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Celluloid Subversion: A Queer Reading of 1980s Teen Slasher Cinema

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

CELLULOID SUBVERSION: A QUEER READING OF 1980S TEEN SLASHER
CINEMA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Yates Diaz

2022

To: Dean Michael Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

This thesis, written by Yates Diaz, and entitled Celluloid Subversion: A Queer Reading of 1980s Teen Slasher Cinema, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Jason Pearl

Andrew Strycharski

Nathaniel Cadle, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 28, 2022

The thesis of Yates Diaz is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
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Florida International University, 2022

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

CELLULOID SUBVERSION: A QUEER READING OF 1980S TEEN SLASHER

CINEMA

by

Yates Diaz

Florida International University, 2022

Miami, Florida

Professor Nathaniel Cadle, Major Professor

“Celluloid Subversion” examines the slasher film genre, specifically how it came to prominence in the early 1980s at the dawn of Ronald Reagan and the New Right’s takeover of American political and social life. With its violence against women and individuals who engage in allegedly immoral acts, the genre is commonly perceived as a cinematic representation of patriarchal values writ large on screen. However, its propensity for challenging gender norms and its adherence to tropes such as that of the Final Girl – where a woman survives the killer’s carnage before defeating him – imbue it with subversively queer qualities that are at odds with the ultra-conservatism of the era. Close readings of *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge* (1985) will illustrate how queer elements exist within slasher cinema while also defining it.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who have always encouraged me to follow my passions and have given me every resource imaginable to do so. And to my sister, whose constant encouragement and faith in me is the reason I was able to reach this moment in my academic life. Lastly, to Celia, whose patience and understanding helped me get through the toughest of days unscathed. I love you all immensely. This one's for
Shredder.

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I. Introduction

Within the classifiable types of film horror subgenres, the slasher is a relatively recent invention. Emerging in the mid to late seventies from the legacy of a handful of industry-altering horror productions, slasher films are typically composed of a cast of characters – usually teenagers – killed off one by one in increasingly gruesome fashion, most often by one male killer within recognizable settings which are perceived to be insulated from such extreme and violent intrusions. The paradigmatic shifts in style and formula of which slasher films are responsible for introducing to horror cinema are plentiful: kill counts as a sort of sport for the audience; creatively bankrupt sequels notable for upping the violence while simultaneously watering down whatever made the originals unique; the idea of the virginal Final Girl who survives the slaughter and defeats the killer by film’s end (Clover 84); and killers – many of which would go on to become zeitgeist-infiltrating pop-culture icons in their own right (Prince 17-18) – whose trails of destruction were overshadowed by the creativity of their murderous methodologies.

Inversely, looking past its lasting popularity and still-persisting presence within modern Hollywood’s yearly output, slasher cinema is frequently associated with its more egregious tropes, such as violence against women and death to any character partaking in “questionable” activity (think taking drugs and/or having sex) perpetrated by often aggrieved men who are the symbolic representations of the prevailing socio-political mindset of the 1980s during an era in which the genre, projected as an aesthetic reaction to 1960s counterculture (Benshoff and Griffin 180), rose to prominence on a wave of sensationalized notoriety in conjunction with relatively low budgets. Looking back through a contemporary lens at how the seventies came to a close, giving way to Ronald

Reagan and the New Right's "profound transformation of American political and cultural life," one which significantly "mov[ed] the country in a rightward direction" (Prince 11), this mischaracterization of slasher cinema-as-patriarchal-allegory has become something akin to canonized genre doctrine. As a result, much of the discourse surrounding slasher cinema of the 1980s steadfastly labels it as "misogynistic" and existing in a period in which "subversive horror cinema seemed untenable" (Towlson Kindle 3808). By contrast, I posit that, through its portrayal of unapologetic violence, messy explorations of gender roles and deep (albeit clandestine) depictions of marginalized lives, slasher cinema is itself a queered horror genre. It achieves this status by critiquing the national moral standards of respectability that were proselytized during its burgeoning years, thus attaining the freedom to explore taboo subjects by burying them within otherwise marginalized-themselves shock-for-profit productions. In effect, slasher films operate in gender subversion through a manic and unapologetic energy matched only by the material excess for which the 1980s are known for.

II. Slasher Cinema Tropes, Background and Historical Context

One significant element which differentiates slashers from other horror subgenres, and which comfortably reflects a family values-obsessed social order, is in its portrayal of the corruption of safe environments, where domesticity is infiltrated by plausible evils. This corruption occurs within the literal spaces inhabited by its characters – think schools, suburbia, the home itself (and as an extension of homely comforts, in the case of Freddy Krueger, the sanctity of the mind). This dimension of losing one's safe spaces aligns with the genre's overreliance on indescribable violence penetrating the safety of a

social milieu forcibly protected by the patriarchy. The thematically tangible queered aspects of slashers arise when one considers how the internalized lives of its characters are altered or abused once that supposed safety of bourgeoisie values is invaded. On a surface level, misogyny runs rampant in these films, with an overreliance on the male gaze, gratuitous nudity, and extreme violence against women. More importantly, the killers in these films often murder teenagers who dare to indulge outside of the prescribed family values that were weaponized by the New Right of the 1980s in creating a false moral dichotomy between sinners and saints. However, I argue that the very existence of such a genre at the beginnings of new conservatism constitutes a subversion of the prevailing national outlook in and of itself rather than a celebration of its newfound dominance. If “horror films...are about what civilization represses” (McGee 181), then slasher films, while somewhat representative of 1980’s conservatism in their propensity for violence towards women and anyone who eschews traditional family values, are ultimately exercises in exploring the very same things that conservative family values hypocritically obfuscate through arbitrary patriarchal standards (gender roles, violence against the marginalized, etc.) dictated by an unironically socially oppressive power structure. In other words, the very existence of slasher cinema, especially after “evolving” from the prestige and more liberally minded New Hollywood-enabled horror productions of the 1970s into nasty little moneymaking hits, is queerness personified through its manifestation on screen at a time when the prevailing national moral attitude stood so incongruously against it.

