

Erasing the B out of Bad Cinema: Remaking Identity in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*

Craig Frost

The film remake has been theorised and examined since it first appeared during Hollywood's Golden Age. Today, cinematic horror remakes have clearly cemented themselves as a commercially viable facet of popular cinema through the release of recycled narratives such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) and its prequel *The Beginning* (2006), *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006) and *The Hills Have Eyes 2* (2007), *Halloween* (2007), *Halloween 2* (2009), *Friday the 13th* (2009), *My Bloody Valentine 3D* (2009) and *The Last House on the Left* (2009). Steffen Hantke, in his article "Academic Film Criticism, the Rhetoric of Crisis, and the Current State of American Horror Cinema: Thoughts on Canonicity and Academic Anxiety" states:

As many new horror films, directed by up and coming directors fail to make the grade, horror film production is shifting emphasis from innovation to canonisation. Starting with the much-lamented glut of remakes, which entrench the originals even more deeply within the cannon of horror cinema; symptoms of this retrospective orientation are everywhere.¹

Although agreeing with Hantke's argument that the horror remake appears everywhere within the contemporary cinematic landscape, I would

argue that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake and prequel are exceptional cases insofar as they invite contemporary audiences to erase any knowledge or memory of what they might know or have seen of the original text. In being reconstituted through a contemporary aesthetic filter, Hooper's original narrative and its three sequels - which were all unsuccessful both critically and commercial - become fragments of cinematic memory jettisoned into a state of what critics might call B cinema, and equated as bad cinema by contemporary audiences.

When discussing the issue of remaking and sequelisation, Con Verevis, in his book *Film Remakes* states "although film remakes (like genres) are often 'located' in either authors, or texts or audiences, they are in fact not located in any single place but depend upon a network of historically variable relationships."² The specific case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* proves to be emblematic of Verevis' contention when considering the relationship between the source material, which cemented the iconic narratives and characters, and the contemporary remake and prequel, which seek to establish themselves as separate entities. Through this attempt at severing historical ties, the remakes recast characters (such as the iconic figure of Leatherface) and establish a narrative past absent from the original text. The prequel's transformation of history ultimately binds the two films together as a "complete" narrative which leaves Hooper's original creations as fragmented moments of cinematic history inextricably left for dead by a contemporary audience.

Thomas M Leitch, in his article 'Twice-Told Tales: The Rhetoric of the Remake' suggests that "the uniqueness of the film remake, a movie based on another movie, or competing with another movie based on the same property, is indicated by the word *property*."³ Discussing property in an industrial context (who owns the rights to the original material, and how this is appropriated through the process of remaking), Leitch qualifies that "remakes differ from other adaptations to a new medium because of the triangular relationship they establish among themselves, the original film they remake, and the property on which both films are based." Appropriating Leitch's terms and expanding on their original context, I believe that both the initial *Texas* remake and the prequel engage with the construct of property under the guise of identity, and seek to correlate a triangular relationship between the original character constructs, the remake's revised characters and the prequel's transformative nature. In other words, the issue of property in this context deals with the characterisation of a canonical figure (such as Leatherface), and how this property of identity shifts, changes and is recast through the sometime problematic construct of remaking. Like the last film in the remade *Texas* cycle, identity proves to be something that

can easily shift away from an original context, reappropriating the past into something that can be perceived to be new or different.

Examining the remake through its non-exclusive positioning in relation to texts, authors and audiences can enable a systematic understanding of how identity is mapped in relation to both narrative and character in the *Texas* cycle. Although often cited as excessive, gaudy and ultimately pointless exercises in narrative regurgitation, it can thus be argued that the *Texas* remakes are emblematic of something much more interesting and worthy of academic study.

Authors

Released in 1974, Tobe Hooper's low budget foray into horror is regarded within some academic circles as the most revered film within its genre. As Mike Quarles states in his book *Down and Dirty: Hollywood's Exploitation Filmmakers and their Movies*:

There are some films that make a fellow speak from the heart. The kind that moved you, the kind that makes a difference in your life. For me, a formative experience as a writer and sometime filmmaker was the first time I saw *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.⁴

At the time of release, Hooper's film embedded itself into the cinematic consciousness through its unrelenting violence and gut wrenching terror. Set in Texas on 18th August 1973, the film begins with an epilogue which not only forewarns the audience of the content of the film, but imbues the narrative presented with a sense of reality. Establishing that the events which the audience is about to watch pertain to "the most bizarre crimes in the annals of American history," the epilogue evokes a sense of unquestionable reality which is only reinforced through a nightmarish tone devoid of aesthetic theatricality. Beginning with the story of five teenage friends driving through Texas, the film rapidly descends into a nightmarish spectacular as Leatherface and his family terrorise and savagely murder the teens one by one. It is ultimately Sally, the film's final girl, who escapes the clutches of Leatherface and manages to ride off in the back of a truck into the sunset and to freedom.

