INTRODUCTION

From Bad to Worse

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That this book was originally conceived and contracted prior to September 11, 2001 has become virtually impossible, even for me, to believe. Since then the invocation of malevolence in political and social life and in our popular cultural fictions has seemed to mushroom, to have spread everywhere, and it is understandable how any discussion of the proliferation of negativity onscreen might be thought inspired by those horrendous events or aimed in response to them. Former Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder's comment September 13, 2001 to ABC, "They are evil in a way that we rarely see in the history of this world," sounds a currently prevailing sentiment, and also echoes and prefigures what has become a standard presidential litany about "Them"—the Taliban, the Palestinians, the Israelis, the Iraqis, the mailers of anthrax, the corrupt CEOs of billion-dollar conglomerates—being "Evil."

But even in the Golden Age before that Turning Point in History—as popular rhetoric is leading us to think of it—the screen had already shifted from a place where conventional dramatic unfoldings were staged with regular use of conflict and a lurking villain, to an unheralded new *topos* where—as the subtitle of this volume suggests—infamy, darkness, evil, and slime resided casually and everywhere as the stuff of the everyday. This book does not pretend to be the history of cinema we would need for showing in detail the long line of thieves, rapists, varmints, codgers, dodgers, manipulators, exploiters, conmen, killers, vamps, liars, demons, cold-blooded maniacs, and warm-hearted flakes that populated cinematic narrative from its earliest days around

1907 onward or for arranging in some sensible order the questioned (and sometimes questionable) screen morality of the precode era; the broad range of dramatic negativity before, during, and soon after World War II (ranging from Rhett Butler's potty mouth through the offscreen torture and murder of the unctuous Bugati in *Casablanca* [1942] through the arrogant murder in *Rope* [1948]); the disintegrating social mores of the 1950s; the chilling and vicious political tactics of the 1960s; the institutional horrors that began to appear in a systematic way in the 1970s (Watergate and beyond); and the new visions of all these, as well as depictions of disconnected personality and fragmented community, that became a screen staple after 1980. This book does, however, intend to present a sketch, as it were, of the range of badness that filmgoers around the world have become accustomed to seeing on the screen and to give some hints as to where screen evil came from and how it functions as a staple of our film diet today. By the turn of the twenty-first century it had become virtually unthinkable to see a film entirely without a moment of egregious—typically fantastic—violence, destruction, immorality, threat, or torture.

A man swallowed whole, on camera, by a mammoth shark (*Jaws* [1975]); a beheading, on camera, followed immediately by a shot of one of the observers biting off, and swallowing, his own tongue (*Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* [1983]); a psychotic slasher murder (*Psycho* [1960]); a crucifixion (*The Last Temptation of Christ* [1988]); a man being presented with his wife's head in a hatbox (*Se7en* [1995]); a metallic insect alien with three drooling mouths popping bloodily out of the chest cavity of a gentle man (*Alien* [1979]); an astronaut exploding inside a space suit when his helmet cracks (*Outland* [1981]); humans tortured by having hideous hungry vermiformities given leave to slither into their orifices (*Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* [1982], *The Matrix* [1999]); a man being devoured by a giant reptile while he sits on the toilet (*Jurassic Park* [1993]); crowds of innocents butchered by military swordplay or gunfire (*Doctor Zhivago* [1965]); a group of apparent innocents butchered by gunfire (*Three Days of the Condor* [1975]); a crowd of mercenaries butchered by gunfire (*Commando* [1985]); people shot in the head (*Stardust Memories* [1980], *Traffic* [2000], *The Prince of the City* [1981], *Dog Day Afternoon* [1975], *GoodFellas* [1990]); date rape (*Saturday Night Fever* [1977], *Bully* [2001]); dental rape (*Marathon Man* [1976]); ravaging by dogs (*The Boys from Brazil* [1978]); death by ice pick at the back of the neck (*GoodFellas* [1990]); accidental electrocution (*The Ice Storm* [1997]); intentional electrocution (*Goldfinger* [1964]); dis-arming (*Satyricon* [1969], *The Empire Strikes Back* [1980], *Total Recall* [1990]); malevolent bisection (*The Phantom Menace* [1999], *Black Hawk Down* [2001]); diabolical explosions (*Darkman* [1990], *Swordfish* [2001], *Blown Away* [1994], *The Sum of All Fears* [2002]); casual planetary vaporization (*Men in Black II* [2002]); being dropped into a pool of piranhas (*You Only Live Twice* [1967]); being tossed from a building (*The*