It should not be a surprise to anyone, then, that the slasher genre would flourish and eventually come to prominence at a time of extreme political transformation in

American life as the 1970s were coming to a close at the dawn of the New Right's takeover and eventual transformation of the American political and social sphere. The horror genre, in reflecting generational anxieties by forcing audiences to face their "repressed fears and desires" through "residual conflict surrounding those feelings" (Clover 73), rose to the challenge by matching the extreme right's vitriol with equal violence and shameless pandering through shock value. This uncomfortable balancing act of simultaneously entertaining audiences while also providing catharsis by way of confronting the unimaginable partly explains how horror has co-existed with the film medium since its inception. Carol J. Clover writes of early "cinema...[owing] its particular success in the sensation genre" (Clover 71), and this suitably applies to horror as it affects viewers through repressed sensations if one considers it a filmic iteration of the fantastical, where physiological alteration can stem from sensory manipulation irrespective of subject matter or thematic content. This explains how horror has remained popular since the silent era onward, with each decade's horror productions seemingly taking advantage of social anxieties in tandem with advancements in special effects and on-screen trickery while showing audiences the collective nightmares that we are consistently reminded to keep at bay. And, as the 1970s came to their depressing end, with the nation still reeling from the turmoil of the 1960s and experiencing economic downturn, it was time for the New Right as "an era...ended in Washington" (Rossinow 29), with Ronald Reagan at the fore, to infiltrate American government in a monumental way.

In its violence geared toward women and those who step out of conservatism's edicts on respectability, slashers seem to be aligned with Reagan-era politics. This is,

after all, the established narrative that is repeated ad nauseum when trying to contextualize slashers as they relate to the time in which they came to be and where they subsequently flourished regardless of critical or public pushback from both sides of the American political spectrum. This is best evidenced in the typical contemporaneous commentary, which frequently overlooked nuanced subtext in favor of the shock value that partly serves as the genre's modality. Janet Maslin, in a *New York Times* article from 1982 titled "Bloodbaths Debase Movies and Audiences," wrote, "At no time in horror history has the violence been as literal as it is today, or as numbing... There is no opportunity to view the monster as the embodiment of a community's fears, or as the darker side of man's nature" (Maslin 1). This type of relentless skewering was even echoed by popular film critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, whose "left liberal perspective... dovetailed neatly with the views of right-wing fundamentalists" into an "unlikely alliance' [of] ideological labeling" (Nowell 228-229). Ronald Reagan, who shifted from Democrat to Republican in the 1950s out of a common-on-both-sides-at-the-time repudiation of communism and who over time took on the persona "of a stern father bringing discipline to unruly children" towards the liberal counterculture of the time (Rossinow 11-12), fully implemented an ethos of patriarchally-defined family values during his time in the White House. It is no coincidence, then, that a genre of horror cinema made popular in the 1980s relishes in showing powerful men – using weaponry oftentimes reminiscent of phallic imagery – butcher collective gatherings of youths who do not abide by conservatism's mandates. Reagan's extremist stance "on enforcing rules and hanging tough" underpins this connection, as a speech he made in reference to "law and order" in the 1970s illustrates (Rossinow 14). There, he stated, "If it takes a

bloodbath...let's get it over with. No more appeasement" (Rossinow 14). This philosophy, whether intentionally or not, would define the slasher killer in the coming decade, thus superimposing the philosophies of the former over the latter as conventional wisdom within film genre discourse.

However, in their indulging of grotesque extremities, slashers manage to portray that same conservative viewpoint as monstrous and utterly destructive. This is where the genre diverges from notions projected upon it by politicians and the critical machinery of the time and in turn becomes purely subversive expression. Even when certain films failed at addressing taboo subject matter, the fact that a thriving subgenre gave filmmakers that type of leeway speaks to the nonconformist textuality found within many slasher films. And in reaching the level where those types of explorations could be made, it is important to consider the progenitors of slasher cinema, through both their direct lineage of murder-centric movies and through the larger scope of their place within horror history in general, before trying to understand how a genre so dependent on bloodshed and outright cruelty peaked in popularity during an era in which Ronald Reagan and his policies came into power after an undisputable landslide.

Slasher cinema is usually considered to have begun with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) (Benshoff and Griffin 179) in an era that saw horror shift from "the aliens [and] radiated insects that populated sci-fi invasion and monster movies in the middle of the century" (McGee 180) towards antagonistic forces more domesticated and plausible. I would further argue, however, that the beginnings of its lineage can be traced back even further to a film which was released before *Psycho*. Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) and its use of subjective point of view (POV) camera shots in displaying violence

against women – thus making theatergoing audiences complicit in the gendered violence taking place on screen – would become a hallmark of the genre. *Peeping Tom*'s overt and unflinching violence towards women, combined with *Psycho*'s alteration of the American family unit through its representation of a killer possessing characteristics familiar within the realm of possibility, helped create the foundation for further proto-slashers and the eventual box-office boom of slashers proper. Long before attaining infamy as successful money-making “trash” in the 1980s and before being given its moniker in 1986 by Carol Clover when she wrote of the still-developing genre, “At the very bottom, down in the cinematic underbrush, lies...the slasher film” (Clover 68), these two films’ direct influence on how slashers were ultimately conceived can be directly felt in interim works, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *Black Christmas* (1974), and the film most responsible in popularizing slasher cinema, *Halloween* (1978). These later additions seemingly differ from Powell and Hitchcock’s psychological epoch-shifting works by increasing the level of violence on screen while also focusing on groups of teenagers being slain by a masked man, but within the DNA of each lies an attempt by filmmakers at showing how the safety of American domesticity and patriarchal protection is ultimately a ruse, one which is not only susceptible to infiltration by external evils, but which itself already houses those evils and, in fact, produces them out of a false sense of moral superiority.

While many of its progeny follow the most predictable of templates, what *Psycho* and (to a lesser extent) *Peeping Tom* did was shift the horror movie antagonist from monster or existential threat, such as nuclear war or alien invasion, into the realm of the psychological, thus corrupting patriarchal family standards and forever altering

depictions of domesticity. *Psycho*'s Norman Bates, himself a queered character in a time when presenting such a person was nearly unthinkable in a prestigious Hollywood production – whose actor, Anthony Perkins, was also homosexual – would serve as a template for future slashers, which would rely on the “killer queer” trope (Benshoff and Griffin 179). These characters were portrayed as “updated...psychopathic sex pervert[s]...beloved of 1950s psychiatrists” (Benshoff and Griffin 180), meaning they were inspired by and cultivated during America's previous ultra-right-wing era. Both the 1950s and 1980s thus bookend a period in cinema in which psychologically driven horror fare brought the monster into the realm of domesticity in attempting to humanize indefensible characters. And though clumsy as that effort may seem, it further shifted the focus of horror antagonism from existential monstrosity to relatable and at-arms-length for the average sheltered American. It is especially important to note that the idea of the “killer queer” extends beyond representations of LGBTQ+ characters, as many of “the killers in slashers...are often the subject of our sympathy, scarred by terrible pranks or robbed of their development” (McGee 180), making them outsiders by default in a society that punishes anything even approaching an identification resembling the “other.”

