The Horror Show

Curated by

Debra Tolchinsky and

Dave Tolchinsky

*W*hat should a collection of art about horror look like, and how might the things that frighten us be represented? Initially, we envisioned a celebratory splatterfest of wall-to-wall blood, guts, and gore. But mainstream entertainment already provides an endless source of such imagery: People eat sheep eyes for cash and glory, families dissect neighbors as a bonding exercise, men saw off their own feet, cadavers are sliced and diced, aliens splayed, prostitutes murdered, and children eviscerated . . .

Horror is everywhere, staring us in the face, so prevalent that it may no longer have an effect. Or if it does have an effect, it's only fleeting, like an alarm clock that wakes us just enough that we hit snooze and drift off again into our traumatized numbness. So instead, "The Horror Show" — a title meant cheekily to evoke old-time B movies as we simultaneously go in quite a different direction — investigates what is nasty, what is ubiquitous, but also what is not apparent: images and sounds that present as banal and benign, as inviting and beautiful, and therefore may ultimately be that much more

terrifying. This kind of horror functions from the inside out, not making us scream but making us increasingly anxious as we realize something is amiss.

In particular, we were attracted to work about the figure you aren't sure you saw, the sound you couldn't have heard, the memory you must have invented. We were attracted to work about paralyzing indecision and haunting regret, work that resees old things in new and disturbing ways — whether it be an old movie, a violent political event, or your own childhood. We were attracted to work about parts that may or may not fit together. Finally, we were attracted to work that makes you laugh at real horrors despite yourself, that makes you question the actions you may be capable of, the fantasies you may have, your role in the creation and perpetuation of all that is dark, cruel, or perverted.

At its core, this show is about looking in the mirror. Not a mirror that reveals sudden and clichéd gore, blood, and monsters, but a mirror that shows you exactly as you are, that shows the abyss. And the abyss is you.

Debra Tolchinsky and Dave Tolchinsky
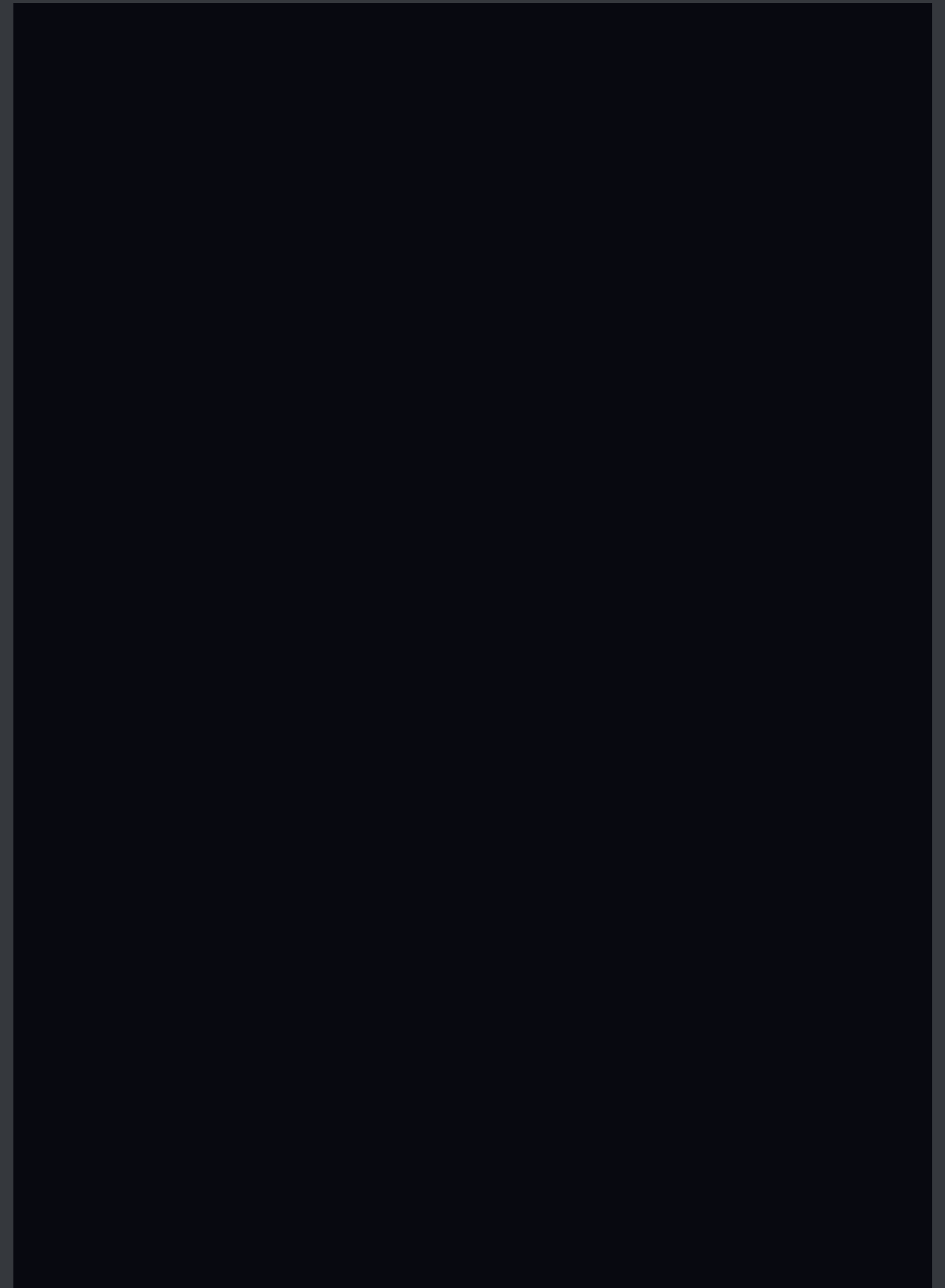
IT GAVE ME GOOSE BUMPS
by Laura Kipnis

Where does the horror come from — the outside world, or within? Consider the goose bump, also known as goose flesh, those involuntary pimply eruptions on the skin, at the base of body hairs, that develop when you've had a chill of either the physical or emotional variety. (They can also be caused by heroin withdrawal.) Produced by the sympathetic nervous system and also known as horripilation or piloerection, they're vestigial reactions related to the fight-or-flight response and have no actual purpose except to provide, at least according to popular lore, bodily verification that something horrifying or uncanny has taken grip of your being. "It gave me goose bumps" is always a high accolade when it comes to horror genres, though such testimonies are probably, as often as not, hyperbolic. Still, the expression conveys the idea that horror isn't solely a cerebral occurrence; it's a *total* experience, body *and* soul, invading your system, taking up residence in your very being.

