The Demon of (Racial) History: Reading *Candyman*

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> ...these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be
> alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude...The White Man will never be alone. Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless.
>
> Chief Seattle, 1855

Race, History, and the American Gothic

We do not know whether Chief Seattle ever really uttered these words – the editors remark that "the existing [transcribed] text appears to be corrupt" (McQuade et al., 319)– or whether they had any effect on the white delegation to which he was forced to surrender his tribe's land. What is more certain is that his ending remarks point, with uncanny precision, to the terrain on which American gothic imagination would flourish. What the whites were receiving, Seattle implied, was not an empty space on which they could realize their fantasies of innocence and historylessness, but a land burdened by the experience of historical violence. The dead had not simply died, they had been persecuted, starved, and murdered by perhaps the very people that formed his audience. The anxiety inspired by the presence of the dead went far beyond the 'universal', pre-historical aspects of what Freud envisaged as a form of the uncanny –our ambivalence towards the dead and their power to act upon us (Freud, "The Uncanny" 211-13). It was a specifically *historical* anxiety, or rather the anxiety caused by the intrusion of a history whose very relevance to white American subjectivity had been consistently disavowed.

The irony, of course, is that the fear of the overdetermination of the present and future of the young republic by the constitutive contradictions of its historical formation would prove rather productive for its forms of cultural expression. What the American Gothic capitalized on was precisely the fear of a

past continually erupting in the face of the present and threatening to wrap the future of bourgeois liberalism in utter darkness. In the process, history was transformed from the Benjaminian angel to a decidedly maleficent demon. The ideological work performed by the gothic was based on the slippages and tensions developing within the charged terrain delineated by the notions of history and of the past: while, within the context of 'official' ideology, the American dream of unlimited individual and national progress had been predicated on the identification of history with a dead and immobile past which posed no social or political limitations upon the future, the gothic 'demon' of history was identified instead with the terror of a past that was neither dead nor alive, but, like Seattle's vigilant ghosts, 'undead'.

For white Americans, historical memory was, as Leslie Fiedler has suggested, always fraught with guilt and linked to the repression of racial otherness: "a dream of innocence had sent Europeans across the ocean... but the slaughter of the Indians... and the abominations of the slave trade... provided new evidence that evil did not remain with the world that had been left behind" (Fiedler 143). It was not accidental, then, that in the American Gothic, historical memory and racial otherness would become so intricately intertwined in the figure of the villain who comes to torture and taunt the 'innocent'; after all, the genre originated with Charles Brockden Brown, who called openly for an abandonment of "medieval castles and chimeras" and the imaginative exploration of the combined terrors of "Indian hostility" and the "western wilderness" (Fiedler 159). Such a conflation of historical memory and racial otherness does not entail that the other was historicized. Rather, it was history itself that was emptied out of its dynamic content and equated with the otherness of a past which could only be seen ambivalently –as 'undead': devoid of the legitimacy of the present and yet capable of usurping and corroding it. In turn, the other became the embodiment of the illegitimate and yet threatening forces of an 'undead' past; his culture typically constituted the domain in which the past in its fetishized form became visible and capable of, not only disturbing, but also complementing the blissful historylessness and unmarkedness of white subjects. American imagination was captivated, painfully and yet with a secret sense of pleasure, by its allochronic projections: Natives and African-Americans were, in Johannes Fabian's terms, denied 'coevalness'. They were simultaneously envied and reviled because their stereotyped 'essence' embodied the residues of a 'past' that the white middle classes, advancing in their relentless march to modernity, had to suppress and yet constantly evoke.[1] In a certain sense they were the counterparts –uncivilized rather than decadent– of the obsolescent European lords and noblemen whose evil schemes on virginal innocence the European Gothic would repeatedly evoke and exorcise.

This logic of projection may begin to explain why, within a culture in which the past was constituted as pure negativity (either as the corruption of civilization –European feudalism, Catholicism, and absolutism– or its absence – native and African 'savagery'), it would also become the point of constant imagi-

native speculation. Significantly, of course, the fetishization of the 'undead' past that racial otherness embodied enabled the gothicization of race itself, its investment with an aura of other-worldliness that facilitated its deflection from the realm of the social onto what Lacan would call the Imaginary. The consequences for American cultural criticism have been quite revealing in this respect: the traditional practice (of which Fiedler, perhaps unwittingly, is a part) of reading racial otherness in the romance within an 'archetypal' context is in fact a response to, and a symptom of, this shutting-off of otherness within a pre-social realm, where difference has not yet become social, where it therefore does not yet truly 'signify'.[2]

However, it would be reductive to see the cultural production of terror –in our case the terror embodied in the figure of the racial other– as the mere reflection of a racial hegemony free of contradictions. It would be useful here to make a short detour through Louis Althusser's formulation of ideology as a representation of the *imaginary* relations of individuals to their *real* conditions of existence (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 162-170). Such a formulation allows us to think of the ideology of white bourgeois fear as it is embodied not only in literature but, as we shall see, in film, not as mere maneuver or falsity but as the the reflection of the "'lived' relation between men and the world" (Althusser, *For Marx* 233). Althusser understands this 'lived' relationship in terms of a mutual overdetermination –"of the real by the imaginary and of the imaginary by the real" (*For Marx* 234). It is possible, then, to understand something of the dynamics developed between the imaginary[3] representations of the Gothic and the real conditions of social existence to which they relate without seeing the Gothic as mere escape from the real conditions of existence or as a docile ideological tool to which the ruling class maintains "an external and lucid relation of pure utility and cunning" (*For Marx* 234).[4] Perhaps, to paraphrase Gramsci, we might say that within cultural forms "the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest" (Gramsci 182). After all, it is this 'ethico-political' movement away from the narrowly defined corporate-economic interests of the ruling class that enables the contradictory functions of cultural forms like gothic/horror literature and film, which have both maintained their alliance with the dominant ideology *and* become genuinely popular among the lower classes.

Two examples of the contradictory function of the gothic within the American social context seem immediately pertinent to the Marxist-psychoanalytic approach this paper will attempt: first, capitalism's ideology of 'social fluidity' was, as Louis Gross remarks, "inversely seen in the Gothic vision as an engine for uncontrolled metamorphosis" (Gross 90). If Marx and Engels were correct in observing that within capitalist production "all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away" (10), the gothic's insistence on the frailty of the carapace of order and its dramatization of the terrifying results that might follow this order's dissolution, cannot but be seen as ambivalent responses to the 'irrational' aspects of

capitalism itself. As Franco Moretti's discussion of *Dracula* shows, however, the gothic's demonization of capital is not altogether incompatible with capitalism itself (Moretti 93-96). In fact, 'uncontrollable metamorphosis', the fear of a world in which the nexus formed between relations and forces of production has become distorted and has ceased to obey the 'logic' of capital, functions to assert the necessity to reterriorialize –often under the rubric of 'reform'– the hierarchical relationships which the movement of capital has deterritorialized.

