them should be a disturbing affront to parishioners of the church."⁷⁹

The morality of the Vampire revolves around the responsible observance of his service to humans. Nonetheless they have sufficient collective memory to make alternative provisions for their survival. One of the brothers ruefully observes: "300 years ago they burned our children as monsters...the old prejudices are still there. Human beings are paranoid creatures by nature." Edgar's efforts to create a new strain of virus by which to renew his race have been approved by the Brotherhood through its "inner circle," and so the fact that the virus makes him insane and incites his murderous rampage does not invoke any question of moral responsibility. The

⁷⁸ This was largely influenced by a series of books, *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (Harris, 2001), which posits a world where, due to the synthetic manufacture of blood, vampires are able to exist alongside humans as legal citizens. The book is the basis of the hugely successful television series *True Blood* (Ball, 2008).

⁷⁹ R. J Carter, *The Trades DVD Review*, 17 July 2007 at <http://www.the-trades.com/article.php?id=5734>

mission of Silus to find and contain him is a politically motivated act designed to preserve the existing peace of a mutually beneficial relationship in which no Brother has ever killed a human.

This is unlike *Black Sheep*, where Angus's confrontation with the laws of nature, inexorably driven by bitterness about his inheritance of deformity, is clearly transgressive. The state of nature that has spawned the villainy of Edgar, on the other hand, has been long since accepted by the ruling authorities as a condition worthy of existence, and through his actions Edgar simply seeks to preserve the consequential circumstances of choices that have already been made. He declares of his murderous conduct that "he is only being what he was meant to be," and this merely highlights his will to survive, rather than invoking deep questions about the foundation of his existence and of the choices he now makes. The donning of the Vampire's new role as the guardian of human faith is therefore not attended by any fundamental change to his nature, despite the outward appearances of Christian civility, effectively accentuated at one point by the Brothers' partaking of blood in espresso cups. Thus the internal conflict between good and evil, which creates the genre's essential drama, is missing.

The inhabitation of the church by the Brotherhood could be seen to be a statement about the use of the church as an instrument of colonial infiltration and assimilation. The film does not seem to make much stock of this situation, however. It does refer to an overarching constitutional order which presumably oversees its police force. When word about Edgar's murders gets out and a curfew is imposed, a voice-over declares "The Queen is reported to have left the city. This is martial law." Thus the role of the Brotherhood in terms of political administration is downplayed, and the focus of the church's role-reversal seems to be confined to its generic significance.

Not only does this shift in the guardianship of the church deflect the moral focus from humans and the human condition, but, where these are implicated, the script also refuses to admit the historicity of consequence that is necessary to the attribution of moral responsibility. The plague of diseases which constitutes the chief evil threat to mankind is presented as a factual circumstance which is not explicitly linked to his actions and exercise of moral choice; we may only speculate that the present situation of widespread illness and deprivation has arisen from his deliberate and irresponsible historical actions. Only at one point is the ethical foundation of genetic engineering brought into the spotlight – as Silus feeds Lilly with his own blood to counteract Edgar's bite he stimulates recall of the stem cell debate with his words: "In some ways my body is like a human embryo. Cells regenerate quickly." Despite the film raising themes of prejudice, trust and betrayal⁸⁰ there appears to be a refusal to dwell upon them so as

⁸⁰ In the Press Kit released by NZ Film, Standring (p.5) comments: "By the end, the characters end up questioning whether The Brotherhood and the world they have helped create is actually just. Along the way, themes of parenthood, honour and how institutions become corrupted are explored, as well as something of the debate around genetic science and its use." See (<http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/FilmCatalogue/Films/PERFECT-CREATURE.aspx?detail=About>)

to fully explore the underlying morality. Moreover, any moral tension that might have been added by the sympathetic 'humanity' of Silus is undermined by the intellectuality and rigidity of his political outlook, whose stoic servitude at first appears to be assisting his race towards extinction. Even after his efforts to protect humanity have alienated him from the Brotherhood, he seems detached, and there is little evidence of internal turmoil. In the closing scenes, despite his declaration that he will fight the Brotherhood, he is shown as an aloof observer of society who inhabits its shadows, a liminal creature – neither human nor Brother.

While the deliberate refusal to explain things in terms of causes tends to dissolve the sense of consequence that informs our moral judgement, the self-conscious generic cross-referencing typical of post-modern culture may generally create a greater sense of narrative expectation that, when frustrated, intensifies the surprise of the unexpected - the fear that Tudor (supra) suggests is the key to the genre's fascination. Even in the absence of genuinely frightful innovation, such as exhibited by the wave of slasher movies in the 1980s, their success would suggest that the gap between the audience's knowledge of how things should play out and that of the characters can generate sufficient excitement to keep audiences engaged.

