CHAPTER TWO

‘Fear’ and the Media: A Common but Complex Theme

2.1 Introduction

This study grew out of an interest in, and a critical perspective on, the work of George Gerbner and his colleagues at the Annenberg Institute of Communications, Philadelphia, who in the late 1960s and early 1970s took media effects research onto a different stage through the development of their ‘Cultural Indicators’ project. Seeking to investigate the possible effects of media violence on society, they moved away from behavioural theories of individual, short-term effects, which had dominated mass communication research until then, and instead suggested that media violence, as well as other representations of power constellations on television, gradually ‘cultivated’ a climate of fear and distrust in the public. Television was considered to cumulatively influence the ways in which people perceived reality and subsequently led their lives. An early hypothesis of the Annenberg group was that the more viewers were exposed to violent television, the higher was their fear and their sense of a dangerous, ‘mean world’ and, further, the more likely they were to accept police forces and other authorities within the existing social order. Consequently, television was seen to act as an agent in reinforcing the status quo (Gerbner et al., 1979; 1987).

Similar concerns about the role of the media in creating and sustaining a fearful public have sparked a relatively constant flow of research across the social-scientific arena, continuing within media and communication studies, but also developing in the fields of criminology, sociology, and psychology. The general premise underlying much of this work has been that fear is a powerful, alienating and destructive force, which ultimately causes people to turn their backs on civil liberties. The reason for academic interest in the topic is clear. Wars, it is argued, are being fought on the back of ‘fear’, and various industries, including the media sector itself, are seen to benefit from a fearful public.
In addition to this macro-societal concern, pundits have also continued to pursue the impact of the media in terms of more immediate and individual psychological effects. Here, much has been written about the ‘distressing’ or ‘traumatising’ potential of certain media material, television news or horror films in particular, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable and ‘easily impressed’, the child audience. In contrast, within the humanities, the relationship between fear and the media has for the main part been considered as somewhat of a puzzle. The question of why people are seemingly afraid of what they know to be unreal has been considered a ‘paradox of fiction’ (Carroll, 1999). While the gothic novel has posed this question for literary studies, film scholars have pursued it with regard to the horror movie. Thus far, the endeavour has often consisted of theoretical and textual considerations from within three main paradigms: psychoanalysis, cognitivism, and phenomenology.

What the social sciences and the humanities have in common is that, with some strong exceptions, they have largely conceptualised the media/fear relationship as that of media inducement. In other words, the media have been held responsible for generating greater or lesser degrees of fear in readers and viewers, with greater or lesser ‘harm’, depending on one’s ideological standpoint. This chapter reviews some of the thought and research that have shaped the exploration and appropriation of fear and the media in its broadest sense. The aim is not so much to provide a chronological history of media/fear research, since this is both futile and difficult in the light of multi-disciplinary approaches, but instead to draw out from the existing literature the different concepts of ‘fear’ that have been applied to the relationship between film/television and the audience. In the process, I hope to identify what I consider a problem in the over-simplified use of the concept of ‘fear’, as well as in the theoretical assumptions about audiences that underlie much previous work. I begin by discussing Gerbner et al.’s Cultivation Analysis in some detail, since it formed an early point of reference for this thesis and has had a particular influence on the design of my study.
2.2 Fear Perceptions

2.2.1 The Cultivation of Fear: Some Context

In *Understanding Audiences*, Andy Ruddock describes Cultivation Analysis as a ‘paradigm of audience research that has enjoyed an unusually high public profile’ (2001: 97). This high profile partly derived from the researchers’ eagerness to produce policy-relevant research and to engage in public debates surrounding the power of the mass media, sometimes, as in the case of the group’s Violence Profiles, conducting their research on behalf of the American government. It seems clear, not least in the eyes of contemporaries (see, e.g., Ball-Rokeach, 2001), that the Annenberg studies were very much a product of their time in that they were generated during a period when violent crime in the United States was considered to be on the rise (though the magnitude of the surge is disputable, see Gurr, 1981: 295f), and people’s sense of a violent society was heightened by the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy in April and June of 1968. It was allegedly as a direct result of these latter events that President Lyndon Johnson appointed a National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (NCCPV), whose aim it was to ‘review all available evidence and report on what the United States needed to do to change the downward course it was following’ (Watson, 2004: n.p.). The link between violence in society and the representation of violence on television was promptly made, and the commission contracted George Gerbner and his colleagues at the Annenberg Institute to conduct a series of research projects in order to measure and assess violent content in television drama.

