Richard Nowell

"Between Dreams and Reality"

Genre Personae, Brand Elm Street, *and Repackaging the American Teen Slasher Film*

It is not uncommon for misinterpretation to lead to notable disparities between the content of cultural products and promotional paratexts, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, discourses that orbit them. Misinterpretations are a key part of genre histories. They underwrite deliberate efforts taking place during production, delivery, and reception to misrepresent cultural products so as to encourage their miscategorization in media, everyday, and academic discourse. Cases of such practices from film history include characters' dialogue in SCREAM (1996) misrepresenting American horror films in order to distinguish SCREAM itself from similar films, US distributors framing downbeat Italian Neo-realist pictures as sexploitation by erroneously suggesting titillating content,[1] and the framing of the conglomerate-backed US blockbuster hit MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING (2002) as a grassroots success story.[2] In spite of such cases, scholars usually eschew the concept of misinterpretation. Instead, they choose to rationalize even calculatedly outlandish readings of cultural products as the sincere byproducts of quite exceptional or idiosyncratic frames of reference. Strong theoretical and pragmatic grounds exist to accept the notion of the misinterpretation however. In theoretical terms, misinterpretations exceed the boundaries of structured polysemy — the notion that the range of potential meanings of a cultural product is broad due to the ambiguities inherent in the act of enunciation and due to nuances of consumption; but ultimately is bounded by the parameters of content being offered by a given cultural product.[3] Pragmatically, just as scholars caution against dismissing, as naive misunderstanding, readings which differ radically from

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1) Mark Betz, 'Art, exploitation, underground', in Mark Jancovich et al (eds), *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 202–222.

2) Alisa Perren, 'A big fat indie success story? press discourses surrounding the making and marketing of a "Hollywood" movie', *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 56, no. 2 (Summer 2004), pp. 18–31.

3) See Barbara Klinger, 'Digressions at the cinema: reception and mass culture', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 28, no. 4 (1989), pp. 3–19.

prevailing contemporaneous understandings of cultural products,[4] so too is some skepticism required when considering discourse that has been produced under conditions in which cultural and/or economic capital was seen to have been at stake. By this situation is meant the phenomenon David Bordwell provocatively, but not unjustifiably, called "interpretation inc.",[5] wherein the perceived rewards on offer to producers of eye-catching readings of cultural products are available to cultural sectors including academia, print journalism, and blogging. Accepting that human beings mislead others routinely and oftentimes intentionally stands to enrich understandings of the social circulation of categories of cultural product.

A field of media studies from which genre studies might take note regarding misrepresentation is Star Studies. Star Studies not only accommodates relations between misinterpretation and cultural artifacts, it is underpinned by these very notions. In this respect, Richard Dyer characterizes star personae as multi-faceted discourses, arguing that in the late 1970s Jane Fonda's persona was shaped by her relationships to father figures, acting skill, American-ness, and Leftist politics.[6] Similarly, reception scholars have shown that a genre can be seen as a product of the various discourses that have circulated films which have been deemed to share common characteristics.[7] The discourses that comprise star personae, argues Dyer, owe their structured polysemy to their having been generated by large numbers of different texts, including audiovisual narratives, promotion materials, publicity materials, and critical commentary.[8] This network of texts again finds its double in what genre scholars call the "inter-textual relay", whereby information about groups of films emanates both from films themselves and other para-textual sources.[9] Dyer argues that, because they can influence rather than control reception texts, industry professionals cannot control a star persona completely — even though they may try very hard to do just that.[10] This principle is once again also applicable to genres, as failed attempts to legitimate horror demonstrate. Such conditions, Dyer concludes, ensure that the individual components of a star persona can coexist harmoniously or in dynamic tension, or on the brink of incompatibility — again, states that are fully congruent with genres. Crucially, Dyer's model exposes an irreconcilable tension wherein the relationship between a star persona and the individual with whom it is associated cannot be comprehended fully or unequivocally.[11] The relationships between a genre and the cultural products with which

4) Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

5) David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 21–29.

6) Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998), pp. 63–83.

7) See Rick Altman, 'Reusable packaging: generic products and the recycling process', in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) pp. 1–41; Jason Mittel, 'A cultural approach to television genre theory', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 40, no. 3 (Spring 2001), pp. 3–24; James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 1–8;

8) Ibid., p. 60–62.

9) Gregory, Lukow and Stephen Ricci, 'The "audience" goes "public": intertextuality, genre, and the responsibilities of film literacy', *On Film*, vol. 12 (1984), pp. 28–36;

10) Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 60–85.

11) Ibid.

it is associated might not mirror precisely this persona/human tension. They do however approximate it by being subject to what Raymond Williams famously called "selective traditions", whereby canons of cultural products come to stand in for broader quantities of output.[12] Because canon formation involves countless texts being expunged from consideration, many members of most film subcultures are oblivious to countless examples of what they consider to be a familiar category of cultural product. For example most websites devoted to American youth cinema feature a tiny fraction of the films they purport to celebrate.[13] This process serves to position the totality of a cultural product category close to the human being associated with a specific star persona.

The similarities between genres and star personae suggest that it might be fruitful to distinguish between publicly circulating "genre personae", as this essay will henceforth call them, and the obtuse yet retraceable "output configurations" with which genre personae are associated but to which they can be expected to exhibit significant disparities. As the remainder of this essay hopes to show, awareness of the aforementioned conditions encourages individuals and institutions to attempt to reorient public perceptions of genre personae in ways that serve their own interests. The assembly of films and their marketing campaigns may be heavily influenced by powerful executives aiming to maximize revenue through the execution of carefully tailored strategy. However, strategy is not always executed as-planned or understood as intended. In particular, the creative talent used to make and publicize a film may well go "off topic" or reconfigure strategy better to reflect their desires, needs or reputations.

The concept of genre personae is ideally suited to shed new light on commonplace instances of relatively formulaic cultural products being believed widely to constitute epochal breaks from convention — circumstances which characterize both academic and popular understandings of media histories. Contributing to this phenomenon have been genre histories themselves. Genre historiography lends itself structurally to overstatements of innovation, in which such claims overwhelm acknowledgment of similarities resulting from inter-textual evocation (a largely unavoidable and oft-cultivated aspect of cultural production).[14] In such cases, the balance between similarity and difference that Steve Neale recognized as characterizing the constituent members of a recognized group of cultural products is shifted heavily in favor of highlighting perceived differences.[15] In practical terms, genre historiography is also subject to a culture of novelty that pervades journalism, fandom, publishing, and academe. The commercial and/or epistemological value of heralding paradigm shifts (whether those shifts are genuine or otherwise) is often deemed to exceed the value of analyzing important instances of stasis, variation, and recalibration that traverse output.

The exaggeration of breaks from convention is particularly prominent in discussions and analyses of the four phases of output which together constitute histories of the North

12) Raymond Williams, 'The analysis of culture', in John Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), pp. 32–40.

13) Ibid.

14) See Murray Smith, 'Theses on the philosophy of Hollywood history', in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 3–20.

15) Steve Neale, 'Questions of genre', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 45–66.

American teen slasher film — youth-in-jeopardy sagas about young people being menaced by maniacs. First cycle teen slashers (1978–1981), including HALLOWEEN (1978), FRIDAY THE 13TH (1980), and THE BURNING (1981) are invariably misrepresented as ultraviolent misogynistic sleaze.[16] Second cycle teen slashers (1984–1989), particularly the A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET films (1984–1989), are often reduced to their supposed "juvenilization" for preadolescent audiences.[17] Third cycle teen slashers (1996–2001), especially the SCREAM trilogy (1996–2000), tend misleadingly to be portrayed as "postmodern" deconstructions of their supposedly straight-faced predecessors.[18] And a fourth wave of teen slashers (2003–), including MY BLOODY VALENTINE and FRIDAY THE 13TH (both 2009), is usually distinguished by virtue of its being comprised of many "remakes" (which tend to be differentiated rhetorically, if not conceptually, from sequels).[19] Periodizing teen slasher history in these ways reproduces and reinforces those aspects of industry discourse that initially emphasized the supposed breaks from convention which purportedly characterized each phase of intensive production and distribution operations.[20] Consequently, and as is the case with other types of film, apparent celebrations of individual creativity have come to stand as unwitting monuments to successful repackaging.

In contrast, this essay approaches American independent producer-distributor New Line Cinema's handling between 1984 and 1989 of its *A Nightmare on Elm Street* property as the first commercially effective effort to repackage American teen slasher films for their principal US market.[21] During this period, New Line Cinema President Robert Shaye and his staff developed the property, which centered on youths being menaced in their sleep by the maniacal Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund), from low-budget feature films to a multi-media enterprise (labeled hereafter Brand *Elm Street*), resulting in its rising to unprecedented heights of cultural visibility. The essay argues that New Line overstated prod-

16) See Carol J. Clover, 'Her body, himself: gender in the slasher film', *Representations* 20 (1987), pp. 187–228; Stephen Prince, *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood under the Electric Rainbow, 1980–1989* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 298–306, 351–353.

17) See Ian Conrich, 'Seducing the subject: Freddy Krueger, popular culture and the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films', in Deborah Cartmell et al (eds.), *Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and its Audience* (London: Pluto, 1997), pp. 118–131.

18) See for example Valerie Wee, 'The *Scream* trilogy, "hyper-postmodernism" and the late-nineties teen slasher film', *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 57, no. 3 (Fall 2005), pp. 44–61; Valerie Wee, 'Resurrecting and updating the teen slasher: the case of *Scream*', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2006), pp. 50–61. My contention is with some of Wee's conclusions, not with her methods, approaches, and objects of study, which I fully support.

19) See for example Andrew Patrick Nelson, 'Traumatic childhood now included: Todorov's fantastic and the uncanny slasher remake', in Steffen Hantke (ed.), *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), pp. 103–118; Ryan Lizardi, 'Re-imagining horror and misogyny in the contemporary slasher remake', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 38, no. 3 (2010), pp. 113–121.

20) For an early contribution to the revision of this periodization of the teen slasher film see Richard Nowell, '"Where nothing is off limits": genre, commercial revitalization, and the teen slasher film posters of 1982–1984', *Post Script*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Spring 2011), pp. 53–68.

21) This essay uses the term "independent" in an institutional historiographic sense to refer to American-based companies, which, during the period under discussion, did not belong to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). The MPAA-members, representing an institutional vision of Hollywood, were in the mid-to-late 1980s: Columbia, Disney, MGM, Paramount, Twentieth Century Fox, United Artists, Universal, and Warner Bros.

uct differentiation by positioning Brand *Elm Street* in binary opposition to its disreputable predecessors. This process involved tailoring film content, promotion, and influencing the course of publicity interviews (often given by returning cast member Robert Englund). The appropriation of misrepresentative discourses which orbited earlier teen slasher films enabled the company to maneuver its property into dynamic tension between notions of Hollywood cinema, quality entertainment, and cult object — three key "supra-generic" categories which struggled to accommodate contemporaneous perceptions of teen slasher films but which promised to maximize the revenue New Line generated from the property. Existing studies of *Elm Street* have drawn their conclusions mainly from examinations of de-contextualized fragments of film content and from uncritical citation of news stories (which themselves tended to paraphrase distributors press-kits).[22] In contrast, this essay analyzes production and distribution strategies, film content, promotional and publicity campaigns (including the press-kits), and interrogates US press coverage — offering a combination of examples drawn therefrom. By shedding new light on the logic and on the dynamics that shaped this chapter of a particular genre history, it is hoped that the essay showcases the potential transferability of its methods to other historical circumstances and other markets. Ultimately, through questioning, problematizing, and revising dominant understandings of this genre history, the essay hopes to suggest in more general terms that genre historiography as a whole may benefit from confronting deceptive genre personae circulating culturally. This process is optimized when close consideration is paid to the production, content, and dissemination of cultural products and promotional paratexts, the texts their reception generates, and the interaction thereof.

