



# Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film (Film and Culture Series)

By Adam Lowenstein

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In this imaginative new work, Adam Lowenstein explores the ways in which a group of groundbreaking horror films engaged the haunting social conflicts left in the wake of World War II, Hiroshima, and the Vietnam War. Lowenstein centers *Shocking Representation* around readings of films by Georges Franju, Michael Powell, Shindo Kaneto, Wes Craven, and David Cronenberg. He shows that through allegorical representations these directors' films confronted and challenged comforting historical narratives and notions of national identity intended to soothe public anxieties in the aftermath of national traumas.

Borrowing elements from art cinema and the horror genre, these directors disrupted the boundaries between high and low cinema. Lowenstein contrasts their works, often dismissed by contemporary critics, with the films of acclaimed "New Wave" directors in France, England, Japan, and the United States. He argues that these "New Wave" films, which were embraced as both art and national cinema, often upheld conventional ideas of nation, history, gender, and class questioned by the horror films. By fusing film studies with the emerging field of trauma studies, and drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, Adam Lowenstein offers a bold reassessment of the modern horror film and the idea of national cinema.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

[Lowenstein] has placed the study of cinematic horror on a whole new level.

(Scott Preston *The Communication Review*)

An attentive and careful reading of various films that straddle the borders of the horror and art genres...

(Eyal Tamir *Kritikon Litterarum*)

#### Review

*Shocking Representation* is an original and convincing study of how history shapes the modes of cinematic horror and fantasy. Through sensitive critical analysis, Lowenstein shows how specific historical traumas are expressed both consciously and unconsciously in a variety of films; in the process he enables us to see these films in a new way, and he repeatedly deepens our appreciation of their artistry.

(James Naremore, Indiana University, author of *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*)

Adam Lowenstein's meditations on the relation between historical trauma and the spectatorial trauma of horror films allow us to see these films, this history, and indeed ourselves in a new light. *Shocking Representation* should be urgent reading for all those curious about the fundamental questions of psyche, history, and cinema. It is filled with insights which will be of value not only to scholars but to intellectually adventurous film viewers and makers.

(Adam Simon, writer-director, *The American Nightmare*)

Adam Lowenstein's *Shocking Representation* transforms our sense of the horror film by knocking down traditional distinctions. The terrain of his analysis is international and he treats art films alongside low-budget exploitation films. Ultimately Lowenstein traces the horror in these films back to that nightmare from which we are all struggling to awaken?the history of the twentieth century.

(Tom Gunning, University of Chicago, author of *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*)

#### About the Author

Adam Lowenstein is associate professor of English and film studies at the University of Pittsburgh. His essays have appeared in *Cinema Journal*, *Critical Quarterly*, and *Post Script* as well as the anthologies *Hitchcock: Past and Future Trauma* and *Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, and *British Cinema, Past and Present*.

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#### **Laura Thompson:**

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#### **Jose Gray:**

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