Steffen Hantke introduces this volume of essays by informing the reader that what is at stake in the book is not, in fact, the horror genre per se. The study of genre in and of itself tends to elide the question of technological medium, stressing thematic and tropic markers rather than asking after the specificity of the horror film as opposed to the literary antecedents of the genre, a danger that Hantke also sees in theory-driven approaches from structuralism and Marxism to psychoanalysis. Genre, in other words, cannot be understood in purely aesthetic, ideological, or semiotic terms, but must be grasped also in terms of technological practice. It is precisely the specificity of the horror film as film, and a critical approach that can "account for and negotiate the boundary between literary and cinematic texts," (viii) that Hantke sees as the project of his anthology. What makes this project so necessary is the centrality of technologies of affect to horror as a filmic mode. Citing Linda Williams' classification of horror, along with melodrama and pornography, as a "body genre," Hantke stresses that the horror movie is defined not by its historical roots in the conventions of the gothic novel, but in its determination to elicit a physical reaction from the viewer. This is thus directly a question of cinema as an apparatus, but apparatus understood in the broadly Brechtian sense as a nodal point of technology, ideology, commodity, and material culture. Any approach that hopes to do justice to the filmic medium will thus have to attend to the film as image and narrative, but also a particular instance of negotiating the "machines, devices, and gadgets of cinema" (x), from cameras, lenses, lighting, and sound, to technologies of reception, such as video and DVD. This is not to mention what might be called filmic paratexts, such as marketing campaigns, reviews, fan communities, and so forth. At this level of analysis, it becomes clear that questions of medium are essential to genre, since genre itself is now framed as a particular mode of deployment of the cinematic apparatus. The question of how exactly the horror film mobilizes this apparatus informs the organization of the book, with essays falling into three categories which could loosely be understood as production, distribution, and consumption.

The first section, "Lights, Camera, Action," thus primarily focuses on the confluence of horror as cultural expectation and the use of particular cinematic techniques and contains some of the book's most insightful essays. It is the creepiness, so to speak, of the cinema itself that comes to light in this section. Stacey Abbott's essay on W.F. Murnau's 1922 Nosferatu, "Spectral Vampires," makes a compelling argument for the affinity of horror and cinema, and serves as a sort of manifesto for the book. "Made up of still images, ghostly shadows of the dead that are re-animated through technological means," she writes, "horror films have always cast a spell over those who are moved by images of the dead."
Catherine Zimmer does something similar in her piece on Michael Powell’s 1960 classic *Peeping Tom*, using a historical account of the development of the 16mm camera to question psychoanalytic theories of the cinematic gaze as an act of violence. Rather than confine the gaze of the spectator with that of the camera, Zimmer follows the look of the camera as a particular historical object. Noting the origins of the 16mm camera in its use by the British military in the Second World War, which the film eludes to through the use of crosshairs, and anxieties in the British film industry about the breakdown of the studio system and the rise of amateur film, Zimmer grounds the sadism of the camera’s gaze in *Peeping Tom* in a “historically specific historical location” (37). Here, as in Abbott and King’s essay, horror is the genre that uniquely addresses fears about cinema as an apparatus somehow out of control. More problematic is David Scott Diffriend’s attempt to link up a particular cinematic technique centrally identified with horror—the shock cut—to shock as the experience of modernity tout court. For Diffriend, the shock cut is a moment of transcendental presence, a moment of authenticity, wherein the cinema “provides the hard material evidence of shock itself” (52). While providing a fascinating and lengthy account of the use of this technique in a number of films and comparing it to other techniques of editing like montage and decoupage, Diffriend does not make it clear to the reader why we should have any investment in the authenticity of experience anyway. If, as many of the book’s essays imply, modern experience is about mediation, dispersal, and intangibility, how could the representation of presence be anything but false? Why not, then, read the shock cut as a sort of mimetic palliative for the “technological necromancy,” (5) to quote from Abbott’s essay, in which we live our lives? At the same time, Diffriend makes some very interesting, and more plausible points, about how the shock cut organizes the cinematic gaze and sutures narrative.

The book’s second section, “Marketing, Packaging, and Franchising,” although focusing on a different aspect of the apparatus, maintains a similar set of concerns with the first. In these essays, the issue of erasure and boundaries and the problem of mediation that are raised in relation to cinema technology come across in a pre-occupation with the boundaries of the genre and the integrity of a film as aesthetic object on the cultural marketplace. Thus, Philip L. Simpson looks at what he calls the horror “event movie,” films like *The Mummy*, which capitalize on familiarity of horror conventions to market films to a mass audience beyond horror fandom as such. Like any commodity, these films play off of the dialectic of sameness and difference, allowing the viewer to identify with the film, while at the same time providing an ironic distance, not as a space of critique, but rather of self-congratulation for those able to recognize the satirizing of genre markers. The point of such films, however, is not to be found in the film itself, but in the cultural event in which they participate. Paratexts, everything from word of mouth to marketing tie-ins, reviews, video games, internet fan discussions, are essentially what the event movie is about, the creation of a multimedia Gesamtkunstwerk known in the film industry as the “high concept formula.” Scott Hand asks related questions about genre borders in his piece on the interchange between film and video game, “Survival Horror and the *Resident Evil* Franchise.” Like the event movie, the franchise transcends any particular media, or indeed genre, since survival horror is a hybrid of filmic, literary, and gaming elements and mixes horror with action/adventure codes.

