

**A Scope e-Book**

# **CULTURAL BORROWINGS**

## **Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation**

**Edited by  
Iain Robert Smith**



*Blank Page*

*A Scope e-Book*

***Cultural Borrowings:  
Appropriation, Reworking,  
Transformation***

*Edited by Iain Robert Smith*

Published by: *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, 2009

Copyright: *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*

ISBN 978-0-9564641-0-1

Cover Design: Iain Robert Smith

Photo Credits: Benjamin Miller and Bart Everson

# Table of Contents

Notes on Contributors.....	i
Acknowledgements .....	iv

Foreword: <i>Scope's</i> Tenth Anniversary .....	v
<i>Mark Gallagher and Julian Stringer</i>	

Introduction .....	1
<i>Iain Robert Smith</i>	

## **Part I: Hollywood Cinema and Artistic Imitation**

Exploitation as Adaptation.....	8
<i>I.Q. Hunter</i>	

The Character-Oriented Franchise: Promotion and Exploitation of pre-sold characters in American film, 1913-1950.....	34
<i>Jason Scott</i>	

Novelty through Repetition: Exploring the Success of Artistic Imitation in the Contemporary Film Industry, 1983-2007 .....	56
<i>Stijn Joye</i>	

## **Part II: Found Footage and Remix Culture**

A Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing: Contemporary Found Footage Practice on the Internet .....	76
<i>Eli Horwatt</i>	

Ethical Possession: Borrowing from the Archives.....	92
<i>Emma Cocker</i>	

Music Videos and Reused Footage.....	111
<i>Sérgio Dias Branco</i>	

### **Part III: Modes of Parody and Pastiche**

From Cult to Subculture: Re imaginings of Cult Films in Alternative Music Video.....	124
<i>Brigid Cherry</i>	
Queering the Cult of <i>Carrie</i> : Appropriations of a Horror Icon in Charles Lum's <i>Indelible</i> .....	138
<i>Darren Elliott</i>	
Irony Inc.: Parodic-Doc Horror and <i>The Blair Witch Project</i> .....	157
<i>Jordan Lavender-Smith</i>	

### **Part IV: Transnational Screen Cultures**

A Marxist's Gotta Do What a Marxist's Gotta Do: Political Violence on the Italian Frontier .....	176
<i>Austin Fisher</i>	
"Tom Cruise? Tarantino? E.T.? ...Indian!": Innovation through imitation in the Cross-cultural Bollywood Remake.....	194
<i>Neelam Sidhar Wright</i>	
"La Television des Professeurs?": Charles Dickens, French Public Service Television and <i>Olivier Twist</i> .....	211
<i>Pamela Atzori</i>	

## Notes on Contributors

**Pamela Atzori** is currently a Doctoral student at Aberystwyth University in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies. Her thesis is entitled *The Dickens Phenomenon and His Enduring Popularity on International TV Adaptations: The Encounter between Popular Literature and the Universal Screen Cultures it Inspired*. She is currently preparing an article for publication in an international multi-disciplinary volume on Charles Dickens. Her main research interests are TV drama (particularly Victorian literary adaptations) and popular television, as well as national European television and cinema in general.

**Sérgio Dias Branco** is researcher in film and philosophy at the New University of Lisbon and an invited member of the film analysis group The Magnifying Glass of the University of Oxford. He has taught film and television at the University of Kent, where he is completing a PhD on the aesthetic patterns of television fiction series. His research on the aesthetics of moving images has been presented at Yale University and the University of Glasgow, among others. Sérgio's writing has been published in *Refractory* -- forthcoming publications include an essay on film noir, and book chapters on *Battlestar Galactica*, Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction*, and Guy Maddin's cinema.

**Brigid Cherry** teaches courses on the horror genre, cult film and television, and music in popular culture. She has researched horror film fandom, particularly the female audience, and other cult and fan audiences. She recently published a book on horror cinema with Routledge.

**Emma Cocker** is a writer and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University. Book chapters include 'Not Yet There: Endless Searches and Irresolvable Quests' in *Telling Stories: Countering Narrative in Art, Theory and Film* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009); 'Over and Over Again and Again' in *Classical Myth/Contemporary Art* (Ashgate Publishing, 2010) and 'From Passivity to Potentiality: The Dynamic of Stillness' in *Stillness in a Mobile World* (Library of Sociology Series, Routledge, 2011).

**Darren Elliott** is a doctoral candidate in Media Arts at Royal Holloway and Film Education Coordinator at the University of Hertfordshire. His thesis *Queer Horror Film and the Erotic Male Spectacle* considers an emerging sub-genre of parodic horror titles that foreground the erotic evisceration of the male body, via the adoption of hypermasculine iconography in a desperate disavowal of the "horrific" conflation of gay masculinity with femininity. He has presented papers at Cine Excess, Brunel University; New Nightmares, Manchester Metropolitan University and Monsters and Monstrosity, Oxford University.

**Austin Fisher** recently received his doctorate from Royal Holloway, University of London, and also holds degrees from the University of Birmingham and Queen Mary, University of London. His PhD thesis, *Radical Frontiers: Political Violence in the Italian Western*, analyses militant left-wing trends which arose from within the "Spaghetti" Western genre around the time of the 1968 protest movements.

Cultural Borrowings:  
Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation  
ISBN: 978-0956464101

**Eli Horwatt** is a doctoral candidate in the department of Film and Media Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada. His thesis, *The Work of Art in the age of [ctrl]-C: Digital Remixing and Contemporary Found Footage Film Practice on the Internet*, delineates the relationship between avant-garde film aesthetics and videos made by subcultures of media activists on the Internet. He has published on Machinima and experimental media, and writes about strategies of appropriation in art and the moving image.

**I.Q. Hunter** is Principal Lecturer in Film Studies at De Montfort University, Leicester. He has published widely on horror, science fiction and exploitation cinema.

**Stijn Joye** is a research and teaching assistant in the Department of Communication Studies at Ghent University (Belgium) where he is a member of the 'Centre for Cinema and Media Studies' (CIMS) and 'Center for Journalism Studies' (CJS). His areas of research and publication include the concept of artistic imitation in film, international news (agencies), and the representation of global suffering. He is currently finalising a PhD on the news media coverage of international humanitarian crises. In 2006 he was awarded the IAMCR Prize in Memory of Herbert I. Schiller.

**Jordan Lavender-Smith** is pursuing his Ph.D. in English and Film Studies at the City University of New York's Graduate Center. His academic interests include self-reflexivity in fiction and film, seriality and addiction, Early- and Post-modern dramaturgy, and, more generally, the cultural causes and consequences of literary forms. He teaches in the English department at the City University of New York's Queens College.

**Jason Scott** lectures in Film Studies at Leeds Trinity & All Saints. His Ph.D. thesis, *Discourses recognizing aesthetic innovation in cinema: Bonnie and Clyde, a case study*, adopted a historical reception approach, applying discourse analysis to explore critical and wider receptions of the film. He is currently developing research on the character-oriented franchise in film and related media into a book *The Character-Oriented Franchise*. His previous articles have featured in Geraghty and Jancovich (eds.) (2008) *The Shifting Definitions of Genre and Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*.

**Iain Robert Smith** is a doctoral candidate in the Institute of Film and Television Studies at the University of Nottingham. His thesis, *Hollywood Remix: Transcultural Appropriation in the Popular Cinemas of Turkey, India and the Philippines*, explores the myriad ways in which iconic elements of American popular culture have been borrowed and transformed in other national contexts. He has published articles on this theme in *Velvet Light Trap* and *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*.