Secondly, the relegation of the importance of genealogy and the foregrounding of the subject as *tabula rasa* found its correlative not only in the discourse of bourgeois liberalism and the 'self-made man', but also in the confusion over racial identity and the perverted familialism of the slave plantation which would, through the American gothic, persistently haunt the white bourgeois imagination with anxieties of incest, miscegenation, and *méconnaissance* (one finds out s/he is not who s/he thought s/he was –black or mulatto instead of white, descended from family B instead of A, married or having sexual relations to a person who is really one's brother or sister, destined for this walk of life instead of that, etc.). To discover one's determination by history is, in this context, to discover one's own literal 'otherness'.

It is not surprising, then, that Hollywood's cinematic discourse would from its very beginnings become enmeshed in the problematic of national history and racial otherness. America's first 'classic' film, Griffith's 1915 *Birth of a Nation,* revolved around the dual axis of American 'history' –staged here on an epic and monumental scale– and on a half-demonized, half caricatured (in other words, un/canny) vision of the racial other. Within the Hollywood horror film, the connection of horror to racial otherness has, however, remained rather figurative and subsidiary (as opposed, for instance, to the 'monstrous' otherness of woman on which the horror film has capitalized). What I found interesting in Bernard Rose's 1992 *Candyman*, therefore, is the unmooring of blackness from a loose system of associations and images and the literalization of its monstrosity with a gesture that mixes Victorian elements and unmistakably American inflections. "Candyman" is a Gothic monster proper, with his genesis in the violence of national history, his accouterments of murder and violation, his supernatural powers, and his all-consuming and transgressive sexual desire (for a white woman, naturally).[5]

In a certain sense, the overt connection between blackness and monstrosity that the film makes can be seen as an indication of the horror film's shift towards a more conservative and even reactionary ideology. Several critics have suggested that the contemporary horror film has eschewed the genre's earlier critique of white middle-class normalcy, and has effected a reterritorialization of dominant values in a strikingly cynical format: sexual promiscuity is brutally punished, women who resist conservatively defined social and sexual roles are terrorized and slaughtered, the 'monster' has become "essentially a superego figure" (Wood 80), or perhaps, as Christopher Sharrett puts it, "representative both of repression and of desire". If such tendencies are taken as criteria of definition,

Candyman certainly fits the category of what Sharrett calls the "neoconservative" horror film. Furthermore, *Candyman* seems to reverse the racial politics of the horror films of the late sixties and seventies; as Richard Dyer has shown, for instance, in George Romero's 'zombie' trilogy, it is the white middle class and its values that are shown to be monstrous, while black men are cast in positive roles, as "representative[s] of life" (Dyer 58-63). However, the fact that the ideological underside of such films is the rather stereotypical equation of blackness with (innocent) 'nature' as opposed to whiteness and its identification with (corrupt) 'culture', suggests that clean-cut oppositions between an earlier progressiveness and a current reactionary conservatism may be rather counter-productive. What I intend to do instead is to show, through an analysis and discussion of three of the film's major segments, that *Candyman* develops a complex and contradictory problematic that spins around and spills over the axes of race, gender, and class in modern-day urban America, while also attempting to stake an ideological position vis-a-vis the meaning of racial history and the function of popular memory.

Bourgeois Subjectivity and the (Mis)reading of Horror

Let me start by giving a quick summary of the film's plot. A white ethnographer at the University of Illinois named Helen is researching what she calls the "urban legend" of Candyman, a modern-day bogeyman who is supposed to appear when his victim says his name five times in front of a mirror. Candyman, she finds out, was a black man, a prosperous slave's son who eventually became educated. He became a painter and fell in love with a white woman whose portrait he was commissioned to paint. Finding out that his daughter was pregnant, the white woman's father punished Candyman's transgression by having a group of thugs saw his hand off, smear him with honey and leave him to be killed by a swarm of bees. His body was burned in a pyre and his ashes strewn in the air. Candyman, ostensibly dead since the 1890's, returns to the modern day Chicago black ghetto that was built where he was killed (Cabrini Green) and begins to murder whites and blacks indiscriminately using a large metal hook.[6] During her investigation, Helen becomes the witness of a series of brutal murders, committed by Candyman and implicating her as the culprit. Before she can prove the truth, she is arrested and treated as a psychopathic killer, while her own husband (a white academic) deserts her.

Slipping off her middle-class status, and moving steadily into the margins, Helen is soon forced to recognize the *méconnaissances* on which her sense of selfhood had been built. When she discovers that she is no more than the reincarnation of Candyman's white lover, she realizes that her life until then had been merely a shadow –her status as a successful researcher a mere ploy of fate designed to lead her to her true identity as Candyman's other half, his partner. In her efforts to save a black child whom Candyman had abducted, and of the murder of whom she is accused, Helen is mistaken for Candyman while searching in

the huge pile of debris outside Cabrini Green. The lodgers approach the pyre with gasoline and torches and set it on fire and, managing to dupe Candyman, Helen traps him in the crumbling and burning wood. While the pyre and Candyman burn behind her, she crawls out of the bonfire and returns the black child to his mother and community. She dies soon after as a result of the massive burns she has suffered. At her funeral, the entire community of Cabrini Green – refashioned in clean Sunday clothes, disciplined, and dignified– show up to symbolically reclaim Helen's body and memory from its white usurpers (including her now repentant husband). In a highly ambivalent gesture, they throw Candyman's metal hook inside her grave, thus reinitiating the reign of terror they had tried to stop. Helen replaces Candyman both as an agent of terror (her first victim is her husband) and an object of (black) memory: the last shot is a painted representation of Helen on the walls of Cabrini Green, her hair in flames and a saint-like halo surrounding her.

The first scene I would like to discuss takes place very near the beginning of the movie, preceded only by a series of one-shot sequences ("autonomous shots" in Christian Metz's term, "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film" 46).[7] Helen is listening to a person, who is (for the present) only a disembodied voice, tell the story of the bizarre murder of Clara, a teenage baby-sitter. Helen's face is shot in a highly aestheticized 'fuzzy' close-up which, by foregrounding both her own sensationalistic beauty and her libidinal investment in the story, points to her contradictory status as both object of spectatorial desire and as agent of a displaced (because still aural) voyeuristic fascination with Candyman. Through the bridging device of the storyteller's voice we move to a series of short, sequential shots, connected with simple cuts: a suburban house in the dark, a teenager (Clara) playing with a baby in its cradle, and what we assume (through the movement of Clara's head) to be a sound at the door. The voice-over describes what we see happening, but also provides important (and missing) narrative information. The sound, as we find out in the next short shot, comes from the motorcycle of a man (Billy) who is dressed in a black leather motorcycle jacket and is described by the narrator as a "bad boy." Establishing the theme of illicit teenage promiscuity so common to horror movies, the narrator informs us of Clara's double transgression: not only does she invite Billy to the house in order to have sex with him (neglecting her babysitting duties) but she also intends to cheat on her boyfriend (Michael) who is too "nice" to be sexually interesting. The idea of corruption of innocence is further established through the use of dated 50's clothing (which points to what American nostalgia has constructed as the golden era of innocence and order). Billy and Clara are also coded antithetically, Billy's black leather jacket and dark hair contrasting with Clara's rather prudish white underwear, blonde hair, milky white skin, and necklace with a crucifix.