Shortly thereafter, in spring 1969, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (DHEW), on request of Senator John O. Pastore, instigated a research programme which sought to investigate the relationship between televised violence and the attitudes and behaviour of young people. Over two years, the Surgeon General’s Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behaviour, directed by Eli A. Rubinstein, initiated and assessed more than forty pieces of research, forming the scientific basis for their report, ‘Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence’, which was presented to the then Surgeon General, Jesse L.
Steinfeld, in December 1971. Gerbner’s contribution can be found in the first of five technical report volumes, ‘Television and Social Behaviour: Media Content and Control’, in which he presents a comparison between the NCCPV studies of 1967-1968 and his results from a more recent content analysis of prime time television output on three major national networks. Concern about the ‘amount of televised violence entering American homes’ (Pastore in Rubinstein, 1974: 80) fostered further interest in Gerbner’s research and his development of a ‘Violence Index’ with which to measure the levels of violence on television. A grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) eventually helped to generate their Cultural Indicators project, which set out to periodically study television programming in connection with survey data about viewers’ worldviews. This enabled them to investigate the actual impact of television violence on viewers’ conceptions of social reality (cultivation hypothesis). Although the researchers subsequently developed indicators for themes other than television violence (e.g. representations of race, gender, occupation, class, etc.), the project was initially very much a consequence of the debate surrounding the alleged ‘effects’ of media violence.

The Annenberg research happened at the intersection of conflicting views about the role television played in the lives of the American people, and particularly of ‘vulnerable’ audiences, such as children and adolescents. Though it might be paradoxical to speak of a ‘fear’ of television here, it is certainly true that television content was held responsible by some for the apparent escalation of juvenile delinquency and violent crime. Importantly, Gerbner et al. rejected the argument that viewing television violence incited real acts of violence; in their view, it was too simplistic and insufficient an argument in the light of the more complex influences upon society they saw at play. As Gerbner et al. wrote in 1979, ‘spectacular cases of individual violence threatening the social order (unlike those enforcing it) have always been “blamed” on some corrupter of youth, from Socrates through pulps, comics, and movies, to television’ (Gerbner et al. 1979: 179). If television’s sole impact was to incite aggression, they argued, society would become as violent as the television world itself. The Annenberg team voiced a different concern, namely the
more subtle ways in which the ‘symbolic world of television’ shaped viewers’ perception of the world they lived in. As they explain in 1978,

Cultivation Analysis is the study of what is usually called effects or impact. [...W]e consider the latter terms inappropriate to the study of broad cultural influences. The ‘effects’ of a pervasive medium upon the composition and structure of the symbolic environment are subtle, complex, and intermingled with other influences. Also, the concept of causation, borrowed from simpler experimental and biological sciences, is not fully applicable to the steady flow of images and messages that comprise much contemporary popular culture. (Gerbner et al., 1978: 193)

The interest, then, lay in the minor, but cumulative influences television was seen to have on the ‘cultural climate’ of a society through the cultivation of common perspectives, rather than through ‘achieving any specific or preconceived goals, impacts, or effects’ (ibid). Conversely, it has been argued that while they sought to distance themselves from previous effects research in psychology and mass communications, which measured the impact of specific television content on viewers in controlled (and thus artificial) environments, they still dealt with a model of communication that identified certain ‘messages’ and sought to measure their bearings. It is for this reason that Gerbner et al’s work is still widely regarded as part of the ‘effects’ tradition (see e.g. Gauntlett, 1998; Jensen and Rosengren, 1990). The difference lies in their focus on television output as a range of message ‘systems’, rather than on the messages presented in individual television programmes, and in their emphasis on long-term enculturation, instead of direct short-term effects.

2.2.2 The Power of Symbols: Project Design and Theoretical Assumptions
In his early writings about the Cultural Indicators project, George Gerbner presented the undertaking as an independent research enterprise into the social significance of the ‘mass production and distribution of the most broadly shared messages of our culture’, as providing a ‘third voice’ alongside the already existing voices of political agents and the media industry, who were also concerned with the
‘dynamics of the common cultural context’, the state and progress of American society (Gerbner, 1973: n.p.). With public policy-making at stake, he argued that too little was known about the production, composition and social impact of large message systems, such as television. The logic behind his argument, and the reason for making the systematic investigation of these three areas necessary, is best summarised by the researcher himself who explains:

The cultural transformation of our time stems from the extension of the industrial-technological revolution into the sphere of message-production. The mass production and rapid distribution of messages create new symbolic environments that reflect the structure and functions of the institutions that transmit them. These institutional processes of the mass-production of messages short-circuit other networks of social communication and superimpose their own forms of collective consciousness – their own publics – upon other social relationships. The consequences for the quality of life, for the cultivation of human tendencies and outlooks, and for the governing of societies, are far-reaching. Informed policy-making and the valid interpretation of social behaviour require systematic indicators of the prevailing climate of the changing symbolic environment. A central aspect of cultural indicators would be the periodic analysis of trends in the composition and structure of message systems cultivating conceptions of life relevant to socialization and public policy. (Gerbner, 1970: 69)

Gerbner defined communication as an interaction through messages, while messages are ‘specialised events (or aspects of events) that signify other things in [...] varied and creative ways unique to human culture’ (ibid: 72). Through this kind of symbolic interaction, the culture industry was seen to provide citizens with a limited – though complex – set of representations, values and points of view that occupy people’s time and imagination and, further, ‘affect all we think and do’ (ibid: 81, original italics).