Man Who Fell to Earth [1976]); slow death by poison (*The Bride Wore Black* [1967]); quick death by poison (*Gosford Park* [2001]); being secretly impregnated (*The Astronaut's Wife* [1999]); being brainwashed (*The Manchurian Candidate* [1962]) . . . all this hardly constitutes even the tip of the iceberg. Speaking of icebergs, how about being shackled to a steam pipe in a ship that is sinking because it has struck the tip of an iceberg, or slowly freezing to death in the icy waters of the Atlantic soon afterward (*Titanic* [1997])? Consider the library of films showing, even centrally turning on, deliberate, brutal, full-frontal scenes of public execution—*The Green Mile* (1999), for example, or *I Want To Live!* (1958), *In Cold Blood* (1967), *Daniel* (1983), *Tom Horn* (1980), and *Dead Man Walking* (1995). Recall putrescent bodies, exploding bodies, bullets to the eye, castrations, rapes brutal (*The Accused* [1988]) and under sedation (*Kids* [1995]), embezzlement, fraud, class warfare, diabolical possession, gay bashing, wife bashing, child bashing, racial and ethnic violence, wanton destruction, cannibalism . . . not to mention mental torture, sadism, humiliation, the myriad ways of producing social death. This is now the *materiel* out of which shots—very often close-ups—are constructed, so that we have increasingly, for the last thirty years, been coming face to face with a vision of conflict and decay that had heretofore been scarcely imaginable in such detail, suggested and implied rather than directly shown. Nor does badness, in life and onscreen, invariably and inevitably bleed, suppurate, and grimace. Out of the shiniest skyscraper, to be sure, the shiniest villainy can routinely emerge, if not to butcher or devour then to exploit, enslave, and politically terrorize. That evil is very often linked to dirt should caution us to search for it, too, in cleanliness.

For an example of the contrast between "old" and "new" screen malevolence, examine the difference between the circumferential way rape is treated by John Ford in *The Searchers* (1956)—John Wayne riding into a gully looking for Pippa Scott and forbidding Harry Carey Jr. to come with him, then showing up a little later without his coat and saying quietly, with a certain cold look in his eye ("When I looked up at Duke during [the first] rehearsal," remembered Harry Carey Jr., "it was into the meanest and coldest eyes I have ever seen" [Eyman 1999, 444]) that he found her and covered her with his coat and buried her—and the on-camera shot near the end of Larry Clark's *Kids* (1995) where Leo Fitzpatrick finds Chloë Sevigny stoned unconscious on a sofa at a party, deftly removes her panties, gently spreads her legs and penetrates her (giving her AIDS) while she sleeps and we hermetically observe. More is at play in this contrast than just the demise of the Production Code in 1964. When *The Searchers* was being filmed, the frankness of *Kids* and its civilian abuse was inconceivable onscreen. Consider, too, the difference between the military killing on Omaha Beach in Sam Fuller's *The Big Red One* (1980)— dangerous, tactical, strategic, adventuresome, individualistic, frightening—or

in Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) or Verhoeven's even more graphic *Starship Troopers* (1997), in both of which thousands of young men are chewed up in a moment, the precise equivalent of cannon fodder, yet in shots graphic enough to reveal gore, dismemberment, and agony up close, one body part at a time. Or note the relatively antiseptic mob shootings in *Some Like It Hot* (1959), the camera modestly turning away from the slaughter in the garage; and the graphic drive-by and casual brutality in *Falling Down* (1993); the off-screen murders in *Key Largo* (1948) or the onscreen ones in Scorsese's *Good-Fellas* (1990). In the 1960s, screen torture lasted a couple of minutes—the laser creeping into James Bond's crotch in *Goldfinger* (1964)—but by *Mission Impossible II* (2000) it is extended to last through the last two thirds of the film, as Thandie Newton is injected with an explosive that will rip her apart unless Tom Cruise solves the riddle and finds her in time. The reader will no doubt recollect hundreds of examples to better these.

Even if such an achievement were possible it would not be the intention of this book to make a neat catalog of the many kinds of film and the many kinds of filmic treatment that make for what might now, fashionably, be called "bad" film—that is, popular and pleasurable screen presentation of evil, nefariousness, monstrosity, darkness, negativity, slime, and the uncouth. The territory is vast. As avid viewers, we have surfed happily from Tinker Bell's bottom wagging mockingly in our face in *Peter Pan* (1953) to the chilling killing in *Murder by Numbers* (2002), flashing by countless mafia films, cop films, action films, sci-fi and western films, not to mention the slavish depravity in social commentaries such as *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) or melodramas such as *Leave Her to Heaven* (1946), kidpix such as *Home Alone* (1990) or docufictions such as *The Contender* (2000). And in taking our pleasures with such films, we have hardly needed a schema for understanding the structure of presented evil, nor has it made much difference to us as an audience in terms of box-office figures and wider, deeper impacts on the culture, whether we gagged and goggled at heroic struggles against evil—*The Mask of Zorro* (1998), for example, or *The Guns of Navarone* (1961)—or at the kind of quasi-animated, purely speculative characterization of badness typified by *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). If only to see the cleanup that follows it, we have sat quietly for the spilling of an ocean of blood (screened as such, quite literally, in *Deep Impact* [1998], where the entire east coast of North America is seen from a stratospheric vantage to disappear), massive limb-pruning (in *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* [1999] the limbs belong to battle droids, and so we need not feel a thing—a great comfort), the sly insinuation of doubt into the minds of characters who seemed untouched by life (Juliet Lewis's seduction by Robert De Niro in *Cape Fear* [1991], as well as the wholesale destruction of public and private property (*Independence Day* [1996] and *Zabriskie Point* [1970], among many others).