The two characters climb the house's stairs and end up in the bathroom where Clara, her back turned to the mirror, and moving sensually, begins to tell the story of Candyman in a breathless, sexually excited tone:

His right hand was sawn off. He has a hook jammed in the bloody stump. If you say his name five times in front of the mirror, he'll appear behind you breathing down your neck. Wanna try it?

The black body is wholly cathected with white desire, first as the object of voyeuristic pleasure in the spectacle of lynching, then as the punishing superego evoked by white guilt. Candyman's name itself functions as a troping for the "rich and shifting in its analogies mixture and melding of the two kinds of drives" (Freud, *Narcissism, Masochism, Fetishism* 49) –the libidinal and the death drive– that characterize masochistic desire: it refers to the ambivalent symbolic function of bees, both as killers (through their phallus-like sting) and producers of pleasure (honey). Candyman's phallic hook which 'rips' his victims 'apart'[8] promises what he will later call "exquisite pain" –the same motif is repeated when Helen later finds in Candyman's lair a number of sharp razors wrapped inside colorful candy wraps.

Stepping into the game, Billy usurps Candyman's libidinal status, by embracing Clara from behind and caressing her breasts (mimicking Candyman's tactics of "appearing behind you" and "breathing down your neck"). As we see their reflections in the mirror, Billy's tall, black-clad body appears to envelop Clara's white and 'innocent' one, enacting an approximation of the forbidden desire. But this bipolar scheme of desire as it is reflected in the frame of the mirror is already disturbed by a third term, the almost spectral apparition of a bathrobe hanging from a hanger on the back of the bathroom door.[9] When Billy finds that he cannot utter Candyman's name for the crucial fifth time, Clara sends him off to the living room and promises him a "surprise". As she returns to face the mirror we notice a significant change: the bathrobe has become anthropomorphized; it is stretched and flat, like a shell waiting for a body to inhabit it, and in much sharper focus than in the previous shot. When Clara utters Candyman's name for the fifth time and shuts the light, we see Candyman's figure momentarily flashing up in the frame defined by the bathrobe, and we hear a scream that redoubles the scream-like sound of the train in the beginning of the film. After a quick shot of Billy looking up at the ceiling and seeing an immense pool of blood dripping from it, the sequence ends symmetrically, as it started: a lap dissolve carries us back to the narrative present: first, with a shot of the storyteller on whose image the pool of blood has been momentarily superimposed, then with a close-up shot of Helen listening in fascination and finally with a third close-up shot of her tape recorder, which effectively functions as a metonymy of Helen's own 'inscription' by the story she has just listened to.

This sequence (which is also the first sequence in the film that is composed of more than one shot) can be read as a paradigm of the film's thematic preoccupations, since it foregrounds the central issue of the dynamics developed between the triangle of fear, desire, and knowledge. Clara desires not merely sex, but, as Foucault would put it, "the truth of sex" and the "knowledge-power" that speaks this truth (Foucault 58). The mirror, as the imaginary space which is supposed to reflect the truth of the subject back to itself is, fittingly enough, the

space where this search for knowledge culminates. Clara, however, has committed not only the error of Narcissus, whose attempt to 'know himself' led to his death, but the error of the Hollywood female protagonist who attempts to become the subject, rather than merely the object, of the look[10]; as Graeme Turner observes, "a staple of suspense thrillers and horror films is the moment when 'the woman looks' ᴸwhen despite what she knows is likely to wait for her, and despite her 'female vulnerability', she dares to look behind 'that' door... the consequence is some kind of narrative penalty" (Turner 118). If Clara dares to do what Billy does not, by calling Candyman's name for the fatal fifth time, Helen dares to go to Cabrini Green, a challenge from which her husband and his fellow male professor would have "chickened out," as she says.[11] Like Clara, Helen is fueled by a desire to 'know', a desire that is doomed because of its contamination by the guilty secret of sexuality. Like Clara, Helen commits the hubris of appropriating the male privilege of 'looking' and 'knowing' –not only does she too look in the mirror; obsessed with the desire to uncover the truth that lies behind appearances, she dares to look *behind* it.

The second segment focuses on the transformation of Helen from the passive transcriber of meanings to their active interpreter and features the first major 'clue' Helen gets in her research of Candyman's legend. It begins with a panning (right to left) ground-up shot of a large apartment building. The next shot is of a table, on which lie, among other things, a note-pad and a pen (two more of Helen's 'recording' instruments along with her camera, tape-recorder, and computer). Helen's right shoulder and back occupy the left of the frame; slightly off-center and to the right, facing the camera at an oblique angle, is Helen's African-American research colleague, Bernadette. Although ostensibly a colleague, Bernadette clearly functions –both within the narrative and within the film's *mise-en-scène*– as Helen's subordinate. Her secondary status is ostensibly due to her hesitation concerning the research itself, a hesitation which, I would like to argue, also constitutes an element of a misrecognized critique. Looking at the newspaper clippings concerning the mysterious murder of a black woman that Helen has brought from the library, Bernadette expresses her unease with the project by telling her friend that "this is not one of your fairy tales; a woman got killed here." The difference between (gothic) fantasy and (social) reality that Bernadette tries to point to, is both echoed and undermined in the very title of the article she has been reading. During Helen's visit to the library, the viewer is provided with a close-up of the newspaper article that Helen copies. Its title reads: "What killed Ruthie Jean? Life in the Projects." Between the gothic mystery of a bizarre murder (a mystery accentuated by the fact that the murderer is assumed to be something other than human –the article asks *what* and not *who* killed) and the problem of life in a class- and race-based society (the complexity and irreducibility of "life in the projects"), lies a gap on which the film's ironic reversals will capitalize. Helen responds to Bernadette's protest as if she never heard it, by proudly announcing that "that's not the half of it." She points to the picture of Cabrini Green in the newspaper and shows her colleague that the picture depicting the black ghetto building where Candyman is supposed to have

committed his last murder, is in fact a picture of Lincoln Village –Helen's own upper-middle class apartment building.

This clue –a result of a 'close' reading of a visual sign– leads Helen to a theory that argues against the possibility of Candyman's existence and substitutes it with a more 'realistic' interpretation of the murders. For the moment, it seems that Helen's approach grounds her, neither in "fairy tales" (as Bernadette seemed to imply) nor in the domain of the gothic, but in its polar opposite –that of the rational and the real. We have, therefore, an outline of two fundamentally opposed relations to experience and interpretation, expressed through a mobilization of the ambiguities inherent in the 'imaginary' (or 'fairy tale') and the 'real': for Helen, based as she is on objectivity and rationality to which her whiteness entitles her, the case is a simple detective mystery: "Candyman" is the invention of a criminal who uses a "fairy tale" to mask his real identity. For Bernadette, whose blackness codes her as more akin to the domain of the instinctive and the preternatural, such tampering with real, albeit supernatural, powers is itself a confusion of reality with 'fairy tales'. Furthermore, Bernadette is (again because of her blackness) invested with an 'inside' knowledge of the reality of horrors in the ghetto ("life in the projects"), horrors that Helen because of her ignorance confuses with fairy tales.