The Cultural Indicators project was thus designed to cover the aforementioned three areas of investigation. Gerbner’s concern about the functions of institutions in the production of messages prompted the group’s ‘Institutional Process Analysis’ (IPA). Comparable to a political-economic approach to communications, this part of the project sought to investigate issues of decision-
making, message production, and power relations within the institutional context of the media. Through interviews, participant observation, and the study of selected records, IPA investigated how the relationship between different roles and powers in the institutional context for instance influenced the content of media messages.

‘Message System Analysis’ (MSA) examined the composition and structure of what Gerbner called the mass media’s ‘flow of symbols’, that is, the kinds of relationships and perspectives expressed in different message systems, as well as the ways in which they vary over time and in different cultures or societies. It is a kind of content analysis; yet, as mentioned before, MSA did not focus on individual pieces of media output but on the ‘symbolic world’ as presented on particular kinds of television programmes as a whole – on what is ‘absorbed’ by large and heterogeneous communities, rather than what is selected on an individual basis. MSA concentrated on samples of prime time and weekend daytime television on the major American networks, primarily focusing on TV plays, cartoons, and feature films, i.e. fictional media systems. Gerbner defined four significant dimensions to the analysis of these: existence, priorities, values, and relationships. These different measures could, for instance, help generate personality profiles of characters in television drama with regard to specific variables, as Gerbner showed in his case study on television violence (Gerbner, 1970).

Together, IPA and MSA formed the basis for ‘Cultivation Analysis’ (CA), or the ‘study of the relationships between institutional processes, message systems, and the public assumptions, images, and policies that they cultivate’ (Gerbner, 1970: 71). CA constituted the audience research element of the project and focused on testing the nature and distribution of mass media’s apparent cultivating forces by comparing viewers’ perceptions of the world with the ‘facts of life’ on the one hand, and the ‘facts of television reality’ on the other.

The role and specificity of television was particularly significant to the group’s hypothesis, and so was the use Gerbner et al. assumed viewers to make of the medium. Television’s competence as a socialising agent was deduced from its apparent prominence as the nation’s main ‘storyteller’. Because people spent a lot of
time watching – an average of six hours a day in the mid-1970s – television was seen to partly replace the influences other social networks, such as families, schools, leisure clubs or churches, had on people’s perceptions of the world. Access was almost universal; television reached the educated as well as the less educated, and was comprehensible to both. It crossed class boundaries and catered for different age groups and ethnicities. For Gerbner and his colleagues, additional crucial characteristics were not only television’s provision of both factual and fictional elements, but its attribute of combining the two in an entertainment package. To them, it was down to the entertainment value of television, as well as its general ‘storytelling’ features, that it replaced the role traditional myths and legends had assumed in helping humanity to make sense of the world, and to establish socio-cultural values and principles. Since television was produced in a specific institutional context and for specific purposes, this was considered particularly problematic and worth of investigation.

Further, and importantly, viewing was assumed to happen by the clock rather than by choice of programme, which stressed the researchers’ ‘stream of symbols’ concept, rendering audiences into relatively passive ‘absorbers’ of a mixture of facts and fiction. As Gerbner and Gross explain in ‘Living with Television’:

Individual tastes and program preferences are less important in determining viewing patterns than is the time a program is run. The nearly universal, non-selective, and habitual use of television fits the ritualistic pattern of its programming. You watch television as you might attend a church service, except that most people watch television more religiously. (Gerbner and Gross, 1976: 177)

This reference to almost ritualistic viewing practices is important because it again hints towards a subtlety in television’s forces, and emphasises the significance of a cumulative kind of enculturation. Audiences might make sense of what they see in a variety of ways and with different levels and abilities of interpretation, but since
television is seen to generate a relatively consistent pattern of overall messages and structures, individual nuances became insignificant.

Gerbner et al. distinguished themselves from what they considered the two main alternative perspectives on audiences, that of the ‘traditional effects research’ which follows an experimental pattern of testing before/after reactions to specific media output, measuring differences between those viewers exposed to certain messages and others not exposed, and that of ‘reception models of communication’ which argue for the polysemy of messages as well as viewers’ active interpretation of selected texts (Gerbner et al., 2002: 47f). While they did not reject these perspectives outright, and in fact argued that neither of them negate their cultivation theory per se, they repeatedly stressed that differences in interpretation did not deny the possibility of shared meanings in any given culture:

Polysemy is not limitless, and preferred readings can have great power. To glorify or privilege only the fact of polysemy is to risk removing any vestige of articulatory or determinational power from the text – and thereby to render culture impotent as well. Equally, concentrating on individual differences and immediate change misses the profound historical challenge television poses not only for research strategies but also for traditional theories of democratic government. That challenge is the absorption of diverse conceptions and attitudes into a stable and common mainstream. Thus, although individual viewers will certainly differ (and differ substantially) in their ‘reading’ of any given television program, cultivation does not ask people what they think about television texts, much less any individual text. Rather, cultivation looks at exposure to massive flows of messages over long periods of time. The cultivation process takes place in the interaction of the viewer with the message; neither the message nor the viewer is all-powerful. In a sense, cultivation looks at the ‘master text’ composed of the enduring, resilient, and residual core that is left over when all the particular individual program-specific differences cancel each other out. (ibid: 48; original italics)

