

**Massacres of Meaning: The Semiotic Value of Silence and Scream  
in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Halloween***

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**Introduction – The Scream is Everything (Literally)**

Within traditional psychological and psychobiological parlance, screaming is considered either an outlet for repressed pain and trauma or the simple effect of a chemical reaction to terrifying stimuli.(1) As an aesthetic device, however, the scream can function in a far less pragmatic manner; it may take on a level of unknowability, of pure symbolic value. Consider: in literature, the scream does not even have a constant textual representation. Authors often simply tell the reader that a character has screamed rather than attempt to render the utterance into a coherent string of signifiers. When the scream is transliterated, it may be variously written as “Ahhh,” “Aieee,” “Aaaaa,” or as any number of other vowel-centric combinations. It has no definite signifier, nor an absolute signified; in this sense, the aesthetic scream is, in effect, the cynosure of signification in that it can be represented in virtually any conceivable manner and, equally, it can represent an endless panoply of concepts, experiences, and individual states of being. This idea holds especially true for the scream in horror cinema which, often through inducement by marked silences that oppose the very concept of conventional signification, acts as the ultimate gesture of multivalency in meaning.

Horror films such as Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) knowingly employ certain auditory tropes in order to increase spectator tension, unease, and anxiety.(2) Certainly, the unnatural groans or breathing of a monster or killer, the roar of a chainsaw or the sleek chink of a bladed weapon, and, most importantly, the scream of a victim all affect the experiential qualities of a horror movie; they draw the audience into a deeper emotional and psychological relationship with what is occurring on screen and, in essence, help to heighten the viscerally “frightening” aspects of the film.(3) However, such auditory tropes do not stop at being technical devices utilized in the enhancement of atmosphere or the intensification of shock. Indeed, aural cues such as those mentioned above – the victim's scream, the sound of weapons and the monster/killer's particular noise or, as is more ripe for critical interpretation, silence – are actually semiotic registers of the battle between life and death, order and chaos, and, most importantly, meaning and the utterly incomprehensible. When employed in the confrontation of victim and monster/killer, otherwise pedestrian sounds take on increased importance and become indicative of an ongoing conflict between the entire symbolic order (full of energy and potentiality) and a vast *lack* (characterized by entropy and a totalizing absence of possibility). In this sense, the monster/killer and all its concomitant noises and silences are representations of non-being, of death, of an entire “shutting down” of the play of signification. Equally, the victim's scream is more than just a scream: it is the attempt to defeat this “shutting down” – which could be described as an ultimate “nothingness” – by forcing the entire realm of signification, all potential meaning – an “everythingness” – into one utterance. What is truly at stake in the auditory confrontation between victim and monster/killer is, therefore, nothing short of the continued propagation of meaning, of the universe of the signified, writ large.

**Nothing Under the Roar – Silence and Screaming in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre***

Potentially one of the most explicit illustrations of the confrontation between auditory signifiers in horror cinema occurs in the final scene of Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. After the film's heroic

“final girl,” Sally, escapes from the serial killing family's house of horrors, she flees down their long, dusty driveway which, ultimately, leads to a public road.(4) As she runs, she is pursued by both Leatherface and the hitchhiker, neither of whom, apart from the monotone growl of Leatherface's chainsaw, make any noise.(5) Sally, however, is screaming the entire time; though on some level she must know that no one will hear her in the driveway, let alone come to her aid, she still employs the aural signifier of the scream. But why? If the sound will not elicit rescue or frighten away her pursuers, why does Sally not remain silent, saving her breath to run faster and harder? Within the world of the movie, it may be perfectly reasonable for Sally to scream and, in fact, one could easily attribute her vocal outbursts to unconscious, primal survival instincts in the face of fear – i.e., strictly psychological or psychobiological reactions. However, *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* does not seem to aspire toward acute realism in any other manner (indeed, many of the trappings of the family's home are bordering on the surreal), so it would be difficult to imagine that Sally's screams were a result of the filmmakers' striving for a more true-to-life character reaction. Rather, the impetus for her outbursts lies outside the narrative logic of the film, in the realm of signs and symbolic values. Sally's screams are primarily referential of abstract ideas that exist in a non-diegetic world, with the fear and fright she experiences in the narrative acting as only the surface layer of a much more complex and multiplicitous sphere of meaning.