The concerted movement in Hollywood from social reality and myth toward action films that choreograph negativity onscreen, beginning roughly with *Rambo: First Blood* in 1982, is due in large part to the economic need of producers—after the breakup of the big studios as production giants—to pre-sell distribution rights to their films internationally. The presale of foreign rights has been lucrative, to understate, and has led not only to steadily increasing star salaries and production costs more generally but also to a need for scripts and mise-en-scène that can satisfy global audiences regardless of variations in cultural knowledge, education, and religion. Sex and violence sell virtually everywhere, and to amplify the film product so that it can be appreciated (that is, bought) by the largest possible audience it helps to detach the appealing sexual and violent treatment from a bed in the plot; plots require thought. Hence the egregious use of sex and violence onscreen—placing it in diegetic contexts where it may seem to have little reason to be. When, more and more, the chance to recoup costs on big budget pictures is restricted to the opening weekend, the size of the audience must be vast, and the people in that audience must be different from one another in taste, background, and sensitivity. Little education or cultural awareness is needed to appreciate the dramatic pungency of a bomb going off, as Orson Welles demonstrated, with elegance, in *Touch of Evil* (1958).

Some further impetus toward the production of films that make extensive use of hideousness and slime has been provided by the development and wide availability of new, more easily manipulable and decorable forms of latex; new explosive and pyrotechnologies; advances in makeup. Anything we see must be capable of being shown. And the more advanced the technology for faking decrepitude—Dick Smith was one of the great pioneers in makeup—the more audiences have been moved to deep-seated delight, but also moral panic, because the corruption that is a pleasure to gawk at is also, in the end—at least as signification—corruption, and therefore something to fear.

Surely, however, it is only an extremely conventional, indeed conservative, notion of organized social life that underpins the kind of moral panic we have seen in criticism of the violence, moral turpitude, and conflict onscreen. In such a perspective, the world is in its ideal state a blissful and rather pretty arrangement of cooperating, harmoniously interrelated, and successfully wishful beings (who are also often complacent, satisfied, and aggressively happy)—the sort of pastoral idyll depicted in the Beethoven sequence of Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). Beside the fact that such an ideal, if it is any ideal at all, is preindustrial and hardly relevant—as moral critics imply it is—to all social systems in all circumstances, the picture of world harmony and bucolic social tranquility that is contradicted by the dark ugliness we are seeing onscreen everywhere now is also impossible to conceive as an objective rendering of things as they "are" or ever "were." Indeed, the idea

that the world is essentially orderly, aesthetic, civilized, and beautiful in the precise way it is necessary to understand "beauty" if one is to see criminal underlife as "ugly," is itself only a hegemonic construct, one that "secures its ascendancy by representing itself as a 'natural' order. . . . Through hegemony, ideology is naturalized as history, beauty, order, 'common sense,' and, on the level of psychology, sanity and maturity" (McKelly 1996, 107). Embedded as we are in the logic that the pictures we see of evil and nefariousness onscreen are only so many obvious and direct representations in fiction of what is "obviously," "already," "directly," "clearly," "plainly," and "unmistakably" evil and nefarious in real life, we think it only "mature" and "sane" to enunciate critical disapproval of, say, the extramarital sex in *Fatal Attraction* (1987) or the rampant gunplay in *The Quick and the Dead* (1995) or the disrespectful and visceral anticlericism in *The Exorcist* (1973).

The view of natural social life as a harmony and the contention that evil and violence are inevitably willful, malevolent disruptions of that life is a kind of advertisement. It consciously and intentionally denies the inequalities of power and privilege, and the consequent social conflicts, produced in a social structure manipulated by big corporations and a tiny number of the superrich who persist in milking social benefits—thus, directly and adversely affecting the lives of the poor, the disabled, the uneducated, the sick, the alienated in general—to maximize profit. The state, operating as an extension of this power base, must help in the accumulation of profit, produce an ongoing rhetorical discourse to legitimate capitalism and capital accumulation, and coercively repress threats to these activities (Naiman 2000, 194–211). Coercive repression, indeed, is a power vital to state interests exactly because it is necessary to the smooth, uninterrupted functioning of multinationals and corporate giants. Yet the open assertion of violence in the name of bourgeois interests is ultimately unproductive—it decimates the workforce, for one thing, and demoralizes generally. Far more successful is the coercive function of subtle propaganda, the utile picture of the world in which certain undesirable but safe activity can be promoted as thrillingly marginal whereas other undesirable and dangerous activity can be cast in shadow as frightening, horrifying, disgusting, insane, idiotic, demonic, and uncivilized. Also central to a picture of the world that will be useful in terms of the overall repressive scheme of the state is the depiction of grassroots rebellion and weapons use as uncool, naughty, illegal, and un-American at the same time—often in the same shot—while "official" possession and use of weapons and aggressive activity is taken for granted as logical, noble, and heroic. When aggression is displayed by well-organized bureaucratically organized Others—enemy armies, the militias of Colombian drug cartels, the limitless factotums of megalomaniac "bad guys"—it is easily delegitimized by being labeled as "enemy" action.