**Neelam Sidhar Wright** is a doctoral candidate in the school of Media, Film and Music at the University of Sussex. Her thesis *Bollywood Eclipsed: The postmodern aesthetics, scholarly appeal and remaking of contemporary popular Indian cinema* uses postmodern and adaptation theory to explore how Bollywood has changed after its economic liberalisation at the turn of the twenty-first century.



Cultural Borrowings:  
Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation  
ISBN: 978-0956464101

Her research offers a redefinition of contemporary Bollywood cinema and suggests ways in which this cinema can be better incorporated into Western film studies courses.

## **Queering the Cult of *Carrie*: Appropriations of a Horror Icon in Charles Lum's *Indelible***

*Darren Elliott, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK*

The cult of *Carrie* (1976) from its origins in Stephen King's novel through to De Palma's initial cinematic interpretation, has accumulated a wealth of *queer* appropriations in both cinema and the theatre. Given Carrie's status as cultural icon, her simultaneous status as horror film victim and monster, alongside the narrative concerning her burgeoning sexuality and attraction to boys she may well be situated as a powerful figure of identification for gay male spectators. The very act of appropriating imagery and the iconography from mainstream and cult film works to reconfigure gendered subjectivities that are imposed upon subjects via ideological (and often heteronormative) narratives. However, despite the radical, queer potential of appropriation, the gay male subject's apparently understandable association with the horror genre's paradoxical passive/aggressive ingénue in fact masks a wealth of unease and anxiety that ultimately longs for her death. In this paper, I intend to discuss the various queer appropriations of Brian De Palma's film *Carrie*, considering the queer appeal of De Palma's original film, then by way of legitimate theatrical adaptations to camp musical parody on the US salon-art circuit, and finally to those in video art -- particularly Charles Lum's *Indelible* (2004) an experimental short that fuses De Palma's films with hypermasculine hardcore gay pornography. These adaptations, and *Indelible* in particular, will show how the act of appropriating imagery can work to challenge and reconfigure gendered subjectivities that ideological narratives impose upon spectators.

It is this notion of the shame felt by the ridiculed victim -- personified in Carrie White -- that the gay male subject (notably gay male fans of De Palma's film) forms a strong identification with. Shamed, ridiculed and embarrassed, yet radical in his vengeance, the gay male subject specifically identifies with the female protagonists of *Carrie*, for various reasons including an obvious association with persecuted sexuality and a fantasised empowerment in the vengeance wreaked out upon tormentors. The very same anxiety and trauma is 'worked through' via the perpetual repetition of images and appropriation of the *Carrie* cult phenomena and has given rise to a plethora of theatrical, film and video appropriations that range from drag stage Rocky-Horror style musical versions, horror and comic film references, to the film's assimilation and appropriation within video art. Queer homage, adaptations and interpretations of *Carrie* often read the source text as a malleable, satirical, critically acclaimed and now seminal work with a fragmentary template that invites ironic reading, re-assembly and reinterpretation.

Why *Carrie*? What is it about this specific horror text that holds such strong appeal for the gay male spectator and for artists and performers who have assimilated it into queer culture?

*Carrie's* narrative is a variation on the 'coming out' tale, both sexually and socially and revolves around the awkwardness of revealing one's own sexuality to one's parents (especially one's mother) and the guilt or shame involved in doing so. The film also has both cult and camp allure for the gay male spectator deriving mainly from its use of excess, in the excessive style and form of De Palma's direction in terms of lighting, colour-coding, melodramatic use of music and score and in its exaggerated melodramatic acting (specifically from Piper Laurie and Nancy Allen). Like many horror films, *Carrie* solicits cross-gender identification for the (gay) male spectator but does so via its basic coming-of-age or teenage sexual awakening narrative and also with Carrie as a bullied or marginalised individual. Yet this strong pull of identification implies a similarity between femininity and gay male or queer sexuality and, in a sense, also provides the main source of tension for gay male spectators.

The gay male subject, while presenting an overwhelming identification with Carrie et al, is actually perfecting a desperate DIS-identification [1] with the feminine abject they come to represent via this inference. In this text that is arguably about women (*Carrie* is considered by its author Stephen King to be 'a feminist tale' (Clover, 1992: 3), the gay male subject in his assumed passivity appears to have been aligned and associated with female disempowerment within patriarchal society. But what is revealed in the queer reception and adaptations of *Carrie* is more of a subjective oscillation between a rejection of this shameful feminine association and a powerful identification with the female subject in terms of her repressed cultural place. In *Carrie's* excessive performances of femininity, the gay male subject seeks indications of his own socially constructed, performed and gendered subjectivity.

Drag *Carrie* parodies find their origins not only in De Palma's *Carrie*, but in a theatrical version of the text from the late 1980's. The cult of *Carrie* is such that it even inspired an ill-fated Broadway version; *Carrie -The Musical* was briefly staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1988. The musical became notorious in theatre circles for being one of the biggest financial flops ever. Despite its critical and public failure, the musical has achieved a similar (but perhaps more negative) indelibility. At the time of its reviews, it was already being heralded as a 'cult musical'. Other critics commented that it "ranks as one of the most misconceived in theatre history, often wildly off in tone and unintentionally comic" (Mandelbaum. 1998: 352). Such camp appeal was also enhanced, retrospectively, by the musical's astounding failure. The failure inherent in the show's appeal suggests specifically that a lack of success holds pleasure for the gay male spectator. *Carrie: The Musical* became a hot ticket for the 'flop connoisseur' its notoriety lay in its presentation of flawless failure.

This incongruity is the legacy of *Carrie: The Musical*, and conversely the basis for its cult success. Yet reveling in its awfulness, while protesting to revere the show and its stars, the gay male fan simultaneously encourages both the shows and its stars ridicule. In the same sense, the gay male subject is associated with an unsuccessful or a failed masculinity within patriarchal culture. The same valorizing of failure may appear to be at work in the gay male spectators identifications with the women of *Carrie*, particularly in the adoption of Carrie-drag. If the gay male subject performs exaggerated femininity then the subject regains a sense

Darren Elliott

of the socially constructed nature of their feminised subjectivity by ironically embracing his 'failed' masculinity in effeminate performance. The same problem occurs, however, in valorizing failure in a display of excessive femininity, the gay *male* subject similarly encourages its derision.

Subsequent theatrical versions of *Carrie* have vied to challenge *Carrie: The Musical's* camp value. All attempt to 'perfect failure' but, according to Ken Mandelbaum, none will ever reach its iconic status, for 'there's never been a musical like her [sic]' (Mandelbaum, 1998: 351). The gay male subject's trans-sex identification with the arguably empowered female protagonists of *Carrie* and *Carrie: The Musical*, is taken to its logical extreme in various stage performances that display increasingly explicit queer references, and in which various female characters are performed by (in many cases) gay men. The first drag-appropriation of *Carrie* was arguably staged by the now disbanded San Francisco-based The Sick and Twisted Players. Their renowned productions would often fuse cult feature films (usually horror) with TV serials and soaps to present 'cross-bred' variations such as: *Texas Chainsaw*, *90210*, *The Exorcist: A Dance Macabre*, and a version of *Carrie* in the early 90s that encouraged audience participation. Its audience members were provided with Carrie Kits which included: "three tampons to throw at Carrie with cue cards to shout 'plug it up!' during the pivotal shower scene" (Ebenkamp, 1996).