"It Goes Without Saying": The Reconstruction of the Early Teen Slasher Genre Persona

Because New Line Cinema's mid-to-late 1980s handling of its *Elm Street* property was underpinned by a misrepresentative teen slasher genre persona (sometimes invoked explicitly; sometimes summoned as a structuring absence), it is necessary to illuminate the teen slasher film's prevailing contemporaneous critical standing within American public channels. The profound albeit largely unacknowledged influence that it exerted over subsequent industrial, popular, and scholarly approaches to teen slashers confers upon the early films' US critical reception the status of arguably the single most significant development in their history. Causal relationships between the respective content of cultural products and news media are routinely asserted, and are usually advanced by associating allegorical readings of cultural products with mediated extra-industrial events. Economically rationalized case-studies in which critical reception is actually shown to have influenced industry conduct directly, such as those detailed in this essay, are, however, quite rare. Examples from horror film history include uncanny sensations reported among viewers of early talkies shaping pictures like DRACULA (1931), British distributors reclaiming the pejorative "video nasty", and publicists distancing THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS' (1991) from

22) Conrich, 'Seducing'.

a disreputable vision of American horror.[23] Not unlike these cases, New Line Cinema's framing of Brand *Elm Street* was enabled by its appropriation of popular critical discourse. In this case, discourse wherein the widely recognized textual model used both for early teen slashers and for the *Elm Street* films had been transformed in the early 1980s from an anodyne youth-oriented storytelling device into a thematic and aesthetic affront to middle-class values.

New Line Cinema sought to turn to its advantage the discursive transformation of tales of youths encountering maniacs — from harmless date-movies into the insidious cultural menace that was the "women-in-danger movie". By reconstructing the teen slasher genre persona into a misogynist, gory, yet largely imagined, cinematic Other, American journalist critics had provided industry professionals, like those at New Line Cinema, with a discursive foil against which to contrast their new films (a point elucidated below). The reconstruction of the teen slasher genre persona had been driven by professional ambition, persuasive rhetoric, analytical shortsightedness, and, above all else, barely concealed classism. Movie reviewers Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert initiated the teen slashers' absorption into the notorious women-in-danger category as part of a bid to become cable television celebrities by engineering a moral panic over purportedly misogynist violence polluting American multiplexes.[24] Like countless scholars after them, Siskel & Ebert insisted that innocuous teen slashers like PROM NIGHT and TERROR TRAIN (both 1980) fuelled misogyny by employing subjective (or POV) shots to elicit support for maniacs who enjoyed terrorizing free-spirited women.[25] These claims have remained credible on both sides of the Atlantic because they reflected prominent, albeit misleading, discourses in which, as social historian Phillip Jenkins has detailed, serial murder was recast publicly as an epidemic of sexually-motivated femicide.[26] As prominent films that older theatergoers had likely heard about, but had probably never seen, teen slashers were rhetorically useful to Siskel & Ebert. Citing them permitted the duo's strategic circumvention of lavish adult-oriented women-in-danger movies, including EYES OF LAURA MARS (1978) and DRESSED TO KILL (1980), which had been enjoyed by Siskel, by Ebert, and probably by many of their viewers and readers. This tactic ensured that the duo's followers were not confronted with uncomfortable questions about their own viewing choices and their own sexual politics. Citing teen slashers also ensured that Siskel & Ebert were not reliant upon building a case exclusively around cut-price women-in-danger movies such as SCHIZOID and MANIAC (both 1980). Films such as these actually undermined the duo's alarmist positions because their exhibition was restricted mainly to rundown urban theatres or "grind-houses" that were associated with lower class itinerants rather than middle-classes

23) Robert Spadoni, 'The uncanny body of early sound film', *The Velvet Light Trap* 51, (Spring 2003), pp. 4–16; Mark Jancovich, 'Genre and the problem of reception: generic classifications and distinctions in the promotion of *Silence of the Lambs*', in *Horror: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 150–161; Kate Egan, *Trash or Treasure: Censorship and the Changing Meanings of the Video Nasties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

24) Richard Nowell, *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Film Cycle* (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 225–228.

25) Ibid., p. 227.

26) Phillip Jenkins, *Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter. 1994), pp. 86–90.

patrons.[27] Collapsing distinctions between teen slashers and low-budget women-in-danger movies enabled the teen slasher genre persona to be imbued with a hitherto absent sense of the unsavory. This was achieved by the importation of connotations of urban decay, female sexual exploitation, and hyper-masculine threat which orbited these venues, their imagined clientele, and the salacious films with which they were associated.[28] By ghettoizing exhibition, demonizing content, and pathologizing spectatorship, Siskel & Ebert reframed teen slashers as hyper-masculine destabilizations of class distinctions.

Siskel & Ebert's correlation of teen slasher films, sadism, misogyny, and middle-class threat, although deceptive, gained hegemonic status rapidly in critical circles. Evidently convinced of the duo's new-found critical insight and moral authority, journalists began to recycle Siskel & Ebert's rhetoric forthwith.[29] "There is a killer on the loose. [...] Murdering pretty young women excites him", wrote the *New York Times*' previously measured critic Janet Maslin, adding: "It goes without saying that these films exploit and brutalize women".[30] Even outlying dissenters ultimately reinforced Siskel & Ebert's positions. The efforts of writers including Elizabeth Dibsie to engage with media-effects debates led them to query whether teen slashers damaged American minds and communities rather than to ask if the films actually featured misogynist content in the first place.[31] The classism central to this backlash was mocked, but ultimately reinforced. For example, while deriding a glossy Meryl Streep thriller as the "first slasher melodrama for chichi consumption", *Los Angeles Times* critic Gary Arnold suggested: "[p]eople who would never dream of sampling 'Friday the 13th' or 'Halloween', may acquire a sufficiently graphic notion of what that stuff is all about if they drift into 'Still of the Night' unawares".[32] As Arnold's turns of phrase indicated, the crystallization of the most prominent cinematic Other of the period was marked fittingly by wholesale uptake of a new generic label. Jettisoned was the women-in-danger moniker, which threatened to expose the paucity of actual male-on-female violence in early teen slashers,[33] in favor of the suitably equivocal term "slasher". Discourse framing teen slashers as women-in-danger movies orbited the public sphere for the duration of New Line's 1980s development of its *Elm Street* property. It was exemplified by Siskel & Ebert's annual denunciations of the latest *Friday the 13th* sequel as "violent pornography" and by a *Time* magazine article in which early teen slashers were dubbed "offensive purveyors of brutality to women [... showcasing ...] graphic and erotic scenes of female mutilation, rape or murder".[34]

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27) David Church, 'From exhibition to genre: the case of grind-house films', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 4 (Summer 2011), pp. 1–25.

28) See Joanne Hollows 'The masculinity of cult', in Jancovich et al, *Defining Cult Movies*, pp. 41–42.

29) Jim Moorhead, '1980 Oscar nominees sadly hobbled nags', *Evening Independent*, 18 February 1981, p. 21; Janet Maslin, 'Tired blood claims the horror film as a fresh victim', *New York Times*, 1 November 1981, p. 15; Vincent Canby, "How should we react to violence", *New York Times*, 11 December 1983, pp. H23, 36.

30) Janet Maslin, 'Bloodbaths debase movies and audiences', *New York Times*, 21 November 1982, pp. H1, H13.

31) Patricia Dibsie, 'Do horror films promote violence towards women? — yes! — no!', *Reading Eagle*, 14 December 1980, pp. 66, 83.

32) Chichi is a rarely used pejorative meaning bourgeois poser.

33) Nowell, *Blood Money*.

34) Anastasia Toufexis et al, 'Behavior: our violent kids', *Time*, 12 June 1989.
Time Magazine, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,957929,00.html#ixzz1qPdsfnqU> [accessed 1 April 2012].

Concurrently, teen slashers became exemplars of another cinematic category that was widely despised by US critical elites: the "splatter movie".[35] This catch-all term for films that were said to trade in the broken body as an object of visual pleasure was sufficiently powerful to ensure that titles tarred by its application usually occupied lowly positions in critical hierarchies. Those positions were proximate to hardcore pornography and women-in-danger movies, categories into which splatter movies often bled discursively.[36] Decrying teen slashers as women-in-danger movies had rested on dubious accusations of abhorrent themes. Their castigation as splatter movies was, however, undergirded by questionable charges of aesthetic unacceptability. Again the notion was achieved by invoking the migration into middle-class locations of the lower-class male outsider supposedly seeking gratification from scrutinizing otherwise concealed aspects of human corporeality. Teen slashers actually featured limited onscreen violence and gore because they required the R-rating which conditioned their access to essential public advertizing spaces, lucrative multiplexes, and the sizable target audience of under-17s.[37] Nevertheless, their credentials as splatter movies were stressed routinely by journalists who happened to be seeking resonant and familiar filmic referents. Some fans also had a vested interest in exaggerating publically early teen slasher film violence. Perhaps reflecting a general need among outraged cultural arbiters and committed subcultural devotees to exaggerate the credentials of the divisive object through which they define themselves appositionally, so-called "gore-hounds" substituted impact for accuracy by citing high-profile teen slashers alongside genuinely blood-soaked obscurities like Dr. Butcher M.D. (1980).[38] "We love gore", one such fan told the *Los Angeles Times*, "'Friday the 13th Part 3' [1982] was fun".[39] The association of splatter movie discourse and teen slasher films was encapsulated in the bookending of Brand *Elm Street*'s 1980s development by two lengthy publications devoted to splatter: teen slashers featured extensively in both of them.[40]

Its appropriation of the newly reconstructed teen slasher genre persona enabled New Line Cinema to invite multiple distinctions between its *Elm Street* property and unduly disreputable generic antecedents, chief among which was emphasizing *Elm Street*'s supposedly novel status as a quintessentially Hollywood enterprise.

35) Karen Stabiner, 'Behind Hollywood's new "slice-and-dice" flicks: big profits and real pain', 12 September 1982, p. D3.

36) See Maslin, "Bloodbaths".

37) Nowell, *Blood Money*, pp. 39–40.

38) Kerry Platman and Bill Steigerwald, 'For gore fans, life is a scream', *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1982, pp. O3–O4.

39) Ibid.

40) John McCarty, *Splatter Movies: Breaking the Last Taboo of the Screen* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); John McCarty, *The Official Splatter Movie Guide* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

"Courage and Resourcefulness": *Elm Street* as Hollywood Cinema, Phase I

"They talk about the 'New' Hollywood", declared Freddy Krueger actor Robert Englund, pointing to *Elm Street* marketing materials; "Well, this is it".[41] Efforts to position American horror films within a perceived cultural "mainstream", like that made by Englund, are usually deemed to be exceptional responses either to unusually bloated budgets or skyrocketing popularity.[42] Growing evidence, however, suggests that such approaches may well constitute standard industry practice, particularly considering that historically industry professionals have striven to expand US consumption of other types of niche audience film such as non-Anglophone pictures and those featuring ambiguous or complex forms of narration.[43] The extent to which the courting of those viewers who are thought to eschew horror actually shapes the American movie business will become clearer once attention is shifted away from examinations of individual examples such as THE EXORCIST (1973) and THE SIXTH SENSE (1999) towards the relationships between them.

While spotlighting Brand *Elm Street*'s relentless migration into a perceived US cultural mainstream, scholars and commentators have left largely unexamined the relationships between the *Elm Street* property and early teen slashers. Consequently, they have stopped short of recognizing the ways in which producer-distributor New Line Cinema appropriated and cultivated genre personae to advance its cause.[44] As a result of these tendencies, overstated claims of creative vision, textual differentiation, and corporate bullishness have drowned out consideration of how repackaging exercises drove production and distribution of the property. This situation has led to widespread reproduction of the distorted visions of Brand *Elm Street*, early teen slashers, Hollywood cinema, and relationships thereof, upon which New Line relied so heavily.