Despite Helen's effort to overcome the implications of this opposition by insisting on the autonomy of the 'reading' process from the assumptions under which it operates (for her, the newspaper picture becomes the fetishistic idol of truth in itself), the problem of boundaries separating the 'real' conditions of life from the 'imaginary' or 'fairy tale' dimensions they are given does not disappear. Instead, it is reinstated on a number of different planes. Moving towards her apartment's large windows, Helen opens the curtains to reveal a picture of the nocturnal urban landscape. The curtains in this scene function like an aperture, not only like the aperture whose opening enables the camera's 'look', but also the aperture whose opening marks the beginning of spectacle (as in some old movie theaters). The important point is that apertures can be opened and closed at will, functioning as a kind of flexible boundary that enables the (bourgeois) subject to establish or sever her contact with her social environment (signified here by the picture of the lighted, bustling city). Such contact is, furthermore, always protected; the world outside is constituted as a spectacle that can be experienced from a point-of-view of distance and power and onto which the subject's fantasy of control can be projected. In front of her screen-like window Helen proceeds to explain that her own apartment building was initially built as a low-income project much like Cabrini Green. The company that built it, however, realized that there was no "barrier" separating it from upper-middle class housing and that, therefore, it represented a "problem". The "problem", Helen unwittingly asserts, is the *permeability* of the boundaries that have buttressed her own Cartesian hermeneutics of distance and objectivity –a permeability that allows the 'low' to spill over the terrain of the 'high' and threatens to disrupt not only the class- and race-based hierarchies of urban topography but the very forms of bourgeois

knowledge-production itself. Earlier on, Helen's husband refers to modern-day urban paranoias such as the fear that alligators are breeding inside the sewers of Florida, a reference which starkly reminds us of White and Stallybrass's analysis of the 19th-century bourgeois obsession with contaminating sewer rats. "'Contagion' and 'contamination', they remark, "became the tropes through which city life was apprehended" (Stallybrass and White 135).

What Helen discovers, then, is the figurative equivalent of the 'contagion' her husband refers to: the displacement of the boundary that separates suburbia from the ghetto, normalcy from terror, (academic) distance from one's object of study from dangerous envelopment in it. When boundaries collapse, hermeneutics are prone to falter and the newspaper's 'misreading' of Lincoln Village as Cabrini Green (as *the double* rather than *the other* of the bourgeois self) exposes the true misreading: Helen's own *méconnaissance* of her collusive relation to the 'other' that Candyman embodies. Just as she misunderstands what the picture really means –that Cabrini Green and Lincoln Village are only superficially different, and that the terror of Cabrini Green is about to erupt in her own life and her own (bourgeois) space– Helen also fails to see that it is her own sense of secure distance from horror that is the real fairy tale: what she thinks of as an academic object of study, a popular self-deception to be condescendingly pried into, is more real than herself and has always already claimed her as its accomplice.

Helen proceeds, after closing the curtains, to lead Bernadette into the starkly lit bathroom;[12] as they enter it, Helen moves to the center of the frame (a position which marks the superiority of her will over that of Bernadette). Since her apartment has the same layout as those in Cabrini Green, she explains, the removal of her bathroom cabinet mirror would unveil the mystery behind the murders supposedly committed by Candyman. We see Helen and Bernadette in profile as they look at the mirror which occupies the left of the frame. To the right of the mirror, in the near background, there is a carnivalesque mask and in the background, behind and between Helen and Bernadette, is a dark colored shower curtain. Since the shot remains static and our point of view cuts across the characters' point of view, we cannot see a reflection in the mirror. As Helen grasps the mirrored medicine cabinet and removes it, the camera moves to the right to show a dark grey surface, which because of the absence of a wall is, we assume, the back of an identical medicine cabinet in the apartment next to Helen's. Helen pushes at this thin surface, explaining that the murderer must have used the exact method to get into Ruthie Jean's Cabrini Green apartment. To Helen's lighthearted curiosity, her will to know at the expense of violating protective boundaries, Bernadette objects that such prying constitutes a violation of (an)other's space, fulfilling her 'Cassandra' function in the film.

But Helen hardly pays attention to this warning (as she also will not when she does not hesitate to pry into Cabrini Green's abandoned apartments thereby rousing the anger of a black lodger). As the partition gives way to her pressure, our point of view moves back to its original place to the side, heightening our own spectatorial anxiety about what lies 'behind' the imaginary space of the mir-

ror. As it seems, Helen already 'knows', and so she gives up her 'look' to Bernadette. The camera overtakes Bernadette's point of view by zooming in on the empty frame of the mirror to show a dark, empty apartment with another boundary (a door) that is closed and inaccessible in the center background of the frame. Crisscrossing shadows from the window-frame fall on the door, forming an 'X' which signifies prohibited access. Boundaries, it seems, are not only capable of collapsing but also of infinitely replicating themselves, making any assumption of 'free' and unmediated knowledge of the other a mere illusion.

The camera zooms out, returning us to Helen's bright bathroom and reassuming its position to the side. As Helen replaces the mirrored cabinet, her finger is momentarily caught in it. Helen laughs the incident off but a sense of premonition concerning the penalty of crossing boundaries begins to emerge in the viewer. Our point-of-view finally shifts to place us behind the two characters, showing us their reflections in the mirror as they smile in snapshot-like fashion. They proceed to call Candyman's name but, like the first segment, only one of the two (Helen) dares utter the name a fifth time. In a repetition of the first segment, the dual structure of reflection is disturbed by a third term, the horrific Lacanian 'real'[13]: as the camera slowly zooms out of the lighted, empty bathroom, the mirror, occupying the center of the frame, is shown to bear the sharply focused reflection of the shower-curtain which 'slashes' the center of its frame at a slight angle. The dark and gloomy Philip Glass soundtrack resounds at an increasing volume, cueing the viewer that something important has happened. To decode it, one has to recall that in the previous shots the shower curtain was shown to be situated to the right of the mirror and that it could therefore not logically be reflected in its center, unless the mirror had been opened (even though we had just seen Helen close it). That something has gone awry is confirmed in the very next shot; the camera, conflating spatial and temporal movement, pans left across the bedroom doorframe of Helen's apartment to show her sleeping with a crucifix hanging above her. We hear the alarm clock ticking (a cue that time is running out and that a climax is at hand; cf. Rosen 19). Suddenly, we see the back of a man wearing a dark robe jump on Helen as if to attack her. The clue is typically false (it is only Helen's husband) and yet it functions as a foreshadowing device and a link in the chain of gradually increasing terrors that befall Helen.