In 2005, New Orleans-based theatre troupe Running With Scissors produced a similar drag musical entitled *A Very Special Facts Of Life/Carrie*. Their variation fuses the U.S. teen television soap *Facts of Life* (an NBC sitcom based on a maternal housekeeper of a girl's boarding school which ran from 1974-1988) with *Carrie*, introducing her as a new girl to the dormitories. Hell in a Handbag Productions' *Scarrie - The Musical* ran in Chicago in 2006. Their version of De Palma's film also involves drag performances of the triptych of female leads and is described as an "unauthorised parody of *Carrie* which features a rockin' 70's influenced score and lots of pig's blood."

Theatre Couture's production of *Carrie*, which was initially marketed with the sub-header *A Period Piece*, was staged in New York in December 2006. Writer Erik Jackson's version also features a drag performance of Carrie. The central blood shower sequence is played for laughs, and implicates the audience in the prom night glee, by dumping buckets and buckets of blood over Carrie - and most of the front rows of the audience. For Jackson the comedy is enhanced by gender play:

There was no way that the part could be played by a woman, since there is nothing funny about girls throwing tampons at a real girl who's having a fake period. But you switch out the genders and something in the equation completely clicks. You have to have that distance in this instance. (Erik Jackson, personal interview, 2007)

Yet once again it is the *female* subject that is excluded from the performance of excessive femininity. In terms of comic excess, Jackson's 'man in a dress' is the 'better woman'. He is more able to achieve 'that distance', which further establishes distanciation between the gay male subject and femininity. The actors on-

stage are not simply simulating femininity, rather they are performing a comically unsuccessful masquerade of femininity. What *is* being performed on stage is a *failed woman*, highlighted by the simulation of a highly exaggerated menstruation. This deliberately *failed gender performance* offers a very strong point of identification for the gay male spectator. Is there a difference between patriarchal representations of femininity (associated with monstrosity or, at the very extreme, nothingness or a void) and the willing adoption of a camp parody of that representation?

There is an implicit misogyny in many of the drag appropriations of *Carrie*. Gynophobia is evident in the disgust shown towards menstruation encouraged by The Sick and Twisted Player's audience participation and in Theatre Couture's overblown gross-out explosion of blood onto audience members. In highlighting the monstrous otherness of women's bodies and, indeed, of femininity, the gay male transvestite performer seems to ridicule femininity by performing an excessive and desperate plea to be recognised as *not* woman, and thus paradoxically distances himself from femininity while 'safely disguised' *as* a woman. Cross-gender masquerade taken to the extreme of female impersonation offers a distancing effect, yet the radical and liberating potential of such ironic performance can also be made at the expense of those genders being performed. It must be noted that the parody or appropriation of monstrous femininity, represented by the various drag-Carries and Lum's *Indelible*, is not undertaken by its *objects* (women) but notably by its *subjects* (men) and, as such, cannot be separated from patriarchal influence.

### ***Carrie's Indelible Images***

Queer theatrical appropriations of *Carrie* highlight the imitative processes of dragging up as Carrie et al. It is in this very literal sense that these performers and fans of the film get under the layers of the filmic text and its performers via female impersonation. What happens then when the source film text is not imitated or modulated by new performers, but re-presented in an abstract sense? One particular experimental, avant-garde short film *Indelible* (2004) does exactly this, shifting 'Carrie worship' to more extreme and explicit levels. The concept of indelibility and the impressionable or unforgettable event or image is at the centre of Charles Lum's fusional short film, where certain impressionable entertainment forms and events work to induce a traumatic effect upon Lum. This extends to the feature film form, queer theatrical parodies as well as the life-changing and traumatic event of discovering his own HIV positive status. All of these feed into Lum's visual contemplation of pleasure and mortality.

*Indelible* is a short video piece that brashly combines borrowed original feature film footage in a clash of the horrific and the erotic. The video is chiefly made up of Lum's own self described favourite films: *Carrie* is intercut with excerpts and frames from *The Fury* (1978) and is further cross cut, dissolved and juxtaposed with images and sounds from hardcore gay pornographic films, most notably from *LA Tool & Die* (1979). In titling his film so, Lum defines these film sources as significant personal experiences in his life. In his publicity synopsis for *Indelible* he explicitly stipulates how he wishes the film to be read:

Darren Elliott

*Indelible* is a cavalcade and crescendo of appropriated images that suggest an aborted narrative about emasculated machismo, femininity, fear, shame, bloodlust, sexual desire, disease, retribution and death in an American pop cultural spray of blood and semen that builds to an explosive, cathartic climax.

The film is offered as a kind of cipher or cultural text which Lum reads across from his own subjective experience and socially constructed identity, and is projected outward as a piece of work which seems to reflect his own personal trauma and anxiety as a gay man living with AIDS. This is particularly reflected in his choice of source film texts which were all produced at a time in the late 70's, a period in time just prior to the onset of a global epidemic of HIV and AIDS. Lum's work also reveals the confining structures of and in reformulating feature film narratives, thereby critically revealing how they define and manipulate our comprehension of self and how subjectivities are culturally formed:

I feel I am offering a strong voice to gay sexual investigations that are tactfully ignored by both the mainstream media and the art world. Confronting the graphic realities of sexuality and how it equates with understanding the roles of shame, repression, violence and power in our cultures...I am interested in the way we understand and live our lives through pre-conceived filmic narratives. My videos are attempts to both observe and then change those narrative conventions. (Charles Lum, personal interview, 2007)

Charles Lum is a photographer and filmmaker whose works often favour the short video form. Lum's digital videos concern themselves with ideas of gay sexuality in relation to his own HIV positive status. His moving image works are mainly presented on DV, VHS and DVD and are often either documentary in style or autobiographical pieces that feature the filmmaker himself on camera. *Indelible* clearly stands out from Lum's filmography in that it 'borrows' or 'samples' (that is he re-edits, re-configures and visually alters) scenes, images, shots and sounds from various other mainstream feature films and their narratives, in this sense it is (un)original.

Lum's films are all generally informed by the conviction that HIV alters the subject's personal experience on emotional, political and sexual levels, and *Indelible* passionately embraces these themes. With a choice of media that extends to poetry, still photographs, painted art works and installation pieces, his video pieces are generally exhibited in galleries - yet works like *Indelible* and other pieces that 'sample' clips from mainstream western cinema have had crossover appeal. Lum states of the exhibition spaces in which *Indelible* has been screened that: "some of these (most) are gallery shows, small art events, or my own lectures". The only major festivals to screen (to date 2009) have been LLGFF, Toronto & Mix Brazil. Although, *Indelible* has enjoyed a popular reception at film festivals and exhibitions on an international level, screening at such places as the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 2005, the Inside/Out Festival in Toronto, Canada 2004, and the Dublin Film Festival in 2005 amongst others, it is a film that has been rejected from various independent film festivals and galleries due to its controversial imagery. Because of the film's explicit sexual content and the copy-

right issues that arise from borrowing clips and sounds without permission, *Indelible* continues to be limited to unrated distribution at festivals.

While not entirely denigrating of femininity, *Indelible* is influenced by the same gender play as drag *Carries*. It explicitly brings together the two genres of horror and pornography, to connect their conceptions of the monstrous, the threatening, the violent, the dangerous and the erotic. Lum fuses the generic, thematic and filmic conventions of each of the films by means of simple juxtaposition, superimposition, cross cutting, cutting on action, dissolving through imagery and soundtrack and -- taking De Palma's now clichéd and overblown use of split-screen to an extra-diegetic level -- he brings images from other films together in a frenzy of split-screen action.