All of which suggests that nothing is obvious or natural about the darkness of screen darkness, the evil of screen evil, the sliminess of screen slime. In order for the social order to be maintained and supported, the population must be brought to understand and accept certain configurations as holy and beautiful and others as repugnant, no structure functioning more deftly to accomplish this proscriptive education than a dramatic one and no drama being so cost efficient as a world-scale drama, highly amplified, with mass audiences and—joy!—opportunity for immense profit. Marvin Harris describes the need for proscription in an interesting ancient Middle Eastern case this way:

> The greater the temptation, the greater the need for divine interdiction. This relationship is generally accepted as suitable for explaining why the gods are always so interested in combating sexual temptations such as incest and adultery. Here I merely apply it to a tempting food. The Middle East is the wrong place to raise pigs, but pork remains a succulent treat. People always find it difficult to resist such temptations on their own. Hence Jahweh was heard to say that swine were unclean, not only as food, but to the touch as well. Allah was heard to repeat the same message for the same reason: It was ecologically maladaptive to try to raise pigs in substantial numbers. Small-scale production would only increase the temptation. Better then, to interdict the consumption of pork entirely, and to concentrate on raising goats, sheep, and cattle. (1989, 44)

To paraphrase Harris, people also find it difficult to resist the temptation to make a mess, to take apart, to reduce, shatter, disunite, strive for power, and otherwise uncontrollably play with the world in a manner that might jeopardize corporate arrangements. Or to put this a little differently, corporate arrangements are more precarious than they at first appear. Calling Hannibal Lecter an epitome of evil is a way to help people organize themselves morally in a way that doesn't jeopardize the plans of MacDonald's and Burger King. To insist on asking whether or not he *really is* evil in the face of the enormous contribution that calling him so can make to the state of social order is, in a way, naïve. What is most chilling about his cannibalism, in the end, is its distance from our regular way of handling cuisine, its revolutionary character, its reflection of the social organization of our own food gathering and thus of our social organization altogether. In most circumstances where food is available (such as those described in *Silence of the Lambs*) one can make arrangements to forego cannibalism, teach it as morally problematic and socially dangerous, and urge people to deny themselves its pleasures, whatever those may be, without at the same time requiring to turn one's exemplification of a cannibal into a hideous, depraved, ravenous, immoral, and diabolical reprobate. The chill in the spine that Anthony Hopkins was able to help provide for us, the chill that we called our pleasure and that was held out to us as a lure—"What

stirs him is art and music. But what compels him is evil. *Hannibal*" (television ad for *Hannibal* [2001])—was the agency of our sentimental education.

More generally, the squeamishness that delights audiences when they watch the impenetrable darkness in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) or the blood slurping in *Dracula* (1992) or a little fuzzy demon Osterized in *Gremlins* (1984) or two grown men surgically exchanging faces in *Face/Off* (1997) or a fellow asking to have his eyes plucked out in *Minority Report* (2002) is an emotional support for the indoctrination being dosed. Following Harris, one may conclude that the more tempting the pleasure against which society deems it necessary to provide indoctrination, the more intense—and therefore the more emotional—the indoctrination needs to be. It is emotion, not logic, that galvanizes, enchants, and engages. A philosophy of film must approach feeling and experience, not just plot.

Philosophy can be a method of denial, however, and much is denied by seeing film evil and ugliness *only* as ideological. To put this differently: film is brainwashing, to be sure, and yet brainwashing is also experience. The pervasiveness in critical (even pop critical) circles of the idea that screen "evil" is never to be seen as anything but an agency of brutalizing hegemonic manipulation, never other than an arbitrary politico-cultural fix on activity that in itself has no inherent moral value does raise the heuristic problem of establishing a true ground for cultural and artistic value outside of film once we have discarded it all as ideological drivel—everything in culture, after all, is equally ideological; yet it also raises the problem of elitism because one of film's great potentials is to harbor not only ideology but also the deep, perhaps transgressive, thought that cannot express itself in the sanctora of approved official culture. When "dark" film distances certain persons and activities, political stances, aesthetic configurations, and human choices as nauseating, sickening, disgusting, and abysmal, it is true that social forces achieve control to a degree; but we are also engaged with a vision of the world that, as André Bazin once put it, "accords with our desire." The debunking approach, useful as it may be, blinds us to that desire, thus turning us away from something that is elemental, fascinating, and worth study.

For an interesting example of how debunking can be blinding, and of how one's moral commitment or detachment can affect the way one sees a film, take the case of Freya Johnson's 1997 Internet comments on Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993). The Third Reich was an enterprise quite real in history (regardless of how silly it has often been made to seem onscreen) and most certainly one that was not merely "seen as" bad by a liberal U.S. government favorable to Jewish interests and hungry itself to dominate Germany. The systematic murder of millions of people is no neutral activity vulnerable to the application of pejorative labels—is not "bad" only because Jewish apologists say it is. When Johnson writes that Spielberg's Nazis "are not only evil, sadis-

tic, sexually perverted, and well-dressed—all the things we have come to expect from them—they are also wildly *counter-productive;* they would rather kill off their workforce for the sake of ideology than merely exploit it as Capitalism dictates they ought," she seems a trifle too tongue-in-cheek, as though only in the crass manipulative perspective of an inauthentic type such as Spielberg could such august agents be seen as so craven. The "we" who have come to expect sadism, sexual perversion, and good clothing, after all, are precisely the readership in need of Johnson's informed point of view; in short, misperceivers. Without her "help," we might fall into the "trap" of thinking the Nazis "really were evil." By implication, the Nazis must not have been evil at all. Only the questionable, wildly Capitalistic, and notably productive Spielberg, the text seems to cry, could animate these rational beings as "wildly counter-productive," knocking them for not being what he is—all too unfortunately—himself. Although Johnson's point of view is stimulating, it is also a denial of history, and thus, of the present, and an expression of a desire to make these denials. It is also innocent, of course, attributing denial to Spielberg instead. In this case, I would argue, the filmmaker has gone beyond covering up real social forces with obfuscating stereotypes and filmic technique; and the presumptive objectivity of Johnson's critical point of view here is the coverup. Spielberg has at least acted from a more committed position than has Johnson in taking him to task.