Slashers, riding high on the success of *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* (1980), “would become one of the most profitable film formulas of the 1980s” (Benshoff and Griffin 179). They were essentially projects that could bring in substantial profits on low production costs. One only needs to look at *Halloween*, which went on to make over \$50 million on a budget of around \$325,000, to see why studios were eager to attempt reaching similar profit margins at low production costs (Dixon and Foster 358). Their rise in prominence coincides with both a disenchanting faith in America's viability in the

world and a rapidly evolving film industry. Reagan's shifting of America to an ultraconservative ethos affected popular culture at this opportune time, and cinema was not immune to its influence. Even with the economy remaining stagnant during his early years, leading many to believe that he would not win a second term (Buckland 63), "Hollywood films harmonized with the emerging political framework," as evidenced by a number of box-office hits beginning in 1981 (Negra 44). It is within this climate that the prevailing idea of slashers-as-conservative mentality took hold, even when so many films of the genre seemingly repudiate patriarchal hegemony through their very essence of violence perpetrated against safe spaces by aggrieved men who have been rejected by fun-seeking youths. This is especially evident when looked back upon after decades of slow albeit profound social progress, as marginalized communities have reappropriated conventional narratives of the past to better represent their place in a more inclusive social milieu.

The argument that the slasher subgenre is a queered form of film horror expression, especially when considering the era in which their popularity skyrocketed, is most profoundly substantiated through specific examples of overtly subversive productions that lend support to the notion. The following three films – *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) – subvert gender roles in clever ways that not only queer audiences' specific interpretations and the subsequent relationships between each, but also in how they enable those same audiences, now separated from each film's initial theatrical run and era-specific discourse by a matter of decades, to reappropriate slasher movie tropes rather than allowing further reification of the New Right's oppressive

philosophical edicts writ large on movie screens. I will examine them in the order in which they were released.

III. *The Slumber Party Massacre*

Situated between strictly financial considerations and a desire to *say something* about the state of cinematic horror, *The Slumber Party Massacre*, written by novelist Rita Mae Brown and directed by Amy Holden Jones, oscillates between already-tired-in-1982 genre tropes and acute observations criticizing those same tropes. As a result, its tonal structure is a bit uneven at times, although the incongruence between its attempts at being a “serious” horror film and its slightly satirical take on the material lend the film a sense of originality and levity which other slashers were sorely lacking at the time. This leads the film to possess a meta quality, something that would not truly define horror until the release of *Wes Craven’s New Nightmare* (1994) and *Scream* (1996), with the latter film reinventing horror by populating it with characters who were aware that they were in a horror film, thus allowing them to act accordingly once the bloodshed began to take effect by following the rules of the genre invented and adhered to by the late-1970s and early-1980s slasher pioneers the film was emulating. A more contemporaneous slasher which attempted to knowingly wink at audiences was *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives* (1986). But whereas that film merely poked fun at the genre by emphasizing some of its conventions, *The Slumber Party Massacre* actively comments on – and openly criticizes – gender roles that horror movie fans and critics had come to expect by 1982, thus giving it the distinction of being both the era’s only truly recursive film that somehow also functions as the very thing it is criticizing and the first of its kind within

the genre's still-nascent history. In doing so, it is a film of two halves: a clichéd slasher film that also engages in blatant social commentary.

Narratively, there is not much in *The Slumber Party Massacre* to differentiate it from other slasher fare. It takes viewers through a day in the life of a group of high school girls as they anticipate the titular sleepover at the house of one of the protagonist's parents. It portrays the idealized American life of the new decade, with its characters participating in after school basketball and enjoying the leisure of materialistic suburban living. Its structure follows the typical slasher template where a killer, in this case an escaped patient from a mental hospital, stalks protagonist Trish and her friends from their high school all the way to their slumber party gathering. His murderous streak leads to a climax in Trish's backyard where he is dispatched just as genre "rules" dictate. Even its mise-en-scène and use of music is lacking anything that would indicate a departure from expected genre conventions, as it relies heavily on the standard use of subjective POV shots to instill suspense within the audience regarding character safety amidst a ramping up of violence until a satisfyingly bloody climax, as well as employing a forgettable musical score that neither heightens the tension nor even makes itself noticeable in the slightest.

It is only upon exploring the interstices hidden in between the clichés where we begin to see the purposely constructed commentary on display. Two specific circumstances may be attributed to its overall subversive nature: first, with the increase in independent film production companies working under the support of larger studios, something endemic to slasher filmmaking as a whole (Nowell 6), women were taking on directing jobs with more frequency than they had in the past. As a result, Amy Jones took

on directing duties for *The Slumber Party Massacre* (Prince 5); and second, lesbian feminist novelist Rita Mae Brown wrote the screenplay (Benshoff and Griffin 180), bringing an outsider storytelling perspective into a predominantly heteromale space. With this atypical creative team of two women at the helm, character archetypes take on new dimensions throughout the film's runtime despite its no-frills and frankly rather subdued nature. This is most noticeable in the way that gender dynamics are completely flipped by altering the trope-dictated roles prescribed to men and women within the otherwise conventional nature of its filmmaking.