As an example of the use of generic expectation to generate excitement, Edgar's escape from his holding cell is a scenario which, as seasoned horror audience, we expect will be contingent upon the employment of some cunning deception. The escape of Hannibal Lector in *Silence of the Lambs* is a familiar precedent which employs similar containment apparatus, and there is also a New Zealand precedent in *The Ugly* (Reynolds, 1997). Edgar escapes, however, by simply crashing through a crack in the glass wall that he has earlier caused to appear by repeatedly slamming his head into it. Our expectation is stunningly undercut by this sudden action and the attendant realisation that the deception has already played out; we simply haven't recognised it as such because Edgar's weakening of the glass has been disguised as a simulation of the purposeless self-violence that often attends states of madness. His adoption of human qualities sees him breaching the frontier between beast and human, if only temporarily. Obviously, too, his incarceration is resolved in a manner that satisfies the spectacular action requirements of contemporary horror/science fiction/action films.

The importance of memory

The careful attention to the superficial formal aspects of ritual helps to emphasise the irony of the radical transformation of the church. The ceremony of the Eucharist, for example, which for obvious thematic reasons is also central to the Brotherhood, has humans making offerings of blood in exchange for medicines to combat disease. Detective Jones (NZ actor Scott Wills) wryly notes "My old mum goes to Church three times a week as is happy as a lark." The Brotherhood's own substance, though, has been depleted. Only 300 years old, it is becoming tired, as there have been no new brothers born in 70 years. Unlike their generic forbears, the

brothers are made sterile by their mutation, and each day that passes is much the same as the day before. As Edgar observes: "There is no love for our kind, only service."

A careful exploration of surface occurs in the confrontation between Silus and Detective Jones. The latter has always been suspicious of the brotherhood's outward appearance, and here he scrutinises Silus, hoping to penetrate to the truth. His dowdy brown jacket and unshaven, plain-looking cigarette-smoking visage are a complete contrast to the sleek Hollywood perfection of Silus's black-robed figure, clean-shaven with leading man good looks. In frustration, he strikes Silus but the blow inflicts no skin damage. Everything is what you see, and this fixation on surface is captured by Edgar when he says to Silus in a strikingly odd phrase: "I will see you drink your policewoman right through."

Lilly, herself is an impeccable beauty in the Hollywood mould, but despite the alluring attractiveness of her appearance possesses much greater depth than any of the other characters. She is the only character about whose emotional past we really know anything, and the lack of history ascribed to other characters serves to accentuate the fact that Lilly herself has a deeply recollected history, represented by the photograph of the daughter whom she lost to influenza and for whom she still grieves. Her antagonism can therefore be seen as a struggle for the preservation of historicity as represented by memory. She has an unusually deep human awareness, fuelled by her sensitivity to mortality, that the brothers are able to detect, due to their own uncanny sensitivity. There is a hint of ruefulness in the voice of Silus who as he contemplates Lilly recovering from Edgar's bite after having saved her with his own blood, murmurs: "I think yours would be a good life to watch, Lilly." While he enjoys supernatural visual and aural perception, as an immortal he cannot experience the reality of time. The strength of his fascination for Lilly drives a wedge between Silus and the Brotherhood, which has branded him a heretic. It seems that his conceptual construction of the perfect creature is in part constituted by Lilly, a possibility ironically supported by the exhortation of the church's formal ritual: "Let the blood be one and the two races joined as a perfect creature." Lilly also fascinates Edgar who has declared, "I shall have her again." The taste of such painful mortality, of course, has always been irresistible to the screen vampire for whom immortality is a curse.

The intensity of aural experience is used to tap through surface appearances, to express the vitality of mortal being. The film announces its theme of sensibility from the outset; it begins with a shot of the eye of a geneticist examining Edgar's defective gene then transitions into images of the surgeons delivering him from his pregnant mother, amoebic and murky, as if to express the faculty of vision being exercised for the first time by the emerging child. Then follows the sequence where Silus listens on the street for the sounds of murder. The acuteness of his hearing is exemplified by the magnification of noises heard from afar – including the sound of a cat washing itself and the blood from Edgar's recent kill dripping on a newspaper.