New Line Cinema's framing of its *Elm Street* property as a quintessentially Hollywood enterprise unfolded in two chronologically distinct phases. It began in 1984 with the first film and not, as is usually suggested, with 1987's third installment, DREAM WARRIORS. Thus, where a largely overlooked Phase I (1984–1985) was marked by a continuation of practices that characterized the handling of early teen slashers, Phase II (1986–1989), as the next section details, witnessed an intensification of conduct that reflected changing perceptions within American film culture of Hollywood. Both phases were distinguished by their ambition, scope, and complexity, thus supporting Justin Wyatt's contention that New Line favored "gradual expansion and diversification only following breakthrough success".[45] The cultivation of *Elm Street* served as a major catalyst in New Line's expansion from financially unstable independent producer-distributor of the 1970s and early 1980s

41) H. J. Kirchhoff, 'The two faces of Robert Englund', *Globe and Mail*, 13 April 1987, unpaginated. LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?> [accessed 1 April 2012].

42) See for example Stacey Abbott, 'High concept thrills and chills: the horror blockbuster', in Ian Conrich (ed.), *Horror Zone: The Cultural Experience of Horror Cinema* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2010), pp. 27–44.

43) See for example Stefan Soldovieri, 'Socialists in outer space: East German film's Venusian adventure', *Film History*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1998), pp. 382–398; Geoff King, *Indiewood U.S.A: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema* (London, I. B. Taurus, 2009), pp. 1–44.

44) See Conrich, 'Seducing'.

45) Justin Wyatt, 'The formation of the "major independent": Miramax, New Line and the new Hollywood', in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, p. 76.

to market-leading independent of the early 1990s and to conglomerate-owned industry heavyweight of the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2000s. The *Elm Street* property also provided a blueprint upon which to base the assembly and dissemination of the tent-pole franchises that underwrote New Line's rise to prominence, from its subsequent properties *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990–93) and *House Party* (1990–94) to later ventures such as the *Austin Powers* (1997–2002) and *Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) trilogies.[46]

Both phases were underwritten by a rewriting of teen slasher film history in which early teen slashers such as Paramount's FRIDAY THE 13TH and Twentieth Century Fox's TERROR TRAIN were divorced from the positions they occupied within Hollywood's aesthetic and institutional structures. Overwritten were efforts by the early pictures' independent producers to secure lucrative Hollywood distribution deals by tailoring content to reflect that of Hollywood's youth-oriented and horror hits.[47] Erased were early teen slasher marketers' efforts to maximize attendance by emphasizing similarities to those hits.[48] Sidestepped were Hollywood distributors' wide theatrical openings and intensive advertizing campaigns, which had facilitated the high cultural visibility of early teen slashers.[49] Ignored also was the exhibition of early teen slashers in shopping mall multiplexes and other prominent sites — the very practice that had catalyzed the reconstruction of the teen slasher genre persona that New Line was summoning. Through such activity, early teen slashers were invoked as remnants of a malaise-era exploitation ghetto that stood in sharp contrast to Brand *Elm Street*'s status as symbol of a vibrant, new Hollywood.

New Line Cinema's appropriation of the reconstructed teen slasher genre persona initially represented a fairly standard industry response to a challenging American horror film market that was characterized by overproduction and market saturation. These circumstances resulted from efforts to capitalize on earlier horror hits and the increased, albeit short-lived, new distribution opportunities offered by the expansion of home video.[50] While moderate cost and youth market potential has ensured teen slashers are generally deemed low-risk propositions, localized conditions nevertheless affect industry confidence, irrespective of the type of film in question.[51] Accordingly, when, in early 1984, New

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46) See for example Justin Wyatt, "Independent, packaging, and inflationary pressure in 1980s Hollywood, in Prince, *A New Pot of Gold*, pp. 157–158; Wyatt, 'The formation of the "major independent"; Schatz, Thomas Schatz, 'New Hollywood, new millennium', in Warren Buckland (ed.), *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 19–46.
Additional information can also be found in the following book, which was published only after this essay was completed: Alisa Perren, *Indie Inc.: Miramax and the Transformation of Hollywood in the 1990s* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012)

47) Richard Nowell, '"The ambitions of most independent filmmakers": indie production, the majors, and *Friday the 13th* (1980)', *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 63, no. 2 (Summer 2011), pp. 28–44.

48) Ibid.

49) Ibid.

50) See Frederick Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

51) To indicate the perceived commercial viability of evoking certain films, I include domestic theatrical rentals (monies received by distributors from US and Canadian exhibitors). All figures are taken from US trade paper *Variety*'s annual 'Big Rental Films' lists. Figures are expressed in the following abbreviated form: THE EXORCIST: $66.3m (2nd/1974), meaning that THE EXORCIST generated US$66.3 million in domestic rentals to rank second of all the films in circulation on the US market in 1974.

Line Cinema green-lit A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, a near-four-year-run of over twenty commercially disappointing teen slasher films[52] indicated that the young and youthful moviegoers swarming to films like WARGAMES, FLASHDANCE, and RISKY BUSINESS (all 1983) had, for some time, shown little interest in teen slashers that had not been differentiated clearly from their predecessors and competitors.[53] Moreover, the potentially encouraging financial achievements of the suitably differentiated sequels FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 3: 3D (1982) and FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE FINAL CHAPTER (1984)[54] were undercut somewhat by concerns that strong attendance figures had been stimulated by their having been presold properties.[55] Employing the reconstructed teen slasher genre persona had gathered momentum across the early 1980s, with industry-professionals finding some success offsetting a general downturn in horror film ticket sales by directly addressing moviegoers assumed to eschew gory, misogynist fare. Director George A. Romero had, for example, mobilized discourses of quality, authenticity, heritage, subtlety, and originality, when drawing distinctions between "the slasher stuff" and the "more gothic and more traditional" merits of his 1950s horror pastiche CREEPSHOW (1982).[56] Similarly, press releases for Columbia Pictures' vampire picture FRIGHT NIGHT (1985) cited "slasher" titles as shorthand for cinematic otherness. "[FRIGHT NIGHT] is no 'Halloween' or 'Friday the 13th,' not a slasher or gore movie", remarked writer-director Tom Holland, urging readers to "[p]lease tell people that".[57] Setting apart the development of Brand *Elm Street* from these efforts and others like them, was the fact that New Line's handling of its property was less an exercise in underscoring meaningful differences from earlier teen slashers than a concerted effort to mask a substantial number of textual and extra-textual similarities between them; similarities which had been to a greater extent marginalized discursively during the reconstruction of the teen slasher genre persona.

During Phase I, New Line Cinema replicated the conduct of early teen slasher film makers and marketers by tailoring the content, promotion, and publicity of A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (1984) and A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET PART 2: FREDDY'S REVENGE (1985) (hereafter FREDDY'S REVENGE) to evoke Hollywood's recent youth-centered and horror hits. The hits in question enabled New Line to distinguish both of the films from early teen slashers by inviting oppositions between the alleged misogyny, inner city deprivation, and brutal realism of early teen slashers and *Elm Street*'s supposedly innovative sta-

52) Between fall 1980 and winter 1984, no non-sequel teen slasher bettered the disappointing domestic rentals of HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME: $4.9m (74th/1981) Anon., 'Big rental films of 1981', *Variety*, 13 January 1982, pp. 15, 42.

53) WARGAMES: $36.6m (4th/1983); FLASHDANCE: $36.2m (6th/1983); RISKY BUSINESS: $28.5m (12th/1983). Anon., 'Big rental films of 1983', *Variety*, 11 January 1984, pp. 13, 30.

54) FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 3: 3D: $16.5m (21st/1982); FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE FINAL CHAPTER: $16m (26th/1984). Anon., "Big rental films of 1982", *Variety*, 12 January 1983, pp. 13; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1984', *Variety*, 16 January 1985, p. 16.

55) After FRIDAY THE 13TH PART II (1981) fared badly when sold on similarities to the first film, marketers highlighted the novel presentation of FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 3: 3D (1982) and pitched FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE FINAL CHAPTER (1984) as an end-of-era event picture.

56) Quoted in Associated Press, 'Names in the news', 11 November 1982, PM cycle, unpaginated. LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?> [accessed 1 April 2012].

57) Quoted in Associated Press, 'A small budget for a big fright', 27 August 1985, PM cycle, unpaginated. LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?> [accessed 1 April 2012].

tus as female-friendly, middle-class-centered, suburban fantasies, when in fact early teen slashers had usually exhibited these exact properties.[58] Accordingly, in addition to the suburban-set, supernatural blockbuster hit POLTERGEIST (1982), youth market winners like FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH (1982),[59] FLASHDANCE, and RISKY BUSINESS were called to mind by A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET's press-kit, which emphasized fantastical dream sequences, a spirited heroine, and the economically upper-middle-class suburban streets, residencies, and high schools in which the film was set.[60] "Nancy Thompson is a typical American kid growing up in a clean middle-class California suburb", began a plot synopsis featured therein; it concluded by stating that "A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET is the story of the courage and resourcefulness of one extraordinary girl — a psychological fantasy thriller that rips apart the barrier between dreams and reality".[61] Moreover, to recall the promotional artwork of several glossy Hollywood fantasy-horror films, including THE DEAD ZONE (1983) and FIRESTARTER (1984), print advertising featured the aforementioned Nancy lying in a sumptuous bed amid expressionistic imagery that blended ethereal threat and refracted light. Unsurprisingly, press-kits spotlighted cast members' links to Hollywood companies, films, and personnel. They emphasized, for example, John Saxon's 1950s contract with Universal Pictures, starlet Amanda Wyss's role in FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH, the acquaintanceship between newcomer Johnny Depp and rising star Nicholas Cage, and Robert Englund's fleeting appearances opposite bankable stars such as Barbra Streisand.[62] The solid albeit unspectacular commercial performance of A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET encouraged New Line Cinema to bankroll a sequel entitled FREDDY'S REVENGE.[63]

The marketing campaign for FREDDY'S REVENGE highlighted the film's focus on young love so as to invite comparisons to youth-oriented Hollywood hits that had been released after the first *Elm Street* film was in production. If the demonization of early teen slashers had been encapsulated in Roger Ebert's proclamation that "these films hate women",[64] New Line was seeking to insulate its property against such potentially damaging rhetoric. The press-kit synopsis of FREDDY'S REVENGE therefore evoked the youth market smashes FOOTLOOSE and THE KARATE KID (both 1984),[65] both of which centralized the romantic travails of a male youth whose family had recently relocated to a different town. It did so by emphasizing a key relationship between protagonist Jesse — "the new kid on the block", as trailers described him — and his teenage neighbor, Kim.[66] Imagery of the couple em-

58) New Line Cinema Corporation, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* Press-kit, p. 2.

59) Poltergeist: $36.2m (8th/1982); FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH: $14m (27th/1982). Anon., 'Big rental films of 1982', p. 13.

60) New Line, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, p. 2.

61) Ibid.

62) New Line, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, pp. 4, 7–8.

63) A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET: $9.3m. This sum was accumulated across two calendar years (1984 and 1985). Had it been accrued entirely in either 1984 or 1985, A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET would have ranked thus: 55th/1984; 43rd/1985. Anon., 'Big rental films of 1984', p. 16; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1985', *Variety*, 16 January 1985, p. 16.

64) Roger Ebert, 'Sneak Previews'. Broadcast 23 October 1980.