Sally's piercing vocalization during her escape is especially notable given the silence of the hitchhiker and Leatherface during the scene. Indeed, in the auditory juxtaposition of monsters and victim, a clear oppositional binary becomes apparent. On one side lies the monstrous, equated with silence, and on the other side resides the victimized, equated with extreme, forceful sound. The monsters' silence is a signifier without a signified; that they do not speak, yell, or even grunt in their pursuit of Sally reveals that they have no true inner monologue, nothing within their beings (or, perhaps more appropriately, non-beings) prompts them to shout out to Sally in order to make her stop and, thereby, enter into the realm of signification-based communication.(6) Instead, Leatherface and the hitchhiker are driven, simply, monolithically, to kill, to end Sally's life. Their existence is predicated on ending other existences, on a totalizing ideology of silencing and closing down. They do not want life to exist, because life entails potentialities for change, diversity, and multiplicity; life is, at its base, brimming with signified meanings. The silence of the hitchhiker and Leatherface in this final scene flies in the face of life and, therefore, competes with potentiality and meaning. Their silence is utter lack; it is death and a dreadful, static meaninglessness. It has no referential, no signified thing that stands behind it, because to have such a signified would be to allow the world of meaning to creep in and, with the world of meaning, the possibility of change, something to which the murderous family in *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is clearly opposed, as is evidenced by their familial isolationism and their obsessive need to preserve and memorialize the past (i.e., making furniture and other functional décor from bones, venerating “Grandpa,” consuming the dead, and wearing pieces of the dead).

Visual representations within the film bear out this reading of Leatherface and the hitchhiker's silence. Within their house are numerous strange, seemingly totemic items – skulls and feathers, random detritus of former killings – that serve no apparent purpose. The meaning of these objects is completely in question, as no family member addresses their existence. The family practices no known religion that would make functional sense of these items, nor do they seem to have any immediately discernible aesthetic value for their owners. Rather, it is as if the totems simply exist without meaning, as if they are signifiers devoid of the universe of the signified. Equally, Leatherface's very appearance is pure signifier; we know only of his surface, his presentation to the world, as his true face is eternally hidden beneath a mask of dried and tanned human flesh. Who is the person (or thing) behind this human mask? The audience never knows and, indeed, cannot know. Leatherface's actual face, which, presumably, would reveal something of his personality or, at very least, give him subtle characterization, is never shown.

Thus, the identity of Leatherface, even on a level as superficial as physical appearance, remains as blank, as lacking, as his silence.

Considering Sally's scream in relation to the nature of the silence of the killers, then, it is possible to see how she is locked in an auditory battle. The hitchhiker's and Leatherface's lack, their emptiness of meaning, threatens to subsume and destroy Sally. She has no choice but to flee – which she does, quite literally – or fight back – which is precisely wherein the scream becomes of critical importance. Against the absolute vacuum of meaning that Leatherface and the hitchhiker's silence encompasses, Sally deploys the only possible weapon she has: an utterance of unbridled meaning, of any and all possible meanings. Her scream is as indeterminate as the killers' silence, but for exactly the opposite reason – it signifies anything and everything; the scream is auditory raging against broken signification, an attempt to fill the killers' yawning lack of signified meaning with a vociferous everythingness. The scream signifies life and endless possibility, the continuation of the individual uttering the sound and of the entire world of ideas, objects, and beings. Thus, in actuality, the scream is a weapon of joyousness, a weapon constructed of the unfettered play of signification.<sup>(7)</sup> Indeed, one of the final shots of the film shows Sally riding away in the back of a salvatory pickup truck, still screaming, but with the scream beginning to melt into a laugh, as if the two are, and always were, one utterance. Play has, seemingly, won the day and the symbolic order, signification as a universal communicative conception, survives.

