

DAVID CRONENBERG AS MYTHMAKER: AN ARCHETYPAL
INTERPRETATION OF HIS FILMS,
1975 TO 1991

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
May, 1995

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By

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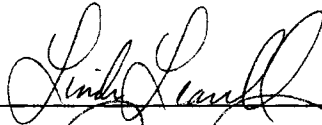
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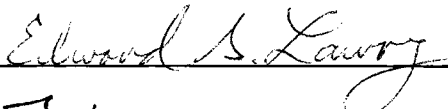
Dissertation Approved:



Dissertation Advisor









Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my major advisor, Dr. Leonard Leff, for his expertise, his intelligent supervision, constructive guidance, and friendship. I would equally like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Peter Rollins for his invaluable encouragement, advisement, wisdom, and friendship. My sincere appreciation extends to my other committee members, Dr. Linda Leavell and Dr. Edward Lawry, whose assistance and guidance are also invaluable.

I wish to express very special appreciation to my wife, Maggie, for her strong encouragement during times of difficulty, and for her love, patience, and understanding during the entire process. I would like to dedicate this project to the memory of my grandmother, Eunice Barnett, whose love, support, encouragement, and sacrifices paved the way for any successes I might enjoy. Thanks to all of my colleagues, friends, and students at Northwestern Oklahoma State University and Oklahoma State University for their encouragement over the past seven years.

Finally, I would like to thank the Department of English for its support during my seven years of study.

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CHAPTER I: THE CRONENBERG MYTHOS

Introduction

At its basic level, myth refers both to the elements which constitute a narrative and the complex of meanings behind the narrative. As such a form of narration, the cinema is one of the most recent manifestations of myth in human experience. As with the ancient oral tradition and later with written literature, visual literature now serves as the vehicle of transmission of a culture's concerns, anxieties, and self-image, i.e. its myths. Myth and mythology now moves into the cinematic realm and reaches a broader audience. In essence, the cinema has become for the modern world of the late twentieth century the collective cathedral of primitive *participation mystique* and the tribal dream house of modern civilization (Hill 4). Cinema, whether secular or religious in itself, promotes collective ideologies and can serve an essentially spiritual purpose. In a secular society, media (including film and television), rather than traditionally recognized religious institutions, often fulfill the functions of religion. In this sense, myth provides a cumulative cultural expression of the sacred mass consciousness. From this standpoint, myth and film are intertwined in terms of presentation and operate on a deeply numinous level. One fundamental expression of this interconnectedness rests in the area of genre. Genre films often rely on unimaginative depictions of formula plots and stereotypes; in so doing, genre films make uninspired use of archetypal material. However, when these archetypes are manipulated in an original manner which breaks the

traditional stereotype, artistry emerges and genre rises to new levels of expression.

Since his first feature in 1975, Canadian director David Cronenberg has created a body of filmwork which incorporates this mythic dimension into a unique signature. Cronenberg's films exhibit a firm thematic consistency, vision, and technique in spite of their reputation for visceral explicitness, violence, and sexuality. More importantly, these films display a significant use of mythic elements which construct a foundation on which to hang his various concerns. It is precisely this mythic substructure which infuses Cronenberg's films with creative authority and grounds his existential worldview.

However, that is not to say that Cronenberg is a filmmaker on the same level as a Kurosawa or a Renoir or a thinker more original or equal to a Kant or a Sartre. Cronenberg, regardless of his own artistic intentions and philosophical agenda, is a genre director. As such, he has found a certain modicum of success and acceptability; he has also managed his fair share of derision and contempt. For all of his philosophical posturing, Cronenberg is not a perfect director or artist. He may discuss in numerous interviews his viewpoints regarding biological predestination and free will, the illusion of religion, and the subversive nature of art and how each of his films reflect these and other matters, yet Cronenberg's films are often marked by lethargy, dull photography, weak characterization, and revolting special effects. While Cronenberg also may have a wide variety of literary influences, his philosophical point of view lacks

originality and is imbued with a sense of hubris not unlike the scientists in his films. Like the universe created in his features, Cronenberg's worldview is bleak, pessimistic, and devoid of hopefulness. Yet despite these deep flaws, perhaps even because of them, Cronenberg's body of work and his position as a late twentieth century filmmaker calls for examination.

This study analyzes the mythic material in Cronenberg's nine genre films. An examination of the first three films will focus on the foundations of his film mythology -- the use of creation myth in the first film, They Came From Within; apocalyptic myth and the Earth Goddess archetype, in Rabid, the second film; and the archetypal first family and the theme of past sins in the third film, The Brood. This analysis will continue through the director's second trilogy of films which collectively depicts the figure of the archetypal hero; in Scanners, the theme of intrafamilial warfare and paternal rebellion is examined; in Videodrome, the use of the Narcissus myth and the three stage heroic process is reviewed; finally, in The Dead Zone, a critique of the Messiah archetype is conducted with a focus on the influence of familial dysfunction. In the third group of films, an investigation into the various uses of the archetypal pattern of the Journey will be undertaken; in The Fly, the Cronenbergian conceit of the Disease of Finitude serves as the focus of inquiry while in Dead Ringers, attention focuses on the mythology of twinship and the quest for complete and autonomous separation of one being from another; finally, in Naked Lunch, the archetypal landscape will be examined. This study will conclude with a

brief overview of Cronenberg's existential and artistic vision. While the tone of this study may at times appear intensive, which might be mistaken for enthusiasm, this study does not roll in worship of the filmmaker. In fact, it does not endorse, accept, or agree with Cronenberg's viewpoints and philosophical agenda. Neither does it attempt to elevate the Canadian director into the pantheon of great auteurs such as Alfred Hitchcock, Jean Cocteau, or Francois Truffaut. What this study fundamentally attempts to do is to critically examine how an auteur can create a film mythology and how archetypal material can be utilized in this endeavor. It is an attempt at scholarly criticism, not enthusiastic hero-worship.

Biography

David P. Cronenberg was born in Toronto, Ontario, on March 15, 1943, to Milton and Esther Cronenberg. Milton was a writer who edited True Canadian Crime Stories and wrote comic books and short stories; Esther was a musician and accompanist for the National Ballet of Canada. As a youth, Cronenberg's chief interests were music, science, literature, and movies, particularly science fiction. He was also intrigued with writing and as an adolescent wrote and submitted several science fiction short stories to various magazines; though none were accepted, Cronenberg received letters from editors who encouraged him to keep writing. After receiving his public school education at Dewson Street Public School, Kent Senior School, Harbord Collegiate, and North Toronto Collegiate, Cronenberg entered the Honours Science program at the University of Toronto as an Ontario scholar in 1963; he switched to Honours English

Language and Literature the following year. He received the prestigious Epstein Award for a short story and was awarded the Gertrude Lawler Scholarship for finishing first at University College. In 1965, Cronenberg took a year off from his studies to travel in Europe. He returned and graduated in 1967 with a General B.A. in English. In 1966, he made his first short film, Transfer. He resumed his studies towards an M.A. but shortly thereafter chose to pursue filmmaking full-time and began shooting his first film, Stereo, in 1967.

After several years in the underground film scene in Toronto, Cronenberg completed his second feature, an art film entitled Crimes of the Future (1971), then traveled again to Europe on a Canada Council grant. A year later, he returned to Toronto and spent the next two years writing and preparing his first commercial feature, Orgy of the Blood Parasites, later retitled The Parasite Murders, Shivers, and, in the United States, They Came From Within, which concerned sexually liberating parasites. Completed and released in 1975, the low-budget film garnered a volley of negative criticism, yet broke Canadian box-office records. Its success led to his second commercial feature, the low budget vampire film, Rabid, in 1976. His growing reputation as an emerging "horror" filmmaker was solidified in 1979 with The Brood and its depiction of a disintegrating family. Scanners (1980), which dealt with telepathy, and Videodrome (1982), which focused on the dangers prevalent in television, confirmed his reputation as a viscerally explicit science fiction/horror director. In 1983, he directed his first adaptation; the only commercial film he

did not write, based on Stephen King's novel, The Dead Zone, concerned the travails of a reluctant psychic. (Fast Company (1979), a film about race-car driving, gives Cronenberg a co-writing credit with two other writers.) In 1986, he co-wrote and directed a remake of The Fly, which depicted the metamorphosis of human into fly; this film not only became his only major American box-office success, but won an Academy Award for special effects. Dead Ringers (1988), about drug-addicted twin gynecologists, enjoyed a modicum of success, though feminist critics were angry over his portrayal of these gynecologists. In 1991, Cronenberg wrote and directed his long-anticipated adaptation of William S. Burroughs' "unfilmable" Beat novel Naked Lunch. His most recent directing effort, an adaptation of David Hwang's Broadway play M. Butterfly (1993) was a box-office and critical disappointment.

Over the years, Cronenberg has directed various dramas for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He has further won awards at film festivals around the world. He currently lives in Toronto with his second wife and two children.

Genre, Myth, and Cronenberg

In constructing his cinemyth,¹ Cronenberg works in two specific film genres that are central in the mass consciousness of late twentieth century popular culture: horror and science fiction. Like myth, genre films serve as reflective narrative patterns which harbor unconscious anxieties inherent and in the psyche of the audience. They reflect a culture's self-image while resolving issues and alleviating social anxiety. In the past, science fiction and horror films have played an important role in this

context; but in the light of the technological revolution of the past three decades, these films will expand this purpose with even more urgency. Both genres are constructed around a primal, psychic core whose essence elicits strongly emotional responses in the viewer. Relieving the collective fears aroused by the socio-political conflicts and complexities of modern society, these films serve as collective dreams which stimulate and defuse such unresolved, repressed tensions by transforming them into fantasy and wish-fulfillment. Horror and science fiction films, like traditional myths, reveal the basic human need for comprehensible answers to cosmic questions while attempting to reconcile the individual to the unknown and unknowable. Such inquiries form precisely the focus of Cronenberg's cinema.

The critical traditions of these genres maintain that a reflexive relationship exists between the two with the science fiction film developing out of the traditional horror film; in fact, the science fiction film is the horror film "technologized" for a modern pragmatic and materialistic audience (Sobchak 29). Though they may have different explorations and emphases, these films share the same fundamental concerns. The horror film may focus on the individual in conflict with society or himself, while science fiction examines society and its institutions in conflict with each other or some alien Other. However, both genres firmly emphasize chaos, either moral or social, the disruption of order, natural or man-made, and the threat to normalcy and social harmony.

The horror genre draws an interior depiction of the

human struggle with evil, its inevitability, man's weakness under its influence, and the resultant struggle for redemption through pain. Similarly, the science fiction film typically deals with the more external threat created by human action and reaction. While the danger arises from the interior and the intimate in the horror film, it is exterior and disconnected from experience in the science fiction film. These genres give rise then to the notions of the "beast within" and the "alien invader" and contribute to the creation of a deeply apocalyptic sensibility; in fact, these two archetypal components form a juncture where both genres begin to merge. This often pessimistic doomsday view serves as a central theme for Cronenberg while also implying the rich capacity for mythic constructions residing at the root of these genres.

This twin potential for myth converges in the creation of two fundamental configurations: the Frankenstein myth (derived from Mary Shelley's 1818 gothic novel) and the Jekyll myth (based upon Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella). Both patterns express the gradual awareness of the individual's diminished status in a technological society and the primordial battleground inherent in his psychological makeup. These two distinctly modern archetypal motifs depict the same struggle uniting the horror/science fiction genres: the war between nature and science. This constant struggle connects each of Cronenberg's nine genre films² and becomes a fundamental thematic strand for the director.

One fundamental paradox proves central to these myths, genres, and Cronenberg -- the omnipotence of human science

and the fragility of human society (Doll and Faller 92). Both myths focus on the apocalyptic potential residing within society and the individual. Subsequently, these motifs reflect deep anxieties regarding life in the present and the future: a fear of losing control of the "Other" and a fear of self-destruction through science and technology. The Frankenstein myth depicts the supreme promise of science -- the opportunity for humans to play God by creating or tampering with life; the ultimate fear occurs when that life is discovered to be without a soul or meaning. The Jekyll myth harbors a hubristic connection to this pattern in that the individual becomes his own creator and creation -- he converts himself into his own monster. The dominant fear becomes the fear of self, of exposure of human nature's more primal aspects coupled with the demanding and taxing energy of repression. It evokes the conflicting tension between repression and release, inhibition and instinct, id and ego. Both archetypal constructs possess a broader base: the Faust myth. Here, the individual trades the certainties of life for an extension of the self beyond human limitations. Finally, it is this hubristic tendency, this arrogant reaching beyond boundaries, and its accompanying apocalyptic core which infuses and encircles Cronenberg's film mythology. Each of his films reflects the director's interest in myth; these characteristics fuse seamlessly to propel his work beyond the confines of genre and to establish him as an auteur in his own right.

Cronenberg has set himself apart from other directors and joined a small group of influential filmmakers (John Carpenter, Brian dePalma, Tobe Hooper, and Wes Craven) who

have revitalized the horror film from the mid-1970s through the 1980s and into the 1990s. However, more than any of these directors, Cronenberg has been singled out for his unified, idiosyncratic vision and artistic sensibility. As an artist, he reveals a fascination with the myriad ways in which the individual can be betrayed by his mind and body.

As an avid reader and writer well-versed in literature (especially science and experimental fictions), and his college career as an undergraduate English major at the University of Toronto during Northrop Frye's influential tenure,³ Cronenberg recognizes the significance of these archetypal patterns. He uses the Frankenstein myth as the predominant narrative paradigm for his films while utilizing the Jekyll myth for his interior details. Out of the convergence of these mythic patterns and genres, Cronenberg fashions his own unique subgenre which over time has been labeled "venereal horror," or body horror.⁴ Here, the director combines the horror film's emphasis on individual inner conflict with the science fiction film's focus on the external social conflict with the Other. Chaos rests at the center of venereal horror; it erupts biologically in visceral detail as the result of intense psychic turbulence. Furthermore, each of his films reflects a fundamental "monomyth"⁵ Cronenberg has fashioned from such elements as the Frankenstein/Jekyll/Faust motifs, the archetypal hero figure, and the journey pattern, and his apocalyptic awareness. In this pattern, a scientist (or medical doctor) pridefully attempts to improve upon nature through some new medical, biological, or psychological breakthrough; this experiment, often performed on or through

a woman, brings disastrous results which annihilate the individual and threaten the rest of society; the scientist perishes either at the hands of his creation or, driven insane with guilt, at his own hand; chaos erupts and wreaks havoc with the physical body and the mental state of the individual. From this fundamental motif, Cronenberg erects a structure of imagery and other mythoi (plot-formulas) which organize subsequent archetypal materials. Through repetition, enlargement, and expansion of these components, this framework becomes a cinemyth and connects each work in Cronenberg's oeuvre.

Critical and Philosophical Contexts

For most of his career, Cronenberg's work has suffered from critical myopia. However, in the past ten years, critical discussion and examination of his work has grown and developed, often in a bi-partisan fashion. Cronenberg's work has effectively split critical opinion into two camps: either full-fledged admiration or outright revulsion. Critics rarely remain indifferent to these films due to the strong reactions provoked in their audiences. Regardless of which pole of the critical spectrum one chooses, one cannot simply ignore Cronenberg's work.

The debate over the director's virtues and limitations begins with the anti-Cronenberg critics who take the filmmaker to task for his sensationalistic use of violent and sexual excess. His films are infamous for their visceral detail; because of this notoriety, the standard critical view has been to consider them as lacking any moral base or artistic purpose. As Cronenberg has gained more serious scholarly attention, these superficial viewpoints

have given way to more serious, and more vitriolic, considerations. The heaviest critical barrage has been feminist. More than one feminist critic has voiced suspicion or outrage at Cronenberg's continual portrayal of women either as predatory figures of menace to a patriarchal society or as objects reserved for experimentation by male authority. The director is especially reviled by critics who interpret his films as supporting the naturalness of dominant patriarchal ideology, i.e. claiming that the female's masculinity, rage, and activeness must remain repressed or apocalypse results. The director's provocative imagery has also been accused by conservative critics of harboring homoerotic and bisexual sentiments. Other areas which have drawn critical fire include the director's supposed condemnation of bourgeois lifestyles, his fascination with morbidity, negativity, and pessimism, and his ideological naivete. His films have further been charged with being reactionary and subversive because they do not reaffirm establishment values or do so negatively. The world created in his films is criticized for its joylessness, its inability to affirm anything, and its ability to be anti-everything (Wood 132, 130). In Cronenberg's films, this stance proclaims, there is not only little joy; there is little potential for joy. This sense of negativity present in his films is Cronenberg's greatest limitation and thus accounts for the uniform drabness and lack of energy and excitement in his work.

The pro-Cronenberg critics hold that most of this negative reaction has been so obsessed with blood, gore, violence, and sex that it has completely ignored any meaning

or message the films might be presenting. These critics recognize the director's fluid uniformity of vision. In so doing, this viewpoint focuses on several overriding concerns: the challenging of mortal barriers by scientists/artists, an abiding concern for the actual or metaphorical family, and an obsession with the schism between mind and body. While his initial trilogy of low-budget films (which bears the brunt of most of the negative criticism) focuses on the sexual transmission and perpetuation of horror, this theme develops and branches out over the remaining films into the complete human system, both mind and body, and cleaves the totality of mind into the real and the imagined. All of these films, his critical supporters indicate, reflect the growing influence of a technological world on human senses while depicting this social acceleration's effects on the individual subconscious. Some critics have focused on Cronenberg's use of irony and comedy in exposing the fragile illusion of order; each of his films has subtle degrees of black humor and satire which portray and ridicule the unforeseen consequences of power and progress. However, the majority of these favorable opinions tends to focus on Cronenberg's obsession with the mental/physical dichotomy dominating every film; specifically, this attention examines the revolt of instinct over rationality and the anarchy produced when repressed emotional forces erupt and overturn reason, morality, and order. Hubristic rationalism and the intricate balance of human nature form the thematic foundation on which all Cronenberg criticism, positive or negative, rests. Though critical consensus has not elevated

Cronenberg to the stature of a Hitchcock or a Kurosawa, Cronenberg's advocates/admirers consider him at least an interesting filmmaker and at most a deeply original and philosophical auteur.

In examining scholarly interest in the films of David Cronenberg, one finds immediately a relative dearth of critical interest as a whole. This lack of attention, however, does not necessarily imply a negative; it merely reflects a source of more critical opportunity. Critical interest in Cronenberg has increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s and his work seems to be gradually attracting more and more scholarly attention with each passing year. On the other hand, there is a fairly large volume of journalistic articles written on Cronenberg and specific films, though these appear largely in film genre magazines such as Cinefantastique, Cineflex, and American Film, as well as popular news magazines such as Maclean's, Time, and Newsweek. The number of scholarly books written on Cronenberg is relatively small, numbering only two, though as interest increases more can be expected; however, in studies devoted to the horror genre, discussions of his work are almost always provided. In the preparation of this study, a fairly large number of secondary sources was procured. What follows is a review of those sources most pertinent and most helpful in analyzing Cronenberg's work, his influences, and the methodology used in the construction of this study.

The most important works dealing with Cronenberg and his films include Piers Handling's ground-breaking collection of critical essays, The Shape of Rage, published in 1983; Chris

Rodley's 1992 commentary and interview study, Cronenberg on Cronenberg; and David Breskin's 1992 collection of interviews, Inner Views: Filmmakers in Conversation. Several significant articles deserve attention, especially those by Christopher Sharrett, Alan Stanbrook, Mary B. Campbell, and others.

The most seminal work on Cronenberg would have to be the Handling collection. Though covering only those films up to 1983, They Came From Within (a.k.a. Shivers), Rabid, The Brood, Scanners, and Videodrome, Handling's anthology offers a thorough compendium of critical perspectives regarding Cronenberg's work and his status as a film artist and treats the filmmaker with a high degree of seriousness which had not previously been afforded him. Particularly relevant and significant pieces include the following; however, the entire collection is valuable. The strongest and most important essay in the anthology is William Beard's "The Visceral Mind: The Major Films of David Cronenberg," a thorough critical overview of Cronenberg's thematic concerns, his major films to that time, his student films, and a general critical appraisal of his status as a filmmaker and as a Canadian filmmaker. Beard meticulously examines the director's first five films and presents the essential themes which constitute Cronenberg's cinematic universe. John Harkness' "The Word, The Flesh, and David Cronenberg" discusses the way in which science and scientists in Cronenberg's cinema create the possibilities of new worlds, the function of his victims, the way science creates a disturbing alternative vision to contemporary life, and the evolution of Cronenberg's thematic concerns.

Piers Handling's "A Canadian Cronenberg" examines Cronenberg's role as a Canadian filmmaker while clarifying the imaginative bases of his cinema. Handling situates Cronenberg well outside the dominant aesthetic tradition in Canadian art "only to recuperate him thematically into an imaginative continuum that marks much of our best cinema." However, in "Cronenberg: A Dissenting View," Robin Wood, possibly Cronenberg's most acerbic critic, reluctantly reiterates his previous attack, made five years earlier in The American Nightmare, and defends "the legitimacy of a politicized criticism." Though Wood is quick to add that his "distaste for Cronenberg's films is not the product of my current political position," he firmly puts forth the idea that "all criticism is political" and, after a brief detour into his personal life, outlines his standards regarding evaluation. He even goes so far as to "defend" Cronenberg on the grounds that his work does have artistic authenticity and "crystallizes a particular national angst" before noting the joyless, valueless world depicted and the total negativity and repulsiveness which characterizes Cronenberg's work. The collection concludes with a very thorough (38 pages) interview with the director conducted by William Beard and Piers Handling which examines a number of positions held by Cronenberg as well as issues regarding his particular preoccupations as a filmmaker. No examination of Cronenberg's work would be complete without a close reading of this collection; it occupies a primary place in the scholarship surrounding Cronenberg and his work.

A second central volume focusing on Cronenberg is the Rodley collection of interviews with the filmmaker,

Cronenberg on Cronenberg. This collection of insightful interviews is prefaced with informative commentary regarding each phase of the director's career. Each film is thoroughly discussed and Cronenberg's overall aesthetic and philosophy is put forth in his own words. Equally compelling is the Briskin volume which republishes interviews conducted by the author for Rolling Stone magazine with Cronenberg as well as with Francis Ford Coppola, David Lynch, Oliver Stone, Spike Lee, Robert Altman, and Tim Burton. These two published collections offer vital insight from the filmmaker's point of view regarding each film, his overall vision, and his specific thematic, cinematic, and societal concerns.

Several individual pieces are highly integral and incisive to any Cronenberg study. The following are comprised of general scholarly essays, journalistic articles, and discussions in individual book-length studies and overviews. One of the most valuable essays concerning Cronenberg's films through Videodrome remains Christopher Sharrett's "Myth and Ritual in the Post-Industrial Landscape: The Horror Films of David Cronenberg." Sharrett finds in the director's films an "extraordinarily rich body of mythic content that interfaces with apocalyptic thought" and which "reflect[s] anxiety, not only about all totalizing theories of society, but also about culture's being cut off from a mythic past." Sharrett firmly places Cronenberg in the apocalyptic tradition of American letters while extensively examining each of the director's first five films. This piece is a crucial component for any discussion of Cronenberg and myth and the

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subsequent relationship to modern culture. Mary B. Campbell's "Biological Alchemy and the Films of David Cronenberg" provides a thoughtful introduction to the director and his first two films and discusses several of the filmmaker's fundamental concerns and motifs.

The most academic and analytical discussion comes from Steven Shaviro in his postmodern film study The Cinematic Body. Shaviro devotes an entire chapter to Cronenberg's films and provides a thoroughly original interpretation of Scanners, Videodrome, The Fly, and Dead Ringers; by examining Cronenberg's emphasis on the human body, Shaviro articulates the limits of vision and of representation as he examines Cronenberg's "violation of bodily integrity" and how the director's films "go against the grain of our most deeply rooted social myths." Like the previous Sharrett essay, this discussion forms an integral perspective regarding the director's films and his thematic concerns. An especially insightful article focusing on Dead Ringers provides a valuable perspective; Marcie Frank's PMLA article, "The Camera and the Speculum: David Cronenberg's Dead Ringers," which examines the ways feminist film theory can integrate psychoanalysis, asserts that the film "subordinates the examination of women to the relationship between two brothers who are gynecologists"; Cronenberg's film asks questions about the analogous status that film theory has given to its various analytical devices.

While these sources provide the majority of information presented in this study, other sources provided insight and foundation for the methodology and perspective used in analyzing Cronenberg's films and his cinematic mythology.

The first of these sources aided in the establishment of a proper critical stance from which to examine Cronenberg's works. The most significant of these is Geoffrey Hill's highly competent and perceptive cinema study Illuminating Shadows: The Mythic Power of Film. Hill, a psychotherapist, analyzes seventeen significant films in establishing his central thesis that films fulfill ancient yearnings toward the numinous in a godless, technologically obsessed age and that the film theatre is the modern equivalent to a tribal dreamhouse. The movie theatre provides spiritual transformations and archetypal insights. Though Hill evades the issue of aesthetics and the contributions of various critical approaches to cinematic myth theory, he does hold an ecumenical psychoanalytic film theory and provides insight into the myth-critical approach. Hill's method is chiefly informed by Jung, Eliade, and Frye. His central strength is primarily organizational, but there are some very useful insights provided in his discussions of certain films from a mythic standpoint. One valuable book-length study provided much needed foundational information; Bettina Knapp's thoughtful study A Jungian Approach to Literature; especially important are her chapter discussions on Euripides' The Bacchantes and the archetypal figure of the Shaman. Further, her particular approach to arrangement and structure provided some much needed ideas.

In examining the influence of Nabokov and Burroughs upon Cronenberg's filmmaking, several works yielded essential information which is connected with Cronenberg's artistic vision and his idiosyncratic iconography. Douglas Fowler's Reading Nabokov provided key connections regarding

Cronenberg's own vision and led to the assertion that Nabokov's idea provides the essential themes on which the director's vision was built. Jennie Skerl's study, William S. Burroughs, aided greatly in deciphering Naked Lunch, the novel, and established key connections with the film version as well as providing important insight into Burroughs' own unique mythological system and especially his imagery.

Lastly, three texts aided in not only the establishment of a methodology, but also supplied key foundations from which to view films in general. Though not directly or indirectly quoted in this study, two works by C.G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious and Man and His Symbols, yielded extremely significant concepts which have informed my own general critical stance; both of these are essential works in the area of myth criticism and supply rich and invaluable insights. Equally significant to the philosophical discussion of Cronenberg's work is Robert G. Olson's study, An Introduction to Existentialism, which was invaluable in supplying a firm underpinning of knowledge regarding the existentialist viewpoint, enabled me to unearth Cronenberg's own philosophy.

Though this list of important sources is not comprehensive, it is comprised of the most significant works which informed, shaped, and refined this study.

However, while the bulk of critical reaction to Cronenberg bears more traditional and fashionable critical agendas, very little has been done in the way of archetypal criticism.⁶ The present study attempts to partly fill this dearth. In surveying each of the director's nine genre films, this approach hopes to provide a structural overview

so that the novice to Cronenberg studies or the student of film or of the archetypal approach may gain access to the rich network of themes and imagery found in this director's body of work. In essence, this study serves as an introduction to Cronenberg by way of his depiction of universal concerns.

In conducting inquiries into human nature through his own personal concerns, Cronenberg could be considered a philosophical filmmaker. His films are important and worthwhile subjects of study due to their continual emphasis on contemporary issues and dilemmas facing the individual in a largely technological civilization. Throughout his filmwork, Cronenberg has portrayed a distinctly philosophical agenda in delineating collective repression overturned by collective desires, examining the Cartesian mind/body split, questioning the notions of balance and control, and exploring the borders separating hallucination and reality, the individual and society. Further, he focuses on the alienation of the individual, on a personal, societal, physical, and mental level, produced by a rapidly changing environment. He also surveys the gradual transmutation of the human biological system as it assimilates technological advancement and the resultant potential for individual and mass destruction.

As a middle-class Jewish youngster whose parents were actively involved in the arts, Cronenberg was encouraged to think for himself. Though both his parents were atheists who had abandoned Judaism before his birth, Cronenberg was urged to form his own opinions concerning religion; he subsequently considered himself an agnostic rather than an

atheist since atheism connoted a belief and he considered himself beyond belief. His youthful interests in fiction and science led him to a lifelong interest in biology, biochemistry, and the physical basis of human thought and imagination (Morris 16). The most significant scientific influence he encountered was the theory of Emergent Evolution, a variation on fundamental Darwinian evolutionary theory which argued that evolution was not a continuous, gradual process; instead, leaps have occurred which produced biological novelties. This theory infused much of Cronenberg's early work and diminished in his later films, especially The Fly and Dead Ringers. This influence explains the director's fundamental notion that the human being is not the end of the evolutionary road; instead, something else lies beyond *homo sapiens* in the form of mutations.

The philosophical thought of Rene Descartes, who was obsessed with the schism between mind and body and the complex interrelationship between the two, was another significant influence on Cronenberg. The emphasis on the physical body and the specificity of physical death led Cronenberg to a Cartesian split. For him, this split between mind/soul and physical existence, codified in the Latin phrase *Timor mortis conturbat me* ("the fear of death disturbs me"), becomes the basis for all horror; it eventually establishes the physical body as the center of everything. For Cronenberg, when the body dies, the brain, the mind, and the soul all die as well. Thus, Cronenberg's one great theme throughout his entire body of work is death: how one deals with its onslaught and what it reveals about

life.