65) THE KARATE KID: $41.7m (6th/1984); FOOTLOOSE: $34m (11th/1984). 'Big rental films of 1984', p. 16;

66) New Line Cinema Corporation, *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge* Press-kit, p. 1.

bracing, in conjunction with the tagline "the man of your dreams is back", ensured that print advertising was so romance-heavy that New Line elected to confirm the horror credentials of FREDDY'S REVENGE by crowning newspaper advertisements with a review snippet that read "The film is scary".[67] Its press-kit went as far as to cite director Jack Sholder — whom, it stressed, was "no fan of slasher films" — promising schmaltz over splatter by proclaiming that, when looking to provoke emotional responses, he had been "going for the 'aah' rather than the 'ecch'".[68]

The incentive to communicate product differentiation from early teen slashers remained pronounced in the second half of the 1980s, with new releases including Paramount's APRIL FOOLS DAY, MGM's KILLER PARTY (both 1986), and Paramount's later *Friday the 13th* sequels (1985, 1986, 1988, 1989) all disappointing commercially.[69] Crucially, FREDDY'S REVENGE's surpassing of its predecessor's relative financial success enabled New Line to expand its efforts to distance its new corporate cornerstone from the disreputability of its generic heritage,[70] not only by continuing to appropriate the reconstructed early teen slasher genre persona but through invocation of a founding myth of post-Classical American cinema.

"The 'Star Wars' of New Line Cinema": *Elm Street* as Hollywood Cinema, Phase II

During Phase II (1986–1989), New Line Cinema transformed its *Elm Street* property from convincingly Hollywood-like independent movies into a multimedia brand befitting a largely imagined American popular cultural mainstream of the late 1980s. A company executive captured the character of the phase by drawing parallels to arguably the quintessential Hollywood property of the day. He described Brand *Elm Street* as "'the Star Wars' of New Line Cinema".[71] Industry-watchers evidently shared this view becuase they casually described the *Elm Street* films as, among other things, "Hollywood", "mainstream", and even "horror's answer to James Bond".[72]

Distinguishing Phase II from Phase I were interlocking strategies, often utilizing the Freddy Krueger character, which were designed to invoke multi-demographic consumption and to maximize exposure in what New Line called "areas of dominant influence".[73]

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67) See for example, Display Ad 70, *New York Times*, 29 November 1985, p. C15.

68) New Line, *Freddy's Revenge*, p. 8.

69) FRIDAY THE 13TH PART V: A NEW BEGINNING: $10m (40th/1985); FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VI: JASON LIVES: $9.4m (44th/1986); APRIL FOOL'S DAY: $5.3m (73rd/1986); KILLER PARTY: <$1m (>158th/1986); FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VII: A NEW BLOOD: $9.1m (49th/1988). Anon., 'Big rental films of 1985', p. 16; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1986', *Variety*, 14 January 1987, pp. 25, 100; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1988', *Variety*, 11–17 January 1989, p. 16.

70) A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET PART 2: FREDDY'S REVENGE: $12.1m. This sum was accumulated across two calendar years (1985 and 1986). Had it been accrued entirely in either 1985 or 1986, the film would have ranked thus: 32nd/1985; 35th/1986.; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1985', p. 16; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1986', p. 25.

71) Seth Willenson quoted in Patrick Goldstein, 'Is Freddy back with a bad rap?', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1988, p. 70.

72) Al Walentis, 'Gory effects dominate Freddy's latest sequel', *Reading Eagle*, 23 August 1988, p. 16.

73) David T. Friendly, '"Nightmare": an industry dream', *Los Angeles Times*, 26 February 1987, p. 1.

Central to these strategies was the implementation of prominent industrial/aesthetic practices which, although they had been remarkably uncommon, were assumed to typify 1980s Hollywood. Their execution underwrote what would stand as the most comprehensive iteration of a dominant genre persona of contemporaneous Hollywood cinema — High Concept. High Concept was an industry buzzword that conveyed a film's high-earning potential based on textual and extra-textual properties that are now recognized as hallmarks of twenty-first-century blockbuster properties like SPIDERMAN (2002) and AVATAR (2009).[74] In principle, High Concept films were undemanding, spectacle-heavy, youth- and family-friendly genre films. They also boasted high levels of media transferability and merchandizing potential, and were, in order to generate event status, released widely in conjunction with intensive multimedia marketing campaigns that reduced content unambiguously to an easily digestible idea.[75] In practice, however, this amalgam of characteristics, in its entirety, reflected very few releases before BATMAN opened in the summer of 1989 (with numbers of such enterprises increasing only gradually throughout the 1990s). Moreover, as reevaluations of individual High Concept components reveal, these features, in isolation or in limited combinations, characterize most US releases — Hollywood or otherwise.[76] Sufficiently flexible to appear familiar to cineastes, cinephiles, and casual movie-watchers alike, but ultimately too elastic meaningfully to reflect the materiality of American cinematic output, High Concept is perhaps best understood as a discursive construct. It conveys disparate strands of creative and organizational conduct, the prevalence and prominence of which was deemed to have reached unprecedentedly high levels when, across the 1980s, the term and its associated discourses became established among film industrial and critical elites. High Concept was an attractive idea because it imbued participation in American audiovisual culture with a prestigious sense of topicality which was summoned by association with creative industries that were supposedly standing united in the newly conglomeratized, deregulated Reagan era. If claims-makers invoke the political to elevate the popular, High Concept was a suitably packaged vehicle befitting a seductive, hyper-real notion of Eighties America. Its problematic relationship to media history notwithstanding, High Concept, as a discursive phenomenon par excellence, influenced industry conduct profoundly. In particular it influenced ambitious independent companies that were aiming to reposition themselves and their product within a perceived mainstream of American popular culture, an oft-cited example being Vestron Video's DIRTY DANCING (1987).[77] Corporate showboating and uncritical journalism had therefore presented insightful, risk-taking, capitalized independents with the seemingly

74) Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Thomas Schatz, 'The studio system and conglomerate Hollywood', in Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (eds), *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 13–42; Schatz, 'New Hollywood, new millennium', pp. 19–46.

75) Wyatt, *High Concept*, pp. 1–22.

76) See for example Marco Calavita, '"MTV aesthetics" at the movies: interrogating a film criticism fallacy', *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Fall 2007), pp. 15–31; Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale, *Epics, Spectacles and Blockbusters: A Hollywood History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010).

77) Justin Wyatt, 'Independents, packaging, and inflationary pressure in 1980s Hollywood', in, *A New Pot of Gold*, p. 155.

paradoxical opportunity of engaging in Hollywood-like practices by filling the void that separated Hollywood's rhetoric from its conduct. High Concept became a self-fulfilling prophecy. New Line's Phase II development of Brand *Elm Street* stood as an unacknowledged catalyst in High Concept's evolution from idealized Hollywood self-image to industry standard for high-end releases.

In order to increase the cultural visibility of its *Elm Street* property, New Line Cinema executed High Concept distribution practices. They included wide theatrical openings and intensive promotion, publicity, and licensing. Dream Warriors opened on 1383 US screens (top 12 % of 1987); A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master (hereafter Dream Master) on 1767 US screens (top 3 % of 1988); and A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child (hereafter Dream Child) on 1902 US screens (top 4 % of 1989).[78] Moreover, quite generous marketing budgets financed extensive television and print advertizing, and uncommonly lengthy press-kits boasting 20–40 pages of material intended to maximize and to marshal publicity in ways that promised to uphold New Line's interests. These steps are often cited to elevate the *Elm Street* films' standing from the solid youth market fare that they were,[79] to genuine blockbuster hits, which they certainly were not.[80] These steps were actually taken primarily to maintain the profit New Line accrued from the films' theatrical releases (and to a less extent from home video releases, wherein revenue was shared with a partner) by maintaining conceptual differences from early teen slashers. It was therefore enriched symbolic value, not increased capital gains, which rationalized New Line's high-risk investment in high-end distribution practices. After all, distribution, like production, comprises unseen organizational aspects and public manifestations that generate individual films' "narrative images" and which contribute consequently to the development of genre personae.[81] Accordingly, conceiving of a heavily promoted saturation release as a hallmark of commercial prowess conflates intention and potential affect. Distribution of this kind requires huge outlay (hence its contribution to Hollywood's postwar stranglehold of major markets). Such expenditure increases a film's break-even point considerably to the extent that it reduces the profit-margins of moderate hits like Dream Warriors and The Dream Master while plunging flops like The Dream Child deeper into the red.[82] Moreover, although the products and services

78) Box Office Mojo,
<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?view=releasedate&view2=domestic&yr=1987&sort=theaters&order=DESC&p=.htm>;
<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=1988&view=releasedate&view2=domestic&sort=theaters&order=DESC&&p=.htm>;
<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=1989&view=releasedate&view2=domestic&sort=theaters&order=DESC&&p=.htm>. [accessed 1 April 2012].

79) A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors: $21.3m (20th/1987); A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master: $22m (17th/1988); A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child: $10m (51st/1989). Anon., 'Big rental films of 1987', *Variety*, 20 January 1988, p. 49; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1988', p. 16; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1989', *Variety*, 24 January 1990, pp. 24, 188.

80) Conrich, "Seducing".

81) See Klinger, 'Digressions'; Roman Labato and Mark David Ryan, 'Rethinking genre studies through distribution analysis: issues in international horror movie circuits', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 9, no.2 (2011), pp. 188–203.

82) See note 86.

resulting from *Elm Street* licensing are often offered as evidence of blockbuster status, New Line actually licensed cheaply, having concluded, like many industry analysts had also done, that public interest in the property would wane quickly.[83] According to company vice president Stephen Abramson, New Line generated a comparatively small pre-tax windfall of around $3m from licensing deals.[84] This sum would have likely returned a net profit of under $1m — significantly short of the oft-cited $50m bonanza that was in fact shared by licensor and myriad licensees. Ultimately, New Line may have pursued synergy via wholesale licensing but it exerted only partial control over the consequences. The potential success of constituent practices hinged on courted licensee interest, actual licensee actions, and the relative unpredictability of the market.[85] Thus, where youth-oriented television station MTV collaborated with New Line, clothing retailer The Gap declined its advances. Similarly, where a premium-rate phone line became a market leader,[86] Freddy Krueger doll production was halted swiftly amid condemnation from the Evangelical Right.[87]

New Line Cinema implemented extra-filmic practices, and invoked locations, objects, and audiences, associated with High Concept to cultivate oppositions between Brand *Elm Street* and the early teen slasher genre persona that were based on space, mobility, and class. Discursively, early teen slashers had effectively been reduced to scratched celluloid quarantined in the dilapidated urban grind-houses of yesteryear. This notion had accumulated deeper historical inflection once many grind-houses succumbed to gentrification policies and to the establishment of home video.[88] In contrast, New Line nurtured a highly mobile property. Its fractured elements were diffusible across numerous platforms so that they would occupy locations associated not with the denigration, decay, poverty, squalor, and threat of the early teen slasher/grind house nexus but with the vitality, youth, prosperity, cleanliness, and safety of High Concept. These venues included shopping malls, multiplexes, small-town neighborhoods, and upper-middle-class homes. Consequently,

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83) Joshua Hammer, 'A cult-film cash machine', *Newsweek*, 12 September 1988, p. 50.
With sales of merchandise for the R-rated action movies RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II and COMMANDO (both 1985) exceeding expectations, New Line clearly shared a consensus growing in industry circles that the hitherto fruitless licensing of R-rated films had been superseded by an era in which home video distribution was increasing under-17s access to audiovisual material to such an extent that licensing R-rated films that boasted strong pre-adult appeal exhibited significant potential. See Aljean Harmetz, '"Commando" garb proves popular', *New York Times*, 15 November 1985, p. C8.

84) Stephen Abramson cited in Desmond Ryan, 'Freddy Krueger doll is a hit in toy stores', *Lewiston Journal*, 24 March 1989, p. 7B. See also Anon., 'Toy company dreams up new doll from "Nightmare" star', *Associated Press*, 6 September 1989, BC cycle, unpaginated LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?> [accessed 1 April 2012]; Iain Blair, 'Recurring nightmare: famouss cut-up is doing just fine', *St. Petersburg Times*, 11 August 1989, p. 13.

85) A clearer picture of licensing emerges when the cross-promotional matrices known as synergy are approached as ongoing processes involving diverse agents possessing distinct agenda and experiencing different outcomes. See Derek Johnson, 'Franchise histories: Marvel, *X-Men*, and the negotiated process of expansion', in Janet Staiger and Sabine Hake (eds), *Convergence Media History* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 14–23.