Visually, Jones employs certain camera moves and blocking that function more as statements, or rather critiques, of what audiences were used to, mostly in how she undermines the ubiquity of the male gaze inherent to both typical male horror movie characters as well as that of predominantly male filmmakers who pandered to male audiences. This overreliance in filmmaking on the objectification of women has always been financially driven. Looking specifically at the climate leading to slasher cinema's peak in box-office viability in which, according to a 1980 *Variety* article, "The audience for horror films...[was] predominantly male and aged 15-25 years" (Nowell 35), the motivations for doing so are depressingly obvious. However, as Nowell also points out, "the central tenet of commercial filmmaking has been the desire to widen attendance beyond the core audience segment," which led to studios actively going out of their way to accommodate female audiences in their efforts to increase ticket sales (Nowell 6), even if those efforts consistently missed the mark while cynically playing into sexist tropes. This push and pull between studios playing to their primary male audience while simultaneously attempting to placate female theatergoers who may have nonetheless

enjoyed the suspenseful elements found in horror films irrespective of the gratuitous sexual exploitation found therein is on full display in *The Slumber Party Massacre*. This all makes Jones and Brown's efforts doubly subversive: yes, gender tropes are turned on their head, but at times it unequivocally feels like certain camera pans and POV shots, in succumbing to the male gaze, are directly pushing back against studio directives, precisely in how awkwardly they are executed. This is evidenced numerous times throughout the film, usually in giving audiences some of the tropes they are used to before being presented with scenarios where the women in the film (and not the men) are in control. In this sense, audience expectations are met while subversive imagery latently infuses the filmgoing experience through novel approaches to the genre.

Further elucidating how the audience's expectations of gender roles are toyed with, the predominantly female characters in *The Slumber Party Massacre* do not spend their time talking about boys or, most importantly of all, acting like helpless victims in need of male salvation once things begin to take a turn for the worse. It is during those moments, in fact, as the film builds to its final confrontation between the killer and numerous Final Girls rather than just one (another subversion), where instead of making illogical decisions and being easy prey, Trish and her friends mostly stick together, only losing cohesion within the group as the antagonist ups the ante and begins killing them off in more brazen ways. While this refreshing approach to female characters is prevalent from the very beginning of the film, the dual nature of its tonal inconsistencies creates an odd tableau of female empowerment obscured by the forced financial realities of selling a movie to a mostly male audience. This is immediately made apparent during the film's opening moments as Trish wakes up for school and undresses in front of her mirror

(Jones 01:55). Curiously enough, Jones frames her body through the reflection itself, displaying an unwillingness to directly shoot Trish's nude body. The subversive statement here goes beyond the detached framing, as Trish then collects childhood toys strewn about her room before throwing them away. In essence, the filmmakers are telling us right from the beginning that our protagonist is no longer a child and that we should not treat her as one. And to drive home how patriarchal thinking would continue to dictate the life of a young woman rather than let her find complete autonomy, the film's killer, in a close-up shot of a trash can on the sidewalk which sees Trish walking away from the foreground as she embarks on her walk to school, enters the frame before pulling out a Barbie doll from among the detritus of her childhood playthings (Jones 02:19). At a time when President Reagan's aggressive attempts at rewriting American morality concealed the reality that he, "in a fashion typical of corporate boardrooms of the 1960s...sometimes referred to grown women, condescendingly, as girls" (Rossinow 15), one can see the gravity of Trish's silent declaration of adulthood existing at odds with her role as the female protagonist in a slasher film in the early 1980s. Seeing as how women are still fighting for equal treatment in 2022, it heightens the profundity of what could have easily been a throwaway moment of vapid character development in a genre known for avoiding that in favor of titillation and shock and awe.

Jones's discomfort with the male gaze is most prominently felt early on after Trish and her friends finish playing basketball at their high school. It leads to an obligatory shower scene, and in one of the strangest, albeit most purposefully framed, shots in the entire film (and perhaps the entirety of the genre's early years), the camera lingers on Trish's lower back before slowly panning downward, revealing her buttocks as

she showers (Jones 07:40). Jones lets the shot rest for an uncomfortably long period of time before cutting away. It absolutely feels intentional, as the crassness of the moment is then reversed as the women talk about sports and each other, and not boys or the typical dismissible nonsense usually reserved for what should be otherwise meaningless locker room talk. Here we're introduced to Valerie (the film's other protagonist), the new girl, and are given the impression that Trish has more than a passing desire to get to know her by inviting her to the slumber party. If this is meant to represent a lesbian attraction, it is never expressed outright. Jones and Brown choose not to linger on this revelation, leaving us to focus instead on the refreshingly normal depiction of young women who like sports and hanging out with each other with minimal scandal and plot or character contrivances.

If the treatment of its female characters, both in how they are written and how the camera observes them, lends them an air of unconventional dignity not usually reserved for women in slasher films, its treatment of the male characters is even more transgressive and deliberate. Aside from Valerie and Trish with her group of immediate friends, there is also the school's fitness coach, Jana, and two female characters who are proficient in maintenance work. Again, these are roles that are most often assigned to male characters. The primary two male characters (aside from the killer and Trish's prying neighbor) are two boys from the same high school who are portrayed in the same light as women in almost every other slasher film. They gossip about the girls from school while incessantly trying to gain their affections. In a notable scene which aptly illustrates the flipped gender roles of the film's characters, one of the boys, through a POV shot meant to trick the audience into thinking the killer is about to dispatch one of

Trish's friends, is thrown to the ground once he reaches her (Jones 16:58). It is early in the film, but what should be a throwaway moment tells the audience that these women are more than capable of protecting themselves. This objectification of the male characters reaches its peak before the film's climax when both boys are killed off. The first boy, Jeff, is the only character killed off from behind, implying that the killer, with his phallic drill, is sodomizing him (Jones 50:30). Jeff's scream reinforces this notion, as it is high pitched beyond what is normally heard from males in these types of films. The next boy, Neil, possesses the role usually reserved for female characters who are locked out of a house and helpless as the killer approaches them. He tries to fight back, but his futile efforts end with the killer straddling him on the lawn while stabbing him repeatedly while he too screams like a woman (Jones 51:28). Further emasculating Neil, who survives the stabbing, the next scene sees him dragging his bloodied body to Trish's door, where he bleeds to death (56:22). This scene allows Jones and Brown to continue their defiant treatment of gender roles. Trish and her friends can actually hear Neil dying outside the door, but they ultimately decide not to let him in because they fear it could be a trap.