Some people even get goose flesh on their faces, which is a little horrifying in itself, when you think about it. One minute you're smoothly human, the next you have poultry flesh. The presence of the animal within the human, or humans becoming animal (from werewolves to cockroaches), is of course a perpetual horror theme. But just about any category confusion can lend itself to horror. Not observing socially accepted boundaries can be horrifying, even monstrous. I don't just mean "aesthetic boundaries," like putting a urinal in an art gallery (though it was shocking in its day), but transgressing fundamental boundaries, like who (or what) you're allowed to have sex with versus who (or what) you're not (see **Jeffrey Sconce**'s *The Genius of Coolwhip*). After all, what is bestiality but a simple category error? Ditto necrophilia or incest — all-too-understandable category errors. These boundaries of ours are flimsy social fences: Categories can blur, proprieties are leaky and invite transgression. On the other hand, cross the wrong boundaries, and boy, do people get upset, as when you have sex with dead people or relatives. Imagine announcing that at a party.

In fact, the imagination itself can be altogether horrifying when not adequately constrained — consider what can happen in free association, the psychoanalyst's (and the surrealist's) devilish instrument. Goose bumps,

goose bumps . . . having the flesh of a goose, *having the flesh* of a goose, having sex with a goose, having sex with mom and dad and a goose . . . In the land of free association, anything goes. One reason pornography is so popular is that it's a prepackaged way to transgress proprieties at a remove, whereas real boundary transgressions can be far ickier. Consider the essential food/nonfood boundary, what's considered edible versus what's not

— since if you don't, what's to prevent cannibalism or coprophagia, that is, ingesting from the wrong categories. Endless material for horror, of course — in fact, it gives me goose flesh just to think about it.

Speaking of goose flesh, these days you can have animal parts medically transplanted onto or into your body, should you be short an organ or two. Porcine heart valves are now a common transplant item, though if you end up needing one, let's hope that it was a kindhearted pig; recall that in the 1962 film *The Hands of a Stranger,* the murderer's hands that are transplanted to a concert pianist's body have a will of their own — hands that keep on wanting to strangle and strangle some more. Missing limbs are always horrifying (see **Christopher Schneberger**'s *Frances Naylor* pieces), but so is having those of a dead person grafted on in lieu of your own. We're all

accustomed to such miracle medical advances these days; still, migrating body parts is another one of those fruitfully squeamish subjects. (Or severed ones; see **Jean Marie Casbarian**'s *The Outcast*.) The thought of wearing someone else's flesh can be viscerally unsettling. This was the general response to the first face transplant a few years ago in France, on a 38-year-old woman who'd lost her nose, lips, and chin

after being savaged by her pet Labrador while she was unconscious from a sleeping-pill overdose. People seemed rather distressed by the whole thing, as evidenced in the public fretting about the new medical territory we were entering, though the grisly circumstances probably didn't help, nor the fact that the donor was herself a suicide victim. Uncanny (if unspoken) questions hovered in the background: What if the dead woman's face had a will of its own? Who would win, the old psyche or the new face? Waking up without a face, then getting someone else's: Yes, a real-life horror, since if you're not your face, then who are you (see **Debra Tolchinsky**'s *Smoke and Mirrors*)?

Goose bumps only occur in mammals; geese themselves don't actually get them. But what do our goose bumps say? What if goose bumps were a secret language or a form

of hieroglyphics, and if you looked closely enough or from the right angle, they spelled out an important message emanating from deep within, from the soul or some as yet unnamed place? Recall that little girl in *The Exorcist* with welts on her stomach spelling out the plaintive message "help me." If I could read my goose bumps, I imagine they'd say something along those same lines.

Laura Kipnis is a cultural critic and former video artist. Her most recent books are The Female Thing: Dirt, Sex, Envy, Vulnerability *and* Against Love: A Polemic. *She is a professor of radio/television/film at Northwestern University.*

Christopher Schneberger
(from left) *Frances Naylor with Doll, Frances with Mother's Shoes, Franny and George Waltzing*

Brad Todd
Halo

1. a. Roughness, ruggedness. **b.** *transf.* Roughness or nauseousness of taste, such as to cause a shudder or thrill. *Obs.* **2. a.** A shuddering or shivering; now *esp. (Med.)* as a symptom of disease. **b.** Ruffling of surface; rippling. *Obs.* (Cf. 1.) **3. a.** A painful emotion compounded of loathing and fear; a shuddering with terror and repugnance; strong aversion mingled with dread; the feeling excited by something shocking or frightful. Also in weaker sense, intense dislike or repugnance. (The prevalent use at all times.) **b.** pl. *the horrors (colloq.)*: a fit of horror or extreme depression; *spec.* such as occurs in delirium tremens. **c.** As *int.* (usu. *pl.*). An exclamation indicating shock, surprise, fear, etc. **4.** A feeling of awe or reverent fear (without any suggestion of repugnance); a thrill of awe, or of imaginative fear. *Obs.* **a.** The quality of exciting repugnance and dread; horribleness; a quality or condition, and *concr.* a thing, or person, which excites these feelings; something horrifying. **b.** = *horror film*. **5.** *Comb.,* as *horror joke, magazine, –monger, –mongering, –photograph, story; horror-crowned, -fraught, –inspiring, –loving, –stricken, –struck* adjs.; *horror-strike* vb. *(rare)*; **horror comic,** a children's comic (sense B. 2) in which the principal ingredients of the pictures and stories are violence and sensationalism; **horror film, movie, picture,** a film designed to horrify, usu. by the depiction of violence and the supernatural.

Horror affects the body, it ruffles the surface; it makes you shudder or shiver; it may, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, have a familial resemblance to delirium tremens. That shuddering and ruffling indicate that one of the things horror does is make you notice (and question) where your body ends and where the outside world begins.

By revisiting fairy tales **Debra Tolchinsky** and **Jeanne Dunning** tell specific and strangely seductive tales about horror and the body's decay, deceit, or potential disappearance. In the stories of Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, untouchable heroines go into a perfect cold storage that resembles death; in Dunning's piece a single hand emerging from a duvet makes you wonder if there

is a body attached. In terms of aesthetic pleasure, would it matter if there weren't? But the other side of these fairy tales with a beautiful young woman's body in deathlike stasis is the mirror that marks the Evil Queen's aging — you can only be the fairest of them all if you're practically dead. A feminist critique might ask which is more horrifying for women, the smoke or the mirror — the female body (and the impossible demands it is exhorted to meet) or its disappearance?

Other works in the show also make the human body disappear. **Stephen Nyktas**'s *Underneath* photos tell of an eerily beautiful world going on around us that we have no part of — a definition of horror as antisublime, inspired by places where the camera can go but we are unnecessary (as the *OED* also suggests, horror can reside in "a feeling of awe or reverent fear"): the silence of the dust balls. **Jean Marie Casbarian**'s ghostly *The Outcast* references 19th-century spirit photography with its poignant black-and-white headless image that seems to be beckoning the viewer. **Dave Tolchinsky** and **Dan Silverstein**'s *Horror* combines an Edgar Allan Poe story of crypt-like suffocation with the fairy-tale structure of *Let's Make a Deal* to narrate the deterioration of the body. We hear a panicked, disembodied voice coming through the ground, desperate to escape, but unable to choose. (Were all those 1970s game shows really allegories of death?) Like Nytkas's work, this is also a version of the horror that lies beneath. Perhaps every door — every choice — is a kind of trap leading to our own eventual disappearance.

