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The aim of the following three chapters is to establish how 'torture porn' has been constructed as a category, outlining characteristics that have become associated with the subgenre. Part I will establish what 'torture porn' means, and the conditions under which those meanings are defined. The aim of examining 'torture porn' discourse is to clarify what the subgenre 'is' according to the critics who have propagated the term. As a starting point, this chapter addresses a paradox that arises within 'torture porn' discourse. 'Torture porn' appears to refer to a coherent category formed by films that exhibit mutual conventions and values. By providing a point of similarity, the label brushes over numerous discrepancies.

At the most basic level, torture porn films have been conceived as sharing a root commonality: torture porn is a sub-category of the horror genre. Yet, by distinguishing this subgenre as a unique grouping, the label contrarily fosters the sense that torture porn is different to other horror subgenres. So, on one hand reviewers have overtly compared torture porn to earlier horror subgenres, such as slasher and splatter films, conceiving of torture porn as part of horror's generic continuum. On the other hand, such comparisons have generally been unfavourable, painting torture porn as inferior (that is, entirely different) to past horror 'classics'. The result is tension, which stems from the implication that both 'torture porn' and 'horror' are delimited, static categories, when they are more accurately hazy gestures towards imperfect, fluid, ever-evolving sets of conventions. Delineating a subgenre perfectly is impossible since both the subgenre and the overarching genre it belongs to are in constant states of flux. The relationship between torture porn and horror will be investigated in this chapter by probing the press's conflicting treatments of 'torture porn'.

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Rather than accepting ‘torture porn’ as a label that simply encompasses a particular body of films then, the objective of this chapter is to examine the difficulties that arise from journalists’ uses of the label as if it signifies a fixed, delimited category. The inadequacy of ‘torture porn’ in that regard is evident. For example, although the label seems to encompass all torture porn films, in practice, the discourse fails to do so. At the time of writing, 4S films have been dubbed ‘torture porn’ by three or more separate articles in major English language news publications. Almost all of those films received theatrical releases in both the US and the UK. The many direct-to-DVD films that fit the ‘torture porn’ paradigm have thus far been neglected in ‘torture porn’ discourse. Theatrically released films have been scapegoated, meaning that the category has been mainly composed around a distributional context – the multiplex – rather than mutual conventions.

Torture porn’s content has been largely disregarded in press discourse. Consequently, the subgenre is characterised as having ‘sprung up’ from nowhere (Tookey, 2011), being constituted by films that are wholly distinct from earlier, ‘better’ horror movies. In actuality, the charges levelled at torture porn are uncannily similar to the scorn bestowed upon those ‘classic’ horror films torture porn has been unfavourably compared to. The desire to separate past from present reveals more about critics’ resistance to change than it does about torture porn. The segregation strategy – attacking torture porn while also defending ‘classic’ horror – fails to explicate continuities within the genre, or precisely what is allegedly wrong with torture porn. Deciphering the similarities between torture porn and earlier horror – in terms of filmic content and the discourses that surround horror film – illuminates both what torture porn putatively is and is not. Torture porn neither simply replicates nor overturns prior genre attributes. The subgenre has organically evolved from its generic precursors. By mapping out problems that arise from categorisation, this chapter establishes the groundwork for the remainder of Part I, which will be devoted to factors other than filmic content that influence how torture porn is understood.

‘Every Legend Has a Beginning’: shared facets and influences

Since ‘torture porn’ collects films under an umbrella term, it is necessary to grasp how the label itself speaks for and shapes responses to the films classified under that rubric. Understanding torture porn as ‘torture porn’ necessarily limits how each film is construed relative to that category.
ing ‘torture porn’ as a label that simply encomsexualties that arise from journalists’ uses of the label or delimited category. The inadequacy of ‘torture is evident. For example, although the label seems to apply to films, in practice, the discourse fails to do so. 45 films have been dubbed ‘torture porn’ by articles in major English language news publications, highlighting the many direct-to-DVD films that fit the ‘torture porn’ discourse. However, in contrast to the few films that received theatrical releases in both the UK and the US, this subgenre is characterised as having ‘sprung up’ from the theatrical context rather than mutual conventions. The inadequacy of ‘torture porn’ as a label itself speaks for and shapes responses to the films at rubric. Understanding torture porn as ‘torture porn’ revises the way each film is construed relative to that category.

A cyclic logic is at play in such categorisation. Torture porn films are torture porn because they have been brought together under the banner ‘torture porn’. The label itself arose as a response to the films, and presumptions about their content. However, once in motion, ‘torture porn’ imbues any film categorised as such with meanings that do not belong to the individual film itself. Labelling any film ‘torture porn’ also entails washing over its idiosyncrasies, instead emphasising the presumed similarities it shares with other torture porn films.

Torture porn is conceived as a subgenre fixated on sex (‘porn’) and violence (‘torture’). This coalescence manifests in four contentions that will recur in various guises throughout this book. First, some objectors claim that torture porn is constituted by violence, nudity, and rape. Second, violence is read as pornographic. Critics allege that torture porn’s violence is depicted in such prolonged, gory detail that its aesthetic is comparable to hardcore pornography’s, since the latter is renowned for its close-up, genitally explicit ‘meat shots’. Third, the ‘porn’ in ‘torture porn’ is interpreted as a synonym for ‘worthless’. Since the films are allegedly preoccupied only with ‘endless displays of violence’ (Roby, 2008), they are dismissed as throwaway, immoral entertainment. Finally, it is proposed that the films are consumed as a type of fetish pornography: that viewers are sexually aroused by torture porn’s horror imagery. Torture porn’s disparagement begins with these undertones, which are inherent to the label rather than the subgenre’s filmic content. The first two contentions portray torture porn as sexually focused. As Chapter 7 will demonstrate, this misrepresents the content of the films that have been dubbed ‘torture porn’. The latter two contentions are based on unsubstantiated assumptions about reception, which, as Dean Lockwood (2008: 40) notes, conform to the ‘limiting effects’. Such attempts to understand the subgenre favour paradigms that pre-exist torture porn over filmic content. As this chapter will evince, that strategy is ubiquitous in ‘torture porn’ criticism.

For the moment, it is worth contemplating what exactly torture porn films do have in common. The four contentions above do not necessarily harmonise, undermining the coherence implied by ‘torture porn’ and making it difficult to grasp why these films have been grouped together. However, critics have more consistently concurred about which films belong to ‘torture porn’ than they have about why these films should be denigrated. Stepping back from detractors’ insinuations and looking to the films themselves offers a clearer sense of torture porn’s root properties according to its opponents. Although diverse, the 45 films dubbed ‘torture porn’ by the press share two main qualities: (a) they chiefly...
belong to the horror genre and (b) the narratives are primarily based around protagonists being imprisoned in confined spaces and subjected to physical and/or psychological suffering. The subgenre's leitmotif is the lead protagonist being caged, or bound and gagged.

Critics' fleeting gestures towards filmic content can be utilised to refine those foundational commonalities. For example, although he is preoccupied with a contextual issue — audience reaction — Kim Newman's (2009a) reference to torture porn's 'deliberately upsetting' tone is worth considering. His grievance is surprising given that horror films intentionally foreground perilous situations, and so are customarily 'deliberately upsetting' in tone. It is unclear why torture porn should be singled out on those grounds. Newman's complaint regarding the character of torture porn's violence becomes more obvious when considering why some films have not been dubbed 'torture porn'. Adam Green's Frozen concentrates on three protagonists who are imperilled by their entrapment on a ski lift. The film has not been labelled 'torture porn' in major English language news articles despite (a) being marketed as a horror film, (b) prioritising entrapment themes, (c) setting the narrative in a restrictive diegetic space, and (d) focusing on protagonists' suffering. Indeed, Green (in Williamson, 2010b) has posited that the film is anti-torture porn. There are two reasons why Frozen has not been dubbed 'torture porn': gore is kept to a minimum, and suffering is not inflicted by a torturer. In Frozen, the teens are accidentally rather than intentionally trapped.

Human cruelty and bloodshed are key triggers that influence opponents' decisions about which films do or do not fit into the subgenre, and help to clarify what Newman means by torture porn's 'deliberately upsetting' tone. The same implication is evident in Luke Thompson's (2008) sweeping definition of torture porn as 'realistic horror about bad people who torture and kill'. Graphic gore ('realistic... torture') is paramount. By proposing that torture porn narratives are about 'bad people', Thompson equally alleges that torture porn narratives are invested in the calculated infliction of human cruelty.

Thompson's assessment that torture porn is 'realistic horror' is another point of consensus among critics. Jeremy Morris (2010: 45), for instance, declares that torture porn is 'never supernatural'. However, Somebody Help Me, Farmhouse, and Wicked Lake are among those contemporary horror films in which supernatural elements are mixed with abduction, imprisonment, and intentionally exacted torture. Such generic 'slippage' might mean that these texts fall out of the 'torture porn' category for many critics. Indeed, these hybrid texts have rarely been termed 'torture
genre and (b) the narratives are primarily based on imprisonment in confined spaces and subjected to psychological suffering. The subgenre’s leitmotif is being caged, or bound and gagged. 

periences towards filmic content can be utilised to inform new formal categories. For example, although he is textual issue – audience reaction – Kim Newman’s torture porn’s ‘deliberately upsetting’ tone is worthwhile noticing given that horror films intensify situations, and so are customarily ‘deliberate’. It is unclear why torture porn should be singled out. Newman’s complaint regarding the character of Newman’s texts fall out of the ‘torture porn’ category for intentionally exacted torture. These hybrid texts have rarely been termed ‘torture porn’.

Jeremy Morris contends that torture porn is ‘realistic horror’ is another example. If torture porn narratives are invested in graphic gore (‘realistic...torture’) is paratextual torture porn narratives are about ‘bad people’, leges that torture porn narratives are invested in of human cruelty.

Content is also eschewed in favour of context where torture porn is delineated via its roots. This is a popular method for determining the meanings of ‘torture porn’ in press discourse, yet the subgenre’s origins are again subject to disagreement. Assorted pundits peg torture porn’s progenitor as Hostel (Maher, 2010a) or Saw (Lidz, 2009; Floyd, 2007). Others cite the 2003 films Wrong Turn (Gordon, 2009), House of 1000 Corpses (Johnson, 2007), The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Fletcher, 2009: 82), and Switchblade Romance (Newman, 2009a) among torture porn’s originators. One difficulty in pinning down torture porn’s starting-point is that the horror genre is replete with torture-themed films. Vincent Price vehicles such as Pit and the Pendulum (1961) and the uncannily Saw-like The Abominable Dr. Phibes (1971) are only two examples that pre-date torture porn. Torture-based horror is clearly not the ‘radical departure’ some disparagers have claimed (Fletcher, 2009: 82; see also Di Fonzo, 2007). Ergo, torture themes and genre-affiliation are not enough to distinguish torture porn as a horror subgenre, since that combination pre-exists ‘torture porn’. The category-label was coined in response to a critical mass of torture-horror production at a particular moment.