Upon its release, *Texas* quickly refused the B movie status that was anticipated for it. As Quarles writes, "critics went in expecting to see a crude gore movie and something that was a nightmare brought to life. But this waking nightmare, this dip into total insanity, was by no means crude; it was a perfectly crafted film that achieved its aim 100 percent."⁵ Establishing a tone of almost unbearable intensity, Hooper cemented himself as a

filmmaker who was able to imbue cultural and political anxieties within a narrative focused on the horrific and macabre. Delving into the post-Vietnam cultural psyche, Hooper's *Texas* (like many horror films of the time) established a distinct subtext which enabled the horrific actions on screen to affectively resonate both cinematically and psychologically, while avoiding the use of graphic onscreen violence. While embedding allegorical commentaries on the financial and literal death of rural American towns, and on the parallels between the civilised and the savage, Hooper's text also offered a kind of warning for the actively mobile generation who constituted the intended audience for the film. His distinct visual style and nightmarish intensity imbued the arbitrary death of innocent youths with a cautionary tone.

Released in 2003, Marcus Nispel's remake proved to be a box office success, grossing \$80 million in its US cinematic release period alone.⁶ Borrowing the fundamental narrative elements of the original film, Nispel's remake tells the familiar story of five friends who become stranded in the middle of rural Texas and are slaughtered by Leatherface, a psychopathic, chainsaw wielding maniac, and his cannibalistic, redneck, inbred family. Erin, her boyfriend Kemper, attractive 'jock' Andy, nerd Morgan and hippie hitchhiker Pepper end up in the house of the Hewitt clan (unlike Hooper's original narrative, the savage family are provided with names in the remake) after picking up a stranger who kills herself after realising that she is headed back to the Hewitt's house. After all of her friends are brutally disposed of, Erin, in true final girl style, gets her "Ripley" on and fights back, ultimately surviving the ordeal through her ability to pick locks and hot wire cars.

From the outset, the remake's narrative introduces the original's verite approach by suggesting that what the audience is watching has been based on real events. A montage of images including autopsy reports, extreme close-ups of body parts, newspaper clippings and an excerpt from police film footage of a walkthrough in the Hoyt's basement introduce the audience to the graphic tone of the film. Spoken by John Larroquette, whose narration appeared within the original film, the opening monologue also attempts to imply a sense of nostalgic, intertextual linkage; a suggestive nod towards Hooper's film for those that have experienced the original.

However, Nispel soon breaks the historic facade of the film with beautiful imagery of sun drenched fields and sweaty tanned, toned youth who epitomise the polished and sleek style that will be carried throughout the rest of the narrative. Establishing this distinct visual beauty, Nispel "sets the contradictory time-warped tone for what is to come"⁷ and embarks on a highly stylised journey which emphasises his technical ability to create set

pieces of immense beauty and spectacle. With a background in music videos and commercials, Nispel unmistakably develops a tonality which erodes any sense of historical replication alluded to during the film's opening sequence. Instead, he retracts all allusion to Hooper's film, and aligns the film with the tonality of those made by the remake's producer Michael Bay. It is this shift, from the initial narrative and visual fidelity to an individualistic and contemporary tone, which marks the remake's shift in historical property. No longer indebted to the original film's distinct verite style, Nispel and Bay consolidate their trademark visual panache and recast the trademark title with an altered, and more recognisable authorial presence.

This is further highlighted in the trailer for the remake, in which Michael Bay is the only featured name associated with the film. Stating "from producer Michael Bay," this invites the audience to understand the film as the property of a particular auteur and reneges any acknowledgement of Hooper's historical ownership. We no longer associate *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* with Tobe Hooper; instead the cultural signifier is transposed to Michael Bay and his authorial status as creator.