Even the narrative's killer is not immune to the filmmakers' emasculating of their male characters. He is not only painfully generic, but the stealthily feminist-adjacent lens through which the audience witnesses his carnage curiously helps to lessen the menace with which these types of characters are generally meant to evoke terror. Being named Russ Thorn and wearing a denim jacket and jeans while using an obviously phallic power drill as his primary killing tool, he seems as non-threatening as he looks. Yes, he does leave a trail of death in his wake, but the way in which the film's female characters act is

completely at odds with what other slasher killers of the era had to deal with. As a result, he represents a pathetic machismo, most evidenced by his near impotence as a killer once the tip of his drill is sliced off by Valerie's machete during the film's climax (Jones 01:12:21). Silent for most of the film, when Russ finally does speak it is to show twisted affection for Trish and her peers. Near the film's climax, he tells Trish, "You're pretty. All of you are very pretty...I love you...It takes a lot of love for a person to do this... You know you want it. You love it" (Jones 01:10:55). For these reasons, he is emblematic of the "patriarchal heterosexuality" of the 1980s (Benshoff and Griffin 180), as his cruelty to women is inspired by the delusional belief that they cannot live without the supposedly difficult choices and sacrifices that sexist men often claim to make, even if no one has ever asked them to do so.

Furthermore, Russ also represents the effects of Reagan-era defunding of necessary institutions which are designed to help another group of marginalized Americans: the mentally ill. Although originally initiated in the previous decade, the Reagan administration made "radical moves toward deinstitutionalizing mental patients" (Rossinow 145). Through this lens, Russ is elevated from the cliché of "psycho killer" and is himself a victim of the 1980s ethos of financial strength-cum-patriarchal antipathy. It is yet another example of how Jones and Brown's queered subtextual duality permeates their film not through emblematic representations of the prevailing national conservative attitude, but rather its antithesis: through characters who are prescribed certain characteristics according to pop culture dictates only to give audiences the opposite of those expectations. For their characters, living in a world in which "funding for social

programs...[and] health care” were deprioritized (Hammer and Kellner 111), so too are sensible safety nets against toxic patriarchy.

IV. *Sleepaway Camp*

Sleepaway Camp, directed by Robert Hiltzick, is a seemingly unpleasant facsimile of *Friday the 13th*, borrowing both its summer camp setting and whodunit trappings but none of its suspense or genuine scares. It begins with a peculiar, borderline-anachronistic scene where a man and his two children are enjoying a leisurely day on a boat before two teenagers, who are driving around on the same lake in their boat, inadvertently run over the father and kill him. The narrative then jumps eight years into the future, when we are introduced to one of the children from the opening scene, Angela, as she is now living with her aunt Martha and cousin Ricky – a setup that indicates that the little boy (Angela’s twin brother Peter) from the opening scene also died with their father as a result of the boating accident. Angela and Ricky are sent off to summer camp where, one by one, campers are murdered by a mysterious individual. Offsetting its horror trappings, some romantic elements are utilized strictly as subterfuge, as a boy named Paul from camp befriends the quiet and awkward Angela and they experience a strange if short-lived romance. This is all meant to make us care about Angela the underdog and her protective cousin while also hinting at the possibility that one of them could be the murderer. Further making it likely that one of them is the killer is the fact that the campers being killed have all wronged Angela to some degree.

This obvious signposting is one of the major flaws of *Sleepaway Camp* as Angela, while strangely endearing in a noncommunicative way, is just too detached from the

world of the narrative to not be anything but the killer. However, the filmmakers manage to supersede what would have been a disappointing whodunit-style reveal by adding what amounts to an exploitative queer element to the proceedings. With the film's running time nearing its end and as the body count increases throughout the film's third act, camp counsellors discover Angela, who earlier we are led to believe was finally caving into Paul's overbearing pleas for sexual contact by the lake. But, before we can really see what is happening, a truth more shocking and relevant than the killer's identity is revealed in a flashback scene. It was Angela's twin brother, Peter, who survived the incident at the lake during the beginning of the film and their aunt, who already has a boy and would rather raise a girl, forces Peter to grow up as a female and in the process gives him his dead sister's name. We then cut back to the film's final shot, where a naked Angela is holding Paul's dismembered head and, as the camera pans back, it is revealed that she has a penis (Hiltzick 01:18:55-01:20:24).

While *The Slumber Party Massacre* aptly straddles the line between genuine horror film and meta commentary on gender dynamics, *Sleepaway Camp* instead fully embraces those dynamics and uses them as its primary thematic currency for most of its runtime, presenting viewers with a summer-camp-as-a-microcosm of society's patriarchal gender attitudes working precisely as they are designed to. And they are played as one would expect, with the camp's female characters being boy-obsessed amidst unremitting gossiping while the boys – as well as the men running the camp – partake in a lot of macho antics, bullying, and rampant sexism. In one particularly repulsive scene, as the kids are still arriving at the camp during the film's early moments, in dialogue that solidifies the crass and humorless tone that the film will sustain throughout its entirety,

the head chef of the camp lecherously watches the kids while telling the other cooks, “Look at all the young fresh chicken. Where I come from, they call ’em baldies. Makes your mouth water, don’t it... There ain’t no thing as being too young” (Hiltzick 10:10). As one of the few men in a supervisory position, we immediately know through this line of dialogue that the children in the movie are at the mercy of an imbalanced gender dynamic structure. Worse still, the camp’s elderly proprietor constantly flirts with and even slaps the buttocks of one of the young female counselors. This brazen toxicity on the part of the film’s males also trickles down to the young boys who are attending the camp, as they are prone to playing pranks on themselves and the girls ad nauseum. Again, the camp itself, a miniaturized reflection of American leisure and privilege, is host to incessant harassment and inappropriate behavior by men and boys who know there will be no repercussions for their actions. The one exception, of course, is Angela’s unwillingness to take the abuse by killing off representatives of a gender hierarchy that can never be reasoned with.

The film’s female characters are not written any differently because they consistently mistreat Angela while sharing a cabin together, displaying a propensity for bullying that matches that of the boys. Combined, the cruelty both groups display throughout the film coalesces into irrational disdain towards Angela, who, as the symbol of outsider queerness in every sense of the word within the film’s quaint summer camp setting, is developed as both the film’s antagonist and hero. I believe this is why its unexpected ending resonates more over time and through multiple viewings once the initial shock wears off, as the trauma of her abusive upbringing and forced gender identity makes her the most relatable character in the movie. This goes beyond

empathizing with her as the film's true victim and instead has to do with identity. Chris McGee observes how, by blindsiding audiences with its final reveal, the film eschews having a separate slasher killer and Final Girl by combining both into the character of Angela (McGee 180), simultaneously making her the killer and the heroine in the traditional sense. This means that, after several uses of subjective POV shots throughout its runtime, the film makes the audience complicit in Angela's queerness by literally placing the framing within her consciousness. This is probably the most brilliant aspect of the entire experience, and one that most likely goes unnoticed by audiences who spend considerable time processing the final scene. Since the film creates the illusion that it is playing things completely straight until its denouement, its adherence to patriarchally sanctioned gender tropes may actually be one of the contributing factors to the sense of shock that most people will feel during the film's final frames, as the audience's attention is purposely fixated on who the killer may be.