But, of course, the movie does not close on Sally; it cuts back to a close shot of Leatherface, who is standing in the middle of the road, wildly swinging his roaring chainsaw without so much as a curse or a cry of frustration in his escaped victim's direction. Still maintaining an eerie silence, Leatherface appears to be purposelessly raging against unseen victims, his mindless drive to annihilate life and, therein, meaning, now scattered and unfocused due to Sally's disappearance. The play of signification may have temporarily escaped eradication, but the challenge to its existence from the lack of meaning and meaningful communication – what may be, in one regard, death – remains as pressing and immediate as ever before, as the tightness of the shot combined with Leatherface's manic fervor reveals. Indeed, it is notable that this final shot of loud, grating chainsaw is abruptly cut off, and the credits roll over absolute silence; no score fills in the auditory background, no chainsaw echoes across the scrawl, and no screams pierce the air. The film ends in total, almost unexpected, silence, providing only further evidence that the silencing force of death, nothingness, and semiotic shutting-down are omnipresent and can burst in upon the noise of signification and life at any moment.

One last point concerning the final scene – almost an addendum – revolves around the growl of Leatherface's chainsaw which, in the aforementioned ending shot, is indicative of the dualistic functionality of its sound throughout the entire movie. Leatherface, as remarked upon already, neither verbalizes nor even vocalizes an internal state; in the final shot, he continues to do essentially what he has done for most of the film – namely, brandish a weapon menacingly and without personal utterance. The character of Leatherface is synonymous with this action and, in contemporary cultural consciousness, he is rarely represented without his chainsaw. The tool of destruction and the destroyer himself have an inextricably symbiotic relationship, as one seems incomplete without the other. This melding and merging of the Leatherface with his chainsaw can be easily explained if the noise of the chainsaw is conceived of as a hollow signifier that stands in place of what should be Leatherface's meaning-filled voice. As Leatherface is the epitome of meaninglessness, of non-being and an eternal shutting down of signification, he can only present unto the world a series of signifiers. Anything that indicates Leatherface's “being” is necessarily surface appearance, as, at his core, is ultimate lack. Just as his blank, human flesh-mask stands in for a real face with true, meaningful features, so too does the roar of the chainsaw stand in for a real voice with meaningful speech acts. Its sound is a grating, monotonous growl

that never varies in pitch or tone but, instead, remains a static auditory field. This noise is the voice of absence; it is the roar of the void. Leatherface does not speak because he cannot, because he has no internal state to express, to signify. The sound of the chainsaw is his only auditory communication and it acts, quite simply, as a conduit through which the unchanging rage toward dynamic existence that lies beneath Leatherface's exterior is able to flow.(8) Rather than scream obscenities or promises of reprisal toward Sally in the final moment of the film, Leatherface revs the chainsaw; in a time and place where some sort of frustrated vociferation would be expected, there exists only an angry metallic buzz. Here, then, the chainsaw's loud, feverish sound substitutes for Leatherface's voice. It is the weapon that "speaks" to the fleeing Sally rather than the killer, and what the chainsaw "says" is nothing coherent or remotely intelligible; it is, simply, the sound of meaninglessness, of the collapse of all play of signification into one grating, everlasting void.(9) Like Leatherface's silence, the voice of the chainsaw (i.e., Leatherface's surrogate vociferation) is the constant aural form of a greater entropic force, a destructive tearing apart of meaning and shutting down of signification that perpetually lurks at the margins of normative, sign-filled existence.