A further defining factor is thrown into relief by the candidates for torture porn’s progenitor then: ‘torture porn’ is conceived as referring to torture-based horror films made after 2003. It is likely that pre-21st century horror movies will remain omitted from such analysis since they are anachronistic to the term itself. That torture porn is partially defined by era underscores the extent to which context is privileged over content in ‘torture porn’ discourse. Lockwood’s (2008: 41) question ‘how should we specifically distinguish torture porn from earlier horror cinema?’ is telling then, insofar as it underscores that the practice of labelling films ‘torture porn’ is precisely a distinguishing strategy: the aim is to separate torture porn from its generic past rather than examining what that
Torture lineage reveals about the subgenre. Fencing torture porn in this manner is a way of closing off rather than opening up meaning.

Although the majority consensus is that torture porn belongs to the 21st century, not all critics so sharply deny torture porn’s relationship to earlier horror. Some have rooted torture porn in late 19th century Grand Guignol (Anderson, 2007c; Johnson, 2007). In other cases, torture porn has been linked to previous subgenres such as the splatter film (Fletcher, 2009: 81; Benson-Allott, 2008: 23), to specific filmmakers including Herschell Gordon Lewis (N.a. 2010c; Johnson, 2007), Lucio Fulci (Kermode, 2010), and Dario Argento (Hornaday, 2008b), or to ‘classic’ horror touchstones such as Peeping Tom (Huntley, 2007; Kendall, 2008), and the original The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Felperin, 2008; Safire, 2007). Numerous torture porn filmmakers explicitly concur with these correlations in their DVD commentaries, since doing so allows them to appropriate the cultural reputation those earlier horror films and filmmakers carry. Torture porn’s filmmakers and critics customarily share a respect for horror’s past, then. That similarity notwithstanding, ‘torture porn’ discourse is constituted by opposing attitudes to torture porn’s relationship with earlier horror. On one hand, decliners have dismissed torture porn by separating it from ‘classic’ horror. On the other, since torture porn is a horror subgenre and is compared to these past ‘classics’, its lineage cannot be evaded. These tensions become apparent when torture porn is compared to its predecessors.

‘I’ve seen a lot of slasher flicks’

In seeking to establish what ‘torture porn’ is, critics recurrently use the slasher subgenre as a point of reference. Some have cited the slasher as a primary influence on torture porn filmmakers (Hulse, 2007: 17; Kendrick, 2009: 17; Safire, 2007). Others have referred to torture porn films as slashers (see Platell’s (2008) review of Donkey Punch, for instance). Furthermore, some torture porn films such as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003) are remakes of slasher originals. These correlations are apt given that torture porn shares aspects of the slasher formula. Slasher narratives typically entail killers stalking teenagers in a specific locale such as Camp Crystal Lake in Friday the 13th, or the town of Haddonfield in Halloween. Torture porn’s imprisonment themes distil that formula by making it harder for protagonists to evade threat. Since they are often confined, escaping their tormentor is more difficult for torture porn’s captives than it is for the slasher’s teens. Torture porn’s adaptation of slasher films’ stalking conventions thus
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Slasher Flicks

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Such continuities elucidate ways in which torture porn’s traits have grown organically from their generic predecessors. Evolution within the slasher subgenre must also be accounted for. Scholars distinctly contrast torture porn to later ‘postmodern’, ironic Scream-style slasher films (Lockwood, 2008: 41; Prince, 2009: 283; Murray, 2008: 1). Many torture porn filmmakers – including Alexandre Aja, Marcus Dunstan, and Rob Schmidt – concur, characterising their films as a return to scary horror and a reaction against Scream’s self-conscious humour. Although such comments acknowledge torture porn’s relationship with earlier horror, these scholars and filmmakers seek to separate the two subgenres. That ethos is embodied within Scream 4. In the film’s opening sequence, one character explicitly rejects torture porn, stating, ‘I’m gross. I hate all that torture porn shit’. Such segregation is too blunt, negating evident continuities. The murder-mystery horror films that followed in the wake of Scream’s success are not as starkly different to torture porn as has been claimed. The Saw series’ progressing plot revolves around a game-playing narrative style that echoes post-Scream whodunit slashers. As movies about making movies, The Hills Run Red and Callback are among several torture porn films that encompass the kind of metacommentary Scream was famed
Torture Porn

Figure 1.2 The Human Centipede 2 (Full Sequence) (2011, Netherlands/USA/UK, dir Tom Six)

Figure 1.3 Paying tribute to horror classics: Martin claws at a car window in The Human Centipede 2 (Full Sequence) (2011, Netherlands/USA/UK, dir Tom Six), a nod to the first zombie attack in Night of the Living Dead (1968, USA, dir George Romero)

Filmmakers' and critics' interpretations of torture porn as a reaction against Scream-style generic self-consciousness fail to account for Roth referring to his torture porn films as exploitation pastiche (McCartney, 2007a); Aja's homage to Maniac in Switchblade Romance's toilet stalking sequence; or Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez's Grindhouse
project, which emulates the aesthetics of exploitation cinema from an era before digital filmmaking. Torture porn filmmakers use genre referentialism to delineate their indebtedness to earlier horror film, just as Wes Craven does in Scream.

The development from earlier stalk'n'slash films to Scream-style slashers to torture porn is also revealed by uses of humour. Scream's comedic self-referentialism is not a unique innovation. Rather, it advances the jokey catchphrases and self-consciousness found in the later Friday the 13th and A Nightmare on Elm Street sequels, for instance. Moreover, Rob Zombie's postulation that 'horror and comedy have nothing to do with one another' (in Zinoman, 2007) - his defence for torture porn's movement away from Scream's jokey style - overlooks not only the continuing popularity and pervasiveness of horror-comedy (particularly in the zombie subgenre), but also Rob Zombie's own uses of humour. Captain Spalding in House of 1000 Corpses is an overtly comedic character, while Zombie's mock-trailer for Werewolf Women of the SS - filmed as part of the Grindhouse project - is also horror-comedy. Although torture porn is generally believed to be 'grindingly humourless' (Leith, 2010), that notion needs to be explicated with greater care than is usually offered in 'torture porn' discourse.

Such comparisons evince that without attention to detail, subgenres may be erroneously perceived as entirely distinct categories. Horror subgenres are further bracketed by their association with the specific decades in which they became most prominent. Linnie Blake's (2008: 139) observation that torture porn filmmakers 'pay stylistic and conceptual homage to their 1970s predecessors' is indicative of that tendency (emphasis added; see also Hays, 2010; Lovece, 2010; Brady, 2010b). 1960s horror (Aftab, 2009; McEachen, 2010) and 1980s horror (Anderson, 2007; Hill, 2007; Cole, 2007) have similarly been cited as points of comparison via which to define torture porn. Opponents' allusions to decades as a means of demarcating shifts in tone verify that the discourse of cycles is shorthand. The implication that there are unequivocal breaks between subgenres - that torture porn is 'a different breed of film entirely' compared to its precursors (Robey, 2007b) - bypasses generic development.

'Torture porn' discourse thus offers polarised views on the subgenre's lineage. Cumulatively, these responses are paradoxical, since torture porn is portrayed as both like and unlike earlier horror. Torture porn cannot aesthetically and narratologically resemble earlier horror whilst also being entirely 'new'. That tension makes the subgenre label problematic for Lockwood (2008: 47). The same awkwardness is apparent
in Carmen Gray’s (2008: 68) disdain for Frontier(s)’s ‘stylistic jumble’. These rifts are not unique to ‘torture porn’. It is a customary critical response to contemporaneous popular horror. For example, Kate Egan (2007: 31) notes that similar objections were raised to the slasher cycle, which was vilified for its lack of artistry and tradition. These two aspects are coupled, insinuating that pastness (‘tradition’) connotes credibility and creativity (‘artistry’), in contrast to commerciality and transient pleasure. Torture porn filmmakers frequently flag their genre credibility via homage to slasher films particularly. That tendency exacerbates the tensions Egan identifies. Torture porn filmmakers’ homages canonise the slasher: a subgenre that has been dismissed for its lack of artistry and tradition thereby becomes part of an artistic tradition. The slasher film’s traditionlessness becomes a tradition. Additionally, torture porn’s detractors replicate past critical complaints when they segregate the subgenre from its generic predecessors. Ironically then, reprimanding contemporary horror for its lack of tradition is itself something of a tradition.

Categorising films via imprecise shorthand labels – category-banners or decades – results in cyclic argumentation. With time, those cycles will smooth over confusions and paradoxes. Conventions and generalisations will remain, to the detriment of detail. ‘Torture porn’ will become increasingly coherent, leaving the kind of sweeping précis that Kevin Johnson (2007) uses to encapsulate the slasher subgenre: ‘large body counts, quick killings by superhuman bogeymen, and... the sex-means-death equation’. Such summation is unsatisfactory, but ubiquitous. In her retrospective discussion of the ‘video nasty’, Egan (2007: 26) remarks that generic labels are ‘“reductive, descriptive” categories’ that allow ‘critics to make brief, and predominantly negative judgments without the need for lengthy discussion or debate’. Rather than seeking to understand torture porn, the shorthand label allows critics to eschew in-depth analysis in favour of prejudicial notions that pre-exist films. Inspecting discursive inconsistencies is one way to counter that leaning towards generalisation. These details uncover more about what ‘torture porn’ means than brushing over those tensions can.

‘Perhaps I am getting old, but...’: nostalgia and generic decline

The press’s responses to ‘torture porn’ illustrate how instituted discursive patterns impact upon critical responses. Torture porn has organically developed out of existing genre conventions. When those characteristics evolved to the extent that the resulting films no longer precisely
fitted into pre-existing diagnostic paradigms, reporters appear to have become frustrated. Torture porn's denigration may stem from its failure to adhere to established critical models. Indeed, the discursive paradigm established to make sense of these films — 'torture porn' — is reactionary, being formulated to rebuke individual films and the entire category that they are assigned to. Accordingly, depreciators have customarily exaggerated torture porn's uniqueness, characterising the subgenre's 'new' properties as evidence that torture porn has changed the horror genre for the worse. The latter is evident in pejorative responses to torture porn, which range from mild accusations — such as Newman's (2009a) proposal that 'the vision of the horror film is narrowing' — to over-reaction. Torture porn has been envisaged as defiling (Maher, 2009b), afflicting (Slotek, 2009b), blighting (Ide, 2008b), devolving (Terrell, 2009), and dumbing down (Conner, 2009) the horror genre, for instance.

Delimiting torture porn as a closed category rather than a progression from previous genre movements, the subgenre's opponents have cited horror 'classics' to exemplify what has been forsaken. Kaleem Aftab (2009), for example, denigrates torture porn's 'sick gore-fests' by comparing them to 'the great horror films' such as 'Rosemary's Baby, Psycho, and The Exorcist'. Numerous other pundits follow suit, unfavourably comparing torture porn to films from the 1960s–80s to verify generic decline (Robey, 2007b; Monahan, 2010). Similarities between torture porn and earlier horror are downplayed, or are interpreted as inadequacies in such commentary. Torture porn is consequently characterised as indicating that horror has 'lost all its edge and ability to scare' (Slaymaker, 2008), being deemed unworthy of critical attention because it is shallow or lacks artistry (Gatiss in N.A. 2008a, and Romero in Anderson, 2008). Older films, in contrast, are painted as 'complex... philosophical, and... idiosyncratic' (LaBruce in Hardy, 2010), 'transgressive' (Patterson, 2010), or plainly 'good' (Aftab, 2009; Robey, 2007b). Earlier horror films are considered to demonstrate 'restraint... taste and intelligence' (Monahan, 2010), because characterisation is emphasised over 'gruesome acts' (Thomson, 2008a), because the films have 'a point' (Anderson, 2008), and because they are 'about something' (Newman, 2009a). Torture porn films, it is asserted, have none of these qualities.