86) Stephen Holden, 'The (900) numbers to the stars', *New York Times*, 24 January 1989, p. C15.

87) Anon., 'Is Freddy Krueger doll being buried in toy graveyard?', *Associated Press*, 19 October 1989, Thursday, BC cycle, unpaginated. LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?> [accessed 1 April 2012].

88) Church, 'From exhibition'.

as well as providing exhibition sites for the films and surfaces for print advertizing, shopping malls hosted meet-and-greets, during which New Line extended interested parties invitations to interact with Freddy Krueger actor Robert Englund.[89] New Line also prioritized licensing to manufacturers of lifestyle goods intended primarily for public/outdoor display, such as Halloween costumes and T-shirts, or for private/domestic use, including posters, soundtracks, and games.[90] Important also were New Line's collaborations with MTV. The Freddy Krueger character introduced pop videos while promoting 1987's DREAM WARRIORS and co-hosted MTV's FREDDY KRUEGER HOUR (1988), a combination of trailers, movie clips, and music videos advertizing THE DREAM MASTER. The markets targeted by such activities invoked the cross-demographic nature of High Concept, thereby positioning Brand *Elm Street* as entertainment suitable for, oriented to, and followed by multiple audiences, including female youths and children.

New Line Cinema emphasized female-youth-orientation and female-youth-following to distinguish Brand *Elm Street* from an early teen slasher genre persona that had been evacuated of the notion of female spectatorship. Early teen slashers were made for, marketed to, and attended by, mixed-sex youth audiences.[91] Notions of female spectatorship had, however, threatened to destabilize the same-sex-identification paradigm structuring their critical reception. Ensuing questions of masochistic pleasure aroused by female interest in, and consumption of, the films would have complicated the recasting of early teen slashers as women-in-danger movies. The working-class adult male spectator therefore validated early teen slashers' credentials as backlashes against feminists and independent women. Conversely, Brand *Elm Street*'s female-youth-friendliness was conveyed explicitly through UPI press releases in which New Line president Robert Shaye used the term "date entertainment" to suggest that the films offered young people "something they can talk about and relate to with their companion" and Robert Englund invoked girlhood crushes by declaring "I get mail. Mainly from girls, who love Freddy".[92] Marketing campaigns also showcased the fact that the films boasted content associated specifically with female-youth-oriented entertainment, including the contemporaneous female-youth-leaning hits PRETTY IN PINK (1986) and DIRTY DANCING.[93] Spotlighted were: strong heroines, sympathetic female characters, female-friendships, daughter-parent relationships; heterosexual yearning, courtship, romance, and relationships; and topics deemed relevant to young American females such as body-image issues, eating disorders, academic expectations, and unplanned pregnancy. Concerning the teenage pregnancy plotline, New Line execu-

89) Dennis Hunt, '"Nightmares" 1 and 2 are dream profit makers; supply catching up with "Back to the Future"', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1986. p. 23.

90) Aljean Harmetz, 'Waking from a new "Nightmare" to new profits', *New York Times*, 13 July 1989, pp. C17, C24.

91) Richard Nowell, '"There's more than one way to lose your heart": the American film industry, early teen slasher films, and female youth', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 51, no. 1 (Winter 2011), pp. 115–140.

92) Bob Brewster (UPI), 'Sequels benefit film producer', *Sunday Times-Sentinel*, 26 April 1987, p. D1; Vernon Scott (UPI), 'Robert Englund nears no resemblance to horrifying character Freddy Krueger', *Scenectady Gazette Supplement*, 10 April 1987, p. 17.

93) PRETTY IN PINK: $16.6m (24th/1986); DIRTY DANCING: $25m (13th/1987). Anon., 'Big rental films of 1986', p. 25; Anon., 'Big rental films of 1987', p. 49.

tive Sara Risher explained "[o]ur intent was to address important teen-age issues".[94] Critics spotted the female-youth-orientation of the property, with, for example, Caryn James detailing its similarities to that most culturally feminized of media forms, the soap opera. She noted that *Elm Street* owed "less to Hitchcock than to 'All My Children'".[95]

Because they reached countless youths via MTV, music videos were central to maximizing and conveying young female consumption of Brand *Elm Street* during Phase II. Crossovers involving youth-oriented horror films and popular music are usually approached as efforts mutually to reinforce "subcultural authenticity" by accessing and invoking likeminded consumers (a point examined in more detail below).[96] However, the later *Elm Street* films illustrate the extent to which certain types of popular music are used to maximize horror's economic potential by conveying to wary individuals its status as pleasurable entertainment. A video to an upbeat pop-metal title-track offered reassurance to any female youths who questioned DREAM WARRIORS' suitability. Functioning like the allegories of female spectatorship in 1940s horror pictures that were examined by Tim Snelson,[97] the self-reflexive video to the "Dream Warriors" song portrayed a teenage girl's transformation from nervous and fearful to joyous and awe-struck upon encountering "macabre" cultural artifacts: musicians Dokken and Freddy Krueger. This notion of overcoming trepidation was expressed overtly by New Line president Robert Shaye. He claimed his own fourteen-year-old daughter, who apparently recoiled at the downbeat nature of the evening news, had enjoyed the *Elm Street* films.[98] Female-youth-orientation and spectatorship also dominated the music video for Vinnie Vincent Invasion's power ballad "Love Kills", which promoted THE DREAM MASTER. The video cut between female-youth-centered film content and the band's unthreateningly androgynous singer, whose doughy-eyed boyishness, high-pitched delivery, and hyper-sensitive posturing recalled contemporaneous girl-friendly soft-rock pinups like Jon Bon Jovi, Skid Row's Sebastian Bach, and Guns 'N' Roses' Axl Rose. Exposition and action footage from THE DREAM MASTER was consequently recast as subjective impressions of melancholic, triumphant, and turbulent pleasures begat by the romantic solipsism associated with girlhood. Supporting the promise of similar experiences to consumers of the film were slow-motion shots of a young female theatergoer being drawn physically from her seat into the screened movie; acknowledging its success was Robert Shaye, who claimed that almost half of THE DREAM MASTER's US theatrical audience had been teenage girls.[99]

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94) Quoted in Linda Renaud, 'LA Clips: doubts about Freddy and a do-or-die bid at the box office', *Globe and Mail*, 18 August 1989, unpaginated. LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?> [accessed 1 April 2012].

95) Caryn James, 'Yech! It's Jason dripping soap', *New York Times*, 24 July 1988, pp. H1, 21.

96) Joseph Tompkins, 'What's the deal with soundtrack albums? metal music and the customized aesthetics of contemporary horror', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1 (Fall 2009), pp. 65–81.

97) Tim Snelson, '"From grade B thrillers to deluxe chillers": prestige horror, female audiences, and allegories of spectatorship in *The Spiral Staircase* (1946)', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2009), pp. 173–188.

98) Robert Shaye quoted in Nina Darnton, '"Elm Street 3" is box office no. 1', *New York Times*, 6 March 1987, p. C8.

99) Quoted in Harmetz, 'Waking', p. C17.

New Line Cinema's openly acknowledged, and widely recognized, cultivation and emphasis of child consumption[100] also enabled projection of Brand *Elm Street*'s High Concept credentials while distancing the property from the early teen slasher genre persona. Pre-adolescent spectatorship infused High Concept's family-friendly image which was epitomized by the *Star Wars* trilogy (1977, 1980, 1983) and by E.T.: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (1982),[101] with a genre persona that reduced pre-teen slasher American horror to bloodless Saturday matinee monster movies through the erasure of ultraviolent fare like H.G Lewis' gore films.[102] It also mitigated unwanted affiliation of Brand *Elm Street* and the earlier teen slasher genre persona by ensuring that such efforts would arouse a potentially outlandish notion of children harboring the reactionary sociopolitical values purportedly underwriting the misogynistic pleasures of early teen slasher film consumption. New Line boasted success in securing child audiences. Actor Robert Englund claimed that the films had, by attracting the "kid brother and kid sister" of America's movie-watching youths, "gotten the 'Poltergeist' audience" (a reference to a 1982 horror hit that had been sold on the name of family-friendly producer Stephen Spielberg and which had been made accessible to un-chaperoned children of all ages due to its controversial receipt of a PG-rating).[103] Subsequent claims that New Line's targeting of pre-teens constituted the "juvenalization" of the teen slasher have, however, cast imitation as innovation by failing to recognize that early teen slashers were also made for children;[104] publically cited market research conducted by Twentieth Century Fox had revealed that early teen slashers boasted a forty-five percent child following,[105] which, if disregarded, threatened commercial disaster for producers, distributors, and exhibitors. New Line's handling of the *Elm Street* films therefore did not mark the "juvenilization" of the teen slasher film. Teen slashers were historically conceived to mine the aspirational tendencies believed to draw many children to youth-centered entertainment — behavior which is institutionalized in American film history as the "Peter Pan Syndrome". New Line reduced the *Elm Street* films' potential to horrify and framed the property as child-suitable. Accordingly, as has been well-documented, series villain Freddy Krueger was transformed publically during Phase II. He changed from a stoic, shadowy, prowler, who shook to its core characters' understanding of the world, into an attention-seeking menace accepted readily as an everyday threat. In cognitive psychology terminology, New Line diluted the threatening, diegetic incongruousness underwriting horror responses. This practice rendered the character,

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100) Michele Litzky (PR Inc.), *Business Wire*, October 7 1988, unpaginated. LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?> [accessed 1 April 2012].

101) See Peter Krämer, 'Would you take your child to see this film? the cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie', in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, pp. 294–311; Peter Krämer, '"It's aimed at kids - the kid in everybody"': George Lucas, *Star Wars* and Children's Entertainment", *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and TV Studies*, January 2001.
Scope, < http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue=dec2001&id=278&section=article> [accessed 1 April 2012].

102) See Kevin Heffernan, 'Inner-City exhibition and the genre film: distributing *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3 (Spring 2002), pp. 59–77.

103) Quoted in Bob Harris, 'Could this be Freddy's last stand', *The Herald*, 21 September 1989, p. 6B.

104) Nowell, *Blood Money*, pp. 39–40.

105) Aljean Harmetz, 'Quick end of low-budget horror-film cycle seen', *New York Times*, 2 October 1980, p. C15.

as countless industry-watchers noted, proximate to a loquacious pantomime villain or perhaps closest in form and in function to the fast-talking heels facilitating professional wrestling's transformation from regional, niche, working-class attraction to national, multimedia, child-friendly entertainment.[106] Capturing general sentiment, a newspaper editorial noted of THE DREAM MASTER: "[n]o longer can this scary movie be judged on its ability to scare", adding — "'Nightmare' movies have become the feel-good horror films of the '80s".[107] Perhaps best encapsulating such sentiments was print advertising for THE DREAM CHILD that had been designed to recall E.T.: THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL's promotional artwork via shared evocation of Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam".[108]

In terms of its magnitude, constitution, and address, licensing reinforced Brand *Elm Street*'s child-suitability. While most products and services, including phone-lines, costumes, fan club membership, and games, exhibited strong appeal to youths and to children, some objects were angled specifically at them.[109] Notable was the video for "Are You Ready for Freddy?", a single from novelty rap trio The Fat Boys, which promoted THE DREAM MASTER. Its video associated the *Elm Street* films with childhood games. It recast a disheveled mansion from the films as a neighborhood haunted house, wherein the outlandish performers bravely must stay overnight. Freddy Krueger's rapping with The Fat Boys aligned the character to a cartoonish, depoliticized, anodyne reconstruction of cultural agents positioned contemporaneously within public discourse as threatening to mainstream American mores. It suggested that he was to the depraved maniacs of early teen slashers what The Fat Boys were to assertive, politically-engaged, gangsta rappers like Public Enemy and N.W.A.: a family-friendly alternative. The child spectator/consumer, in conjunction with its elder sister, called forth mixed-sex, middle-class Americans spanning childhood to young adulthood, thus differentiating, in terms of address and audience, Brand *Elm Street* from the alleged sexist-orientation of early teen slashers and their adult male viewership.