Cronenberg's greatest influences, however, are literary. Though the director was influenced to varying degrees by such modernist writers as James Joyce, Henry Miller, and T.S. Eliot, he was particularly interested in the Beat movement, specifically, the work of William Burroughs, who would have the most lasting significance. Especially influential was Burroughs' scorn for the middle-class and totalitarian states, corporate capitalism, addiction and the mind-expanding possibilities of drugs, and the subsequent effects of physical bondage and social victimization. Most importantly, Burroughs provided Cronenberg with a pessimistic vision of a world trapped in a parasitical, destructive sexuality, and controlled by technological power groups. In his youth, Cronenberg read almost everything Burroughs wrote, recognizing in the Beat novelist an imagination almost identical to his own. The future director drew much of his imagery from Burroughs' literary iconography.

While Burroughs provided the imagery and themes, Vladimir Nabokov provided Cronenberg with an overall artistic vision. Nabokov's antinaturalistic emphasis, especially concerning reality, played a crucial role in Cronenberg's development. Most significant was Nabokov's view that an artist does not deal with reality, but in fact has to reinvent everything -- each work is the invention of a world. Thus, there is no truly realistic novel or film. Cronenberg further drew from Nabokov the notion that the artist has absolutely no social responsibility whatsoever.

Cronenberg insists that he has few, if any, filmic

influences. He was a student of the surrealists at university; his background as an underground filmmaker in the 1960s and 1970s reflects an interest in filmmakers such as Ed Emshwiller, Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, and Nicholas Roeg. Cronenberg does admit admiring other directors but insists fervently that this interest is not equivalent to any kind of influence. From these various areas then (science, philosophy, and literature), Cronenberg fashions his existential foundation.

The Cronenberg Mythos

Regardless of the weight or accuracy of adverse critical determinations, the interior logic and purpose of Cronenberg's work, i.e. "The Cronenberg Project," must be examined. As Cronenberg's career has progressed, his various titles and notoriety have masked the actual development of a maturing talent and an underlying network of ideas.

In his films, Cronenberg explores the tenuous territory between reality and nightmare as well as the psychological terrain of individual subjectivity. The director has essentially continued work on the same project, which grows increasingly more complex, refined, and highly achieved with each new film. Furthermore, Cronenberg's cinema is chiefly an existentialist instrument. This viewpoint emphasizes the uniqueness and the isolation of the individual, and individual experience, in an indifferent, often hostile universe; it further has no explanation for human existence and stresses responsibility and freedom of choice for individual actions. Cronenberg's philosophy reflects these concerns in focusing on the problematic split between

physical, biological existence and mental, spiritual essence and the complicated interconnections between the two realms. Cronenberg continually delves into the ambiguous line separating biology from spirit but especially examines the anxiety produced by a lack of foreknowledge. He makes no claim to ultimate meaning, refuses the notion of any external moral force guiding the universe, dismisses moral absolutes in favor of personal freedom, and questions the nature of sexuality and gender differences. In the final analysis, his primary emphasis is on death; in each film, human beings carry with them the seeds of their own destruction which can erupt at any time and from which there is no defense and no escape. For him, death, the source of all horror, is physical and body-conscious; nothing is true or absolute. Reality remains merely a human construct, one which is highly changeable. Yet this inevitability of death also serves as an absolute strength and provides a sense of personal freedom. However, freedom is limited, if not by external structures, then by internal configurations. Though free will resists the idea of predestination, there exists the implication that a large amount of human identity is biologically predestined, due to the mysterious programming of genes and chromosomes. This biological determinism forms the core of Cronenberg's distinctly human-centered universe; here, nothing is forbidden.

The rational universe presented in these films is not a complete system; neither is it presided over by a creator-God. Instead, it develops in an evolutionary progression and harbors a highly unpredictable character. The individual grows ineffectual, overcome with feelings of

powerlessness and entrapment which completely undermine knowledge and subjectivity; the world remains unknowable and mysterious while reality and illusion grow indistinguishable.

Cronenberg views order as a deceptive mask which the universe, specifically the social universe, wears, hence his constant return to anarchy and rebellion, particularly in biological terms. The individual confronts the cosmos without any rational scheme to master it. Any attempt to impose order only accelerates personal apocalypse. This universe reveals an alienated consciousness in a morally bankrupt society which destroys individuals while passing its sins on to their children. His overtly Cartesian concerns and his fascination with physical decay eventually point to his central concern -- the interface of the human and the inhuman. Arriving at this, Cronenberg fulfills his mission by radically subverting the individual's ability to elevate humanity above other lifeforms.

Examined together, Cronenberg's nine feature films establish a unique cinematic mythology emphasizing chaos over the apparent fragility of order. The director creates a mythos which, ironically, de-mythologizes and replaces more traditional systems of belief. Cronenberg erects a new postmodern mythology which parodies and criticizes conventional myth, while establishing the individual self as the source of all such structures.

Methodology

As a work of auteur criticism, this study has a twofold purpose. First, I intend to show that the nine science fiction/horror feature films of David Cronenberg can be

viewed as a singular entity, a modern cinematic mythology, or body of unified narratives portraying fantastic incidents, such as the creation of a universe and its apocalypse, strangely gifted figures, and a comprehensive worldview. Second, in a broader sense, I intend to show that, by taking such an approach, the full mythmaking potential of cinema can be examined and appreciated. Further, I will show that the archetypal, or myth, school of criticism supplies the proper methodology for the interpretation of meaning and value in genre films, especially those belonging to the science fiction and horror categories. Though it reached its apex of influence in the 1960s and 1970s, this particular method is now considered "out of fashion." I intend to show that it still has practical and meaningful benefits, especially for films that have heretofore been excluded from serious critical consideration. As an introductory approach, archetypal criticism can provide a firm foundation for and prelude to other methods.

As a contribution to film criticism, my study strives to verify the importance and usefulness of the aesthetic principles of myth criticism, particularly when applied to film. The myth approach offers a new slant to Cronenberg's films in that the subject matter lends itself easily to such an interpretation. Not only do the archetypes themselves have significant meanings, but so might their limitless variations. Since Cronenberg seems to have made one film nine times, this approach readily encourages the analysis of variations, especially for comparison and contrasts. The same can be said for the horror and science fiction genres.

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Since both genres, and Cronenberg's films in particular, emphasize the subconscious and primal fears, desires, and images, they lend themselves easily to the Myth approach. However, though the focus is on archetypal material, "archetypal" does not automatically mean "Jungian." While Jung's work has its significant place, this study tends to hold to Northrop Frye's definition of an archetype as a recurring symbol found in literary works rather than an image in Jungian racial memory. Because Cronenberg's work especially evokes strong emotional responses from its audiences, these films are rich in their use of universal symbols and concepts such as the hero, the journey, and various other motifs and characters. As a result, this archetypal material evokes shared symbolic qualities in audiences.

Conclusion

Cronenberg's mythos is not systematically and explicitly described in each film; however, it is thematically developed and consistently functions as an evolving metaphor. Fundamental patterns, situations, and images recur through the cycles and amplify their significance with each repetition and each new context. Each film serves as an important, necessary stage in a continuing film experiment which Cronenberg has progressed and refined - film to film - as a commitment to finding a response to mortality. With traditional religious belief unacceptable, each film explores an alternative way of defusing anxiety about death; mutation and transformation serve as potential cures for the mind/body schism, itself the result of the incomprehensibility of physical demise.

Cronenberg's manipulation of basic plot-formulas and characters, together with his existential tone and visceral imagery, establish these works as quintessential examples of modern cinema's unique mythopoetic capability.

The ultimate goal of this study is to provide a new context for Cronenberg's films, themes, and iconography; it also intends to function as a guide for using the archetypal approach in analyzing film. As a model for analysis and structure, this study uses Geoffrey Hill's approach to seven films in his book-length study of film and myth, Illuminating Shadows. In examining Cronenberg's nine films, Chapter Two will focus on the Cosmic trilogy formed by the director's first three films; Chapter Three will analyze the Hero trilogy of the early 1980s; Chapter Four will probe the more recent Journey trilogy of films; and Chapter Five will conclude with an overview of Cronenberg's existential and artistic visions.

¹Term coined by Hill, 37.

²This study examines Cronenberg's first nine films, produced from 1975 to 1991, because these reflect the director's progression from low-budget director to mainstream award-winning filmmaker, and express his consistent thematic concerns within the confines of genre. Student works such as Stereo and Crimes of the Future, while difficult to obtain, lack the artistic maturity of Cronenberg's later films. Cronenberg's most recent film, M. Butterfly (1993), fails to fit the schemata of his earlier films; in a sense, this film does present a "creature" who is both sexually ambiguous and primarily a mental construction. Still, Cronenberg's M. Butterfly makes a distinct break from genre and enters a more mainstream arena; thus, since this study focuses on the director's works in the science fiction/horror genres, this tenth film falls outside the purview that has been established.

³Northrop Frye is acknowledged as the most important spokesman for archetypal criticism. He taught at Victoria College, University of Toronto during the 1960s while Cronenberg was an English major. His 1963 Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, Princeton UP) is considered a masterwork in the field.

⁴Cronenberg explains to Chris Rodley that the label "biological horror" is often attached to his films which "really refers to the fact that my films are very body conscious" more so than other horror/science fiction films which are more focused on the technological or the supernatural (58).

⁵"Monomyth" refers to mythologist Joseph Campbell's

term to signify the standard mythological adventure of the hero in his masterwork The Hero With A Thousand Faces (2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968). According to Campbell, the monomyth is a "magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation- initiation-return" (30). The term was first used in James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake (New York: Viking, 1939. 581).

⁶Christopher Sharrett, "Myth and Ritual in the Post-Industrial Landscape: The Horror Films of David Cronenberg," Persistence of Vision, 3/4 (Summer 1986): 111-30, is the only scholarly article which deals with myth and archetypes in Cronenberg's films. Though Sharrett's article is central, it does not go far enough in terms of its discussion of archetypal material, opting instead to focus on cultural criticism; moreover, it discusses only four films: They Came From Within, The Brood, Scanners, and Videodrome.

CHAPTER II:**THE COSMIC TRILOGY**

(THEY CAME FROM WITHIN, RABID, AND THE BROOD)

Introduction

Cronenberg's first three films introduce the core elements and themes of the director's cinematic universe. These elements in their infancy appeared previously in Cronenberg's student films Stereo (1969) and Crimes of the Future (1970), small art films completed by the director as an English major at the University of Toronto. Both of these student featurettes reflect Cronenberg's interest in science fiction, philosophy, and abstract composition. Stereo, set in the future, depicts the bizarre experimentation conducted by "The Canadian Academy for Erotic Inquiry" on a small group of young adults in order to expose an inherent "polymorphous perversity." Also futuristic in setting, Crimes of the Future revolves around disease, in this case "Rouge's Malady," caused by cosmetics, which annihilates millions of post-pubescent females. The plot centers on the efforts of a conspiracy of heterosexual pedophiles to kidnap and impregnate a little girl in order to avoid the malady; this act is left up to the sexually ambiguous and hesitant hero, Adrian Tripod. These works were preceded by two film shorts, Transfer (1966), Cronenberg's first film effort, and From the Drain (1967); the former is a brief sketch involving a psychiatrist and his patient while the latter is a surrealist sketch in which two men sit, fully clothed, in a bathtub at a futuristic veterans' home talking about the changes in human and plant biology. The elements treated in these early works receive a much deeper investigation and

expression in Cronenberg's first commercial features.

These first releases, They Came From Within, Rabid, and The Brood, constitute the creation of the Cronenbergian universe, its end, and the archetypal first family which inhabits it. These mythic constructions belie traditional religious dimensions; instead, Cronenberg infuses these elements with his own secular worldview. He initiates his own existential cosmogony by drawing on archetypal themes and images and then supplying his own unique "spin" on their subsequent details and implications. The result is a complex parody of a traditional mythological system which focuses on biological tampering, the liberating impact of transformation, and the corrupting influence of the past on the present and the future.

The first film in this cosmic trilogy, They Came From Within, treats the themes of rampant sexual parasitism/addiction, gender blending, and hubristic rationalism in a sardonic myth of creation. Significantly, Cronenberg's parody of the Genesis story depicts the deification of human instinct and the ensuing fall of the human mind, complete with its restraints, obsessions, and phobias. The physical body becomes the battlefield in which this abstract power struggle plays itself out. Cronenberg uses scientific rationalism, with its desire to improve upon humankind, as the catalyst for the creation of a new life form, the emergence of a new consciousness, and the destruction of a previous awareness. The director's depiction of a sexual epidemic on an isolated island high-rise apartment complex becomes a myth in which order and restraint are overthrown by instinct and passion.

The second film, Rabid, mirrors the first and serves as a companion film to it; but more importantly, Rabid functions as an apocalypse to the previously established creation story in the first film -- an end to match the beginning. In this film, the same hubristic rationalism again tampers with nature and unleashes a vampiric sexual force which spreads a plague throughout Montreal. With its stark images of epidemic and martial law, the film ushers in a significant apocalyptic sensibility and couples it with a heavy indictment of the feminine principle, and its threat to patriarchy, to produce a misogynistic view of woman in a male-dominated universe.

The third film in this initial trilogy, The Brood, localizes the disintegration of society to the microcosmic family unit. Here, the director's existential version of the first family story found in both creation and apocalyptic myths. Yet again, intellectual pride attempts to improve upon humanity, this time focusing upon the mental rather than the physical aspect of mankind. In depicting the treatment of the metaphoric *Psychoplasms* approach to psychology, Cronenberg delves into the inner tensions of generational family relations, the continual cycle of emotional and physical abuse, and the dangers of the maternal and the failure of the paternal. The story revolves around a child caught in a devastating custody battle between her loving, but weak father and her insane mother. Ultimately, The Brood, which has a strong autobiographical base,¹ portrays a dark, visceral power struggle between domination and ineffectuality, between mothers and fathers, and between mind and body.

They Came From Within (1976)

Cronenberg's first feature stands out even among his subsequent works as a pure horror film, disturbing in its implications and graphic in its visceral assault on the audience.² The film firmly initiated "The Cronenberg Project" by merging the director's thematic obsessions and a trademark organic preoccupation with the body and the sexually violent.

While They Came from Within definitely succeeds according to the central tenet of the horror genre to shock and repulse, it also takes on broader concerns which lift the film out of the limitations imposed by its genre. Here Cronenberg makes it clear that he is much more interested in exploring abstract concepts and dimensions than in simply shocking his audience. As an auteur with an educational foundation in the sciences and literature, Cronenberg affiliates himself with the anxiety created by the modern technological society. He establishes a landscape consumed by catastrophe in which rationality occupies a rather exalted position over the physical. Cronenberg's universe in They Came From Within possesses a decidedly humanistic flavor tainted by a heavily pessimistic and existential spirit. This initial endeavor reflects a deep anxiety intermixed with a sardonic attitude towards the modern environment while separating it from a mythic past. Cronenberg inherently uses myth to parody myth, establishing an ironic, existential cinemyth. He further adds parodic versions of creation and apocalypse set against the uncertainty of a bleak urban landscape. One subtle message he imparts in They Came from Within, and further developed

in his later films, implies that the mythological traditions of the past fail to enrich the chaotic present; a new mythology should present itself to reinvigorate and revitalize this dystopia.

Cronenberg lays the foundations for this new mythology through his "combination aphrodisiac and venereal disease" and the resultant chaotic liberation it promises. In so doing, this initial work becomes a compendium of mythic structures, themes, and images that would develop and mature in his subsequent films. In They Came From Within,

Cronenberg constructs a parody which incorporates sexual imagery, the traditional flood myth, and a heavy strain of apocalyptic awareness to form a uniquely existential creation myth.

Synopsis

In Starliner Towers, an isolated modern high rise apartment complex, Dr. Emil Hobbes has created a form of parasite that can take over the function of failing body organs in order to save life. However, Hobbes' real purpose is to cure mankind's over-rationality which would allow individuals to reconnect with their primal impulses. Actually, Hobbes' parasite is a sexually transmitted bug which, upon entering the body, acts as a strange aphrodisiac, which ensures its continual spread to other bodies. After he implanting a parasite in a sexually active teenager, Hobbes realizes the imminent danger he has created. Hobbes kills the girl and then commits suicide; however, his efforts are too late. The girl has already infected one of her older, married lovers, Andrew Tudor. Despite the efforts of Dr. Roger St. Luc, the resident

physician, and Hobbes' partner, Rollo Linsky, the parasites spread rapidly throughout the complex, transforming the inhabitants and instigating an orgy of chaos and destruction. At the end, the surviving infected apartment dwellers, led by St. Luc, calmly leave the underground garage in a convoy, setting off to infect the world.

Cronenberg's Creation Myth

Infused with Cronenberg's idiosyncratic vision, They Came From Within "founds" the universe which fully develops throughout Cronenberg's oeuvre.³ It serves as a cosmic myth encompassing both a creation and, to a lesser degree, an apocalypse, portraying the beginning of a new society and an ending of a previous one. While most critics have emphasized the film's apocalypticism in its profoundly pessimistic portrait of modern society, few have actually noted the equally valid creation of a new sensibility arising from the ashes of the old.

Generally, a cosmic myth would include not only the creation of the world and humanity, but also a fall of humanity from a state of perfection as well as the heavenly struggle between groups of immortals. In They Came From Within, Cronenberg, an agnostic, sardonically touches on each of these incidents as he depicts the gradual transformation of the society on Starliner Island. The "state of perfection" ironically is a coldly antiseptic, repressed status quo which gives way to a literal transforming flood of passion; the "heavenly" struggle becomes a revolution of libidinous forces over restraint; and the creation is instigated by a scientist hoping to improve mankind.

Inevitably, a creation myth holds a significant psychological meaning; a cosmos is born out of chaos or nothingness and provides a metaphor for an awakening consciousness. Cronenberg forms his myth by establishing and elevating chaos from superficial order and conformity. He, in effect, generates a new universe of disorder. The old universe portrayed in *Starliner Towers* represents a dead world populated by human automatons who move through a coldly conformist routine of existence. Vitality is either repressed or dwindling, as evidenced by the Tudors and the several elderly people seen wandering the premises. Passion is likewise frowned upon or ignored, except when deemed illicit as in the off screen affair between the adult Nicholas and the teenage Annabelle and in the implication that this teenager willingly had a multitude of older suitors in the building.

Cronenberg reduces life to cool interiors of modernized comfort and convenience which hold little warmth. *Starliner* functions as a microcosm reflecting the late twentieth-century sensibility: selfish, frigid, superficial. Into this passionless environment, Cronenberg infuses an overabundance of uncontrolled passion and forbidden sensuality running the gamut from lesbianism and pedophilia to incest and sadomasochism. Since the sex act plays a central role in the act of creation, Cronenberg pushes this element to the extreme. This sensualistic creation myth functions as a regenerative event as the inhabitants fundamentally experience a rebirth and rekinship with the anarchical element in human existence. Rather than portraying the events at *Starliner Towers* as a chaotic end

to society, Cronenberg instead posits that catharsis springs forth from chaos and brings about a new beginning. A damaged existence is replaced and restructured into a new orientation driven by instinctual drives rather than controlled by a flawed superego.

Throughout the film, chaos gradually replaces complacency. Calm exteriors give way to raging emotions. The film chronicles the usurpation of rationality by instinct, the modern overrun by the primitive. In effect, Cronenberg generates a primordial act, depicting not "the transformation of chaos into cosmos" (Eliade, Return 12), but the changing of the cosmos into chaos by unleashing the repressed energy of immanence. He calls into existence a cosmos infused with disruption, free and unfettered, and does away with a cosmos entangled in restraint.

Sex becomes the metaphor and chief agent for this regeneration; therefore, They Came From Within emphasizes potent sexual imagery. Just as many cultures (Egyptian, Hindu, etc) view creation as a sexual act, so does Cronenberg. Creation myths often intermix images of divine beings masturbating the universe into creation, the primeval mound of earth being penetrated by the hot rays of the sun, the commingling of the waters of life with the firmament, or the Sun setting into Gaia. Cronenberg's film proclaims this active sexual function; throughout the film individuals and couples literally mad with sexuality and, for all practical purposes, celebrating sex in a variety of ways. All manners of sexual congress are presented; superficially, of course, the purpose would seem to be shock; however, in constructing his creation myth, complete with an active sexual

ingredient, Cronenberg actually utilizes imagery and actions which have signified for a variety of cultures the creation of the universe. Cronenberg shows us graphically how a universe comes into being and spreads its creative force. The closing shots of the film establish his myth of creation as the starting point for his developing cinematic mythos.

Furthermore, the film continues with a related mythic tradition often associated with creation: the deluge myth. The flood myth is integral to the destruction, or apocalyptic end, of an old society and the birth of a new civilization. While destroying the old creation, this myth gives birth to two archetypal images: the Destructive Mother, due to the breaking of the eternal waters of the Great Mother, who sweeps away the old life while preserving the seed of a new beginning; and the emergence of a new hero who is born of the cosmic waters from the womb of the Great Mother. The basement pool scene becomes pivotal for the emergence of this new community. The waters of the swimming pool obviously function metaphorically not only as the unconscious, but also as the cosmic waters of the universe.

As the apartment-dwellers rampage about the complex still in the grips of their transformation, only one "normal" individual is left uninfected. This figure, St. Luc, is eventually forced back into the indoor pool by the encircling mob, and pulled beneath the waters by the transformed Betts as Forsythe ominously rises up out of the waters, like the Destroyer-Mother, to kiss, and thereby infect (i.e. transform), the physician. Upon St. Luc's submersion, the residents throw themselves joyously into the creative waters, eerily lit from underneath by blue light,

and thrash about in an orgy of conversion. Here, creation becomes complete. The old consciousness has passed away to be replaced with a new sentience. In the process, a new heroic figure emerges. The scene cuts to the garage doors slowly opening to reveal St. Luc, with Forsythe by his side, leading the caravan of residents out of the old wilderness of Starliner Towers into the night and neon of Montreal, a new Jerusalem. In this sense, a deluge,⁴ complete with the necessary water imagery, has taken place and now spreads throughout the world to wash away the past culture and usher in a reborn remnant of believers.

Having descended into the darkness of anarchy deep in the labyrinth of Starliner Towers, St. Luc and the other residents have been metaphorically swallowed by the chaos of their human instincts and have re-emerged on the other side, baptized into a new creation, a new race of mankind, a new sensibility which replaces the modern.

Furthermore, in the final scene, in which St. Luc leads the inhabitants out into the night, the throng is not an ensemble of wild-eyed, raving lunatics, though throughout the rest of the film this judgment would seem an accurate description; instead, they have completed a significant metamorphosis. The implication exists, though, that this herd would infect the rest of the populace with the dreaded parasite, which is true to a degree; however, the flock is not intent on wreaking a chaotic apocalypse, as are the zombies in Romero's Night of the Living Dead, to which Cronenberg's film has been often compared. Instead, St. Luc and his followers set out as agents of a new creation spreading out to convert the old order to the new and to

reestablish mankind's link with primal energies. The Starliner inhabitants become a creative, regenerating force. They are not blind, libidinous zealots; they act as a single organism, fully mindful and in possession of a single-minded purpose. As in other creation myths, man is created to be a namer, to apply his consciousness to recording creation and providing it with significance. The Starliner legion, therefore, embarks on a night journey to spread their new creative collective consciousness, to rename and resignify the old order, to revivify the instinctual and overthrow the constraints. The "slaves" of the parasites have become the masters as their fixed countenances reveal in the automobile exodus from the garage. The previous social hierarchy has been swept away and a new social order initiated beneath the ripples of the subterranean pool. In effect, the cosmic cycle of creation and deluge paves the way for its third element: the apocalypse.

In a strict sense, an apocalypse is a revelation or prophetic vision. In a more common sense, apocalypse refers to a vision of the end of the world. Generally speaking, then, an apocalyptic myth marks the end of an old world and the emergence of a new and emphasizes an end to the current order of things⁵. Cronenberg fully reveals the end of an old way of life and the coming of a new sensibility on Starliner Island. In the process, the director presents new, yet strange, parasitic creatures and instigates a libidinous resurrection of the "dead" by infusing the conformity and sterility of Starliner's modern living with a revolution of instinct over cold order. Here, sexuality functions metaphorically as the deeper impulses which modern

civilization has deemed unacceptable and forced into the subconsciousness. The parasites themselves do not control the residents; instead, the parasites act as catalysts for the residents' own repressed appetites. The parasites are liberators rather than controllers; if anything, they mediate between man's inherent tendencies and society's control and submission. This dynamic spells a sense of salvation for its adherents while bringing an end to the mindset of the old order of society.

The primary purpose of apocalyptic myths is to abolish the previous existence and replace it with a new creation. Cronenberg offers such an apocalypse by going beyond the trappings of an old consciousness and demonstrates a total annihilation of consciousness. This negates previously constructed notions of morality, with the subsequent control and manipulation. In plunging into the depths of hereditary impulses, Cronenberg refashions, or recreates, the unconscious, both personal and collective, releasing the life energy, or the libido, which lies at the heart of existence. Though Freud would view libido as pure sexual appetite and Jung would view libido as pure energy, Cronenberg simplifies both views by stripping away tendencies toward repression while combining energy and sexuality into pure appetite. Despite the graphic sexual imagery and the apparent dismantling of societal order, the apocalyptic sense of They Came From Within points toward the disintegration of restraint, producing a more damaging and destructive chaos, and the re-establishment of base appetite as a governing force without the benefit of rationality. The apocalypse portrayed in the film is one of interior

rational control de-emphasized and reconstructed into a singular dynamic of craving. Thus, apocalypse stems from appetite, hunger. By peeling away the various levels of inhibition, in effect, deconstructing society's desire for control, Cronenberg brings modern civilization to a close by allowing humankind's innate urges to supplant man's rationality.

Rabid (1976)

Cronenberg's second feature further develops the thematic strands begun in They Came From Within while placing a woman firmly in the center as its protagonist. Here, Cronenberg again explores the basic dualism of the horror genre. By pitting the central opposition of the "monstrous" against the "normal," Cronenberg presents his obsessions with the rational and irrational aspects of society and the mind/body dichotomy. Cronenberg's films depict a rational, ordered society which represses instinct and appetite, resulting in an eruption of primal energy which destroys this rational order and fabric of society. Cronenberg addresses the problem of *balance* in the modern world; the arrogance of rational hubris instigates these eruptions of the body. The distinct message of Rabid holds that these bodily manifestations, while bringing about release, will eventually kill. However, while this liberation may spell catastrophe for the old order, it harbors within itself, to a much smaller degree, the seed of a new creation, and new beginning.

The horror element of Rabid, like They Came From Within, is a plague; in this case, a rabies-like epidemic which causes its victims to go berserk and spread the infection

before finally dying. The thematic consistency with the previous film is obvious: the social basis of the action, the bodily expression of frenzied irrationality, the resulting propagation of horrors, and the destructive capacity of well-intentioned, but overconfident, rational science. Rabid continues the pessimism of Cronenberg's decidedly secular apocalyptic vision. Cronenberg again manipulates archetypal figures and motifs, primarily those surrounding the Earth Mother/ Goddess, and creates a distinctive modern apocalyptic myth which parallels and contrasts the earlier creation myth erected in his previous effort and serves as a companion piece to that film. The two films together serve as bookends which form the cosmogony, the beginning and the end, of the Cronenbergian universe.

Synopsis

Outside Montreal, Hart Read and his girlfriend Rose are injured in a fiery motorcycle accident in the countryside near the Keloid Clinic, a plastic surgery infirmary. Dr. Dan Keloid, the center's founder, performs emergency plastic surgery on Rose and, in order to save her life, utilizes a new skin grafting procedure. His previously untried technique backfires when the neutralized tissue refuses to form the intestines Rose desperately needs. Upon awakening, Rose discovers that she can only digest blood, which she takes from her victims through a penis-like organ which has developed in her armpit. Rose escapes the hospital to roam the countryside seeking the sustenance she now requires. However, unknown to her, by extracting blood, Rose spreads a new and fatal form of rabies which transforms her victims

into raving, violent lunatics. Gradually, the plague, and Rose, infect Montreal, turning it into a danger zone where martial law is declared. Hart frantically searches for Rose and finally tracks her down at a friend's apartment.

Finding her extracting blood from Mindy, Hart confronts Rose with the truth. Disbelieving Hart's charge that she is the cause of the epidemic, Rose locks herself in a hotel room with one of her victims and is killed by him. The next morning, with thousands of other corpses, Rose ends up thrown in the back of a large garbage truck.

Rose as the Fatal Earth Goddess

Cronenberg again orients archetypal characters to his existential mythos as he portrays an apocalypse riddled with irony and angst. Significantly, he resurrects the mythic figure of the Terrible Mother who dispenses a plague across her land as punishment for some affront done her. To this central axis, Cronenberg weaves several mythic strands as Rose journeys "home" through the Wilderness to the City. Rabid, in effect, closes the creation myth originated in They Came From Within and makes more explicit the thematic nexus which unites both myths and both films.

Whereas the ineffectual St. Luc fills the protagonist role in the earlier film, Rose, a vivacious yet lethal young woman, occupies that position and creates a more potent and sympathetic impression. As such, she fulfills Cronenberg's penchant for dominating central feminine characters. Rose, at various points in the film, fills an assortment of feminine archetypes ranging from the Devouring Mother and Earth Goddess to the Femme Fatale to the Androgyne, and, finally, the Anima itself.

Rose, in the opening sequence, makes a startling first impression. Sitting astride a motorcycle, clad completely in tight black leather, with her honey-colored hair sparkling in the chill sunlight and a firm sensual expression on her angelic face, Rose poses as the ultimate sexual predator while maintaining a subtle innocence. Her stance, coupled with her very feminine gaze, reflects her self-awareness and her sexual confidence. She is solidly in control, even after her ineffectual companion, Hart, also clad in black leather, straddles the cycle, grips the handlebars, and roars off down the highway. This first impression sets the tone for the remainder of the film; Rose literally becomes a predator who preys upon men and women alike with animalistic intensity, yet she alleviates this darkly threatening persona with a childlike innocence and vulnerability. Essentially, Rose is a split personality who oscillates between the malevolent femme fatale persona and the innocent goddess. This integral division is continually linked to natural imagery.