Brad Todd's *Halo* and *Æther* offer another version of a world outside and beyond human perception. Poe's tales and a priest's last-rites kit — both inescapable reminders of the porous boundary between life and death — become harbingers of a different kind of after-life, a world of electromagnetic pulsations, which once again makes the individual human seem wholly redundant. **Renate Ferro**'s *Facing Panic* reminds us that histori-cally, humans have been made redundant in a different way. Inserting us between TV screens to surround us with media exhortations to protect ourselves (from the

absurdity of "duck and cover" to the racist paranoia gener-
ated by 9/11), she reveals how panic becomes a tool of
control. Looking recent terrorism-inspired panics in the
face may make us wonder about the uses of horror and
panic — a kind of subjection in which the desire to protect
our individual bodies and minds makes us forget the need
to face the politics of panic. Who benefits from horror?

Finally, the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s ministory
of horror takes us to art and horror's central place in pop-
ular culture. Horror movies and comics (and art exhibits)
help us love our fear. By revisiting the familiar soundtrack
of *Psycho,* **Melissa Grey**'s *Psychodrama* suggests how a classic
horror movie can become uncannily new. In this show the
human body returns from the dead (from the disappeared,
from the ether, from behind the smoke of the mirror) to
enjoy the bodily sensations of horror as art.

*Pam Thurschwell is a senior lecturer in English at the University
of Sussex. Her work has focused on the intersection of psycho-
analysis, late 19th- and early 20th-century interest in the super-
natural, and new technologies. Her published writings also explore
popular culture and film. Thurschwell's current project (tentatively
titled "Out of Time: The Temporality of Adolescence in the 20th
Century") examines representations of adolescence in literature
and culture.*

Jean Marie Casbarian
The Outcast

Stephen Nyktas
(top to bottom) *Porch, Cabinet, Cinderblock*
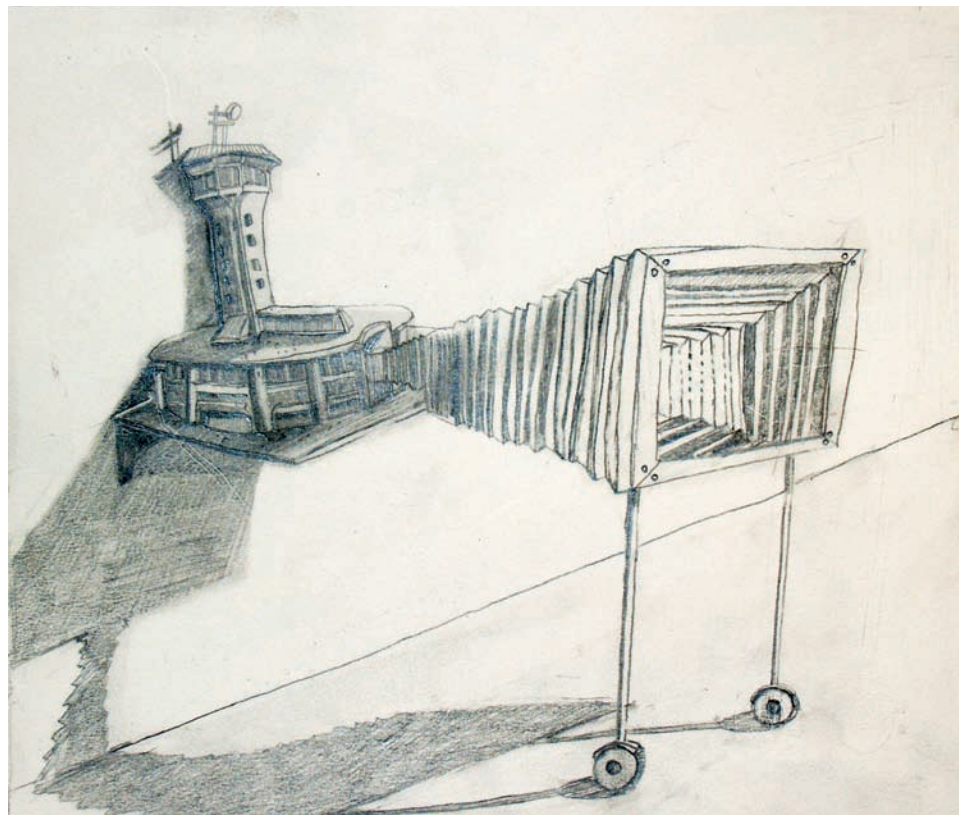
Brian Getnick
Drawing of *Old Airport II*

Craig Yu
Untitled from the series *Airline Disasters*

Josh Faught
The First Person I Ever Came Out To
Was a Convicted Sexual Predator, No. 5

Will horror survive the new century? Spectacular terror, certainly, but horror? The gothic uncanny — horror's primary engine for lo these many years — increasingly appears to be running on fumes. All the familiar signifiers remain — the blood, the corpses, the dungeons, the vampires — but what can any of this mean in the absence of the unconscious?

Some 30 years ago, Jean Baudrillard asked, "What are you doing after the orgy?" Suspicious of the incessant demands made in the name of an illusory sexual and political liberation, Baudrillard predicted a world where desire, difference, and seduction would eventually evaporate into a wholly transparent performance of enforced sexual emancipation. When everything is permitted and nothing is forbidden, and where everything is understood to be both sexual *and* political, what else could ensue but boredom and flattened affect, the awkward aftermath of liberation's orgy? In a world of complete visibility, where every fear, desire, and trauma is spoken — made instantaneously accessible across a variety of media platforms — desire and repression, both individual and collective, become Victorian relics, "discovered" by Freud only to pass away just as quickly in the history of the mind. What is left to not think about, to not see, to not hear?

Gothic horror survives on television with *Buffy* and her progeny, and yet its entire vampire mythology becomes slightly ridiculous in a world without Minas and Jonathans, only Lucys. A big-screen version, *Van Helsing,* reimagines Stoker's anxious advocate of reason as Indiana Jones, kicking the collective digital ass of the entire gothic menagerie. And yet nothing is really at stake beyond mere pain and bodily injury, no fates worse than death to take home after a night at the theater. When every paraphilia generates its own web site — efficiently visualizing previously secreted communities of "perversion" — to what extent do such sexualities remain beside and beyond? The "goth" movement, finally, refetishizes century-old sartorial markers of psychosexual dysfunction so that doomed excess becomes little more than another variety of erotic evening wear. What are the truly repressed to do?