One particular sound constitutes an aural motif - the sound of moth-wings fluttering. Its first appearance marks Lilly's reminiscing over the death of her daughter and suggests a theme of transitory and delicate physical existence. Later we see the moth struggling to fly through an air conditioning duct as Lilly hides from the stalking Edgar. Its sound here is accentuated, and makes audible Lilly's emotional and physical frailty, while at the same time the generic association its image invokes⁸¹ assists to heighten our sense of fear.

The film's celebration of poignant sensory experience and the brave endurance of Lilly give it a somewhat optimistic outlook for the survival of temporal experience, despite the bleak situation in which it leaves the majority of humankind. On giving Lilly charge of the female infant brother Silus implores her, "Don't let them touch it," before taking his leave with a passionate kiss. He thus expresses his commitment to traditional sentimental human values, and when Lilly leaves the city at the end with the baby in her arms she heads off into the backdrop of a bright sunrise. This mood contrasts with the ambivalent post-modern mood of films such as *Blade Runner*, of which Sobchack (2001, 272) writes:

On the one hand, its mise-en-scène valorises space for its capacity to accumulate and conserve past experience as a future present of tangible "things." On the other, the narrative elegizes temporal memory, its invisible flow, its ephemerality, its lack of tangibility. Dying, the more grandly human than human replicant Roy Baty says to Deckard, "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe...Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion... All these things will be lost in time... like tears...in rain."

I would venture to suggest that the endorsement of temporal memory in *Perfect Creature* is underpinned by a deep cultural reverence for history within New Zealand, as expressed by events such as our annual media pilgrimage to Waitangi to reflect upon the formation of our nation, and our nation's solemn recall of its human sacrifice at Gallipoli each year on ANZAC day. The importance of memory is thus inscribed upon the New Zealand psyche, and individual memories themselves are things which are not to be discarded lightly, if at all.

As if to remind us of our own history and experience, the film is punctuated with strikingly sensuous moments. The most prominent of these, because it is culturally specific, is a vignette of a Māori kuia as a street vendor surreptitiously slipping a large and unctuous eel into a sack. It is an image which resounds as though it were a stamping of a New Zealand trademark, and because its subject seems displaced in the general social fabric of the text, seems to form a point of tension which raises questions about the political implications of an over-indulgence in superficiality.

⁸¹ It revives the image of the death's head moth whose pupa is a symbol of the killer Buffalo Bill's desire for transsexual change in *Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991).

The film can thus be seen as employing the technological effects of Hollywood, including its rendering of flat post-modern space and the suspension of personal history, to lay doubts about the future of such effects as the base for a vital cultural aesthetic. Sobchack (2001,272) discusses Jameson's identification of the consequences of our "cultural inflation of the value of space and surface," saying: "The inflated value of space and surface has led to a deflation of temporal value, to a collapse of those temporal relationships that formulated time as a continuous and unifying flow – constituting the coherence of personal identity, history and narrative."

In *Perfect Creature* the use of 'bullet-time'⁸² effects is succeeded by accelerated motion shots of Edgar clambering over buildings, thus appearing to invite comparison between time as perceived by Silus and time as perceived by the film camera.

The Christian church is of course built upon assumptions about the continuous flow of time and Man's place in the eternal scheme of things. But the spiritual sustenance that the eventual promise of immortality has historically provided is replaced in *Perfect Creature* by a caricature of faith whereby humans grovel at the feet of vampires for the immediate access to immortal prescience that comes with drinking vampire blood, literally given on tap by Edgar. His acolyte Freddy (played by Stephen Ure) is a thoroughly despicable creature with no redeeming values, whose obsequious willingness to serve acts as an example of the depravity that may ensue when the ability to see things out of time is valued higher than the experience of the moment.

The valorisation of the real and ephemeral in opposition to the play of surfaces and sensory perception echoes the binary tension of science fiction films such as *The Matrix*, in which the entire existence of humans is simulated, and again underscores the degree to which *Perfect Creature* draws from the science fiction genre. The opposition there centred upon the issue of the exercise of free will, and *Perfect Creature* hints that the assumption of free will, as symbolised by the humanisation of the vampires, counts for little if it has no consequences in terms of mortality.