It is Bay's authorial presence that is carried through the franchise with the release of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* in 2006. Although the film is directed by Jonathan Liebesman, it replicates the tone and visual flair of producer Bay's initial remake. Inviting the audience to "witness the birth of terror," *The Beginning* provides an historical account of the Hewitt clan, and specifically Leatherface and his adopted father Sheriff Hoyt. Although initially presenting an alternative and more interesting scenario than Nispel's film (which I will discuss later), *The Beginning* ultimately replicates the initial remake's narrative when - once again - four young nubile teenagers are slaughtered for the audience's viewing pleasure. Again boasting Bay's name in the trailer and promotional material, this film seeks to cement his authorial presence and reforge the film's cultural identity within his body of work.

Texts

As discussed, the authorial remapping of the *Texas* name is heavily reliant on the visual recasting of both the initial remake and the subsequent prequel. I would now like to focus on how these texts seek to visually reframe Hooper's original narrative, thus establishing a new sense of cultural identification in correlation with the *Texas* franchise. As described, the opening sequence of the remake in which the five young characters are introduced both borrows from and rejects Hooper's source material. Nispel's film signals the specific date of the events as the 20th of August 1973. Di-

rectly engaging with Hooper's narrative (which is set two days before – 18th of August 1973) this specific positioning of events invites the audience to assume that there is some correlation between the two narratives. In attempting to forge a narrative bridge between the two films, this onscreen title demonstrates a highly problematic feature of remaking, in that audience members are ultimately required to have seen the original in order to make sense of the connection. As Fredric Jameson states:

The word remake is ... anachronistic to the degree to which our awareness of the pre-existence of other versions is now constitutive and essential part of the film's structure: we are now, in other words, in "intertextuality" as a deliberate, built in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of "pastness" and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic style displaces "real" history.⁸

In his review of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake, Scott Foundas states that "in the press notes, one of the executive producers notes admits that the idea for the remake stemmed from research showing that 90% of the film's core, males-under-25 audience knew the title of Hooper's film, but had never seen it."⁹ In light of Jameson's comments on the remake and intertextuality, the *Texas* remake can prove to be problematic insofar as the film's target audience would not be equipped to appreciate the attempt to forge a correlation between the two films.

Furthermore, in an attempt to modernise the look of the film, Nispel's film goes against the cinematic style and mood of Hooper's original text and produces a film in which history becomes irrelevant. As previously discussed, Hooper's film became reliant on not actually depicting scenes of extreme violence or gore; instead the narrative attacked the audience psychologically. In both Nispel and Liebesman's films the intended affect does not replicate the original film's ability to induce palpable terror; rather, set pieces of extreme violence, torture and mutilation attempt to evoke physical repulsion from the audience. In their shift in aesthetic affect, these contemporary films successfully exploit what Scott A Lukas and John Marmysz discuss as "technology offering new possibilities for remaking the world. Because film and media technologies have advanced, there exist the new possibilities to remake films in new ways-adding more sophisticated special effects."¹⁰ In this case, these effects become the focus of the narrative.

This is emphasised through many set pieces, but none more graphic and shocking as the sequence in which the group pick up a traumatised hitchhiker. As the female hitchhiker warns the group they're all going to die, she pulls a gun out from between her legs and shoots herself in the head.

Disturbing in itself, the sequence is further exploited as Nispel uses a tracking shot which initially frames the characters' reactions, but then dollies back through the gunshot hole in the hitchhiker's head, taking the audience inside the cavity and out the rear window of the van.

When juxtaposed with the use of the same character in the original narrative, the overextension of visual effects in this sequence highlights how the film shifts its intended affect on the audience. In the original, the hitchhiker, who we later learn is a part of the savage family unit, embeds the formidable sense of dread through his erratic demeanour and predilection for slicing flesh. He lays a blood soaked handprint on the exterior of the van as a symbol of the group's ultimate demise. Nispel's modification of the character through the female hitchhiker supplants his previous visual style as he launches his onslaught of extreme explicit violence and visual viscera on the audience. Establishing that the source of the horror will originate through the visual image, the film erases any form of atmospheric terror associated with Hooper's text, and through set pieces of dismemberment and torture attempts to forge an aesthetic to test the viewer's ability to watch what they are seeing on screen. In an endeavour to show the audience everything, Nispel works against Hooper's original intention of creating a film that locates the terror within the viewer's mind. Hooper himself stated "I knew that in film theory that tantalizing the audience with the promise of an image, and then getting around it editorially, allows everything to happen in the mind. We fill in the blank, I think, with much more serious information than we could have seen anyway."¹¹