"The Horror Show" makes many stops along this historical trajectory from eerie modernity to the contemporary crisis of a viable unconscious. Many of the pieces reimagine the classic iconography of the Victorian uncanny in the context of our increasingly canny era: **Jean Marie Casbarian**'s allusion to the minds lost in the wake of Charcot; **Jeanne Dunning**'s invocation of the bed as the premier theater of Freudian horror; **Christopher Schneberger**'s dream logic of childhood memory and trauma; **Debra Tolchinsky**'s mysterious mirror demanding that subjects excavate beyond their reflected surface. **Brad Todd**'s *Æther* and *Halo* resuscitate the long-standing alliance of the uncanny with technologies of the dead — the galvanic Poe married to the gothic's EMF afterlife. The techno-dead return in the flattened dread of **Craig Yu**'s plunging missiles, **Renate Ferro**'s *Facing Panic,* and **Brian Getnick**'s *Old Airport,* pieces that consider the new technocratic orders of time and space in late 20th-century horror. In a world without "obscenity," where few if any "other scenes" remain hidden, **Stephen Nyktas**'s "dirty pictures" probe for the last remaining hidden sites/sights still lurking within domestic life — an abjection of perspective and contamination. Moving from eye to ear, **Dave Tolchinsky** and **Dan Silverstein**'s *Horror* gives voice to sound's indexical relation to both impending terror and internal anxiety, while **Melissa Grey** dissects perhaps the most infamous horror "cue" in modern film, the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho.* **Josh Fraught** and **Jeffrey Sconce,** finally, consider two very different contemporary prospects for perhaps the last remaining monster in the cultural psycho-imaginary — the sexual predator, figured here as both a subaltern confessor and the subject of network television comedy.

A timeline of gothic horror's historical ascendance and its portending dissipation, "The Horror Show" sifts through a century of repression while also considering the looming horror of repression's end. A rare point of agreement, perhaps, between Freud the architect and Baudrillard the demolitionist: Be careful what you wish for.

Jeffrey Sconce teaches courses in film, media, and popular culture in the screen cultures program at Northwestern University. He is the author of Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television *(2000) and the editor of* Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics *(2007). His work in pop sound collage has been featured on* Some Assembly Required, Radio Clash *, and a number of college radio programs.*

Debra Tolchinsky
Installation views from *Smoke and Mirrors I*

Uncanny Abject Traumatic Sublime Horror
by Jeanne Dunning
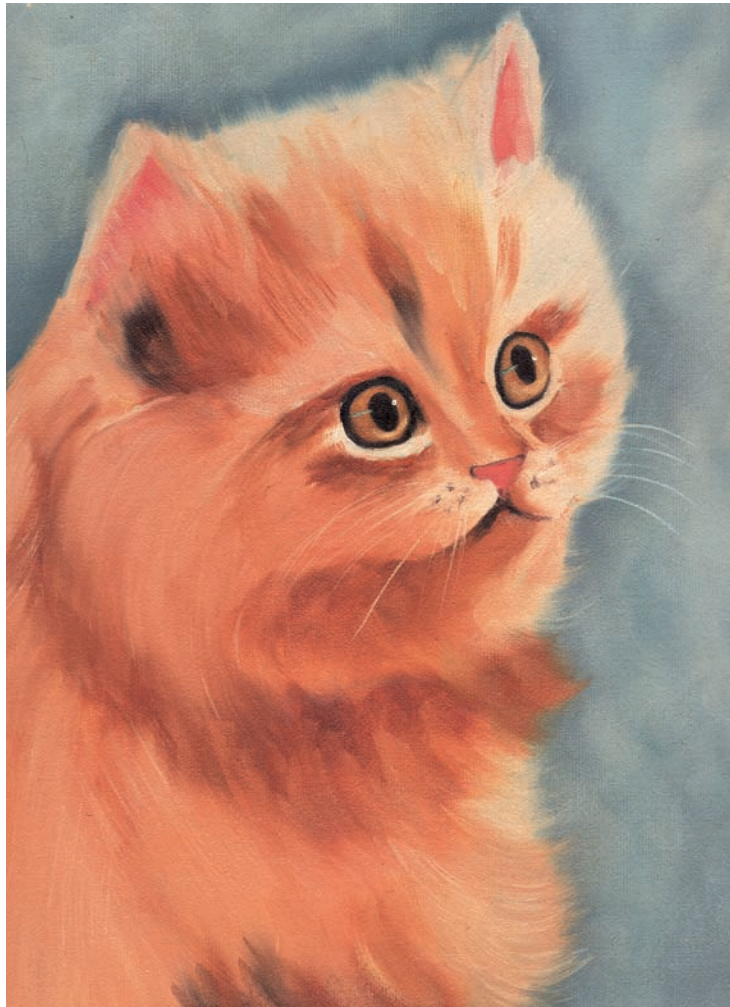
Jeffrey Sconce
Detail from *The Genius of Coolwhip*

The uncanny

In his essay of the same name, Freud describes the *unheimlich* — the uncanny, in English translation — as something familiar experienced as unfamiliar. *Heimlich* means comfortable, familiar — literally, homelike. This association with home carries with it an intimacy, suggesting a comfort that comes from being so routinely close to something that it is almost part of you — your home, your family, your baby blanket. It is a closeness of proximity; we do not see the *heimlich,* rather we are in it and part of it, immersed in its comforting touch.

But *heimlich* also means secret or hidden. The homey is also the private, kept behind closed doors — in the shadows. When those doors are opened and what is by nature private and hidden becomes public and exposed to view, it is wrenched from the blind comfort of proximity. We still recognize it as ours, and yet we do not. It is now distant and therefore strange. Since it is not where and how we knew it before, we both do and do not know it now. It is uncanny.

When we repress, we sequester something we know to the secret and the dark. We close the door behind it. Freud loved the archaeological metaphor. If we excavate our repressions, dig them up from their deep burial under the strata of centuries of civilization's sediment, they will come to light as so many risen corpses, the very stuff of horror. Freud's uncanny is the return of the repressed, and it takes a horrible form.

The abject

Kristeva's quintessential abject is turned milk, expelled bodily fluids, and corpses. The abject dissolves any illusion of boundaries. It is made up of things that could have become us or used to be us but are no longer. It is in between, evidencing a transition that we cannot comprehend, the transition from living to dead. We often talk about the living and the dead as though between the two we've covered everything and all things will fit into one category or the other. Yet really there are three categories: the living, the dead, and the never alive at all. For something to be dead, it must have once been living. Deadness always harkens back to a living past and in that sense seems transitional yet at the same time arrested, static. Transitions seem to be moving, and yet what is deadness if not inanimate? And even when something is dead, it cannot ever go back to its true originary state of never having been alive.