In this opening sequence, the leather-clad couple are surrounded by wintry trees, hills, grasslands, and sunlight as they speed down the highway in a traveling montage. From this, an association exists with the archetypal first couple in their natural paradise. However, the female is clearly the authoritative figure of the pair while the male occupies a role of servitude -- his control of the cycle, his steering of the course, and his acceleration or deceleration of speed -- to the feminine principle who sits behind him as a passenger. This montage is paralleled with scenes involving a family in a van on the same highway; the

husband/driver is lost and desperately trying to read a map as his wife and child continually berate him for not admitting that they are right and he is wrong. Ultimately, the driver, another ineffectual male, stops the van in the middle of the highway to get his bearings. Significantly, this family foreshadows the family at the center of the next film, The Brood. Hart and Rose round a curve and collide with the van; their cycle careens off into the grassland with Rose and crashes in flames as Hart is thrown clear, thus the dominant female becomes pinned beneath the wreckage and surrounded by flames -- the archetypal paradise permanently destroyed and the heroic male rendered helpless and impotent as Nature, and the dysfunctional, yet guilt-ridden, family, looks on.

Later, after a newly restored Rose walks away from the Keloid clinic, nature imagery again reveals Rose's dominant position. Wandering the surrounding countryside at night in pouring rain, Rose comes upon a barn and enters it in search of shelter and food. Finding a cow inside, she penetrates the cow with her penile "spike" and draws blood from it. Here, a noticeable nod toward bestiality becomes apparent as Rose, with the phallic spike in her armpit, has intercourse with an animal. Though the cow's blood makes her violently ill, the implication is clear: she is the Earth Goddess -- all life, all nature lies at her command, to do with what she will. Further, the downpour solidly connects Rose to the feminine principle through its water imagery. The pastoral image continues when a drunken farmer enters the barn and attempts rape. Rose, her lips dappled with blood, instead penetrates her attacker. She has aroused the most

primitive instincts in the male and then has punished him for his effrontery. The mise-en-scene of the barn with its wooded walls and stalls, the surrounding hay, the cow, the lamplight, the besotted farmer, and the bloodied goddess imply a pagan fertility ritual which further connects Rose with Nature and the Earth. Later, after arriving in Montreal, Rose goes out on the prowl in the wintry snowy streets sporting a fur jacket, again implying a connection with animal life, death, and the natural cycle. Her metaphorical devouring of the male, in effect, re-establishes her dominance as the Earth Mother.

In They Came From Within critics neatly overlooked the positive liberating influence of the parasites and thus the notion of a creation myth; in Rabid, Cronenberg demonstrates the Anima's power through an apocalyptic plague unleashed on the populace. Several scenes depicting the spread of the disease revolve around women attacking men; for example, the scene in which Mindy witnesses a woman's sudden, violent attack on a man standing next to her on the subway and Murray Cypher's death at the hands of his own crazed wife soon after returning home. However, by firmly anchoring this apocalyptic element in the feminine principle, Cronenberg again extends a traditional mythic motif. As Bettina Knapp observes, plagues have been continually embodied throughout history in womankind; woman is "the disease-spreading force which must be routed" (301). Like the Erinnyes, the Greek goddesses of revenge, and Death's Daughters in the Finnish *Kalevala*, Rose is a destructive anima figure who carries both spiritual and physical disease and who performs her terrors in vulnerable

areas where fear and repression are the norm, i.e. Cronenberg's modern metropolis. The director performs this act in the film's final moments by having a culpable Rose test Hart's accusations that she is the origin of the plague. Though the anima has run rampant through male society, it is finally condemned and destroyed by the animus.

In the final scene, amid symbols of patriarchal authority (gunshots, sirens, a predatory dog), two men, dressed in white protective suits arrive in a garbage truck, pick up Rose's body and, in slow-motion, dump her body in with the other trash. The powerful Earth Mother has spread her disease throughout male society only to be crushed and rendered powerless by male fear. The Mother Goddess, the *vagina dentata*, has been subsumed by the masculine principle. The animus has condemned her destructive actions, entrapped her within her own snares, and, protected from her touch, annihilated her with the rest of society's waste. However, the earthly mother represents the presence and immanence of God in the consciousness; male insecurity and ineffectuality, as well as rational hubris, has unleashed and decimated "the autonomous image of woman the male carries within his unconscious" (Knapp 289). Rose, the anima, has been mutated by Keloid, the shaman, into a destructive force. In his quest for regenerative tissue, Keloid has tampered with the fabric of Nature and has tried to impose his own will and purpose onto that which denies such attempts. When he becomes one of Rose's victims, Keloid is not simply being attacked by his own creation; he is being fundamentally punished by the natural forces which

he had tried to usurp. Eventually, Rose is nurtured and finally condemned by the "hero," Hart, who is initially horrified at what Rose has done and become. However, when Rose blames him -- "It's all your fault, your fault" -- she points directly to his major flaw. Hart was the one in control of the motorcycle; he was also the one who should have prevented the accident; in fact, Hart was the one who walked away from the crash relatively unscathed. From Rose's viewpoint, Hart bears the ultimate responsibility for her condition because he was not effective in his role as servant and guardian. Rose basically indicts the animus for its weakness and ineffectuality. As a result, she is destroyed by the collective animus of patriarchal society because she has dared question its power and because she has both aroused its primal appetites and punished the expression and release of those appetites. Fundamentally, the Goddess is murdered by patriarchy because she has resumed her rightful place and subsumed its authority within her own.

While Rabid (and They Came From Within) exalts in the frenzied liberation of instinct with Rose's quest for sustenance, the film firmly undercuts the feminine at the end by turning Rose into so much wasted energy. Like St. Luc, Hart and the other male figures have little or no understanding of the feminine principle; they are solely enslaved to the animus. Rose becomes more than a physical threat; she becomes a spiritual and emotional threat as well because of her predatorial absorption of the male. By arousing the male's base instincts, Rose renders him vulnerable and manipulates him; she turns the male against

himself -- in effect, she motivates the male to self-betrayal. Then, having the male fully exposed, the feminine overpowers and devours the male principle, leaving only a warped hunger in her wake; the male becomes a hollow shell driven by one impulse -- the urge to eat, to absorb energy as his impulse has been absorbed -- thus propagating the plague.

However, the male is not Rose's only target; she also attacks two women: Judy Glasberg and Mindy Kent. Both attacks begin with a seduction: Rose seduces a nervous Judy in the hot tub in the basement of the clinic while she seduces Mindy with overtures of friendship and trust. With Judy, the element of lesbianism presents itself strongly and erotically. The scene bears a distinct resemblance to the penultimate scene in They Came From Within in which the ineffectual and insecure St. Luc becomes transformed by the liberating kiss of Forsythe in the Starliner basement pool and Betts' seduction of Janine. However, in Rabid, the undeveloped personality is distinctly feminine. In fact, like Rose, Judy is a victim of the male's failure to integrate the anima; her father, at least from her perspective, clearly fears this integration by ordering her to undergo plastic surgery to please him by not resembling him. In the hot tub in the clinic's basement, Judy's weaker feminine side is attacked and, underwater, penetrated by the androgynous Rose in a physical and metaphorical rape. In the unconscious, the feminine becomes integrated with both the anima and the animus; thus absorbed, it is added to the androgynous power of the feminine/masculine principle. Afterwards, Judy does not even have the opportunity to

spread the plague; instead, her body is found frozen in the basement refrigerator; her own anima has been so weakened and absorbed into another that she is transformed literally into a stiff, lifeless shell.

With Mindy, however, the attack is much more subtle and, thus, more powerful. Upon her return to Montreal, Rose arrives at her best friend's apartment. Mindy gladly takes her in and provides food and shelter. Later, shaken after she witnesses a female plague victim attack a man next to her on the subway, Mindy returns home to Rose. Unlike the attack on Judy, Rose's attack on Mindy occurs offscreen; Hart discovers Rose bending over Mindy's body. However, this attack seems more potent due to the fawning, concern, and sensitivity that Mindy has shown toward Rose. Rose's attack becomes more than a betrayal of friendship; it becomes a betrayal of the feminine principle itself. Here, the Devouring Mother literally absorbs the Nurturing Mother and, for Cronenberg, solidifies the ultimate predatorial nature of the feminine. This, even more than the attack and consumption of the male principle, manifests the director's pessimistic treatment of Rose at the end of the film: seemingly, the message is that the feminine is truly a predator and must be condemned and taken away from society.

The Brood (1979)

Rabid ends with a firm, yet slightly comforting sense of the finality of death. Cronenberg's third feature, The Brood, offers no such consolation; the director's most pessimistic film of the 1970s expresses an icy and mournful spirit of helplessness. The film's closing shot presents a distinctly less hopeful attitude about human nature and

Nature in general with a severe image of suffering and the promise of more grief to come. The close-up of two small sacks on the arms of the film's central character, Candice Carveth, coupled with the extreme close-up of the child's sad eyes express more than any of his films the poignancy of human suffering and establishes the existentialist *angst* of Cronenberg's vision.

The film focuses on generational, domestic, and private conflicts and emphasizes the traditional notion of "the sins of the fathers." The center of conflict in this film is the archetypal family. Unlike his previous tendency to point to society at large, Cronenberg here focuses his examination on the interrelationships of the self-contained family, a microcosm of society. He delves into family history and specifically uses the metaphor of birth as a vehicle for yet another form of apocalyptic plague released into the world.

Synopsis

Dr. Hal Raglan, a popular psychologist, has seemingly perfected his practice of Psychoplasmics, which treats mental disorders through their physical manifestation in the body. Nola Carveth, his most prized patient, is a woman full of rage for her parents and her estranged husband, Frank. Raglan keeps her under lock and key at his Somafree Institute in the countryside outside Toronto. When Nola's daughter, Candice, returns home to her father from a visit with her mother, Frank finds that her back is covered with mysterious bruises and angrily decides to investigate. He unsuccessfully tries to legally prevent Nola from having access to the little girl. Both of Nola's parents are brutally and mysteriously murdered by strange

midgets; these midgets eventually attack and kill Candice's teacher, Ruth Mayer, who has begun to have some affection for Frank. Frank finds one of these creatures dead and discovers that it has no navel. When Candice is kidnapped by these creatures following Ruth's murder, Frank breaks into Somafree, and into Nola's lair, and discovers that her rage has manifested itself in the form of self-made children - the brood - who act on her anger. With the help of the repentant Raglan, who is murdered by the brood as he tries to rescue Candice, Frank strangles his wife and escapes with his daughter. On the way home, Frank does not notice the small bumps developing on Candice's arm.

Motherhood, Past Abuse, and the Failure of Paternity

In The Brood, Cronenberg makes a significant move away from the outward sphere of social interaction into the more personal and intimate sphere of individual relationships. This movement is clearly rooted again in the mutual interconnection of mind and body, but embodies a clear shift from physical science into mental science, i.e. psychology. Noting that a great deal of philosophical thought revolves around the duality of mind and body, Cronenberg says, "There seems to be a point at which they fuse and it should be apparent to everyone. But it's not... It's very easy to see why many philosophers detach the mind from the body ... but I don't believe that" (Rodley 79). For Cronenberg, rather than producing predatory feelings, the psyche produces predatory entities -- emotions made into physical forms. Cronenberg views Nola Carveth's rage as "an all purpose one - genderless. Her rage goes beyond certain moral categories so the resulting creatures were primal, nearly foetal,

nearly formless. Just pure anger. ... creatures from the unconscious, making the mental physical" (Rodley 84). The ability to embody feelings provides the narrative drive for the director's deepening development of his central themes.

Once again, the rational hubris of modern science creates a disastrous plague in the Cronenbergian world. The focus of this hubristic error is Dr. Hal Raglan. As a pop psychologist, Raglan attempts to effect liberation from normal restraint and repression in his patients. This Cartesian mistake carries psychotherapy to its logical extreme of transforming intangible mental disorders into tangible physical eruptions. In creating anti-rational destructive forces which lash out without inhibition, Raglan creates and sets loose yet another epidemic and joins Emil Hobbes and Dan Keloid in the pantheon of Cronenberg's Prometheus-like figures.

Behind the creation of "the brood" lies a desolate determinism which emerges as the product of the contradictions inherent in human nature. The brood themselves are merely entities of pure anger; mindless and without gender, they are emotions exteriorized and metaphors of a rampaging unconscious ravaging its own physical body. For Cronenberg, no method of beneficially liberating the irrational is possible; however, the irrational cannot simply be ignored or suppressed because if it is, revolution ensues and results in total liberation. Once escaped, the irrational wreaks havoc in spite of reason's best attempts at control, is connected to the body and the primitive, and will always devour and destroy whatever lies in its path. Raglan makes his hubristic error when he believes that in

externalizing the id he has successfully defused it. His "ultimate therapeutic device," which he dubs "Psychoplasemics," embodies this mistake and mingles with man's contradictory nature to produce in his patients' skin lesions and rampaging cancers. Cronenberg says that the "basic idea for Psychoplasemics was that people do get rashes when they're stressed out; muscles do tighten up ... The idea of a creative cancer; something that you would normally see as a disease now goes to another level of creativity and starts sculpting with your own body" (Rodley 80). In its most extreme form, this flaw helps release Nola's "brood," gnomelike automatons of anger.

In depicting these "children of rage," Cronenberg is careful not to portray them as pure evil. The brood is "merely subconscious feeling, capable of destructive acts when aroused by anger, but impossible to judge morally" (Beard 36). What ultimately becomes the thematic nexus of the film is the balancing act which must be performed in order to keep the id in check yet not totally liberated. Raglan's method of getting the anger out there -- of going "all the way through to the end" -- superficially seems the proper course of action; however, when one does "come out the other end" one still must deal with the very physical manifestations of that anger. Even worse, one can learn to control it and use that anger as a nefarious weapon or tool of punishment.

The continual cycle of liberation, revolution, and consumption informs the film and points toward the off-screen future as Candace's bumps imply a dark, pessimistic apocalypse. This cycle reflects Cronenberg's

conclusion that human nature itself is a disease without a cure. The ultimate creed of the film becomes simply that one's physical nature can be altered by mere thought. An individual can create and bear monstrosities, devour others, and devour oneself by a force radiating from the innermost depths of the self. This force is also capable of passing that process on to others who in turn continue to hand it down to others. By focusing on the fraying of the archetypal family, the Carveths, Cronenberg shows the pessimistic vision that one is doomed to rain destruction on those whom one most loves. He forms in this vision the metaphor of family history which indicts both matriarchy and patriarchy by focusing on motherhood, child abuse, and the failure of masculinity.

Like the ancient mythic figure of Medea, Nola serves as an incarnation of the Terrible Mother archetype which reflects the negative aspects of the feminine principle, especially the maternal element. In The Brood, Cronenberg targets motherhood as a metaphor for the relationship between past, present, and future. Nola, as well as Juliana and Candice, becomes the full embodiment of Euripides's notion that "Love, when it comes in too great strength, has never brought good renown or virtue to mortals." Nola's targets appear as hapless victims of an external force rather than an internal essence. This energy, as in previous Cronenberg efforts, eventually emerges as the fundamental chaos of the universe. Nola serves merely as a temporary vehicle for its rampage and unites this formless absurdity with the maternal instinct and the feminine principle. While the narrative focuses on Nola, this same chaotic force

has erupted once before through Juliana. In the session scenes between Nola and Raglan, not only is Raglan's method of operation depicted, but also the depth of Nola's rage and its point of origin.

Nola connects with and envelopes the tumultuous energy of Cronenberg's universe through the form of her mother's past abuse. In a later session with Raglan, Nola's connection with both Juliana and Candice becomes firmly explicit: "Frank thinks I'm turning into my mother and I'm turning Candy into baby Nola." The disrupting energy which operates throughout the fabric of the universe again becomes personified, as with the earlier figures of Nurse Forsythe and Rose, in the feminine principle. In this case, Cronenberg recalls his earlier *Fatal Women* by combining them in a godhead consisting of Juliana, Nola, and Candice thus putting forth a Matriarchal Trinity. This three-personed goddess positions herself in direct opposition to the Patriarchal godhead of Frank, Barton, and Raglan and overpowers it while also continually devouring and propagating itself in a vicious cycle. The intensity of this struggle is illustrated in a second session between Nola and Raglan in which the focus of her rage turns from Juliana to Barton.

That these sessions prefigure the deaths of both Juliana and Barton only further reinforces the power of past rage to masquerade and embody. These sessions also function metaphorically as an act of conception with Raglan serving as the cosmic Father who unites with the Mother Goddess, Nola, to conceive the disorder of the universe -- i.e. the brood.

Further, the connection between the dominance of the matriarchal/maternal (Juliana, Nola, and Candy) and the weakness of the patriarchal/paternal (Barton, Raglan, and Frank) is given a temporal connection through the continuance of this manipulation of energy. By passing this malevolence from Juliana to Nola on down to Candice, Cronenberg indicts the anima even more strongly than in previous films while also condemning the ineffectuality of the Animus. Here, both are abusive whether by direct action or inaction and thus function only as mere tools for the destructive fabric of existence.

The central image of tragedy in the film, however, is child abuse and its suggestion of a vicious cycle of violence. While Nola indeed is tragic in that her passions ultimately are stronger than her reason, Candice becomes the focal point for Cronenberg's melancholy preoccupation. In Candice, the deep strain of violence connecting Juliana and Nola evolves into auto-cannibalism. Just as Nola's rage, placed firmly in the abuse of her childhood, devours her and Juliana, the appearance of the seeds of Candice's rage suggests that she will be similarly devoured and will potentially pass this on to her own children. The small bumps on her arms point to the continued tragic cycle of abuse. These lesions also complement the previous image of Nola ripping the sack of her new-born fetus open with her teeth. Medea, the Fatal Mother, has devoured the protective innocence of childhood; now her malevolence lives on in her offspring awaiting the proper moment for eruption.

By transferring her pathological rage on to her daughter, Nola, the victim-villain, physically accomplishes

what her own mother began psychologically. In Nola's eyes, her mother has been abusive and thus a target for her revenge. Juliana, however, expresses to Frank, "what it feels like to be a parent, being blamed for everything. What it's like to have the past distorted so you don't recognize yourself. It's your child's version of the past. Candice is only five and she's working on it right now." From Julianna's point of view, she has done nothing wrong and anything she has done has only been perverted and distorted by her daughter's mental illness. This same process has already commenced regarding Candy. However, whether she has indeed been as abusive as Nola claims, Juliana makes a telling remark; by stating, in a slightly sinister tone of voice, that her past has been so distorted by her daughter that she no longer recognizes herself, she unconsciously makes a connection with Nola. Though she may not identify the nurturing qualities in Nola, or herself, she does recognize the malevolence and rage which boils within her daughter because it still rages within her. Her tendency toward abuse is hinted at by her consumption of alcohol, which, like Raglan's therapy, releases the turmoil into open expression. Juliana holds that "thirty seconds after you're born you have a past. Sixty seconds after that, you start to lie to yourself about it." On the surface, Juliana seems to be indicting Nola and her "blame" for the past; however, she unconsciously indicts herself and her own efforts to manipulate the truth of the past. For Cronenberg, the past becomes nothing but its various portrayals by different perspectives; its objectivity and substance disappear yet its influence lives on from generation to generation,

wreaking havoc with more and more concentration. The past thus becomes, like the present and future, ambiguous. However, Nola's ability to embody her feelings and Candice's bodily reaction to traumatic shock would indicate the possibility that Nola could have given herself the "bumps" and could have read her psychological injuries retrospectively as physical hurts. Julianna's abuse, regardless of its intensity, has grown into Nola's murderous rage and this irrationality continues on with Candice. Juliana prophetically states that she has "been indulging in a horrid bout of nostalgia. At least now I have a partner in crime," indicating Candice. The final shot bears this out as the camera closes in on the lesions on Candice's arm. She becomes the embodiment of this past abuse and she has the potential to further the apocalyptic generational destruction she has already witnessed. She becomes the sins of the past revisited.

Religious texts such as the Old Testament offer several passages addressing the notion of "the sins of the Fathers" and their subsequent visitation upon future generations. Specific examples can be found in Exodus 20:5, Numbers 14:33, Proverbs 14:11, Isaiah 14:20, and Lamentations 5:7. Cronenberg mines this concept and uses it to undergird the thematic consistency of his film and to indict the archetypal family. While the "sin" in The Brood originates from Matriarchy in the guise of the Kelly/Carveth women, retribution primarily affects the Kelly/Carveth men along with Ruth Mayer, Candice's doomed schoolteacher and Nola's supposed rival, and Hal Raglan himself, whose obsessive interest and therapy give legitimacy to Nola's pathology.

The issue ultimately becomes one of responsibility, and here Cronenberg again levels a decisive indictment against the male. On first glance, the blame for the break-ups of both sets of marriages seems to rest firmly with the women, Juliana for her domination and Nola for her instability, while clearing the men, Barton Kelly for his sensitivity and Frank for his sanity, of any culpability. However, upon closer examination, both Barton and Frank hold an equal, if not greater portion of, responsibility. Barton becomes culpable because, as Nola tells Raglan, he does nothing to prevent Julianna's supposed abuse: he "looked away ... pretended it wasn't happening." However, Barton, meeting Frank and Candice at the airport after hearing of Juliana's murder places the blame fully on Juliana: "She couldn't admit we were finished." Frank's earlier statement that Juliana had "a long series of lovers" coupled with her drinking problem only puts her in an even less favorable light. Nevertheless, Barton himself drinks and is prone to drunken anger demonstrated in his confrontation with Raglan at Somafree. He further instills the tumultuous parallel between the two families when he remarks to Frank that "you, Nola, and Candy are going through the same thing Juliana, Nola, and I went through. It's enough to make you cry." Later, just before his murder and after his visit to Somafree, a drunken Barton calls Frank and conspires to return to Raglan's institute. Here, a glimpse of a Father-Son relationship appears which counterpoints the Mother-Daughter pairing. However, this masculine bonding survives only moments before Barton, lying across Juliana's bed in their old house, suffers Nola's retribution for his

weakness. Barton's "sin" implies his recalcitrance to express his proper patriarchal role; he is thus rendered ineffectual, and possibly impotent, by Juliana's domination. He has failed in his paternal duties as a "good protective father" and is overwhelmed and annihilated by his daughter's rage.

In Cronenberg's scheme, the ineffectual male is caught in a power struggle between dominating females; regardless of his actions or intentions, the animus is doomed to sublimation or outright obliteration by the anima. Further, the male is imprisoned in a patriarchal system which bows to the matriarchal; his "sin" lies in not having the power to usurp this bondage. The reason for his lack of power rests in a basic unwillingness to take responsibility. Masculinity, whether in personal or societal structures, suffers from an acute internal insecurity. This determination resounds through all of Cronenberg's feature films.

The notion of responsibility encounters a transference as the traditional family relationships implode and suffer a breakdown. Here, as in most contemporary horror films, responsibility is shifted from the parent to the child. Nola bears the responsibility for the disintegration of her family while Barton weakly accedes to Juliana's dominance. Similarly, Candice is forced into the same position after the climactic clash between Frank, fighting to regain his paternity, and Nola, seeking to devour and nullify it. Five-year-old Candice absorbs the fury and harbors it within until, as the police psychologist (and her bumps) attest, she suffers "a breakdown if she doesn't come to terms with

what she has experienced." Thus, like Barton, Candice is entrapped by weakness; however, she holds the potential to break the bonds of her entrapment at a future date primarily because of her feminine essence.

Frank personifies this entrapment more intensely than Barton. While Barton appears a prisoner of his own weakness, Frank is a compassionate yet weak personality who is trapped within the institutional processes which bow to matriarchal pressures. As his lawyer tells him, "The Law believes in Motherhood." Frank is trapped by a legal system which professes patriarchy in criminal matters but turns matriarchal in domestic situations. Frank is in a double bind: on a psychological level, he possesses and expresses the positive characteristics of the anima (compassion, sensitivity, nurture, and concern); yet he finds himself in the center of a feminine storm and at the mercy of the malevolent aspects of the anima, reflected in Nola and in the normally patriarchal legal system. Here, Frank symbolizes Sobchak's argument that the contemporary horror film "plays out the rage of paternal responsibility denied the economic and political benefits of patriarchal power" (184). Caught in the tangled web of paternity refused and patriarchy failed, Frank becomes the victim of a malevolent matriarchy which seeks not only to usurp the bourgeois power structure but also to obliterate the male identity. The mythic family disintegrates when the Great Mother overpowers and devours the father while instilling the same power in the child. The Brood embodies not just the catastrophe brought about by unchecked libido but also the annihilation of traditional structures cultivated by various mythological

systems.

In Frank, the traditional father becomes the archetypal outcast. Frank is alienated from his animus because of his overemphasis, warranted by circumstance, on his anima; yet, this male principle becomes entangled with a malignant feminine essence intent on consuming it. Further, Frank's persona becomes ensnared with his own Shadow archetype; he wants to do the right thing for his daughter, yet for him to do "the right thing" Frank must submit to his own primal negativity and literally kill the encroaching threat. Therefore, patriarchy must become like matriarchy in order to sublimate it.

Frank's one moment of possible integration occurs with Ruth Mayer, Candice's teacher/potential surrogate mother. "Candy got me to play Mother and Daughter with her," Ruth tells Frank; "She obviously needs mothering and isn't getting any." Frank responds with a clear statement of alienation, both psychological and marital: "I might've screwed my kid up alright. You get taken in by a woman who married you for your sanity and hoped it would rub off. Instead, it started to work the other way." While clearly evoking the archetype of the Devouring Mother and shifting the responsibility to her, Frank also senses his own fragmented personality; as a result, he recognizes and shares the blame for the damage being done to Candice.

While Nola fully personifies the Terrible Mother, Ruth embodies the Good Mother archetype. She offers concern, insight, and support to Candice and harbors a subtle romantic interest in Frank. She holds the potential to fully offset the damage caused by Nola's rage and occupy the

healing position offered by the positive aspects of the anima. Nola, herself, senses the power of this opposition. Later, like a true malevolent Mother, Nola defends her family from outside interference by sending her brood after Ruth. The surrogate mother's murder becomes the centerpiece of abuse in this film. Attacked in front of her class, Ruth weakly tries to defend herself against the brood who shatter her skull, significantly emphasizing the mental threat to Nola, as a roomful of innocent children watch in shock. Frank arrives soon after, finds Ruth's body, and covers her bloody head with a child's drawing, creating an indelible metaphor for abuse. The Terrible Mother has wielded her enormous power, done away with her one true opponent, inflicted her abuse on a generation of children, and destroyed Frank and Candice's one opportunity for healthy integration.

Any individuation Frank achieves occurs only when he surrenders himself to his own rage and strangles Nola after she has given birth to another "shape of rage." This moment possesses some catharsis in that Frank finally vents his own anger for the first time in the film and murders his wife. While the primary motive lies in securing Candice's safety, the fact that Nola has borne yet another metaphor of her chaotic rage and Frank's impotence must be seen as the ignition for Frank's eventual descent. Cronenberg again manages his own form of epiphany in this scene by having the seductively beautiful Nola spread her robe to reveal not just her beauty and sexuality but also what that sexuality has wrought. The epiphany is complete when Nola rips the fetus from its amniotic sac and, quite

maternally, licks it clean. This moment culminates in Frank's primal attack which ends in her death. Frank's process of integration becomes complete as he regains his paternal authority and masculine identity from Nola, the Medea figure, and rescues his daughter from the dying brood as the scientist lies bloody and dead nearby. This moment becomes indicative of the future, however, for just as Nola's final moment concerns giving birth to another embodiment of her rage, her daughter bears the marks of her mother's rage and represents a union of the sexless automatons and the conscious female principle. Candice now becomes fully a member of Nola's brood and will continue her mother's chaotic and anarchic legacy; she now represents a young Nola, insuring that the cycle of madness and violence will continue into the future.

While Frank has successfully dispatched the malevolent anima and matriarch, he has only enacted the beginning of his own eventual demise. Again, patriarchy and masculinity become entangled in a diabolical web of ineffectuality. This continual cycle of paternity refused, denied, and hated and maternity embraced, accepted, and loved continues; patriarchy terrified and terrorizing in its increasing impotence does continual battle with a dominating, malignant, and devouring matriarchy. In the final outcome, patriarchy paradoxically ushers in its own demise. The Brood's closing image testifies fully to the fact that in "the contemporary horror film the sins of the fathers are truly visited upon the sons -- and daughters" (Sobchak 185). In the final analysis, Cronenberg suggests that the weakness of masculinity/patriarchy overpowered by the rage of

femininity/matriarchy produces only apocalypse.

Conclusion

Cronenberg's mythos is ruled overall by chaos and irrationality; for him, life is infused with uncontrollable and unrestrained creative energy. This energy is often portrayed through sexuality and disease. As Cronenberg states, "Sexuality is one of those very basic issues. Life and death and sexuality are interlinked...Since my films are concerned very much with death and the human body, sexuality is automatically discussed. And in this area we are not fully evolved - culturally, physically, or in any other way. The films are an attempt to try and percieve what ... a fully evolved human being might look like" (Rodley 65). Any attempts to constrain or embody this force are destined for destruction or negation. In his version of the universe, the primordial condition of wholeness becomes transformed and differentiated; this energy becomes most focused and expressed in the human mind and body; both seemingly vibrate with elemental life and personality. However, for Cronenberg, each entity experiences a *participation mystique* with the cosmos while containing its own *mana*, or energetic personality; this dualistic relationship arouses the traditional notion of the *numinosum*, and ushers in apocalypse. Cronenberg does not "believe that anybody is in control ... There is only the appearance of control. I feel disorder is very close ... I think I'm more conscious of the presence and closeness of chaos...We are condemned to be free. We have to continue to try and wrest control from the world, from the universe, from reality, even though it might be hopeless. I think the more inventive and extreme we are,

the better off we are... I am also exploring the dangers of going that particular route" (Rodley 67).