So, understanding screen malevolence requires feeling, sensitivity, political savvy, and a commitment to careful sight and thought: taking a position. Sharon Stone's remorseless Catherine Tramell in *Basic Instinct* (1992) was widely regarded as depraved and antisocial. Yet one could argue that her willingness to murder men while copulating with them is "obviously" problematic and "obviously" unthinkable as direct representation only for smug (male) viewers who have never contemplated what women routinely suffer through the enforcement of male-dominated heterosexuality in presumably cleaner films where only females are the (systematic) victims: *Cinderella* (1950), *The Stepford Wives* (1975), *Heavenly Creatures* (1994). She seems a transgressive figuration. But why the long copulation scenes as settings for the murders? Can it be to hook our pornographic imaginations into alignment with exactly the misogyny she may be fantasized to revenge? Although this book is not an express statement of position about screen violence, it is intended to be a provocative collection of inquiries that suggests approaches and questions such as this.

It is worth suggesting that not every inquiry into infamy, darkness, evil, and slime onscreen need occupy itself with the presumption of a basic duality—that there is negativity or positivity (and nothing else); evil or goodness; darkness or light; ugliness or beauty. Binary thinking and depiction by chiaroscuro lend themselves handsomely to a certain style of dramatization of

conflict, a style that is ultimately not dialectical and in which one side of the equation invariably dominates. From a screenwriter's perspective, binary logic makes possible the swift, if shallow, mobilization of audience engagement with character, and it is not accidental that contemporary binary representations of screen malevolence are character- (which is to say, actor-) centered in construction. If beauty and ugliness are only to be seen as polar opposites, and so too goodness and evil, the same can be said for heroism and villainy with the result that a plot can revolve on a convenient battle between singular forces, a scene can be composed in alternating close shots, and in the end the cult of personality so dear to consumerist logic can be nourished and maintained. Although situations in real life are far more complex than this, nevertheless the easy division made possible by binary logic makes for enjoyable—if also idiotic—films to watch. I think that, in the end, considering how these films, unrepresentative though they are of real experience, manage to excite us when we view or remember them is far more interesting than elaborating on how they are simplistic, trivial wastes of time. Very often, I would say, the more ridiculous the representation, the less being engaged in it actually feels to viewers actually viewing like a waste of time.

An exploration of screen evil must therefore navigate between two dangers, what might be called the structural and the phenomenological problems: first, an inability to see social structural formations because of a too-ready armature of received ideas about what is and is not bad, a too-pious commitment to the hegemony; secondly, an inability to be true to the deepest sensations and experiences of a viewer's vision of cinema, because of an overinvestment in ideological analysis. To be sure, in this book we have steered *toward* that ideological analysis with some favor, because in an individualizing society where the broad-based issues and formations that shape culture and modern life are systematically hidden much cultural experience is officially masked as personal and idiosyncratic. Yet while there is plenty of ideology around us, there is not only ideology. That "evil" or "ugliness" may seem evil or ugly only because we have been induced to think of them that way does not in the end make us shudder less. Many of the writers here attend to the quality and extent, the ramification, the historical shape, the felt nuance of our experience when we see what we would call bloody deformation, destruction, malevolence, hideousness, shadow, corruption, manipulation, violation, and villainy onscreen. These things of darkness we must acknowledge ours.

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The chapters you will find here, that try to come to terms with our experience of watching films, are all original to these pages, and each is written to explore either a single film or a few related films, or a genre, or some facet of the pro-

duction of what I am calling "bad" movies. Certainly, no single overriding theme interconnects them all except that in them malevolence of some kind is prominent in an interesting way. The writing, lively and pointed, should engage anyone who loves film and anyone who is fascinated by the way Hollywood has moved to extend moral boundaries, multiply and ambiguate screen treatment of evil, extend the forms of representation, and mass market blood and gore around the world. We are living, certainly, in a world where moral problematization is the running theme: the war against terrorism, the reinflamed war in Iraq, the war against immorality in a Catholic Church beset by what the Pope, on March 21, 2002, called "the most grievous forms of the mystery of evil at work in the world" (CNN.com). We are enduring a war of capital against the environment, a war of conglomeration against local interest and small business, a war against disease and at the same time a war against drugs, a war against crime and at the same time a war against decency, and a war against illiteracy and also a war against text. We are, in short, in a state of global and multivariate war with little perspective on resolution—and, I might add, with little sense of stability. Already by April 2002 *Vanity Fair* reported that "9/11" was "out," along with snowboarding, dissing Oprah, and Greta Van Susteren.