The deconstructive aesthetic of *Indelible* allows us to explore the generic conventions of the horror film and the gay male pornographic film and draws parallels between them: of a connected eroticism, shared anxieties, shared imagery and notions of desire, shame, humiliation and trauma. By taking apart, reviewing and re-editing the horror film in this way, the genre takes on a new resonance and cultural meaning. Erotic elements that may have been implicit become foregrounded by association. The films become eroticised by the *penetration or insertion* of explicit sexual imagery into their narrative and, conversely, horrific elements are attributed to explicit erotic scenes of sex. Lum's eroticisation of horror is a means of revisiting, recollecting and replaying cultural notions of trauma. *Indelible* allows for a contemplation of Lum's eroticisation of horror as a metaphor for the (gay) male spectator's re-experience of the genre as a means of revisiting, recollecting and replaying cultural notions of trauma pertinent for the gay male subculture. These include: the defining or cultural imposition of subjectivity that is acknowledged by Lum and that is consequently rejected; the paralleling of homosexuality with HIV and AIDS and the effect this has upon homosexual culture and finally the conflation of a submissive femininity with gay men within heteronormative culture.

Lum's paradoxical consideration of the potentially threatening and, for him, liberating elements of gay male sexuality is shown in *Indelible's* uneasy and frenetic comedy of eroticism. I want also to briefly look at what happens to the comedy of De Palma's original in Lum's reworking and whether the humour of *Indelible* retains the same meaning. The film's presentation of a gay machismo as visually fascinated by the phallus, and the anxieties of heteronormative masculinity in light of the devastation caused by the AIDS virus, clearly invites a comparison with Leo Bersani's controversial article '*Is the Rectum a Grave?*'. I want to discuss points with which they concur, using Lum's *Indelible* as both a visual example of Bersani's ideas and moments where it provides a contradiction to Bersani's polemic which in particular posits gay male penetrative sex as traumatic (more specifically he refers to gay sex as having a subversive potential for 'self shattering'). For Bersani, anal sex provides a means through which the subject can achieve self-divestiture, therefore "self-shattering...disrupts the ego's coherence and dissolves its boundaries" (Bersani, 1996: 101). He later continues that what he refers to as self shattering 'jouissance...blocks the cultural discipline of identification' (Ibid.: 125). Initially, it appears likely that the method of appropriation that Lum implements shares similarities with Bersani's reconfig-

ration of ecstatic anal sex, whereby 'this self-divestiture is enacted as a willful pursuit of abjection' (Ibid.: 126).

*Carrie* is a narrative and cultural text that is susceptible to such 'breakage' or a 'shattering' in an already fragmentary narrative structure, made visually fragmentary and 'fragile' by De Palma. Lum achieves this cinematic shattering and fragmentation by superimposing and layering various film sources (including *The Fury* (1978) which is also featured) creating one amorphous narrative, which is nevertheless always informed by the appropriation of its original visual materials. Lum's decision to juxtapose *Carrie* with *LA Tool & Die* (from Joe Gage, a director famed for his representations of 'hypermasculinity' both in terms of his macho 'Gage Men' performers and his blue collar and proletarian settings), paves the way for *his* main thematic and visual opposition and his analogy of what a heteronormative ideology defines as 'abject femininity' with 'abject masculinity'. In *Indelible*, the main film which stands in opposition/juxtaposition to *Carrie* is the third and final film in director Joe Gage's 'Working Man' trilogy of films. This begins with *Kansas City Trucking Company* (1976), moves onto *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* (1977), and ends with *LA Tool and Die* (1979). Indeed, alongside a nostalgic inclusion of scenes from more antiquated pornography from an earlier era -- prior to the trauma of AIDS -- *Indelible* includes several scenes from more contemporary porn films, including an untitled video directed by gay pornographer Paul Morris and his production company Treasure Island Media, which features scenes of fellatio, bareback sex and semen ingestion, and *The Final Link* (2000), featuring an sadomasochistic orgy scene. In summary, Lum, chooses to foreground scenes from gay pornography that involve either marginalised, unprotected sex either of a penetrative, oral or masturbatory nature.

As a text composed entirely of borrowed sources and footage 'ripped' from other films and videos (apart from Lum's superimposed titles), Lum draws attention to editing as a process designed to create narrative cohesion and diegesis. In rupturing both *LA Tool and Die*, *Carrie* and other source films, only to juxtapose and over/underlay them to combine both their narrative and spectacular scenes, Lum seems to take De Palma's excessive and overblown editing style and exaggerates it further to foreground the very 'material' elements of film itself. Lum's work, in its desire to fragment narrative and foreground the structures which interpellate its spectators into sexual subjectivity, would seem to offer a liberating, revelatory and challenging spectacle. However, as much as Lum's refashioning of the films in *Indelible* draws attention to the artifice of narrative, it also leaves stretches of narrative intact (the narrative of *Carrie's* prom night scene is shown in flash forward during the White's discussion/summary of events at the dinner table), narratives that may reveal masculinist essentialism.

Lum's films consider filmic narrative as a prescriptive method by which sexual identities are shaped and positioned within a dominant ideology and how this is blurred, confused and played out in terms of both feminine identification and masquerade and parade of gendered differences. Monstrous femininity and the various attempts to 'plug it up' by *Carrie's* previous authors, either by visual or literal means, are practiced in vain. King's original text makes plentiful use of parentheses in association with *Carrie's* interior monologue and the text's various



narrators (appearing in the form of textual stops and interruptions and abruptly switching narrative points of view) and De Palma's split-screen and excessive framing both fail to contain its seeping threat. The 'failure of repression' that Shelley Stamp Lindsay refers to in her discussion of De Palma's *Carrie*, to contain the feminine abject (in a patriarchal symbolic order) permits the continued flow of unchecked abject femininity. Failed repression of femininity is formally represented in *Indelible* by jarring juxtapositions and in the invisibly present super or sub impositions that slowly seep and bleed through the primary image. Fragmentation, multiple narratives or points of view cannot cut away or stop the relentlessly seeping threat of the abject feminine. *Indelible's* final image is of Carrie's vengeful silent scream taken out of its original narrative order and replaced as the shorts resolution. In *Indelible*, too, *Carrie* always returns to us, underneath images, and in these final shots. For Lum, cutting away from *Carrie* will not prevent the indelible, irrepressible narrative from returning. He uses the techniques of juxtaposition and subversive super- and sub- imposition not to stem *Carrie's* flow of blood or flow of femininity, but to show that it continues to bleed across into his other source films. The parentheses and techniques of cutting serve to draw attention to cross-textual similarities, as both blood and semen intermingle across films. When one stream of bodily fluids (menses) stops, another (semen) flows freely with renewed vigour. This flow of consciousness or subjectivity that was until now so intrinsic to femininity (and is symbolised by blood) is shown to have its counterpart in Lum's male subjects (and is symbolised by semen). Lum re-reads *Carrie* by way of the enforced new-voices he introduces to the text and consequently enhances and restores its flow (of narrative, and of bodily fluids of blood and semen) with a renewed vigour.

The film's presentation of gay male subjectivity offers an opportunity to consider representations of (gay) male sexuality orally and phallicly, but not essentially *anally*, directed. This appears to be at odds with Leo Bersani's suggestion that all gay male sex culminates teleologically in anal penetration. [2] *Indelible* centres on oral sex, a more equivocal sexual act, which defies easy classification as active or passive. It can be received or given. Conversely, Bersani's argument revolves around a masculine subjectivity that he claims is 'shattered' in the penetrative act of anal sex and which he links by analogy to the feminine supine sexual position. For Bersani, 'to be penetrated is to abdicate power'. If the main sexual acts for consideration in *Indelible* are fellatio and masturbation, are these acts, like anal penetration, also paralleled with femininity in their penetrable and submissive connotations? Unlike Bersani, *Indelible* does not overtly conflate an *anally* receptive or penetrated sexual position with a subordinated cultural and political position.