Sleepaway Camp is a mostly generic exercise in mimicry for profit's sake as it hews closer to the dime-a-dozen-style productions that were designed more with titillation rather than innovation in mind. Even its romantic elements seem to exist only to have horrible revelations and cruel reversals rob the audience of any respite from the exploitative violence on screen. Aside from the reveal that Angela is a trans character, there is also the plot thread dealing with her homosexual father, which at times borders on sweet in defiance of the film's unrelentingly bleak tone. The father's plot thread is intermittently revealed through flashbacks designed to show the audience that Angela – who is trapped in a toxic and male-run camp where everyone is cruel – was raised in a

loving household by a father who nonetheless would have been demonized by the New Right for his sexual orientation.

This leads me to believe that while the final scene ultimately comes off as exploitative and succumbing to harmful trans stereotypes, the filmmakers did attempt to at least add a modicum of dignity to its queer characters. It is true that “the killers in many of these films turn out to be queers, either transvestites or transsexuals” (Benshoff 231), and when taken at face value *Sleepaway Camp* is emblematic of exactly that type of negative portrayal. Contrarywise, Angela’s victimization by her aunt and the happy memories of her childhood indicate an insulated world that is only corrupted when the outside world ironically diminishes the value of her family life. This is best evidenced in one peculiar moment which most depressingly comes to fruition during a flashback scene, the only moment throughout the film’s runtime that directly portrays a queer relationship. We see Angela and her brother Peter, as children, innocently standing in a doorway as they spy on their father as he lies in bed with the other man from the opening scene (Hiltzick 53:03). The men are fully clothed and just having a conversation, their moment of embrace framed with sincerity as the orchestral music hints at the potential sweetness of the scene. The two siblings innocently giggle as they watch, not because two men are sharing a loving familial moment, but rather because they are where they are not supposed to be, and their joy at being there reflects the feeling that they love him. Angela is abruptly awoken from this happy memory, back into the reality of the moment, a reality where her father was killed in a symbolic gesture indicating obvious punishment for daring to love outside the bounds of conservatism’s family values-obsessed decrees. It is apropos for a decade that saw “a tremendous and devastating backlash against

LGBT[Q+] rights,” which brought with it an “open demonization of queer individuals on all fronts” (Martins 1-2). This leads me to assert that the inclusion of the father’s subplot is not intended so much as a balancing act to counter the depraved nature of how trans lives are narratively handled, but rather as a reminder that queer lives are susceptible to an “open season” from all sides, particularly from the arbiters of morality who themselves are capable of more evil than their perceived enemies.

It goes without saying that the film’s treatment of trans lives is problematic, and that even if its cult status has empowered slasher film fans to reappropriate Angela into a queer horror anti-heroine, its propensity for leaning into harmful tropes must be acknowledged in any analysis. It is also important to note that even among the more exploitative films of its ilk, *Sleepaway Camp* is particularly crude in its execution and themes. As a pure slasher film operating as a whodunit, besides feeling like mostly ineffective facsimile of previous murdered-in-isolated-locations horror films where any character can be the killer, it is admittedly difficult to appreciate any of the queer subtext as a result of its almost nihilistic tone. And while the subtext surrounding Angela’s deceased father borders on tasteful, the rest of the film’s bleakness overwhelms any scathing critiques of social imbalance it makes along the way. Like *Freddy’s Revenge* after it, *Sleepaway Camp* seemingly exploits marginalized lives while operating on a surface level of pure shock value and desire for large profits on low budgets vis-à-vis pandering to audience expectations. While Freddy Krueger was almost instantly reappropriated into a fan-favorite killer, one whom audiences cheered for rather than vilified, Angela’s canonization into the slasher-killer pantheon percolated over a much longer period of time, as it took decades for her unwillingness to subscribe to traditional

institutions to be fully celebrated. By making her the villain and the victim, as well as the avatar through which an audience experiences the film once it is revealed whose perspective is represented in its POV shots, the film is nevertheless bold in forcing its audience to unknowingly experience life from the margins. Whether it succeeds as a queer film is debatable. However, its ongoing divisiveness and willingness to “go there” ensures that queer audiences have a say in slasher cinema’s legacy, helping to further solidify the idea that the genre itself is geared for a level of inclusion and audience participation which elevates it to the realm of queer proper.

V. A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge

While Freddy Krueger would go on to become one of the defining pop culture icons of the 1980s, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge*, directed by Jack Sholder, was still operating within the confines of its highly successful predecessor. This means that the defining characteristics for which the soon-to-be-a-franchise of *Elm Street* films would be known for had yet to materialize in any meaningful way aside from its slasher killer and the concept of dream invasion as a way of murder. It is also important to note that what is considered to be the first cycle of teen slasher films had already come to an end by the time of Freddy Krueger’s arrival in 1984, with the release of the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Nowell 53-54). By this point, it was not only critics who turned on the majority of slasher releases, but also audiences through diminishing box office returns, which in turn led to some of their more extreme elements being toned down due to the MPAA toughening their on-screen violence stance (Nowell 228-229). However, that did not stop certain titles like *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm*

Street from taking on the “franchise productions” moniker, ensuring continuing success through sequels of varying quality (Prince 18). What makes *Freddy’s Revenge* so bizarre when looked upon within the context of its still-burgeoning series is that there was no template to define it aside from a killer who invades dreams. Yet this first of many sequels is heavily permeated with queer subtext through its protagonist’s desire to come out and be his true self within a setting that does everything in its power to stop him. And, aside from the film’s tangibly materialized representations of Jesse’s inner desires and Freddy Krueger as the monstrous representation of patriarchal violence, its mise-en-scène and use of music eschew any subtlety in supporting the allegorical nature of their conflict.