Part I, "It's a Slimy World, After All," collects a group of broadly conceived chapters, sociologically or historically based, that examine screen evil and violence as a reflection of broader cultural concerns and technical developments in a world where moral absolutes are crumbling and where ethical conduct is under threat. To begin, Tom Gunning's masterful "Flickers: On Cinema's Power for Evil" is an engaging exploration of the idea that cinema is inherently evil, an idea implicit in the 1915 U.S. Supreme Court decision separating cinema from First Amendment rights. Tracing the history of the regard for cinema as evil from Manicheanism through Cartesian epistemology, parlor magic, and early cinema to Theodore Roszak's book *Flicker,* the author shows that any film "could be ideologically complicit if it was projected in a darkened room with the illusion of motion and the viewer positioned in front of the screen." If the trick of cinema offered neither demystification nor redeeming allegory, if it supported neither science nor religion, visual illusion "might maintain a dangerous anarchic force, an undermining of authority itself in favor of the pure play of sensation." Vulnerable audiences thus "risked being subjected to the 'evil demon of images'" produced by a hungry industry "deviating from the tradition of print culture."

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's "Monstrosity and the Bad-White-Body Film" examines *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman, The Incredible Shrinking Man,* and several other films that concentrate on the bad-white body, associating whiteness with badness and with war against the self, murder, destruction, and hypersexuality and showing how in these films "the terrain of conquest is

the white body, over which whiteness attempts to display mastery." A particular focus of these films, shown in *The Amazing Colossal Man* and *War of the Colossal Beast,* is "problematic liminal whiteness," in the sense that whiteness as performed "underscores the unstable configuration of whiteness at odds with itself." Foster shows how cheap sci-fi exploitation cinema "allowed for a space in which the social conduct of white society could be critiqued" in the 1950s, when women's liberation and civil rights were in their early stages and attitudes toward minorities and women were in retrenchment.

Aaron Baker's "Beyond the Thin Line of Black and Blue: Movies and Police Misconduct in Los Angeles" is a study of systematic police racism in *Colors, Internal Affairs, L.A. Confidential, Training Day,* and other films. By maintaining essentialist notions about race, such films typically advocate the need for "rough justice," sometimes going as far as to suggest that the moral corruption of the police is a straightforward outcome of the increase in non-white police personnel. "Bad cop" films are therefore a screen for the hidden promulgation of racial essentialism. Baker writes, "Because Hollywood is not good at representing systemic problems and is even worse at showing structural solutions, the response these films offer is mostly the individual heroism of a good cop."

Hollywood cinema has a long tradition of representing mass murder. Christopher Sharrett's "Genocidal Spectacles and the Ideology of Death" discusses films from *The Birth of a Nation* to *Black Hawk Down* in terms of the utility of mass violence onscreen in the American imperialist project and the neoliberal ideology on which it depends. Commenting on the disjunction between official, state-sanctioned violence and the representation of unsanctioned violence in cultural media, Sharrett notes governmental concern to stage-manage cultural displays of violence: "the annihilation of the racial Other is a staple of the commercial entertainment industry." That mass destruction onscreen might be so graphic is seen by Sharrett to collude with "the postmodern conceit that all human experience (or at least all experience worth writing criticism about) is mediated."

Peter Lehman's "Bad, Worse, Worst: *8MM* and Hollywood's Bad Boys of Porn" is a discussion of the presumptive moral superiority of mainstream Hollywood filmmakers depicting the "bad" porn industry in mainstream, "good" narratives. With specific focus on *8MM* as seen in comparison to *The People vs. Larry Flynt* and *Boogie Nights,* Lehman gives a precise reading that reveals the angling and exaggeration necessary for construction of a portrait of the porn world as a thoroughly morally suspect universe. Perverse and widely varying depictions of the "bad boys of porn" from filmmakers such as Joel Schumacher, Milos Forman, and Paul Thomas Anderson can be understood best through an examination of the relationship between the porn industry and mainstream Hollywood, which includes attention to the move from film

to video, the filmmaker's position on First Amendment rights, and what Lehman calls "dominant cultural fears about pornography."

In "Toxic Corps," Kirby Farrell muses upon the "bewilderingly equivocal" relation to historical reality of the Hollywood trope he calls "rage at the corporate state." Corporations are "enabling fictions" making possible risk, responsibility, and resource sharing, but they also diminish responsibility. Seen in films from *Intolerance* and *Metropolis* through *King Kong* to *The Atomic Cafe, Kalifornia,* and *Titanic,* the state and its institutions are increasingly and pervasively corporate. Although rage against this development "underlies consumer rights advocacy and anti-globalization protests," Farrell shows that it serves, at the same time, "specific groups as different as Al Qaeda terrorists and right-wing militias in the United States."

And Henry A. Giroux, in "The *Ghost World* of Neoliberalism: Abandoning the Abandoned Generation," assesses *Ghost World*'s attempt to address the question of how popular representations of youth use a discourse of privatization to signal social crisis. For Giroux, our public, "emptied of any social content," has been "reduced to a phantom sphere largely dominated by the vocabulary of the private." Politics has become disengaged from power and has turned inward, and youth "have become a target of disciplinary control, surveillance, and punishment, especially on the streets and in the public schools." This chapter illuminates the simplistic notion of the "bad kid" and its function for hiding broadly developed and pernicious social formulations that imperil democracy. *Ghost World* "points to crucial problems without fully engaging them."