Where its implementation of industrial-aesthetic practices associated with High Concept distinguished Brand *Elm Street* from the early teen slasher genre persona by situating the former as the quintessence of an imagined popular cultural mainstream, New Line Cinema strove to establish quite different conceptual allegiances when framing its property as reified cultural product.

"Ingenious ... remarkable ... clever ... surreal": *Elm Street* as Quality Entertainment

MTV footage of Freddy Krueger reading Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* exemplified and parodied New Line Cinema's efforts to raise Brand *Elm Street* above the cultural standing of early teen slashers through the invocation of prestigious cultural artifacts and dis-

106) See Dennis Hunt, '"Wrestlemania" makes a comeback for round 2', *Los Angeles* Times, 23 May 1986, p. J19.
107) Mitch Zamoff, '"Nightmare:" cut-up Krueger steals the show', *Cavalier Daily Spectator*, 8 September 1988, p. 4.
108) See for example Display Ad 74, *New York Times*, 13 August 1989, p. H24.
109) Harmetz, "Waking", p. C17.

courses. The supposedly clear-cut distinctions between horror as a low-prestige form and comparatively prestigious culture have tended to be questioned through consideration of intersections occurring in niche sectors of American film culture, which are already elevated by internal markers of distinction related to inaccessibility, expertise, and connoisseurship — 1980s mail order video circuits and twenty-first-century indie culture being examples.[110] The case of Brand *Elm Street* indicates the extent to which invoking discourses of prestige extends even to calculatedly "mainstream" American horror film production, promotion, and publicity.

New Line Cinema's handling of its *Elm Street* property was underwritten by appreciation of the early teen slasher films' status as low-prestige incarnations of the already devalued American horror film.[111] This evaluation of the cultural standing of 1980s horror may not have respected the contestation and flux that shape cultural hierarchies, especially when divisive forms like horror are involved, but it gauged fairly accurately a current of antagonism that ran deep through US cultural elite circles.[112] Moreover, New Line clearly recognized that the American critical establishment deemed contemporaneous American horror anathematic to longstanding discourses of artistic value. This position was based on the films' supposedly unchallenging content, on the (non-intellectual) emotional and bodily responses that they provoked, and on the class of patrons whom they supposedly addressed and attracted.[113] Rather than being accepted as reflections of inherent superiority, such distinctions are widely acknowledged to be products of the associations that cultural artifacts invite to other cultural artifacts, to human beings, to institutions, and to discourses.[114] Accordingly, the generally low cultural status of 1980s American horror and of the early teen slasher genre persona in particular was fuelled by associations it invited to entities that were seen to lack prestige in a class-based, capitalist, socio-economic system, wherein value is often measured in terms of education, wealth, or a combination thereof.[115] The classism that had underwritten the demonization of early teen slashers had generated a genre persona in which the already low status of contemporary horror had been infused with a sense of economic deprivation and, via reductive implication, educational deficiency. This phenomenon, as noted above, resulted from the invocation of economically impoverished locations (rundown urban neighborhoods and grind-houses), periods

110) See for example Joan Hawkins, 'Sleaze mania, Euro-trash, and high art: the place of European art films in American low culture', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 2 (Winter 1999), pp. 14–29; Janie Sexton, 'US Indie--horror: critical reception, genre construction, and suspect hybridity', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2 (Winter 2012), pp. 67–86.

111) See Vincent Canby, 'How should we react to violence', *New York Times*, 11 December 1983, p. H36.

112) See for example Scott Eyman, 'Despite gore, slasher flicks still sell big', *The Day*, 6 August 1989, pp. D1–D2; Eve Zibart, 'Shock schlock & today's horror movie: from Jekyll to Jason, how Halloween fare has deteriorated over time', *Washington Post*, 29 October 1989, pp. G1–G2.

113) Linda Williams, 'Film bodies: gender, genre, and excess', *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4. (Summer 1991), pp. 2–13.

114) See Pierre Bourdieu [Translated by Richard Nice], *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984 [1979]), pp. 1–9. See also for example Jonathon I. Oake, '*Reality Bites* and Generation X as spectator', *The Velvet Light Trap* 53 (Spring 2004), pp. 83–97; Michael Z. Newman, 'Indie culture: in pursuit of the authentic autonomous alternative', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Spring 2009), pp. 16–34.

115) Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 1–9.

of recession (the 1970s malaise), and underprivileged consumers (underclass and working-class males).

New Line Cinema's development of its *Elm Street* property was made possible by a sophisticated understanding of the extent to which the multi-directional exchanges of symbolic value that underpin cultural status, distinctions, and hierarchies enable already prestigious entities to bestow additional prestige upon either borrower or bequeathed.[116] This understanding was informed by substantial experience in art cinema distribution.[117] The company distinguished Brand *Elm Street* from the disreputability of the early teen slasher genre persona by loading the films, their marketing campaigns, and associated publicity materials with references to entities that were rich in transferable cultural capital. Framing *Elm Street* as quality entertainment also constituted an attempt to broaden the property's appeal. This effort involved addressing niche audiences that were thought to eschew material that they, and cultural arbiters whom they admired, had deemed to be inappropriately lowbrow fare. It also involved nourishing a sensibility that was assumed to be operative among the larger collective of "cultural omnivores" who consumed a broad range of cultural products — appealing therefore to a transient disposition which might be termed "a quality cinema state of mind".[118]

New Line Cinema sought to distinguish its *Elm Street* property from a major aspect of the early teen slasher genre persona wherein accusations of low quality had been supported by suggestions of insufficient textual differentiation between the films and by their general vacuousness. Early teen slashers were singled-out for being unacceptably formulaic films, which, by implication (and rarely by explication), offered little to judicial viewers on account of their exhausted repertoire of formal, stylistic, and structural elements. They were also derided for being superficial films in which plodding narration and lurid spectacle was supposedly exacerbated by a virtual absence of thematic depth. This is a slightly paradoxical position given that the claims of misogyny that were directed at early teen slashers rested on engagment with their supposed thematic terrain. Acts of selectivity, homogenization, and caricature had served to erase substantial textual differences between films to such an extent that even HALLOWEEN, which had been lauded in some quarters for its apparent visual flair and self-reflexivity, was routinely, albeit temporarily, stripped of its status as an anomalous stylish, intelligent teen slasher film. In truth, the contention that early teen slashers were "all the same" and "dumb" were less elaborated critiques than short-hand rhetorical stratagems intended to stoke indignation towards the films. Because the specific nature of uniformity and superficiality was left ambiguous, both claims could be used to intensify numerous denunciations through exploitation of acceptance of notions of innovation (as a generator of originality) and thematic sophistication representing legitimate criteria of quality. The sense of mass called forth by the formulaic served to magnify to pandemic levels any objectionable or unacceptable traits.

New Line Cinema associated Brand *Elm Street* with agents who had castigated early teen slasher films for their textual shortcomings. It did so by emblazoning the *Elm Street*

116) Ibid.
117) Wyatt, 'Formation', p. 76.
118) See King, *Indiewood*, pp. 11–28.

films' print advertizing materials with quotes attributed to leading American journalists, many of whom had lambasted early teen slashers. The sheer volume of accolades mobilized aligned the *Elm Street* ads, and by extension the films themselves, to "quality cinema" and "art cinema", recognized categories of cultural product that were exalted for exhibiting the formal, thematic, and/or stylistic attributes said to be absent from the early teen slashers.[119] This association was cemented by the content of the snippets which made claims for the films' fulfillment of recognized indices of cultural worth. One tendency mainly emphasized elevated forms of narrative cinema. Intelligent, subtle, uncanny motion pictures in the mold of studio-era noir-mysteries were, for example, called forth by an advertisement billing FREDDY'S REVENGE as: "a classy thriller" which boasted "satiric humor", "a classic character", and "a surprise ending"; as a "deliriously frightening" film; and as a film that "gives you goosebumps [sic]".[120] A second tendency, which invoked primarily venerated exercises in style, was exemplified by an advertisement that framed DREAM WARRIORS as a landmark in visual expression. It suggested that "spectacular and imaginative fantasy sequences" and "devilishly creative predicaments and spectacular special effects" had contributed to the creation of a work that was "ingenious ... remarkable ... clever ... surreal".[121] A third tendency forwent direct evocation of applauded cultural forms by stressing general superiority. It was epitomized by an advertisement that showcased endorsements from leading cultural arbiters who had proclaimed THE DREAM MASTER to be "[t]he most intelligent premise in current genre film", to "[balance] wit and gore with imagination and intelligence", and to exude "style, class, and charisma".[122] Such strategies underwrote the production of other texts as well.

The content of the *Elm Street* films and their marketing campaigns was tailored to associate the property with prestigious cultural artifacts that were recognizable to a general audience. The films routinely featured discussion of canonized literature and art. Where, for example, readings from, and thematic analyses of, William Shakespeare and Aristotle featured in A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET and THE DREAM MASTER respectively, DREAM WARRIORS was prefaced with an Edgar Allen Poe quotation. Similarly, THE DREAM MASTER and THE DREAM CHILD featured extended visual allusions to works by Salvador Dali and M. C. Escher respectively. Promotional photographs, on the other hand, associated the Freddy Krueger character with bourgeois leisure. They showed him sporting a shirt and bow tie or a dinner suit as he posed with ball gown-clad actresses or enjoyed a martini. This practice disassociated the character (a former-janitor otherwise clothed in a tattered jumper), from its proletarian roots, and, by extension distanced the *Elm Street* property from the working-class connotations of earlier teen slashers.

Brand *Elm Street*'s human resources were also presented in press-kits and interviews as off-screen embodiments of legitimate culture. Central to this strategy were the respective star personae of New Line president Robert Shaye, actor Robert Englund, and Wes Craven (the writer-director of the first film and the co-writer of DREAM WARRIORS). Shaye served

119) See Steve Neale, 'Art cinema as institution', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1981), pp. 11–39.
120) See for example Display Ad 56, *New York Times*, 8 November 1985, p. C14.
121) See for example Display Ad 109, *Chicago Tribune*, 27 March 1987, p. M.
122) See for example Display Ad 41, *New York Times*, 26 August 1988, p. C21.

as the behind-the-scenes face of Brand *Elm Street*. He was portrayed as the ultimate Renaissance man. His achievements in academia, law, international art, commerce, and legitimate cinema culture were conveyed by the spotlighting of his credentials as an Ivy League graduate, a Fulbright scholar, a published authority on copyright law, a director of short-films acquired by New York's Museum of Modern Art, a successful businessman, and a patron of the arts who had been responsible for showering America with the sweetness and light of the Czech New Wave, Jean-Luc Godard, Lina Wertmüller, and a Best Foreign Film Oscar recipient.[123] Englund was ostensibly the public face of Brand *Elm Street*. He was in part depicted as a serious thespian boasting refined taste in cultural products. Much was made of Englund's training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, his early days performing Shakespeare plays, and his apparent predilection for quality cinema and international art house fare.[124] "My taste goes more in the line of 'The Last Emperor [1987]', 'Tender Mercies' [1983], and 'Dance with a Stranger' [1985]", responded Englund, when asked if he enjoyed viewing horror films; "I go for the classic American and foreign cinema".[125] Despite only having participated in two out of five films at this point, Wes Craven continued to be invoked as a kind of spiritual father to the *Elm Street* property. As an early interview in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* already begins to show, Craven was a consummate self-promoter who had capitalized on some critical observations of apparent hints of social satire in his films LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT (1971) and THE HILLS HAVE EYES (1977) by cultivating the media-friendly persona of a progressive, cerebral, iconoclast using a debased cultural form:[126] "the professor of horror", as the *Chicago Tribune* called him.[127] Accordingly, press-kits emphasized Craven's time as a college humanities instructor, acknowledged his "underrated genius", spotlighted his "intelligent approach to the horror genre", and drew comparisons to esteemed director Alfred Hitchcock.[128] These materials also attributed to Craven suitably high-register abstractions concerning the thematic sophistication, social relevance, and psychological resonance of his films. Craven was cited voicing his conviction that his films were "very important" because "they deal[t] with images and situations that mirror[ed] the anxieties which shoot through us all or all of our culture".[129] He was also cited contending that a story scenario he had written had ensured that DREAM WARRIORS was "about consciousness and accepting responsibility on a very deep level".[130] In the absence of Craven, similar marriages of authorial insight and interpretative analysis were offered by Englund and Shaye. Where,

123) Compare New Line Cinema Corporation, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* Press-kit, pp. 19–20 and for example *Harmetz*, 'Waking', pp. C17, C24.