Justifying this presumed difference between 'then' and 'now' is vital so that critics can defend the former while attacking the latter. That necessity, however, results in hypocritical argumentation. For instance, John Patterson (2010) shuns torture porn's violence but celebrates the 'orgasmic fusillade of machine-gun fire climaxing Bonnie and Clyde', which 'was as much sexual as brutal'. Similarly inconsistent is Liam
Lacey's (2007) vision of the 1970s as a 'golden age', which 'saw filmmakers pushing to one-up each other in more dramatic, splashy, graphic, sublime, and ugly violence', coupled with his rejection of torture porn on the same grounds. Furthermore, when citing the original *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as a 'classic' and rebuffing its remake as too violent, David Kehr (2003) forgets that the original *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was itself banned in the UK for exactly the same reasons. The only difference these detractors offer to distinguish torture porn from 'classic' horror is that one set of films is older than the other. Although intended as derogation, their disputation makes a more convincing case that torture porn should be valorised for precisely the same reasons 'classic' horror is.

Many contentions regarding torture porn's supposed inferiority are undermined by critics' artful misremembering of past 'classics' and what they signified for contemporaneous reviewers. Carla Di Fonzo's (2007) complaint that torture porn is not exciting because protagonists are 'tied down on a table or handcuffed to a radiator' is flawed because she does not address the continuities between slasher films and torture porn. Di Fonzo identifies that stalking (rather than slashing) is the slasher films' main source of terror, and yet misremembers how slasher victims were habitually depicted. Apart from the final girl (to use Carol Clover's (1993) terminology), the slasher's targets were conventionally doomed from the outset, meaning chase sequences prolonged their deaths rather than offering hope that they might escape. Lacey Terrell (2009) similarly suggests that 'original [1980s] slashers, at least, had characters to root for', while dismissing torture porn's protagonists: '[w]ho's next? Who cares?'. This statement uncannily echoes Jonathan Lake Crane's (1994: 148) incrimination of 1980s slashers: '[h]ow did they live? Who cares? ... How did they die?'. Terrell forgets that slasher films were also known as 'slice-em-up' movies, and that teens in slasher films were often perceived as 'inconsiderate, unpleasant people' (Hutchings, 2004: 200). Jenny McCartney's (2008) unease regarding torture porn's audience is equally telling. 'My generation' she professes, 'was terrified by the Child Catcher in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*'. McCartney's evocation of a nostalgic, subjective past to evidence declining standards is unconvincing, because she favours anecdote over direct comparisons between torture porn and horror of the era she refers to.

These strategies reveal little about changes in genre or audiences and much about critics' subjective biases. President of Picturehouse Films Bob Berney's hypocrisy (in Gordon, 2006) summates the issue. On the one hand, he opines that 'these newer [torture porn] movies are purely
tion of the 1970s as a ‘golden age’, which ‘saw film-makers compete with each other in more dramatic, splattery, graphic violence’, coupled with his rejection of torture porn. Furthermore, when citing the original The Texas Chainsaw Massacre as a ‘classic’ and rebuffing its remake as too violent, he forgets that the original The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is the UK for exactly the same reasons. The only differ-
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original [1980s] slashers, at least, had characters to risk... sounding like an old curmudgeon’ in divulging that he twenty years ago... I was already beginning to see the horror films of [the day] ... as a lesser, meaner breed than the works I valorised in [Nightmare Movies].’ ‘Even then’, he continues, ‘I saw this as a subjective inevitability – we prize the discoveries of our youth and defend them.’ It is startling that Newman then condemns torture porn, irrespective of his brief reflection. By Newman’s own admission, the problem is his own developing attitude towards violent horror, not changes in violent horror itself.

Other opponents have raised the same age-related anxieties. Liaguno (in Zoc, 2008) admits that his nostalgia indicates his age, stating ‘[y]ou know you’re getting older when you find yourself saying... “Remember those great old slasher films?”’. Less self-critical is Gatiss’s recognition that he ‘risk[s]... sounding like an old curmudgeon’ in divulging that he has ‘little appetite for contemporary horror.15 Di Fonzo (2007) uses ‘going soft’ or being ‘lame-o’ rather than ‘older’, but her justification shares Gatiss’s and Newman’s strategy of spurning torture porn outright despite briefly contemplating that her shifting perspective might be the problem. Statements about age are followed by defensive reversals that aim to validate the reviewer’s opinion. Some pundits explicitly use their age to endorse their anti-torture porn stance. For instance, Patterson (2007) refers to himself as ‘a veteran of the gore-wars’, asserting that his opinion should be respected rather than rejected as out-of-touch.

Many of torture porn’s belittlers employ this rhetorical device, yet few recognise that they have become the oppressors they rallied against in their own youths. By failing to reflect on their personal biases, these
detectors propagate a general unwillingness to critically engage with whichever forms of horror are popular in the present moment. It is unsurprising that despite some micro-level changes, the wider arguments against popular horror have remained remarkably consistent over time. For example, discussions of contemporaneous horror becoming gorier and therefore ‘worse’ are evident in interviews with Forrest J. Ackerman and John Goodwin in the documentary *Shock Cinema Vol. 2* (1991). That is, the same pejorative rhetoric found in ‘torture porn’ discourse was being utilised by authorities on horror 20 years ago. Such patterns suggest that torture porn is not the marker of generic decline its detractors have suggested.

This chapter has begun to sketch out how and why torture porn has been characterised in conflicting ways that do not clearly or consistently represent torture porn’s content. The discourses’ shortcomings partially stem from classifying films under a banner that absolutely separates torture porn from other subgenres. Categorisation necessitates generalisation, overlooking differences and augmenting commonalities. Yet, as complaints levelled at torture porn demonstrate, categorisation may also curtail understanding of torture porn’s relationship to the past. Without a foundational comprehension of torture porn’s origins and ‘torture porn’ discourse’s inheritances, responses to torture porn are likely to remain reactionary and neglect the lessons the past has to offer. As the next chapter will illustrate, the hyperbolic charges against torture porn overcompensate for the discourse’s unstable foundations, inappropriately characterising torture porn as cause for immediate alarm.
Despite a general unwillingness to critically engage with horror are popular in the present moment. It is despite some micro-level changes, the wider argue-mental horror have remained remarkably consistent over time, discussions of contemporaneous horror becoming "worse" are evident in interviews with Forrest J. Goodwin in the documentary *Shock Cinema Vol I*, the same pejorative rhetoric found in 'torture porn' is utilised by authorities on horror 20 years ago. Such at torture porn is not the marker of generic decline it is suggested. It begun to sketch out how and why torture porn has been regarded in conflicting ways that do not clearly or consistently torture porn's content. The discourses' shortcomings in classifying films under a banner that absolutely porn from other subgenres. Categorisation necessitates looking differences and augmenting commonalities levelled at torture porn demonstrate, categorisation understanding of torture porn's relationship to the past, a national comprehension of torture porn's origins and course's inheritances, responses to torture porn are actionary and neglect the lessons the past has to offer. It will illustrate, the hyperbolic charges against torture rate for the discourse's unstable foundations, inappropriating torture porn as cause for immediate alarm.

Critics' judgments directly shape the meanings of 'torture porn'. As Newn (1996: 134) notes, it is 'usually film critics' who label films, and this is certainly true of 'torture porn', a term that was coined and propagated by journalists. The press's responses to torture porn are culturally powerful, gaining gravitas from the mode of dissemination. Not only are such evaluations inter/nationally distributed, but the news context also situates such commentary in a context that intimates factuality. That context lends an impression of authority to print press reviews that other forms of criticism - such as internet-distributed opinion pieces and fan responses - do not necessarily share. Ergo, it is vital to grasp how torture porn has been represented in the press in order to explicate what 'torture porn' means.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the connotations of 'torture porn', exploring the complications that arise within press reporters' discussions about the subgenre. This involves detailing what qualities have been associated with 'torture porn' and the subgenre's films. The attributes that derogators point towards in order to disparage torture porn typically spring from off-screen contexts rather than on-screen content. Torture porn's depreciators predominantly universalise their objections to and assumptions about the subgenre, interpellating their readers and masking their personal biases. Such obfuscation also veils the fact that their individual complaints are symptomatic of the press's tendency to illegitimatise popular horror film more broadly. By rejecting the films outright, depreciators naturalise the lack of textual detail in their responses: the films are presented as unworthy of investigation. In sum, press critics directly shape the connotations of 'torture porn', but their complaints are seldom made about torture porn's content alone.
In order to collate press responses to torture porn, searches were conducted across major English language news articles for the terms ‘torture porn’, ‘torture horror’, ‘horror porn’, ‘blood porn’, ‘gore porn’, ‘gorno’ (as well as derivatives thereof) via LexisNexis UK. While these terms are used somewhat interchangeably in such criticism, ‘torture porn’ is the most ubiquitous of these labels. These searches provided an expansive base of articles from which to ascertain ‘torture porn’ discourse’s chief patterns. Indicative examples have been selected to illustrate dominant trends. The most pertinent statements have been opted for rather than, for instance, quoting from news sources with the largest distribution reach. The chapter itself is structured around the recurring contentions uncovered by this study of more than 1200 articles. The prevalent suggestions within press discourses are that torture porn (a) is constituted by violence, (b) is a fad, (c) is problematic because it is mainstream entertainment, and (d) affronts critics’ sensibilities. These trends reveal inconsistencies within ‘torture porn’ as a category. This chapter’s closing sections inspect those discrepancies, evaluating their impact on ‘torture porn’.

‘Every Ten Minutes One Must Die!’: centralisation of violence

Foremost, torture porn is characterised as a subgenre constituted by graphic, realistic violence (see McClintock, 2006; Zinoman, 2007; Anderson, 2009). Since violent horror films have been classified as ‘torture porn’ according to that property, it is self-fulfilling that torture porn films are primarily concerned with physical threat, rather than supernatural/spiritual peril. However, some caveats are necessary. The notion that torture porn is made unique by its goriness is overpronounced in this discourse, as are allegations concerning the amount of violence displayed in each torture porn film. The idea that ‘levels of horrific violence on show at the multiplexes...have gone through the roof’ (Cochrane, 2007), is hyperbolic. As Blair Davis and Kial Natale (2010: 44) demonstrate, although torture porn films are bloody, ‘the average number of on-screen acts of gory violence [in successful multiplex horror] has not increased since 2001’, and in fact declined between 2003 and 2007. Since this era is torture porn’s theatrical boom-period, claims regarding torture porn’s violence levels are evidently exaggerated. Two factors feed that critical misperception. First, films are categorised as torture porn because they are violent, leading decriers to overstress the level of violence each film contains. That is, the idea of what
press responses to torture porn, searches were major English language news articles for the terms 'torture horror', 'horror porn', 'blood porn', 'gore porn', (derivatives thereof) via LexisNexis UK. While these nomenclatures interchangeably in such criticism, torture porn ubiquitously of these labels. These searches provided articles from which to ascertain torture porn patterns. Indicative examples have been selected to trends. The most pertinent statements have been an, for instance, quoting from news sources with the reach. The chapter itself is structured around themes uncovered by this study of more than 1200 articles. Suggestions within press discourses are that torture porn is a fad, problematic entertainment, and affronts critics' sensibilities, inconsistencies within torture porn as a category. Following sections inspect those discrepancies, evaluating torture porn.