The generic place of women

I have already commented on the limitations placed on the director's ability to introduce local inflections, other than through location and character, and, notwithstanding the fact that the lead actors are both British, it is through character that the most interesting societal perspective reveals itself. In the way in which the resourceful character of Lilly is distilled from familiar generic situations, *Perfect Creature* displays a deep respect for the ability of women to look after themselves. Homage to the basic *Nosferatu* blueprint is paid as Lilly reprises the character Mina's languid state in hospital after having been bitten by Edgar but she is far from being the

⁸² A term coined in respect of *The Matrix*, which involves the slowing down or freezing of an object or character while the camera pans around them.

terminally debilitated woman of that landmark film. We soon see her freeing herself from an overhead pipe to which she has been handcuffed, dispatching an infected woman who hungers for her blood, and going on to slay Edgar at a point where he has just subdued the chief vampire-hunter, Silus.

The casting of Lilly as the virile killer of the monster seems to enact the transformation of woman that is the subject of Carol Clover's feminist reading of horror. In *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992) Clover has argued that horror can be empowering, as in films such as *Halloween* the transformation of women from helpless screaming victim to triumphant slayer of the beast (the 'final girl') attracts male empathy and his willingness to participate in the female exercise of power. Silus's fascination with Lilly appears to mimic this empathy, and he is content to see her set forth in her immensely powerful role as the mother of the future perfect race. By contrast there is amusing irony in the feeble efforts of Detective Jones to protect her from Edgar and Silus.

There is reason enough already to apply a feminist reading to *Perfect Creature*, and Saffron Burrows has even commented of the film, "I could say it is a neo-feminist film noir..."⁸³ Lilly's strength of character, reinforced by her occupation as a crusading policeman, distinguishes her as an extraordinary screen female, and her only close relationships in the film have been with other females - her own daughter, and her newly acquired surrogate vampire daughter. To some extent she is a selfless female counterpart to Silus, and while her embrace by Silus presents a classical Hollywood lovers' tableau, she seems somewhat surprised by it. In fact there is little evidence at all in the film of the sexuality that has preoccupied many recent vampire features, which reflects a deliberate change in direction by Standring:

I made a point of not doing the cliché – the close up when the eyes go red and the fangs go in and blood drips out and the woman swoons – well that's a bore, it's been done a million times. So I chose, when Lilly is bitten, to play it all on her face and play her reaction to the gritty horror of it. All you see is the back of Edgar's head and arterial blood spraying in a squirt on a wall.⁸⁴

Another cliché of the genre is used to emphasise the reversal of the stereotype of the helpless woman. The kung-fu stand-off between Edgar and Silus, which continues a generic tradition of martial arts reference⁸⁵ is resolved only by Lilly's intervention, where she impales Edgar in the conventional way, albeit with a steam-pipe rather than a stake. In one scene where Edgar

⁸³ NZ Film Commission Press Kit, page 7.

⁸⁴ Interview with Helen Frances 2007. Available at <http://movingmatters.blogspot.com/2007/08/perfect-creature.html> [accessed 6 January 2011]

⁸⁵ See, for example, the *Mr Vampire* series consisting of the film titled *Mr Vampire* (1985), and its five sequels, all directed by Ricky Lau Koon-Wai, along with several *New Mr Vampire* films directed by others. A more recent martial arts influence is *The Matrix*. New Zealand examples include the Dunedin film *Kung Fu Vampire Killers* (Davison, 2002) and the character of Father McGruder ("I kick ass for the lord") from the cemetery scene in *Braindead*.

considers a choice of victims between a helpless woman and an emphatically bullish male, complete with handlebar moustache and barbells, he slaughters the male. The very fact that Lilly survives a similar attack helps to underscore the strength of her character. Her ultimate emergence as the bearer of mankind's hope for survival in the future is a statement about the reversal of power relations that seems to go somewhat further than the simple handover of the role of triumphant slayer of the beast that Hollywood typically allows. In looking to its hybrid horror/science fiction/action film peers, we find that *Vampires* (Carpenter, 1998) treats its female prostitute as a tool, using her fang-introduced infection to telepathically track its vampire villain. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Rubel Kuzui, 1992), the precursor to the television series of the same name, has a high school cheerleader who is the 'destined one' triumphantly defeating the vampire king Lothos. The zombie-battler Alice in *Resident Evil* (Anderson, 2002) meets an uncertain end, wielding a shotgun against an army of undead, while *Underworld* (Wiseman, 2003) and its sequel *Underworld: Evolution* (Wiseman, 2006) has its female vampire character, Selene, as a vengeful but obedient exterminator of Lycans (a werewolf-like species), whose importance is greatly diminished from one film to the next. Even *Queen of the Damned* (Rymer, 2002), which initially presents an all-powerful female vampire figure, has as its climax a scene where other vampires drain her of her powers before one of them walks off hand in hand into the night with his compliant female consort.