Differences were further rendered redundant in the agenda-setting component that television does not determine how we think about something but what we have to think about. Gerbner and colleagues also made television’s awkward relationship to reality responsible for cultivating effects, describing the entertainment package as a
‘Trojan horse’ (Gerbner and Gross, 1976: 178). To the ‘unsuspecting viewer’ (ibid.), television offers a stream of impressions and facts which, though they might not embody reality as such, are still put forward against the backdrop of reality. Most fictions, they argued, are based on a kind of representational realism. And while viewers are aware of the fictiveness of stories and characters, they still take away some incidental knowledge about the ways of the world. Not only was this seen to be problematic because of television’s artificiality and selectiveness, it was also regarded as particularly seductive because, unlike real life, television was seen to be an open book in which motives and outcomes were clear, questions were answered, and there was a sense of resolution which people did not always experience in real life.

For Gerbner and colleagues, all of this added to the potential of television’s persuading cultivating forces. Yet, as Shanahan and Morgan explain in their exploration of cultivation theory, the overarching concern of the early CI project, as well as of their later work, was the notion of social power (Shanahan and Morgan, 1999: 57). Cultivation Analysis sought to address the ways in which ‘television help[ed] maintain a social power hierarchy marked by an unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and security, differentiated according to gender, race, age and other key markers of “difference”’ (ibid.). Those in power, it was reasoned, controlled the production and distribution of messages that in turn expressed, reflected and reinforced power relations. As Gerbner and Gross inferred in 1976, television’s chief cultural function was ‘to spread and stabilize social patterns, to cultivate not change but resistance to change’ (1976: 175).

One of the ways in which the status quo could be sustained, then, was through teaching audiences who and what to ‘fear’. Fear, ‘that historic instrument of social control’, was considered to be a universal emotion, and one that was easy to exploit (Gerbner and Gross, 1976: 178, 193). Television’s representation of ‘symbolic violence’ was made chiefly responsible for the cultivation of what the Annenberg group called the ‘mean-world syndrome’, an overestimation of crime and violence in society, a heightened sense of personal risk, heightened anxieties, or a general
distrust or suspicion towards other people, all of which were fostered by a conception of life’s truths as coming closer to television reality than to that of the real world. Television violence, it was argued, taught lessons about power relations, which were internalised by viewers and which potentially led them to perceive the world as a more frightening place, other people as less trustworthy, and their own roles in society as more or less powerful, depending on how often they were ‘exposed’ to television and which socio-demographic groups they considered themselves to belong to. As Gerbner and Gross explained,

TV violence is a dramatic demonstration of power which communicates much about social norms and relationships, about goals and means, about winners and losers, about the risks of life and the price for transgression of society’s rules. Violence laden drama shows who gets away with what, when, why, how and against whom. ‘Real world’ victims as well as violents may have to learn their roles. (1976: 178, their italics).

This argument was brought forward and tested in the Annenberg group’s series of Violence Profiles (see, e.g. Gerbner, 1972; Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1979; Gerbner et al., 1980), based on the Message System Analyses they had conducted annually since 1967. In order to further clarify the nature and methodology of Cultivation Analysis, as well as to elaborate on Gerbner et al.’s notion of fear and anxiety, it is vital to consider these specific pieces of Cultural Indicators research in more detail.

2.2.3 The Violence Profiles: ‘Fear’ as Cultivation Outcome

The basic cultivation hypothesis, as defined by Gerbner et al. in 1981, states that ‘television cultivates common conceptions of social reality’ (1981: 46). In the case of the group’s Violence Profiles, however, the initial implication and expectation was that the more viewers were exposed to television, the more they perceived the world as a mean and scary place. This is something early findings seemed to confirm, if only by small margins (see Gerbner et al., 1976; 1979). Crucial to this particular hypothesis was the group’s assertion that the world of television was
dominated by violence, a contention which they based on their analysis of samples of prime-time and weekend-daytime fictional network television, in which (violent) crime was ten times more likely to happen than was the case in American society, and an average of five to six acts of physical violence per hour of programming involved over half of the main characters (Gerbner, et al., 1982: 106). In order to reliably measure the prevalence of violence in any particular range of programming and over time, the group created a Violence Index (VI), which sought to assess violent content on a number of levels. It consisted of the percentage of programmes containing violence at all, the rates of violent acts per programme and per hour, and the percentages of characters involved in violence and killing.8

The Annenberg group’s general definition and coding of violence referred to ‘the overt expression of physical force, with or without weapon, against self or other, compelling action against one’s will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing’ (Gerbner et al., 1979: 178). The VI was designed to be little more than an indicator of general trends and changes within the composition of message systems as regarded their violent content. It allowed for some relative comparisons between programmes, genres and networks over time.