Lum has produced short films that consider both the apathy within gay male sexual culture towards safe sex and more specifically the debate concerning the safety of oral sex. *Facts.suck* (2005) considers the statistical possibility of infection from unprotected oral sex. [3] In an interview, the director has described himself as:

A longtime AIDS survivor who has NEVER had receptive anal sex. The content of my videos deal directly with that traumatic fear, its [the exclusive practice of oral sex] inability to protect me from the virus, and the

Darren Elliott

negotiations I have with myself, sex partners, and the public about the risks and responsibilities of oral sex in the current sexual arena in which HIV is (or should be) always invisibly present.' (Lum, personal interview, 2007)

The indelible effect that *Carrie* has had upon him is then paralleled with the traumatic effect of HIV and is made formally visible in the 'invisibly present' superimpositions and sub-impositions which perpetually interchange. *Indelible* is caught between a frenetic embrace of the oral act as an alternative and supposedly safer sex, and the unknown risks involved in contracting sexually transmitted diseases [4] through indulging in it, as Lum may have done. Lum's ambiguous desire to both defend and prosecute fellatio and masturbation as unsafe yet erotically alluring sexual practices (in this act the *flow* of semen is visible and externalised and therefore abject) is presented in the face of both heteronormative *and* homosexual views of anal sex as infectious.

Lum juxtaposes the abject menstrual flow of *Carrie*, with its connotations of marginalised sexuality and gender and its polluting potential, with the flow of semen, which too is specifically gendered and abject (in its association with fatally infectious sexually transmitted disease in unprotected sex). However, he seems to offer semen as more powerful, more forceful and perhaps more abject flow than that of the seeping feminine menses. The usage of the term abject here is taken from Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. Kristeva posits the term abjection as the expulsion of a part of the self in the pursuit of identity and subjectivity. The primary border separating the subject, the 'I' from the 'other' is the body itself. Kristeva, and subsequently Barbara Creed in her book *The Monstrous Feminine – Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, focus upon the abjection of the body's own fluids - waste, blood, urine, saliva and excrement:

Such waste drops so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit, cadere, Cadaver...The body's inside shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside...Urine, blood, sperm, excrement then show up in order to reassure a subject that it is lacking its own and clean self. (Kristeva, 1982: 63)

Kristeva defines menses, excrement, urine and also sperm as abject bodily fluids. Viewed externally, they represent potential infection. It is the *visibility* of such fluids that indicate their status as expelled or wasted, as polluting or toxic. Visible sperm, rather than that which is located inside the male body or secreted into another's in penetrative sex, would suggest its 'abjection' from the subject. But having already defined sperm, among other objects, in particular bodily fluids, as that which symbolises a 'pollutant' in opposition to the body's pure and 'clean self', Kristeva later retracts the potent and polluting power of sperm that she earlier attributed to it. In defining the abject in relation to objects that pollute, she goes on to point out that:

Polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual. Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to the borders of the body, have any polluting value. (Kristeva, 1982: 71)

Confusingly then sperm seems to represent abjectivity but without any *polluting* power. If Kristeva is correct, what makes sperm so explicitly abject in *Indelible*?

Semen is the bodily fluid that is most strangely absent from both Kristeva and Creed's discussions of the abject; generally Kristeva tends to identify abjection with women and, more specifically, with the maternal which is in opposition to patriarchal law. Creed offers a close study of the menstrual pollutant in *Carrie*:

woman is specifically related to polluting objects which fall into two categories: excremental and menstrual... [The Abject] is that which crosses or threatens to cross the border. (Creed, 1996: 10-11)

The 'border' in question may be, that between normal and abnormal, man and beast, human and inhuman, good and evil. Creed observes that blood is of extreme symbolic importance in *Carrie* and takes the form not only of menses but also pig's blood, identifying woman with two religiously proscribed fluids. This blood ties Carrie to her mother (who describes her daughter's first period as a 'Curse of Blood', women's punishment by God for the 'original sin of intercourse') and the deadly blood spilled in the film's denouement. It is blood that is the main metaphor for struggle, pain, femininity, infection and evil in *Carrie* and, to some extent, in *The Fury*. How then can semen be positioned as abject in terms of Kristeva and Creed's theories? Following Creed's argument, semen not ejaculated in the act of reproduction but in masturbation, oral and anal sex becomes waste, and therefore abject. Moreover, the onset of AIDS as visually symbolised in *Indelible* would seem to suggest that *semen*, as the fluid medium of infection, is not only 'abject' when wasted. In the wake of the AIDS crisis, semen can become fatally infectious.

### **Semen: A New Abjection**

Both *Carrie* and *LA Tool and Die* were made prior to the early 1980s hysteria surrounding the AIDS pandemic, and before the promotion of safe sex became widespread. Combining scenes from both, Lum's post AIDS perspective in *Indelible* can be seen to give credence to the anxiety symbolically associated with blood, but also perhaps to represent semen as a source of infection. Lum clearly equates menstrual blood with semen in *Indelible*. It is questionable, however, how he views semen. Does he see it as a cause for revelry in its potency or as source of anxiety in its potential for lethal infection? Lum's own ambivalence towards semen is exemplified in his consideration of the fluid in *Indelible* in its juxtaposition and relationship to menses:

I am asking whether it is the sight of semen what makes it an abject, more humiliating than within fucking, where the ejaculate is hidden, seeded, planted in a more natural, more normal hidden place, (that 'other' - vagina, anus, condom). Is basking and bathing in semen a contraceptive waste of the greatest magnitude? Does safe sex itself indicate the greater more absolute rejection of infection? Is eating the stuff even worse, a willful defiance of safety or the sanctity of procreation? Is it just gross? (Charles Lum, personal interview, 2007)

It is not the actual spermatozoa that Lum renders abject in *Indelible* but its visible, viscous *flow* (as paralleled with the flow of menses). It is the liquid medium of sperm, in other words *semen* (particularly in subjects with HIV where it becomes a carrier of the disease), that is deemed a source of abjection. The appropriated sequence of *Carrie's* shower of pigs' blood is visually paused in *Indelible*, for it is not a shower of blood that Lum wants as his spectacular release but showers of semen. By analogy then, these torrents of semen, and their ingestion, temporarily replace the Mrs White's configuration of the 'curse of blood' associated with feminine sexuality, with a 'curse' of semen in a display of potentially infectious unprotected sex. In turn, the juxtaposition also highlights the potential infectiousness of blood as much as semen in the transmission of HIV. Lum sees the liberating *jouissance* in *Indelible* as only possible because of the pre-requisite existence of guilt: "If there were no guilt or anxiety, ecstatic frenzy would not be liberating or spectacular." (Lum, personal interview, 2007). It is worth noting here Leo Bersani's claim that 'there is a big secret about sex: most people don't like it' (Bersani, 1987: 197). Lum's self-confessed ambiguous aversion to sex (as represented in *Indelible*) seems to confer with Bersani's dictum, as previously debated in the viscous appearance of semen as itself 'gross' and in representing the 'gross-ness' of sex in its messiness. *Indelible's* presentation of unprotected sex and potentially infectious semen, provides a *jouissance* born out of the anxiety and thrill associated with such sexual acts, but also from the re-empowerment gained in putting oneself in such a position or by vicariously experiencing it via memory or re-presentation.