In general, death scenes scattered throughout the film support – albeit somewhat less demonstrably than the final scene – the notion that killers and victims are locked in an auditory war of signification. Franklin's death, for instance, deals in the same formula of silence and scream. It occurs as he and Sally are wandering in the darkness, searching for their missing friends. As they traverse the murdering *Massacre* family's land, an overwhelming silence hangs in the air; there is no sound but for their crunching through twigs and leaves. Then, suddenly, Franklin tells Sally to stop because he "hears something." The audience is not privy to what this "something" might be, as nothing breaks the silence just yet. For a moment, indeed, no more than a brief second, all attention is aurally focused; the audience struggles to hear anything, but only silence comes from the darkness – the same disquieting silence of absolute nothingness that flows through Leatherface and Hitchhiker. Indeed, the audience listens closely for a sign of presence, but is greeted by nothing, a vast, uncontained absence. Out of this silence emerges Leatherface, the embodiment of semiotic hollowness, bearing his roaring tool of meaningless vociferation, the chainsaw. As in the final scene, Leatherface does not speak or laugh or make any communicative gesture other than to hack Franklin, now screaming, to pieces while Sally, also screaming, watches. Here, again, Leatherface has only one goal: the eradication of life and those who come bearing meaning and meaningful signification. He gives no reason for his killing nor does he show any emotion – pleasurable or otherwise – toward the act. Leatherface's entire being is here, as in the final scene, wrapped up in lack of signified meanings.

Equally, Sally's scream is also highlighted as a contrast to Leatherface's personal silence (and his chainsaw's monotone roar). As Franklin is being murdered, Sally stands in the shadowed background, subsumed, visually and sonically, by Leatherface's shutting down of Franklin's potential for signification. Initially, the action focuses on Leatherface and Franklin, with the darkness encompassing Sally, making her form indistinct, and the noise of the chainsaw drowns out her screams, all as if she is literally being swallowed into meaninglessness. Eventually, however, the scene cuts to Sally, alone, bathed in a dim light and screaming in a clear, piercing tone. This scream is blatantly juxtaposed with the prior silence and guttural chainsaw sounds; it is the antithesis to Leatherface's absolutely empty death-dealing and, as such, is the vociferation of life itself, the simultaneous assertion of every possible signified, every possible meaning in the communicative spectrum. Here, as in the film's final scene, Sally screams to ward off Leatherface's nothingness, his lack of signification. She attempts to fill the monstrous void with an utterance that can, and does, have any and all potential meanings.

The same sort of binary opposition between silence and scream plays out in other murders within the film as well – not the least of which is Pam's infamous meathook murder scene. However, to discuss each of these murder scenes in depth would be to only reiterate and belabor points already made. It will suffice to say that in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (and, indeed, perhaps in all other horror films that deploy silence against the victim), the confrontation between monster/killer and potential victim is not so much a struggle for mere life or death, but a struggle to end or propagate signified meaning.

### **The Silence of Eviscerated Meaning – *Halloween* and Layered Nothingness**

Although the auditory battle of signification between monster/killer and victim exists within an extremely broad spectrum of horror films well beyond *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, few of these movies add any significant caveats or extensions to the general formula.<sup>(10)</sup> John Carpenter's *Halloween* is one of the rare exceptions. In *Halloween*, the audience is presented with the inscrutable, ever-silent Michael Myers, a figure of absolute meaninglessness and nothingness in the same vein as Leatherface. Michael kills for no reason; he is, according to his psychiatrist Dr. Loomis, “pure evil.” In this case, pure evil most closely means destruction and violence without purpose. The reason Michael is so feared and so alien to Dr. Loomis and the broader swath of humanity is because there exists no meaning behind his actions, no signified object or thing that serves as motivation for his killing. Every one of Michael's murders is what it is – a killing, a cessation of life for the sake of the cessation of life. His actions are, therefore, well outside the realm of signification, as nothing whatsoever stands behind them as greater or deeper meaning for their existence.

Michael, as much as Leatherface (and, arguably, more so), embodies lack, the vast nothingness that seeks to usher in a totalizing universe of empty, static homogeneity. Indeed, from opening scene to the credits, Michael never utters a single syllable or even (unlike Leatherface) a cry of physical pain. In the final confrontation with Laurie, he is gored through the eye by a clothes hanger, stabbed with a butcher knife and, eventually, shot multiple times by Dr. Loomis. Yet, during all this physical punishment, nary an expletive or groan escapes Michael's lips; rather, he remains eerily, preternaturally, silent. Lynda's death earlier in the movie is also telling of Michael's drive to shut down signification, as he strangles her with a telephone cord, literally and figuratively breaking her line of communication to Laurie, with whom she is conversing when Michael strikes. After he has killed Lynda, Michael is offered an opportunity to talk to Laurie on the telephone, but he cannot do so. He picks up the receiver and places it next to his ear and mouth, but says nothing. Michael has no message to convey to Laurie, as a message entails meaning and signification. Instead, he can only offer up silence on the line, his nothingness rebounding against Laurie's urgent, and voiced, concern for Lynda. Michael is, therefore, existentially silent, having no internal state whatsoever (not even a state of biological internal normalcy, apparently) and no realm of deeper signified meaning to express. Michael is entirely without signified substance. The characters around him, Dr. Loomis and Laurie, for instance, try to give reasons for Michael's behavior and attempt to understand his being, but invariably fail and are forced to deal with Michael as a machine-like presence, a pure functionary of what they term “evil” – i.e., unmitigated destruction of life and signification.