MSA and the Violence Index thus provided a basis for the research presented in the Violence Profiles, which gained their further significance from Cultivation Analysis. Besides MSA’s facts and figures, two other kinds of data were crucial to this part of the project: Survey data containing demographic, attitudinal, as well as viewing habitual details, and statistics about real-life violence, crime, and law enforcement. The former were gathered from such sources as the National Opinion Research Center General Social Survey (NORC, e.g. 1975, 1977-1978) and the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies 1976 election survey, both nationally representative probability samples. But Gerbner et al. also generated their own surveys, such as those addressed to school children in New Jersey and New York during 1976 and 1977 (see Violence Profile No. 10). The ‘real-life’ figures mainly derived from police statistics, the FBI, or the U.S. Census. While the possible inaccuracies of this kind of material were acknowledged, the researchers insisted on
its capacity to provide a picture of the observable world which could be roughly considered as true.

The basic principle of CA was to split viewers into groups of light, medium and heavy viewers, depending on the hours of television watched per day, and to correlate their viewing habits with their assessed conceptions of social reality, while controlling for such variables as gender, age, race, education, or places of residence. The three viewing categories were considered to be relative and sample-specific. People’s perceptions of social reality and the extent to which those were ‘cultivated’ by television viewing were determined by asking respondents questions about the facts of life and giving them two kinds of answers to choose from. One answer, the ‘television answer’, presented facts resembling those in the world of television (based on MSA findings). The second one, the ‘real-world answer’, was slightly slanted towards the data provided through official statistics. The questions were generated to test people’s sense of security and trust in themselves and others, as well as their general attitudes towards moral rights and wrongs. Similarly, people were asked to agree or disagree with particular statements which either let them appear to see the world in a positive or a gloomy light. Some of the questions asked or statements given, along with the possible answers, are listed below:

1. Are you afraid to walk in your own neighbourhood at night?
2. Is it dangerous to walk alone in a city at night?
3. During any given week, what are your chances of being involved in some kind of violence? About one in ten? About one in hundred?
4. What percent of all crimes are violent crimes like murders, rape, robbery and aggravated assault? Fifteen percent? Twenty-five percent?
5. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.
6. The people running the country don’t really care what happens to you.
7. Can most people be trusted, or do you think that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?
8. Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?

In the above, underlined options refer to the television answer, whereas the television answer for the remaining questions and statements usually reflects the more fearful, gloomy, or generally negative choices. The list includes measures for both ‘first-order’ and ‘second-order’ cultivation effects, with the first relating to the facts presented on television, inviting an overestimation of violence in real life, and the latter regarding the general perceptions, values, feelings and outlooks television was seen to foster in its audiences (see Shanahan and Morgan, 1999: 175). ‘Second-order’ cultivation was considered to be closely connected to the interpretation of symbols, since such issues as trustworthiness could neither easily be counted on television nor statistically represented in the real world.

Not only were these questions above designed to test viewers’ levels of fear and alienation, they also relate to Gerbner et al.’s ‘mean-world syndrome’, an outlook dominated by an exaggerated sense of victimisation, apprehension, mistrust, insecurity and anxiety. Through a combination of violence-related items, the researchers developed a Mean World Index, which facilitated the comparison between mean world responses within and across samples. The more viewers agreed with a mean world perspective, the higher they scored on the Index (second-order cultivation).

The margin by which heavy viewers gave the television answer to a greater degree than light viewers was referred to as the Cultivation Differential (CD). In other words, the CD consisted of the percentage of heavy viewers minus the percentage of light viewers giving the television answer. It was the Cultivation Differential which generally (or initially) indicated whether the cultivation hypothesis was supported (+CD) or negated (-CD). As mentioned before, early findings by Gerbner et al. suggested a general correlation between heavy television viewing and a tendency to give the television answer, which remained visible, sometimes significantly, when single controls such as gender, age or education were
employed. Their assertion that television’s demonstration of power relationships also clearly demarcated victims, usually women, older characters and people from a lower socio-economic background or ethnic minority, resulted in their special interest in people’s sense of their own victimisation. It was found that heavy viewers in minority categories were more apprehensive of their own victimisation than were light viewers from the same categories (Gerbner et al., 1982: 107).

It was only later in their studies that Gerbner et al. began to pay attention to notable exceptions, in which subgroups would behave against the rules of cultivation predictions. A refinement of the cultivation hypothesis suggested that, firstly, television had the potential to homogenise the outlooks of otherwise disparate and heterogeneous groups of viewers, a phenomenon which was dubbed a process of ‘mainstreaming’, and secondly, that for those viewers whose lives were to some extent congruent with certain realities as presented on television, cultivation was amplified because television’s realities were confirmed in the viewers’ everyday life experiences. This process became known as ‘resonance’ (see Gerbner et al., 1980; 1981 for elaborations on both concepts). Regarding the mean-world syndrome, the process of mainstreaming was, for instance, detected when comparing the Mean World Indices across the 1980, 1983, and 1986 General Social Survey Data. It was found that 53% of both light and heavy viewers in a subgroup of people without college education scored highly on the Index, whereas amongst college graduates, 28% of light viewers scored highly compared to 43% of heavy viewers. Because there was a much larger difference between light viewers of each category than there was between heavy viewers, the researchers saw this as an example of how a large amount of television viewing instigated otherwise divergent groups of people to take on similar outlooks (see Gerbner et al., 2002: 52f).