Julia Kristeva argues that it is not uncleanliness or illness that is the source of abjection, rather, it is a symbolic representation of that which "disturbs identity, system, order. The abject is that what does not respect borders, positions, rules, it is the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva: 4). Flowing across borders, ambiguity and the idea of the *composite* are given a visual treatment in Lum's consideration of semen as abject and in his editing of *Carrie* with its own abject bodily fluid, menses. *Indelible's* bareback pornography reveals the border that the abject bodily fluid, semen, encroaches upon is that of the condom, and further still the body itself. When the border is transgressed, semen can become potentially dangerous and abject. For Lum, semen becomes abject in its ambiguous symbolic form as representative of ecstatic sexual and phallic intimacy yet laced with anxiety and danger as a potential carrier of lethal infection.

If abjection is only possible if it straddles a border between two distinct entities and territories, what are the two distinct areas at play here? Are the entities that of the socially constructed ideals of the feminine and the masculine as symbolised by (menstrual) blood and (gay man's) semen? Does he want to tie a heterosexual (and homosexual) fear of gay men as specifically represented by their potentially HIV- infected semen, with the same heterosexual and homosexual male fear of menses and the abjection it connotes for women? Does he wish to access its terrifying potency? Should menses as an abject bodily fluid cross the border between men and women, it would operate, according to Kristeva, to threaten 'the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference'. Can semen, and more specifically HIV infected semen in its juxtaposition with menstrual blood also offer the same threat?

The central visual motif of *Indelible* intermingles *Carrie's* shower of blood with *LA Tool's* shower of semen, combining not only blood and semen, but the culturally determined and gendered connotations that are projected onto them via colour codings. The colour codings and mise-en-scène of De Palma's *Carrie* are re-presented in *Indelible* and begin to form one of the film's basic binary oppositions of red (representing blood and by extension, femininity) and white (symbolically representing semen and masculinity). *Indelible* merely picks up on an idea present in De Palma's original source text and develops it. In one significant scene, Carrie's mother enters her daughter's room in a final attempt to dissuade her from attending the prom. She curses Carrie's choice of dress, again prefiguring the excess of colour in the blood shower that is to follow: "Red! I might have known it would be red!", suggesting the colour's cultural connotations of wanton sexuality. As Carrie protests, the dress's actual colour is pink, combining red and white. Pink, with its cultural connotations of homosexuality, further supports both De Palma's and Lum's films' queer appeal. *Indelible* develops this symbolic intermingling of red and white via their symbolic and colour coded referents to create a queer text. Blood (red) and semen (white) intermingle to make pink and with it fuse the gendered cultural connotations of the aforementioned bodily fluids.

### **Red vs White: Gendered Colour Coding in *Indelible***

The opening scene of Lum's film sets up the colour coding that is to follow. The film's title appears repeatedly in the opening shots, changing from red bold type on a red tinted background image from the prom night in *Carrie*, to a white type of a slightly translucent quality, before appearing in bold white type flashing intermittently as the frame cuts to black. Dissolving over the fading white titles from *LA Tool and Die*, the shot tracks back into a scene from *Carrie*. The frame slowly reveals the Whites' tapestry representation of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, and then an altar-like dinner table at which Carrie and her mother Margaret White now sit eating an evening meal. Carrie's family name, 'White', now also forms part of a colour-coded opposition within *Indelible* as a whole. Three small red candles are centred at the lower portion of the frame, flanked either side by two taller white candles.

The scene at the dinner table continues from *Carrie*, but superimposed over and running concurrently are images of a rough, wooden garage or workshop connoting labour and masculinity. A man's shadow is framed approaching the door of the garage and continues to follow his movements inside the warehouse. The reverse shot is a man's silhouette in low angle medium close-up, filling the door-frame with the glaring sun setting behind him. Throughout this melding of images, the domesticated dinner conversation between Carrie and her mother continues. The films play in composite layers under/over each other in a dream-like synchronicity, where images of hairy, male legs shadow the wooden walls of the garage underneath the dinner in *Carrie*.

As the Whites' conversation turns from apple pie and pimples to that of a prospective date at the prom, the images from *LA Tool and Die* become more visible. Out of focus, extreme close-ups reveal hands, legs and what appears to be a penis. Mrs. White's shock and disapproval at Carrie's suggestion -- "Prom?!" --

is pronounced at precisely the same time that images of sexual acts become more apparent under this domestic scene. A hand fleetingly comes down over the penis at bottom centre of the frame, and a mouth follows; fellatio is being performed. Mrs. White's face becomes aghast in disbelief, and under the image again is a sub-imposed wide shot of three or four torsos of burly, muscled men, standing partly in shadow, masturbating. The formation of men across the frame parallels the position of candles in *Carrie*, linking them as phallic symbols.

Cut to a medium close up of Carrie pleading with her mother: "Please see that I'm not like you, momma. I'm funny – all the kids think I'm funny and I wanna be, I wanna be normal..." Their arguments continue, with Mrs. White ranting wildly, over shots of more men, indulging in barely visible anal sex and fellatio. Mrs. White cries out for her daughter to "run to your closet!", which the knowledgeable viewer of *Carrie* will understand as the room under the stairs into which Carrie is thrust to pray for her sins. The closet in *Indelible* then, like Carrie's plea to be 'normal' and her declaration that she is 'funny' (as in peculiar), becomes a representative symbol for clandestine homosexuality or queerness. Mrs. White's order is directly linked to the heteronormativity that would condemn gay sex.

Other instances of this opposition of red and white occur in *Indelible*. The first scenes of the prom stage at the high school in *Carrie* are represented in high angle wide shot with the bucket of pig's blood positioned precariously on a girder which hovers over the school stage. The girder serves to split the image between stage (the place of spectacle, stars, dreamlike fantasy and eroticised imagery) and the dancehall (the audience, the place from which the spectacle is to be viewed). The palette of colours on stage from De Palma's original is of a decidedly whiter, silvery shade, whereas the audience appears redder, warmer and darker. To further the colour motif, scenes from De Palma's film's denouement included later in *Indelible* show Carrie attempting to wash herself of the sticky, bright red blood in her bright white bath tub. However it is the explicit fusion of (red) blood with (white) semen at the film's centre that demands discussion.

Suddenly, 'Jim' is introduced to the viewer in a startling cut in the midst of Carrie and Mrs. White's argument about the prom. In contrast to the dreamlike dissolves to gay male sexuality that have gone before and continue underneath this scene, there is an abrupt cut from *Carrie's* domestic setting to an opaque, medium close-up of a man bathed in a yellowish/amber light. In the lower portion of the frame the groin and penis of another man is shown, his chest and lower legs cut by the frame, fragmenting and objectifying him. 'Jim' pumps the erect penis, while directly gazing at the camera. A male voice addresses him from off camera and renders the shot subjective: "Don't let me stop you, Jim", to which he replies "Nothing could." Proceeding to plunge down and fellate the erect penis, he announces, "This guy's real hot...he's just about ready to pop!". It is Jim, the fellator, who is the main scene of spectacle, rather than the recipient (who is deliberately cut out of the frame). Jim is clearly the active party and yet is the object of our gaze as spectacle. Similarly, his aggressive demands are to be rendered passive, as he commands the diegetic and extra-diegetic voyeur, "Why don't you jack that dick off 'till you cum in my face?".