That Michael is pure, absolute impersonality and meaninglessness is also represented visually. Through much of the movie Michael's true face is obscured, as he perpetually wears a pure white mask, a featureless, utterly blank false-face. His representation to the world is this lack of personality and definition, a complete and generic shallowness of being (and, even when the audience does see a clear shot of Michael's face in the opening scene, it is revealed to be that of an entirely average blond-haired, blue-eyed boy – a completely generic American child). Michael is not, therefore, a person, but a thing, a device by which entropic nothingness may assert its violence upon the world of meaningful signification.

His clothes are equally lacking in personality or meaningful feature, as, for the majority of the film, he wears a plain blue mechanic's jumpsuit, a garment devoid of any frills or aesthetic contrivances – it is, in essence, the garb of pure functionality. Indeed, as Michael is more a function (or machine) than an individual, it is only fitting that the jumpsuit he wears is one of a mechanic, a person who deals in the maintenance and propagation of lifeless, mechanized, and, for the most part, merely functional objects (i.e., vehicles).

One might be tempted to argue that Michael Myers does not fit the model of monster/killer without signified meaning because he is revealed to be a “real” person underneath his mask (once, in the opening scene, as a child and once, when he escapes from Dr. Loomis, as an adult). The idea that Michael's silence is not representation, but an actual auditory form of nothingness itself, hinges on support from the narrative and visual aspects of the movie (as was the case with Leatherface in *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*). If Michael is a “real” person, a character with deep psychological motivations and a complex inner state, then his silence is indicative of some signified “thing” – an introversion or sociopathy, perhaps – rather than nothing whatsoever. However, this is not the case. Even though *Halloween's* opening scene shows Michael's true face (at least at a young age), this does not mean he has a substantial being. Indeed, Michael's appearance is extremely and disturbingly average, as if he is an everychild. As mentioned before, he is the prototypical blond-haired and blue-eyed Caucasian boy, a stock individual, an American archetype – the “boy next door,” if you will. When his clown mask is pulled from his face, he displays no expression, no emotion, no sign of thought or inner dynamism. He appears devoid of any specific set of psychological and emotional traits that might be thought of as “personality.” Thus, even in his supposed individuality, Michael is generic. As such, his blank mask is overlaid upon an equally blank “real” face; layers of meaningless signifiers stack one atop the other to create the illusion that Michael might be a “real” person on some as-yet-unseen level. (And, in fact, the layers are stacked even one higher when Michael drapes a ghost-sheet over himself and dons Bob's glasses just before he murders Lynda.) In reality, however, this multi-layering of signifiers only deepens Michael's insubstantiality, as his identity becomes like that of a Russian nesting doll, with the final, tiny figurine at the middle cracking open to reveal nothing but a yawning abyss of meaning. Michael's silence throughout the film is, therefore, of an even more impenetrable nothingness than the lack of meaning that Leatherface embodies. This complete and all-encompassing silence and its concomitant drive to destroy signification is reinforced by the nature of Michael's very being – that of nothing more an amalgam of hollow signifiers.