This use of the visual image is further highlighted in Andy's death sequence, in which he runs into a maze of white sheets billowing in the breeze while attempting to out run Leatherface and his roaring chainsaw. Combining aerial, point of view and frenetic tracking shots, we see Andy's unsuccessful escape, ending with the severing of one of his legs. The combination of the slow motion shot of the leg being sliced, the blood splatter on the white sheets and the image of the severed limb combine to create an impressive set piece of visual nastiness. Like the entire film, the sequence doesn't attempt to evoke any other reaction from its viewer apart from physical recoil. We are not invited to care about the fate of Andy, he is just another body to dissect and decimate. Compared to the original film in which Hooper implied the violence rather than explicitly depicted it, Nispel's vision of violence fails to hold anything back for the audience's imagination to envisage or imagine. This contemporary re-visioning demonstrates the conflicting modes of reproduction and representation that demarcate the aesthetic distance between the two films through its shifting of receptive modes.

Stephen Price notes this shift between the two periods of horror cinema stating:

But it would be the horror genre, at least in its modern reincarnation relative to the pictures of early decades, that would become synonymous with a detailed visual attention to the mechanics of violent death and graphic mutilation, to the point where this imagery and the emotional responses it elicits in viewers would become the very style and subject matter of the films.¹²

Although Price is discussing the horror films of the early 80s, his summation of the graphic image becoming the style and matter of the film can aptly be applied to the resurgence of the horror remake. Though not all films place their sole emphasis on style and graphic mutilation (Alexandra Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes* remake imbues a post 9-11 subtext within its narrative of the nuclear family under attack from nuclear mutants), the form in which these films convey their terror are all reliant on the graphic representation of violence.

Audiences

As previously discussed, when examining the issue of identity and reconstruction within the remaking paradigm, the manner in which the remake appropriates or borrows from its original source instantly draws direct (or sometime indirect) comparisons and judgements from audiences. In relation to the initial *Texas* film and the subsequent remakes, the transformative nature of character construction and archetype formation is initially focused on the iconic figure of Leatherface. The theatrical trailer for Nispel's remake plays with the notion of the unveiling of Leatherface; only allowing audiences brief glimpses of his shadowy silhouette. Although his roaring chainsaw and hanging meat hook are present - the synonymous implements of death from Hooper's original film - the reincarnated monster is given a truly theatrical (and memorable) entrance only within the feature length film. Already playing on the mysterious construct of Leatherface's physical identity, the trailer entices audiences to neglect previous guises of the hulking figure, and create a vested curiosity in this current reincarnation.

Although initially seen subduing Kemper and dragging him down to his basement slaughter room, Nispel unveils his monster with tremendous theatricality and fanfare, recasting the character's mythological status within the horror genre. As Erin and Andy are discovered searching the Hoyt's residence for Kemper, Monty, the wheelchair bound member of the Hewitt

clan, tells Andy “you’re so dead you don’t even know it”. Banging his cane on the ground and bellowing “come on boy, bring it,” he summons Leatherface who emerges wielding his trademark tool of death and dismemberment. Although replicating similar sequences from Hooper’s original film, Nispel combines the two narrative images synonymous with the film’s title (Leatherface and a chainsaw) to create his own distinguished moment when unveiling his reincarnation of the character. Although initially intended to instil terror and fear in the audience, the sequence ultimately becomes a moment of self-reverentiality as audiences are asked to detach themselves from any former portrayal and revel in the sight of the character’s re-embodiment.

This reestablishment of the iconic figure of Leatherface is further entrenched for the audience through the 2006 prequel which chronologically cements the reconstituted character’s origins. Displacing any semblance of Hooper’s narrative, *The Beginning* recasts the historical mythology of the characters and bestows on the audience a form of psychological justification for the character’s actions. Observing Leatherface’s mother, a meat plant worker and part-time prostitute, give birth and discard the deformed baby into a bin, the audience witnesses both the physical and symbolic delivery of a cinematic icon. It is this creation of new life that consolidates the metamorphosis of the recast figure of Leatherface for a contemporary audience, eclipsing any previous reincarnation or personification. Charting both his psychological and physical development from infantile curiosity to psychopathic enjoyment, the audience is privy to Leatherface’s first animal kills and his fascination with making masks out of their skin to cover his own deformity, which is also displaced from the original remake’s narrative (the audience is told that he has a skin disease). This character development is then strengthened as the audience is invited to observe Leatherface’s first human kill, his boss at the meat plant.