After introducing us to Jim in this scene of phallic and oral obsession from *LA Tool and Die*, *Indelible* speeds through dissolves, flash cuts and shots from *Carrie*: Carrie meeting Tommy; her prom date; the rigged voting at the prom; Carrie and Tommy's dizzily romantic dancing; the announcement of their victory, their procession to the stage and Chris's plot to humiliate her. Lum includes most of De Palma's editing of these proceedings, while adding his own jump cuts and dissolves to the build-up to the seminal climax of *LA Tool and Die*. The original sequence replays extreme close ups of Chris's hands and fingers teasing at the rope from under the stage, her eyes blinking. In several close-ups, her moist tongue darts out to lick her full lips. However, Lum supplements this implicit eroticism with scenes of literal masturbation and fellatio. He juxtaposes the feminine imagery of Chris's lips and her teasing of the phallic rope with an erect penis and Jim's gaping mouth. The succession of cuts to and from *Carrie* and *LA Tool and Die* speed up as the former film approaches its humiliating climax.

Cut to Chris in close up, pulling down on the cord attached to the bucket. The shot is orgasmic in suggestion, with Chris closing her eyes and convulsing as she pulls the bucket onto Carrie. Her ecstatic release is shown as the action cuts to the high angle shot of the bucket, falling from the rafter in slow motion, to the sounds of sexual groans from *LA Tool and Die* (later mixed with Mrs. White's orgasmic death cries throughout the ejaculation). Lum cuts to a visually matching expression from *LA Tool and Die*. Jim's eyes are closed in pleasure as a voice from off screen warns 'I'm gonna cum', and we see the first, almost subliminal, spurt of semen.

It is interesting to notice at this point that the object of spectacle *crosses genders*, but it is the fact that it is the initiator of the sexual act that is the centre of attention, not the victim or passive object of spectacle. Carrie does not pull the bucket of blood onto herself, but Jim willingly exposes himself to the shower of semen. By this, Lum offers an alternative to gender stereotyping and arguably a 'de-gendering' or 're-gendering' of the conventions of the horror genre by crossing traditional boundaries of who is deemed the object of spectacle. He plays with these gender connotations and reverses them, by positing Jim as a very aggressive, demanding fellator and paralleling him with Chris from *Carrie*. As a sexually objectified but aggressive, manipulative and demanding female character, she links the two gender types and blurs their conventions. Lum's film cuts the blood descending from the bucket in slow motion as a medium close-up shows Carrie, centre frame, looking out to the audience at the prom. The blood falls into the extreme top of the frame, but *Indelible* freezes it in mid-air with the words, 'gonna cum' from *LA Tool and Die* repeated in quick succession. The downward cascade of red blood is paused, instead focusing on an upward spurting fountain of white semen - with the symbolic effect of blurring the gendered connotations of genital fluids and the spectacular objectification.

Lum cuts to *LA Tool and Die*, where a penis emits a torrent of semen in slow motion, showering Jim's face, with the initial spurt replayed over and over. All the while, the blood splash from the soundtrack of *Carrie* is layered underneath these images. In *Indelible* semen is even more visible in the multiplicity of replayed images and scenes. The spurts are synchronised to the amplified sound of screeching violins used in *Carrie*, suggesting a link between her psychokinetic

powers and the potency of ejaculation. The note held by the strings slides down in musical scale in a glissando effect - suggesting an almost vertiginous decline to a mood of foreboding and seriousness, in contrast to the upward ejaculation. Lum is perhaps suggesting, in his underscoring of the seminal spectacle with a typical horror score from *Carrie*, that Jim's unprotected ingestion of the man's ejaculate is a cause for concern rather than frenetic pleasure, or indeed perhaps a thrill that is derived from the potential danger of such an act. There is an ambivalent tension between pleasure and revulsion that ties the films together at this point, in representing ejaculation as a spectacular liberation and visceral pleasure but also as dirty and dangerous. Is the moralizing suggestion that unprotected gay sex is threatening influenced by the hysterical heteronormative anxiety about gay sex and gay male sexuality as paralleled with HIV and AIDS? It seems more likely that it is precisely *this* danger that provides the *jouissance* for Lum, and a dangerous act that provides another means of disavowing passivity and femininity.

*Indelible* serves to show a continuation or a *flowing* of the homosexual sex act in the face of these castrating and repressive threats. Just as Carrie ignores her mother and goes to the prom, the gay pornography carries on, perhaps in a mania of 'unstoppable sex'. Lum not only wishes to gain access to the potent flow that is attributed to menses in De Palma's *Carrie*, but hopes to supercede it in his presentation of a more powerful ejaculation. *His* flow is shown issuing forth with a more concentrated force than Carrie's seeping menstruation. The inclusion of powerfully spraying hoses of water in *Carrie's* prom sequence, juxtaposed in *Indelible* with almost comically powerful ejaculations, support the apparent conclusion that male fluids are more powerful and (more abject) than feminine ones. The power represented by these forceful bodily emissions progresses to a literal masculine explosion in *Indelible's* final images.

*Indelible* represents a desperate reaffirmation of phallic power as a response to the threat of femininity. Lum and other gay male fans of De Palma's *Carrie*, are drawn to her as both victim and powerfully phallic woman, but in their consequent representation of her they reveal a desire to be dissociated with a femininity that compromises their masculine aspirations. While identification with the abject woman has the potential to shatter male subjectivity, the female impersonator and the identification implied in that act, as Carole-Anne Tyler suggests, can also *perpetuate* phallocracy, "When the active, desiring woman still reflects man's desire, the mirrors of the patriarchal imaginary cannot have been shattered." (Tyler, 1991: 48) *Indelible* paradoxically reveres and disavows femininity both in the female subject and in the effeminate and, by extension, penetrable gay male subject. While not overtly misogynistic in its discussion of "emasculated machismo, femininity, fear, shame", *Indelible* recognises a negatively coded and powerful femininity as something to be adulated yet feared and ashamed of. Yet the abject potency of femininity is surpassed by the explosive potency of gay masculinity.

The bodily fluids from *Indelible* are allegories not only of layered clothing, but represent the performative nature of gender as socially constructed, by way of Judith Butler, but especially in the masquerade theory discussed by Joan Riviere [5] and Mary Anne Doane [6] (in terms of the cinematic spectator). Riviere and



Doane both posit the feminine masquerade as an exaggeration of gender, done as a means of defence against heterosexual male reprisals towards them should they display traits of empowered masculinity in certain social contexts. The masquerading female subject achieves a distance from her own image then by ironically performing an excessive femininity. If to masquerade or parade is to perform an 'excess of gender' this is echoed in both *Indelible's* display of excessive bodily fluids, and in the parodic excesses of camp female impersonations of Carrie. Ultimately the macho hypermasculinity of the Gage Men via *Indelible* is represented as just as camp and ironic as *Carrie's* theatrical transvestite performances. Both excessive presentations of gender do the *same thing*; they both work to disavow femininity one way or another. However, the female impersonator and the gay male spectator in his culturally imposed identification with the feminine, is unlike the masquerading female subject. He cannot effectively appease or disarm the anxiety evoked in heterosexual male spectators by performing femininity, unless the femininity performed is exaggerated to the point where it is made obvious. Then it is precisely femininity and, arguably, effeminate gay men that are the *butt* of the joke.