It is more the integrity of the filmic object that is at stake in Michael Amzen’s contribution. Amzen charts the various revisions of *The Exorcist* between its 1973 release and the 2000 theatrical release of the restoration under the subtitle “The Version You’ve Never Seen!” Amzen carefully details both the economic and ideological motivations for displacing the original film, while at the same time critiquing the notion of originality itself. Thus, the questionable notion of restoration, of producing a new version that is, again, more authentic somehow than the previous, sustains the imperatives of the home viewing market. Amzen compliments this account of the ideology of marketing with a strong account of the restored *Exorcist*’s repression of the narrative openness of the original. Jay McCoy raises another, albeit related question of boundaries in his piece on the Japanese *Guinea Pig* films of the 1980s. Discussing the use of mock-documentary techniques in films meticulously depicting the mutilation of women, McCoy diagnoses the anxieties within Japanese culture in the face of capitalist globalization. Here, the violently opened female body is legible both as a figure for the increasingly weak bonds of national identity and as a critique of postmodern attempts to recover Japan’s patriarchal “traditional” culture as a counterweight to the disintegrating tendencies of the world economy. In all of these articles, the concern with the breakdown and maintenance and boundaries is played out in terms of genre. The crossing of generic borders is itself a metaphor for other kinds of slippage, as McCray makes clear in his discussion of the staged collapse of the fact/fiction distinction in the *Guinea Pig* films. On the other hand, these essays address moments where the cinematic apparatus itself motivates the deployment of genre, rather than the reverse, to discipline and re-integrate products that threaten to stray too far from what we understand as marketable cultural goods. The re-creation of the relatively socially critical 1970s *The Exorcist* into the family-values morality play of *The Version You’ve Never Seen* for our own more pious times is a good example of this trend, as is the integrated marketing of the “high concept formula.”
The book closes under the rubric “Theory, History, Genre.” Rather than the more general theorizing as to the social and historical function of the horror film that this heading may lead some of us literary criticism types to expect, this section again presents us with a number of heterogeneous and narrowly focused essays, this time largely concerned with how horror films are received. As James Kendrick makes clear, however, reception does not simply, or only, mean the act of viewing. In his essay on the social panic generated by the sudden eruption of a mass home video market in Great Britain in the 1980s that for whatever reason gravitated towards B horror movies from the US and Italy, Kendrick demonstrates that media hysteria and government censorship can also be read as modes of reception. Stepping in to protect children and decent working people from foreign video nasties, the British Video Recordings Act of 1985 was also an attempt to protect national culture, and the domestic market, against the transnationalizing influences of video technology. Another unexpected take on the topic of reception comes from Blair Davis, whose essay “Horror Meets Noir,” demonstrates that all the while those of us watching old detective movies were, in a roundabout way, watching horror films. More concretely, Blair follows the transition between these two filmic genres, as Hollywood studios switched from the increasingly tired horror movies of the 1930s to the noir dramas of the 1940s, often simply re-assigning the same people from one genre to another. These directors, lighting and sound engineers, and scriptwriters brought the techniques they had used in horror over into the new style. “The visual signatures that define noir film,” Davis writes, “were born not of back alleys and concrete jungles, but of crypts and tombs, dungeons and laboratories” (194). K.A. Laity offers an interesting account of some of its signposts. Finally, the book closes with an extremely interesting reading of What Ever Happened to Baby Jane Working off Susan Sontag’s notion of camp, Lorena Russell argues that Baby Jane is a critique of the Hollywood star system that works as horror through its unsettling queering of female sexuality. According to Russell, the bodies of Crawford and Davis function here as ruins of a sort, not only commodities that have outlived their exchange value in a youth-driven Hollywood star system, but uncanny reminders of Hollywood’s own past. Yet, these ruined bodies continue to make their claims upon the viewer, both as sites of identification and as sites where conventional codes of sexuality become unhinged and malleable.

Reading a collection built around a genre that programmatically avoid theorizing the genre, as this book does, can be frustrating at times, but ultimately, the more specific and local focus of these essays has its rewards. The reader is exposed to a stunning array of approaches and discourses. If we are not told what a horror movie is, we are show what a large number of these movies do in various different contexts. Especially fascinating and suggestive, as I have indicated, are those essays that seek to make a connection between technology and ideology. This is not a matter of technological determinism in any of these essays, but a more subtle investigation of correspondences. Many of these kinds of questions, however, are only asked implicitly in this volume, and one sometimes wishes the essays were less modest. The most obvious implication that comes out of reading these pieces side by side is the issue of boundaries and their transgression. This question arises in relation to the cinematic apparatus, the genre of horror, and the narratives of specific films, but we are not given much of a sense of why this theme is so over-arching? Is this perhaps a genre question? As a mapping out of the various directions that the study of the horror film can take, though, this volume is invaluable.

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1. Emphasis in the original.

About the Reviewer:

Hunter Bivens received his PhD from the University of Chicago in 2006. He has presented widely on postwar German literature and film, and his article on Anna Seghers and early East German literature recently appeared in the German Studies Review. He currently teaches at the Rosa Parks Campus of the College of New Rochelle.
We use cookies for various purposes including analytics and personalized marketing. By continuing to use the service, you agree to our use of cookies as described in the Cookie Policy. OK. You are minutes away from monetizing your first tracks. In the next scene we see her son sitting in the seat. See more ». Quotes. Computers were still in the major developing stages in the early 1990s (at least compared to today's standards), as was the Internet, and Ghost In The Machine seems to be a false start on getting a handle on turning the new technology into a horror movie or suspense thriller. The problem is that the writers of the movie were apparently so anxious to get the film written and filmed and released that they didn't take the time to put any thought into it.