While Cronenberg has brought about an apocalyptic end to the society of repression, manifested in its cool, white towers, clean lines, and sterile arrangements in They Came From Within, he also follows the pattern of cosmic myth by providing a creation to replace what has been dismantled. The deluge which spreads from the indoor pool of Starliner Towers to the outside world furnishes an on-going creation myth which transforms and unites the spiritual and the physical into a more harmonious totality, free of restrictions and separations. However, in the next feature, Rabid, Cronenberg depicts the product of this totality and the re-emergence of apocalypse in the form of the archetypal Earth Mother. What has been established in this first film negates itself in the second.

Likewise, Rabid exemplifies the tension between creation and destruction and explores the interrelationship between the two; one entity cannot be created without another being annihilated while this destruction only serves to plant the seeds of yet another creation. Apocalypse and creation are convoluted twin concepts with a firmly ambiguous, yet tenuous, connection.

Rabid posits key points of Cronenberg's existential mythos: the feminine principle is a dominating feature of the universe, one which has great potency for both cultivation and guidance; yet it demonstrates an immediate destructive threat to the male principle and must be nullified, if not destroyed outright. The male principle, either through rational hubris or pathetic posturing,

attempts to usurp and dominate the feminine principle and eventually the numinous energy of the universe; and, finally, the basic division between mental vitality and physical potency erupts in the metaphor of disease which annihilates the flesh while invigorating the levels of the mind.

The Brood thematically focuses on the destructive capabilities of an uncontrolled feminine consciousness, embodied in the Medea myth, and the eventuality of masculine apocalypse. Through Cronenberg's metaphorical use of child abuse, the director examines the entanglement of the traditional family structure, its facades, power-plays, and resulting neurosis. He also examines in far greater detail the complex interrelationship between the mind and the body and, in the ritualistic "magic" of Psychoplasms, the inability to achieve successful compatibility between the oppositions in the dichotomy. Cronenberg feels that the physical, i.e. the flesh, is not "treacherous, evil, bad. It is cantakerous, and it is independent. Independence is the key... my characters talk about the flesh undergoing revolution at times ... That's what it is: the independence of the body, relative to the mind, and the difficulty of the mind accepting what that revolution might entail" (Rodley 80).

The pessimism which flavors the film, however, is not totally unique; horror films in the 1970s, and especially in the latter part of the decade, portray the notion of apocalypse through the vehicle of a child. In this case, the potential for such catastrophe is generated by familial incoherence and paternal weakness. The apocalyptic fury

threatening the future thus, for the Carveths and others, seems deserved. The Brood closes Cronenberg's first trilogy of films, the establishment of his cosmogony, and his particular treatment of integral themes. What began in They Came From Within with the general eruption of libidinal forces initiated by rational hubris and the gradual displacement of masculinity and femininity, continues in Rabid. With its more developed depiction of the positive/negative aspects of the feminine principle on its rampage through patriarchal society and its consumption of the male essence, the film leads to The Brood with its darker, more pessimistic investigation of woman's power and man's weakness. With these first three films, Cronenberg lays the foundations for his mythological system by erecting an essentially chaotic universe, and imbuing it with a creative, yet hubristic rationalism, a dominant and ambivalent feminine consciousness, a weak, fragmented male principle, and an energizing yet destructive libido. Cronenberg's universe is one controlled by paradox and contradiction; balance becomes unattainable and any effort towards that balance ends in apocalypse for his modern world.

NOTES

¹During the writing and directing of The Brood Cronenberg was going through an emotionally draining divorce and custody battle.

²In the realm of fantastic cinema, only one other film, George Romero's Night of the Living Dead (1967), has aroused as much hostile reaction. Condemned by critics such as Robert Fulford ("the most repulsive movie I've ever seen") and Robin Wood ("it is anti-everything") (Beard 17; Wood 130), They Came from Within provoked an outcry of disgust from most reviewers across Canada, including a demonstration of shock from legislators that taxpayers' money (via the Canadian Film Development Corporation) had helped produce the film (Beard 17). Despite this reaction, filmgoers poured into theaters across Canada and the United States to make it the largest moneymaking Canadian film up to that time.

³According to Mircea Eliade, a cosmology, or "cosmogonic myth tells how the cosmos came into existence" (Sacred 75). A cosmogony refers to the study of the evolution of the universe or the study of a specific model or theory of this evolution; a cosmology, likewise, deals with the origin of universe, but also examines the processes and structure of a universe or specific theory/ model of this structure and dynamics. According to David Adams Leeming, a cosmogony, or myth of creation, relates a story of "how the cosmos began and developed" (15).

⁴As posited by Eliade, the Flood myth, like the original creation myth which spawns it, is a "festival" of productive chaos, a "restoration of primordial chaos, and

the repetition of the cosmogonic act" (57-9). The Deluge also holds personal ramifications as well. The baptized "'sinner' immersed in the waters of the font-womb dies to the old life and on emerging is born into the new. Just as the hero descends into the underworld to confront death itself, the baptized individual symbolically overcomes the destructive powers of chaos" (Leeming 43).

⁵As Leeming notes, apocalyptic writers tend to make "heavy use of symbol and fantasy ... Apocalypses contain strange beasts and a resurrection of the dead" (76).

CHAPTER III: THE HERO TRILOGY

(SCANNERS, VIDEODROME, AND THE DEAD ZONE)

Introduction

Cronenberg's fourth feature departs in a sense from his earlier films. While still developing the same themes and concerns, Scanners presents a surprisingly optimistic outlook which contrasts with the overly pessimistic determinism of The Brood, the bleak helplessness of Rabid, and the randy chaos of They Came from Within. Further, Scanners, of all the films in Cronenberg's oeuvre, remains his most conventional, action-driven narrative. By combining the science fiction film with the action/adventure thriller and the metaphysical horror film, Cronenberg creates a unique blend of suspense, existentialism, and speculative mythmaking. As Sharrett describes, Cronenberg "builds an elaborate mythic structure into a conventional horror/sci-fi framework" and this mythic aspect provides a vitality to the social/political richness of the narrative (117). In this structure, the director depicts the alienation and destruction of the new technological man envisioned by a corporate culture. Cronenberg examines the central metaphor of intrafamilial warfare and the subsequent archetypal patterns of paternal rebellion and fraternal rivalry and uses both themes to develop his unique version of the mythic hero.

Scanners emphasizes the physical expression of mental activity, i.e. the corporeal nature of telepathy. This extension of the central trope of The Brood, the literal incarnation of psychic impulses, carries with it a critique of contemporary life which implies a transcendent union of

opposites signaling the beginning of a new historical era. "Scanning," i.e. the ability to literally influence and kill by thought, becomes a key metaphor for psychological and sociological disunity.

Once again, Cronenberg presents a portrayal of rational hubris and the destruction it creates; the attempt to improve humanity, regardless of whatever benevolent intentions, leads to catastrophic side-effects. The central modern tradition which embodies these effects, of course, is the Frankenstein myth. According to Cronenberg, "I realized that ... I was really closest to [the archetypal horror story of] Frankenstein. It's the return of what's been created, and also the father/son man/god connection between those things" (Harkness 15). Here, Cronenberg extends this myth and, according to Beard, explores the fear of the disintegration of boundaries between "mental and corporeal containment" (43). The barriers separating internal and external reality are annihilated; as in The Brood, interior turmoil effortlessly becomes external calamity. In this regard, the familiar saying, "if thoughts could kill" takes on serious implications.

Cronenberg's next feature proved to be his most ambitious, his most mystifying, and, arguably, his masterpiece. While Videodrome is certainly flawed, its mythic dimensions resonate more deeply because its thematic complexity shows more originality and richness. Its central subjects involve the self and the limits of individual perception, manipulation by external forces, specifically media sexuality and violence, and, as in other Cronenberg films, the relationship between impersonal chaos and

personal order. Cronenberg treats these basic subjects, and others, with his trademark apocalypticism and existentialism against a bleak technological landscape, a continuation of the dystopic world portrayed in Scanners. However, though the film presents Cronenberg's most powerful and shocking images and most complex treatment of central issues to date, Videodrome ultimately serves as a pivot point in the director's work because of Cronenberg's compelling sameness. Yet, Videodrome presents its own unique perspectives and difficulties which lift it out of the director's body of work, if only to proclaim it as the Cronenberg film -- the signature work of an artist.

As in his previous films, the director shows us the catastrophe involved when the powers of the unconscious are unleashed. By delving into the conflict between emotional repression and emotional release, Cronenberg shapes his own central concern -- the question of desirable and instinctual consequences of emotional involvement, i.e. the fear of losing control and a desire to lose control. Cronenberg takes this theme and applies his unique perspective to it with ramifications which are still resonating in his work. What makes Videodrome central to Cronenberg's development as an artist, and what sets it apart from his other works (except for his adaptation of Naked Lunch), is a firm reliance on a first-person unreliable viewpoint. In his protagonist, Max Renn, Cronenberg moves thematically deeper into personal subjectivity and further away from the social objectivity which characterized his previous films.

Cronenberg's 1983 adaptation of Stephen King's best-selling novel The Dead Zone holds a unique place in the

Canadian director's oeuvre. Not only is it Cronenberg's first adaptation of a literary work, the film is also the first not written by the director; neither is it steeped in Cronenberg's traditional milieu. Interestingly, it is one of Cronenberg's more commercially successful endeavors.

Cronenberg manages a highly successful fusion of his own sensibilities with King's concepts and reveals a large degree of continuity with the director's other films. The film also is connected to Cronenberg's other films in terms of strong images, camera angles, and individual scenes. Furthermore, as in his previous efforts, Cronenberg turns once again to his staple themes: the mind/body dichotomy, bodily revolution, alienation, and transformation.

But, even more importantly, the film reveals significant developments for Cronenberg as an auteur. He abandons, for the most part, his notorious visceral dimension. Instead, he adds an emotional dimension not seen before in any of his features. Ultimately, what was stillborn in Max Renn in his subjective trip into his own psyche emerges in Johnny Smith's haunting trip through Puritan New England. Though some viewers were put off by the lack of flesh-tearing transformations, weird science, and creative cancers, most viewers were surprised by the emotional charge of the film; even Robin Wood described it as a "healthy development" and found it the first Cronenberg film he could admire (Rodley 116). Also, for the first time, Cronenberg consciously touched on politics and provided some troubling commentary on political murder by "prophets" who "see" the future.

Scanners (1980)

Introduction

As in The Brood, Cronenberg uses the familial unit as a metaphor embodying his central concerns. However, in Scanners, he presents a radically different vision of family. In the previous film, Nola, as the archetypal terrible mother, draws her strength from past familial sins and decimates the present structure of relationships. In Scanners, the notion of past sins becomes crucial, yet the feminine principle becomes supplanted, actually displaced, by the male. The archetypal mother disappears and in her place we have Dr. Paul Ruth, the supreme Father, creator, and scientist. Cronenberg examines the role of fatherhood with the same ambivalence with which he depicted motherhood in Rabid and The Brood. Further, Cronenberg presents a schism in the personality of the child archetype. Whereas the psychological trauma of Candice is specifically implied in the last shot of The Brood, the same trauma in Scanners is personified in two personalities, Vale and Revok, Ruth's sons, with each harboring both positive and negative potentialities. Cronenberg has taken the destructive triangle of his previous film (Frank, Nola, and Candice) and has made a more potent trinity (Vale, Ruth, and Revok) with a more panoramic view of apocalypse. What was potentially catastrophic in Frank and Candice becomes fully manifested in the mirror images of Vale and Revok. However, the intensity of the conflicts in these two families grows more overwhelming with Ruth and his sons.

Synopsis

Set in the near future, the film depicts the struggle for supremacy among a group of scientifically created and telepathically gifted misfits. Social derelict Cameron Vale is taken to the mysterious Dr. Paul Ruth, who shows a deep understanding of Vale's particular problems. Vale is a scanner -- a mutant troubled by the unheard thoughts of others and possessed of great powers of telekinesis. Ruth helps Vale control his scanning abilities with the drug Ephemerol which suppresses the voices. Ruth also works for ConSec, an organization specializing in international security, weaponry, and private armies. Ruth is grouping all known scanners together in order to recruit them for intelligence purposes. Darryl Revok, however, is a psychotic scanner who leads a rival group, with the aim of bringing society to its knees and establishing himself as its ruler. Ruth and ConSec manipulate Vale into penetrating the scanner underground, which he accomplishes with the help of fellow scanner Kim Obrist, a defector from Revok's group. Vale discovers that Revok is manufacturing vast amounts of ephemerol and supplying it to doctors nationwide, who in turn are administering the drug to pregnant women and producing a new breed of scanners. In a final confrontation, Revok explains that he is Vale's brother, that Ruth was their father and the inventor of ephemerol, which was originally a tranquilizer for pregnant women. Ruth tested it on his own wife - their mother - and produced the first and strongest scanners: Vale and Revok. After a fiery scanning battle between the brothers, Vale's body is physically destroyed but he moves his mind into Revok's

body.

Intrafamilial Warfare and Paternal Rebellion

In The Brood, Cronenberg effectively renders the battle for domination between the maternal and the paternal with the Mother emerging as the final victor. Scanners, however, exclusively depicts the outright warfare, both physical and mental, between male relations and the eventual weakness of the paternal. On one hand, Cronenberg invigorates basic fraternal rivalry with a decidedly apocalyptic tone in the struggle between Vale and Revok for supremacy over the Scanners while, on the other, he galvanizes the archetypal situation of paternal rebellion with a cosmic potency as Revok's mutiny against Ruth. In both instances, Cronenberg relies on traditional mythic machinery to embellish and augment his overall mythic vision.

In establishing and developing the core conflict between Daryl Revok and Dr. Paul Ruth, Cronenberg relies on two interrelated traditions: the Faust myth and its descendant, the Frankenstein myth. Ruth's ambitions become questionable in their nobility and decidedly Faustian in their implications. Ruth, a "Psychopharmacist," has created "the most spectacular human beings ever" in the 236 known Scanners. His initial development, the drug Ephemerol, focused on sedating pregnant mothers. Like the original Adam, whose fall precipitates painful childbirth for the woman, Ruth attempts to make amends for, if not reverse, the consequences of the biblical fall and thus begin a small but needed movement toward restoration. However, Ruth (whose name evokes the biblical heroine who, in conforming to larger social demands, became an ancestor to the New

Testament messiah figure) has created a side-effect which, as represented in Revok, can without guidance become "self-destructive at 22, at 35 simply destructive."

Ruth's greater creation, Scanning, "a certain form of ESP, a derangement of synapses called telepathy," and the "direct linking of two nervous systems separated by space," constitutes, like Raglan's psychoplasmics, yet another example of rational hubris and its destructive after-effects. Scanning is essentially a channel for aggression and a metaphor for mastering internal violence. Ruth, like other Cronenbergian scientist/shaman figures, mediates between the higher reason and the body. His benevolent utopian design for Vale and his "brothers and sisters [who] must bring a glory and a brilliance" to Scanners' dystopia, however, is ultimately marred by his own mental duality and personal shadow. "It's always been inside me lurking away, sucking out my joy, rotting my successes," Ruth confesses during his mental breakdown scene. This malignant essence dwelling within the creator manifests itself in two forms: Revok and the RIPE computer program. However, Ruth, like the literary Victor Frankenstein before him, exceeds the limits of the human body and nature through his invention of Ephemerol, and thus scanning. He gains the ability to eventually unite all oppositions. Ruth plants the seeds for the climactic epiphany at the end of the narrative in his initial creation. The film eventually becomes a working out of Ruth's basic duality as a creator.

As part of this schism, the RIPE computer program has three functions in the narrative. First, the program "controls everything" in the ConSec mainframe and thus

becomes a target/prize for Vale and Revok. Second, it harbors the list of doctors who have been administering Ephemerol to pregnant patients and thus creating a new generation of Scanners. Third, and most importantly, the program is a metaphor for past sins. During his mental breakdown scene, Ruth rambles on about the computer program, "the RIPE program is the past; therefore, access the past. Access the past." By opening this electronic doorway, one can control both past, present, and future. The program embodies Ruth's past errors, specifically his hubristic dream of a perfect race. It also signifies his own absorption and conformity into ConSec, the technological/social structure which would control and sublimate everyone, scanners and humans alike, under the pretext of national security. What began as a benevolent attempt to ease humanity's pain becomes twisted and distorted and ultimately militaristic. Again, Ruth substantiates Cronenberg's basic theme and becomes a god-like figure who in Cronenberg's existential, agnostic mythos exerts some authority but who also harbors tragic flaws and insecurities which lead to his downfall.

Revok, as eldest son to Ruth, becomes the dark, id-like antagonist to younger brother Vale's idealistic egolike protagonist. As a tragic renegade, Revok revolts against the established order personified in Ruth and ConSec and creates his own society in the cult-like underground. Revok, the demon, tempts, frustrates, and terrorizes the establishment in his attempts to subvert the present order. In fact, Revok represents the culmination of the evil, dehumanizing era spearheaded by his father and thus becomes a projection

of Ruth's own hubris. The two therefore must battle for control over the present era.

As Ruth presents Vale with his mission, with thunder and lightning crashing in the *mise en scene*, we see a black and white film of Revok as he violently threatens his interrogator, a bandaged hole drilled into his forehead in order "to let the people out of my head." An outcast, this rebellious nature is inherent in Revok, who functions as Cronenberg's fallen angel. As Frankenstein's creature rises against his creator out of the agony of isolation and loneliness, Revok revolts against his creator, not only out of alienation, but out of a thirst for superiority and a desire for paternal recognition. Revok knows he is superior to Ruth and other Scanners. We see this power in the infamous "exploding head" scene in which Revok literally scans a fellow Scanner before an audience and explodes his skull. Revok is the oldest Scanner and thus the most powerful, evoking a parallel with Milton's Satan who was the brightest archangel in Heaven. His only threat exists in Vale, his "kid brother" and Cronenberg's Miltonic parallel to Adam. Revok's holy war against his father takes on cosmic import due to the visionary nature of his rebellion -- Revok's superiority could result in the creation of a Scanner master race, a future society, which would replace/rule the present world -- and lay the foundations for a Scanner millennium. Therefore, the superior angel plans to usurp the morally confused and divided Creator-father and repopulate and restructure Heaven in his own Nietzschean design.

However, what ultimately transpires between Ruth and

Revok takes on wider implications in Cronenberg's conventional plot machinations. While the events in the narrative cast a dark tone over much of the film, this sinister flavor enhances the mythopoesis in which Cronenberg is involved. The dystopic future Cronenberg portrays signifies a dark historic period in a post-industrial culture as well as a psychological reality. In this reality, both Revok and Vale struggle to find a sense of unity and selfhood. This significance is labeled, from a mythic standpoint, the Supreme Being, or, in patriarchal cultures, the Father. Thus, the film portrays Vale's search for, and Revok's ultimate acceptance of a relationship with, the Father -- "the real father, the universal source, the agent of conception that transcends even the biological father" (Leeming 218). Ruth is not simply the biological parent to the protagonist and antagonist, but also their spiritual father because of his endowing them with the psychic power of scanning and his seemingly omniscient and omnipresent surveillance of their development as well as his abusive manipulation of them.

In Scanners, Cronenberg presents Ruth and his two sons as physical antecedents of a spiritual nucleus. Ruth, as the father-figure and the wise old man, defines the prohibitions and convictions of the film's dystopic universe and authoritatively passes judgments. He also, as the father, is a human figure which expresses the self and ultimately the force which energizes Vale and Revok. Ruth functions as both father, representing the external body, and mother, representing the internal mind, and becomes a converse figure to Rabid's Rose.

Cameron Vale eventually signifies the positive animus and thus the higher personality of the self, especially since the focus of the film traces his process of individuation from human derelict to transcendent messiah. Revok represents the shadow and the negative animus which struggles against both figures for supremacy in the personality. What both Vale and Revok really struggle and search for is a foundation -- a secure and solid masculine identity. They attempt to break through the silence created by an absent father-figure. This eventually becomes a mythic act since one of the great patterns in mythology, especially Christian myth, revolves around the silence of the father and the suffering of the son. This is seen explicitly in Scanners with Vale's blank acceptance of himself as human junk in the opening scenes and in Revok's tortured attempts to "get the voices" out of his head and his aberrant aggression in the black-and-white home movie. Revok's aggression and Vale's passivity are connected to the silence and absence of Dr. Ruth.

Revok views Ruth as weak and incompetent -- ultimately inferior -- and continually demonstrates his repugnance in the form of terroristic scanning and his founding of the underground group which attempts to usurp Ruth's, and ConSec's, authority. These are simply manifestations of the resentment, guilt, mistrusts, and idealizations left by the bleakness caused by Ruth's absence. However, Ruth, as Revok's father, though physically and emotionally absent, has established an internal structure for his son's growth, albeit as an unseen presence. Here, Ruth is successful; Revok has a highly developed aggressiveness and sense of

exploration along with his logic.

Though absent, Ruth has also provided, through surveillance and clinical study, the necessary conditional element which is "crucial to a child's developing sense of responsibility, a willingness to test and go beyond limits, and even a respect for established hierarchies" (Corneau 17). However, the consequences of this element show Ruth's paternal failure -- Revok cares little for responsibility; he does as he pleases and cares nothing for anyone who gets in his way. He does continually test limitations and successfully goes beyond them until his final showdown with Vale; and he has no respect for hierarchies except his own. Ruth's failure has been to set inadequate limits for Revok; in fact, each limitation he has secretly supplied has been ineffectual and thus results only in conditioning Revok to revel in his own superiority. Ruth's only alternative then is to use Vale as a last attempt at restraint.

The origin for Cronenberg's depiction of the mythic pattern of Paternal Rebellion rests in the silence and absence of the father and the son's resultant resentment and manic aggression aimed at any form of authority which might resemble the father. Revok's goal is to replace Ruth as the father of all of the scanners. Thus, the son becomes the father. In a more figurative sense, Revok wants to become God, as exemplified in his messianic rantings; to become God, he must do away with God. One might also argue that the Revok/Ruth struggle becomes analogous to the Job/God conflict in the Old Testament with Revok continually shouting and venting his anger toward Ruth in hopes of securing some semblance of selfhood and understanding of

life's injustices. However, the son's emotional and physical onslaught proves circular -- the son continually rebels against the father even though he longs for recognition and final identification with the father. In effect, Revok wants to ultimately become the father and replace Ruth's paternal authority over the scanners. However, Revok's "war" against Ruth, and by implication ConSec, becomes ineffectual because of Revok's own irrationality - he will continually rebel against the image of his father until that image becomes transformed, which is exactly what Ruth has desired all along. This transformation occurs with the introduction of Revok's brother and becomes complete during the final battle between the two siblings, i.e. Ruth mutates into Vale as Vale mutates into Revok and represents the Father's ultimate desire for consummation. Yet, this union does not occur harmoniously. The emerging conflict spirals into a similar, but no less volatile, paradigm of brother against brother or Self against the Other.

While the central conflict in Scanners remains the rebellion against Paternal authority, the primary mythic motif is manifested in the archetypal theme of rival brothers, especially the Cain/Abel myth. In Cronenberg's version of the myth, Revok, the first-born, fights with his younger brother, Vale for supremacy over their fellow Scanners. Initially, Revok desires Vale's allegiance; however, upon Vale's idealistic refusal, the insane Revok battles his brother in a fiery showdown. Though Revok destroys his brother's physical body, Vale becomes the victor by overcoming and incorporating his brother's mind

and acquiring his body. This fraternal rivalry, however, ultimately functions merely as a manifestation of the effects of Ruth's paternal abandonment: both sons vie for the attention of the unseen presence of the absent father. More significantly, the struggle between the good son and the evil son, and their eventual transcendent union, represent the Jungian union of opposites; this union is necessary to complete the individuation process in which a totally unified personality emerges.

While the inherent elements of the brother-vs.-brother theme (power, recognition, and jealousy) are obvious, the motif personifies the awareness of opposition and the need for reconciliation. Since the element of rivalry is indistinguishable from the presence and division of the Authorial Father, the polarizing effects of Doubling become firmly manifested. Revok and Vale are ultimately Doubles, or antithetical selves. According to Fred Botting, Otto Rank, the noted mythologist, holds that doubles emanate from a wish for immortality; for Freud, they present uncanny forebodings of death (200). For Revok, Vale epitomizes Revok's own thirst for immortality since there is "a whole generation of scanner soldiers waiting ... to be born. we'll find them, train them to be just like us...we'll bring the normals to their knees. Build an empire so brilliant, so glorious ..." Revok's messianic zeal is countered by Vale's humanism which views cooperation with Revok as synonymous with death. The two cannot exist separately but must be reconciled; in so doing, they foreshadow the Mantle twins in Dead Ringers. Through this consummation they become the father reincarnated. Vale, prior to their fiery showdown,

reminds Revok that "you're just like him, like Ruth, it's as though he's been reincarnated in you." While Vale represents the positive aspects of the animus and the anima, Revok represents the darker aspects of both and embodies a monstrous system of differences which attempt to disrupt the system of control presented in ConSec. Vale fully embodies the Apollonian to Revok's Dionysian view of reality. Both become fused when Vale's internal essence (his mind/spirit) merges into Revok's carnal, physical essence to represent a complete whole personality. In this process Cronenberg creates a new myth which exceeds the dual role of myth. By describing an object (Revok/Vale) and imposing a metalanguage (scanning), Cronenberg makes his scanners productions of myth. In this cosmic fusion, the fragmented assemblage of several myths becomes purified, deconstructed, and transformed into a manifestation of the deformities of humanity's subject -- its self.

Since consummation becomes the chief mythic act, the fusion of Revok and Vale accomplishes the Father's goal of unifying his own duality and recreating his own essence. By doing so, primitive aggression is made controllable without losing any of its vitality. Since both Revok and Vale have lacked a father, for all developmental purposes, both have learned to deal with aggression: they are consumed by it. In the opening scene, we see Vale's aggressive nature as he scans an older woman who scorns him. Figuratively, Vale unleashes his primitive tendencies toward an obvious maternal figure. The condescending tone of the woman's appraisal of him as "disgusting," of course, implies maternal rejection which culminates in sending "mother" into

convulsions and attracting the attention of father, as two ConSec agents, working for Ruth, subdue and take him to the scientist. This scene is paralleled with Revok's explosive performance in the auditorium in which he causes a man's head to literally explode from scanning. Both sons have tremendous difficulties in dealing with their aggressive tendencies, due principally to Ruth's absence. What then unfolds is the taming of the primitive man who rules beneath the thin veneer of consciousness.

Vale becomes more aware of his aggressive nature, and his "gift" through Ruth, and is able to control and master both through the use of Ephemeral. As a result, he undergoes a transformation in which his more Apollonian nature becomes primary. Revok, on the other hand, completely submerges his positive nature and allows his decidedly Dionysian nature to reign supreme. Thus, at the film's climax, Cronenberg's message becomes clearer. Men must become aware of both their nurturing and aggressive natures in order to completely control and master their libido. Paul Ruth functions in this capacity as an authority figure, a creator, and a father; Ruth combines both paternal and maternal impulses. Paul Ruth's name signifies the male/female dichotomy and its contrasting views toward sexuality and aggression. He also serves as a model of balance for his sons; in him are the masculine and feminine aspects of identity unified. By embracing primal energy and wielding it with a degree of control, the dual personalities can merge into selfhood. The fusion scene becomes the culmination of Jung's processes of integration and individuation. This fiery union provokes a catharsis that

expresses violence and negativity while empowering the individual with a healthy degree of aggression. This remains the most idealistic statement at the end of any of Cronenberg's films. The director provides a source of optimism for the continuation of history. Though Revok and Vale both "die" at the conclusion, a new personality emerges which suggests an equilibrium, at least for the tiny faction of scanners who are alienated from society.

Videodrome (1982)

Introduction

Like Scanners, Videodrome follows a plotline that portrays the struggle of an individual caught between two opposing institutional forces who eventually achieves a transcendence. Unlike the previous film, this "breakthrough" offers little optimism in the face of the modern society.

Cronenberg grounds his tale of solipsistic obsession upon myth; in this case, Cronenberg treats the myth of Narcissus in his examination of the limits of personal knowledge and existence, the nature of reality, the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, and the influence of external and internal forces upon individual perspective. In treating this mythic subtext and its related concerns, Cronenberg develops his version of the archetypal hero through a three-stage process which culminates as the controlling metaphor of the New Flesh. The "new flesh" refers to the transmutation and fusion of human flesh, human mind, and video technology; more broadly, this metamorphosis exemplifies another, more inventive and satisfying, fleshy existence which waits just beyond death.

Synopsis

As the head of a Toronto cable station specializing in softcore pornography and violence, Max Renn is constantly looking for something that will "break through." Harlan, his sidekick and an ace satellite pirate, "accidentally" tracks down Videodrome -- a snuff TV show comprising torture, murder, and sadism -- and is asked by Max to get a fix on its source. Max increasingly becomes disturbed by violent sexual hallucinations as his sadomasochistic relationship with Nicki Brand, a radio therapist/personality, escalates. In attempting to locate the source of Videodrome, Max discovers that it is encoded with a signal that induces a brain tumor, which eventually transforms the viewer's reality into video hallucination. Invented by media prophet Professor Brian O'Blivion as the next stage in man's evolution as a technological being, his partners - having murdered him - intend to launch Videodrome as a mind-controlling device through Max's own morally bankrupt cable channel. Max, suffering from extreme hallucinations involving murder and bodily mutation, becomes the pawn of the opposing forces of O'Blivion's daughter Bianca, and the treacherous Harlan and Barry Convex, who are determined to unleash Videodrome on a sick world. Max apparently assassinates his partners, Harlan, and Convex before going into hiding as a fugitive. On a television in a deserted barge, Nicki Brand appears and tells him to surrender the old flesh and embrace the new. Max then shoots himself.