The final sequence of *Indelible* gives rise to yet another contradictory image: that of male subjectivity literally blown apart, inside out. Lum's inclusion of scenes from *The Fury*, in the final, rapidly paced and cut denouement of *Indelible*, show two images of apparently feminised and shattered masculinity that perhaps links Lum's visual discussion of gay masculinity with Leo Bersani's. Lum furthers the narrative of *Carrie* within *Indelible* by including scenes and images that foreground the female gaze and, in turn, the potent telekinetic power of Carrie. The return of the gaze from the normally objectified woman, by force of juxtaposition across films, objectifies and fragments the male. Its threat is shown in spectacular form as Lum cross-cuts from a fragmented jump-cut [7] which acts as a zoom into Carrie's eyes (originally in *Carrie* this telekinetically forces a car from the road) which, via juxtaposition with *Indelible*, serves to cause the following images of the exploding male from *The Fury*. In another example, a similar 'zip-zoom' technique moves in close up to focus on the eyes of Childress (John Cassavetes) from *The Fury*, the film's villain being telekinetically manipulated by his captive female prisoner, Gillian, who enacts telekinetic revenge upon kissing him, making him weep tears of blood. The feminine act of weeping is rendered even more so by its association with the menstrual blood. Femininity makes itself known by crossing the border of the body and externally presenting itself, forcing its way out. It is the externalizing of bodily fluids, here semen and blood, which suggests the inability of the body as the primary border to contain its own fluids. The visible bodily fluid has passed through the border of the body (which represents the self) and is externalized (representing Other) and its visible return 'threatens ones own and clean self'.

More startlingly then, Lum's gradual climactic finale, which rises to an erotic peak with the torrents of ejaculate, now cuts to a paralleled crescendo in the reflow of blood. The symbolic and sexual explosions of the masculine in the scenes from *LA Tool and Die* become intermingled when the feminine flow of blood continues. The central scene of humiliation from *Carrie* is reintroduced and chants of 'plug it up!' become fused with the explosion of masculinity as a source of both humiliation and jouissance. Yet the film's final images reveal an explosive rather

Darren Elliott

than exploded masculinity. The explosive male seems to perpetuate the concept of the powerfully ejaculating and explosive male power, rather than the Bersanian 'shattering' of 'proud' heteronormative masculine potency. In *Indelible*, Lum retains the glowing eyed feminine catalyst for Childress's explosion, yet in following the increasingly powerful ejaculations from the juxtaposed segments of pornography, the *potency* of Childress's explosion seems to resonate with the viewer as radiating from *within* the male as if his flesh is intrinsically vulnerable to disintegration. Childress is shown standing in a living room in mid shot and he seems to explode from within in extreme slow motion. Solid flesh seems to erupt from him in contrast to the liquid semen and blood that has been a central motif until now. There is a cut on action during the explosion to an extreme high angle shot. His head flies up into the frame, literally decapitated (castrated) and his body explodes with such force that its liquids are evaporated. Internal bodily fluids appear now to have all been externalised and there is no longer any flow here.

I would argue that *Indelible* literalizes Lum's paradoxical concerns regarding the contraction of the HIV virus and AIDS through sexual practices like the ones previously considered, the very same practices that provide an erotic thrill and appeal. In the face of such determined suicidal sex, Bersani's symbolic 'shattering of the self' is negligible compared to the consequences of the unchecked explosion of fatally infectious bodily fluids. The excessive display of bodily fluids can only be surpassed and satisfied by the ultimate explosion of the subject himself. The entire body is abjected to the point where its borders cease to exist and it is completely destroyed. In reviewing the film and, perhaps vicariously, the memories of anonymous sexual acts from the director's past, the initial jouissance felt in indulging in such exploits is replaced by a pang of guilt and shame when returning to such images from a new perspective. Shattered masculinity is of a different form here, leading us to question what exactly is being exploded. Is it a visual representation of the death of 'proud male subjectivity' (Bersani, *Homos*, 1996: 281), or the idea of the passive, penetrated male? Is Lum's idea of invigorating, liberating and orgasmic self-shattering, in the face of the cultural anxiety that surrounds AIDS and safe sex? Above all it is perhaps the ambiguous appeal of a gay masculinity that is perpetually conflated with femininity that provides both a means of transgression and access to an abject potency that, in a heteronormative culture, also serves to associate gay masculinity with femininity, the connotations of which will be perpetually mapped onto it.

## Notes

[1] Jose Munoz defines disidentification as a practice by which subjects outside of a racial or sexual majority negotiate with dominant culture by transforming, reworking and appropriating ideological impositions from the mainstream. From *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[2] Leo Bersani dismisses the pluralism and sexual liberation of Foucault's multiplicity of sexual acts, cultural and physical positions enjoyed by gay men, includ-

ing sadomasochistic role play as 'lies' to the inevitable truth of penetrability in *Is the Rectum a Grave?* *October* 43 (Winter, 1987) pp. 219 – 220.

[3] In *Facts.suck* (2005), Lum presents titles and captions over filmed footage and coloured backgrounds, of the conflicting statistical potential of contraction of the HIV virus from unprotected oral sex. They highlight cautionary statistics, but remain undecided as to their credence and offer no final statement as to the dangers of unprotected oral sex.

[4] Documented evidence from studies and theoretical evidence is published on the website of [www.avert.org](http://www.avert.org) and are based on the Centers for Disease Control Fact sheet: Annabel Kannabus and Ben Hills-Jones (2000) Preventing the Sexual Transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS: What you should know about Oral Sex (December). The study reveals that in 2000 a study of gay men in San Francisco who had recently acquired HIV infection, where 7.8 percent of infections were attributed to oral sex.

[5] Joan Riviere discusses the non-cinematic female masquerade in 'Womanliness as Masquerade' in Hendrick M. Ruitenbeck (ed.) *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[6] Mary Anne Doane applies Riviere's theory of feminine masquerade to the cinematic spectator and the representation of women on screen in her article *Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator*, in Mandy Merck (ed.) *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. London: Routledge, pp. 227-242

[7] The extreme close up and gradual zoom into Carrie's pained face is fragmented by multiple jump cuts which cut closer into Carrie's eyes in a kind of fragmented, high speed, zip-zoom.

## References

Bersani, Leo (1987) *Is the Rectum a Grave?* *October* 43 (Winter)

Bersani, Leo (1996) *Homos*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Butler, Judith (1993) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Creed, Barbara (1993) *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.

Doane, Mary Ann (1992) *Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator*, in Mandy Merck (ed.) *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. London: Routledge, pp. 227-242

King, Stephen (1974) *Carrie*. London: New English Library.

Kristeva, Julia (1982) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: New York University Press.

Lindsey, Shelley Stamp (1996) Horror, Femininity and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty, in Barry Keith Grant (ed.) *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 279-293

Mandelbaum, Ken (1998) *Not Since Carrie: Forty Years of Broadway Musical Flops*. New York: St. Martins Press.

Munoz, Jose Esteban, (1999) *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Riviere, Joan (1966) Womanliness as Masquerade, in Hendrick M. Ruitenbeck (ed.) *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Tyler, Carole-Anne (1991) Boys Will Be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag, in Diana Fuss (ed.) *Inside/Out : Lesbian Theories and Gay Theories*. London: Routledge, pp. 32

## Websites

Ebenkamp, Becky (1996) You Make Me Sick! in *The Prism: San Francisco Fashion and Culture* (June) Available at:  
<http://www.journalism.sfsu.edu/www/pubs/prism/jun96/29.html> [Accessed 11 June 2009]

## Filmography

*Carrie*. 1976. Dir. Brian De Palma. United Artists.

*El Paso Wrecking Corp.* 1977. Dir. Joe Gage.

*The Final Link*. 2000. Dir. Chi Chi La Rue. All Worlds Video.

*The Fury*. 1978. Dir. Brian De Palma. Twentieth Century Fox.

*Indelible*. 2005. Dir. Charles Lum.

*Kansas City Trucking Company*. 1976. Dir. Joe Gage.

*LA Tool and Die*. 1979. Dir. Joe Gage.