The *Elm Street* films have always stood out among their brethren for numerous reasons. Aside from their willingness to embrace aspects of fantasy cinema, the series’ chief antagonist actually has a personality, unlike many of his slasher killer contemporaries. With tongue firmly in cheek, he would evolve throughout his series into a comedic anti-hero of sorts, balancing his killing sprees with bon mots aplenty. More importantly, in what is most likely a direct result of the previous decade’s blockbuster mentality, which helped contribute to an increase in high-concept productions that were popular with audiences (Prince 3), the *Elm Street* series reached a level of mainstream success through its novel ideas. That is why *Freddy’s Revenge* seems like an almost impossible project, with its brazen inclusion of homosexual themes both literal and figurative. Thematically, the film’s narrative can be considered a radical take on the ordeals of puberty, and its protagonist’s “character development can be paralleled to a teenager detecting his first homoerotic desires amidst a general atmosphere of

homophobia” (Martins 6). It is somewhat similar to what Jones and Brown accomplished in *The Slumber Party Massacre*, albeit in a more obvious and relentless way and only in relation to its protagonist. This is due to the fact that while it seems to be reveling in its high-concept ideas, it nonetheless operates as yet another by-the-numbers murder-centric movie. Its portrayal of gender roles leans heavily on patriarchal clichés and its actual filmic horror elements rely far too much on tried-and-true scare tactics (including a cat-in-the-closet moment). In this regard, it would seem the complete *opposite* of something like *The Slumber Party Massacre*, if not for one alteration which has transformed the film into the poster child of slashers-as-queer cinema. Jesse, the protagonist, is male, and his entire journey is centered on the previous film’s killer, deceased child molester/murderer Freddy Krueger, attempting to resurrect by *coming out* – as in literally emerging from the bowels of hell through Jesse’s body by feeding off his inner homosexual urges and thus killing off his “straight” self in the process – and into the real world to continue his murderous spree vis-à-vis the “sin” of homosexuality.

Irrespective of its slasher horror movie trappings, Jesse’s story is ultimately one of a young man traversing the oppressive moral atmosphere of Reagan’s America. At the very least, anyone willing to go along with the premise that *Freddy’s Nightmare* is a statement of queerness persisting in 1980s America, even at its most basic level, will come to a similar conclusion. The common interpretation is that Freddy Krueger is the representation of Jesse’s “monstrous” homosexuality. In further elaborating that thesis, one could even consider his willingness to murder as representative of the AIDS pandemic, which by 1985 had still not attracted the Reagan administration’s belated national attention it so desperately needed (Hammer and Kellner 111). I, however, reject

the assessment that Freddy Krueger represents Jesse's homosexual urges and instead propose the following: that Freddy Krueger is, in fact, a representation of the conservative 1980s patriarchal male, enacting suffering on a new generation of young Americans in retaliation for the 1960s counterculture sins perpetrated by their parents, and in Jesse's case punishing him for his "non-traditional" lifestyle. This idea that punishment for the sins of the parents is enacted on the children is supported by Freddy's backstory, which is that he was burned alive by the parents of his child victims. It is not much of a justification for his resurrection and continued murder spree, but it illustrates how "straight" domestic society takes matters into its own hands in the face of a non-conformity deemed perverse.

The film starts as Jesse and his family are still settling into their new house on Elm Street, the same house in which Freddy Krueger terrorized the first film's protagonist. Jesse keeps having vivid nightmares of Krueger, and only as the film progresses does it become apparent that the nightmares symbolize outside forces trying to prevent Jesse from living the life he wants to live. Outside of the nightmares, he has two primary friends who embody the dichotomous psychological torment he is experiencing every night upon going to sleep. One is wealthy Lisa, who is obviously attracted to Jesse and who spends most of the film trying to get him to repress his "urges." The other friend is alpha male Ron, who by film's end turns out to be what Jesse truly desires. As a result of the strange behaviors brought on by his nightmares, his milquetoast suburban family has a difficult time coming to grips with his desires. For example, after one particularly vicious dream causes Jesse to wake up screaming, his sister asks, "Mommy, why can't Jesse wake up like everybody else" (Sholder 05:55). This inability to understand Jesse's

desire is emblematic of a family values-obsessed nation, one where AIDS was proclaimed to be “God’s retribution for the sin of homosexuality” (Rich xvi). This perspective helps reinforce the notion that Freddy Krueger – who is tormenting Jesse – is more conservative standard-bearer than secret homosexual alter ego.

So focused is the film’s screenplay on Jesse’s inner torment that its killer barely does any actual killing. Aside from Jesse’s dreams and house being haunted throughout the film, the film’s only pre-denouement murder occurs nearly forty minutes into its runtime. During a particularly vivid nightmare, Jesse finds himself walking the rainy streets of his town in the middle of the night – away from Krueger’s oppressive dreamscape – as if hypnotized by a latent desire that leads him to a gay S&M bar (Sholder 31:45). There he is confronted by his high school gym teacher, Coach Schneider, who was referred to earlier in the film by Ron as a man who “Hangs around queer S&M joints downtown” and “Who likes pretty boys” (Sholder 10:50). Schneider takes Jesse to the high school and has him run laps in the gymnasium before telling him to “Hit the shower.” As Jesse does what he is told to do, the film intercuts between Jesse underneath a shower and Schneider grabbing a jump rope in his office, presumably for sadomasochistic sexual acts. The jump rope takes on a life of its own, however, tying itself around his wrists and dragging him to the showers before tying him up. Here, Jesse watches in horror as floating towels whip the coach’s bare and increasingly bloodied buttocks. As steam permeates the shower room, Schneider is stabbed with Krueger’s knife glove, which is revealed to be worn by a blood-soaked Jesse (Sholder 33:05-37:08).