'Gore, Violence'

Torture porn is characterised as a subgenre constituted by violence (see McClintock, 2006; Zinoman, 2007). Since violent horror films have been classified as 'torture porn', it is self-fulfilling that torture porn is made unique by its goriness. Discourse, as are allegations concerning the amount of violence each film contains. The idea that 'levels of gore on show at the multiplexes...have gone through the roof' (Maher, 2007), is hyperbolic. As Blair Davis and Kial Natale state, although torture porn films are bloody, 'the on-screen acts of gore violence [in successful multiplex releases since 2001]', and in fact declined between 2003 and 2007, claims torture porn's theatrical boom-period, claims torture porn's violence levels are evidently exaggerated. That critical misperception. First, films are categorized because they are violent, leading decriers to over-emphasise the amount and significance of torture porn's violence.

Kevin Maher's (2007) précis of torture porn's formula - 'lots of screaming, yada yada yada...Ultraviolence overkill' - exemplifies how torture porn is conceived: as an unsettling cumulative trend rather than as a series of discrete films that contain disturbing themes or imagery. Detractors tend to embellish the amount of violence in individual films because each belongs to the category 'torture porn'. The quantity of violent films in the subgenre augments the impression that individual films are exceedingly bloody, because each film labelled 'torture porn' stands for the whole subgenre. Since the connotations of 'torture porn' are prioritised over filmic content in this discourse, critics often link torture porn to one another when passing judgment. Samuel Wigley (2007), for instance, makes comparative assertions such as 'each entry in this brutal cycle is obliged to outdo the last'. Wigley's statement submits that filmmakers conceive of their films as belonging to the subgenre, positing that 'torture porn' is a movement created by filmmakers rather than the press. The notion that filmmakers seek to outdo each other's depictions of violence is prevalent in torture porn discourse (see Johnson, 2007; Orange, 2009; Puig, 2009). The common parlance for this idea is 'pushing the envelope' (Hulse, 2007; Ide, 2009), a phrase that implies both graphic escalation and filmmakers' shared desire to offend normative sensibilities via their violent imagery. Highlighting violence in this way insinuates that torture porn's pleasures are one-dimensional, consisting of 'test[ing] how much gore you can watch before throwing up' (Zane, 2010; see also Ide, 2009). Those disdainful judgements about content are complimented by estimations
of violence's effect on the audience. Descriptions of violence as 'repellent' (Phillips, 2010), 'nauseating' (Ordana, 2010a), 'stomach-churning' (Lowe, 2010), 'disgusting' (McEachen, 2010) and 'excruciating' (Anderson, 2009) all involve a leap from portrayals to presumed reactions, which are loaded with value-judgments. This rhetoric interpellates, proffering that most readers will (and should) agree that torture porn's images are disdainful.

'Torture porn' discourse situates torture porn's violence, imbuing it with connotative meaning. It is melodramatically professed that violence is all torture porn offers (see Muir, 2010a; Slotek, 2009a; Bowles, 2009), thereby painting the subgenre as vacuous. Moreover, torture porn is indicted with including 'gore for gore's sake' (Kermode, 2008a), 'nasty things...for the sake of nastiness' (Fox, 2007), and 'violence for the sake of violence' (Ketchum in Kirkland, 2008b). These sentiments are corroborated by the six 'gr'-adjectives habitually used to describe torture porn: 'gratuitous' (Hill, 2007; Phelan, 2011); 'gruesome' (Hunter, 2010; Tookey, 2007a; Lidz, 2009), 'graphic' (Ordana, 2010a; McEachen, 2010; Williamson, 2007c) 'grisly' (Dalton, 2009a; Kendall, 2008), 'gross' and 'grotesque' (N.a. 2010b; Kermode, 2010; Gordon, 2006: 60). Each intimates that torture porn's violence is excessive or – as Claire Hill (2007) has it – 'unnecessary'.

'When You Think the Worst has Happened... Think Worse': torture porn as a fad

Torture porn's violence is subsequently perceived as replacing narrative depth and characterisation. As Aftab (2009) inveighs, '[n]arrative development is a mere inconvenience in these films' (see also Slotek, 2009a; Dalton, 2009b; Tookey, 2008a). Such supposition is typically utilised to verify torture porn's cultural illegitimacy: it is claimed that torture porn is 'pointless' (Cumming et al., 2010; Muir, 2010b) and 'meritless' (Ordana, 2010b). Cashmore (2010), for example, describes the subgenre as a 'sheer, ruptured-sewage-pipe deluge of gore, mutilation, and general unpleasantness'. The term 'sewage-pipe' underscores that violence is equated with worthlessness. The same tactic is apparent where torture porn is described as 'excrementous' (Williamson, 2007a), 'garbage' (Robey, 2007a), 'trash' (Phillips, 2010; Booth, 2008), 'junk' (Conner, 2009), and 'low' (Robey, 2007a; N.a. 2010; Lim, 2009). Other adjectives such as 'daft' (Edwards, 2007), 'puerile' (Maher, 2009; Tookey, 2008d), 'infantile' (N.a. 2007b), 'crass, silly' (Bradshaw, 2010), 'wrongheaded' (Phelan, 2011), 'cretinous' (Cashmore, 2010), and 'mindless' (Hunter,
on the audience. Descriptions of violence as ‘repel-
'ntious’ (Williamson, 2007a), ‘nauseating’ (Ordna, 2010a), ‘stomach-churning’ (McEachen, 2010) and ‘excrementous’ (Williamson, 2008) involve a leap from portrayals to presumed reac-
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most readers will (and should) agree that torture
is disdainful.

The same tactic is apparent where torture
is subsequently perceived as replacing narrative
situation, the reviewer dismisses
the same point is made by citing disappointing returns made
to portrayals to presumed defient and culturally undiscerning.

In this view, torture porn is indefensible per se. Where positive traits
are noted, they are immediately qualified. For instance, Nigel Kendall
(2008) states that Untraceable ‘has a surprising amount to recommend
it’, his ‘surprise’ arising from the idea that any torture porn film can
be recommended. Indeed, enjoying Untraceable is enough to prove its
dissimilarity to ‘Saw and Hostel’ for Kendall: the film cannot be both
recommended and be torture porn. Kendall’s qualifying statements
attest to torture porn’s ostensible worthlessness then, despite evidence
to the contrary. Similarly, Shea Conner (2009) decries the subgenre, and
then cites Saw – a film ubiquitously associated with ‘torture porn’ – as
one of ‘the few gems this decade [2000–9] had to offer’. ‘Torture porn’
discourse is constituted by such contradictory statements. The label has
been widely applied to films that critics do not enjoy, and so if hecklers
appreciate individual films, those films become exceptions to ‘torture
cern’. Another pundit (N.a. 2010c) sustains the critical narrative that
torture porn is valueless in her/his evaluation of the Saw franchise.

Rather than defending torture porn against accusations of one-dimen-
sional narrativisation, the reviewer dismisses Saw’s narrative complexity
as ‘baffling’, which implies incoherence rather than sophistication.

Other disparagers declare that torture porn is passé, thereby debunking
the subgenre rather than addressing its popularity. Hence, torture porn
is presented as a fleeting fad by some detractors (Kenny in Johnson,
2007; Monahan, 2010). To the same ends, others announce that torture
porn is ‘over’, or verging on imminent collapse (Barnes, 2009; Safire,
2007; Mundell, 2008). In many articles, the theatrical success of films
belonging to other horror subgenres is utilised as evidence of torture
cporn being ‘replaced’ (see N.a. 2010d; Wloszczyna, 2009; Newman,
2008). This was especially pronounced when Paranormal Activity’s
sequels were scheduled for annual October releases, because the Saw
franchise explicitly claimed ownership of the October multiplex horror
slot. As Saw III’s tagline denoted, ‘[If it’s Halloween, it must be Saw’.
Paranormal Activity has been heralded as toppling that monopoly (see
Schwartz, 2010: 51; Miska, 2012). Many pundits deem that the release of
Paranormal Activity 2 alongside Saw’s ‘Final Chapter’ in 2010 also marked
torture porn’s ‘Final Chapter’.

The same point is made by citing disappointing returns made
on Hostel: Part II in June 2007 (Wloszczyna, 2007; Leydon, 2007;
Torture pegs the subgenre's demise even earlier, asserting that 'by the end of 2006 [torture porn] showed signs of beginning to wane'. Less than a year after the subgenre was named, it was said to be 'finished'. Such repudiation continues (see Killingbeck, 2011; Middleton, 2010), illustrating that reviewers were premature in pronouncing torture porn's death in 2007. In fact, the popularity of 'torture porn' in the press peaked in 2009, with 308 English-language articles employing the term. Although usage has declined since 2009, the label has been utilised more times per year in the period 2008–11 than it was in 2007, when only 205 English-language articles used the term. Press discourse itself evinces that torture porn was far from moribund in 2007.

Such arguments may have aimed to facilitate rather than report the subgenre's decline. This rhetorical strategy – declaring that torture porn is 'over' – consolidates the established critical narrative that torture porn is superficial entertainment. Derogators predicted that torture porn was doomed to faddishness because violent escalation is unsustainable in the long-term (see Zinoman, 2007; Purcell in Zoc, 2008). Such arguments insinuate that the subgenre is not worth becoming too anxious about because it is doomed to transience. The latter assurance is belied by the near-hysterical tone that pervades the press's denunciation of torture porn, an inconsistency that exposes the flawed logic and reactionary impulses that underpin 'torture porn'.

Contrary to critics' persistent proliferation of 'torture porn' and torture porn films' continued production, the impression that torture porn has all-but died out since 2007 is prevalent. That idea is inherent to the 'torture porn' paradigm in two ways. First, since 'torture porn' is a theatrically-biased discourse, torture porn's shift to DVD releasing may appear to signal a decline in production, despite an increase in the quantity of torture porn films produced between 2007 and 2010. Torture porn's reduced theatrical presence has meant its cultural visibility has also diminished. Second, after 'torture porn' was established as a category, its characteristics were instituted and became predictable. Grouping these films based on repeated facets and shared attributes may have led audiences and pundits to perceive the material as less exciting than it was initially. That is, torture porn may have become less noticeable because critical discourses defined torture as a standard convention.

**Box-office 'gross': the mainstream context**

The subgenre's continuing success on DVD post-2007 is of little concern to those detractors who have eagerly proclaimed torture porn's demise.
It’s demise even earlier, asserting that ‘by the end of [j] showed signs of beginning to wane’. Less than a year after it was named, it was said to be ‘finished’. Such rhetoric (see Killingbeck, 2011; Middleton, 2010), illustrating premature in pronouncing torture porn’s death in the press peaked in English-language articles employing the term. Although since 2009, the label has been utilised more times per 2008–11 than it was in 2007, when only 205 English-used the term. Press discourse itself evinces that torture porn moribund in 2007.