The Modern Narcissus

At its core, Videodrome functions as a fantastic retelling of the myth of Narcissus and transplants the

solipsistic themes inherent in the myth soundly in the media-infused landscape of Toronto. In Max Renn, Cronenberg creates his first three-dimensional protagonist, a man firmly entrenched in the "reality" created by the image and just as fundamentally lost within the hallucination as the youth in Ovid's rendering of the ancient tale of Narcissus. Both narratives question the nature of reality and the importance affixed to the image as well as the strong attraction and influence connecting spectator and image. In Videodrome, Renn, as the archetypal hero, undergoes a transformation process. Beginning with an incarnation stage, he, like Narcissus, exists in an image-influenced autonomy; he then moves into a second transfiguring stage in which his reality becomes intermixed with hallucinatory images as he experiences various metamorphoses. The third stage, apotheosis, signifies Renn's merging with the image until all distinctions between the two are obliterated. This transcendent process ultimately informs Cronenberg's concept of the New Flesh and becomes a central theme in the director's subsequent films.

The basic Narcissus myth harbors several similarities with Cronenberg's ironic cinemyth. These include a fundamental concern with the image, its influence over reality, the manipulation of desires, the androgynous merging of male and female, and libidinous craving. This concept of self-knowledge becomes crucial to Cronenberg's film and serves as the basis for the director's pessimistic conclusion.

Renn, as a modern, technological Narcissus, suffers much the same fate as his ancient counterpart. Both figures go

through the same symbolic process of transforming from man to image and then to a transcendent existence. Renn, like other Cronenberg protagonists, begins his transformation ignorant of its implications or consequences. As Masha, one of his suppliers, chides him after inquiring about Videodrome, "It has something you don't. It has a philosophy and that is what makes it dangerous." Max is morally bankrupt; he has no philosophy. Without a belief system to sustain him, Renn is clearly a *tabula rosa*, a moral infant. As the first third of the film progresses, Renn gradually finds himself caught up in a deeper level of events than he has yet experienced. When Bianca O'Blivion christens him "the video word made flesh," Renn has completed the process. While "incarnation" carries with it connotations of godhood and divine personality, the term, in Max's case, represents a more secular notion of one being held to personify a given abstract quality or idea. Max becomes the video image/word invested with bodily nature and form; he essentially becomes a physical metaphor. This incarnation period in the film associates Max Renn with the video image.

Numerous instances occur, especially in the first third, which point to this union. The film opens with the "Civic TV" logo filling a television screen ("The one you take to bed with you") and the recorded voice and image of Bridey James, Renn's secretary. The film's subjectivity is established here with Bridey's instructions for the sleeping Renn to "ease yourself back into consciousness." Clearly, the indication is that Max sleeps and rises with the video image and that the spectators are joined with Renn's

consciousness at the outset. The remainder of the film offers only information on Renn's interpretation of reality. Renn may not have a philosophy, but he does have an obsessive interest in the image, especially the electronic image created in video. His occupation as a cable television operator makes him a dealer, a profiteer, in the image. Every minute of Max's waking hours, and even his non-waking hours, are spent dealing in some way with the image. From meetings with Japanese video representatives or his business partners, to his dealings with Harlan and Masha, to his leisure activities (videotapes and video game joysticks and other video paraphernalia litter his television set and apartment), everything in Max's life is based on the image. Even his eventual sadomasochistic relationship with Nicki Brand is based on image: he meets her on a television talk-show dealing with media violence and sexuality and is immediately attracted to her by her red dress, a testament to her "highly excited state of overstimulation." Later, she asks him for pornographic tapes because "it gets me in the mood"; they soon lie naked before the glow of his tv screen as he pierces her ears with a needle. Max's first hallucination immediately occurs. From the film's first shot, Cronenberg establishes Max Renn's identification with the video image. This association becomes clearer through Renn's hallucinations until finally the two are combined in a transcendent, fiery conclusion before a tv screen; the screen and the image both provide a full circle opening and closing for the film.

The next stage of Max's development, the transfiguration stage, begins with this first hallucination

which establishes a radical metamorphosis of Max's consciousness. His mind and his body become radically altered through a succession of hallucinations which represent his gradual merging with the video image. The first hallucination involves Max and Nicki making love in the Videodrome program's torture chamber. These visions increase in frequency and intensity as Max gains more knowledge about Brian O'Blivion. Further, Max's visions are also seemingly triggered, at least initially, by a feminine force: Nicki Brand in the first hallucination, Bridey in the second.

In the second vision, which occurs during sleep, Bridey becomes Nicki as Max seemingly slaps her for picking up O'Blivion's videocassette, equating the feminine with violence, power, and threat. Thus, reality for Max becomes juxtaposed with his hallucination in his state of "deep sleep;" his transformation has begun with his haggard appearance and his "rash." This rash becomes metaphoric for Max's subconscious gender confusion; later, in the most significant hallucination of the film, the rash becomes an open slit, a vagina, in Renn's abdomen.

The third vision, incorporating both videocassette, television set, message, and viewer, commences with O'Blivion's videocassette, obtained from his daughter, Bianca. As Max opens it, the cassette begins to breathe. After finally inserting it into the VCR, Brian O'Blivion appears and begins his monologue, his "preferred mode of discourse," which lays out his basic philosophy:

The battle for the mind of North America will be fought in the video arena -- the Videodrome. The

television screen is the retina of the mind's eye; therefore, the television is part of the physical structure of the brain. Therefore, whatever appears on the television screen emerges as raw experience for anyone who watches it. Therefore, television is reality and reality is less than television.

The reiteration of this message via a videocassette through a VCR onto a blank television screen solidly reinforces O'Blivion's assertions for Max and for the viewing audience and calls into question a collective reality for both. Next, O'Blivion blurs the definitions of both even further:

I've been through it all myself, you see. Your reality is already half video hallucination. If you're not careful, it will become total hallucination. You'll have to learn to live in a strange new world.

O'Blivion specifically alludes to Max's mythic role as essentially a "stranger in a strange land." Most mythic heroes -- Odysseus, for example -- leave their known surroundings and venture into new, unexplored dimensions. Here, Max takes a mythic journey into unexplored territory -- the land of video image/reality/hallucination. According to Peter Morris, the literary basis for this fantasy can be found in the writings of Canadian media philosopher Marshall McLuhan, particularly his most influential book, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (94). Like Max, O'Blivion "had visions," the result of a brain tumor. "I believed the visions caused the tumor and not the reverse. I could feel the visions coalesce and become flesh --

uncontrollable flesh. But when they removed the tumor, it was called Videodrome. I was Videodrome's first victim," O'Blivion intones. He is menaced and then strangled by a masked individual, who reveals herself to be Nicki Brand. As an extreme closeup of her mouth fills the tv screen, the hallucination climaxes with Nicki intoning seductively "I want you, Max." The television bulges rhythmically with Nicki's heavy breathing and cracks with veins as the screen/lips bulge outward to swallow a kneeling Max, headfirst.

Following this "vision," Max experiences two further hallucinations which prepare him for the final stage of his transformation: the vagina/fleshgun incident and the experience with Barry Convex and his helmet. Like the previous visions, Renn's hermaphroditic hallucination arrives on the heels of another viewing of O'Blivion's taped monologue. "I believe that the growth within my head ... is in fact a new organ -- a new part of the brain," intones O'Blivion as Max scratches the thin reddish line that has formed on his abdomen. "I think that massive doses of the Videodrome signal will ultimately create a new outgrowth of the brain which will produce and control hallucination to the point that it will change reality -- after all, there is nothing real outside our perception of reality -- is there?" Max glances at his stomach to find a gaping vagina-like opening. He places his pistol (a Walther PPK -- the pistol used by superspy James Bond, thus a doubly significant symbol of male potency and phallic aggression) inside the vagina and moans in pain and ecstasy at the penetration. He stands in pain, his hand still in the vagina, and pulls it

out of his suddenly normal stomach.

This sequence combines the sexual undercurrents developed not just by the previous hallucinations but also by the film's earlier references. The "normal" sexual categories are subverted as Renn's inner turmoil acts itself out in a self-contained representation of intercourse. As Stanley Shaviro states, Sight is not a neutral source of information, but a gaping wound, "a violation of the integrity of the body" (141). As such a violation, Cronenberg combines his previous dominant figures into a singular vehicle in which the body seems to be revolting against itself only because the mind is controlling its data. Anima and animus become united momentarily. Max becomes Jung's androgyne archetype as a foreshadowing of the later transcendence which unites not only male and female but also image and reality. The implications of this union are born out in the next hallucination, orchestrated by O'Blivion's enemy, Barry Convex.

Both Convex and O'Blivion serve as Max's surrogate fathers/mentors and in them are found affinities with Cronenberg's other scientists -- Hobbes, Keloid, Raglan, and Ruth. Just as Renn becomes a culmination of Cronenberg's heroic ideals, he also becomes the culmination of Cronenberg's scientists' creations. Max's final hallucination in this second stage of development occurs in his first clandestine meeting with Convex. Max is prodded into sampling the Spec Op helmet, which induces and records his hallucinations for "analysis." The hallucination, an erotic whipping session with Nicki (dressed in her red dress), ends with Max waking up in bed next to a dead,

bound, and gagged Masha, her body bloody from whipping. Obviously, these series of hallucinations are expressions of Max's moral sickness, his lack of a philosophy. However, these visions prefigure Max's final metamorphosis and prepare the audience for the gradual displacement and separation of mind from body, image from fact. Thus transformed, Max passes into a new realm of experience further away from the world of objective fact and firmly toward the realm of image.

This third "Apotheosis" stage severs the connections rooting Max in the "real" world. In this stage, the predominantly fiery imagery suggests explosive fusion and echoes the mental fireworks which concluded Scanners. This stage commences with Max's discovery of Harlan's treachery and his collaboration with Convex. Harlan has been the closest thing Max has to a friend and his betrayal separates Max completely from his earlier non-philosophic state of being. In the subsequent hallucination, Convex shoves a videotape into Max's abdominal "slit" and programs him to murder his business partners as Max himself reaches into his stomach and removes his fleshgun. In one of the more suspenseful sequences of the film, Max walks into his office building and calmly assassinates his partners, then goes on the run as a fugitive.

This flight from justice metaphorically alludes to Renn's separation from physical reality and its limitations. Renn's role as a fugitive further works as a prelude to the final stage of his transformation as Cronenberg's modern Narcissus. As identities merge and shift, bodies die and resurrect, appear and disappear; the

line separating hallucination and objective reality becomes indistinguishable. Renn does not merely lose any point of reference outside of what is imprinted on the video screen, he directly manifests this process. As Max experiences this final stage, he represents the consciousness of the video society as it solipsistically strives to reach the only enlightenment it can -- that which it has already shaped in its technological modern mind. Seemingly, Videodrome attests to the lack of attainment of any real "spirituality"; man's only spiritual hope lies in what is artificial or manufactured to suit his spiritual needs -- in this case, the sublime image which acts as a barrier to a reality as yet unknowable and unspeakable.

This barrier is apparently crossed in this third stage and the viewer is indeed left with an indication of its non-communicable essence -- only darkness and silence and the echoes of the present -- while Renn himself finds something else, possibly nothingness. Following his escape, Renn makes his way to O'Blivion's Cathode Ray Mission "programmed" to kill Bianca. Yet another bizarre hallucination involves Nicki's televised murder, the fleshgun, and a television screen. When shot three times, the screen mutates into Max's chest, which bleeds from three wounds. Bianca "reprograms" Max by replacing the Convex videocassette in his abdominal slit with her own videocassette. "You'll see that you've become something quite different than you were. You've become the video word made flesh," intones Bianca. With a raised fist, Max replays, "I am the video word made flesh." "You are the video word made flesh. You know what you have to do. You've

turned against Videodrome. You use the weapons they've given you to destroy them. Death to Videodrome! Long live the New Flesh!" Again, with raised clenched fist, Max repeats the litany. Here, the earlier Incarnation stage reaches its fulfillment as Max becomes fully identified with "the video word," the image, the video concept given a form. After dispatching Harlan, as the satellite pirate reaches into Max's "vagina" with another videocassette and withdraws a literal hand grenade which then explodes, Max makes his way to Convex's trade show for Spectacular Optics. Cronenberg satirically uses two quotes from Lorenzo Medici to further manifest the centrality of sight as ad slogans for "the Medici line" of eyewear: "Love comes in at the eye" and "The eye is the window to the soul." He shoots Convex three times with his fleshgun, screaming into the microphone, "Death to Videodrome, Long live the New Flesh!" as Convex's body literally mutates into a squirming, cancerous, and bloody mass. By disposing of these "false" purveyors of the video incarnation, Max paves the way for the true video avatar, himself, to ascend to his technologically induced throne. Max foreshadows Cronenberg's messiah figure, Johnny Smith, in the next film. However, as a messiah, Max is inherently flawed because he has no philosophy.

In an apotheosis, the individual becomes exalted to a divine rank or stature at best, or an exalted or glorified example, at least. Renn's apotheosis takes place in the film's final sequence. Max enters a rundown boatyard and boards a derelict tugboat which has been condemned. Surrounded by a literal world of trash and junk, Max sits

down on a filthy and rotten mattress facing a television against a wall. Nicki's face fills the screen as she intones,

I'm here to guide you. I've learned death is not the end. You've gone just about as far as you can with the way things are. Videodrome still exists. You've hurt them but you haven't destroyed them. To do that you have to go on to the next phase. Your body has already done a lot of changing. But that's only the beginning. The beginning of the New Flesh. You have to go all the way through now. Do you think you're ready? To become the New Flesh, you first have to kill the Old Flesh. Don't be afraid to let your body die. Watch. I'll show you how. It's easy.

Max moves toward the television set and raises the fleshgun to his head. "Long live the New Flesh," he says as he fires. In one of the film's strongest shots, the tv screen explodes in a roaring flood of blood, intestines, and smoke. The camera then cuts to Max as he rises from the mattress and walks toward a small fire burning in the center of the room. He kneels before it and, as the flames grow and leap about him, consuming him, raises his pistol to his head. "Long live the New Flesh," he says as he closes his eyes, smiles, and fires. Only the echoes of the pistol and a black screen remain.

With this final, disturbing image, Cronenberg unifies the opposing forces in his hero in a fiery, existential transcendence. This final shot complements the film's first shot in Max's apartment. This unification resolves the

primary mind/body dichotomy as the body (represented by Nicki) and the spirit (Bianca) are made whole in a new state of transcendence which may be only death. The flames which leap up as Max raises his gun are not only those of the sexual body consuming itself in conflagration, but also those of the fire pronounced by the original Narcissus and the purifying fire of spiritual faith. This final moment is a culmination of all Max has done as Nicki and Bianca, the eternal feminine, leads him into "the next phase" which, hopefully (Cronenberg does not say), will be an ascension of sorts to replace the gradual Cronenbergian descent into the world of Junk.

Though the quasi-religious doctrine of "the new flesh" pushes Max to a limit, it offers no promises regarding what he will encounter on the other side. True, the film ends with the echoes of a gunshot and blankness, presumably the death of a body-based consciousness, but ultimately the unshowable cannot be shown. With the technological and spiritual allusions and themes notwithstanding, Cronenberg cannot penetrate that moment of finality; instead he offers only hallucinatory implications as to what lies beyond. Any type of answer rests firmly, though elusively, in the image-making faculty of the individual mind. Like Narcissus entranced by his own reflected image, the individual's spirituality is locked into his own physicality. The individual soul remains tied to mental powers of perception and creation. When the individual stares into the final blankness, he, like Narcissus at the stream, finds only his shadow staring back.

The Dead Zone (1983)

Introduction

One central concern in The Dead Zone is the exploration of the messianic impulse in a technological society, that is, the belief in a deliverer or liberator who firmly holds to a cause felt to be absolutely right. Johnny Smith functions fully as the film's archetypal messiah. However, Cronenberg undercuts this traditionally religious figure by adding a political dimension which makes Johnny not only a savior for this world but also a bourgeois "lone nut" assassin.

This interrogation of the messianic complex, taken with Cronenberg's previous emphasis on the apocalyptic, might at first seem contradictory, yet the two concepts are firmly intertwined in the concept of the hero. If there is going to be an end, then there must also be one who challenges the end, regardless of the success of the endeavor. The human spirit instinctively fights annihilation. Unlike the New Testament messiah, who promises to return, the existential savior cannot return. Apocalypticism precludes a division or dichotomy often embodied in rival factions, usually expressed in secular/political and spiritual/enlightened terms or ideals. The messianic hero paradoxically embodies the ideals of one or both camps, thus intensifying the division while grappling with reunification. This unique form of heroism requires equally unique preparation. Just as there are stages in the process of heroism (separation-initiation-return), similar stages also present themselves in the messianic process (isolation-

withdrawal-rejection). In The Dead Zone, Cronenberg initiates broad rival factions and specific familial dysfunction which influence and oppose the visionary/messianic abilities of Johnny Smith; he further moves Johnny through the stages his role as visionary/messiah requires and deepens Cronenberg's version of the hero.

Synopsis

New England schoolteacher Johnny Smith is engaged to Sarah Bracknell, a fellow teacher at their local school. However, Johnny is involved in a serious car accident which sends him into a five-year coma. He awakens to find that Sarah has since married someone else. As he learns to walk again, Johnny realizes that -- though his life has been dismantled -- he now possesses the psychic ability to see into people's lives: past, present, and future. As he becomes a local celebrity, Johnny is asked by the police to help solve a serial murder case through the use of his "gift." He reluctantly agrees after he spends the only night he will ever have with Sarah. Cursed by his psychic ability, Johnny grows more and more reclusive, eventually moving far away and becoming a private tutor, fully aware now that every vision he experiences brings him closer to death. Sarah reappears in his new life campaigning for senate hopeful, Greg Stillson. Johnny has a vision in which he "sees" that Stillson will, in the future, lead the world into a nuclear conflict. The vision has a "dead zone": a blank spot which indicates that Johnny can intervene and change events. Johnny plans to assassinate Stillson but is shot in the attempt. As he dies, Johnny envisions Stillson

committing suicide having been discredited by the event.

The Bipolar World and Familial Dysfunction

The Dead Zone's world is neatly divided into a fundamental bipolar opposition consisting of those who align themselves with the visionary and those who support and follow the false visionary. What emerges through this dichotomy is yet another variation of Cronenberg's central mind/body duality. Johnny and his followers clearly represent the mental with its emphasis on past, present, and future and the hallucinatory nature of Smith's visions. Stillson's supporters underscore the body in their yearning for immediate economic and social relief and its subsequent accent on work and the working class. This bodily emphasis is further underscored not only by Stillson's bullying political tactics, which involve blackmail and physical threats, but also by his continual call to physical action ("a volunteer army to send Greg Stillson to the U.S. Senate and mediocrity to Hell!"; "I'll have Sonny take your goddamned head off! Now put your hand on the scanning screen or I'll hack it off and put it on for you!").

Though Stillson, like Johnny, has a clear vision, it is very much an arrogant obsession for personal glory with the self firmly seated as the center of attention. Stillson embodies hubris more fully and explicitly than the rationalistic scientists of Cronenberg's previous films. Johnny's visions, on the other hand, always focus on the Other -- that which lies outside the self: other people -- men, women, and children. These "glimpses," freed from temporal reality, are infused with an ethical core of compassion involving safety, justice, and protection against

the chaos of the universe. Cronenberg's modern visionary is firmly based in a spiritual realm of human activity: Smith is ultimately committed to the betterment of his fellow man despite the severe personal losses he must experience; Stillson sees his fellow man as nothing more than stepping stones to his own personal exaltation.

Johnny's followers include Sam Weizak, the compassionate doctor who rehabilitated Johnny's body; Sheriff Bannerman, the local constable who seeks only a solution to savagery; Chris Stuart, the shy introvert who becomes Johnny's surrogate son; and Johnny's father, Herb, who knows his own paternal inadequacies yet empathizes with his son's plight. These "disciples" each have a flaw or wound which is ultimately healed through Johnny. Smith awakens in them a solid spiritual yearning.

For Sam, Johnny's vision of the doctor's long-lost mother ushers in a personal peace and brings him to the line separating personal knowledge from selfish indulgence. For Bannerman, the rational agnostic, the visionary ultimately encourages a new awareness concerning the unknown and spiritual. For Chris, Johnny awakens a confidence and a nurturing faith and understanding that lay undiscovered by the boy's wealthy, politically savvy father. Finally, for Herb, Johnny simply, without visions, gives a non-condemning acceptance of Herb's paternal limitations and good-heartedness, an obvious, but benevolent, complement to the father-son relationship in Scanners. For these individuals, Johnny Smith ultimately becomes a chameleon who heals their innermost needs and flaws and brings them to a new sense of themselves and their existences. He acts as a

"giver of light" who sees not only future apocalypse or past sins but also the deep pain of the present. While Stillson, in his political machinations and crowd-pleasing oratories, seeks only pawns and puppets who simple-mindedly reflect his own false, illusory image, Johnny genuinely seeks only solitude and silence and, in so doing, offers to a small but loyal following self-understanding and selflessness. The world portrayed in The Dead Zone and the people occupying it long for the easy answer, the quick fix. This world is fractured from within by self-doubt and inefficacy. Economic hardship and moral uncertainty mask a deeper self-loathing which is reflected in the numerous ruptured and dysfunctional relationships interwoven among the chief characters, especially those between parent and child. These faulty familial connections echo earlier Cronenberg families like the Carveths and the Ruths. The primary family presented here, of course, is the Smith family dominated by the religious fanaticism of Vera, sublimated by the weak gentleness of Herb, and activated by the tragic impulse of their visionary son.

Maternal domination continues in the Dodd family and results in a five-year reign of terror created by intense Mother hate. Frank Dodd rapes and murders young women while living in a darkly sinister house where he has been kept a young child, as reflected in the juvenile decor and trappings of his room. Here, he has been ruled over by a defiantly protective mother, herself a neurotic recluse. Dodd's failure to fully integrate the anima results in a rampaging Animus. Both mothers harbor an abnormally intense preoccupation with their sons which threatens their

offspring with destruction. Dodd commits suicide as a result of being uncovered by Johnny; Dodd, in various ways a twin to the equally psychotic Stillson, dies in his bathtub, itself an obvious analogue to his mother's womb, within the labyrinth erected and guarded by the dark maternal force. This force almost claims Johnny himself by shooting and seriously wounding him before being killed by the paternalistic authority of Bannerman, a surrogate father for Dodd by virtue of his office. Johnny's mother, however, suffers a stroke while watching Johnny's press conference and dies still proclaiming the Divine authority of Johnny's "gift" while Dodd's mother proclaims Johnny a "devil" preceding her death. This praise/condemnatory aspect of Motherhood echoes the previous schism within Nola Carveth and functions as a fundamental aspect of division in The Dead Zone as well as an indictment of the Feminine Principle. The only possible salvation for such a scarred motherhood rests with Sarah Bracknell, herself the mother of the film's third family.

As Johnny's intended bride, Sarah provokes the ire of Vera, who condemns her because she "now cleaves unto another" and has "forsaken" Johnny upon his awakening. Yet even Sarah fails in her maternal capacity: she violates her marriage vows when she sleeps with Johnny as her son Denny rests nearby. Though Johnny is Denny's spiritual father, Sarah's adultery, and subsequent deception, foreshadows Stillson's cowardly use of Denny as a shield from Johnny's bullets and ensures Johnny's death. Sarah's tearful reunion with Johnny as he dies testifies to the inherent instability of her own marriage; Sarah's maternity holds within it the

seeds of yet another dysfunctional family unit. Sarah also is the one character whose feet are firmly planted in both camps, Johnny's and Stillson's. However, Sarah's participation in Stillson's political campaign seems more a wifely duty than any firm ideological decision. Her husband, Walt, proudly promotes Stillson as "mounting the most successful third party campaign this state has ever seen" and naively asks Johnny, "Are you aware of what Greg Stillson stands for?" as his wife silently distributes campaign literature. Even in the climactic assassination scene, Walt appears as nothing more than an overeager yes-man welcoming Stillson to the platform. Though his appearance is brief and obviously subordinate, Walt embodies Cronenberg's familiar paternal inefficacy and joins the ranks of Frank Carveth and Barton Kelly with this weakness contrasting with the strength of Johnny's spiritual fatherhood.

This paternal fragility seriously undermines all of the families portrayed in the film and combines with the maternal schism to render the family unit unstable and thus pliable to the two rival factions operating within the narrative structure. Weak and/or absent fathers only further increase the power of the already potent maternal principles functioning within each family. Weak fathers include Herb Smith, Walt, and the newspaper editor brutalized by Stillson; absent fathers include Frank Dodd's father and Sam Weizak's missing father.

However, the one father figure in the film who fully embodies Cronenberg's flawed fatherhood is Roger Stuart, Chris' wealthy and influential father, who hires Johnny to

tutor his introverted son. Stuart clearly takes on a dominating role and replaces Chris' absent mother with a firm, extroverted masculinity which overpowers his more sensitive and cerebral son. Stuart hires Johnny to bring the boy "out of his shell" but, as Chris tells Johnny, "it's my dad who lives in a shell, not me." The father's shell begins to crumble even when he first cajoles Johnny into tutoring his son. Johnny reluctantly accepts his charge under the condition that Stuart must bring Chris to Johnny's house. Immediately, Stuart strives for the upper hand; he is clearly threatened by Johnny as he watches the two become acquainted and draw closer together. Eventually, this jealous insecurity brings about Stuart's downfall. Johnny has a vision that Chris will be involved in a tragic hockey accident. When he confronts Stuart, who has arranged the game on the family pond, he is first placated and then abruptly fired by the father. Later, after Chris refuses to play because of Johnny's warning, Stuart must face the reality of his arrogance and jealousy when the ice does break and two boys drown. When Johnny calls to make sure Chris is alright, Stuart is a broken shell. He has failed as a father and committed an irresponsible and criminal act. He now must face the consequences brought on by his weaknesses.

Finally, in the cold world depicted in The Dead Zone, Cronenberg reveals a dualistic nature which fragments and splinters into the collective psyche. Though this world is neatly divided into essentially materialistic and spiritual factions, the reverberations of this split can be found in the basic unit of this society: the family. In these familial relationships, Cronenberg reveals a flaw which

only heightens the direct tensions between Stillson's materialists and Johnny's spiritualists. The division of power between mother and father rests with the maternal principle clearly in the dominating position and the weak paternal forces sublimated and effectively emasculated. However, these divisions experience further splinter with a maternity composed of neurosis and fanaticism, on one hand and confusion and irresponsibility, on the other; paternity likewise grapples with self-indulgent insecurities such as naivete, indecision, arrogance, and jealousy. The result of these divisions is an intensification of the rival factions' powers. Ultimately, the world of The Dead Zone is one crying out for a messiah and any kind will do, either the political or the more potent spiritual variety.

The Existential Messiah

As he did with Max Renn in Videodrome, Cronenberg takes his protagonist in The Dead Zone through a three-stage process of development. However, with Johnny Smith, the director chooses an equally personal but more melancholy trajectory with the end result being a more illuminated and more specific heroic figure. Yet, as with all of Cronenberg's heroes, there exists a cynical attitude toward the hero's final accomplishment. Though The Dead Zone ends on a note, albeit small, of optimism, it is severely undercut by Johnny Smith's personal tragedy.

Though he accomplishes his heroic feat of saving the world, momentarily at least, from the monomania of Greg Stillson, the only reward given Johnny is the act of dying in his true love's arms with the vision that in the very near future Stillson will commit suicide. Though he has

attempted a political assassination, Cronenberg's messiah has not killed his target but has managed an even greater victory: he has discredited his foe in the public opinion polls. However, the true irony found in Johnny's victory is that he is the only person who knows it is a victory; to the general public and the media Johnny Smith will be remembered as only one more lone nut stalking political candidates. This tragic irony ultimately bears witness to Johnny's savior role: in accepting public scorn and ridicule for his heroic sacrifice, Johnny displays the necessary attitude and motivation required for a truly messianic figure. In Cronenberg's universe, by finally bearing the public mantle of madman, Johnny Smith becomes a savior.

Yet the road to this final, though inconclusive, saving act is itself fraught with darkly ironic levels of descent. While Max Renn ascends the more ethereal stages of incarnation, transfiguration, and apotheosis, Johnny Smith must descend into the more corporeal labyrinth of isolation, seclusion, and rejection. Taken together, these steps represent the totality of the Cronenbergian hero and further display the basic tensions of Cronenberg's cinematic universe. By first positing thesis with antithesis and then synthesizing them into a unified whole, the director depicts the essential nature of his mythos: contradiction and compromise. The Cronenberg hero embodies these qualities and his plight serves as an exploration of this contradictory essence. Therefore, the hero comes to represent those forces at work in Cronenberg's world; he becomes a microcosm of that universe while the universe becomes a macrocosm of the hero. Just as Cronenberg's heroes demonstrate a

development from Roger St. Luc to Max Renn, the director's protagonists experience a devolution from Johnny Smith to Seth Brundle, the Mantle Twins, and finally to Bill Lee. Each figure represents and unites heroism and messianism, creation and destruction, self-protection and self-destruction, and arrogant pride and selfless sacrifice.

Johnny's isolation begins almost immediately. As the film opens, Johnny stands before his classroom as an awkward but quietly charismatic teacher reciting Poe's "The Raven." The solitude of this teaching role becomes apparent when Johnny asks Sarah, "Can teachers get expelled for kissing?" Her response, "They get fired," firmly points to the inherent isolation of the teacher and the potential it brings for absolute rejection. However, the full brunt of Johnny's isolation comes a few scenes later after he leaves Sarah's house in the rain. He collides with a milk truck and is thrown into a five-year coma. The collision scene itself is charged with symbolic, and absurd, possibilities. The large milk tanker sliding over a rise out of the darkness and rain takes on mythic proportions as it gains speed and hurls headlong toward Johnny's small Volkswagen. The milk which erupts in the collision signifies both mother's milk by throwing Johnny into a deep, almost nurturing sleep, and the father's sperm as it creates a new form of life. This new being is the visionary who stands outside temporal reality and sees past and future events while descending into a personal reality of visions with a mere touch from his fellow man.