Perfect Creature thus continues a line of strong heroines, but appears to give a little more ground to the formative power of women as opposed to their power to punish and destroy. Its conclusion situates her as a pivotal source of new life and emphasises her nurturing aspect, whereas these other films have their female figures ultimately brutalised, marginalised or, in the case of *Buffy*, endlessly reprising their exploits in the service of a greater franchise. While not flagged in terms of local significance, this perspective of power perhaps reflects recent New Zealand political experience, which has seen two successive female Prime-Ministers and a wave of substantial participation by women generally in the constructive future direction of the state, not to mention the images of embattled women employed by the media in the construction of our sporting identity, for example in the depiction of the Silver Ferns⁸⁶.

The marriage of the horror and science fiction elements in *Perfect Creature* facilitates introspection about the nature of identity. Traditionally horror on screen has kept humans and vampires apart, notwithstanding its theoretical emphasis on the psychological mirror that we hold up to ourselves. When humans are bitten they become vampires and must be hunted and exterminated. Mad science, which Edgar very much symbolises, brings with it possibilities of hybridisation. But while through science vampires may inherit many of the features of humans, they must retain their fundamental distinguishing feature, their immortality, which deprives them of the painful taste of ephemeral existence. The ethos of the superficiality of objects provided by science fiction models such as *Blade Runner* provides the appropriate correlative world by

⁸⁶ The New Zealand women's netball team. Advertising for games is often cast them in gladiatorial terms.

which to express this sense of never quite reaching through to the core. At the same time the features of its New Zealandness are, notwithstanding one haunting vignette of displaced Maori, simply scattered among the artefacts of other nations and other times. Despite the ethnic familiarity of some of these artefacts, for example, the relics of Victorian Britain, their displacement in time makes them strange and foreign. Ultimately the nation of New Zealand is one foreign object among many.

8. Conclusion

The fetishisation of surface detail encountered in *Perfect Creature* is symptomatic of the fetishisation of media symbols and images by global consumer culture that Baudrillard⁸⁷ has argued creates a unique experience of hyperreality. Its economic-political analogue is the wave of capitalist globalisation which in recent times has seen phenomena such as “McDonaldization” emerge.⁸⁸ While early scholarship emphasised its homogenising effects⁸⁹, theorists now acknowledge that globalisation has multiple layers of effects which can involve complex processes of hybridisation or creolisation. Ritzer (2007, 41) notes that “second wave thinking emphasized its polarizing dynamics in strengthening traditional identities and leading to the resurgence of nationalism and ethnicity.” Of course, the ability of global consumer culture to commodify particular national attributes for export is one of its most outstanding features⁹⁰ and can also lead to the deadening-by-objectification of previously vibrant ethnic characteristics and styles. More optimistically it may provide a shared framework for heterogeneity marked by “an organisation of diversity rather than by a replication of uniformity” which, with its common platform for mediating between cultures, “provides the context for the production of new cultural forms which are marked by local specificity” (Ang, 1966). Its common forms therefore exhibit and include the organising features of genres. As evidence of how genre is deliberately employed to mediate between cultures we have noted its enthusiastic invocation with regards to *The Tattooist* and crossing the economic bridge between South Auckland and Singapore.

The processes by which the customs and cultural practices of the Other are desired, consumed and transformed into the global mainstream, as described by bell hooks (2006), are relevant to all three of the films presented as case studies. The horror genre with its literal consumption of the body provides a physical analogue of this commoditisation process, with our fascination for fear providing the universal hunger for its enactment.

In *Black Sheep* the carnivalesque inversion of place, which has its ovine subjects climbing from the roasting dish to dine on their human gourmands, enacts the consumption of the international representation of New Zealand as a poster paradise of some 40 million docile sheep. The features of this mythical pastoral paradise are described with a degree of cultural specificity that is intended to render the film’s attention to the myth’s deconstruction absolutely clear. This intent is described in the following extracts from the NZFC’s ‘About’ summary and press kit:

⁸⁷ Baudrillard, J. 1975. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St Louis: Telos Press.
1983. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e).

⁸⁸ Ritzer, G. (2007,17) notes that opinions about the true origins of globalisation give dates ranging from thousands of years ago to the fall of the Soviet Union. The term McDonaldization was coined by Ritzer in *The McDonaldization of Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. (1996).