Part II, "Auteurs of Negativity, Icons of Darkness," focuses on screen darkness and immorality as particularized in particular motion pictures or in the work of particular filmmakers. Wheeler Winston Dixon's "'How Will I Get My Opium?': Jean Cocteau and the Treachery of Friendship" is a biographically focused reading of the important film work of Jean Cocteau (1889–1963). A paragon of the twentieth century *artiste,* Cocteau is shown through analysis of his life and work to have been willing to go to extraordinary lengths to find "new material." Here, the artist is analyzed as morally culpable, rather than the neutral medium through which social morality is filtered and depicted. Dixon's analysis of Cocteau's apparent perfidy in his working method brings new insight to the appreciation of works such as *La Belle et la Bête, Orphée, Les Enfants terribles,* and *Le Sang d'un poète* among others.

Russ Meyer was a significant contributor to the history of the exploitation film and to the 1970s eruption of hard-core porn. In "The Sweeter the Kitten the Sharper the Claws," Kristen Hatch analyses his midcareer work, notably *Vixen!, Motor Psycho, Lorna,* and *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!,* among other films, to show that what seems to be transgressive in Meyer may be counterhegemonic: systematically in his work, "the patriarchal family structure

is shown to be perverted." Although conventional critique of exploitation cinema rests on a claim for its endorsement of patriarchy, Hatch convincingly shows that in the case of Meyer, that dominant structure is no more supported than it is symbolically overthrown.

In "Wanted for Murder," Tony Williams examines the revealing and peculiar case of Eric Portman, who figured prominently, very often playing nefarious and twisted villains, in 1940s and 1950s British cinema. Although Portman never achieved major star status, his performances are consistently noteworthy—in such films as *The Colditz Story, Wanted for Murder, A Canterbury Tale,* and *Forty-Ninth Parallel.* Williams explores the possibility that the "obsessional" acting style Portman used may have been related to his secret homosexual orientation, problematized by repressive British cultural codes of the era. The actor qualifies as an auteur of negativity, Williams asserts, "especially if we place Portman within the specific cultural context of repressive British social life."

James Bond films have typified Hollywood's vision of immorality and evil in a coherent way since 1962. Steven Woodward's "The Arch Archenemies of James Bond" explores the treatment of villainy in the twenty-two James Bond films so far, arguing that ultimately the Bond villain, "surrounded by beautiful women who do not love him, comfortable with wealth although obsessed with its acquisition, connoisseur of food and wine although ascetic to a fault," constitutes the real enigma in Bond narratives. As our moral landscape has grown "hazier, the distinction between dignity and depravity less easy to make in everyday life," Bond films have sustained the portraiture of villainy in terms of sexual coding and Oedipal drama, "primarily through the self-conscious irony embodied in Bond himself."

Gina Marchetti's "Cinematic Incarnations of Chinese Villainy" examines the Oriental evil on Hollywood screens with specific focus on the treatment of Orientalism in two contemporary films, David Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly* and Olivier Assayas's *Irma Vep,* with performances by John Lone and Maggie Cheung. In both films, masking is associated with the construction of villainy—in *Butterfly* invoking a notable performance of gender. As with Fu Manchu, these characters openly suggest a fear of colonial hybridity and European violence, and give us to see how "the Yellow Peril/Red Menace combination of the Cold War continues to endure in contemporary figurations of Red China. Marchetti provocatively suggests that if the Orient has lost its power to be our "underground self," it follows that "the projected fantasy of imperial ambition, colonial conquest, and patriarchal privilege loses its screen in the Other and must ricochet back onto the white male."

Dana Polan's "On the Bad Goodness of *Born to Be Bad:* Auteurism, Evaluation, and Nicholas Ray's Outsider Cinema" is a metacritique of our procedures for distinguishing "bad" from "good" films, and at the same time

a close reading of an underexamined film, Nicholas Ray's *Born to Be Bad*. Contrasting moral and aesthetic badness in terms of this film, Polan shows how the narrative reflects changing moral attitudes in the 1950s. If *Born to Be Bad* has been "declared aesthetically bad by auteurists," because of the conventional morality underpinning its aesthetic, Polan finds it fascinating because it evidences the "pressures toward conformity to the dominant system in action." That *Born to Be Bad* was not sanctioned by auteurists sheds light on auteurism as much as on the film.

No study of screen evil could miss an exploration of the director Andrew Sarris has called "the supreme technician of American cinema" (1968, 57). William Rothman's "The Villain in Hitchcock: Does He Look Like a 'Wrong One' to You?" explores a wide range of Hitchcockian films with some focus on *The 39 Steps* and *The Lodger* and their implication of the viewer in a moral position. Rothman shows how Hitchcock affiliates the eye of the camera with the eye and "I" of the protagonist, in situations where the characters and the audience are similarly trapped in the filmmaker's device. Unable to "self-nominate" as villain, the screen character is very different from the protagonist of stage melodrama—a human being, ongoingly mysterious. Hitchcock's mastery included his special sensitivity to *the camera*'s nomination of villainy.