Psychoanalytic theory understands human beings as obsessed with origins, and the death drive is part of that obsession. The death drive is not exactly a drive to die but rather a drive to become inanimate, to reduce tension to nothing and reach a state of calmness. It is a drive toward a oneness with the world through being indistinct from other matter. In this way it is a drive toward the impossible, a drive to return to our origins, to reexperience our originary state, before our own conception, before we existed at all. Not to be dead exactly, but also not alive. Rather, to never have lived. And especially not to be a subject, since a distinction between what is me and is not me is the very fabric of subjectivity. My own origins can be understood as primally repressed, as they are the state that had to be suppressed for me to be at all.

The abject forces upon me a vertigo of boundary loss that is utterly threatening to my subjectivity. Yet it also pulls at my desire to know of my own origins. I fear it, but the fear is a magnetic one.

Like the uncanny, the horror of the abject is one of self-recognition. I recognize myself in something that used to be part of me but is now apart. For something to have been rejected or expelled — physically, as with rotting food, excreted bodily fluids, and dead bodies, or mentally, as with repression — it must have once been within. Horror is not external to the self. In a fundamental way horror is of one's self, of what one is or could become. The bodily examples are more literal, but we also experience horror of ourselves when we have glimpses of what we might be capable of, either based on our own actions or our identification with the horrifying actions of others. The horror we feel about our own possibilities is a threat to our sense of our humanity, just as the horror of dissolving boundaries is a threat to our subjectivity.

The traumatic

Our senses are extraordinary collectors, gathering vast amounts of information each moment we are alive. We learn, over time, how to filter, edit, and organize this information. Eventually, gradually, we learn to attend to the things that our past experiences tell us are useful and relevant and to discard the rest. Rather than being a calm and rational process, this is a defensive mechanism; it has an air of desperation about it. The sheer volume of unfiltered sensory data is an assault; it would inundate us, would be more than we could tolerate. Some say it would drive us crazy. Both autism and schizophrenia have been theorized as an inability to effectively cope with an excess of sensory data. With schizophrenia we see quite clearly how subjectivity is challenged by the inability to sort and edit sensory information. The schizophrenic cannot tell whether the voices he hears come from outside or inside his own head; or she experiences her body as breaking up, with bits and pieces drifting away; or he experiences his skin as a sieve that cannot contain him. There's a threshold after which too much information tears a person apart. An intact sense of self depends on the ability to filter and organize the excess of data that our senses provide.

The traumatic has been theorized in a similar way. If I have an experience so drastically foreign and overwhelming that I have no way to even begin to sort it out or place it, it is traumatic. Sometimes traumatic events are defined as events that cannot be experienced. Taking in the sensory information surrounding an event and experiencing that event are not exactly the same thing, although usually the latter follows so seamlessly from the former that we don't even realize an operation is being performed in between. To experience an event, I must be able to at least begin to sort and organize the sensory data. I must be able to give it some structure and relate it in a skeletal way to other experiences I have had. If my learned, constructed methods of organizing sensory data are of no use and this data remains unsorted, unprocessed, unfiltered, then I am never able to experience the event at all. The traumatized person is stalled, reliving the incomprehensible event over and over again, but unable to move on because he or she is incapable of experiencing it.

It's been said that there is no subject of trauma. In the cacophony of unstructured sensory input, subjectivity is lost. The traumatized person is at the mercy of an onslaught of unprocessable information.

The sublime

It is striking that the sublime is understood to be triggered by the same basic situation as trauma. Kant describes the sublime as an initially painful experience of something so vast and overwhelming that we cannot take it in. He describes a formless immensity that we can apprehend but can't comprehend, at least not with our imagination alone. Reason, he says, enables us to unite the immensity of the sensible world into a whole, thus transforming pain into pleasure. Among the autistic, the schizophrenic, the traumatic, and the sublime, only in the case of the sublime is the overload of information tamed and ordered through the idea. If the traumatic exemplifies the threat of being overwhelmed by sensory information, the sublime is its recuperation.

Horror

The uncanny, the abject, and the traumatic are each described as horrors, and when I think of trying to understand what horror is, that's where my thoughts move. Each of these states stems from assaults on subjectivity and problems with boundaries. The insidious particularity of horror is that these assaults don't originate squarely outside the self but are in some sense intrinsic. With the uncanny and the abject, the internal origins of the threat are clear. In both cases I try to get rid of a part of my self that I don't want to deal with by sectioning it off and burying or expelling it. But (as in any good horror movie) this expulsion does not get rid of it. It returns; it lingers and confronts me with my own dissolution. In the case of the traumatic, the culprit is the nature of our senses themselves. We always have this threatening excess within us; our senses continually bring it in. So here too, the problem seems intrinsic to who and what we are. There is a tenuousness to the sense of self that each of these states brings into graphic relief, as though the self is as flimsy as a house of cards, some fantastic mental construction with no substance. Our selves are based on the rejection of what

we can't deal with. In horror I am forced to look at the parts of what I am or might become that I reject. I suspect that, once experienced, true horror is never overcome, but remains as an internal reminder of all that I rejected in order to be what I need to think I am.

Jeanne Dunning's photographic, sculptural, and video work explores our relationship to our own physicality, looking at the strange and unfamiliar in the body, gender, and notions of normality. Her work has been shown extensively throughout the United States and Europe since the mid-1980s. She is a professor of art theory and practice at Northwestern University.