It is important to foreground the fact that the entire second segment plays with the notion of boundaries (social, ideological, spatial). While Helen's sense of subjectivity and her search for knowledge (about Candyman, about "life in the projects", about the 'other') are predicated on the privilege afforded by economic, spatial, psychic and epistemological forms of distance from her object of inquiry, her unrelenting quest for proximity to the 'real thing' threatens to annihilate (bourgeois) desire itself, by engendering the 'too-close presence' of its object. The limits that define bourgeois subjectivity become displaced from within, as it were; under the thin façade of bourgeois refashioning, the thin plaster coating that was applied to Lincoln Village in order to separate it from its

twin ghetto building, lies the ghostly presence of the 'other'. This moment of internalization with the potential for critique is, however, simultaneously reversed within the larger ideological framework of the film. The violence that is shown to lie at the center of modern segregated capitalist society is also 'externalized' and displaced onto the gothic, fantastic violence of the 'monster'. The 'imaginary' distortion of the gothic dimension of terror then, is linked to the 'real' conditions of capitalist society, but not in a simple, one-to-one equivalence. It both 'overdetermines' these conditions (by displacing the ghetto, a social consequence of capitalism's *internal* contradictions, 'outside', to the domain of the other, and by entirely subsuming the complexity of "life in the projects" under the shroud of death and terror) and is 'overdetermined' by them (the intrusion of the 'other' inevitably constitutes a 'transcoding' of social contradictions within the domain of bourgeois gothic imagination).[14]

Such overdetermination influences the very way the 'monster' is constructed. That Candyman operates in the ghetto is anything but accidental: "Candyman", it should be observed, is also a slang term for "drug dealer". The figure of the monster both becomes the materialization of the displaced abjection of the white bourgeoisie towards what is seen as the 'real' horror embodied in the black underclass, and overdetermines the way this underclass is perceived in its 'reality' through the mediation of a discourse of fear. When later in the film Helen encounters 'Candyman' for the first time (in a context which plays on the sexual overtones of 'gangbanging') we are shown that this Candyman is not the 'true' one, but a druglord who exploited Candyman's legend to terrorize the community. The reaction of the spectator who 'knows' (through specific visual clues) that this is not the 'true' Candyman, and who tends therefore to ratify Helen's original theory that Candyman was only a 'fairy tale', echoes Slavoj Zizek's witty exploration of "How the non-Duped Err". What the film has offered to the spectator "as a lure" is "truth itself" (Zizek 73) –it is not the 'fake' Candyman that mimics the 'true' one, but the 'true', supernatural Candyman whose representation both displaces and condenses the threat of the socially deviant, sexually aggressive, and criminal racial other that the 'fake' one embodies. It becomes important to understand ideology in general and filmic ideology in particular as something analogous to the complex dialectic between truth and falsity, knowledge and belief, that underlines Freud's conception of fetishism. To paraphrase Marxist literary critic Franco Moretti, "[ideology] has a double function: it *expresses* the unconscious element and at the same time *hides* it."[15]

At the basis of the third segment on which I want to focus is a more fully articulated critique of the very modes of white knowledge of the 'other'. Shortly before the sequence starts, Bernadette and Helen are shown arguing over the propriety of 'examining' Cabrini Green. Despite the fact that this is an academic project, both women feel a sense of unease at visiting a place infested by both 'social' and 'gothic' crime; naturally, both are properly 'armed': Bernadette with a can of mace, Helen with her camera. The issue at hand is that they may evoke distrust because their presence might be considered invasive: "you are the one

who got us dressed up like cops," Bernadette protests when Helen objects to carrying arms. The African-American 'homies' who, in the beginning of our sequence, suspect them of being cops, ("sure you're not the police?", "look like 5-0 to me") and the black woman (Ann-Marie) who compares them to prior 'visitors' –"newspapers, cops, caseworkers, they all wanna *know*"– are in a sense the "duped who do not err". Despite Helen's protestations to the opposite, the film seems to suggest that her academic practice –based as it is on the exploitation of the community as mere 'material' that will boost her career– is neither harmless nor innocent.

Despite its architectural identity to Helen's apartment building, Cabrini Green is filthy, chaotic, and frighteningly dark. As Helen and Bernadette climb the stairs, followed by the verbal harassment of the sexually menacing 'homies', the film camera, mimicking Helen, begins quickly panning left and right frantically 'scanning' the environment. Placed behind Helen's shoulder, it allows us to see grafitti-stained walls whose dimness is occasionally dissolved by the investigative flash of Helen's camera. Candyman's name, together with references to his ambivalent melding of pleasure and pain ("Sweets to the Sweet") is sprayed in modern-style graffiti all over the walls. Still operating within the Cartesian logic of bourgeois knowledge-production and its grounding in a secure distance between the subject who 'knows' and the object of knowledge, Helen seems more pleased than uncomfortable with what she encounters. "This is great!" she exclaims, clearly at odds with the gloomy and desolate effect given by the use of lighting and *mise-en-scène*. The scene inside the bathroom of the Cabrini Green apartment where Candyman murdered one of his victims, is both a repetition and an inversion of the one that unfolded in Helen's apartment. On the one hand, the stark lighting of the second sequence has been substituted by dim lighting; the orderliness of Helen's bathroom is replaced by the filth and decay of the Cabrini Green one. On the other hand, both scenes take place in spaces whose "layout", as Helen observes, "is identical". The camera focuses on Helen, as she again takes the initiative to cross over to what lies beyond the boundary defined by the mirror. Bernadette repeats her function as 'distractor', this time overtly linking 'gothic' and 'social' threats: "what if someone's packing drugs in there?" Helen, however, proceeds –literally this time– to 'go through'.

As we enter what appears to be a dark maze of apartments –significantly honeycombed with symmetrical jagged holes much like a bee's nest– we are forced to identify not only with Helen's own sense of confusion and disorientation but with her invasive practices as well; the camera scans the field by panning left and right, but what we see is only what the light of Helen's camera flash enables us to see. Our identification with Helen is broken only at the point when she arrives at the last hole and proceeds to climb inside it. As she puts her head in our point of view abruptly moves to the opposite side to face her. Before Helen emerges from the hole, the camera –in what is perhaps the most spectacular shot of the movie– zooms out to reveal the painting of an immense black head (Candyman's) whose mouth is precisely the hole through which Helen is climb-

ing. In what constitutes a bold reference to both black cannibalism and the power of 'word of mouth' that sustains Candyman's legend, Helen's body is shown emerging, crouched and diminished, from the mouth, and is framed by the ac-centuated upper and lower teeth of the painted Candyman. Holding her camera, she shoots in the direction of what we are forbidden to see –the camera and its persistent gaze on her– while we are afforded the privilege of seeing what she cannot yet see. When Helen enters the inexplicably bright room, she turns to face Candyman's painted portrait. Our identification with her resumes for only a mo-ment as she prepares to take a snapshot of the painting. As the soundtrack builds to a crescendo and the camera zooms in on Candyman's frightening, disconcert-ing eyes, we sense that a break in the existing regime of the look has been regis-tered. As if to confirm it, the next medium-close shot of Helen (left to right) shows her lowering her head and rubbing her eyes, looking confused and pained.[16] What meets its limits here is not only the invasive function of the look – its naive assumption of the other's transparency and passivity– but its inappropri-ate (perverse as it were) en-gendering. What we come to identify with is not only the desire to discredit the ocular (and not only) imperialism that Helen's aca-demic project implies but also the desire to chastise her naive and dangerous usurpation of the male prerogative to the look itself. The return of the other's repressed gaze is con-fused with the return of the repressive gaze of patriarchal injunctions; Helen's 'unnatural' assumption of the masculine functions of pene-trating, uncovering, and demystifying will be penalized by being turned against her, inverting the inversion and returning her to her 'proper' place in the narra-tive.[17]