The final part, "The Charisma of Villainy," has contributions that focus on particular characterizations or characterizational types. Alexander Doty and Patricia Clare Ingham give an extended queer reading of *Cat People* in "The 'Evil Medieval,'" suggesting that the film can be read as a tale of the conflict between a heterocentric power structure and a transgressive cultural tradition that emphasizes women's pleasure and liberation. The "badness" of the cat women is portrayed narratively as a cultural strategy for containing those who threaten the dominant order. However, in a "shift to biological essentialism" that highlights the protagonist's natural essence, the film suggests that our racial and ethnic past is ineluctable. In its panther imagery, the film alludes to the "troubled and troubling" past of U.S. race relations as well.

E. Ann Kaplan concentrates on the later careers of Marlene Dietrich and Jeanne Moreau in "Wicked Old Ladies from Europe." Postmenopausal screen characters are almost invariably seen in negative light. Dietrich can be seen in Chris Hunt's *Marlene Dietrich: Shadow and Light* and Maximilian Schell's *Marlene* attempting to repress her aging, maintaining her youthful screen allure well into old age. Moreau, on the other hand, often contradicts powerful cultural assumptions about old women, most specifically when she plays the principal role in *La Vieille qui marchait dans la mer*. Here, "outrageous" in her desires for a young man, she "has her own morality, her own limits, and above all her own perspective on herself."

Lester D. Friedman provides a penetrating overview of Nazis in Hollywood film in "Darkness Visible." The author begins by reflecting in depth upon the attractions of Nazi imagery, suggesting the importance of Nazi image power; our "sympathy for the devil" attitude with respect to villains; the erotic appeal of Nazi imagery; the Holocaust culture that grounds our perception of screen Nazis; and our fear that we might be *them.* He then proceeds to a systematic overview of the vast array of American screen treatments of Nazism, categorizing them as period pieces—those made immediately before or during World War II; as retrospectives—films set in World War II but made after that time; as humoresques and satires; as fantasies; and as victimization narratives—particularly Holocaust stories. In this sweeping and galvanizing view, we are brought from *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* to *Apt Pupil* and *Schindler's List* with a stunning awareness of the pervasiveness and power of the Nazi as an icon of evil on the Hollywood screen.

Cynthia Fuchs's "'The Whole Fucking World Warped around Me': Bad Kids and Worse Contexts" examines two ostensibly different yet deeply related films about kids: Larry Clark's *Bully,* set in a dreamlike world of "speed and immobility, boredom and overstimulation, expectation and hopelessness, affluence and pretense"; and David Gordon Green's *George Washington,* recounting the story of young people who live among wrecked cars, with constant noise from trains, "crossing bells ringing, wheels grating and squealing, truck beds heaving." Both films deal with sudden death—in one by murder, in the other by accident—and the moral world the kids inhabit as in their very different ways they come to terms with it. *Bully* raises questions about "social responsibility and ethical definitions," whereas *George Washington* suggests that moral comprehension is a personal experience that "can be affected by contexts, but is not determined by them."

Rebecca Bell-Metereau examines the hideous monstrosities that people sci-fi and horror film in "Searching for Blobby Fissures: Slime, Sexuality, and the Grotesque," an exploration through the territory defined by such films as *The Fly, Men in Black, The Blob, Carrie,* and *The Elephant Man* to discover what accounts for the allure of "disgusting" sights onscreen. Bell-Metereau connects the grotesque body to the abjectness of femininity, but her analysis shows that screen uses of bodily fluids, orifices, and membranes differ. Although the ultimate taboos of menstruation and castration certainly help underpin the chilled response of many viewers to grotesque imagery, we must also note that female viewers may "take vicarious pleasure" in the release of aggression that permits them to find themselves empowered in "identifying with the monster or killer and in the shock and horror of the victim."

The mad scientist as a screen convention is discussed in Ina Rae Hark's "Crazy Like a Prof: Mad Science and the Transgressions of the Rational." With specific attention to a close reading of *Forbidden Planet* and the role in

that narrative of exceptional intelligence as a harbinger of pure "evil," Hark suggests that mad scientists are more often "bad" than "mad" and that the mad badness they display is typically configured as contention with the powers of divinity. In *Planet,* the blasphemy of the mad scientist is punished as his creation turns on him.

And finally, in my own "Tom Ripley's Talent" I consider an unconventional reading of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* that takes the protagonist's social class and sexual identity as structural forces. More important than what Tom Ripley does in this story is the way he is seen and framed, the consequences that beset him because of the economic advantages he does not have. That the "criminal" aspect of the film is so tightly wedded to a portrait of class distinction suggests that "evil" is a label we can conveniently and systematically apply to those we wish to keep down.

Screen malevolence provides a sense of power exactly to the measure that we can alienate ourselves from it by watching, then climb above it by finding it disgusting. A sense of power, but not power. "Badness" onscreen therefore helps produce a society in which individuality and personal sanctimony are heightened at the expense of group relations, where individualistic sensuality and sensitivity are played up at the expense of humanity, recognition, and deep understanding. The villain we abhor is precisely the figuration we cannot accept as a version of ourselves, the screen on which we cannot see ourselves—our discrete and self-absorbed selves—projected. And the gorier the image—by the end of the twentieth century screen imagery had reached new heights of gore—the more easily we can deny it, withdraw into a narcissistic paradise where the world is perfect as long as we do not have to reach out and touch it.

Badness on film may be a repository of our most important secrets.

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