⁸⁹ See, for example, the discussion of ‘McWorld’ in Herman and McChesney (1997)

⁹⁰ See Douglas J. Goodman’s “Globalization and Consumer Culture,” Ritzer (2007,330-351).

Jonathan King's debut feature is a high-spirited take on the question that has puzzled New Zealand for over one hundred years. Are we forever to be known as a small isolated nation dominated by sheep?

Black Sheep plays with the defining image the world has of New Zealand – and, in turn, the image we're anxious about – the sheep and the scenery!⁹¹

The pastiche used to undermine the complacency of the mythologizing perspective derives from the images we use as a nation to promote our culture and lifestyle to the world. I have noted earlier, for example, how the images of sheep grazing conjure up scenes from *Jurassic Park*, so that the similarity of one fantastic landscape to another becomes an effective platform for raising doubts about the authenticity of the landscape. In his recently published article on contemporary New Zealand horror Alan Cameron⁹² argues that International maps of the landscape can be seen to overlay our domestic maps, thereby effecting a dislocation of traditional Gothic preoccupations with the land. He cites the 'tourist idyll' as one such map in reference to *Black Sheep*, and it is with the same map that *Jurassic Park* begins.

Whether this untethers the Gothic from the landscape altogether, as is claimed of a number of the films discussed, I think depends on the extent to which it is at the same time re-connected and re-energised by new associations. For example, the depiction of the shearing shed in *Black Sheep*, despite an exaggeration of Gothic effects and some momentary humour, does in my view release a new strand of situational menace.

What seems to me to be the most striking feature of *Black Sheep* is the confidence with which its pastiche is employed. In the tracing of its local detail there is no deference given to possible foreign ignorance. This arises, I would suggest, from the director's awareness of the strength of 'Brand New Zealand' in the international market, due to the extraordinary success of its marketing both as a 'clean green' farm and 'Middle Earth' tourist destination. In generic terms it also reflects a creative maturity that comes from the recognition of New Zealanders as 'splatter-meisters' of the horror genre, such that *Black Sheep*, in its use of the vernacular, is beginning to reflect the type of generic transformation through demythologization that Cawelti (1986) suggests accompanies conscious self-awareness and the tiring of traditional generic tropes.

The proud packaging of our identity for international consumption is aptly captured in the metaphor of Mrs Mac's rendering of offal into haggis, which also perfectly captures the spirit of colonial pragmatism that underlies the 'No. 8 wire' belief that as a nation we can do anything

⁹¹ <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/FilmCatalogue/Films/BLACK-SHEEP.aspx?detail=About>

⁹² Op. Cit. 61.

with whatever comes to hand⁹³. But at the same time it suggests a dressing up of reality. While *Black Sheep* on the surface appears to endorse a one-nation, one people approach, its exclusion of any reference to marginal ethnicities forms part of a conclusive reconstitution of identity that is intentionally formulaic and ambiguous. The havoc created by genetic tampering in order to stage the debut of the Ubersheep cautions against the possible danger of our obsession to create a perfect animal for international consumption, and this warning carries through to the closing image of a sheep dog baaing, whose intimation of possibilities for a franchise and future infection underscores the fragility of *Black Sheep*'s final cultural construct. At the same time the apparent simplicity of the collective choice about whether to 'go organic' is undermined by our knowledge that the methane, which has been the springboard to the achievement of this balance of affairs, is at once both a natural and a global greenhouse gas.

Whereas *Black Sheep* offers a model of nationhood more closely focused upon the synthesis of the 'internal processes of nation-formation,' *The Tattooist* presents a model of national community that is more akin to Schlesinger's membrane that admits an influential commerce with other nations. It would also appear to support the idea that the interface of global consumerism and local ethnic consumption may not even admit other interior constructions of the nation. While ostensibly about the culture of Samoans in New Zealand, it presents this culture as stranded in much the same way as the vampire race in *Perfect Creature* is depicted as stranded, relying on sustenance from another culture within the same broad community. But where this sustenance is an accepted fact of the political landscape in *Perfect Creature*, its necessity is at first questioned in *The Tattooist*, chiefly in the figure of Va'a who describes the community's resistance to colonisation by missionaries. The gangrenisation that occurs as a result of what is suggested is improper cultural practice is symbolically inscribed in the infection that Va'a gives to Mr Perenese's son. When the film confirms its endorsement of ethnic boundary-crossing as a means to reinvigorate culture it draws its membrane between the Samoan community and outside American culture, and conspicuously omits the processes of internal ethnic exchange. The result is that *The Tattooist* lacks the sense of collective national branding that pertains to *Black Sheep*. In this respect it is a film that could be seen to articulate the 'assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests' of ordinary New Zealanders in such a way that is 'not necessarily national and still less nationalist' (Hobsbawm 1990,10).