Renate Ferro
Facing Panic

Dave Tolchinsky and Dan Silverstein
Horror
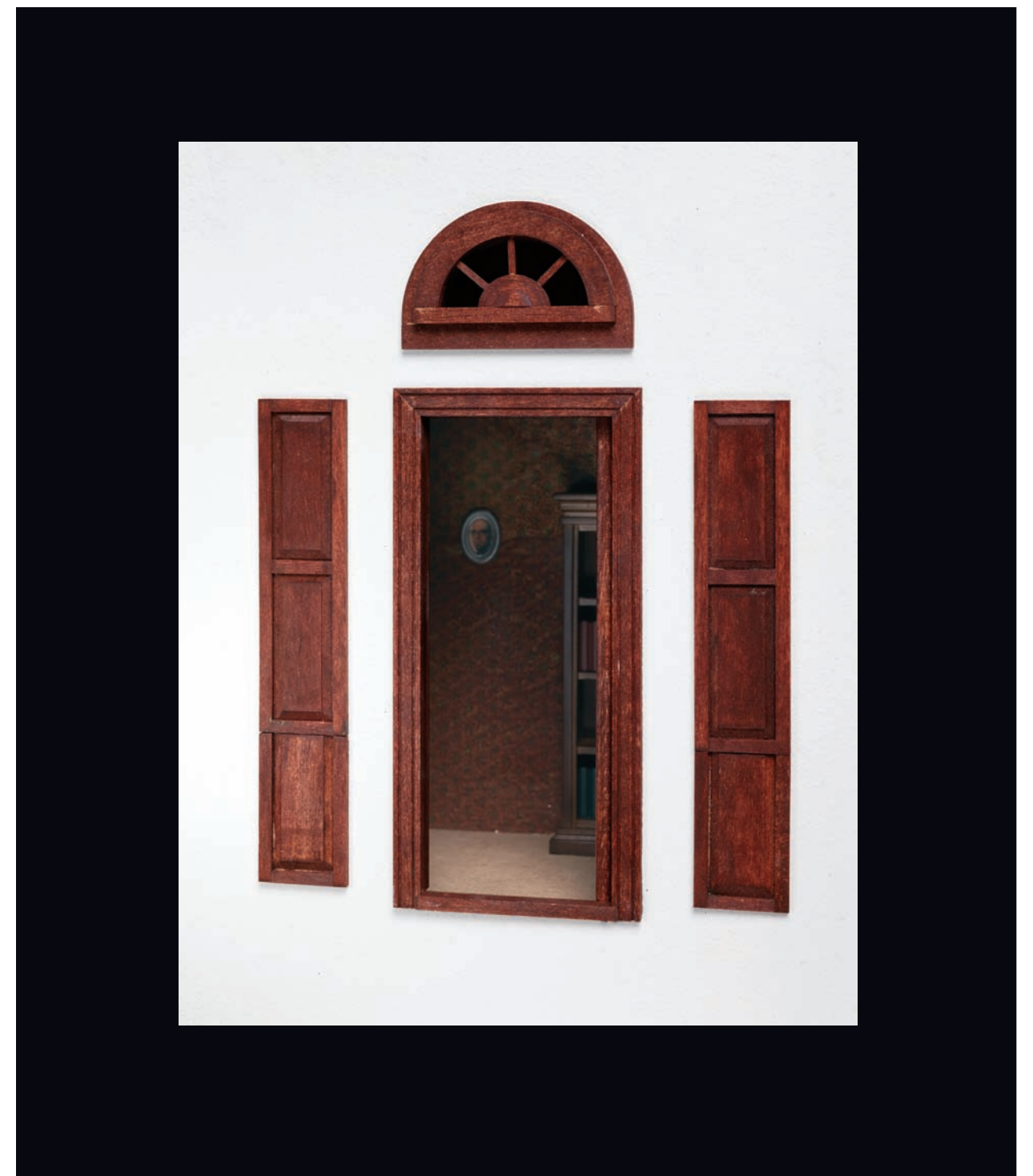
DISQUIETING HORROR: DISEMBODIMENT, MIRRORICAL STAIN, AND ELECTRONIC DISTURBANCE
by Timothy Murray

What does it mean for an exhibition on "Horror" to eschew the representation of horror itself? Absent from the gallery are those familiar depictions of mangled bodies, violent assaults, fleeing crowds, and rampaging chain saws that we associate with the horror of B movies and the shock of tabloid photos. Missing in action is the recognizable gore of horror and the expectant surprise of shock, whether from pools of blood or screams of terror. In their wake, almost as if clouded in the affect of melancholy for the loss of horror itself, lies something far more discomforting than the mass reproduction of what popular culture has accustomed us to seek but really no longer to fear.

Debra and Dave Tolchinsky chill their viewers with the psychic residue of disquiet itself. Here we're caught in psychic zones of time travel between fictions of old and terrors of new. We are solicited by the sounds of disembodied voices while being seduced by visions of disembodiment itself. And when the curators comfort us with the more solid ground of technological prosthesis — whether the book, the mirror, the door, the television, or the camera — they do so to eschew what Jean-François Lyotard called the terroristic "megamachine of reproduction, which understands alterity only as an opposite for dialectical reabsorption" (*Les TRANSformateurs Duchamp,* 92). When we finish the journey through Terror Tolchinsky, we remain tensed by a discomforting web of contrasting voices and sounds, by a photographic stream of uncanny apparitions of lost limbs and found objects, and by a sense that the frisson of disquieting sound moves ever so freely between these many artworks, as if specters disturbed in their slumber.

At every move this exhibition seems to unsettle the conventional discourse of terror. Perhaps this is most apparent in relation to psychoanalysis, whose terror was defined so chillingly by Freud in the divisive language of castration and its fright. We all know Freud's familiar tale of how males are discomforted by the visual shock of female lack, only to have their shaken subjectivity bolstered by disavowal through fetishistic reabsorption in the foot, the shoe, the leg. It is somewhat wondrous that so many of this exhibition's artists circulate limbs in ways that seem to diminish the fright of castration and the comforts of disavowal. Striking

in this regard are **Christopher Schneberger**'s enigmatic sepia photos showing an adolescent girl suspended in midair (whether dancing or posing with a doll) without the aid of her invisible legs. By levitating so leglessly in a rather stark environment, the girl denies the very possibility of Freud's fetishistic line of vision, from the feet up. What's particularly thrilling is how her limbs, or someone else's, reappear in the most incongruous setting in **Brian Getnick**'s *Old Airport,* whose sculptural aperture reveals a set of bizarrely detached legs flailing in uncanny suspension. **Jeanne Dunning** then greets us with an equally detached image of a hand whose isolation is rendered cozily familiar by its inviting framing in luscious bed sheets. **Jean Marie Casbarian** seems to take up the theme even more perversely by presenting a hazily suspended torso whose headlessness seems rather naturalized and benign within the show's recontextualization of horror (no headless horseman, this!). Taken together, these differing presentations of corporeal detachment work as "enigmatic signifiers" that gesture to the very Freudian tradition of terror without grounding the artworks in the clarity of disavowed vision or the pride of patriarchal confidence in the megamachine of reproduction.

Even the gaze is turned asunder by **Craig Yu,** who provides a bird's-eye view of a falling plane, and by **Stephen Nyktas,** who reverses vision in his inventive photographs to dislocate point of view from positions "underneath" cinderblocks, porches, and cabinets. Here subject becomes upside-down object, endowed with curious perspective. Similarly, many exhibited artists move from Freudian cabinet to Lacanian mirror to disquiet symbolic confidence in the gaze. In *Frances with Mother's Shoes,* Schneberger's legless girl stands in front of a mirror, but instead of looking back in horror at her inadequate self turns her mirrored vision at an angle to the floor, where her mother's shoes stand empty below her floating torso. It's almost as if Schneberger's shoes mirror Nyktas's cabinets to nullify the promise of the gaze, if not to grab it back for the daughter through the absent mother in an empowering redefinition of the fetish. If the shoe fits? The stain of the mirror is

Brad Todd
Æther

enacted literally by **Debra Tolchinsky**'s ingenious *Smoke and Mirrors,* through which the idealized mirrorical portrait vanishes before the viewer's eyes in an electrified puff of smoke. The horror of mirrorical masochism is here nullified by the terror of digital conceit.