Reinforcing the ‘justification’ in shifting from animal victims to humans, Leatherface murders his boss after being told that his employment has been terminated due to the plant closing for health reasons. No longer being able to legitimate his thirst for violence and dismemberment, Leatherface turns his skills onto his employer and fulfils his destiny as one of horror cinema’s most iconic villains.

What I find most interesting about this establishment of heritage is the justification given to Leatherface’s predilection for murder. As mentioned, in Nispel’s initial remake, Leatherface was born with a skin condition, hence his predilection for wearing masks made initially from animal skin, and eventually from human flesh. The original narrative doesn’t attempt to pre-scribe any form of rationale as to why Leatherface is what he is; it is just an

attributed facet to the family's unstable and homicidal nature. However within *The Beginning*, Leatherface is constantly referred to as being retarded or an animal by others, which appears to instil a sense of justifiable revenge in his actions. Similar to Rob Zombie's revisioning of John Carpenter's *Halloween* in which Michael Myers is given a history and ultimately a sympathetic positioning as a victim of bullying and an abusive stepfather; Leatherface's physical deformities define his actions as understandable rather than abstract. Erasing any semblance of audience interpretation, these current narratives appear to necessitate justification and validation for the gruesome actions that the characters take part in which removes the unpredictable and unsettling nature of the original film's tone. Whereas Hooper created an atmosphere which amalgamated absurd black comedy with palpable terror, both the initial remake and the prequel erase any semblance of the original tone through cementing Leatherface's actions within an understandable, moralistic, and almost sympathetic characterisation. Linnie Blake, in her book *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* states:

But unlike Hooper's original he is here depicted, at least by his family, as a victim of 'cruelty and ridicule' heaped upon him because of a skin complaint that begins in childhood. Thus while he retains his penchant for impaling individuals (this time male) on meat hooks and running around in the dark with his chainsaw on full throttle, his predilection for wearing the faces of the dead is presented as a perversely justifiable desire to emulate those who have rejected him in childhood.¹³

Although somewhat reductive, this interpretation of a form of justification demonstrates how a character can shift and change as different films attempt to emulate a sense of verisimilitude with the property of an iconic figure through altered rationales. As Sheriff Hoyt replies when told that he hasn't raised his 'retarded' son right, "he aint retarded, he's just misunderstood."

Alongside Leatherface, the construction of the character of Sheriff Hewitt provides another shift in how audience members are invited to replace previous character incarnations. As much as the prequel implies that its narrative is invested with the emergence of the character of Leatherface, it can in fact be seen as the birth of Sheriff Hoyt. R. Lee Emery recycles his infamous Drill Sergeant persona from *Full Metal Jacket* into another representative of regimented power (this time the police force) in the role of Sheriff Hoyt. However, unlike his previous role which was situated within the confines of a regimented army barracks, Emery's interpretation of Sher-

iff Hoyt forms a predominant source of bad taste and grotesque humour throughout (he at one point gropes the breast of the dead hitchhiker and remarks on the perks of his job). Providing what can be seen as the human horror (which works in conjunction with Leatherface's monstrous horror), Emery's characterisation of the brutal and appalling head of the community can be seen as an amalgamation of both the Hitchhiker and Old Man characters from the original film. Representing both the head of the Hewitt family and that of the almost defunct community, Emery ingratiates both the sadistic nature of the Hitchhiker and the semi-monstrous character of the Old Man, but revises both of these characters in transcending the most vile and horrific aspects of humanity.