When Johnny finally awakens from his long dormancy, he finds himself totally isolated mentally, physically,

emotionally, and spiritually. The life he knew, with all its potential, has been wiped away and he wakes up in a new world. Physically, his body needs rehabilitation in order for him to walk again; emotionally, his true love has married another, his job and livelihood are gone, and his parents have grown older; mentally, he is estranged from this new reality and the old, not knowing how to respond or what to respond to; and spiritually, he is alienated from and bitter towards God, whom Cronenberg considers here as his absent scientist.

The seclusion stage of Johnny's development commences soon after his release from the hospital, which has also acted as an isolating agent in itself and ends with the hockey accident. As Vera lies in her deathbed, Johnny takes her hand in his and kisses it as she dies; presumably, Johnny sees beyond death here; however, it remains uncertain as Johnny lowers his head whether he does so out of grief or because he has seen what actually resides on the other side. From this point on, Johnny is adamant about his seclusion. As a recluse, he simply wants to escape the notoriety and exposure caused by his visions of little Amy, a nurse's daughter, caught in her burning bedroom. He also seeks solitude due to his press conference vision in which he tells an arrogant reporter about the reporter's sister's suicide. ("Let go of me, you freak!") Only at the prodding of Bannerman does Johnny reluctantly at last step out in the world. "If God has seen fit to bless you with this gift, you should use it," Bannerman tells him. Johnny responds vehemently and indicts God for the injustice of his situation and his own sense of his powers:

Bless me? You want to know what God did for me? He threw an 18-wheel truck at me. Bounced me into nowhere for five years. When I woke up my girl was gone, my job was gone, my legs are just about useless. Bless me? God's been a real sport to me!

Johnny's total alienation and isolation become complete in this tirade as he takes on a Job-like questing for personal justice against a cold, silent universe. Only after his one night with Sarah, in which he comes closest to being granted any sense of justice for his plight, does Johnny agree to venture out of his self-imposed exile.

The *mise-en-scene* of the tunnel scene fully amplifies the mythic dimensions of Johnny's reclusive character. The eerily lit tunnel, with light ethereally glistening on the cobblestone walls, becomes a passageway between the real world and a symbolic spiritual realm. The tunnel also serves as a metaphor for Johnny's unique position. As a figure who traverses back and forth between these two levels of existence, Johnny himself is an eerie wanderer who doesn't belong to either side and yet must reconcile them within himself. According to Bannerman, the killer waited around the corner "for her to come through. I tell kids not to come through here but they like to use it as a shortcut to school." Thus, the tunnel becomes even more representative of Smith's condition; as a reclusive tutor, Johnny himself is a shortcut to public school teaching and to traditional learning.

Furthermore, by having the ability himself to "come through" the symbolic tunnel between two worlds in his

visions, Johnny represents a new kind of "seeing" or "knowing." Throughout this stage of development, Johnny continually exposes himself to the "knowledge" of the world and the way its inhabitants see. With the visionary's way of knowing repeatedly called into service and his knowledge held up for public inspection, the isolation of the prophet is more and more reinforced as is his constant search for seclusion. The tension which develops from Johnny's thirst for solitude and the call for his "gift" ultimately prepare him for the final stage of his messianic impulse.

Society's rejection of Johnny is foreshadowed throughout the film. From the screams of the nurse who first experiences Johnny's gift to the arrogant reporter who labels him a "freak" to Frank Dodd's mother who calls him "a devil" and Sarah's choice of another mate during his coma, Johnny experiences the pain and loneliness of rejection more extremely than any other emotion. Indeed, his forays into seclusion can be read as his attempts at renouncing a society which continually denies him and his gift.

Yet, as he enters the final stage of his messianic development, Johnny harbors a deep affection and interest in the world as is evidenced by his concern for Chris and his love for Sarah. In fact, the rejection stage commences as he tries to find Sarah at the Stillson rally held across the street from his new home. As he is carried away by the crowd, Johnny encounters Stillson, shakes his hand, and has a vision of the candidate as president starting a nuclear strike against an unnamed enemy. By ushering in the subjectivity of this vision as Johnny's primary motivation for his later actions, Cronenberg infuses his hero with

certain rejection.

Through Johnny's discovery of his "dead zone" in the hockey episode, Cronenberg adds yet another reactionary layer which will complete society's expulsion of Johnny as another "lone nut." Johnny's dead zone, his "possibility of altering the outcome of premonitions," of not only seeing the future but also changing it, motivates Johnny to get his father's rifle, disassemble it, and take a bus to a nearby rally with the firm intent of assassinating Stillson in order to save the world from a future nuclear destruction. In this act, Johnny further is attempting to reconcile the oppositions present in his world. As he takes his weapon apart, Johnny pauses before a photo of his parents and a picture of the cross. Here, in this final act which he has chosen as a course of action, Johnny reconnects with the harmonious relationship of mother and father, man and woman, and connects that relationship with the concept of a suffering scapegoat as a divine agent. His messianic impulse is complete as is his final, complete rejection by society. In a voice-over letter to Sarah, Johnny says:

I can't go on hiding any more. That's what I've been doing. Running and hiding. I had this figured all wrong. I always thought this power of mine was a curse. But now I can see it's a gift. You never will understand; nobody will. Just know that I know what I'm doing. And I know I'm right.

Again, a distinction exists in the emphasis on Johnny's "knowing" and the world's "knowing." The visionary /

sees his true purpose and his gift and accepts both; in so doing, he accepts himself even as the society for which he dies will ultimately reject him.

Though his vision has flexibility (by not physically killing Stillson, Johnny effectively kills his public persona which will result, supposedly, in Stillson's suicide), Johnny's messianic role remains largely a subjective affair. Only Johnny understands his actions; the public will brand him insane and an attempted murderer, but he will have the secret knowledge that he was "right." In Cronenberg's universe, the Messiah need only accept his vision and act upon it; public opinion, like total comprehension, is inconsequential.

Conclusion

In Scanners, the Id is synonymous with power; with no constraints holding back primal urges, the individual becomes a menace to the order and structure of a fearful society. This apprehension translates into a fear of invasion, of being engulfed, and of being annihilated. Individual awareness, thus, becomes threatening due to its potential as a weapon. One mind can actually dominate another. Thoughts literally can kill. However, despite this dangerous potential, a converse situation arises. Thoughts can also release and expunge as well as absorb and assimilate. For the first time in Cronenberg's body of work, however, this mental-into-physical ability takes on the aura of a gift, depending upon the nature and will of the individual.

Ultimately this becomes Cronenberg's main interest: the nature of mankind. This focus eventually leads to the

unusual hopefulness Cronenberg presents in the film's final shot. Cronenberg's scanners provide an alternative society, one purer than the technological dystopia in which the film is set. Further, by emphasizing the refined mental ability of telepathy, Cronenberg provides a purer, more sublime language in which this society could communicate -- an ideal communication separated and liberated from the constraints of the flesh. Also, this language system competitively polarizes with artificially advanced information systems, i.e. the ConSec mainframe. In his scanners, Cronenberg creates a metaphor which embodies a hypersensitive consciousness and a coherent ideology distinctively absent from a systematic corporate world.

By locating the enemy in human nature itself rather than in a mental or created defect, Cronenberg probes much deeper into his basic concerns. Scanners is not so much positive as really more highly idealistic. By having Vale overcome the dark, idlike Revok and inhabit his body, Cronenberg ends his film by suggesting that the constructive aspect of the individual can unite with, rather than defeat, his more destructive aspect. Through infusing the outward movement of inner impulses with essentially optimistic mythic dimensions, Cronenberg complements his earlier pessimism and points toward a more specific and volatile journey into the personal psyche. Scanners represents a pivot for Cronenberg's thematic concerns and a distinct move away from the social emphasis to the personal in the hopes of philosophically, artistically, and cinematically charting the contours of the interior landscape of the individual, rather than the collective, psyche.

In Max Renn exists a culmination of Cronenberg's earlier heroes, his first dominant protagonist, and a fuller, more dense embodiment of "the Cronenbergian Problem"; Max encapsulates this predicament in himself "by denying the forbidden parts of his nature, by assuming he can control them, by experimenting with them without thought of consequence, [and thus] ensures that these parts will rise up and assume command" (Beard 51). By making Videodrome a "first-person film," Cronenberg provides an intense examination of subjectivity that would show to the audience the subjective growth of his hero's insanity. From this perspective, Max becomes a vehicle in which hubristic consciousness and a raging unconsciousness are locked in a paradigmatic struggle. What was once treated separately in two or more characters is now treated within a single character in a highly complex statement on personal responsibility.

By adding the media as an external force manipulating the subjective consciousness, Cronenberg adds a topicality and a metaphoric dimension which deepens the film's rich textuality. The reflective relationship between subjective viewer and subjective image provides a solid thematic foundation in which the limits separating society and the individual grow indistinct. Cronenberg poses an existential proposition: with objectivity and subjectivity indiscernible, life becomes unknowable, and its problems unsolvable, because verification of information becomes highly problematic, if not outright impossible. Therefore, sender and receiver become identified with message and promulgate a solipsistic perspective and existence.

Everything in Renn's world revolves physically, emotionally, and spiritually around Max; he creates his own universe out of his mind and his hallucinations become his universe. What becomes objectively verified meets the stone wall of subjectivity resulting in the dissolution of the line separating exterior reality and interior existence.

Like Scanners, though more melancholy and bittersweet than optimistic, The Dead Zone reveals a larger degree of affirmation toward the individual rather than Cronenberg's customary ambivalence. Furthering the trend begun in Videodrome, Cronenberg continues his focus upon the individual and the effect of "visions" on subjectivity. Again, the director goes inside a character and depicts an interior reality. Cronenberg ultimately "personalizes" the film into Johnny Smith's story. Intent on visually representing Johnny's visions, Cronenberg sees the story through Johnny's point of view. This tendency continues on in Cronenberg's The Fly and, more importantly and to a higher degree, in his adaptation of Naked Lunch.

The Dead Zone is Cronenberg's most human film and Johnny Smith is the most sympathetic figure in any Cronenberg film. He is Cronenberg's only "real" hero; Max Renn may have been the director's first fully realized, three-dimensional protagonist, but Johnny Smith emerges as truly heroic because, unlike Renn, Johnny possesses "a philosophy." Like Rose, Nola Carveth, and Cameron Vale, Johnny Smith lives beyond the edge of human interaction -- first in a five-year coma, then as a recluse living outside of town in a small country home. Only when he must become society's savior does Johnny bring himself to re-enter it, though its

salvation brings about his death. This form of solution further echoes throughout Cronenberg's films. With Johnny Smith, Cronenberg moves more fully into the realm of individual character at the same time as he recasts archetypal figures for positions in his personal mythos. Commencing with Max Renn in the previous film, Cronenberg created his prototypical "hero"; with Johnny Smith, the director adds a layer of humanity to his version of the archetype and creates a more compassionate figure.

The Dead Zone marks the end of Cronenberg's second trilogy of films and serves as a suitable segue to the more complex and thematically dense The Fly, Dead Ringers, and Naked Lunch. With these films, Cronenberg's emphasis on the individual, the increasingly intricate interrelationship between mind and body, and mythic conceptions in a contemporary environment reach a significant peak. Having gone to the edge with Max Renn's hallucinatory visions, the director crosses over into new territory by dealing less with the subjective nature of the individual vision and more with the placement of the individual visionary in a less than hospitable society. But, in The Dead Zone, more than before, Cronenberg emphasizes the tragic condition of the visionary in a technological world and provides a more sensitive and understated, rather than visceral, depiction of the tensions which create and impel such a figure. By shifting his focus from cancerous growths and bizarre sexual transformations to more subtle interior concerns such as melancholy, loneliness, and unrequited love, all presented in archetypal figures and patterns, Cronenberg demonstrates an expansion of his artistic vision. He also reveals a

deeper exploration into the human psyche which moves away from his earlier "clinical" portrayals. He, in effect, grows closer to his human subjects.

CHAPTER IV: THE JOURNEY TRILOGY

(THE FLY, DEAD RINGERS, AND NAKED LUNCH)

Introduction

Cronenberg's third trilogy reflects his official entrance into mainstream success and a far deeper, more melancholic exploration of the human psyche. In these three films a connecting thread constitutes an existential parody of the archetypal Journey. Rather than taking his protagonists on an external trip into geographic landscapes in search of strange adventures and new knowledge, Cronenberg takes them on an interior voyage through the psychic caverns laced with the most potent demons of them all: the personal. The Fly, Dead Ringers, and Naked Lunch present an internal and external descent into the primordial ooze of the Collective Unconscious; here, the Campbellian heroic journey of separation, initiation, and return becomes transformed into the Cronenbergian downward spiral of fusion, separation, and re-integration. In this trilogy, Cronenberg's scientist officially moves to the central position of hero. Here his consciousness merges with an Other and descends into a sub-human form, then splits into twin personalities who are riddled with an existential desire for identity. Then he mutates into an artist who struggles with the addiction of creativity.

With this trilogy Cronenberg also adds the last archetypal element to his cinematic mythology. What began as an external critique of technological society now turns inward and concludes with an exploration of time, identity, and addiction and their effects on awareness. This final triumvirate forms a complex interior journey into the realm

of total subjectivity, which is the source of all myth and all creation for the individual.

The director's remake of The Fly typically concerns itself with traditional Cronenbergian motifs and themes (the revolution of the body, disease as a metaphor of the human condition, the world of junk, the identity of the individual man amidst the landscape). A key element in the devolution of the film's hero to his primordial origins lies in the director's unique use of the metaphysical conceit.

Greatly influenced by the metaphysical poets, Cronenberg paraphrases John Donne's definition of metaphysical poetry as "poetry in which normally unharmonious elements are violently yoked together" (Rodley 131). Cronenberg's version of this conceit, one which he has consciously used throughout his career, becomes central to the thematic structure of The Fly as what he calls "the disease of being finite," i.e. the Disease of Finitude.

In his next film, the director uses the archetypal journey to explore even more fully the interior landscape of the human psyche. In Dead Ringers more than in any other work, Cronenberg tackles the difficult issue of individual identity. From a Jungian perspective, Cronenberg addresses the complex relationship between ego-identity and the self-archetype, which ostensibly becomes the *Other*. The sharing and opening of the self to the experience of an *Other* becomes one of the central issues of Cronenberg's film; exactly how deep is the connection between one's identity and another's? What is the origin of the self? What are the costs of separation from identity, especially if that identity is both feminine and masculine in nature?

Furthermore, the mysterious source of the self, which can be viewed also as the unknown otherness, connects with the mystery of an external reality; these two unknowns combine and take on religious overtones. The search for the self, the quest for personal identity, then, becomes a journey towards "God," the Absolute Reality. Cronenberg, an avowed agnostic, questions this notion of identity as more biological than spiritual. Cronenberg's story of Eliot and Beverly Mantle concentrates on the twins' biology and, in a larger context, on the notion that biology is destiny. As a result, the director questions the ultimate justification of free will.

It is fitting perhaps that Cronenberg's ninth feature, the film that seemingly closes the director's forays into the fantastic, would also be, in a sense, the story that began his cinematic vision: an adaptation of William S. Burroughs' notorious beat novel Naked Lunch. Burroughs became, with Nabokov, Cronenberg's greatest literary influence; his iconography serves eventually as the source for much of Cronenberg's cinematic vision. Though the entire process of writing, financing, and shooting his screenplay would take more than a decade, Cronenberg's initial notion of making a film about writing and the commitment, dangers, and effects of creativity would prove successful. Hailed as an original blending of Burroughs and Cronenberg, the film serves as an extrapolation of Naked Lunch and becomes less a literal translation and more an exploration into the creative impulse. Cronenberg uses Burroughs' novel, as well as portions of his Exterminator! and Junky, as jumping off points while sprinkling various

episodes and characters from Burroughs' own life throughout. The film serves as an penetrating examination of the writing process. As such, Cronenberg, like Burroughs in the novel, uses the archetypal quest motif as the central structuring device. By focusing on the creative process, Cronenberg depicts the symbolic journey of the artist into the depths of his subconscious to the source of the creative waters. Bill Lee as the archetypal artist joins Seth Brundle, who trekked into the source of change and aging, and the Mantle twins, who explored the labyrinth of identity, and plunges headlong into the unknown and forbidden territory of creation.

The Fly (1986)

Introduction

In The Fly, the disease motif takes on a new significance as it fuses with romantic elements. Cronenberg creates the visual equivalent of a metaphysical conceit by joining a tragic, yet sensitive, love story to violently visceral images of physical deterioration. This conceit controls the thematic implications of the film while evoking concerns regarding identity, time, the flesh, and the mind. Cronenberg views his film, with its central image, as "talking about mortality, about our vulnerability, and the tragedy of human loss. The difficulty in accepting it, and the difficulty of coming to terms with it when you've got it. We've all got to do that... We've all got the disease -- the disease of being finite. And consciousness is the original sin: consciousness of the inevitability of our death" (Rodley 128). This concern with consciousness and physical deterioration forms the Cronenbergian conceit of

the Disease of Finitude, the force which ushers in Change and the effects of Aging.

The Disease of Finitude refers to the physical and mental deterioration resulting from time interacting with the body which results in an attempt to recognize and preserve individual identity as the body degenerates. This attempt is reflected as a journey from wholeness to disintegration and, significantly, as a return to and from the point of origin. This metaphor embodies the struggle to survive, at least mentally, despite the overwhelming impact of aging on the body. In The Fly, this Disease of Finitude manifests an archetypal pattern involving the physical devolution and mental alienation of Cronenberg's scientist/hero as his consciousness experiences a total immersion in physical/temporal alterity, the contradictory impulse to neither integrate nor separate.

Synopsis

Seth Brundle, a brilliant young scientist, meets science journalist Veronica Quaife at a science convention. Infatuated with her, Seth unwisely takes Veronica to his laboratory to demonstrate his new discovery: teleportation, or the successful disintegration and reintegration of inanimate matter through space. Brundle convinces the eager reporter to keep his secret until he can teleport living matter. A romance develops between the two, but Veronica's ex-lover and boss, Stathis Borans, begins to interfere. Through this new relationship with Veronica, Seth begins to understand "the flesh," and teaches this to his computer, which finally teleports a baboon successfully. However, one night, Brundle misinterprets Veronica's relationship with

Borans and, in a fit of drunken jealousy, teleports himself and an unseen housefly. The two are genetically spliced, and Brundle, initially super-strong and healthy, begins mutating into a grotesque form. Veronica, pregnant with Seth's child, is kidnapped from an abortion clinic by Brundlefly, who plans to fuse them both together to help regain his humanity. Borans saves Veronica but Brundlefly is accidentally fused with a telepod. The resulting creature silently begs for release. Veronica shoots it.

**The Disease of Finitude: Physical Devolution,
Alterity, and Mental Alienation**

The downward journey of Seth Brundle's body forms the primary dynamic which connects the other themes of the film. This potency materializes in the decisive devolution of the modern individual's muscular, lean, and attractive body into a decidedly primordial lifeform, echoing that body but of an entirely *other* cast. Through this physical regression, Cronenberg demonstrates the effects of a physicality which exceeds its limitations and echoes the hubristic theme of his earlier films. This is manifested in Seth's superhuman abilities following his physical descent into the genetic equivalent of the Collective Unconscious and his seemingly god-like mental acumen which devised and implemented the method of teleportation. This descent is the result of the actual transformation of body into thought. Depicted in Brundle's teleportation process, the physical body disintegrates into pure energy, is transmitted through space, and reintegrates into its original form. Since "thought" can be considered pure impulses of electricity or energy, this transmutation functions as an extension of

mental and creative processes. While these after-effects bridge eons and point toward a new stage in human development, they also foreshadow the tragic and intense dissolution of body and consciousness at the crux of Cronenberg's conceit.

Physical Devolution and Alterity

Seth Brundle's hubristic foray into the unknowable, and seemingly forbidden produces a new humanity embodying the individual's primordial makeup, his present state of physical "perfection," and a future biomechanical aberration. This metamorphosis indicts the unstable nature of the human body and reflects the ubiquitous influence of the Disease of Finitude. This also predestines the individual's transformation to exceed the limitations of the body and to seek fusion with outside elements (whether a fly or a metal pod).

Significantly, Cronenberg couples Seth's devolution with the primitive aspect of humanity. After misinterpreting Veronica's actions concerning Borans, Seth gets drunk in a fit of jealousy and impulsively decides, as he sits chattering to a test baboon, to go through the teleportation process. Primitive emotion -- anger in the form of jealousy -- is visually reinforced by the presence of a primate, who occupies the next lower rung on the evolutionary ladder. Furthermore, by adding a still lower evolutionary presence in the fly buzzing around the baboon's face, Cronenberg foreshadows Seth's return to a sub-human state.

Seth's twin teleporter chambers, two egg-shaped structures, function as twin wombs which he enters naked and

through which he is essentially reborn. "You tell me," he says to the baboon, "am I different somehow? Is it live or is it Memorex?" as he emerges from the mists of his teleportative rebirth. Seth's question ushers in the dichotomy of original creation or modified replica. Though physically, at first, little if anything has changed in Seth's appearance, genetically he has experienced great changes. Seth's original composition no longer exists: it has been fused with an external Other which initiates and encourages the devolution process. Seth Brundle is now not only a replica of his original self, but also a fleshly cocoon which harbors a new form of life. He has become a New Adamic figure who gradually does away with the original design in order to usher in the new product.

In this deconstructive journey, along with physical matter, psychic energy has also been disintegrated and reintegrated into a facsimile expression. Once Seth teleports himself, the original Brundle is gone; his essential material has been tampered with and is therefore non-original, regardless of the fly's invading presence. The sheer act of transmission alters the person who was Seth Brundle. Whatever form emerges from the second pod is a new Brundle because the old Brundle has been "destroyed and recreated." Even without the fly's genes, this recreated Seth, while perhaps the exact duplicate of the original Seth, is still a duplicate, mentally and physically. The old Brundle has been disintegrated; out of the scattered molecules, a new Brundle is born.

By entering the flux of conceptualization, body and mind become saturated in the creative energy of metamorphosis;

the invading presence of the fly takes an already volatile dispersal of energy and renders it more explosive and unstable. Since the fly's essence is purely physical and instinctual, it fuses with Brundle's original consciousness and body and ravages the molecular makeup. When reintegrated, both the original fly and original Brundle no longer effectually exist. What has been reproduced, recreated, and reintegrated are two clones who are then combined into an original -- what the computer/creator itself labels as "Brundlefly." This conceptual modulation of body into thought and thought back into body creates physical turbulence and psychic chaos.

This new product, however, becomes yet a further manifestation of the Disease of Finitude. Through disintegration and reintegration, the fly's genetic makeup is itself free from temporal restrictions and welds itself to human DNA; it becomes in essence an infection attacking Seth's entire biological system. This infection in turn frees Seth himself from the limitations of time as his biology travels backward to the primordial mud which first gave expression to human life.

In Seth's gradual return journey to a sub-human, primordial form, Cronenberg introduces "alterity," a paradoxical inability to assimilate and to alienate. With alterity, sensation and desire are reduced to an incompatibility with self-consciousness. Cronenberg's metaphors of disease and parasites serve as both forms of alterity which cannot be reduced to the economy of the Same, but also cannot be identified as purely Other (Shaviro 145-6). The fly ultimately becomes neither part of Brundle

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nor apart from Brundle; it becomes an element from which Seth cannot separate himself, yet simultaneously, an element he cannot integrate into himself. In keeping with the pattern, the archetypal hero experiences the nonhuman at the same time he experiences the human. In fact, it is this paradox that personifies the Cronenberg hero in his journey. Following the reintegration into the second telepod womb, what emerges is neither "live" nor "Memorex"; it is collaterally both and neither. As the mythic breath of God meets and merges with the dust of the earth to produce the first human in a variety of creation stories, the primordial, in the figure of the fly, meets and merges with the modern human, Seth, to produce "Brundlefly," a shadow figure signifying humankind's future development. Seth Brundle, the New Adam, now unites the present individual with the primordial form, creating future physicality; the human of today transmutes into the past in order to foreshadow the future.

Ultimately, Cronenberg's archetypal hero breaks down the walls of autonomy between Self and Other and serves as the vessel not simply for Shaviro's alterity but also for Cronenberg's Finite Disease. As a result, this "disease with a purpose" emancipates Seth from temporal restrictions while physically shifting him back and forth between pre-human, human, and post-human conditions. He becomes the superhuman avatar of physicality exceeding its limitations; he is indeed an embodiment of the mythically heroic figure who has done the impossible and traveled in an area denied human access. However, like his ancient counterpart, Prometheus, he must pay a price.

This superhuman state advances the eclipse of physical boundaries and provides the first ironic glimmer of his future deconstruction. Brundle's excessive strength, agility, and sexual drive are often associated with the display of competitive primal tendencies. Beginning with a startlingly increased sexual appetite, Brundle's transformation shows itself in small hints: small, thick hairs emerging from his back, increased physical reflexes, astounding gymnastic ability, an obsession with sugar, and finally an overeagerness in communicating which at first seems endearing and then becomes increasingly irritating and alarming. On one level, this sudden transformation resembles the onslaught of puberty while the subsequent decline recalls the ravages of aging. Again, the disease of being finite functions as a solid metaphor for the aging process itself.

These tendencies climax in the bar scene in which Seth breaks the arm of a local brute in an arm-wrestling match for the sake of impressing Tawny, a local barfly. Upon returning to his lab, Seth teleports again and emerges from the pod just as camera cuts to Tawny spreading her legs seductively. This cements the primal sexual instinct with Seth's usurpation of his physical boundaries. Since this entire sequence is the result of Veronica's earlier firm rejection of Seth's intense desire to teleport her, his physical acceleration is the end result of his breakthrough regarding "the flesh," teleportation, and its subsequent after-effects.

In his earlier programming of the computer, which now defines the Flesh as a result of the steak experiment,

Brundle takes physicality beyond its natural boundaries and instills in it a synthetic awareness which at first heightens the corporeal reality but which eventually initiates a regressive tendency. Later, when Seth steps out of the teleportation womb, he is indeed "a king" -- a prototype of a new humanity. However, as he discovers with the steak, this new form of life is an interpretation and translation of the old form with retroactive and dehumanizing modifications.

Through this process, the biological body journeys beyond its corporeal boundaries and enters the realm of thought -- of "interpretation" and "translation." It has transmigrated into abstractness and undergone a reformation into a reasonable, but deeply flawed, facsimile. This re-clarification brings with it new apprehensions which, left unchecked, will threaten the existing social fabric.

By crossing the boundary between tangibility and abstraction, Seth re-enacts mythic creation in producing materiality from concept. Seth's body enters a state, albeit brief, of pure essence. His molecules suffer a complete reorientation and realignment as they are energized and reformed in the original context. Seth's oath of "Drink deep or taste not of the Plasma spring!" and his "deep penetrating dive into the Plasma pool" reinforce his return to primordial form and existence initiated by the first teleportation. This deconstruction results in the rupture of physical limitations and paves the way for the total dissolution augmented by his second re-birth experience in the pods.

Disintegration is finalized as Brundlefly fuses with the

pod itself; i.e., the primordial form and present form transmute into a bio-mechanical aberration. This final incarnation of Seth Brundle's essence prefigures the future of humanity's interrelationship with technology.

Ultimately, human life will cease to exist and will be replaced by a bio-technological form which will be neither wholly human nor wholly technological. This fusion also reverberates with the birth motif by joining the womb-like pods with the new "product" of the marriage between technology and hubris.

Through this gradual retroactive, deconstructive process, the Disease of Finitude reveals its permanent influence over human activity. Seth's "disease" rushes its implicit design to an explicit conclusion. Though Seth's inner essence struggles for survival within its decaying corporeal form, the disease insures liberation for man's consciousness at the expense of physicality.

Mental Alienation and Alterity

A distinctive interior estrangement in Brundle's psyche corresponds to the deteriorating physical effects wrought by Seth's dive into the Plasma spring. This mental rupture increases as Brundle's physical condition heightens and disintegrates. This psychic anarchy, while initially paralleling bodily disruption, eventually levels off to a bemused and, at times, begrudging acceptance of the massive changes taking place within the physical context. While the Disease of Finitude resonates with physical instability, the resultant psychological effect reveals even more the tragic dimension of the entire invasion. As a result of his immersion in bodily turbulence and saturation in the flux c

pure thought, Seth Brundle undergoes a psychic separation which alarmingly amplifies to the point of fracture. This schism manifests the rigorous implications of alterity and the interrelationship of Self and Other. It also reflects the struggle to preserve psychological identity and awareness in the midst of physical deterioration. This mental turbulence is just one more manifestation of Seth's "motion sickness," i.e. the earliest appearance of the Disease of Finitude.

When bodily need and psychic action actually reach convergence, a physical and mental explosion results. Thus, turbulence begets turbulence. Seth's heightened mental abilities spill over and combine with his heightened physical prowess to commit destruction. Due to his return to the flux of creation, Seth has mentally transformed from an awkward, shy genius into an abnormally brutish sexual engine. This psychological and bodily split is clearly influenced by appetite. Both food and sex lead to a physical outburst. The motivating factor is power -- shown as either physical hunger or sexual hunger -- which is, at its base, a primitive instinct. Thus, primal influences force even more the division between physical and mental acceleration, along with aspects of Seth's psyche. This combination grows more intense once Seth learns of Veronica's pregnancy and eventual decision to terminate the fetus. The hunger factor shifts from pure biological need to a more psychological longing for continuance -- he wants his essence to continue in his offspring. This need in turn becomes obsession and accelerates Seth's disintegration.