124) See for example Michael Chapple, et al, 'Freddy Krueger likes to scare people', *Milwaukee Journal — Green Sheet for Kids*, 26 November 1988, p. 1

125) Quoted in Ibid.

126) Tony Williams, 'Wes Craven: an interview', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 8, no. 3 (Fall 1980), pp. 10–14.

127) Glenn Lovell, 'The "professor of horror films" wants to be understood', *Chicago Tribune*, 7 December 1984, p. A1.

128) New Line, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, p. 3; New Line Cinema Corporation, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors Press-kit*, pp. 32–44.

129) Quoted in New Line, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, p. 3

130) Quoted in New Line, *Dream Warriors*, p. 6.

for example, Englund employed pop-Freudianism to proclaim Freddy Krueger "a latent symbol of the father of us all",[131] Shaye offered a social-reflectionist view whereby "the symbolic underpinnings" of the films served as "recognition by the younger generation of life-threatening malevolence in the air [...]".[132]

The logic, mechanics, and strategies that characterized New Line Cinema's systematic attempts to inflect Brand *Elm Street* with the prestige that was associated with recognizable examples of legitimate culture were echoed, albeit for the benefit of a quite different imagined audience or sensibility, in its framing of the property as cult object.

"Not Just Idiots Walking Around the Mall Listening to Madonna...": *Elm Street* as Cult Object

In 1987, actor Robert Englund described Brand *Elm Street* consumers as "not just idiots walking around the mall listening to Madonna [...]".[133] In so doing, he encapsulated New Line Cinema's efforts to communicate to segments of the American public that its *Elm Street* property was fully concordant with the oppositional stance underwriting certain cultural products' elevation to "cult" status. New Line's handling of Brand *Elm Street* shows that existing scholarship on the critical and popular reception of cult films can illuminate how, in an effort to shroud their products in the aura of cult, industry professionals handling apparently "mainstream" fare appropriate, and thereby commodify, discourses surrounding cult fandom.

Bestowing cult status upon an object involves drawing rhetorically powerful yet conceptually unsupportable oppositions between a demonized caricature of the "mainstream" and a valorized alternative.[134] In terms of media texts, these oppositions operate at the levels of production, content, engagement, and consumption.[135] New Line's understanding of the cult/mainstream dichotomy was not unusual in the sense that it was underpinned by the belief that the imagined cultural mainstream was derided in some quarters for supposedly being characterized by an unimaginative lower-middle-class mass consuming passively the readily available, unchallenging (feminized) cultural products of corporate America;[136] or, to put it differently, idiots walking around the mall listening to Madonna. Consumers holding this antagonistic view, it follows, set themselves apart from what they see as mindless conformers by engaging in cultural practices that they deem to be superior to, and that they conceive of as representing a symbolic challenge to, such undiscriminating behavior.[137] The belief that this latter form of consumption amounts to subversion — that it transgresses, rather than upholds, canons, protocols, and tastes endorsed by le-

131) Stephen Schaefer, 'Ready to don another mask', *USA Today*, 11 August 1989, p. 2D.
132) Quoted in Harmetz, 'Waking', p. C17.
133) Kirchhoff, 'The two'.
134) Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)
135) Mark Jancovich, 'Cult fictions: cult movies, subcultural capital and the production of cultural distinctions', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2002), pp. 306–322.
136) Jancovich et al, 'Introduction', in *Defining Cult Movies*, pp. 1–2.
137) Ibid.

gitimate culture elites — differentiates the mindset underpinning it from the mindset characterizing consumers of cultural products that are generally accepted to qualify as "quality", "art" or "highbrow".[138] However, even though cult devotees' identities are seen partly to be based on perceived oppositions to legitimate culture, they share with self-styled legitimate culture aficionados a sense of connoisseurship. A common bond can be seen to be forged by a shared sense of distinction from the imagined mainstream, based on protocols of consumption involving distance and de-familiarization.[139] Accordingly, and crucially for New Line's efforts to maintain conceptual distance between its property and the devalued teen slasher genre persona, cult connoisseurship, like preferences for legitimate culture, was seen to be imbricated within a cultural middle-class (albeit one marked by turf wars).[140]

New Line Cinema's association of Brand *Elm Street* with the protocols of cult was a commercially motivated and conceptually complex undertaking which projected symbolic value towards certain audiences and sensibilities. To communicate a sense of "subcultural authenticity", the company endeavored to distance Brand *Elm Street* from a vision of the cultural mainstream it was simultaneously evoking by associating its property with High Concept, and to distance Brand *Elm Street* from an imagined bourgeois culture that it was also evoking by associating the property with quality entertainment such as art cinema. This distinction was made possible by the imagined cult audience possessing significantly more cultural capital than the imagined early teen slasher spectator (a working-class male supporting animatedly the gratuitous spectacle of misogynist murder). Framing Brand *Elm Street* as cult also fortified the property's appeal to targeted audiences. Invoking cult seemingly represented an attempt to maximize the series' apparently strong early following among subcultural groups. Perhaps more importantly, however, it promised to arouse among a larger cohort of young Americans less invested in cultivating identities through oppositional consumption, a potentially attractive sense of mild transgression born out of consuming, being seen to consume, and imagining one's self being seen to consume media said to boast a measure of subcultural capital. That youth audience was required to turn profit. New Line employed established industry strategies to fulfill these objectives, associating its property with recognizable youth subcultures and recognizable cult movies, and by circulating oppositional readings of the *Elm Street* films themselves.

New Line Cinema sought to establish relationships between the *Elm Street* films and youth subcultures it had deemed to embody the oppositional stance undergirding cult.[141] Accordingly, the subcultural orientation of creative personnel was emphasized. For instance, Robert Englund suggested that "[t]hese art school kids bring a sort of punk sensibility to the films".[142] Similarly, characters defined by subcultural belonging appeared alongside conventional youth character-types in the films and their marketing materials: a punk in DREAM WARRIORS; a martial artist in THE DREAM MASTER; a comic book artist

138) Ibid.
139) Jancovich, 'Cult fictions'.
140) Ibid.
141) Thornton, *Club Cultures*.
142) Kirchhoff, 'The two'.

and skateboarder in THE DREAM CHILD. Subcultural sports were also central to publicity for THE DREAM CHILD, with photographs featuring Freddy Krueger posing with a credibly branded skateboard and surfboard. Publicity materials were used to relay apparent subcultural endorsement of the brand. Accordingly, Robert Englund portrayed the relative commercial achievements of A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET and FREDDY'S REVENGE not as what they were — products of astute and aggressive corporate practice having secured a moderately sized general youth audience — but as a byproduct of the grassroots support of niche music fans.[143] "[T]he original audience were [sic] punk rockers and heavy metal kids", Englund declared: "They discovered the movie on their own".[144] To ensure that masculine overtones accompanying invocation of subcultural fandom did not arouse the notions of misogyny and female victimization imbricated within the early teen slasher genre persona,[145] New Line also claimed sexually confident female rock music fans had embraced the *Elm Street* films. It addressed to both sexes titillating/inspiring stories of female sexual empowerment. "You wouldn't believe the girls [...] those rock girls, the heavy metal girls", claimed Englund: "they take the glove and they rub it all over their bodies".[146] This strategy suggested that Brand *Elm Street*'s cult fandom accommodated certain forms of youthful femininity, rather than necessitating their rejection which would have been needed to become, in the oft-cited words of Sarah Thornton, "culturally 'one of the boys'".[147]

New Line Cinema also sought to associate Brand *Elm Street* with a manifestation of cult cinema that was likely to be recognizable in the mid-to-late 1980s to many young Americans: the midnight movie. The midnight movie referred to a loose grouping of mainly low-cost, idiosyncratic films which were primarily associated with late night screenings that had been held across the 1970s and early 1980s at dilapidated metropolitan theatres. This genre persona was distinguished from that of the early teen slasher primarily by the social class of their respective imagined spectators and the modes of engagement those imagined spectators were said to practice. The supposedly immersive, emotional, working-class experience of consuming early teen slashers in ghetto grindhouses stood in stark contrast, discursively at least, to the image of a cultural bourgeoisie, comprising loft-dwelling bohemians and slumming grad students, viewing in detached or ironic fashion the iconoclastic offerings of the downtown picture house.[148] Invoking the spirit of the midnight movie provided an alibi of sorts if antagonistic claims-makers rhetorically positioned Brand *Elm Street* within the urban decay that was central to the early teen slasher genre persona. The midnight movie became emblematized in the image of costumed fans viewing THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (1975); an image that Robert Englund aroused when he described similar practices taking place at screenings of the *Elm*

143) Ibid.
144) Bob Harris, 'Could this be Freddy's last stand', *The Herald*, 21 September 1989, p. 6B.
145) See Hollows, 'The masculinity'.
146) Rob Salem, 'Santa Claws Freddy Krueger is coming home for Christmas', *Toronto Star*, 4 December 1988, p. V34.
147) Thornton, *Club Cultures*, p. 104.
148) J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York: De Capo Press, 1983).

Street films.[149] This incarnation of cult unsurprisingly boasted its canon of touchstone films, a small number of which had been distributed by New Line Cinema. Accordingly, New Line went to great lengths to ensure audiences were not reminded of the overwhelming majority of forgotten, low-budget efforts it had handled over the years, but were made acutely aware of the fact that the company behind Brand *Elm Street* was in fact the risk-taking cineastes behind such high-profile midnight movies as director John Waters' taboo-breaking gross-out picture PINK FLAMINGOES (1972) and the visually innovative horror films THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (1974) and THE EVIL DEAD (1981).

Finally, New Line Cinema showcased Brand *Elm Street*'s subcultural credentials in publicity materials by articulating oppositional readings of the *Elm Street* films. This strategy involved creative personnel, particularly actor Robert Englund, speaking on behalf of insightful, critical young Americans who purportedly read Freddy Krueger as a radical, Leftist, anti-establishment figure. Readings of this sort drew from popular conceptions of Marxism and anarchism to recast Krueger's vengeful killing of fairly affluent American teenagers as a symbolical challenge to oppressive class structures tht shaped social inequality in Eighties America. In so doing, they framed Krueger's actions as allegorical, morally righteous, socially just, and, therefore, binarily opposed to the literal, unwarranted, egocentric crimes perpetrated in early teen slashers. Of course, the very content that was used to develop these readings was present in early teen slashers, indicating that, by extension, the early films also made possible similar interpretations. Disseminating such positions insulated New Line against attempts to employ the notion of sadistic consumption, aroused by declaring violent characters identification-figures, to link Brand *Elm Street* to the misogynistic killers of the early teen slasher genre persona. The strategy preempted any efforts to denounce Freddy Krueger as another extreme manifestation of a cultural "backlash" which many second-wave feminists saw emanating from the American cultural Right. Thus, for example, DREAM CHILD director Stephen Hopkins suggested "[p]erhaps one of the reasons Freddy is so popular is that he only kills white yuppies".[150] Similarly, Robert Englund suggested "[t]here was a certain subversiveness, a certain anarchy to Freddy, a slight attack on middle-class complacency. After all — 'Elm Street.' What does that stand for? Picket fences and mowed lawns".[151] Emphasizing the economic class of the young victims over their sympathetic characterization also allowed Freddy Krueger to be celebrated for enacting, on behalf of America's disenfranchised middle-class youth, symbolical retribution against the young beneficiaries of social hierarchies operative around high schools, which, if not a lived reality for specific individuals, were at least recognizable to a mixed-sex youth audience exposed to class-conflict teen romances in the vain of RECKLESS (1984), PRETTY IN PINK, and CAN'T BUY ME LOVE (1987).[152] "Freddy's kicking butt out there, and not only sticking up for those kids", argued Englund, "he's exploiting Elm Street — white, Anglo-Saxon, white-bread

149) Cited in Edward Jones, 'Better things ahead for Robert Englund', *Free Lance-Star*, 23 November 1985, p. 4.