Proving to be more memorable than the hulking and almost animalistic Leatherface, the character of Sheriff Hoyt is distinctly expanded within the narrative of *The Beginning*; ultimately becoming the true focus of horror within the series. Within the initial remake's characterisation, the figure of Hoyt is seen as a form of salvation for Erin and her friends through his status of law enforcer. Like the Old Man, who in the original narrative similarly provides initial hope for Sally, Hoyt's figure of Sheriff presupposes an emblematic position of good until his true nature emerges. However, throughout Nispel's film, this character - like Leatherface himself - proves to be a narrative tool used to both terrorise and entertain the audience. It is not until the prequel that the character is actually given any appropriated sense of identity, as the narrative enacts his transformation from Charlie, the red-neck male figure of the Hewitt clan, to Sheriff Hoyt. Through the murder of the previous Sheriff, Hoyt assumes his identity, and with it a sense of power and purpose. As he is given his new, freshly ironed uniform and proudly pins on his adopted badge, director Liebesman relishes the character's emergence in the transformation from country hick to Sheriff. Replicating the original film's early montage sequence and the subsequent symbolic emergence of Leatherface and his chainsaw, Liebesman gives Hoyt the same precedence as we witness the first time he wears his uniform and assumes the power of this persona.

This is furthered through Hoyt's monologue, which again provides a justification or explanation as to why the Hewitt family kill and eat human flesh indiscriminately. Sitting down to a pot of "Sheriff" stew, Hoyt says "people may not remember what we say here tonight, but they sure as shit going to remember what we do." This recasting of the character provides the audience with justification for the cannibalistic impulses, but also establishes a retrospective continuity within the character's mythology that the audience can recognise. Whereas in the initial remake, the community of people left in the town appear to be just savage hillbillies without any form

of justification or purpose, the prequel recasts the characters with some semblance of purpose and identity. They are no longer just the stereotypical cultural aberrations of rural America killing indiscriminately; they are the survivors of a once prosperous town who are forced to do the most inhumane of actions to survive.

Demonstrating a particular knowledge of Hooper's narrative, this sequence of cannibalistic consumption also proves to be indicative of discourse surrounding the nature of the remake itself. As Hoyt consumes both the Sheriff's flesh and identity, and transforms himself into something new, the filmic cannibalism of Hooper's narrative proves symptomatic of the time in which it has been made. Although previously discussed in relation to the depiction of violence, the contemporary reconstitution of character motivation and identity clearly shifts in accordance with the cultural climate from which the remade film emerges. As Anne Friedberg states, "in Benjaminian terms the 'aura' of the event has already disappeared in the mechanical reproduction of itself, but the aura of the original moment of exhibition also disappeared."¹⁴ Feeding into the issue of how the film and narratives are received by audiences, Hooper's film was understood to display the cultural anxieties surrounding post-Vietnam America, a theme that is completely excluded within the initial remake. However, the issue of political implications emerges in the prequel as Liebesman recycles Hooper's subtext through the direct integration of themes involving the unease with America's involvement in Vietnam, and the decline of rural America. Failing to capitalise on the original post-Vietnam cultural climate from which Hooper's film emerged, this induction of subtext functions primarily as narrative fodder, restricting character engagement for a contemporary audience. As Friedberg discusses, the political and cultural aura associated with the original text appears to have disappeared in relation to the remake and prequel, as through the reproduction of character archetypes, the interest appears to shift away from the traditional identifiable protagonists (who ultimately fail to survive), to the monstrous Hewitt family. By reshaping the villain's heritage and forging a correlating bond between the two contemporary narratives, audiences are presented with characters that ultimately are not indicative of their contemporary political and cultural contexts, but rather are reincarnated replicates which are intended to overshadow and replace their original source.

Discussing the intention of the remake, Leitch states that:

Remakes also seek to please both the audiences who have seen the films on which they are based and audiences who have not, but their task is complicated by the fact that instead of advertising the original films, they are competing with them, and so cannot risk in-

voicing memories of the earlier film too fervently even though they are limited in the kinds of novelty they can introduce, since they are telling the same story again rather than developing a familiar story in a new direction.¹⁵

Furthering this construct of erasure and replacement, the use of actors familiar to audiences overshadows the roles recycled from Hooper's original source through distinct intertextual connections. Instantly breaking the original's use of non professional actors, the two Michael Bay produced films cast television and film actors such as Jessica Biel, Eric Balfour, Jordana Brewster and R. Lee Emery in lead roles. As previously mentioned in relation to the construction of the Sheriff Hoyt character, the implementation of familiar actors establishes an intertextual connotation of character dynamics which transplants the audience's connection away from the original narrative to a more contemporary point of reference. This is most evident in Nispel's construct of Erin, the film's final girl. Coming from the successful television program *7th Heaven*, a family orientated drama centred on a family headed by a Protestant minister, Biel's role within the *Texas* remake instantly taps into her previous characterisation of Mary from the television program. Reproducing Mary's moralistic and virtuous persona, Erin is immediately established as the film's moral centre and provides the audience with a known character reference.