This primitive force reveals a central connection to

the notion of alterity. Brundlefly is born in the excruciating rigors of estrangement without hope of return. While his desperate attempt to preserve his identity from monstrous transformation may be intertwined with social conformity, Seth "cannot distinguish his self-preservation from his subjection to socially imposed definitions of what it means to be human, to be male" (Shaviro 147). This suggests that will and personal identity are connected to domination and social control. Throughout, Seth is compelled to endure the burden of materiality that he is unable to comprehend or master.

Seth, caught up in the processes of alterity and the rigors of the Disease of Finitude brought on by his first teleportation, struggles to preserve his inner identity in the face of the intense disintegration which has begun in his body. His subsequent puns, one-liners, and wisecracks reveal an active mind imprisoned in a crumbling shell. He attempts to reconcile himself to his fate and reconnect his psyche with his physicality, even going so far as to record his physical decomposition for posterity. Seth attempts to balance his mental sharpness with his physical deceleration. Yet, he knows inevitably that his transformation into a primordial form (the fly) will take him further away from any identity that he might have had or hope to re-establish.

Seth's mental alienation not only separates him from his physical being, but it also separates his psyche from his sense of identity. He is decomposing physically and psychologically and is fully aware of this. His consciousness, his inner self, becomes the final victim of the Disease of Finitude embodied in Brundlefly's experience

of the ultimate, violent devolution.

Finally, the Self, or organizing principle of the personality, becomes physically manifested as the form of Brundlefly becomes fully emergent. Just as Seth's remaining body parts fall away from his new, monstrous form, his selfhood disintegrates until only his consciousness remains, encased in the overwhelming image of primordial form. The self, the archetype of order, organization, and harmony, decomposes under the crushing influence of primordial nature released from Seth's journey into the plasma pool and re-enacted through his mind and body. In Cronenberg's mythos, the archetypal journey serves as another demonstration of the anarchic cosmic fabric. This chaos imposes its disruptive power into the very genes of the individual and dooms him to annihilation. Regardless of the individual's efforts to control his own destiny, the universe declares and seals his fate.

Dead Ringers (1988)

Introduction

In Dead Ringers, twinship serves as a metaphor representing intense complex relationships such as marriage and parenthood in the director's exploration of the Mantles' emotional life. Gynecology, in a symbolic function, acts as yet another manifestation of Cronenberg's traditional mind/body split by examining the fear and attraction of the feminine as well as the essence of individuality. Speaking to Chris Rodley, Cronenberg conceptualizes a response to the question "What if there could be identical twins?" and suggests that "it's impossible, and let's look at them real closely ... The fact that Elliot and Beverly are identical

twins is their evolution into something monstrous. They are creatures as exotic as The Fly. So there's a double game there; the mind/body split ... but here the body is split into two parts" (144). This dichotomy serves as the foundation for the "beauty" of gynecology. Cronenberg puts it as "the mind of men -- or women -- trying to understand sexual organs" and portrays his twins, both as children in the opening sequence and as adults throughout the remainder of the film, as "extremely cerebral and analytical. They want to understand femaleness in a clinical way by dissection and analysis, not by experience, emotion, or intuition ...'Can we dissect out the essence of femaleness?' We're afraid of the emotional immediacy of womanness, but we're drawn to it. How can we come to terms with it? Let's dissect it" (Rodley 144). By metaphorically marrying the sexual, psychological, and discovery with the formalizing technique of passionless analysis, Cronenberg creates a perspective which allows further exploration of central concerns. In this point of view, such themes as the essence of masculine identity, the fears aligned with psychological separation, and the ambivalent male attitude toward the female body become explicit in the course of the narrative. In his eighth feature, Cronenberg constructs a mythology of twinship which, in its critique of identity acquisition, declares the impossibility of achieving total autonomy of Self from Other; this inability to formulate full identification arises from the problems inherent in the structuring of masculine identity and the objectification of the Feminine aspect.

Synopsis

Identical twins Elliot and Beverly Mantle enjoy local fame in their native Toronto. Not only do they enjoy the notoriety that twinship brings them, they also run a highly successful gynecological clinic. They live together and share everything: glory, fame, emotions, experiences, and women. A visiting actress, Claire Niveau, comes to the clinic for treatment of infertility. The twins discover that she is a rare "trifurcate," i.e. she possesses not one but three entrances to her womb. After Elliot sleeps with her and passes her on to his "baby brother," Beverly falls in love with Claire. When she discovers the bizarre sexual game that the twins have been playing on her, Claire is disgusted and publicly breaks off the arrangement, leaving Beverly distraught and Elliot merely unaffected. Beverly's love for Claire, coupled with her rejection of him, begins to affect his relationship with Elliot. Haunted by fears of separation, he -- like Claire -- becomes addicted to prescription drugs. Elliot continues his ascent up the career ladder. Claire, now re-connected with Beverly, leaves town for a film assignment. Overwhelmed by his isolation, Beverly descends into a drugged melancholia. The brothers are ultimately suspended from their practice because of Beverly's intoxicated attempted operation on a woman patient with his instruments originally designed for operating on "mutant women." As Beverly's mind goes and his addiction deepens, Elliot too becomes mentally unhinged and addicted. In their apartment, the twins attempt to "separate" through self-surgery: Beverly cuts Elliot open. The following day, both twins are dead on the floor.

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The Structuring of Masculine Identity

In Dead Ringers, Cronenberg creates a limited omniscient perspective from the point of view of the two male protagonists. However, while this omniscience utilizes a level of subjectivity exchanged from one twin to the other, ultimate attention clearly focuses upon the male gaze as the fundamental viewpoint of the film. Since the transferable quality of the subjective eye manifests itself in two disintegrating personalities, the integrity of the male gaze grows jeopardized and eventually reveals the faulty structure of male identity. So, in one respect, Dead Ringers questions the acquisition and completeness of masculine identity. This inquiry reveals this frailness as a result of being the direct product of a defective authority, the impossible object of male fantasy, and the absence of a unified awareness at the base of individuality.

Through their practice of gynecology, the Mantle twins are endowed with a direct expression of power and knowledge which provides them with a conventional sense of male identity by objectifying women's bodies. Yet such an "identity" is unstable and affected by a variety of forces. This articulation furnishes a role which allows the twins to distance themselves from the issue of masculinity by allowing them to focus on femininity. As gynecologists, the twins are given a formal, clinical permission by women to have intimate knowledge of their sexual organs. In effect, they become dispassionate, yet mythic, explorers on an archetypal journey into unknown territory normally reserved for the intimacy of lovers and husbands, free from emotional constraints and complications. This distance frees them from

questions of manhood and "heroism" while empowering domination of the female form. The twins examine what they know they are not; they gain experiential knowledge of the female body which allows them power over the women. The Mantles specialize in women's fertility problems; as a result, they are ritualistic shamen who manipulate the conception of life in the womb -- they are, in effect, male "gods" of the womb.

This seemingly omnipotent role defines their sense of male identity. However, it also allows them a distinct arrogance emotionally. Their identical physical similarities allow the twins to "pass" for each other; they can literally be in two places at once. More importantly, they can share and transfer experience, especially when dealing with sex and women. Following Beverly's first sexual encounter with Claire, Elliot derides him, "Listen, you haven't had any experience until I've had it, too." Until this point, the twins have played a masculine game with women. In fact, their deepest emotional gratification comes from mimicking each other; they take great pride in their ability to switch identities in order to fool the external world. Their greatest specific satisfaction from this game occurs, however, when they share sexual partners. Despite their almost omnipotent knowledge and power over women's bodies as gynecologists, their emotional masculinity remains at the adolescent level. The first structured layer of male identity reveals itself as a facade, a role which reflects a powerful masculinity, but which is nevertheless immature and fragile at its core.

This immaturity further serves as a manifestation of

male fantasy. This functions as the nucleus of the film's thematic center as well as the masculine identity's chief flaw. The opening sequence reveals the twins' male fantasy taking shape; they want to experience sex without emotional or physical contact. While their clinical persona allows the twins a sexual charge without affecting their emotional detachment, their physical resemblance allows them a similar, more internal impulse. For Shaviro, "male fantasy thus separates self-consciousness from the constraints of materiality, purchasing omnipotence by denying embodiment" (151). Both Elliot and Beverly can share in the ultimate sexual deception without the emotional shrubbery of guilt or infatuation. They are able to fulfill their primal desires without having to deal with the issue of responsibility. In this sense, then, they are indeed sociopaths, or creatures without a conscience.

The twins' male fantasy, assuredly sexual in origin, grows much less sexual and more psychological by the film's conclusion. In the beginning sequence, the twelve year old twins discuss sex as they walk through their neighborhood. They unsuccessfully try to get the girl next door to have sex with them "in our bathtub -- it's an experiment"; in response, she humiliates them by her certainty that they do not even know the meaning of the word "fuck." Despite their sexual curiosity, the twins remain clinical and dispassionate concerning physical contact. They compare human sex unfavorably to that of fish. They want a "kind of sex, but the kind where you wouldn't have to touch each other." In effect, the twins want to reproduce without benefit of sexual contact; they want to replicate their own

selves without the use of an outside agent or element. Their discussion of "fish-sex" echoes the basement pool scene at the culmination of They Came from Within and Seth Brundle's teleportation pod/wombs in The Fly. In the water/womb, men and women are not differentiated; however, as the young twins observe, "Girls are different from us and all because we don't live underwater." Their subsequent dissection of a female anatomy model finalizes their fantasy; women's bodies are simply objects which can be examined, used, then discarded. Even more importantly, the feminine body is faulty; its requirement for "intraovular surgery" renders it unacceptable for the twins' ultimate fantasy; though it is suitable for exploration and curiosity. The film reflects this powerful male fantasy, but shows its impossibility.

As Marcie Frank rightly argues, the twins' fantasy revolves around "the ability for a man to give birth to himself without the mediation of a maternal body" (468). The twins' aversion to the mother's body thus becomes a central element in their acquisition of masculine identity. To achieve a sense of self and of identity, a child must become separate from Mother. To have identity means to be separate; but for these identical twins to be separate, they must first acquire identity. For them, separation ultimately becomes a problematical, if not outright impossible, feat; the Mantle twins can not achieve total union nor complete separation. Their identical status represents an excess that disturbs the freedom of male fantasy.

For the Mantle twins to achieve separation, they must

first exclude their maternal body and find a substitute with which to perform the act of separation; the acquisition of male identity in their fantasy "requires that the female body must be excluded and that violence be done to its substitute" (Frank 268). However, as the film shows, the absence of a unified identity renders the act of separation ultimately impossible. Due to their contrasting roles, the twins find the essence of individuality essentially elusive. They are simply too much alike; as Cronenberg puts it, they are one mind in one body which is "separated into two parts" (Rodley 144).

This absence of unified identity is, in fact, a focal point of the film. The second half of the film in which the twins withdraw into their private world of drug addiction and violence in particular reveals this vacuum in selfness and reflects an identity meltdown.

An integral aspect of this disintegration is the twins' addiction to prescription drugs. Drugs, like woman, in the person of Claire Niveau in the first half of the film, function as a means to achieve a separation which leads to distinct identity. However, rather than providing separation, drugs provide an even stronger impetus for fusion precisely because neither Beverly nor Elliot has a strong enough personality to withstand addiction. The entire addiction sequences testify to this single, central weakness within the twins' psyche: neither has a strong sense of individuality.

In the first half of the film, Beverly especially is susceptible to addiction; first, Claire, and then, under Claire's influence, to sleeping pills. This dependency is

due to the psychological conflict created by his constant nightmares about being separated from Elliot and his total desire for separation.

In the second half, Bev's addiction leads directly to Elliot's which then reinforces Beverly's original dependency. While the film traces, especially in this section, the brothers' attempts and ultimate failure to create separate identities, it also suggests that their relationship is contradictory and impossible. Neither twin can totally survive on his own for long; they can neither be self-sufficient nor self-contained. Eventually, the twins' earlier addictions to women and drugs merely serve to mask and augment the strength of their own co-dependency. However, as strong as this mutual dependency may be, it does not guarantee unity. Because they are unable to live apart, in spite of Beverly's attempts at escape, their bodies are two and are separated in space. There is no unified identity at the base of their contrasting roles. While Beverly struggles with his addiction to Claire, Elliot obsesses over his need to be "synchronized" with his twin. The vacuum of identity which rests at the merging line of the brothers' "selves" becomes an embodiment of the problematical nature of intimacy; even at the closest possible intimacy of the self's relation to itself, the impossibility of achieving autonomy becomes more and more apparent.

Objectification of the Feminine Aspect

The previous emphasis on maternal/feminine presences that rest at the center of the problematic male fantasy foreshadows the integral role the Feminine holds in

Cronenberg's film. As in the earlier films, the archetypal Goddess exerts enormous power over the Hero. In Dead Ringers, however, the twin heroes attempt to objectify and manipulate the Goddess. This attempt eventually leads to the twins' own annihilation. In the opening and closing credit sequences, Cronenberg presents a series of Renaissance anatomical illustrations of the female body that reveal the interior of the womb through a dissected abdomen. The narrative which takes place between these credits, though male-oriented, is infused with the feminine presence either in name ("Beverly Mantle"), atmosphere (the Mantle Gynecological Clinic), character (Claire Niveau, Cary, Eliot's lover), or situation (the affair with Claire, gynecological examinations and operations). As Frank paraphrases Irigaray, the female can never really be presented by male discourse even if she appears; de Laretis holds that women are always represented, even when they do not appear (468); Dead Ringers manifests the latter claim fully. Though the film presents the female as an integral aspect of male fantasy, specifically as nothing more than mothers, female domination forms the primary subtext. By doing violence to the maternal in body and image the Mantle twins can achieve autonomy; however, this becomes costly for the male due to the violence ultimately committed on his own body. Cronenberg's film essentially objectifies the Feminine as Other while exploring the male fascination and fear concerning the female body before surreptitiously imploding male fantasy.

Through pursuing the obvious hostility toward women in the twins' psychoanalytic narcissism and violence,

Cronenberg constructs the anima as an objective other. The fragile animus personified in both twins, but especially Elliot, continually confronts and subverts the Feminine Principle either in his domination of Beverly, in the research he conducts in infertility, and in the women he deceives and beds, thus reflecting a rampant misogyny. Beverly, equally misogynistic, desires separation from his Animus-like twin so that his own anima can develop and sustain his thirst for identity. For both twins, women are merely objects which serve their indulgences and curiosities and which often function as mediators. In one scene, Elliot literally gets a woman to mediate between himself and Beverly. All three (Beverly, Cary, and Elliot) dance seductively together as the brothers caress each other's bodies through and over the female body. This mediation ultimately fails because the twins' internal connectedness will not (and will never) allow it. As Beverly collapses after dancing alone with Cary, at Elliot's request (with strongly sexual overtones), Elliot shoves the woman roughly aside to resuscitate his brother. Here, the female is viewed as a sexual object for self-gratification until the strength of her essence overpowers the male throwing him into a frenzied panic.

While firmly positioning the female as an object, this scene exemplifies the twins' (and therefore the male) fascination and fear of the female body. From the film's opening sequence to its grotesque conclusion, the woman is both the object of the twins' intellectual energies and the source of their lack of total understanding. They are both drawn to the feminine as uncharted territory and repulsed by

the feminine's complete differentiation from the male, thus the need to create instruments (like the Mantle Retractor and Beverly's bizarre tools) to not only separate themselves from one another, but to change "mutant women," to transform them and make them align more into the twins' preconceived image of femininity. In fact, the impetus for the entire Claire Niveau affair is the twins' fascination with Claire's rare three-chambered womb (a "trifurcated cervix"); Claire is essentially a "mutant" woman and an oddity. Furthermore, underlying the twins' fascination/fear is their intense preoccupation with motherhood. Their entire career is devoted to working together in order to turn women into mothers; they don't deliver infants and they "don't do husbands." The Mantles magically cross the veil between known and unknown and return empowered to perform godlike acts such as making infertile women fertile. They are obsessed with motherhood; this significantly points to the puzzle of their own conception and birth. The Mantles, at least on one level, are attempting to dissect their Mother in order to find out how they, as twins, were produced as oddities rather than as two separate individuals. They are fascinated with the mother's birthing machinery and simultaneously afraid of its power to subvert their own understanding of existence.

This obsession and apprehension of feminine reproductive capabilities ultimately shape the Mantles' own male fantasy and eventually disrupt and destroy it. Their fantasy commences in the opening sequence with their rejection by a female, develops with their research into separating the outer body from the inner body with their invention, the

Retractor, reaches a climax with their substitution of drugs for a feminine mediator, and self-destructs with Beverly's disembowelment of Elliot and his own eventual death. Their fantasy simply stated focuses on excluding the female presence in acquiring male identity; they want to create their own male identity free from the differentiation and influences imposed by femininity. However, by violently dissecting the symbolic female presence, the twins violently dissect the male presence literally; their fantasy implodes upon itself.

Naked Lunch (1991)

Introduction

Burroughs' controversial novel, long considered unfilmable, is an hallucinatory trip into the mind of a drug addict, or as Jennie Skerl interprets, "a record of a man's addiction to opiates, his apomorphine treatment, and cure" (36). In the literal sense, Burroughs' "novel" seems compiled of the disjointed memories and hallucinations of withdrawal, interspersed with satirical fantasy episodes. This fantasy element envelopes the majority of the novel, creating the imaginary world of Interzone and transforming its central experience, addiction, into a foundation for its social satire. Subtextually, however, Burroughs expands his earlier ruminations of the mythical quest, through drugs, expressed in Junkie (1953) and "In Search of Yage," a collection of experimental letters. According to Skerl, Naked Lunch represents this same quest, but without hope of transcendence. Two metaphors of the human condition hold centerstage within this framework: addiction and junk. Essentially, from the former addict's special angle of

vision comes the perception that all humanity is victimized by some sort of addiction, that the body is a biological trap, and that society is dominated by "control addicts" who use the needs of the body to satisfy "their obsession with power." However, due to the narrative origin of the novel, Burroughs needs and uses characters, action, and setting as vehicles to convey his satiric ideas. In accomplishing this, Burroughs creates an entire metaphorical world, a mythology. The foundations of Burroughs' private mythology which dominates his later work are constructed in Naked Lunch.

The impact of this cosmology was pivotal in Cronenberg's early artistic development. Burroughs' influence was largely iconographic; the central difference between the two was "Burrough's impassioned moralism and Cronenberg's bloodless agnosticism." Without Burroughs, Cronenberg may be without imagery (Rodley 157). So, it comes as no surprise then that Cronenberg's mythos comes full circle to its original impulse; having borrowed Burroughs' primary imagery to create the iconography of his own existential mythology, Cronenberg returns to and now uses that impulse to create his magnum opus. Furthermore, by "borrowing" material from Burroughs' own life and supplanting that with Naked Lunch, the novel, and two other significant Burroughs works, Junkie and Exterminator!, Cronenberg provides a concise overview of Burroughs' personal mythos through the interpretive lens of his own cinematic structure. In it, Cronenberg submerges the viewer in the intensely subjective mental labyrinth of his central archetypal protagonist: the artist. While Cronenberg's central subject in his complex Naked Lunch is

the creative process, the director explores the mythic landscape of Interzone, i.e. the created inner reality of the artist/visionary, and the subsequent dangers of addiction and control affecting this personality.

Synopsis

Cronenberg's adaptation of Burroughs' Naked Lunch begins in 1953 New York. Bill Lee, the protagonist, is a former junkie turned exterminator. Joan, his wife, has, like the insects, become addicted to the bug poison. After being brought in by two narcotics agents, Bill is confronted by a giant beetle which claims to be his controller for a bizarre spy operation. Joan's addiction has become so serious that Bill seeks out the mysterious Dr. Benway who prescribes a stronger narcotic cure, made from the black meat of Brazilian centipedes. After shooting Joan to death in their ritualistic "William Tell" routine, Bill goes on the run as a fugitive. In a series of bizarre encounters, each more hallucinatory than the last, Bill meets a powerful and sexually sinister alien from Interzone, a mugwump, before becoming an operative for his typewriter, which has by now been transformed into a giant beetle. Writing questionable "reports" on his insect typewriter in Interzone, Bill becomes involved with two expatriate writers, Tom and Joan Frost, who harbor a dark secret within their decadent lifestyle. He loses all sense of time, space, and himself; more seriously, Bill is running out of junk. He is, in fact, writing what will become one of the most influential novels of the century, a series of "reports" to be called Naked Lunch. The film ends with Bill and Joan Frost seeking entrance into neighboring Annexia. Required to produce

evidence of his writing, Bill kills Joan Frost in the "William Tell" routine.

The Mythic Landscape of Interzone

In Naked Lunch, Cronenberg inverts the technique which he used in Dead Ringers. Rather than taking an objective, exterior point of view to compel the audience to reconstruct the dual protagonists' mental landscape from a small number of clues, Cronenberg instead allows the viewer various glimpses of the interior landscape; then the viewer must construct the personality that has created it. This interior landscape becomes a geographical projection of a personality; Cronenberg's Interzone functions both as a physical state, based on Burroughs' depiction of Tangiers in the novel, but more importantly as a state of the soul. As such, it becomes a mythic landscape which serves as a backdrop for Bill Lee's interior subjective quest for understanding. Cronenberg's locale becomes a Tangiers of the imagination seen through the paranoid, hallucinating sensibility of Lee, i.e. a mental state of the addict in the depths of his addiction. Yet, though Interzone is a product of the addictive consciousness, it also becomes a metaphorical landscape which manifests Lee's fear, anxiety, and his basic revulsion for the body. In terms of Cronenberg's cinematic mythos, it connects with and replaces the director's usual landscapes of Montreal and Toronto.

Since the primary structural motif for the film is the archetypal journey of the hero, the imaginary world of Interzone takes on mythic significance. This environment, like Cronenberg's other landscapes, is one of fear and anxiety, full of conspiracies between rival factions

competing for domination. Above all, Interzone becomes an amalgam of biology and the subconscious.

Cronenberg's version of Interzone remains true to Burroughs' vision, but is streamlined for the Cronenbergian universe. Gone for the most part are the specific political elements, though there is still an undercurrent of political conflict and intrigue; likewise, the commerce ingredient has been lessened, though a subtle emphasis on Benway's illegal operations through Interzone and Annexia exists. Noting Bill's dreamy, delusional state of mind, Cronenberg says that the film becomes more internalized and hallucinatory, "so that one understands ... that Lee never really leaves New York City [Instead h]e has hallucinated a quasi-exotic kind of North Africa where he's gone to escape to write his book" (Silverberg 70). As this transient state, Cronenberg's Interzone contains elements from Lee's experiences combined with bits of New York City and exotic Interzone settings. The overall effect was the formation of a drug-induced metaphoric landscape of Lee's own creation. Lee's subconscious impulses instigate a nightmare terrain of disorienting, distorted, and grotesque landmarks. This mythic world is fundamentally the archetypal underworld -- the Hell into which the hero must descend to face his greatest fears.

For Bill Lee, Interzone becomes the manifestation of three explicit anxieties: fear of exposure, fear of intimacy, and fear of freedom and responsibility. These fears emerge from Lee's artistic impulse as a writer and reflect his own deep insecurities as well as his own relationship to creativity, manifested in Cronenberg's centralizing drugs --

mugwump jissom, centipede meat, and bug powder.

Lee's fundamental anxiety, the fear of exposure, stems from the organic flow of imagination. Lee must write himself out of a nightmare which he has created in an act of exploration of the nature of addiction for the artist. However, in writing his "reports," Lee runs the risk of exposing himself and his sensibility to forces seemingly beyond his control. These forces are personified in both his "bug-writer," an insect-like entity on which he types, and in the Mugwumps, who represent the evil spirit of Interzone, i.e. the instrument and the addictive creative impulse. Lee's imagined role as a secret agent working for a shadowy organization vying for power in Interzone only compounds the threat of exposure. To be exposed is to face the reality of the present situation; the primary method of exposure is communication. Lee's fear, and the network of images he experiences, are really expressions of his essential anxiety of expression, his fear of the danger of writing. Lee becomes caught between the imaginary world of his creation and the completion of the written expression of that imaginary world -- between Interzone and the completion of Naked Lunch, the novel about Interzone.

His second fear, likewise, serves a reciprocal purpose: Lee's fear of intimacy. Though downplayed significantly from the novel, Lee's homosexuality forms a central theme connected to the established fear of exposure. For Cronenberg, Lee's admission of his homosexuality becomes ambiguous at best and nebulous at least, unlike Burroughs' Bill Lee whose sexual orientation is decidedly less problematic. Throughout the film, Lee moves through the

decadence of Interzone almost as a zombie, frozen and non-committal. Occasionally, he delves into the issue of sexuality with Kiki, a young hustler who becomes Bill's lover, and Joan Frost, with whom he falls into a fatal affair. However, though he enters into these sexual liaisons, Bill's fear of intimacy provides two of the film's fundamental images: the sex-blob and the Cloquet-Centipede. In the scene involving the sex-blob, Bill seduces Joan Frost through writing stream-of-consciousness erotica at her desk. Eventually, the seduction becomes physical and they fall to the floor. In the midst of their lovemaking, in fact at its height, a repulsive insect-like figure leaps upon them and begins to imitate their movements before being beaten off by Fadela, the Frosts' bizarre housekeeper-witch. The second instance occurs later, as Bill and his lover visit the Swiss expatriate, Yves Cloquet. At one point in the visit, Cloquet, obviously attracted to Kiki, lures the boy into his bedroom, leaving Bill alone to roam the house stoned. Bill hears orgasmic moaning outside Cloquet's bedroom and peers inside and sees one of Cronenberg's most unnerving images: Cloquet, transformed into a giant centipede, enveloping and devouring the helpless Kiki. Both scenes and images indicate Bill's deep fear of intimacy. At the height of his seduction of Joan Frost, Bill hallucinates a sexual intermediary in the sex-blob while, in Fadela, he envisions an interrupting force. Both prevent him from growing too close emotionally and physically to Joan, acts which would reflect his vulnerability. Essentially, through the sexblob, Lee cannot admit his heterosexuality. Likewise, with the repulsive Cloquet-centipede, Bill constructs an image around

the homosexual union through which he can escape intimacy and by which he can negate his homosexuality. This repulsive image functions as a metaphor for Bill's revulsion and guilt and as a force from which he can escape and disconnect.

As an imaginary landscape, Interzone, and the events and figures in it, function as mechanisms triggered by Bill Lee's fears and impulses. Lee creates his own mental universe in which he becomes a fugitive and a slave from and to his own obsessions. Ultimately, in this private cosmos, Lee's greatest fear -- the fear of freedom and responsibility -- provides much of the energy infusing Interzone and its inhabitants. Lee is never a free agent; he is enslaved to the various figures enmeshed in the labyrinth of the Bugwriter, the bug powder, his muse Joan Lee/Joan Frost, his secret agent role, or his homosexual "cover." However, the one element which he never samples, and which eventually serves as his central obsession, is the mugwump jissom -- the creative juice. He is never completely responsible for what happens; he is merely the victim of his own obsessive journey into creativity. To be creative, the artist must hold a paradoxical position: the artist must be free of restraints -- guilt, fear, insecurity -- yet simultaneously the artist must be subject to these influences in order to produce. Bill Lee, as envisioned by Cronenberg, is forced by his own artistic compulsions to explore those very impulses. He must follow them to their ultimate source deep within his consciousness, and eventually to his own tortured relationship with the archetypal Goddess -- Joan Lee/Frost.

His sense of reality is rooted in his imagination --

the core of the Self -- and this imaginative capacity has become distorted by physical dependence stemming from an addictive personality. This hallucinatory solipsism both enables the creation of the "reports" and endangers the subjectivity from which they are written. By focusing such concentration on the dark corridors of Lee's psyche, Cronenberg essentially returns to the watery pool of the collective unconscious which gave birth to his private mythos in They Came From Within. In so doing, he mythologizes the artist's journey and brings his themes and characters full circle into an exploration of creation itself.

Bill Lee's solipsism points painfully to the essentially absurd act of creation and reveals the genesis, not of a paradise of green potential and fruitfulness, but a demiparadise of barrenness and dark paranoia. Here, as in his previous films, Cronenberg notes the reflexive nature of the relationship between the creator and the creation, i.e. the creation is fundamentally a mirror image of the creator. Naked Lunch reflects Bill Lee's state of anxious subjectivity and its distant, invisible, intelligence operation. Bill's journey, his visions/ hallucinations, and his reports significantly point to a Cronenbergian standard which runs through his entire oeuvre: a revulsion for the physical body.

Cronenberg's film, not surprisingly, is constructed out of a genuine revulsion for the body. The various alien creations exemplify Lee's own attitude toward his physical self. While the Cloquet-Centipede sequence firmly establishes Lee's fear of intimacy, it also reflects his

repugnance at not only the sexual act but also the physical means of that act. Lee transports himself to an area where he allows his revulsion to be expressed; his mode of transportation and release, of course, is a syringe of bug powder and the black meat of the Brazilian centipede. He allows himself ultimately to transcend physical barriers in order to explore interior caverns. Again, we have Cronenberg's trademark mind/body schism in operation. Bill Lee hates the body, its needs, its desires, its limitations because it represents for him his interior reality -- his addictive personality and fear of control. His addiction becomes so organically-based that it impedes his true addictive quest -- the act of writing. Thus, the physical body becomes a menace, a threat, to the interior, creative life.

Though Burroughs uses this story to depict the tyranny of the mind over the body, Cronenberg inverts it to represent the tyranny of the body by situating it as he does before the Cloquet-Centipede episode. Cloquet's intense intellectualism comes to dominate and devour Kiki's raw physical attractiveness. Therefore, the revulsion Bill feels for the physical body is a manifestation of the will's, i.e. the imagination's, ability to tyrannize the physical and create other realities, even at the expense of the physical body. For Burroughs, domination leads to destruction; for Cronenberg, domination leads to creation. Bill's contempt for human life, i.e. his revulsion toward the body, dehumanizes humans into insects, automatons, or body parts and cuts them off from individual will so that, in their dehumanized state, they could feed his own

anxieties, chief of which is his fear of the act of writing.