2.2.4 Gerbner’s Critics

Probably the strongest and most detailed early critique of Gerbner et al.’s work from a social-scientific background is Paul Hirsch’s two-part article in Communication Research, in which he, firstly, reanalysed the NORC General Social Survey data used
by the Annenberg group in their Violence Profiles between 1976 and 1980, and secondly, criticised their then latest concepts of ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘resonance’ as logically inadequate with regard to the initial cultivation hypothesis, as well as the general endeavour of theory-testing research per se (Hirsch, 1980; 1981).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss Hirsch’s critique and Gerbner et al.’s subsequent defence in detail, particularly since a good proportion of the argument related to the validity of particular data sets or more fundamental issues about the design and interpretation of statistical research, none of which can be tested here, and neither of which are of particular interest to this chapter. For reasons of comprehensiveness, I list Hirsch’s most important points of criticism:

1. **Definition of viewing categories:** One of the issues raised in Part I of Hirsch’s critique was the inconsistency with which Gerbner et al. assigned respondents into categories of light, medium, and heavy viewers, hampering the comparison of Cultivation Differentials within and across samples (see Hirsch, 1980: 411-14). More importantly, he questioned their decision to collapse light viewers and non-viewers into one category (i.e. 0-2 hours of viewing per day), which ignores their potentially significant differences in the light of the cultivation hypothesis. By creating two additional viewing categories, those of non-viewers and extreme viewers (8 hours or more), Hirsch found that across 18 items (or sets of questions) in the NORC data set, those people who did not watch any television at all were in many cases the ones who scored highest in giving the ‘television answer’, as opposed to the ‘real world answer’ (ibid: 420ff). Only in 5 out of 18 items, did light viewers provide the ‘television answer’ more frequently than non-viewers, which means that to 72% of the examples the opposite was the case. Conversely, extreme viewers gave the television answer less often than heavy viewers (4-7 hours), apart from which Hirsch could not find any significant patterns at all. Both observations, of course, go against the (initial) cultivation
hypothesis which would suggest a linear increase in cultivation with ascending hours of television watched.

2. Unreported discrepancies: A point of criticism which forced a strong response from the Annenberg group was Hirsch’s contention that Gerbner et al. were selective in their presentation of findings, and that they indeed failed to report on those items which happened to move contra their cultivation theory. Gerbner et al. refuted this proposition in their rejoinder, arguing that they were suspicious about the validity of the NORC survey data, and that the strength of their cultivation work lay in the cumulative consistency of their findings over a range of material, rather than within one, possibly flawed data set (Gerbner et al., 1981: 41).

3. Multivariate analysis: Importantly, Hirsch criticised the group’s application of single controls on the relationship between dependent variables and television viewing. When the controls of race, sex, age, and education were applied simultaneously, the independent effect of television viewing disappeared, and it was education which stood out as the only consistent independent strength. This finding was supported by Michael Hughes’ reanalysis of the Annenberg data as regards items of fear and anomia (Hughes, 1980: 295f). His re-examination, like Hirsch’s, also raised issues of causality. Even after the introduction of multiple controls, he argued, any statistically significant relationship between television viewing and fear of victimisation and alienation would not necessarily indicate that these perceptions were a result of television exposure. Instead, ‘[i]t [was] just as plausible that persons who [were] fearful and alienated [were] more likely to stay at home and watch television’ (ibid: 290).

4. Subgroup variations: Part II of Hirsch’s critique also hints towards some conceptual errors he perceived in the group’s reformulations of the initial hypothesis. His main issue lay with their interpretation of subgroup variations as examples of ‘mainstreaming’ or ‘resonance’. Hirsch started from the point at which the relationship between viewing and perceptions of
social reality was a linear one – the more one watched, the more they were ‘cultivated’ to assume a certain perspective. And this was the case for all viewers across the board. A negative CD would suggest a negative relationship here, and thus a negation of the original hypothesis. Interpreting such occurrences as instances of mainstreaming or resonance, he argued, meant that the cultivation hypothesis itself could never be disconfirmed. Furthermore, he noted that the ‘mainstream’ was never defined as any fixed point (e.g. as a mean of each demographic group or subgroup), and that the researchers’ lack of offering a prediction of where and when mainstreaming might occur, prevented a real theory from being tested or untested. Thus, what Gerbner et al. in effect provided were random ‘post hoc speculations’ explaining negative effects (Hirsch, 1981: 28).

All along, Hirsch insisted his critique was not aimed at disproving the cultivation hypothesis per se, but at revealing some methodological errors which substantially weakened Gerbner et al.’s arguments. Yet his views have since been rejected or modified by the group and others (see Gerbner et al., 1981; Ruddock, 2001: 108ff). The inclusion of non-viewers and extreme viewers, for instance, was challenged on the grounds that those groups only constituted 10% of the viewing population, while the researchers were interested in identifying overall trends for a majority of the population (though the latter argument seems to contradict their special interest in particular subgroups of viewers). The concern about differences in the coding of viewing categories was deflated by the assertion that self-reported viewing merely served as a useful ranking device and should not have been taken as a rigorous classification. Hirsch’s problematisation of mainstreaming and resonance was simply discarded as a misunderstanding by Hirsch, who is portrayed as unable to comprehend the significance of exceptions to the rule. Furthermore, Gerbner et al. argued that their actual hypothesis stated ‘that television cultivates common conceptions of social reality’, and that this very hypothesis had not been negated.
It is notable that Hirsch’s argument concerning the examination of testable hypotheses remained largely unchallenged.