This rhetorical strategy — declaring that torture porn was finished because violent escalation is unsustainable in the human, 2007; Purcell in Zoc, 2008). Such arguments may have aimed to facilitate rather than report the decline. The latter assurance is belied by the persistence that pervades the press’s denunciation of torture porn’s entertainment. Derogators predicted that torture porn was moribund in 2007. Instead of protest against unsuitable filmic content. Rather, opponents have aimed to facilitate rather than report the impression that torture porn’s continued production, the idea that torture porn’s profitability as particularly noteworthy, contending that lucrative entertainment should not be based on violent spectacle. This is not prima facie a moral protest against unsuitable filmic content. Rather, opponents take exception to torture porn’s profitability itself. For instance, Rob Driscoll (2007) foregrounds economics over ethics by complaining that Roth ‘mak[es] a mint from producing amoral entertainment’. Similarly, Williamson (2007a) compares Roland Joffe to a ‘pimp’ for directing Captivity (see also Skenazy, 2007), submitting that the director’s greed is immoral. Feeding the critical narrative that torture porn offers vacuous, transient entertainment, it is alleged that torture porn production is driven by superficial motives; ‘it’s a reason for all this torture porn: it makes money’ (Lacey, 2009; see also Fern, 2008; Collins in Di Fonzo, 2007).

Resultantly, disparagers often amalgamate fleeting descriptions of torture porn’s content with comments about finance. Frank Lovece (2010), for example, interrupts his sparse recap of the Saw franchise’s plot to impart combined box-office figures for the series: ‘The story so far – as some $370.2 million worth of domestic ticket buyers and a total $738.5 million worldwide know – involves a serial-killer mastermind’. Spuriously mentioning box-office gross in this manner is pervasive (see Sembri, 2010; Anderson, 2007c), sometimes manifesting in terms such as ‘moneyspinning’ (Vaughan, 2007) and ‘cash in’ (Phelan, 2011; Tooke, 2006; Kermode, 2007). Economic success is a focal point that usurps what little content-based consideration is available in journalistic discussions regarding torture porn.

Elsewhere, derogators spotlight that profit comes from movie-goers (Dalton, 2009b). The public are characterised as victims of filmmakers’ ‘vulgar opportunism’ (Kermode, 2007) in such arguments. Framing torture porn as a kind of exploitation cinema allows critics to draw on another pre-existent critical paradigm to scornfully marry torture porn’s ‘vulgar’ content with its financial performance. In this view, the public are duped into spending their money, and filmmakers willingly exploit audience naivety by supplying ‘cheap thrills’ (Gray, 2008). Disparities between production costs and profits are also flagged (Murray, 2008: 1; Kinsella, 2007), corroborating that torture porn is motivated by avarice, and portraying each ticket purchase as part of a cumulative dynamic.
Movie-goers are rendered culpable for torture porn, and so are asked to ‘[v]ote with [their] feet and [their] wallets’: ‘don’t go to see [torture porn]’ (Heal, 2007). Such suggestions are futile inasmuch as they appeal to those readers who are sympathetic to the authors’ anti-torture porn position. Torture porn fans are unlikely to be persuaded by the belittling tone these pundits adopt, and readers who agree that torture porn is worthless are not likely to be among the ticket purchasers being addressed. The instruction is rhetorical rather than persuasive, contributing to the overarching proposal that torture porn should be hindered.

In order to support this case, some opponents interpellate even those press-readers who have not seen any torture porn films. Several of the subgenre’s movies – such as Mum and Dad, w1z, and Donkey Punch – were funded by the UK Film Council. Numerous reporters point this out, announcing that the British public unwittingly ‘helped pay for…pointlessly unpleasant torture porn’ (N.a. 2008b; see also Tookey, 2008b; Platell, 2008). Such argumentation rhetorically holds the entire populace – even non-movie-goers – accountable for torture porn. Doing so creates a sense of majority resistance to torture porn. The strategy holds film funders liable to public-pressure, tacitly stifling torture porn at the root by discouraging funders from becoming involved in torture porn production.

These economically-focused complaints are thus geared towards pushing torture porn out of the multiplex. The word ‘mainstream’ is habitually interjected into commentary regarding money, pointing to torture porn’s theatrical exhibition as a source of apprehension (see McCartney, 2008; Gordon, 2009; Cochrane, 2007; Hunt, 2007). However, these allusions do not specify why torture porn’s mainstream presence is problematic: it is just self-evidently worrying. Pointing out that ‘[t]orture porn movies play in multiplexes everywhere’ (Johnson, 2007) has a similar effect, underlining that prevalence is a problem without stipulating why. Such observations are undermined by assertions regarding torture porn’s decline elsewhere in the press. Much like detractors’ over-inflation of torture porn’s violent content, torture porn’s multiplex presence is also typically exaggerated. As a horror subgenre, torture porn performed well at the box-office, but that is not to suggest that torture porn films are comparable to summer blockbusters in terms of profitability, for instance. When critics such as Driscoll (2007) and Pamela McClintock (2006) express anxiety over Hostel usurping the family film The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe at the top of the American box-office, it should be noted that Hostel’s success does not typify torture porn’s performance as an entire subgenre, particularly
undered culpable for torture porn, and so are asked to feel and [their] wallets: ‘don’t go to see [torture porn] suggestions are futile inasmuch as they appeal to those sympathetic to the authors’ anti-torture porn position, are unlikely to be persuaded by the belittling tone, and readers who agree that torture porn is worth- to be among the ticket purchasers being addressed, rhetorical rather than persuasive, contributing to the sal that torture porn should be hindered.

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That few objections are raised over torture porn’s continued production in the direct-to-DVD context elucidates that theatrical exhibition is a particular problem. For example, more than 80 English language articles in major world publications covered Hostel: Part II’s release in 2007. Most of these consisted of depreciatory opinion. Diametrically, only three short articles (Longsdorf, 2011; Bentley, 2011; and Miller, 2012) – mainly constituted by plot synopsis – immediately followed Hostel: Part III’s direct-to-DVD release. Notably, only one of these articles was printed in a major world publication. Furthermore, these disparities evince that disputes about torture porn are not ultimately concerned with filmic content. Torture porn DVDs are commonly packaged as ‘unrated’ or ‘extreme’, implying that the DVD version contains more explicit violence than the theatrical cut. If content were the primary issue, then these expressly uncensored DVDs should alarm reporters more than the cinematically released, R-rated versions. However, the opposite is true in ‘torture porn’ discourse.

Torture porn’s disparagement exposes much about the multiplex’s significance as a site of cultural power. Critical unease is fixated on torture porn being ‘accepted as the norm’ (Hill, 2007), and horror’s potential to move from the sidelines of film culture into its commercial centre. Most plainly, Aftab (2009) rejects torture porn by complaining that ‘at least [splatter] films knew their place in B-movie theatres’ (see also Lovece, 2010). His explicit reference to location reveals that the torture porn ‘problem’ can be resolved via what amounts to cultural gentrification.

‘... like some sort of epidemic?: the ‘need’ for restriction

Critics’ affront stems less from torture porn’s content than it does the structures via which they are exposed to that content. That is, reviewers frequently object to having to deal with these films. That sentiment is clear in Vicki Brett’s (2007) admittance that ‘my stomach isn’t strong enough for [torture porn]. I’m the one who comes out screaming like the bloodied victims’. Various critics echo her apprehension, positing that they are directly – even physically – affected by their encounters with torture porn. Anna Smith (2010) declares that she ‘would have given anything for release from the gratuitous torture porn of Wolf Creek’, for instance (see also Platell, 2008; McCartney, 2007a). Such personal responses illustrate that reporters find torture porn’s success problematic
because they are ‘forced’ to sit through films they dislike. Journalists have a patent reason for defaming theatrical torture porn, then. If ghettoised to DVD, press-based film reviewers – who primarily concentrate on cinematic releases – will no longer ‘be tortured’ by the subgenre’s presence.

This implicit subjective bias is masked by the outward focus adopted in ‘torture porn’ criticism. Reviewers customarily make the case that violent entertainment should not be permitted to occupy a medial cultural position per se. Torture porn’s presence in the mainstream is cited to warn of broader problems, such as the ineffectuality of censorial bodies (see Kirkland, 2008a; Heal, 2007; McCartney, 2007a). Couched in this suggestion that the MPAA and BBFC have failed to protect the public from violent spectacle is the connotation that torture porn genuinely endangers the populace. It is unsurprising that this discourse flourished in the British press particularly, since numerous previously banned or heavily cut 1970s–80s films such as Cannibal Holocaust were re-released in the UK in less censored versions from the mid-2000s onwards, tallying with torture porn’s boom-period. Rather than perceiving this trend as evidence that films once considered worthy of banning lose their propensity to shock over time, torture porn’s opponents have characterised these shifts as confirming that horror films are more violent than they once were, and that censorial bodies have become too liberal (see Tookey, 2011; Beckford, 2008; Bor, 2007; Gordon, 2009). Similar arguments are found in the American press, where critics have expressed concern that the MPAA’s ratings categories are incapable of encompassing torture porn’s content and should be more restrictive (see Zeitchik, 2010; Rechtshaffen, 2010; Goldstein, 2010). Contra to numerous torture porn directors – including Zombie, Zev Berman, and Aja – recounting how inflexible the MPAA is,9 the press have emphasised instances in which censorial decisions have been appealed and overturned to propound censors’ lack of authority (see McCartney, 2008).

The desire to classify and hence contain these films is as palpable in such discussions as it is in the practice of labelling films ‘torture porn’. Torture porn is thus commonly dubbed ‘extreme’ (see Hill, 2007; Graham, 2009b; Macnab, 2011), verifying censors’ failure to control the subgenre’s content. Postulating that they know better than the censors, many critics position themselves as cultural guardians, a ‘line of defence’ between the public and torture porn’s filmmakers, who are painted as greedy and irresponsible. These pundits thus advise that if filmmakers are not deterred, horror will continue its alleged decline. Jason Zinoman (2007), for instance, asks ‘[a]fter you blow up someone’s head, rip people
forced’ to sit through films they dislike. Journalists, on for defaming theatrical torture porn, then. If ghouls-based film reviewers—who primarily concentrate—will no longer ‘be tortured’ by the subgenre’s subjective bias is masked by the outward focus adopted criticism. Reviewers customarily make the case that content should not be permitted to occupy a mediasphere. Torture porn’s presence in the mainstream is loader problems, such as the ineffectuality of censorial d, 2008a; Heal, 2007; McCartney, 2007a). Couched in the MPAA and BBFC have failed to protect the public face is the connotation that torture porn genuinely nullifies. It is unsurprising that this discourse flourished is particularly, since numerous previously banned or-80s films such as Cannibal Holocaust were re-released’s censored versions from the mid-2000s onwards, here porn’s boom-period. Rather than perceiving this that films once considered worthy of banning lose shock over time, torture porn’s opponents have charted as confirming that horror films are more violent are, and that censorial bodies have become too liberal; Beckford, 2008; Bor, 2007; Gordon, 2009). Similar nd in the American press, where critics have expressed MPAA’s ratings categories are incapable of encompassing tent and should be more restrictive (see Zeitchik, 2010; 0; Goldstein, 2010). Contra to numerous torture porn ening Zombie, Zev Berman, and Aja—recounting how A As, the press have emphasised instances in which is have been appealed and overturned to propound authority (see McCartney, 2008).