In *Perfect Creature* the hybridity that is a consequence of the interplay of national and international influences again features in the generic enactment of 'Eating the Other.' Not only is there hybridity in respect of the symbiotic relationship between human and vampire but also in the employment of the science fiction genre to compress and freeze time or to disperse objects through it, thereby reformulating, as Sobchak (2001,229) argues, the "spatial and temporal shape of our world and our world view." This gives rise to the state of "invasion" being replaced

⁹³ Petrie and Stuart (2008, 122) report that "The fourth most cited distinction of local movies is the element of offbeat inventiveness..."

by the state of “pervasion,” where a profusion of electronic simulacra act to disperse both the individual and collective sense of identity we may once have had in confronting the Other. This implicates our self-produced images of New Zealand culture in the exercise of alien-ation wherever they have been infiltrated and influenced by the introduction of foreign capital, and this is evident in the dislocated images of our culture that *Perfect Creature* presents. But as in *Black Sheep* there is a palpable current of resistance to free exchange, expressed particularly by the discomfort of Officer Jones with the idea of vampire/human co-habitation and his confrontation with Silus. The desire to consume what is different manifests itself in the determination of Edgar to feast upon Lilly, and its manic intensification threatens both ethnic and cultural obliteration. Writing of the vampires as “inveterate boundary crossers” Cameron (2010,67) argues “they embody both the possibilities and the dangers of the hybrid” and that “the status of the film as co-production introduces the threat of cultural erasure or recolonization, but also the possibility of rearticulating local culture in relation to the global.” An important point made by the film is that the Vampire culture is besieged by its own insularity and is threatened by the absence of the new births that would enable it to renew itself. Its emphasis on the essential reproductive need for the Other appears to endorse the necessity of cultural exchange for survival.

The way in which liminal films such as *Perfect Creature* contribute generally to our sense of nationhood is that they highlight fundamental questions about the nature of difference and the point at which it occurs or is threatened with erasure. In *Perfect Creature* difference, as represented by genetic mutation, is the wellspring of intense sensational experience, and the craving of Freddie for the foresight given by drinking Edgar’s blood is a symptom of the sexual fascination that bell hooks (2006) argues adheres to the Other. But the traditional sexual fascination associated with the vampire is absent in Lilly. She has no desire to enter the destructive flux of exchange that Edgar offers. The obsession that governs her existence is one of domestic remembrance, and this seems to support the idea of collective memory and imagination being the ultimate refuge of nationhood in a world where peoples and their possible points of orientation are being rapidly dispersed by globalising forces. The vampire, as an ageless and indifferent international commodity, is excluded from this cultural community, and so as with Silus, must always remain a liminal creature. Its continuing survival relies on its recirculation in popular myth. In my introduction at page 1, I noted Lealand’s observation that “The mythologies of Hollywood became ‘naturalised’ in the absence of any more powerful propositions, integral to the ways of ‘reading’ the world for New Zealanders.” The refusal of *Perfect Creature* to try to naturalise the vampire myth in specific cultural terms and its simultaneous emphasis on the emergence of a new breed of family suggest there is a more powerful proposition of community in play here, one which is bound by the sharing of deeply inculcated values rather than mere geographic co-tenancy.

One of the conclusions that might be drawn from this apparent rejection of essentialist frontier terms of nationhood and culture is simply that the film industry as a commercial enterprise,

together with its branding overseas have matured to a point where the cultural inflection of genre is unnecessary for the purpose of promoting consumption, and as with *Black Sheep*, we are confident enough now to even admit a degree of self-deprecation with respect to our nation building practices.

We might also conclude that the troubling issues of nation have been set aside in the common economic interest or in the pursuit of particular ethnic and cultural recognition. The NZFC press kit for *The Tattooist* notes that the Samoan community honoured director Peter Burger and star Jason Behr with the title of matai (chief), a gesture which the latter attributed to “doing our best to bring their culture to the global stage with a lot of respect.”⁹⁴ While the film is purported to be a faithful representation of the Samoan ethnic community, there was obviously considered to be much at stake in getting it internationally airborne, and the desire to present strong images of this community may have influenced the exclusion of problematising aspects of nation.