Cementing a distinct character motif, the casting of Biel reflects Jameson's comments on "a new connotation of pastness" as audiences are invited not to draw a connection with Hooper's original final girl Sally from 1974, but with the television program that Biel was in from 1996. In casting Biel in the lead role, Nispel removes any connective relationship between the two characters, which in turn erases the character's history as Sally is no longer a point of reference for audience recognition. Instead, the audience is intertextually navigated toward Biel's previous roles as a form of historical reference which erases Hooper's original characters.

Further, the expansion of the role of Erin and her ability to survive through resilience and strength contradicts Hooper's characterisation of Sally, who ultimately survives through chance and luck rather than her ability to retaliate against those who seek to harm her. Drawing on a heritage of tough female characters such as Sigourney Weaver's Ellen Ripley or Linda Hamilton's Sarah Conner, Erin appears to emerge as an emblematic figure of a current cinematic character trend rather than from Hooper's original creation. Biel herself states:

Her name's Erin, and she's the glue that holds everybody together. She's compassionate and kind of mothering. She tries to save all her

friends, though they end up getting killed anyway. What's really cool about her is she has a will to survive and the strength to fight. She's not a victim. She's a strong, pissed-off young woman.¹⁶

As Biel somewhat simplistically proposes, this reincarnation of the narrative's sole survivor is not reliant on a male truck driver to facilitate her freedom (which is how Hooper's narrative ended); it is her own self reliance that enables her escape and ultimate survival.

When examining the nature of remaking and sequelisation, one cannot help but return to the initial question: why? Considering Hantke's argument that the popular trend of horror remakes directs the audience back to the original source and thus entrenches it within the horror cinema cannon, it emerges as a neat but problematic conclusion. Although proving to be a commercially driven exercise for studios, the recasting of a previous narrative also invites audiences to supplant a fragmented history of the "original" text (a mask, a tool of destruction or even an iconic death sequence) with a new narrative, intent on fashioning a contemporary identification with its audience. Although I do not wish to proclaim this as a good thing (or even a bad thing), what this interrogation does is enable an investigation into how contemporary filmmakers deal with the difficult concept of cultural property, and in turn how this recasting of history entwines a contemporary audience within an already established intertextual relationship. As Nispel's film ultimately reveals, audiences are no longer obligated to remember or revisit the original source material, as the previously celebrated narrative is no longer the historical marker for intertextual reference. Instead, through the remake and prequel, audiences are asked to accept the reinvented characters as replacements. As Leitch states:

The audience for sequels wants to find out more, to spend more time with characters they are interested in and to find out what happened to them after their story was over. The audience for remakes does not expect to find out anything new in this sense: they want the same story again, though not exactly the same.¹⁷

Monash University

craig-frost@hotmail.com

NOTES

- ¹ Steffen Hantke, "Academic Film Criticism, the Rhetoric of Crisis, and the Current State of American Horror Cinema: Thoughts on Canonicity and Academic Anxiety", *College Literature* 34.4 (2007) 197.
- ² Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006) 2.
- ³ Thomas M Leitch, "Twice-Told Tales: The Rhetoric of the Remake", *Literature/Film Quarterly* 18.3 (1990) 139.
- ⁴ Quarles, *Down and Dirty*, 99.
- ⁵ Mike Quarles, *Down and Dirty: Hollywood's Exploitation Filmmakers and Their Movies*, (USA: McFarland and Company Publishers, 1993) 108.
- ⁶ Peter Debruge, *Variety.com*, October 2006, Monash University, date of access 1 May 08, <<http://ezproxy-authcate.lib.monash.edu.au/cgi-bin/authcate.pl?url=http://proquest.umi.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/pqdweb?did=1142452261&sid=2&Fmt=1&clientId=16397&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.
- ⁷ Mark Kermode, "What a Carve Up", *Sight and Sound* 13.12 (2003) 13.
- ⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 20.
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