Michael's primary combatant in his auditory battle is *Halloween's* “final girl,” Laurie. Unlike Sally in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, Laurie does not scream when in direct confrontation with the monstrous Michael Myers (when he initially startles her after she finds the dead bodies of her friends, she screams, but this seems to be less in response to Michael than to the shock of the entire situation – i.e., seeing a room bursting with dead bodies then being accosted by a knife-wielding stranger). Rather than scream, Laurie whimpers. In the final sequence of scenes, as Michael continually attempts to murder her inside the Doyles' house, Laurie is unable to make any noise other than a frightened sound of desperation. She is clearly capable of screaming, as, before she ran into the Doyles' house, she pounded on a neighbor's door and screamed the word “help” repeatedly (a call to aid, which, tellingly, went unanswered – perhaps exhibiting the inefficacy of Laurie's screams). However, once she is in direct, face-to-face confrontation with Michael, Laurie cannot voice any meaningful communicative utterance. Her whimpers feel as though they are on the edge of louder, more forceful vociferation, and might grow into screams – especially in the scene in which she is hiding in an empty closet with Michael attempting to break through – were they not perpetually cut short or somehow retrained. That Laurie evinces this inability to scream, this stopping just short of deploying the signifier of everythingness, is testament to the overwhelming power of Michael's silence, his vast and all-consuming lack of signified meaning. Laurie cannot scream

because Michael's silence is too forceful, too pervasive; it shuts down signification to a substantial degree even without murder. Indeed, Michael cuts the phone lines in the Doyles' house prior to stalking Laurie, thus silencing her in a broader manner by disallowing her communication with the outside world. Michael's multi-layered meaninglessness is, quite simply, all-pervasive within the film and shuts down signification at every possible turn, whether through killing (his means include, interestingly, slitting throats and strangulation – both forms of violence against the larynx and, hence, vociferation) or through the sheer force of his non-being in the world. Thus, due to the strength, the unfathomable depth, of Michael's silent meaninglessness, Laurie cannot do more than whimper during the confrontation. The last useful weapon against Michael's silence has been held at bay, and there can be no end to the invading nothingness, no gleeful “filling up” of the lack, as is evidenced by the fact that Michael is “filled up” with a knitting needle to the neck, a clothes hanger to the eye, a knife to the stomach, and several bullets to the chest yet still survives. No matter what weapon attempts to penetrate and disperse his silent lack, the result is the same: failure.<sup>(11)</sup> Michael Myers is, therefore, an ultimate figure of endless nothingness and hollow signification against which there may be no true escape, only brief, and quite temporary, abeyance

### **All or Nothing – A Very Brief Conclusion**

Sound in horror cinema has many uses. It can be utilized to heighten a visceral shock, enhance a disturbing or anxiety-provoking atmosphere, or even to foreshadow horrific events. Such spectator-centric functions of sound have been scholarly and critically recognized and explored. However, as is evinced in *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Halloween*, certain sounds in the horror film also have value in terms of their semiotic capacity – a fact which has gone undeveloped within academic discourse. Horror movies that contain a silent killer or monster involve an auditory struggle between a force that seeks the total shutting down of signification, a vast lack of signified meaning – i.e., the killer/monster's silence – and the entire realm of the signified, an everythingness of meaning – i.e., the victim's scream. When silent monster and screaming victim collide, nothingness and everythingness meet, with the scream, the victim, and everythingness occasionally winning the day but, more often than not, the killer/monster's silence, the absolute lack of meaning (death and entropic destruction writ large), remaining an ever-present, ever-looming threat to the entire world of signification and meaningful communication. Thus, within horror films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Halloween*, the juxtaposition between monstrous silence and victimized scream is, in actuality, a perpetual battle between meaning and meaninglessness, with victims not only fighting for their lives but for the continued existence of signification.