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Lenore Skenazy (2007) is particularly foreboding about what torture porn’s ‘extremity’ might indicate: ‘[i]f we start accepting this kind of movie as just “extreme” horror, the baseline will change... If that’s the world you want to live in... [i]t’s coming. But if you’d like a different future, you’ve got to act’. Skenazy hyperbolically heralds torture porn’s box-office performance as a symptom of impending social downfall. At this spectrum’s most hysterical end, some proponents have urged that the advertising campaign for Captivity is ‘a literal sign of the collapse of humanity’ (Whedon in Cochrane, 2007), and that the Saw films are ‘a sign of the apocalypse’ (Beale, 2009). The rhetorical mechanisms at work here point outwards – away from critics’ subjective affront and torture porn’s content – towards unimaginable threat. Opting for abstract fear over tangible detail is illustrative of this discourse’s central flaw. Detractors condemn torture porn for being spectacle without substance, yet their complaints are so often founded on unsubstantiated, salacious rhetorical gestures.

Similar strategies are utilised to prove torture porn’s potential harm by connecting the subgenre to much broader socio-political problems. Although such arguments point to concrete events, they are usually undercut by the failure to explicate torture porn’s connection to those incidents. Torture porn has been correlated with moral ambivalence issuing from Ghana’s independence (Danquah, 2010), and ‘the dramatic rise in sexually transmitted diseases among 16 to 24-year-olds’ (Platell, 2008), for instance. These associations remain remarkably vague, since the reporters avoid making direct cause–effect statements while affirming that the films reflect social decline.

Despite predictions of societal meltdown, ‘torture porn’ discourse has not escalated into moral panic. Unlike recent responses to extreme porn (which will be discussed in Chapter 8), or past responses to the video nasties, torture porn has not prompted any legal modifications. Appeals are made directly to film-goers in ‘torture porn’ discourse, yet its dispar­agers’ vitriolic reactions are so over-compensatory that the public have little impetus to respond. Torture porn’s relative mainstream success confirms that the subgenre is not as controversial as the majority of
objectors have exaggeratedly claimed. The critical discourse itself dispels much of torture porn’s potential to offend. Labelling films ‘torture porn’ makes them knowable, diffusing their propensity to shock by categorising them. Contrary to opponents depicting torture porn as a stepping-stone towards social degeneration, torture porn’s failure to launch as a moral panic is indicative of hegemonic stability.

‘How can I disprove a false accusation?’: confusion and incoherence

Less stable is the category ‘torture porn’ itself. As a discursive paradigm, ‘torture porn’ is riddled with inconsistencies. The label masks divergences and tensions that are inherent to collecting diverse films together. Although initially aimed at multiplex horror, all manner of popular cultural objects have subsequently been called ‘torture porn’, further undercuts the category’s coherence. ‘Torture porn’ has been applied to films outside of the horror genre, including comedies such as Jackass Number Two (Tooke, 2006) and action films such as Casino Royale (Schneller, 2008; Driscoll, 2007). This move undercuts one of torture porn’s chief properties: that it is a horror subgenre. It is not just genre that is diversified, but also medium. Television crime-dramas 24 (Riegler, 2010: 32; Williamson, 2007c), Dexter (Mangan, 2007), and Wire in the Blood (McLean, 2007) have been dubbed ‘torture porn’. The same is true for novels – including crime fiction authored by Jonathan Littell (Wilhelm, 2009), Scott Bakker (McKie, 2008), and Patricia Cornwell (Teeman, 2010) – and videogames such as Manhunt 2 (Schiesel, 2009; see also Lacey, 2009). Therefore another point of coherence – that ‘torture porn’ refers to horror film – is undermined. While intended jokingly, Sex and the City 2 (Leupp, 2010; Harlow, 2011), and Shrek the Third (Andrews, 2007) have also both been referred to as ‘torture porn’. These gags treat ‘torture porn’ as a synonym for ‘meritless’. In doing so, ‘torture porn’ is exposed as a discursive framework that has little to do with an object’s content: it is merely an epithet in these cases. That treatment alone speaks volumes about what ‘torture porn’ means when applied to horror film.

One further factor weakening the consistency of ‘torture porn’ as a categorising term is the existence of similar labels before Edelstein coined ‘torture porn’ in reference to a body of horror films made after 2003. ‘Horror porn’ has been used to describe David Cronenberg’s films (Vera, 2002) and hentai anime (Antonucci, 1998). Between 2001 and 2004, a number of authors used ‘gore porn’ to describe violent cinema,
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'Torture porn' is enriched by these slippages, which divulge much about how and why particular horror films have been demarcated as 'torture porn'. Responses to the subgenre are nonetheless shaped by 'torture porn' discourse, and in common parlance 'torture porn' (however imperfectly) still outlines a body of horror films that share similar themes. Although 'torture porn' will be utilised as a label in the remainder of this book, these limitations are implied within that usage. 'Torture porn' is in motion. It is intertwined with wider conceptual networks that impact on its various meanings. Torture porn's objectors have typically used the term to denounce the subgenre, but also to delimit texts and fix their meanings. The two endeavours are incompatible, as the inconsistencies outlined in this chapter demonstrate.

'Torture porn' can instead be utilised as a starting point to stimulate engagement by connecting filmic content to the concepts that underpin the term. While the films themselves will be addressed in Part II, the next chapter will take stock of other off-screen contextualising factors that inform what 'torture porn' signifies. Since Edelstein's article was published, filmmakers and fans have responded to the label's pejorative connotations. The press may have situated the subgenre in the cultural zeitgeist, but these latter groups - torture porn's creators and primary consumers - are most affected by 'torture porn' discourse, and also shape what 'torture porn' means.
Critics may have been pivotal in establishing the cultural meanings of ‘torture porn’, but filmmakers and audiences – particularly horror fans – are also rebuked via that discourse. Regularly, such derogation is indirect, conflating characters' actions with audiences' responses and/or with filmmakers' intentions. For instance, Ben McEachen's (2010) grievance over 'violent films that appear to get off on their disturbing deeds' is loaded against either filmmakers, fans or both. McEachen's pernicious rhetorical strategy obscures its target by blaming the film (an object). Since films cannot 'get off', McEachen implicates some unnamed party who responds to the diegetic action, or who neglects their responsibility to create 'appropriate' representations. More directly, reporters such as Killian Fox (2007) complain that since the dawn of cinema, 'critics have abhorred the depravity of...film-makers, and audiences have ignored the critics by trampling one another in a rush to see the films'. Fox's exasperation exaggerates both critical wisdom and audiences' defiance of pundits' acumen, implying that the reviewer's task is futile. Such statements disclose that although critics speak from an authoritative position, their ability to fix meaning is not final.

Filmmakers and fans also contribute to and shape 'torture porn' discourse. In interviews and on DVD commentaries, filmmakers have explicitly responded to the term. In blogs and online forums, horror fans have examined and debated what 'torture porn' signifies. While these outlets do not have the same distribution reach or cultural authority as the print press, they shape what 'torture porn' means for producers and consumers, two groups who claim ownership over the films in question. Torture porn's legacy is contingent on how horror fans and filmmakers use the term beyond the initial furore in the press. That is not to suggest
Approves of What You’re Fans and Filmmakers

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that fans and filmmakers simply resist critical opinions as Fox suggests. The press’s anxieties about torture porn are frequently replicated in fans’ and filmmakers’ responses.

This chapter is divided between those groupings, first dealing with filmmakers and then moving onto fans. Principally, the chapter’s analysis is focused on how the press have characterised fans and filmmakers, and various contributions those groups have made to ‘torture porn’ discourse. This brief dissection utilises interviews from print media, DVD commentaries and some devoted online forum debates to investigate these positions.

‘You don’t make film, you live film’; filmmakers

Once films are gathered alongside one another under a subgenre banner, their commonalities take on a retroactive character. Collectivising films connotes that they have been intentionally created with shared values in mind. Those ideals and intentions belong to the films’ creators, and so ‘torture porn’ groups filmmakers along with their films. Most
ture porn films – have been branded as ‘the splat pack’ (Jones, 2006).3 Separating torture porn filmmakers from other horror directors in this way consolidates the idea that torture porn is an intentional move- ment. Accordingly, Mcclintock (2006) describes the splat pack as a ‘cadre’, a ‘closely knit...team’ with a group manifesto: a ‘dedication to the genre, which they say has been hijacked by watered down PG-13 fare’. Mcclintock’s assertion has been confirmed by filmmakers such as Roth (in Driscoll, 2007) proclaiming that PG-13 movies are not ‘proper’ horror.

Roth has been singled out as the splat pack’s progenitor (see O’Sullivan, 2009), perhaps because Edelstein name-checked Hostel specifically,4 but also because Roth has been most vocal about the label.5 Roth (in Mcclintock, 2006) has validated the term ‘splat pack’, stating that the group of directors ‘all have the same agenda: to bring back really violent, horrific movies’. Roth’s oxymoronic statement that ‘what [the splat pack] all have in common is that everybody is...different from each other’6 illustrates that grouping individual filmmakers together results in conflict. Just as ‘torture porn’ generalises about filmic continuities, ‘the splat pack’ places emphasis on similarity – that these filmmakers create torture porn – but does not convey anything about directorial distinctiveness.
Other filmmakers have been less vocal about such collectivisation or have actively distanced themselves from ‘torture porn’ and ‘the splat pack’. Tom Shankland, for example, insists that \textit{Wax} was written before \textit{Saw} and \textit{Hostel}, and that although he enjoyed \textit{Saw}, he finds the ‘whole “torture porn” thing...quite dull...people have been tortured in drama since Homer. So, whatever’. Jamie Blanks reveals that in the original script for his film \textit{Storm Warning}, the torturers were Nazis – as if they ‘weren’t reprehensible enough’ already – following up by facetiously imparting that they were also ‘Eli Roth fans’. Blanks thereby distances himself from Roth, and also from the excesses connoted by ‘torture porn’. Laugier and Adam Mason have both used DVD extra features to distance themselves and their films from ‘torture porn’, describing the subgenre as mean-spirited and gore-centric. In doing so, they replicate the press’s fulminating critical narratives. Moreover, their remarks demonstrate that ‘splat pack’ and ‘torture porn’ lack the ostensible coherence postulated via those labels. Many filmmakers are clearly uncomfortable about being associated with either term.

Their resistance is unsurprising given the pejorative overtones of ‘torture porn’. The vast majority of reviewers who utilise ‘torture porn’ do so to disparage the films’ cultural worth, and to belittle directors’ abilities. As Bloody-Disgusting.com’s editor Brad Miska (in Ventre, 2009) has it, “‘torture porn’ was coined basically to explain away poorly made films’. To be dubbed a ‘torture porn’ director is to be accused of: being ‘inept’ (Booth, 2008; Kern, 2008), or ‘barely functional’ (Lacey, 2007);
of a typical Eli Roth fan? Poppy in Storm Warning (2007, Blanks)

Filmmakers have been less vocal about such collectivisation or advanced themselves from ‘torture porn’ and ‘the splatterland, for example, insists that Saw was written before and that although he enjoyed Saw, he finds the ‘whole thing... quite dull... people have been tortured in drama whatever’. Jamie Blanks reveals that in the original Storm Warning, the torturers were Nazis – as if possible enough’ already – following up by facetiously they were also ‘Eli Roth fans’, Blanks thereby distances and also from the excesses connoted by ‘torture porn’.