While my interest here does not concern who was ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in the debate, Hirsch’s critique hints towards a whole range of problems as regards the way in which ‘cultivation’ was meant to work. One of the points he raised with regard to subgroup variations was that of character identification. The hypothesis logically seemed to state that those people who fell into the category of viewers who saw their (demographic) counterparts victimised or killed on television were most likely to be more anxious or apprehensive of their own victimisation. ‘If heavy viewing “cultivates” increased fear’, Hirsch writes, ‘this should be most apparent for elderly and black women, and for all women’ (Hirsch, 1981: 12). Yet this did not appear to be the case in his reanalysis. Hirsch went on to argue against this simplistic model of viewer identification, in which identification only worked on the socio-demographic level: the young identify with the young, the old with the old, whites with whites, blacks with blacks, women with women, men with men, and so on. In very simple terms, according to the world as presented on television, it suggested that all white men should be rather fearless in real life, and that black women should constantly be on a heightened state of alert. While the issue of identification itself was not explained by the Annenberg group in detail, and is certainly one that still causes controversy among audience researchers today, there was a general implication that viewers considered their own life situations in the light of the circumstances of characters who led their televised lives in the same socio-cultural contexts. While an identification (or level of empathy) of this kind is by any means possible, it is certainly not the only way in which viewers might relate to film or television characters, as studies on cross-gender identification, for instance, will illustrate (see, e.g., Hill, 1997; Chandler and Griffiths, 2004, the latter on the importance of character traits versus demographic variables, albeit in relation to reality TV).

Hirsch’s criticism about the coding of viewing categories pointed towards a related issue, which the author began to touch upon in his 1981 rejoinder to Gerbner.
and colleagues. Here, he questioned whether it made sense to base tests of television’s influence on the number of hours watched:

The assumption is that it is of no consequence which programs are seen, that they all transmit the same world view, that viewers interpret stories solely in terms of the characters’ gross demographic characteristics, that single incidents are seen by viewers separate from the narrative context, and genre in which they occur, that viewers do not distinguish what is fantasy from reality in popular entertainment, and that it is not the lifestyles and prior attitudes of individuals which account for the amount of television they view (rather than the opposite) are all untested assumptions built into the framework and rhetoric of the Annenberg team’s Violence Profiles as well as the research strategies of others in this field […].’ (Hirsch, 1981: 89)

There is, of course, a problem with this argument, since, as noted above, Gerbner et al. did not actually assert that viewers could not distinguish between fantasy and reality. At least they did not suggest this to happen within the viewing context. But it is true that their arguments seemed to imply that, over time, audiences did not consciously make a difference between knowledges gained from fact or fiction. In many ways, Hirsch’s critique can simply be classified as an opposing view to that of Gerbner and colleagues. While Hirsch argued that contextual specificities in viewers’ interpretation of a text mattered, Gerbner et al. downplayed their significance. Gerbner argued that television provided overall patterns, whereas Hirsch contested this by demonstrating how the same action of one character might mean something entirely different in an alternative context; a character crying might express happiness in one case and sadness in another.

Hirsch’s final conceptual observations resemble those brought forward by researchers and critics from a humanist perspective, such as Horace Newcomb. In his 1978 article, the author identified a number of problems with the studies’ basic assumptions and definitions. Central to Newcomb’s critique were two related issues; firstly, a dissatisfaction with the simplistic or one-sided interpretation of symbols and, secondly, the model of communication Newcomb saw implied in the Violence Profiles. Both of these issues have begun to appear in the writing above, which is why I will only briefly summarise them here.
Regarding the former, it was particularly the Annenberg researchers’ definition of TV violence which fostered Newcomb’s criticism. And not only its definition, but also the very status the researchers assigned to dramatic violence. For Newcomb, it was a long leap from statistically assessing the violence level on television as ‘high’ to asserting that the television world itself was ‘ruled’ by violence (Newcomb, 1978: 271). It was only one out of many regular dramatic elements presented on television – why, he wondered, should it necessarily be the most important one? It was curious, in his view, that the researchers did not seem to measure the more readily *positive* geographies of television, all the incidents of kindness, friendship, love, and laughter, or those that do not really carry any strong positive or negative connotations at all (see also Brian Winston, 1990, ‘[o]n counting the wrong things’).