The portrait of Candyman's head is done in twentieth-century style; al-though it is ostensibly spray-painted, it shares the air-brushed, smooth surface and emphasis on facial distortion of modern comic-book art. Together with the late twentieth century graffiti art and the seemingly paint-brushed, nineteenth century representations of Candyman's lynching that Helen later discovers, it constitutes a mystery that is never explicitly dealt with. However, although the film never answers the question of the origin of these representations (created by no one out of no where), it certainly contextualizes the problem they represent through the words of Candyman himself: "Without the faith of my congregation I am nothing" he says to Helen, accusing her of trying to rationalize and demystify his existence. Inviting her to be united with him as his lover once more, he re-minds her of the power of the mouth that was visually represented in the earlier scene: "Our names will be written on a thousand walls, our crimes will be *told* and *retold* by our faithful believers."[18] Candyman is, apparently, the embodiment of the story that 'won't go away'; a story which is itself a microcosmic embodi-ment of America's own racial history which haunts the present. The 'demon' of racial history lives through the stories that circulate orally from generation to generation and that eventually become ominous 'writings on the wall'. The oral circulation and the written inscription transform Cabrini Green –dilapidated, multilayered, and soaked in blood– into a metaphor of the palimpsest of history itself.

As in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the black community's collective memory of desire and desire for memory has brought the unspeakable story of racial violence back to life (147). Like Beloved, Candyman is the desire that desires, usurping the present and draining its life-affirming forces; like her, he must be exorcized by the community itself. In contrast to Morrison's novel however, the film completely negates the value of historical memory. Whereas *Beloved* shows that for the black community the memory of racial violence –however painful and self-destructive– has to be acknowledged (and such an acknowledgement can only be stated paradoxically –the story that the writer passes on is not a story to pass on),[19] *Candyman* relates black historical memory to the very cause of African-American moral and economic degeneration. In effect, Candyman's function is the exact opposite of Beloved's; instead of pointing to the historical legacy of the multiple forms of violence inflicted upon and internalized by racial minorities, he codes minorities themselves as the real aggressors. It is no accident that Candyman operates within the bounds of a community that has failed to monitor and discipline its own criminal elements. The only ideological solution that the film makes available to African-Americans is the identification with the subject-position of the oppressor. At the end of the film, the disinherited lodgers of Cabrini Green become (in effect) their own lynchers by setting Candyman on fire in a pyre at the same place where the white thugs had burned him a century before. Their transformation from the deviant, unruly, and internally divided mass they were into the orderly, clean and respectable community they become by the end of the film is predicated on precisely such an identification.

Such an impressive regeneration, of course, cannot be effected by violence alone. Helen becomes the saint-like figure (the film's final image explicitly shows that the black community has accepted her as a martyr) that will expiate white guilt[20] and save the black community from itself by returning its own rightful future (the black infant that she saves from the raging fire). All this is not only to rationalize, but also to simplify. Helen is not unambiguously a martyr; by substituting Candyman through the mediation of the black community itself she also becomes the new 'demon'. The child she saves may be understood as her own since not only does she not bear any children with her white husband, but Candyman's staging of the event in the pyre to include the child suggests that it is the reincarnation of the offspring of their own illicit relationship. In addition, her only victim in the duration of the film is white, complicating the original problematic of racial tension.[21] Such loose ends should not be tucked in too hastily since they point to the fact that the film's effort to serve horror film conventions and Hollywood economic injunctions at any price (the evil's regeneration guarantees a sequel –already released) compound the gaps and contradictions the film has to rely on in order to articulate its ideological statement on social reality.

Resisting the Monster's Seduction

The fact that such contradictions are *constitutive* –without them the filmic text could not have said what it attempted to– is an important reminder of both the political potential of utilizing the insights of Derridean *écriture* and of the dangers inherent in its trivialization by a merely 'demystificatory' practice. As the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* state, filmic reading should not be a demystification in the sense [that] it is enough to relocate the film within its historical determinations, 'reveal' its assumptions, declare its problematic and its aesthetic prejudices and criticize its statement in the name of a mechanically applied materialist knowledge, in order to see its collapse and feel no more needs to be said (446).

Despite the orientation of *Cahier's* critical bite towards a 'semi-vulgar' Marxism, (the assumption that one demystifies the ideological processes at work in film by bringing into it the *external*, non-ideological and non-discursive 'truths' which it tries to veil), it is possible to see the validity of their comments as a basis for the critique of many deconstructive readings as well (more precisely, readings operating under the assumption that one has only to point to the impossible moments, the constitutive contradictions of the film's 'statements' to be 'done' with it; that all that remains is to present the film in the luminous isolation of its deconstructed discourse, as if it could be extricated from the system of political, cultural and economic relays in which it is always already embedded).

The purpose of this analysis is not therefore to counter the 'false' filmic representations of *Candyman* with a series of externally situated and impassive 'truths' about gender relations, the geopolitics of capitalism, the history of racism, or the social overdetermination of desire, nor to suggest that critical labor is somehow complete after it points to the dangerous ruptures that discourse can never manage to suture and reveals to it its own duplicity. Although the *Cahiers* collective seems to provide an alternative to this double-bind, it also remains problematic. Problematic, first, because its analysis does not deliver the exploration of the "complex, mediated and decentered relationship" of Hollywood film within its sociohistorical context that the theory promised.[22] Secondly, and more importantly for my argument here, its advocation of a reorientation of critical practice towards "its own deciphering operation" (446) is belied by its silence concerning the relationship of its own critical practices to the debates within the cultural moment from which it emanated –more specifically the post-1968, post-*nouvelle vague* debates on the function and orientation of French cinema, the influence of *Cahiers du Cinema* within these debates, and French film's current relations to Hollywood and its inheritance of 'classical' cinema.

Cultural criticism in the United States cannot avoid facing its similar (uneasy) positioning within a cinematic tradition and its extended ramifications into the body of popular culture. One cannot afford to evade the issue of the status of the 'popular' under conditions of mass production and commodification, on the one hand, and increasing centralization and cultural homogenization, on

the other. Adversarial readings must remain aware of their potential overprivileging of culture, their tendency to fetishistically isolate it from concrete considerations of economics and politics under a banner which proclaims that, 'after all, everything is discursive'. The road to counter-hegemony is not paved with interpretive practices that simply 'read against the grain'. It necessitates (at the very least) first, the theoretical connection of such adversarial practices not only with the practice of everyday life but with the domain of political economy to which this life is inescapably connected. Secondly, it requires the transformation of individual interpretive subversion into *communal practices* that reclaim the classical 'civil sphere' from the insular operations of the bureaucratic state. Thirdly, it calls for the opening up of new spaces of cultural production and dialogue that may manage to curb the impact of the deadening grasp that corporate conglomerates have on mass-produced culture. To persistently focus on what is said within the dominant culture, even in order to register the moments of its confusion, runs the risk of replicating the autonomous and self-explanatory status of its statements. One is in danger, in other words, of emulating Helen's own (mis)reading practices. By postulating the autonomy of a semiotic analysis from the context in which such an analysis is made possible, and from the conditions that enable us to occupy our positions as authors/interpreters, *we* become the "non-duped who err".[23]

I would like to insist, then, that when reading *Candyman*, one needs to register a break, to insist on the limits of any approach that seeks to explain social reality by merely analyzing the ideological imaginings of a commercialized and commodified culture: if there are no outside 'truths' that the film veils, there are alternative truth *claims*, oppositional testimonies, and imaginative explorations of the issues *Candyman* so seductively mystifies. In the final analysis, the pool of blood that saturates *Candyman* is, like the pool of blood trailing after the majority of postmodern horror and science fiction films, the expression of "an ideology preferring total annihilation (including self-annihilation) over radical change" (Sharrett 108). It is important to remember that behind the blood-curdling noise of the victims' screams lies an impassable and arid space of silence; one cannot make it resonate merely by climbing through mirrors.