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Such is unsurprising given the pejorative overtones of the vast majority of reviewers who utilise ‘torture porn’ to malign the films’ cultural worth, and to belittle directors’ intentions, or ‘barely functional’ (Lacey, 2007).

making ‘shoddy... lazy’ product (N.a. 2010b; see also Tookey, 2007b); not understanding their craft (that is, how to scare) (Phelan, 2009; Patterson, 2010); lacking creativity (Kenny in Johnson, 2007; Macabre in Zoc, 2008); failing to create human drama or flesh out characters (McCartney, 2007b; Slotek, 2009a); and being derivative (Monahan, 2010; Ide, 2008a). Even in the rare cases when directorial skill is acknowledged, the derogatory narrative is maintained. For instance, Zinoman (2007) admits that torture porn films are ‘slicker’ than earlier horror, but this observation is used to evidence a prejudicial punitive position. Zinoman inveighs that the films ‘look like the work of maniacs... who’ve been to film school’. Such derision is ultimately used to dismiss the subgenre as undeserving of critical attention.

That attitude is verified by detractors who contend that torture porn filmmakers’ collective motto is ‘splatter, splatter, and we need more splatter’ (Williamson, 2007b). Torture porn filmmakers’ alleged aim – to deliver gore in increasing levels – is characterised as puerile. Additionally, in this view, directors even fail to produce that level of entertainment. Mark Monahan (2010) decries torture porn ‘as a collective admission of crushing directorial defeat. Running low on imagination? Turn someone to mincemeat... in close-up! Like, cool!’ The informal register of the last clause implies that torture porn directors are immature. Monahan’s commentary concludes with an overt challenge to filmmakers: ‘Can’t you do better?’ He intimates both that torture porn is deficient, and also that its creators have no excuse for not doing better’. Monahan thereby hints that these directors fail because their aspirations are flawed.

The filmmakers’ presumed intentions are of greater concern than gory content in such argumentation. ‘Graphic ferocity’ is limned as a ‘one-note’ strategy, intended only ‘to shock’ (Holden, 2009; see also Thomson, 2008b; N.a. 2007a), connoting that the filmmakers only have superficial ambitions. Violence is characterised as ‘a gimmick’ (Di Fonzo, 2007), suggesting that torture porn filmmakers are driven by commercialism rather than creativity. Such arguments regularly incorporate directors’ attempts to defend their films. Srdjan Spasojevic’s declaration that A Serbian Film ‘is not meant to be commercial... or popular’ (Brady, 2010b), and Roth’s promise that the ‘end of Hostel: Part II will shock everybody’ (Nelson, 2007), have been appropriated by their disparagers to prove that these filmmakers only aim to cause outrage, and have not thought carefully enough about the meanings of the representations they produce.

Given this tendency to adapt filmmakers’ statements to fit existent uncomplimentary narratives, torture porn filmmakers have primarily responded to such accusations during DVD featurettes and commentaries
rather than in press interviews. Director DVD commentaries customarily address allegations regarding how carefully they have crafted their films and how violence is employed. For example, many directors defend their decisions by rooting violence in characterisation; in his DVD commentary for w/z, Shankland asserts that 'there is no sadistic pleasure... [w/z's antagonist, Jean] is looking for something much more affirmative about life'. Other filmmakers seek to justify violent content by stressing its thematic relevance or claiming that the story requires the level of violence portrayed. For instance, in The Tortured's DVD special features, both Erika Christensen (actor) and Rob Lieberman (director) comment that the narrative is based on 'moral dilemma' rather than spectacle, while Carl Mazzocone (producer) discusses how The Tortured's violence was carefully measured and controlled. Directors such as Shankland and Zombie have also used DVD special features to state outright that they dislike violence, and take no pleasure in filming fictional bloodshed. These defences demonstrate that the authors have appraised what is at stake in representing violence, directly addressing accusations levelled at torture porn's creators by the press. DVD special features provide a space in which directors can vindicate their choices without the negative mediation such explication is subjected to in the press.

The location of such defences also reveals power advantages the press have in shaping 'torture porn' discourse. Press criticism is widely distributed, and advance press screenings mean reviews are customarily printed before most readers have the opportunity to see the films themselves. DVD special features, in contrast, are ordinarily consumed by a limited audience, and only after they have seen the film. Even if it is the case that directors are principally interested in expounding their decisions to
Press interviews. Director DVD commentaries customarily foreground how carefully they have crafted the violence employed. For example, many directors Discount Sergio Endrizz...
advocates horrific narratives, as long as ‘they are told responsibly’ (emphasis added), specifically pointing to Saw and Hostel as failing in this respect, Edelstein’s remark (in Johnson, 2007) that Zombie is ‘a sensationaly good director’ but lacks ‘moral sense’ gestures towards the same objection: that torture porn filmmakers are irresponsible and should be hindered.

Accordingly, when Roth (in Schembri, 2010) proffers that he is ‘trying to make smart, intelligent movies’, quoting Plato to illustrate his cultural credibility, his defences are mocked by objectors. McCartney (2007a) decries Roth’s use of ‘pseudo-intellectual[ism]’ to justify his status as ‘shameless pedlar of pain and gore’. More directly insulting is Mark Kermode’s (2008a) opinion that Roth is a ‘numbskull’. Kermode’s slur is exemplary of another trend in anti-torture porn discourse. Direct personal attacks on filmmakers are commonplace in torture porn criticism, and sometimes become alarmingly literal. Ross Douthat (2007) claims that he would like to ‘punch [Roth] in the face’ because ‘the bastard has it coming’, for example. Reviews are meant to address the films themselves, but, as is typical of responses to torture porn, many critics are preoccupied with external factors. For instance, in his reviews, Chris Tookey repeatedly charges torture porn directors with having ‘barmy ... morals’ (2007b), or delighting in cruelty (2007a; 2008c). Since ‘torture porn’ is ubiquitously used to connote the subgenre’s ‘badness’, it follows that torture porn films are presumed to be badly made. An offshoot of that logic is the supposition that these films are made by ‘bad’ people. Roth again is scapegoated in such fulmination. The inference that ‘Roth has a penchant for seedy sexual practices’ (Catt, 2010; see also Nathan, 2010) epitomises the way in which Roth’s personal life is implicated in attempts to censure his films.

More broadly, torture porn filmmakers are depicted as perverse to corroborate the sexual connotations of ‘torture porn’. Within press discourse, pundits commonly portray themselves as more intelligent and morally staid than torture porn’s filmmakers and fans. Jane Graham (2009a), for instance, posits that ‘the general view among grown-up commentators is that the Saw movies represent an artistic and moral black hole’ (emphasis added). Graham’s condescending tone exposes her desire to present torture porn’s creators and consumers as ignorant, contrasting with her own apparently mature view.

‘You made me look like a degenerate monster’:17 fans

Divergences between reviewers’ opinions and the target audiences’ perspectives are unsurprising. Critics are professionally required to
narratives, as long as ‘they are told responsibly’ (emphasis pointing to Saw and Hostel as failing in this respect) (in Johnson, 2007) that Zombie is ‘a sensationally good ‘moral sense’ gestures towards the same objection: that makers are irresponsible and should be hindered.

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*look like a degenerate monster*: fans

ween reviewers’ opinions and the target audiences’ unsurprising. Critics are professionally required to watch films, which is quite different to watching them of one’s own volition. Even when press pundits self-identify as horror enthusiasts, they commonly use that status to disparage torture porn. For example, Robey (2007b) declares that he ‘was a fan of horror movies’ before torture porn. Robey cites his fandom to reject torture porn with some authority, and to interpellate any other horror fans reading his article.

In contrast, torture porn filmmakers also present themselves as fans, using their authority to support the subgenre. Roth (in Howell, 2009), for instance, describes his directorial role in terms of his devotion to the horror genre: ‘I wanted to do everything I could to help bring back bloody R-rated movies’ (emphasis added). In opposition to critics’ outright dismissals of torture porn, Roth takes ownership of the genre, both as a producer and a consumer of horror.

Belittlers hold filmmakers culpable for creating torture porn, but fans too are condemned using that same ownership logic. Torture porn’s audience is admonished for financially and symbolically supporting the subgenre. ‘Torture porn’ also collectivises fans via their shared interest in torture porn films. The negative qualities attributed to ‘torture porn’ by its detractors are thereby conferred onto fans. This move – ‘turning the film’s characteristics into a judgement on the target audience’ - is a standard press response to popular horror (Egan, 2007: 32–3; see also Hutchings, 2004: 83). That approach is equally evident in Carmine Sarracino and Kevin Scott’s (2008: 161) proclamation that ‘the most frightening’ aspect of torture porn is not ‘what occurs... on-screen, but [what occurs] in the audience’. This remark epitomises how reported audience attitudes are employed to substantiate the pejorative traits commonly assigned to both torture porn films and filmmakers.

Much of the critical discussion regarding torture porn’s audience is concerned with youth, and manifests via two propositions. First, some detractors allege that the subgenre ‘harms’ children. ‘Harm’ remains unspecified in such cases, but torture porn producers are nevertheless painted as degenerates who want to damage young people, or who do not care if their films do so (see Cieply, 2007; Hart, 2009; Cochrane, 2007). Second, torture porn fans are deemed naive. This judgement is concretised by referring to the target-audience as ‘sensation-hungry teenagers’ or ‘kids’ (Driscoll, 2007). As Katy Hayes (2010) puts it, ‘you may not have heard of [Saw] if you are over 23’ (see also Graham, 2009b). This anti-youth sentiment is also iterated indirectly. Brady’s (2010b) description of individuals ‘aged between 19 and 25’ as ‘Generation Meh’ in her response to Saw 3D connects on-screen cruelty with audience
Torture porn's audience as young, amoral, and dispassionate in order to explicate the subgenre's popularity. In Brady's view, torture porn could only be enjoyed by a younger generation who supposedly lack cultural awareness and enthusiasm, who neither know any better nor care to learn.

These detractors use youth as a rhetorical tool to signify their authority, explaining torture porn's success as symptomatic of the audience's 'erroneous' pleasures. Kendall (2008) limns the supposed dichotomy between teen fans and older audiences as an unassailable gulf. '[A] film that attempts to please both the teenage gorehound and the mature filmgoer', he posits, 'is doomed to disappoint' (see also Russell, 2007). The underlying suggestion is that reviewers are dissatisfied that young people enjoy contemporary popular entertainment instead of the 'classics' they valorise. That subjective taste judgment is projected as if the 'mature' view is empirically different to a teenagers'. This much is epitomised by debates over Antichrist's status as torture porn or art film, which typically hinge on similar contrastive presumptions about critics' wisdom and audiences' lack of cultural knowledge. Williamson's (2010a) warning, 'Run, torture-porn fan! Run! You don't know what you've stumbled into! It's an art film!' imagines that 'art' film's supposedly 'higher' intellectual and cultural pleasures are anathema to the torture porn fan (see also Hornaday, 2009). That distinction uses audience stereotypes to mark torture porn as 'lowbrow'. Again this strategy is typical of critical responses to popular horror cinema. An imaginary dichotomy is formed in this discourse whereby horror's audience is framed as 'vulnerable, impressionable', while pundits belong to a 'better and more mature audience' (Hutchings, 2004: 84). These reviewers coerce their readership into joining their 'mature' position by denigrating audiences who enjoy popular horror.