Interzone, then, is a realm manifested and controlled by fear; it is also the mental terrain of a writer caught in the unnatural act of making literature. It is a created world of manic subjectivity, an outgrowth of subconscious fears, and a reflection of Bill Lee's basic sense of physical revulsion. Lee's hallucinated alternate reality is a manifestation of Cronenberg's concern with writing and the education of a writer. It is more potent as a setting because as well as being a figment of Lee's drug-fevered imagination, it is also a highly surreal dimension where deranged fantasy and emotional reality intersect. Here, in the desolate Interzone, is where Bill Lee, the archetypal writer, must wrestle with the forces which threaten, and uplift, his love/hate relationship with creativity. Rather than portraying a mountaintop where inspiration serenely fills the writer's mind with ideas, Cronenberg portrays a nightmare desert where the writer sits in a stupor, sweating out his art in fear of the demons which have infected his mind. Cronenberg's version imagines where the bizarre work of genius comes from and how that mental terrain disrupts, disorients, and distorts personal experience into personal expression.

The Dangers of Creation: Addiction and Control

With Interzone a hallucinatory projection of Bill Lee's inner demons, Cronenberg's literal setting remains a place in the mind of a writer who never leaves Manhattan. In focusing on the mind of the archetypal artist-hero, he portrays that hero as a lost soul submerged in an environment of decadent sex and drugs. In Lee's journey

through these elements, Cronenberg jettisons the usual narrative markers which have grounded his other films. Instead he opts to rely more heavily than before, even more heavily than in Videodrome, on visual imagery to convey the journey into spontaneous unwilled artistic creation. Cronenberg's masterly use of imagery depicts not only the intricacies of artistic creation, but also the artist as decomposing personality.

In portraying the subjectivity of this psychological underworld, certain key images prove integral to the director's depiction of Bill Lee's existential angst-ridden quest. The central imagery focuses on control and obsession primarily in the form of the typewriter and its equivalent, the "bugwriter," while the central quest revolves around writing. Bill Lee's writing represents the struggle between opposing influences, those forces which strive to dominate, i.e. addiction, and those forces which endeavor to throw off control, i.e. communication/expression.

The originating insect image first appears in the interrogation room scene when, atop a mound of yellow bug powder, it announces to Bill that it has "arranged all this just to have a moment alone with you." This insectoid "case officer" functions as a mediator between Bill, the "agent," and his "Controller," an unseen force who seemingly orchestrates the events in the film. Significantly, this insect image communicates through a sphincter-like opening. This image, which recurs throughout the film in the bugwriter and the "talking anus," signifies the notion that language can be fundamentally used as a weapon in the struggle for supremacy between the mind and the body, i.e.

between Controller and Agent. The image progresses thematically when it is fused with the typewriter to create the Bugwriter in Interzone; this creation then reflects the violence and domination built into the duality of mind and body. However, in this initial sequence, the bug relates "instructions" for Control concerning two items: Joan Lee and Interzone. Joan, Bill's addict-wife and archetypal woman, is revealed to be an "agent for Interzone, Inc." and must be exterminated because she might not be a woman or a "human at all." Though Bill smashes the bug to a disgusting pulp, the "case officer" returns as a Mugwump who instructs Bill to buy a Clark Nova portable typewriter because it has "mythic resonance" for Bill's "reports from Interzone." Later, as Bill, in a drug-induced stupor, types his reports, the Clark Nova metamorphosizes into the Bugwriter. Instructing Bill to type the sentence "Homosexuality is the best all-around cover an agent ever had," the Bugwriter serves as the mouthpiece for the Controller's "point of view" and expresses appreciation over Bill's ability to "overcome these personal barriers [his repugnance at committing homosexual acts] to better serve the cause to which we all are devoted."

However, the Bugwriter also communicates Bill's basic misogyny and his inherent violence. When Bill borrows Tom Frost's feminine Martinelli typewriter, Bill's Bugwriter reacts violently by attacking, biting, and pushing it off the table as the Martinelli utters a loud feminine shriek. The Bugwriter scolds Bill for bringing "an enemy agent into your own home! You gave me no choice! You were giving her access to your innermost vulnerabilities! Forcing them on

her, for God's sake!" The Bugwriter further instructs Bill to seduce Joan Frost which will throw the opposition into "total confusion" before pouncing on the Martinelli and taking one last loud bite as the machine screams and dies. Here, as in the Cloquet-centipede and Sex-blob sequences, a direct hallucination puts forth Bill's negative feelings. In the apparent disembowelment of the Martinelli, Bill's hostilities toward women are acted out. Again, Cronenberg's familiar hostility toward the Feminine Principle appears, couched in symbolism. Its first appearance in the film, in Bill's shooting of Joan Lee, the archetypal Terrible Mother, seems at first justified due to Joan's addictive devouring of Bill's supply of bug powder, or his talent. However, with Bill's identical shooting of Joan Frost, the archetypal Good Mother, who has nurtured Bill's reports, the director's traditional fear of the Feminine solidifies the woman's power and the man's weakness. The male typewriter is nourished by the blood of the female and is thus established as a patriarchal icon and instrument.

Though Bill rarely commits violence, a sense of brutality infuses Bill's monotone deliveries. For example, when explaining the fate of the Martinelli to Joan Frost, he says, "I probably just threw it on the floor and smashed it. I suffer from sporadic hallucinations. I understood writing could be dangerous. I didn't realize the danger came from the machinery." Though Bill Lee does not express his violent disposition physically, his mind is rife with destruction.

However, Cronenberg diffuses much of the political content of the novel in order to simplify the treatment of addiction. In the film, Bill Lee becomes an invisible man,

without definite gender or sexual inclination. In his junkie state of mind, Bill concludes that no one can be trusted and everything conspires against him. Ultimately, the Mugwumps and the Bugwriters become configurations in Benway's "organization" with Bill as the Agent who must oppose it and who eventually must accept a position with it.

In Cronenberg's version, the ultimate focus of addiction is not heroin as in the novel; rather, it is the creative act itself, and its dangers, personified in Mugwump Jissom and Black Meat that are the film's primary interests. Cronenberg has said, "I didn't want it to be a movie about drugs, because I think Burroughs is more about addiction and manipulation and control" (Rodley 164). By transmutating political domination into artistic addiction, Cronenberg has made Burroughs' essentially unfilmable novel more accessible and decipherable. The director goes on to say, "I knew the drug had to be invented. By inventing my own drugs they would have internal, metaphorical connections attached to them, rather than external, social ones" (Rodley 164). Cronenberg felt that his adaptation should concentrate on exposing the artistic rather than the physical addiction which is buried subtextually in the novel. "I wanted it to be about writing: the act of writing and creating something that is dangerous to you ... [though] the act of writing is not very interesting cinematically ... It's an interior act ... [To make it interesting] you have to turn it inside out and make it physical and exterior" (Rodley 165). However, in portraying the writing process, the same concerns expressed in the political subtext of the novel filter into Bill Lee's mythic descent into his psyche.

Cronenberg uses writing to explore Burroughs' concept of "Sending," and its addictive consequences. In Burroughs' mythology, both in Naked Lunch and other works, the Sender, or the word-addict, becomes devoured by his own need to dominate and turns into a giant centipede; no longer a human individual, the Sender becomes a member of "the Human Virus." The individual is most taken in and taken over by language when he thinks he is manipulating it for his own purposes. The site of language -- sending, representing, naming -- is blind and empty and robs the individual life and the world around it. Once one is able to see and touch and smell the word, its invisible power is undermined. In terms of addiction and control, much of the dominating authority's power is founded on controlling the word. In the film, Benway, with his stable of Mugwump jissom and his supply of Black Centipede Meat, becomes the supreme representative of thought control and manipulation through media, with media representing the verbal creation of desire and dependency. By employing Bill and giving him his "muse," the kidnaped Joan Frost, Benway creates a conduit into the adjoining control state, Annexia.

However, one way for the individual to fight the controlling system is to write. Thus, when Bill, the agent-fugitive-informant, is ordered to produce writing in order to gain admittance into Annexia, he kills Joan in a repeat of the earlier William Tell routine, the very act which sent him into Interzone in the first place. As a result, the film's ending implies, he embarks on an even more disturbing quest into the very heart of addiction.

This second routine acts as a metaphorical breaking

down of language patterns in order to free the individual from controlling agents. Lee and Joan take their proper roles, with Bill as the sender, the bullet as the message, and Joan as the receiver. All three act in predictable ways, with the exception of Bill's faulty aim, i.e. his faulty use of language. Therefore, artists, as Hilfer interprets Burroughs, confuse sending with creation; sending is evil, a biological operation, a virus infection. Sending is "an effective example of control: the implanting of an obsessively troubling image" (256). In Cronenberg's film, Bill Lee's mythic Journey into the creative process originates in a single horrifying image planted firmly in his memory. This memory produces an addictive self-image of weakness, revulsion, and guilt that wanders through the decadent streets of an hallucinatory, drug-ravaged environment. In this world, Bill's fear and anxieties are given form as he drifts aimlessly back and forth from angst to control and strives to express his flawed humanity. Like fellow travelers, Seth Brundle and the Mantle twins, Bill Lee must journey back to the questions at the beginning in order to make sense of the certainty of the end.

Conclusion

Cronenberg's The Fly marks a development in the director's continuing oeuvre. His work now becomes more thematically dense and his metaphorical imagery more complex and far-reaching than in his first two cycles of films. In a sense, Cronenberg figuratively returns to the basement pool of Starliner Towers through Brundle's twin pods. Again, he depicts the invasion of a parasitic form which transmutes man's interior life, and now his exterior life,

into a liberating consciousness. Though Seth Brundle's essence begs for, and receives, death and final separation from his physical form, Cronenberg has effectively stripped Brundle of all physical and psychological humanity. The director takes the viewer to humanity's highest peak, in the form of Seth's invention of teleportation, but reveals the hollowness of that, or any, achievement by intensely returning man to his primordial beginnings. In the process, Cronenberg displays man's ineffectual state in the face of the ubiquitous and inevitable Disease of Finitude which ultimately overwhelms the individual's mind and body. The individual indeed becomes as significant as a fly as he faces the encroachment of time upon his corporeal existence. Like Seth Brundle at the end, humanity ultimately is made mute as it faces the eventual cold reality of the "disease with a purpose" -- mortality.

In Dead Ringers, the assertion that "Biology is predestined" calls into question the concept of free will which is found at the origins of existence. In exploring the issues implied in biological predestination, Cronenberg uses two primary metaphors: twins and gynecology and, in so doing, the director returns "to his own original and essential impulses and materials, the quintessential 'stuff' of the Cronenberg universe" (Rodley 150). These issues make Dead Ringers a disturbing viewing experience for some audiences; Cronenberg attributes this disturbance to "existential fear and terror: the evanescence of our lives and the fragility of our own mental states, and therefore the fragility of reality" (Rodley 144). The film effectively lays yet another layer of anxiety to the

existential framework of Cronenberg's cinematic mythos and becomes one of his most challenging and stimulating.

Finally, in Naked Lunch, the death of Joan, the source of inspiration, the experience itself and, more importantly, the mental image, provides the impetus for Bill's interior journey as a writer. That image takes Bill to Cronenberg's metaphor for the very juice of creativity -- Mugwump Jissom -- at its source: the Mugwump, the dominating force which lies at the center of Interzone, the mental landscape of Bill's addictive personality. Bill Lee functions finally as a mystic vessel, a dazed automaton, through which the addictive drug of literary inspiration flows onto the page. He becomes Burroughs' notions of both Sender and Controller, moving mentally from a state of fear, Interzone, to a state of Control, Annexia, obsessively hooked to the one image of his troubled past which sparks the inspiration for his "reports": the shooting of his addict-wife and muse, Joan Lee/Frost, the personification of the archetypal Goddess-Mother, the core of the Feminine Principle.

In his "extrapolation" of William Burroughs' novel Naked Lunch, David Cronenberg returns to the influential pool of imagery which sparked his cinematic mythos. First seen in They Came From Within, as an underground swimming pool from which a new society emerges after the old society has drowned, this source of inspiration for Cronenberg now becomes the psychological landscape of the individual artist. This terrain both exposes the addictive obsessions of the writer/artist/ addict and his deepest fears and makes the artist conscious of these needs and their domination in producing art. While this landscape, here called Interzone

and earlier Starliner Towers, represents a state of continuous flux between will and its absence, it is also a world of contradiction and confusion from which a unique personal mythology is created. Between Bill Lee's wanderings in Interzone and the diaspora of the inhabitants of Starliner Towers, Cronenberg creates an invigorating cinemyth which revels in the eternal questions of biology and spirituality. These inquiries ultimately, like Bill Lee's circular William Tell routine, remain ambiguous and uncertain while his unique parodies of the archetypal Creation, Hero, and Journey reflect the chaos and confusion resting at the core of an antagonistic universe.

Chapter V: Cronenberg's Existential and Artistic Visions

A central impulse of Cronenberg's cinematic mythos has been to analyze, criticize, and eventually neutralize the power of traditional myth as a vehicle for outmoded beliefs, leaving the viewer free of its control. Therefore, Cronenberg's mythology serves as an ironic parody of myth; in effect, an anti-myth. While it replaces conventional creeds with a new, more contemporary worldview and provides structure for his art, Cronenberg's metaphorical system satirizes those very functions and ultimately negates itself. Whereas myth seeks to impose order on the unknowable, Cronenberg's anti-myth seeks to establish the unknowable as the only certainty and order as fundamental illusion. This dichotomy between what is certain and what is illusory forms Cronenberg's existentialist and artistic agenda. However, as is shown with the ninth feature, Naked Lunch, this anti-mythic system never completes itself with final boundaries; instead, it turns back upon itself, becoming circular and invalidating its own claims. This circuitous trajectory explicitly manifests Cronenberg's existentialist perspective.

Cronenberg's Existential Vision

This viewpoint reveals itself in the statement "Nothing is true. Everything is permitted," from the opening of both the book and film, Naked Lunch. The focus of Cronenberg's views, like that of other existentialists, originates with chaos but eventually culminates with death; subsequently, each film in his oeuvre deals with that eventuality. According to Cronenberg, the statement points toward the

absence of Absolutes and the mutability of human constructions and summarizes his own existential propositions:

It's saying, because death is inevitable, we are free to invent our own reality. .. Nothing is true. It's not an absolute. It's only a human construct, very definitely able to change and susceptible to rethinking. And you can't then be free. (Breskin 223)

In its rejection of traditional values, the existentialist viewpoint examines the life of the individual as a desperate adventure, filled with insecurity, frustration, and painful striving. The concept of a complete, fully satisfying life, the goal of most philosophical systems, is anathema to this proposition. Existence, marked by irreparable loss, generates certain values which are the only values worthy of human pursuit (Olson 19). Cronenberg's agenda of existentialist values includes subjectivity, the individual, human freedom, and control.

Cronenberg grounds his films in this analysis of the human condition and focuses on the subjectivity of individual experience; Cronenberg creates a celluloid canvas which acutely presents and blends both a sense of dread, terror, and revulsion with a sense of awe and sublimity.

The only reality that exists is in the human mind, and each human mind is different.

Therefore, each reality is different. ... there is no absolute reality. You ... [can] be horrified at the way the universe works. Then you could back off and say, "Maybe it's not

repulsive, I'll go back and say try to see it as beautiful." So at the same time it can be horrible and horrifying and shocking and incredibly beautiful and philosophical and metaphysical. (Hedegaard 142)

In each film, Cronenberg's protagonist experiences intense physical and spiritual anguish as the physical body literally revolts against the mind. This basic metaphor fully embodies the intrinsic existential notion that the physical world is simply a coating over the surface of being-in-itself. This force threatens to explode the phenomenal world created by the activity of human minds and sensibilities. Cronenberg expresses this through physical transformations, usually involving disease or some form of parasite which overrides the individual's mental processes. Eventually, this biological usurpation is manifested through the experience of hallucinations and visions (most prominently in Videodrome, The Dead Zone, Dead Ringers, and Naked Lunch). This being-in-itself is an absurd, continuous entity of which humans are constantly but only dimly aware and which eventually poisons existence. This force rips through and manipulates the flesh and overcomes the mind.

Cronenberg holds that in the absence of eternal, immutable beings, the individual becomes the source of value and meaning. This localization of the individual at the center of the universe forms Cronenberg's version of "optimism."

[I'm] saying, this is as bad as it is, and if we are to have optimism, we have to be very tough ... in our understanding of what reality is, and

what life's possibilities are, and we have to create optimism out of that. Because if we create it out of pie-in-the-sky, ... out of some willed delusion, then it also is a delusion.

(Breskin 232)

Cronenberg's "willed delusion" refers to the ambivalent notion of divinity. For him, the basic question has never been the existence of God, but the morality of God: "If God is a totally abstract force in the universe with no understanding for human beings, then it really doesn't matter. It's only if God is interested in the affairs of man and cares what you morally do that it makes any difference." However, Cronenberg differentiates between atheism and agnosticism. Since "atheism" suggests a reaction against a religious system, and thus acceptance of that system, Cronenberg considers himself beyond atheism to the point of simple non-belief. This especially translates into Cronenberg's films through his central depiction of scientist/doctors.

In each film, the primary impetus for the narrative's movement and basic situation rests with a male scientific figure, fundamentally a magician, who constantly seeks new ways to improve mankind and, ironically, succeeds in insuring humanity's destruction. Cronenberg equates this figure with the artist and, by extension, his films' "persona." Though often tragic and demented, eccentric characters such as Dr. Dan Keloid, Dr. Hal Raglan, and Dr. Seth Brundle, among others, evoke empathy in their continual search for what some would regard as "forbidden" knowledge. Cronenberg holds defiantly to the position that there are

not "things that shouldn't be played with...You have to believe in God before you can say there are things that man was not meant to know... there's [not] anything man wasn't meant to know. There are just some stupid things that people shouldn't do" (Rodley 5). These scientific figures merely represent human beings as a whole, people who are simply dealing with the existential condition of the individual while fending off absurdity and disorder.

In effect, Cronenberg's agnosticism reflects a human-centered universe. In his lack of belief in an external universal, cosmic structure imposed on human beings, Cronenberg firmly establishes the individual at the center of the universe and disregards the notion of a force outside humanity. In such a system, the question of freedom arises and grows increasingly problematic, especially when viewed from an existential perspective.

Cronenberg takes a unique stance on the issue of human freedom. In his view, the entire notion of free will resists the idea of anything determining destiny. Freedom of choice essentially is founded on the premise of freedom from physical and material restrictions. However, due to the mysterious detailed programming of genes and chromosomes, there exists the implication that a large portion of human identity is biologically predestined. In each film, Cronenberg confronts this notion of free will versus predestination. The question of religious predestination or genetic predestination is eventually rendered moot; what concerns him is the sense that free will is highly palpable despite the compelling evidence against its existence. Part of Cronenberg's cinematic journey has been to arrive at a

position of conciliation; however, a more important side issue develops from this position: control or, more accurately, the delusion of control.

Cronenberg firmly views control as an integral aspect of the artistic life: "any artist is trying to take control of life by organizing it and shaping it and recreating it. Because he knows very well that the real version of life is beyond his control" (Rodley 75). One of the primary reasons individuals create is in order to have some control over the universe. Throughout his work, characters continually strive for control of their existence, but fail with disastrous consequences.

This domination impulse spurs Cronenberg's scientists into creating the parasites/diseases which run amok and overturn the normal social order, especially in the early films. The need to improve humanity becomes just another expression of the need to control the universe. This thirst for godlike authority results in an ironic inversion of that impulse; through their efforts at controlling humanity's irrational impulses and the reality of chaos, these scientist/heroes only release those very impulses to grow stronger and wreak even worse havoc than if let alone. Again, this pattern serves as an existential reminder that the individual cannot order and control his universe, but instead must somehow strive for a way to survive in it. Since the primary concern of Cronenberg's scientists is the biological human body, the existential implication suggests that the individual cannot even hope to control his own organs. Viscera exist in and of themselves, free to do as they please. Any hopes of domination by rational thought

only exacerbate their hunger for existence and domination. The biological elements themselves become the controlling influence; driven by basic impulses, these elements feed on their hosts and spread.

The notion of rational or intellectual control indeed becomes a delusion. The parasites/organs/diseases created in the hopes of improving upon what has already existed are merely manifestations of being-in-itself which will not be controlled but will do the controlling. The mind ultimately is rendered ineffectual against the assault of the body and becomes merely subservient to primitive drives. One of the key foundations for reality is the human body, yet the body itself is only temporary and transitory. Cronenberg adds that "to whatever degree we center our understanding of reality in our bodies, we are surrendering that sense of reality to our bodies' ephemerality. By affecting the body ... you alter your reality" (Rodley 145). This continual questing after biological and mental control ultimately becomes a representation of death.

Life, to the existentialist, has meaning only for the individual who lives in the shadow of death and faces the fact of inevitable death. The affirmation of life is impossible unless human beings hold steadfastly to the consciousness of death. Out of this preoccupation comes Cronenberg's brand of optimism. With this consciousness of the inevitability of one's own death, an individual has some measure of control over it. By taking this awareness one step further and uniting it with action, the individual may provide some significance and some sense of control to his life. Cronenberg feels that suicide is:

probably the only way we can give our death a meaning. Because otherwise it's completely arbitrary ... And it doesn't mean anything! ... I don't like the fact that death ... [has] no meaning. The only way you can do anything about that is to control the moment and the means of your death. And that means suicide, basically. (Breskin 224)

Four of Cronenberg's features end with the main character's suicide (The Dead Zone, Videodrome, The Fly, and Dead Ringers). In spite of the genetically programmed desire to survive at all costs, the inevitability of death can be viewed as an absolute strength and a release. Thus, suicide is, or could be, an elegant, properly structured way out of life, as well as a means to endow one's life with meaning.

Cronenberg's existential vision then takes as its focus the human body; the universe is fundamentally human-centered and body conscious. The sole meaning that can exist in this universe comes only from the human brain. No God or external system of meaning apart from the individual being exists; the final basis of meaning originates from an understanding of the human body. The individual possesses free will, however tangibly, and is free to make choices in reaction to objective or subjective situations and circumstances. However, control over the universe and over the individual body eventually serves merely as an illusion. Biological predestination, made up of determined details found in genes and chromosomes, is the ultimate force acting on the human body. This force itself embodies a central

aspect of chaos; Cronenberg's universe then is ruled by disorder and any attempts at imposing order result only in further disorder and annihilation. It is also dual; a profound split exists between the mind and the body. The biological body dominates the rational impulses of the mind; however, both mind and body are ruled by primitive instinctual forces which cannot be totally repressed. These forces are only manifestations of the universal, absurd ferment lying at the core of being-in-itself expressed in biological forms. This energy sooner or later breaks through the varnish of the phenomenological world and reveals the essential chaos at the source of existence.

Cronenberg's Artistic Vision

Since he delights in revealing the fragility of order which is exposed through art, the director's artistic imagination focuses on the subversive, the dialectical, and the cathartic.

Firstly, Cronenberg accepts the proposition that the essential nature of art is subversive and that art is specifically subversive of civilization.

[I]t's my understanding of art as being subversive of civilization. I think it is. And yet, it's a paradox, because in the Freudian equation civilization is repression. ... you don't get civilization without repression of the unconscious, of the id. And the basic appeal of art is to the unconscious. Therefore art is somewhat subversive of civilization. And yet at the same time it seems to be necessary for civilization. You don't get civilization without

art. (Breskin 211)

While art may disrupt civilization, it is necessary for civilization because culture fails to exist without some form of artistic expression.

However, art also develops an uneasy alliance with civilization which continually invites attempts at political domination. While figures in political power desire to develop culture and artistic expression, they also attempt to place artistic expression under firm control. Likewise, when artists themselves "flirt" with politics, art stops being cultural expression and becomes a source of hostility or political embarrassment. Therefore, art functions subversively by its sheer interrelationship with culture. Cronenberg's films are considered subversive because they "suggest [and insist on the equal reality of] other realities than the ones that are normally accepted as realities" (Breskin 211). Indeed, his art, like his metaphysical parasites, rages out of control and threatens the status quo. This recalls similarities with one of Cronenberg's seminal influences, Vladimir Nabokov.

Nabokov's influence is felt most explicitly in Cronenberg's overall vision and thematic concerns while the director's other important influence, William S. Burroughs, is primarily responsible for Cronenberg's imagery and visual sensibility. Nabokov is repeatedly concerned with both a world and a world apart, "with an objective reality on which we can more or less agree ... and a consciousness which recreates a subjective world of its own" (Fowler 202). The conflict between these two worlds may take the form of the conflict between past and present or between art and life.

Yet, the mark of Nabokov's most advanced fiction is found in the complex interrelationship between the two. Likewise, the intricate, intense, and subversive relationship between Cronenberg's world of the body and his world of the mind forms the crux of his vision. In this sense, Nabokov's theories crystallized Cronenberg's own ideas.

This vision is also delineated by a self-conscious attempt to free art from critical ideology. Cronenberg admittedly questions the function of criticism as being reductive and dogmatic; for him, the strenuous application of ideological stances

is not what art is all about, or what criticism is about ... You can interpret anything in the light of a particularly dogmatic stance, whether it's Freudian or Marxist or whatever. You can rigorously apply these standards to any work ... and then judge the artifact is wanting or not wanting. But is that really the function of criticism? I don't think so. (Rodley 67)

The value of his work, the director maintains, is not based in any ideology; rather, he considers his films as "integral, organic living things" while resenting the critical dissection of them.

Cronenberg hopes to reach a depth more intuitive and instinctive and then work outwards; to him, such an attempt would validate and legitimize art (Rodley 119). Art is a means of attempting the ordering of reality as well as a method of creating and dealing with one's own reality, i.e. understanding phenomena not susceptible to understanding. Part of this attempt is not constructing a replica of life,

but creating "an alchemy, of personal things and schematic things that ends up being something you could call art" (Breskin 215). His central impulse as a director, an artist, is "making mental things physical" and "showing the unshowable, speaking the unspeakable"; Cronenberg localizes his creative endeavor in the metaphorical. In the creation of his own art, the director concentrates on constructing his own symbols and metaphors rather than seemingly imposing any sort of political or external ideological consideration on his vision.

Ultimately, Cronenberg's artistic stance works toward one overall effect: catharsis. Cronenberg routinely insists on catharsis as a benefit and as a primary reason for his decision to work in the horror genre. For him, catharsis is the basis of all art, especially in terms of the horror film; he associates catharsis with primal impulses, particularly those connected to death. Cronenberg's vision links personal apocalypse with catharsis. Present day reality fuses with a personal rehearsal for death, leaving the audience purged through the depiction of the brutal and visceral. Cronenberg's brand of catharsis relies on ambivalence and becomes a mechanism which varies from work to work without rigidly following the classical definition. Certainly, "when you mix your blood with the characters' in the film," Cronenberg says, "you're mixing your own anxieties with the anxieties that are being played out in the film, the catharsis does not purge, it makes clear" (Breskin 230). Cronenberg instead opts to isolate and concentrate on those elements which typify chaos.

For example, in The Fly, a transmuted Seth Brundle

begs to be shot and killed. When his lover Veronica complies, we have a Cronenbergian cathartic moment. This catharsis rarely implies the notion that life will go on, or that something positive will come from such a tragic incident. In reality, it displays Cronenberg's own "optimism" which ushers in, for many, an ambivalence almost to the point of bleakness, though oddly not "pessimistic but ...insisting on redefining what optimism is ... I think too often optimism is an invention, a fantasy" (Breskin 232). This contention forms the director's most subversive argument. It represents a complete undercutting of the basic assumption that mythology generally functions as a record of humanity's quest for hope, understanding, and triumph over the universe's obstacles. In Cronenberg's mythology, no one wins over adversity, everyone is vulnerable, indeed addicted, to delusions, and no hope exists for the individual in the struggle against the cosmos. While traditional myth exalts the individual in the face of cosmic obstructions, Cronenberg's version devolves and debases the individual against these forces. In the same respect, traditional optimism merely acts as an ineffectual "fantasy" while Cronenbergian optimism reflects grim existential reality.

This artistic vision only further reinforces Cronenberg's fundamental worldview in its emphasis on the subversive, the dialectical, and the cathartic. Cronenberg's art is highly visionary in that it makes use of a deeply personal iconography, yet it is equally bleak in its view of humanity and in its prospect for transcendence. In the Cronenberg mythos, the individual, philosophically and

artistically, is as isolated and alienated as he is alienated biologically and socially.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study has been to establish the cinematic mythos created by Cronenberg in his nine genre films. By focusing on its existential view of the individual and the universe, the director's unique manipulation of archetypal figures, and the overall mythmaking process employed, this study has broadly examined the use of myth in cinema and specifically its use by an individual director in establishing a cinematic identity. The examination of Cronenberg's first three films reveals the establishment of a cinematic universe through the use of creation myth, the apocalyptic elevation/ degradation of the goddess archetype, and the destabilization of the archetypal family. The exploration of Cronenberg's second trilogy showed his deepening vision by focusing on intrafamily warfare, the development of the archetypal hero as the incarnation of "the New Flesh," and the progression of the Cronenberg version of the Messianic figure. In Cronenberg's third trilogy, attention was given to the Cronenbergian conceit of the Disease of Finitude, the mythology of twinship and the subsequent problematic acquisition of identity, and the role of the Archetypal Artist. These three groups of films reflect and are connected by the director's existential and artistic vision. This journey through a filmmaker's mythological universe teaches how a cinematic discourse is forged and infused with philosophical meaning; specifically, how a basic unit of narrative construction can be manipulated to reflect an artist's worldview; and finally,

how a decidedly secular myth can be shaped to appeal to the modern audience.

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