150) Stephen Hopkins quoted in UPI release adapted and reprinted as 'Freddy Krueger cultural hero', *Ellensburg Daily Record*, 4 August 1989, p. 16.

151) Harris, 'Could', p. 6B.

152) See Timothy Shary, 'Buying me love: 1980s class-clash teen romances', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2011), pp. 563–582.

America".[153] The challenge the character posed to this perceived nexus of economics and social-value was also expressed in terms that showcased solidarity with disenfranchised members of New Line's targeted young female audience. "Freddy Krueger is the guy getting revenge on all those rich girls that ticked you off in high school, those girls that thought your dress was shabby and your corsage was from J. C. Penny", explained Englund, in a statement that appeared tailored to recall the most female youth-oriented horror picture of its generation: CARRIE (1976).[154] Framing Freddy Krueger in such ways had contributed to the character's reception as "the ultimate anti-hero" and as a "cult hero".[155]

Conclusion: "Not the Typical Slash-and-Splatter Thing"

The issue of categorization was, throughout the second half of the 1980s, prominent in the US critical reception of Brand *Elm Street*, as industry-watchers wrestled with how best to position the property in relation to earlier films about maniacs menacing youth. At issue was the question of whether the measure of differentiation from, and similarities to, earlier teen slashers exhibited by *Elm Street* amounted to an unremarkable case of textual development in full accordance with the regimes of invocation and differentiation underwriting cultural production or whether difference overwhelmed similarity to such a degree that *Elm Street* and the early teen slashers were best conceived of as distinctive contributions to media culture. This predicament was typically resolved by suggesting that the *Elm Street* films were at once affiliated with, and notably distinct from, early teen slashers — a form of rhetorical compromise that was encapsulated by phrases which proclaimed *Elm Street* to be, among other things, "not the typical slash-and-splatter thing".[156] Driving this critical quandary was a sense of incompatibility characterizing the textual and extra-textual properties of a group of films released in the early 1980s and a prominent cluster of discourses which, after having orbited the films synchronically, remained audible across the decade. In short, the situation had arisen because of an irreconcilable tension between, on the one hand, the materiality of output and content, and on the other hand, the discursive phenomenon that this essay has called genre personae.

The analysis of New Line Cinema's handling of its *Elm Street* property presented above suggests that film historiography may benefit from paying greater scrutiny to the construction, dissemination, and appropriation of genre personae. By centralizing consideration of these misrepresentative discursive clusters, this essay has shown that New Line's handling of Brand *Elm Street* was driven by efforts to distinguish the property conceptually from an early teen slasher genre persona constructed around the films' misrepresentation as women-in-danger movies. Framing its property as High Concept, quality entertainment, and cult object, it has been argued, enabled New Line to insulate Brand *Elm Street* against comparisons to early teen slashers, even though the very acts of distinction

153) Lou Gaul, 'Freddy Krueger's popularity no nightmare', *Burlington County Times*, 23 October 1988, pp. D1, D3.
154) Ibid.
155) Hunt, '"Nightares"', p. 23
156) Lovell, 'The "professor of horror films"', p. A1.

underwriting this practice often involved replicating textual and extra-textual dimensions of early teen slashers that had been obfuscated during the reconstruction of their genre persona. Paying close attention to genre personae also enabled this essay to expose a hitherto unacknowledged class dimension shaping the first successful repacking of the American teen slasher film. Differentiating the new films from their generic antecedents involved reorienting class-associations away from the proletarian inflection of the early teen slasher genre persona towards a multifaceted vision of middle-class-belonging determined by economic factors and cultural orientations.

Bearing in mind that the case of Brand *Elm Street* reveals reception cultures (inside and outside of the academy) as well as industry-insiders have a vested interest in circulating misrepresentative images of certain films and groups of films, consideration of genre personae promises to develop understandings of genre as an industrial, aesthetic, and discursive phenomenon. In particular, consideration of genre personae promises to enrich both the currently dominant reception approach to genre, which examines critical and fan responses to, and use of, groups of films, as well as emergent industrially-focused production-content approaches to genre, which examine the dynamics of production trends, textual patterns, and output configurations. Reception studies' necessary distance from the discursive dynamics of reception cultures may be complemented by a comprehensive understanding of output and content. In addition, a deeper appreciation of the cultural politics shaping reception promises to enrich understandings of the economic forces driving production, content, distribution, and marketing. Crucially, the extent to which new insights gleaned from considering genre personae may mandate revision of existing genre histories will only be determined empirically. As this essay perhaps indicates, uncovering the extent to which genre personae and deliberate mischaracterization have shaped genre history, and, by extension, perceptions of media history more generally, requires extensive research, and fine-grained analysis of specific historical circumstances — examples of the midrange, piecemeal scholarship called for by David Bordwell and by Noël Carroll.[157] In the absence of such research, the making of broader claims risks reproducing the very misrepresentations that the approach seeks to counter. Accordingly, while prevalent resource to textual models across the creative industries, coupled with a propensity in reception cultures for disseminating genre personae, suggests cases like New Line's handling of Brand *Elm Street* are not uncommon, elucidation will be restricted at this point to a case touched upon in the introduction to this essay.

The second successful effort to repackage the American teen slasher film started, it turned out, in 1996 when SCREAM was green-lighted by Dimension Pictures, a subsidiary of Miramax films, which itself was a leading independent company that had struggled financially when New Line Cinema was developing into the market leading independent of its day thanks to Brand *Elm Street*.[158] Dimension's handling of its *Scream* property exhib-

157) See David Bordwell, 'Contemporary film studies and the vicissitudes of Grand Theory'; Noel Carroll, 'Prospects for film theory: a personal assessment', both in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 3–36; 37–70.

158) For discussion of the influence of New Line on Miramax and Dimension see Bradley Schauer, "Dimension Films and the exploitation tradition in contemporary Hollywood", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 26, no. 5 (2009), pp. 393–405.

ited key similarities to New Line's handling of Brand *Elm Street*. Against the backdrop of a bold graphic of a hand covered mouth, SCREAM's poster warned that, in "[t]he highly acclaimed new thriller from Wes Craven", "[s]omeone has taken their love for scary movies one step too far". Declarations of quality and of fandom printed atop an uncomplicated composition, which recalled High Concept poster art, framed SCREAM as at once Hollywood fare, quality entertainment, and cult object. The invocation of these supra-generic discursive formations belonged to Dimension's broader efforts to differentiate SCREAM from the genre persona of a group of earlier films. Dialogue extracted from the film for use in audiovisual marketing materials made clear the nature of the films in question. "There all the same", a female youth mused, "some stupid killer stalking some big breasted girl [...]". Prominent among this group, other characters explained, were not only early teen slashers but also the *Elm Street* films. In much the same way as it had appropriated and cemented a genre persona that misrepresented the output of its competitors, including Miramax's debut effort THE BURNING, so was New Line Cinema subject to the very same practices, as invocation of its one-time tent-pole ensured that SCREAM stood to benefit from the blurring of discourse and materiality that publicists might have dubbed "the barrier between dreams and reality".

Richard Nowell teaches American Cinema at Charles University in Prague. He is the author of *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Film Cycle* (2011) and he has also published articles in *Cinema Journal*, *Journal of Film and Video*, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, and *Post Script*. (*Address*: richard_nowell@hotmail.com)

Cited Films:

April Fool's Day (Fred Walton, 1986), *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009), *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989), *The Burning* (Tony Maylem, 1980), *Can't Buy Me Love* (Stev Rash, 1987), *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976), *Commando* (Mark L. Lester, 1985), *Creepshow* (George A. Romero, 1982), *The Dead Zone* (David Cronenberg, 1983) *Dirty Dancing* (Emile Ardolino, 1987), *Dr. Butcher M.D.* (Marino Girolami, 1980), *Dracula* (Todd Browning, 1931), *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma, 1980), *The Empire Strikes Back* (Irwin Kershner, 1980), *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (Stephen Spielberg, 1982), *The Evil Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1981), *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), *Eyes of Laura Mars* (Irwin Kershner, 1978), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (Amy Heckerling, 1982), *Firestarter* (Mark L. Lester, 1984), *Flashdance* (Adrian Lyne, 1983), *Footloose* (Herbert Ross, 1984), *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), *Friday the 13th* (Marcus Nispel, 2009), *Friday the 13th Part 2* (Steve Miner, 1981), *Friday the 13th Part 3: 3D* (Steve Miner, 1982), *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* (Joseph Zito, 1984), *Friday the 13th Part V: A New Beginning* (Danny Steinmann, 1985), *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives* (Tom McLoughlin, 1986), *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood* (John Carl Buechler, 1988), *Friday the 13th Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan* (Rob Hedden, 1989), *Fright Night* (Tom Holland, 1985), *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *Happy Birthday to Me* (J. Lee. Thompson, 1981), *The Karate Kid* (John G. Avildsen, 1984), *Killer Party* (William Fruet, 1986), *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977), *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1971), *Maniac* (William Lustig, 1980), *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Joel Zwick, 2002), *My Bloody Valentine* (Patrick Lussier, 2008), *A Nightmare*

on Elm Street (Wes Craven, 1984), *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Jack Sholder, 1985), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* (Chuck Russell, 1987), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (Renny Harlin, 1988), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* (Stephen Hopkins, 1989), *Poltergeist* (Stephen Spielberg, 1982), *Pink Flamingos* (John Waters, 1972), *Pretty in Pink* (Howard Deutch, 1986), *Prom Night* (Paul Lynch, 1980), *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (George P. Cosmatos, 1985), *Reckless* (James Foley, 1984), *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983), *Risky Business* (Paul Brickman, 1983), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), *Schizoid* (David Paulsen, 1980), *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996), *Scream 2* (Wes Craven, 1997), *Scream 3* (Wes Craven, 2000), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999), *Spiderman* (Sam Raimi, 2002), *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *Terror Train* (Roger Spotiswoode, 1980), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), *Wargames* (John Badham, 1983).

SUMMARY

"Between Dreams and Reality".
Genre Personae, Brand Elm Street, *and Repackaging the American Teen Slasher Film*

Richard Nowell

This essay introduces the concept of "genre persona" — the notion that misleading discourses contribute to perceptions of film categories. It provides a revisionist account of New Line Cinema's handling of its *A Nightmare on Elm Street* property that demonstrates the extent to which the industrial mobilization of genre personae enables product differentiation to be exaggerated. I show that this leading American independent producer-distributor went to great lengths to distinguish its flagship multimedia teen horror franchise from an earlier cycle of films about maniacs menacing young people. Central to New Line's production and distribution strategies, I argue, was the invocation of that cycle's genre persona, wherein constituent films such as HALLOWEEN (1978) and FRIDAY THE 13TH (1980) had been transformed discursively from anodyne youth market date-movies into insidious, misogynist sleaze. In so doing, the company was able to frame its own property as the quintessential Hollywood enterprise of the day, as a form of quality or art cinema, and as an example of cult media — three supra-generic formations that stood in binary opposition to the genre persona of the earlier films. The case of New Line's conduct reveals that genre historiography as a whole may be enriched by confronting the extent to which misrepresentation shapes the circulation of categories of cultural product.