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Notes

1. In his examination of white minstrelsy, U.S. historian David Roediger makes a similar argument concerning the formation of white working class identity: "the content of blackface performances identifies their particular appeals as expressions of the longings and fears and hopes and prejudices of the urban Jacksonian working class" (Roediger 115).

2. I am using Lacan's term to point specifically to the reduction of racial otherness to pure image, as opposed to its possible function as a signifier of social difference. For Lacan the imaginary form of identification (as exemplified in the mirror stage) "situates the agency of the ego, *before its social determination*, in a fictional direction, which will... only rejoin the coming-into-being of the subject asymptotically" (*Ecrits* 2, emphasis mine). It is of course true that the other, racial or not, does not yet emerge within the mirror stage –except in the form of the *Ideal I* which "symbolizes the mental perma-nence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination" (*Ecrits* 2). However, my approach does not concern the mirror stage as such. It is rather predicated on Fanon's extension of Lacanian theory to suggest the possibility that, under condi-tions of racial oppression, the imago of the white man may "undergo an imaginary ag-gression with the appearance of the negro." The crucial issue here is that "for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self – that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable. For the black man... historical and eco-nomic realities come into the picture" (Fanon 161).

3. 'Imaginary' is used in the Althusserian sense of the necessary level of mediation and distortion that is implied in ideological forms of representation –for instance, the his-torical subjectivity of the racial other and his placement within the relations of produc-tion are mediated and also distorted by his identification with immobile, allochronic projections of the past (with its irrational tendencies, its violence, its backwardness, but also with its sexual 'licence', the 'primitive' appeal of elementary forces etc). See Althusser's use of the term "imaginary distortion" (*Lenin and Philosophy* 165). I am aware of the fact that to follow Althusser all the way is to partly succumb to an over-simplified view of dominant ideologies; I would, for instance, disagree with Althusser's claim that the ideology by which the ISAs function is "unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, beneath the ruling ideology, which is the ideology of 'the ruling class'" (*Lenin and Philosophy* 146). The problem, I think, originates partly from Althusser's indifference towards the conceptual problems posed by private, as opposed to State owned, ideological apparatuses. Although Althusser evokes Gramsci to explain his attitude towards the issue, the latter's attentiveness to the distinction between State and Civil society, his investigation into the role of culture within a "war of position," and his insistence on the active, consensual element in ideology (as opposed to its pure imposition from above), could be applied as correctives to Althusser's position. In any case, my approach differs sharply from theorists such as Michael Ryan who attempt to counteract what he perceives as the "nondynamic and nonrelational" aspects of Althusserian and Gramscian "Leninists" by advocating an extreme voluntarism. Ryan's perspective on filmic ideology in specific is profoundly ahistorical; by arguing that "ideological domination" is itself an indication of the existence of resistance, and by rejecting "counter-hegemonic" forms as merely reinstatements of a logic of power (as if that by itself discredits or 'taints' them), he seems to me to be advocating a quietistic approach that is incapable of theorizing the specificity of historical struggles (see Ryan 483-85). Indeed, since ideological domination would not be necessary if resistance did not pose a threat to the dominant order (as Ryan argues in relation to the women's movement), the problem of resistance and its forms is magically solved. Forms of re-sistance can be unproblematically read off forms of domination, and historical agency is replaced by the comforting recognition that to be dominated is the unmistakable proof that one resists!

5. Using a Greimasian semiotic rectangle, Nick Browne points to the race- and gender-based regulation of desire in Hollywood film: only heterosexual desire is sanctioned, and miscegenation is only acceptable in a white male-nonwhite female relationship.

The relationships of nonwhite males with white females are therefore mostly transgressive, coded as rapes, and narratively penalized (see Browne 9-10).

6. The function of prosthesis here –the hand is cut off as a punishment for the (black) phallus' transgression, but is reconstituted as a stiff and invulnerable, technologized phallus– clearly points to the movie's attempt to mobilize white anxiety by invoking the threat of the re-phallicization of the lynched and castrated black body through the technological mediation of the cinematic apparatus.

7. These first few shots operate in a highly economical fashion, establishing not only space and time, but much of the actual thematics of the picture: the film begins with a single moving aerial shot of downtown Chicago (the credit sequence), a single shot of a solid mass of bees accompanied by Candyman's voice-over (which constitutes what Christian Metz [46] calls a "displaced diegetic insert"), a single shot of a swarm of bees flying in the sky, and finally a shot of the bees enveloping the downtown skyscrapers in something like a black cloud (Candyman's "black" threat of terror enveloping the city). Along with the sound of a huge buzzing we hear the sound of a train whistle whose sound culminates in something that uncannily resembles a scream (its function confuses diegetic and non-diegetic usage since we never see the realistic "referent" of the sound –the train– and since the sound functions more within the context of cultivating a feeling of sinister premonition than within the context of diegesis). Before the shot is over, we hear Candyman's deep-bass, husky voice uttering "I came for you" and a lap dissolve reveals Helen's face in a close-up, thus establishing her as the object of Candyman's desire before the narrative explicitly does so.

8. We should note here that the murders are explicitly eroticized: Candyman violently inserts his hook in his victims' body, groaning loudly, while his victims writhe spasmodically.

9. The bathrobe, in which Candyman will eventually appear, is the third term in another sense, as well. It introduces what Lacan will call the 'gaze': "what we have to circumscribe... is the pre-existence of a gaze –I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides... on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 72, 109). The field of the gaze, then, as Colin MacCabe explains, is defined by the fact that "the object we look at offers a position from which we can be looked at" (MacCabe 186). This is precisely what happens in the film: the bathrobe is not merely an object but the space from where Candyman's eyes will look at Clara. For Lacan, the gaze is terrifying because it reintroduces the *petit objet a*, the real, and thus the third term of the imaginary-symbolic dyad. As he remarks, the gaze *qua objet a* is what is eluded in the narcissistic structure of imaginary identification, what introduces the unbridgeable lack of castration (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 74, 77). As Mladen Dolar insightfully adds, this lack is not to be confused with the lack of adequation between the subject and its imaginary counterpart (the 'imago') within the structure of narcissism. The lack implied in narcissism is the precondition of normalcy, the ticket to the Symbolic. The lack suggested by the gaze, however, is the *lack* of lack, "the anxiety of gaining too much", the "too-close presence of the object" (Dolar 13).

10. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", esp. pp. 11-17.