Certainly, as concerns increase about the global effects of issues such as genetic modification, there is a sense too in which new international communities are being born, with affiliations of state being displaced by common commitment to ethical values. The horror genre continues to be a strong platform for exploring issues of identity in the face of globalisation, not only because of its contextualisation of the Other, but also because of its fundamental exploration of the morality of being human. Its appeal to those developing a sense of nation, whatever its base, is all the more so because the evolutionary stages of genre resemble the evolutionary stages of nation building. In Thomas Schatz’s words:

“As a genre’s classic conventions are refined and eventually parodied and subverted, its transparency gradually gives way to *opacity*: We no longer look *through* the form (or perhaps “into the mirror”) to glimpse an idealized self-image, rather we look *at* the *form itself* to examine and appreciate its structure and cultural appeal” (1981,38).

Indigenisation is very much a process of trying to locate an idealised self-image in the form. It may be that as we become more inundated in the streams of foreign influence and capital, we see the attention of our horror film industry given more and more to the expression of how identity and culture is formed, rather than to the description and self-reflection of the specific features of the constituent cultures that make up our nation.

⁹⁴ Page 9.

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Appendix 1 – Extract from New Zealand Film Commission Act 1978

Definition of Significant New Zealand Content

(2) For the purposes of determining whether or not a film has or is to have a significant New Zealand content, the Commission shall have regard to the following matters:

- (a) The subject of the film:
- (b) The locations at which the film was or is to be made:
- (c) The nationalities and places of residence of—
 - (i) The authors, scriptwriters, composers, producers, directors, actors, technicians, editors, and other persons who took part or are to take part in the making of the film; and
 - (ii) The persons who own or are to own the shares or capital of any company, partnership, or joint venture that is concerned with the making of the film; and
 - (iii) The persons who have or are to have the copyright in the film:
- (d) The sources from which the money that was used or is to be used to make the film was or is to be derived:
- (e) The ownership and whereabouts of the equipment and technical facilities that were or are to be used to make the film:
- (f) Any other matters that in the opinion of the Commission are relevant to the purposes of this Act.

(2A) A film shall be deemed to have significant New Zealand content if it is made pursuant to an agreement or arrangement entered into in respect of the film between—

- (a) The Government of New Zealand or the Commission; and
- (b) The Government of another country or relevant public authority of another country.

(3) In carrying out its functions, the Commission shall in relation to the content of any film have due regard to the observance of standards that are generally acceptable in the community.

Appendix 2 – List of Recent New Zealand Thriller/Horror Films

Name of Film	Year	Director	Nature of Monster	NZFC Classification
The Scarecrow	1981	Sam Pillsbury	Psychotic	Thriller
Death Warmred Up	1984	David Blyth	Zombie	Drama
Mr Wrong	1985	Gaylene Preston	Supernatural spirit	Thriller
Bad Taste	1988	Peter Jackson	Alien	Horror
Sweetie	1989	Jane Campion	Psychotic	N/A
Red Blooded American Girl	1990	David Blyth	Vampire	N/A
The Returning	1990	John Day	Supernatural spirit	Thriller
Braindead	1992	Peter Jackson	Zombie	Horror
Crush	1992	Alison McLean	Psychotic	Drama
Moonrise	1992	David Blyth	Vampire	Fantasy/family
Jack be Nimble	1993	Garth Maxwell	Supernatural spirit	Horror
The Frighteners	1996	Peter Jackson	Supernatural spirit	N/A
The Ugly	1997	Scott Reynolds	Psychotic	N/A
The Irrefutable Truth About Demons	2000	Glenn Standring	Psychotic	Thriller/Horror
No-One Can Hear You	2002	John Laing	Psychotic	Thriller
Kung Fu Vampire Killers	2002	Phil Davison	Vampire	N/A
The Locals	2003	Greg Page	Zombie	N/A
Flatmates Wanted	2004	Gary Davies	Supernatural spirit	N/A
Perfect Creature	2006	Glenn Standring	Vampire	Sci Fi Thriller
Black Sheep	2006	Jonathon King	Were-sheep	Horror/comedy
Hidden	2006	Tim McLachlan	Supernatural spirit	N/A
The Ferryman	2007	Chris Graham	Supernatural spirit	Horror
The Tattooist	2007	Peter Burger	Supernatural spirit	Supernatural Thriller
Down By the Riverside	2007	Marama Killen, Brad Davison	Psychotic	N/A
When Night Falls	2007	Alex Galvin	Psychotic	N/A