If Krueger is meant to be the embodiment of Jesse’s homosexuality, his influence should have ceased once Jesse arrived at the S&M bar. Instead, sadistic treatment of both

Jesse and Schneider comes off as more of a violent lesson for the former. Krueger has led Jesse into a contrived teachable moment, with his message being that homosexuality begets pain and misery. Yet in blurring the real world with his dreamscape and in forcing Jesse to torture and murder Schneider, what Krueger ends up revealing is that sexually focused oppression is the real evil. It is an extension of the ethos of traditional family values, and at face value reinforces the narrative that slasher cinema is the genre simulacrum of the Reagan administration's openly contemptuous policies aimed at the marginalized. However, the film's inner life is as multifaceted as Jesse's, and what we are led to believe is really window dressing for a complex panoply of contradicting emotions. And as Krueger's nightmares begin to blur the lines between Jesse's dreams and reality before finally bursting into an act of carnage with real-world consequences during the film's climax, it is precisely because these contradicting emotions act as an unavoidable catalyst. Lisa is hosting a party at her parents' house, where the song "Whisper to a Scream" by Bobby Orlando is played in typical 1980s teen party movie fashion. However, with lyrics such as "I wanna tell you...how I feel" (Sholder 52:30), the heteronormative implication takes on a new meaning in light of Jesse's struggles – struggles which finally rise to the surface and set off a series of events that bring Freddy Krueger into contact with the real conservative 1980s world whose New Conservatism has enabled him to carry on its deadly mandates in the first place.

It is at the party where Lisa and Jesse finally kiss. It does not take long for Jesse to reject her moves, however. They lead him to run off and sneak into Ron's room. Jesse has wanted this all outcome along, and revealing it to Ron is almost as terrifying for him as confronting Krueger head-on. He tells Ron, "There's something inside of me...I'm

scared,” to which Ron, speaking for a potentially unsuspecting audience, responds with, “Yeah, and she’s female and she’s waiting for you...and you wanna sleep with me” (Sholder 54:03-56:00). Shortly after this exchange, Krueger finally emerges from Jesse’s body, as in literally tearing himself out of Jesse’s flesh. He kills Ron, only to see Jesse’s reflection in a mirror. The two are now one, and Krueger, as the avatar of conservative bigotry wearing a glove with knife for fingers, is overbearingly in control of the situation (Sholder 57:33-01:01:30). What follows is pandemonium, as Krueger appears at Lisa’s party and curiously only kills boys while all the teens are trying to run away from him (Sholder 01:08:39-01:09:44). Lisa eventually “defeats” Freddy by rekindling a forced heteronormative connection with Jesse, thus negating the need for patriarchal violence in forcing him to change.

The queer subtext of *Freddy’s Revenge* was partly by design, as its writer, David Chaskin, has admitted to including elements which signify Jesse’s homosexuality, unbeknownst to director Jack Sholder (Martins 4-5). This leaves the film open to endless analysis and scrutiny, which is reflected in how its popularity has only increased throughout the years, leading to a documentary named *Scream, Queen! My Nightmare on Elm Street* in 2019. The fact that both aforementioned interpretations can attest to some level of queer ambiguity within the film speaks volumes on how one of most popular slasher franchise’s entries leaves no doubt as to what it is exploring. However, in looking primarily at what is contained within its frames throughout its runtime, what viewers are left with is a slasher narrative dealing with heavier themes than naysayers will ever give it credit for. This is understandable, as its metaphorical representation of the battle between queer lives and pure hatred is distractingly dressed up in 1980s horror

conventions. But at its heart lies a struggle which must have resonated with queer youths who watched it upon its release, especially with how the film portrays that struggle in its ending. Jesse, having seemingly defeated Krueger's bigoted hatred by succumbing to the projected "straightness" of Lisa, finds himself once again confronting him in a dream (Sholder 01:22:26). What does this mean? That no amount of hate or violence can corrupt the real essence of a life.

VI. Conclusion: The Slasher Reappropriated

While all three films explore different places where America is advertised as being protected from the Other as defined by the heteropatriarchy, they share the common currency of subverting gender norms in a genre that, by the early eighties, was already beginning to run its course after numerous years of highly successful hits. To put the meteoric rise of teen slasher cinema into perspective, the genre's "boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s" brought about "one of the most high-profile shifts in film production" history (Nowell 4), with fifteen films seeing release in America "from January 1980 to April 1982...[with] a remarkable ratio of a new teen slasher every six weeks" (Nowell 5). What is considered to be the first teen slasher cycle began in 1978 and had already ended by 1981, yet even with diminishing returns there were still vast sums of money to be made by studios not willing to let go of the genre just yet (Nowell 53-54). Which is why, even though the genre's popularity died down as the 1980s gave way to "...a cataclysmic shift to the liberal/left after more than a decade of Republican leadership" (Villarejo 70), subsequent slasher permutations began harkening back to the era in which the genre transformed from experiment to bona fide box office success.

Having emerged from the more liberally minded “horror films of the 1960s and 1970s,” which “constantly challenge[d] the legitimacy of capitalist, patriarchal rule” (Sharrett 281-282), slashers have always maintained some level of iconoclastic characteristics.

Like any pop culture fad, their popularity ran dry and the discourse surrounding them slowly turned into discussions about how their propensity for violence and unapologetically trashy nature eventually doomed their sustainability. Barring their resurgence in the mid-nineties and the stubborn way in which they are not only still made, but also in how they continue to thrive in a film market where primarily films with giant budgets or micro budgets seem to get greenlit, queer reappropriation of the genre through a lens made possible by a more inclusive pop culture milieu should be no surprise. The original discourse surrounding the genre’s merits occurred decades ago, and where its characteristic insistence of men mowing down immoral youths in the New Right’s newly dominated America was the obvious way of interpreting their textual merits – as well as those of the filmmaking machinery responsible for their short-lived box-office rise and dominance – marginalized audiences can instead emphasize how the genre’s antithetical-to-conservative-elements help serve as a repudiation of the mythologization that slashers are endemic of bigoted ideology. That they were made during “a decade of tremendous change that gave the Hollywood industry and American film its modern shape and form” (Prince 20), their reliance on blood, guts, and suffering demonstrates their inherently subversive nature. Yes, in many cases the victims are precisely the communities villainized by the New Right, but whether through the tenacity of the Final Girl or the societal origins of the slasher killers, an argument has been made that the added queer subtext of many slasher films fuels the possibility of dissent from

conventional genre doctrine. It is a genre composed of endless experimentation and a willingness to dabble in the realm of taboo, and in drawing the ire of the very conservative machine that is by default labelled its philosophical equal, the slasher has been appropriated from one generation to the next. It is a genre which continues to reside in the margins where it always has, irrespective of how it is interpreted.

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