11. Making sure that we do not miss the point of the poetic justice through which the hubris of female antagonistic agency is punished, the script has Helen tell her husband's colleague that her research evidence will "bury him", making his work obsolete. Near the end of the film, when Helen is literally buried herself, the same man stands, safe and sound, above her grave.

12. The corridor is decorated with fearful African masks, objects of academic "curiosity", but also fetishistic embodiments of a feared and desired racial otherness.

13. This "real" should not be confused with the homonymous Marxist concept from which it is markedly different. For Lacan the real is the residual element that is left over from the translation of Imaginary difference into Symbolic (social) difference. As such, it can never be transparently known (the real is the impossible, says Lacan) and it remains necessarily refractory. The Marxist 'real' represents a central theoretical problem for Marxist philosophy itself. In its crude, purely economistic form (the real *qua* economic structure), it is, at least for Althusser, an "impossible" moment ("the lonely hour of the last instance", as he says, "never comes" [*For Marx* 113]). It remains, however, (at least for pre-Laclau-Mouffe Marxism) the determining, if absent, instance of the social. One could say that for the majority of Marxists the reality of social existence is an overdetermined reality (since the structural cannot be abstracted from the superstructural), but it nevertheless remains a reality that can be known and understood with relative thoroughness.

14. The term 'transcoding' derives from the work of Stallybrass and White, which complements the Althusserian theory of ideology by pointing to the unequal and complex processes of overdetermination between discursive domains; as they insightfully put it, "a valuable way of thinking about ideology is to conceive of it as the way discursive traffic and exchange between different domains are structured and controlled" (Stallybrass and White 195).

15. As Freud remarks, it is within the fetish itself that both the disavowal *and* the acceptance of castration coexist (*Narcissism, Masochism, Fetishism* 64). Like ideology, the fetish becomes both what hides the 'truth' and what points to it. In fact, it is only because it functions as a device of concealment and deception that it enables the analyst to read the 'truth' behind it..

16. In the nightmarish events that follow, the image of Candyman's eyes accompanied by the light and the unrealistically violent, thump-like noise of the camera flash will assume the function of a motif, a 'subjective insert'. Helen increasingly finds herself powerless under the surveillance of a number of different gazes: first Candyman's own (in their first 'real' encounter, Helen's own body is shot through with surrealistic 'flashes', while she staggers, as if shot by real bullets). Later on, police car lights flash on her as she is carried off for questioning, a policewoman's relentless gaze humiliates her while she is undressing at the police station, and a swarm of journalists concentrate their flashes on her as she comes out of jail. It must be noted here that this process of punishment of the 'look' begins earlier, when the 'fake' Candyman hits Helen in the face with the side of his hand-held hook, leaving her eye swollen and shut for several days.

17. If Helen's masculinization is accompanied here by Candyman's momentary feminization (the dental orifice of his mouth is less phallic than reminiscent of the 'vagina dentata' of the castrating woman), the relations will be reversed in the symmetrical counterpart of this image, when Candyman's mouth will open only to pour his phallic bees into her waiting, passive one. Her ambition to 'uncover' the mystery of Candyman will rebound in her discovery of her own predestined fate soon before her death. Her efforts to demystify him will result in her own eventual mystification by urban legend. In effect, Helen goes altogether too far towards discovering 'the thing' and is penalized by becoming the 'thing' itself.

18. It is here that the true significance of a shot from the first segment is manifested: The superimposition of the blood stain on the storyteller's face, which would remain inexplicable considering her subsequent disappearance from the plot, is explained by the power Candyman attributes to storytelling: the storyteller, through her oral circulation of the story, is an active accomplice in Candyman's murder spree, and shares in the responsibility for the sacrificial shedding of blood that Candyman's legend feeds on. Let

me add here that I find René Girard's concept of 'sacrificial crisis' immediately perti-
nent; Girard points to the explosion of violence that ensues on the failure of preexisting
rituals to maintain social order. Such violence is "mimetic" and "contagious", feeding
on itself, and purifying nothing. Candyman kills again and again, but his victims'
blood fails to purify history; on the contrary, it stops only when someone else (Helen)
helps kill him and imitates him by taking up his hook and continuing the murders. In
the words of Catherine Russell, "sacrificial crisis involves a disintegration of catharsis
into mimeticism" (Russell 196).

19. See Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 274-75.

20. It is significant that although Candyman kills both blacks and whites, it is only in the
cases of white victims that Candyman's invocation through the mirror is established.
Such an apparent gap in narrative plausibility may be attributed to three possible
causes: a) the deaths of blacks are not as important (narratively, socially, or symboli-
cally) to the filmmakers themselves, so less attention is paid to the establishment of nar-
rative plausibility in their cases; b) Candyman's presence in the ghetto is assumed to be
somehow intricately connected to the community itself (either because it is the commu-
nity that has 'created' him, or because the violence he embodies is just part of the
community's every day reality); c) Candyman is invoked only by whites, because it is
only in them that moral and erogenic masochism finds fertile ground: it is they who
must expiate their guilt by turning the 'other cheek' to the punishing superego, while
also making sure that they do what they can to 'deserve' the punishment. The second
and third hypotheses relate to filmic manipulations of the spectators' unconscious. The
first reflects the film's unconscious itself. Although my argument here is more closely
related to the third hypothesis, I see all of them as equally significant.

21. See note 15 for a (partial) speculation on the logic of such a narrative 'twist'.

22. For a critique of this weakness see Nichols, "Style, Grammar and the Movies" 619.

23. I am referring here to the film's insistent taunting with the ways in which 'correct'
readings miss their own implications or function to disorient rather than illuminate the
reader; see above.

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Antonis Balasopoulos
The Demon of (Racial) History: Reading *Candyman*

Το άρθρο επιχειρεί, μέσω μιας ανάγνωσης της ταινίας *Candyman*, μια ανάλυση του συνδυασμού ιστορικής μνήμης και φυλετικής διαφορετικότητας στη λειτουργία της πολιτισμικής παραγωγής τρόμου όπως αυτή σχετίζεται με το σχηματισμό του φυλετικού

Άλλου. Υποστηρίζεται ότι το Αμερικανικό γοτθικό είδος περιβάλλει τη φυλετική δια-
φορετικότητα με μια εξωκοσμική ατμόσφαιρα που στην πραγματικότητα διευκολύνει
την εκτροπή της από το χώρο του κοινωνικού σε αυτό που ο Λακάν θα ονόμαζε το Φα-
ντασιακό, ένα προ-κοινωνικό χώρο όπου η διαφορά δεν έχει γίνει ακόμα κοινωνική,
όπου επομένως δε λειτουργεί πραγματικά ως 'σημαίνων', αλλά ως 'τερατώδες'. Το άρ-
θρο επιχειρεί να δείξει, μέσω μιας ανάλυσης και συζήτησης τριών από τα κύρια μέρη
της ταινίας, ότι η ταινία αυτή αναπτύσσει μια πολύπλοκη και αντιπαραθετική προβλη-
ματική που στριφογυρίζει γύρω και απλώνεται πέρα από τους άξονες της φυλής, του
φύλου και της κοινωνικής τάξης στη σύγχρονη αστική Αμερική.