1. Jeffrey Gray's *The Psychology of Fear and Stress* (1972) and, though somewhat controversial for its therapeutic suggestions, Arthur Janov's *The Primal Scream* (1970) both explore the implications of the scream as a device engaged in the subconscious management of horrifying or terrifying events.
2. Although audio in horror cinema remains a relatively underrepresented subfield of scholarly inquiry, works such as *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear* (2009), *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound, and Horror Cinema* (2009), and Thomas Sipos's *Horror Film Aesthetics: The Visual Language of Fear* (2010) all discuss the topic in significant depth. However, they primarily focus on the technical aspects of sound production and the experiential effects that such sounds have upon an audience.
3. In their "Developmental Differences in Response to Horror," Joanne Cantor and Mary Beth Oliver explain that the sounds of horror movies are "available to energize and intensify, via excitation transfer, the viewer's feelings of fear that are produced by the various plot elements [of the horror movie]" (228).
4. "Final girl" of course referring to Carol Clover's postulation of the recurring female figure – an ostensible heroine – who is the last person to face the killer of a horror film. For further explanation, see Clover's *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*.
5. In *Horror Film Aesthetics*, Sipos explains how the "sudden loss" of ambient sound – such as occurs in the final scene, with only Sally's screams echoing in the audience's ears – can "unsettle or terrify" due to the sudden and precipitous lack of what is normally present (228). From a filmmaking standpoint, this is logical and useful technique, but from a textual position, the silence defies explanation, as there should, seemingly, be no reason why practically all sound beyond Sally's scream (and eventually Leatherface's chainsaw) evaporate within the scene.
6. It should be noted that this idea of signifier with missing signified is not the same as Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra as posited in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1985). In Baudrillard's philosophy, the signifier has no signified because the signifier is, in itself, its own signified; it has been mass produced and copied to the point where it has taken on a life of its own. The lack of signified here, in *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, is total and, indeed, purposefully hostile toward the notion of signification-based communication. It is not merely a byproduct of rampant consumerism, but the embodiment of a system that stands in opposition to the generation of meaning.
7. It is interesting that audience members in a university study found Sally's screaming to be "the most freaky thing about the movie" (Nolan and Ryan 39). This might be explained by considering that the chainsaw, and, indeed, even absolute nothingness in the form of physical or existential death, have been within the general Western cultural consciousness for decades (and in the case of physical death, since time immemorial) while the scream as weapon and absolute everythingness is a fairly new and, therefore, unknown concept (indeed, the idea of an everythingness of signification has only been in common parlance since Derrida's *Writing and Difference* (1967)). Thus, being the lesser known quantity, the scream becomes the sound that evokes the most anxiety as audience members are not certain what it entails.
8. It is worth noting that monotone drones, such as the growl produced by the chainsaw, have been found to produce within listeners a heightened sense of suspense. Janet Halfyard in her essay "Mischievous Afoot: Supernatural Horror-comedies and the *Diabolus in Musica*" explores this issue in significant depth, examining the manner by which atonality and aural stasis affect the reception of horror film.
9. Scholars have also noted that simplistic, uncomplicated sounds – like the growl of a chainsaw – evoke a sense of visceral disturbance rather than an intellectual interest. Thus, the reaction to Leatherface's buzzing weapon is not one that queries why he might be using the device but, rather, one that simply flees from it, like Sally, in abhorrence. For further discussion of this issue, see Fiona Kelleghan's ICFA presentation "Sound Effects in Science Fiction and Horror Films."
10. James Wan's *Dead Silence*, for instance, provides another overt representation of monstrous desire to shut down signification, as the film's spectral monster, Mary Shaw, demands absolute silence of all around her (i.e., a complete shutting down of signification). If a victim screams in the face of her terrifying form,

she tears out that individual's tongue, thus silencing that individual literally and symbolically. Shaw abhors meaningful communication and, hence, seeks to destroy the entire symbolic order which allows for such communication. Although perfectly exemplifying the monster/killer's monolithic desire to silence and end the system of signification by destroying the scream, this film does not advance the idea in any novel manner and, ultimately, is simply an excellent example of the aforementioned rage against semiotic and symbolic communication. For further discussion of the more conventional ways in which *Dead Silence* uses sound and silence, see Brigid Cherry's *Horror: Routledge Film Guidebooks* (2009).

11. In *Nightmares in Red, White, and Blue: The Evolution of the American Horror Film*, Joseph Maddrey explains this insane fortitude as the all-pervasiveness of chaos and disorder in even the most orderly and socially well-organized places (i.e., the suburbs) (133).

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