Digital terror, then, is a means by which many works in this exhibition reflect the reversals of terror in contemporary digital and media culture. The issue is less the paranoia of two-sided mirrors, surveillance, and tracking than the appropriation and reversal of nefarious procedures of digital invasion though artistic performance. Indeed this is a show that seems tied to the beat of media disquiet. **Renate Ferro**'s *Facing Panic* marks the time travel of retrospective trauma by juxtaposing Cold War media tips for nuclear survival with contemporary interviews of 9/11 survivors and their elder kin, for whom the war on terror catalyzed unanticipated flashbacks to earlier anxieties. The medialization of trauma receives equally complex treatment in **Melissa Grey**'s sound piece, 13 sonic variations of character response to the infamous shower scene in the cinematic icon of horror, *Psycho.* This medialized slide between stained gaze and grain of voice acquires particularly slimy resonance in **Jeffrey Sconce**'s parodic sound appropriation of child molesters from *To Catch a Predator* — matched visually by **Josh Faught**'s ironic drawing *The First Person I Ever Came Out To Was a Convicted Sexual Predator.*

The network of electronic disturbance is most disquieting in **Brad Todd**'s interactive sculptures and **Dave Tolchinsky** and **Dan Silverstein**'s *Horror.* Todd's *Æther,* for instance, transforms the book of Poe's tales into a mobile EMF detector that makes audible the otherwise invisible flow of environmental electromagnetic currents. Todd's interactive performance of Poe's disquieting voice calling out from the past resonates strongly with Tolchinsky and Silverstein's nightmarish narratives, from behind three doors, of a body's strange deterioration, endless torture, and mental evaporation. Emitted from under doors lying curiously on the floor, these confusing sounds of terror speak in ghastly fashion to the extensive disquiet of disembodiment, mirrorical stain, and electronic disturbance figuring Tolchinsky Terror.

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Jeanne Dunning
In Bed

Jennifer and Kevin McCoy
Big Box 3

Ellen Wetmore
Up in Smoke

Jean Marie Casbarian;
created 1989, printed 2007
The Outcast
from the series *Notes from a Stranger*
Iris print, 35″ x 35″

out·cast (out′-kast′) one who is cast out or expelled; an exile; one driven from home, society, or country; hence, often, a degraded person; a vagabond. *The Outcast* presents the quintessential martyr who, through his timeless alienation, leads us into the darkness of a distant and tragic memory — one that pulls us forward into present tense to remind us of (what could be) a larger vision of humanity. My works are concerned with time, loss, longing, disconnecting familial histories, and the cultural friction of identity. My fascination lies with the deficiencies of language and how the absence of (hidden) stories or written accounts intersects with and reacts to a visual narrative, be it fiction or fact.

Jeanne Dunning, 2004
In Bed
C-print and frame, 32″ x 56″

I made *In Bed* as part of a larger body of work that attempted to explore the notion of a fragmented body. In our everyday language we divide the body into pieces and talk about the parts as though they could be conceived of as wholes. We talk about a finger, a foot, or an ear as though it can be understood as a thing in itself, separated from the rest of a body. The works I was making around this time attempt to suggest the anxiety that once you begin to take the body apart, it may not always be so easy to put it back together again. The body, unable to be fully reconstituted, remains a collection of scattered parts.

Josh Faught, 2004
*The First Person I Ever Came Out To
Was a Convicted Sexual Predator, No. 5*
Coffee, pen, and ink on drawing paper,
approx. 12′ x 40″

Reveling in the suburban panic sparked by true-crime novels and docudramatic tragedy, my current work calls on the darker side of craft and craft making to explore more personal sites of domestic dysfunction. Radiating in notions of camp and hysteria, objects and ornamentation are reconfigured to rhapsodize over codes of depression, desire, illness, loss, tragedy, and criminality. My intent is to invoke notions of failure and strategize sexual difference by combining the formal concerns of textiles, collage, drawing, and sculpture. Ultimately, the negotiations and translations between these disparate materials and processes catalyze the excavation of my own intimate moments of potential vulnerability and desire within this history.

Renate Ferro, 2007–08
Facing Panic
Video installation

Facing Panic was inspired by childhood memories of the Cuban missile crisis and an unexpected paranoia stemming from 9/11. I was struck by eerie similarities in the urgency for ordinary citizens to prepare for impending doom that Washington has promulgated in light of tragic events. This instal-lation asks the viewer to consider what happens when the federal bureaucracy's messages of panic in the media disrupt the balances and boundaries between the public and the private. Playing on the retrospective confusions between trauma then and now, juxtaposed public service announcements promoting "duck and cover" and bomb shelters are montaged with the high-tech television and web directives of our contemporary Department of Homeland Security. Videotaped interviews of cross-generational subjects reveal their personal responses to the panic of both periods. Whether relating to protection from the fallout of nuclear warheads or the possibility of additional terrorist attacks 40 years later, the installation becomes a catalyst for a confusing intermix of fright and anxiety both present and past.

Brian Getnick, 2007
Old Airport II
Wood, cardboard, clay, plaster, Plexiglass,
and mini-DVD player, 25″ x 25″ x 20″
(boarding ramp: 36″ x 24″ x 24″)

The airport is a place where I have thought a lot about death. Fantastic death, as opposed to the actual experiences I have had with death — the slow disappearances from hospitals. So my airport is crafted in an obvious way. It's the airport that is dead; it has a boarding ramp that grows like an esophagus into the room. People inevitably stick their heads inside it. If I could have, I would have designed it to close around them. In movies and stories it's always desire that trips up the hero; looking into that closet or under the bed, the protagonist is suddenly absorbed into the past in a way that's inescapable. This whole project is about a trap. That's the mechanism behind ghost stories that thrills me: the way we welcome the intrusion of the past into the present.

Melissa Grey (composer), 2006–07
Variation Nos. 1, 9, and 11
from *Psychodrama*: 13 sonic variations
on the visual theme of the iconic
shower scene in *Psycho*
DVD, c. 12.5 minutes

Psychodrama is an electroacoustic composition about audiovisual interaction in horror and suspense films. Consisting of 13 variations, the composition is a multiple rescoring of the shower sequence from Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho,* which the director originally envisioned without any accompanying music. Subjected to a series of sonic transformations, Hitchcock's iconic imagery functions as an artifact through which the role of sound in horror and suspense films can be high-lighted. *Psychodrama* experiments with the potential of sound to generate structure and form and to induce different meanings for the on-screen moving image. Ten of the variations are scored for live performance with chamber orchestra, tape, and projected video; variations 1, 9, and 11 are designed for headphone listening in "The Horror Show."

Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, 2008
Big Box 3
MDF, acrylic, wood, resin figures and
models, motorized turntable, electronics,
video camera, and video display,
36″ x 36″ x 18″

Big Box 3 is one of a series of works that imagine the possible futures of big box stores and shopping malls. Sculpturally a thin, miniature facade of stores moves endlessly in front of a stationary video camera. Clearly, something has gone wrong. Groups of figures — zombies, refugees, survivors — wander aimlessly. The stores have been fortified and walled off. The signs have been rearranged into cries of help. Everything is burned out and broken. The viewer can see clearly that the whole scene is a veneer, a set built around a hollow black core.