Torture porn fans' alleged immaturity is not only linked to cultural illiteracy in such arguments, but also to political unawareness. Driscoll's (2007) comment that 'the kids flocking to Hostel don't come out of the cinemas contemplating psychological undercurrents of revenge torture in Guantanamo Bay' makes sweeping, unfounded assumptions about who is watching torture porn and their reactions to the subgenre (see also Graham, 2009a). Other objectors similarly decry 'the public's appetite for mindlessly sadistic gore' (Dalton, 2009b, emphasis added), connoting that horror offers 'simple' visceral pleasures for 'stupid' people. These sentiments are prevalent in attempts to denounce torture porn (see Tookey, 2008a; Anderson, 2007b), although Monahan's (2010) certainty that torture porn will be dismissed by 'anyone with an IQ out of single-figures' stands out as a patently insulting example of such rhetoric.
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Another method of explaining the appeal of the subgenre’s ostensibly unappealing films is to present consuming torture porn as a macho endurance test (Billson, 2008; Hare, 2010; Hill, 2007). This notion is bolstered by the twin deductions that PG-13 rated (‘soft’) horror attracted a female audience to the genre (Timpone in Tapper, 2006), and that R-rated horror appeals to males simply because those films are assumed to be more physically violent and invested in sexual aggression. Two intimations follow. First, it is supposed that torture porn aims only to shock, and this one-dimensionality precludes any need for further contemplation. The ‘endurance’ argument is a veiled strategy to disparage such texts along with their viewers. Since the appeal of extreme porn has also been understood according to the logic of macho fortitude (see Hardy, 2004: 7), the endurance argument also validates the porn-horror conflation implied by ‘torture porn’. Second, torture porn fans are assumed to be male (see Graham, 2009b; Sandhu, 2009). The subgenre’s association with pornography fosters the presumption that torture porn is a male-oriented subgenre, despite numerous individuals involved in producing and exhibiting torture porn – such as horror festival organiser Adele Hartley (in Roby, 2008) or Lionsgate’s marketing team (Williams, 2006) – contending that torture porn’s demographic is constituted by as many females as males. Again, critics tend to override such attempts to diverge from the dominant discursive narrative. Emine Saner (2007), for example, sceptically states that ‘the movie industry
wants us to believe women are more and more interested in‘ torture porn (see also Hill, 2007).

Having been portrayed in these ways, many horror fans have distanced themselves from the subgenre or have adopted ‘torture porn’ as a pejorative label. Both strategies bolster the popular discursive pronouncement that torture porn blights the horror genre. Since torture porn has been widely presented as irredeemable, horror fans may feel compelled to condemn torture porn in order to defend the horror genre and horror fandom itself against detractors’ accusations. Iloz Zoc’s (2008) question ‘what does [promoting such movies] say about us, the audience[,]’ is paramount, since reviewers have persistently asserted that torture porn’s success speaks for the genre audience.

While this chapter’s limited space is inadequate for a full empirical study into torture porn fandom, it is worth outlining some of the patterns that have emerged in online horror fan-forum discussions of torture porn. Much debate over ‘torture porn’ occurs in threads dedicated to individual films such as Saw and Hostel. However, several popular horror community sites – Bloody-Disgusting.com, HorrorDVDs.com, and Rue Morgue magazine’s forum – have hosted discussion threads specifically dedicated to ‘torture porn’, provoking fans to deliberate what the term means to them. The resulting responses are remarkably consistent. The patterns briefly outlined here gesture towards indicative trends that are discernible in debates about torture porn on Fearnet.com, Dreadcentral.com, and other popular horror-based Internet discussion boards, sites populated by contributors who are connoted to be horror enthusiasts by their engagement with these forums.

When the subgenre is broached as a topic for discussion in these forums, some users initially respond by closing-off debate, repudiating ‘torture porn’ as a ‘stupid catchphrase’, or requesting that the fan-community ‘outlaw’ the term. These mechanisms overtly distance fans from the disdainful connotations of ‘torture porn’. Where deeper engagement with the label occurs, conversations tend to gravitate towards (a) the relative quality of individual films, (b) torture porn’s origins, (c) defining the term, (d) complaints regarding how ‘torture porn’ is applied, and (e) whether films have to contain sexual depictions to be classed as torture porn (see Miska, 2007 and 2009; N.a. 2008c). These debates are frequently cyclical in nature since users enter and leave threads as they evolve. Even horror fans – individuals who are presumably familiar with the genre – express confusion over what ‘torture porn’ means, thereby testifying to the term’s woolliness.
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Another common topic addressed is how torture porn's denigration impacts on horror fandom. In such cases, users reflect on journalists accusing fans of being 'sickos'. In some cases, contributors reveal that they have publicly distanced themselves from horror fandom because of critical fulmination. One Rue Morgue user states 'I dont [sic] even tell people I like horror anymore', for instance. The stigma felt by such fans is at odds with the subgenre's relative financial success, which hints towards torture porn's popularity beyond a specific genre fan-base. Despite that broad appeal, reporters customarily hold horror fans accountable for torture porn's box-office performance, inasmuch as fandom implies devotion to, support of, and some ownership over the genre. Non-fan crossover audiences may approach torture porn films with a greater degree of detachment than fans can. Equally, some fan resistance to the label may arise from torture porn's crossover success insofar as torture porn may be perceived as a subgenre that is consumed by the general public rather than dedicated horror fans.

Replicating objectors' derogatory proposals, 'torture porn' is correlated with bad films or improper fandom in many forum discussions. Resultantly, 'torture porn' is subject to intra-community regulation: how a contributor uses the term is often treated as a benchmark against
which the users’ credentials as a horror fan are measured. This form of credibility evaluation is unsurprising in the forum context given that these communities are brought together by fandom. To illustrate, one user thus declares that ‘casual’ horror movie fans see too much gore and just categorise it into torture porn’ (emphasis added), while another explodes ‘[h]ow long have you motherfuckers been watching horror movies?...leave us alone about horror since you obviously don’t [sic] get the purpose of the horror genre’. This contributor suggests that ‘real’ fans understand what qualifies as torture porn. The question of ‘how long’ one has been watching horror aver”s that a degree of genre knowledge is required before one can accurately apply such labels. Using the label at all may signal a lack of subcultural capital in this context. Asking ‘how long’ one has been a fan also insinuates that torture porn is a passing fad, since the term carries overtones of fleeting or novice-level acquaintance with the horror genre. In rendering the label an indicator of genre knowledge, such comments distance horror fandom from torture porn fandom, and therefore from the scornful accusations offered in press responses to the subgenre. This strategy does not repudiate the films dubbed ‘torture porn’, but rather the negative discourse that surrounds the term.

Such online debates allow community members to collectively negotiate the connotations of ‘torture porn’, and the label’s lasting meanings will eventually be forged in such discussion. ‘Torture porn’ was only employed in 213 articles in major English language world publications in 2011, the lowest number of articles to use the term since 2007. While that waning suggests high-profile public interest in the term is dissipating, horror fans continue to employ the category-label in online discussions, concretising ‘torture porn’ as part of horror’s lexis. Press critics have instilled the term with assorted connotations, yet horror fans may eventually recoup ‘torture porn’ from those numerous pejorative associations. The terms ‘slasher’ and ‘video nasty’ were previously vilified by pundits in the same ways ‘torture porn’ has been, although it took over a decade for fans to embrace those labels as legitimate subgenre referents. It is not clear whether ‘torture porn’ will follow suit. Online forums expedite discussion amongst disparate fans in a way that was not available to previous generations of horror enthusiasts, for example. Online debates could allow horror fans to co-opt the label much more swiftly than the term ‘slasher’ was. Alternatively, the process may be stunted by the frequency with which established discursive prejudices are reiterated in discussions about ‘torture porn’.
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It is unsurprising in the forum context given that fans are brought together by fandom. To illustrate, one user who self-proclaimed to be a 'casual horror movie fans see too much gore and have a history of watching horror films alone about horror since you obviously don't [sic] have a horror genre'. This contributor suggests that 'real' horror fans see torture porn as a form of genre ignorance, as one can accurately apply such labels.

The question of what qualifies as torture porn. The term carries overtones of fleeting or novelty with the horror genre. In rendering the label as knowledge, such comments distance horror fandom, and therefore from the scornful accusations of torture porn's detractors. This strategy does not repudiate 'torture porn', but rather the negative discourses around the term.

Debates allow community members to collectively denounce torture porn, and the label's lasting impact is a site of discursive struggle. The category conflates producers and fans, creating overlapping tensions, many of which originate with the label's fulminatory connotations. Torture porn's detractors have habitually sought to illegitimate the subgenre, railing against production and consumption of torture porn by insulting filmmakers and fans. However, characterising torture porn as illicit may have facilitated the subgenre's financial success. Since most torture porn films have not been subject to censorship, they are both 'forbidden' and yet highly obtainable. Torture porn's detractors may have inadvertently prolonged the subgenre's popularity by proclaiming that these accessible films are taboo.

Some horror fans' rejections of 'torture porn' may derive from that veneer of controversy. Torture porn films are not as outrageous as reporters have insisted. Horror fans' complaints regarding torture porn are not being 'true' horror articulate that disparity between torture porn's content and its opponents' claims. Being more familiar with the genre than the casual consumer, horror fans are more likely to be aware of the numerous horror films that have been officially illegitimated (banned). If illicitness really is torture porn's predominant appeal, the multiplex is not where such films will be found. To consume torture porn because it is illicit therefore reveals one's unfamiliarity with the genre, and hence may explain why some self-identified fans correlate liking torture porn with genre ignorance. Press critics' concerns over torture porn are squarely focused on multiplex horror, drawing attention away from lower-budget, peripheral horror films. Some such films are included in the analysis that follows, and illegitimate horror films will be returned to in Part III once torture porn's content has been examined.

Despite outlining discursive complications and inconsistencies over the last three chapters, the objective has not been to entirely discredit the usefulness of 'torture porn' itself, or postulate that torture porn films are unworthy of investigation. 'Torture porn' provides ways of engaging with rather than disavowing the subgenre. Films that have been dubbed 'torture porn' share facets, and their categorisation imbues those commonalities with significance. In Part II, the focus will be on filmic content itself. In the chapters that follow, some of the patterns and meanings that emerge from torture porn's collectivisation will be illustrated.

'Torture porn' is a site of discursive struggle. The category conflates producers and fans, creating overlapping tensions, many of which originate with the label's fulminatory connotations. Torture porn's detractors have habitually sought to illegitimate the subgenre, railing against production and consumption of torture porn by insulting filmmakers and fans. However, characterising torture porn as illicit may have facilitated the subgenre's financial success. Since most torture porn films have not been subject to censorship, they are both 'forbidden' and yet highly obtainable. Torture porn's detractors may have inadvertently prolonged the subgenre's popularity by proclaiming that these accessible films are taboo.

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