Stephen Nyktas, 2007
Porch
Cabinet
Cinderblock
from the series *Underneath*
Lambda prints, 18″ x 27″

The *Underneath* series is a collection of photographs captured by placing a camera underneath everyday objects and within ordinary household enclosures. The camera withdraws into the deepest, darkest corners and peers back through them. Through this simple gesture, the camera becomes a surrogate for the self. The images present a study of the desire to see without being seen, anxieties from being looked at, and the safety of being hidden. They document the undersides of cabinets, pipes, and other everyday spaces that usually remain unseen. Yet while these places are often layered with dust, dirt, and grime, they are also empty. One is hiding alone within these claustrophobic spaces, waiting and looking. The shroud of deep darkness is pierced by blinding light, each of which seems equally unknowable.

Christopher Schneberger, c. 1921
Frances Naylor with Doll
Frances with Mother's Shoes
Franny and George Waltzing
Archival digital pigment prints,
12″ x 12″

Frances Naylor's legs were amputated when she was only two years old. But when she was 13, Frances began having powerful dreams that she could walk. One morning, after waking from such a dream, she leapt from bed and found she was able to levitate. Her mother was a devoutly religious woman and forbade Frances from displaying this ability outside the house. Her father was fascinated, however, and made a number of stereo photographs of his daughter as she floated about their house. Just as mysteriously, Frances lost the ability after a few weeks, and the photographs her father made remain as the only record of this amazing occurrence.

Jeffrey Sconce, 2007
The Genius of Coolwhip
Audio with found photos

Embedding dialogue from the popular MSNBC series *To Catch a Predator* over a layered collage of popular recordings, *The Genius of Coolwhip* explores the accelerating horrors of "real" media content no longer anchored to its moral, ethical, or political contexts but instead stylized into a farcical comedy of deviant fascination and Baudrillardian "obscenity." Originally a "documentary" series purporting to expose online sexual predators, *To Catch a Predator* quickly evolved into a prurient (and overwhelmingly popular) comedy of candid-camera embarrassment. Alleged predators are lured to a home in search of an underage sex partner; instead, they find themselves trapped in a hidden-camera interview with NBC reporter Chris Hansen, who confronts the predator with humiliating transcripts of his highly sexualized Internet banter. While "sexploitation" has always depended on "squaring up" — a pedagogical justification for sensationalistic content — *To Catch a Predator* is perhaps unprecedented in exploiting the comic potential of statutory rape. But much as comedy functions in traditional horror, the series also provides a vehicle for viewers to displace and disavow their own sexual desire/anxiety (online and otherwise) through the staged humiliation of bona fide "perverts." By enhancing the already disturbingly ludic qualities of the program, this piece attempts to refocus the very real structures of desire at work on both sides of the television screen.

Brad Todd, 2006
Æther
Edgar Allan Poe *Complete Works,*
old belt, EMF sensor, and speaker
with 9-volt battery, 9.5″ x 7″ x 3″

Halo
Antique (1912) portable priest's
last-rites kit and Schumann Resonator,
11″ x 7.25″ x 4.5″

Halo is comprised of an antique portable priest's last-rites kit from 1912 and a Schumann Resonator. The kit itself signifies an endgame effort to provide some kind of closure or indeed bridge from one world to the next. Emitting a kind of numbing aura, the box became, for countless families, a kind of magnet for charged emotions, a vessel that erased the immediate surroundings of anything but the moment. Inside the box I have installed a Schumann Resonator, a discrete device that generates a field of the 7.83 Hz frequency, the pulsing rhythm of the earth itself — effacing all other frequencies within a range of nearly 300 feet. *Æther* incorporates an electromagnetic field sensor and speaker inside a hollowed-out copy of Poe's complete works. When switched on, the book becomes a mobile EMF detector, rendering audible the invisible flow of electromagnetic currents in the environment. Modeled on the archaic practice of belting books together to carry them to school, the book-belt apparatus functions as a companion piece to the "terrors" of Poe's worlds, and by extension infers a condition of anxiety (of influence?) and a sense of the "presence" of the past in our lives.

Dave Tolchinsky and Dan Silverstein, 2007
Horror
Clay, wood, paint, and audio,
26″ x 22″ x 12″

Horror explores the space of indecision, the gray room between the perceived polarity/duality of paradise and inferno. Through one door (or gate, as the case may be) certain doom, through the next unlimited pleasure, and through the third — who knows what. True horror is not looking into the face of hell; true horror is not being able to decide. A musing about suburban paralysis and overwritten TV, this is our first collaboration.

Debra Tolchinsky, 2007
Smoke and Mirrors 1
from the series *Smoke and Mirrors*
Mirror, DVD, plasma screen, and wood,
12.5″ x 10.5″ x 3″

What is terrifying? Is it the images perpetuated by horror movies? Or are those images merely "smoke and mirrors" covering up what is actually scary: one's own reflection or lack thereof. In countless horror movies someone looks into a mirror and sees not him/herself but a ghost. The Evil Queen in "Snow White" looks into her mirror and is told she is no longer the most beautiful. Yet like Dracula, who sees no reflection at all, we often look into mirrors without really perceiving. In *Smoke and Mirrors* one peers into a mirror and glimpses one's reflection only to have it slowly engulfed and snuffed out by smoke. *Smoke and Mirrors* is a pondering on perception, deception, and the difficulty of self-truth.

Ellen Wetmore, 2007
Up in Smoke
Video, dimensions variable,
15 seconds

Up in Smoke is a video image describing a dream I had about my body being reduced to ash. This is part of a larger series exploring gross physical transformations of my body through video and sculpture. I could explore self-immolation in a number of ways . . . but with video, a time-based document of "real" life, there is a cachet of truth, even for sophisticated audiences. I use comedy in this work because discussing horrible things can get didactic and it's more fun to work with absurdity. My inspiration for the comedic treatment of horror is classic cartoons: the coyote runs off a cliff, and it takes him a beat to realize it. When you transpose this type of action onto a photo-realistic human figure, people have a sympathetic physical response, and it stays with them.

Craig Yu, 2006
Untitled
from the series *Airline Disasters*
Oil on panel, 24″x 28″

Anxiety, disorientation, incomprehensibility, trauma, desensitization, spectacle, proximity, amnesia, aesthetics, and mass communications are all elements reflected in my work. The work engages in certain discourses regarding the historical identities of representation, abstraction, and process and the slippages and contradictions between these categories. It also engages with specific historical concerns found in monochrome painting. A sense of anxiety is reflected within my work through the disorientation between the time and space of material process, abstraction, and representation. These works reflect a constant continuum of trauma by withholding the sense of resolution.

The Horror Show

Curated by
Debra Tolchinsky and Dave Tolchinsky

Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, Long Island City, New York
August 7–September 2, 2009

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