Newcomb pointed out that Gerbner et al. very clearly demarcated televised violence as a symbol, and more precisely a metaphor for the demonstration of power, and he queried whether audiences had to interpret it as such in order to be gradually influenced in their perception of the observable world. Again, Gerbner and colleagues did not seem to provide any details on this process. In some ways, they argued that not every message needed to be understood by audiences for cultivation to take place. But on the other hand it is difficult to comprehend the notion of the mean-world syndrome if viewers have not, in some ways, drawn conclusions about the world’s winners and losers, and about the dangers and power relations television suggests, either implicitly or explicitly, in the context of its stories.

The problem Newcomb raised about the ‘meaning’ of violence was also a methodological one with regard to Gerbner et al.‘s survey questions, such as Question 3 in the list above: ‘During any given week, what are your chances of being involved in some kind of violence?’ Newcomb’s guess was that respondents’ concept of violence might differ from Gerbner et al.‘s definition. Furthermore, the term ‘involvement’ was ambiguous, at once entailing being attacked in the street, witnessing a car accident, or visiting an injured friend in hospital. In Newcomb’s
view, the fact that it might mean different things to different people problematised the significance of Gerbner et al.’s findings.

Of course, Newcomb’s attack is a common criticism against any kind of survey research that imposes categories and meanings on a field without checking whether such meanings are shared or understood by the researched. For cultivation analysts, ‘Newcomb’s big question, “what does violence mean to the respondents” [was] not only irrelevant but distracting’ (Gerbner and Gross, in Shanahan and Morgan, 1999: 61). Their interest lay in ‘the bucket of beliefs and conceptions within which individual and idiosyncratic interpretations are but drops’ (Shanahan and Morgan, 1999: ibid.). Yet their rejection of micro approaches to ‘cultivation’ or related issues does not seem justified if one considers the kinds of far-reaching conclusions Gerbner and Gross, for instance, drew from their Violence Profiles. In Profile No. 10, the researchers speak of a ‘large majority of people who become more fearful, insecure, and dependent on authority, and who grow up demanding protection and even welcoming repression in the name of security’ (Gerbner et al., 1979: 196). While much of their work focused on people’s perceptions, attitudes, and world views, this warning clearly made a link between people’s perceptions of the world, as deduced from hypothetical survey questions, and their subsequent behaviour.11 What people’s fears, anxieties, or gloomy outlooks actually meant with regard to people’s everyday senses of self, and their actions, was not entirely clear.

Both Hirsch and Newcomb’s critical pieces are dated in the sense that they belong to the body of criticism that surrounded the Cultural Indicators project in the early days of its existence. Yet I have discussed them here because both contributions were particularly systematic in their approach and influential in shaping much of the criticism to come. They can, in fact, be described as the prototypes for cultivation criticism, since they cover both statistical and conceptual concerns, and largely reflect the main issues critics have taken up with the Annenberg work over the years. As has transpired in the above, my own critique of Cultivation Analysis is situated closely to that of Newcomb’s, in that I am concerned with the (either implicit or explicit) assumptions made by the Annenberg group
about the meaning-making world of the audience. It is not in my interest here to argue for or against the media’s role in heightening viewers’ fears or anxieties. It seems logical that television can have some agenda-setting elements, in that it draws viewers’ attention to specific topics and incidents at particular points in time, which might have otherwise not crossed their minds and which they might consequently not have ‘worried’ about. But this again begs questions about whether cultivation is, in fact, just a matter of drawing audiences’ attention to something, which seems linked to cognitive evaluations of a situation presented on television, and a process of making the link between televised event and real-life possibilities. Or, whether viewers ‘absorb’ television reality in a somewhat subconscious way and happen to mix such internalised or, as Gerbner and colleagues might have called them, ‘incidental’ kinds of knowledge with anything they learn or have to deal with in real life.

Neither of these possibilities allow for a large amount of critical thinking and reflection on the part of the audience, although the former perhaps more than the latter. What if viewers themselves consider television as scare-mongering, find conventional narratives just that: conventional? Does this mean they are able to see through television’s patterns and cultivating forces? And if so, will they become immune to them? Or is this perhaps the wrong question to ask altogether as regards the relationships between what we see on film and television and our personal fears or worries? Before moving on, I consider some of the problems I see in Gerbner et al.’s appropriation of ‘fear’ and related emotions by investigating the kinds of questions the Annenberg group failed to address.

2.2.5 A Simple Concept of ‘Fear’

Gerbner et al.’s ‘fear’ and ‘mean-world’ hypotheses can be considered as by-products of Cultivation Analysis as a whole. As the researchers insisted in their rejoinder to Hirsch’s critique, ‘the cultivation of “fear” per se may be a “secondary” hypothesis. Our basic notion is that television should cultivate images of what “the world” is like.’ (Gerbner et al., 1981: 59) And further:
Since our message system analyses show over half of all leading characters involved in some kind of violence, [...] we proposed the idea that television might cultivate the belief that a relatively large number of people are involved in violence. [...] Our findings represent] the cultivation of a conception of social reality, an image of the world as a more or less violent place, and does not necessarily have any direct relationship to consciously experiencing “fear”. By a natural extension, however, we wondered whether or not it might apply to personal projections of risk and danger. (ibid: 59f, original italics)

Gerbner et al.’s attempts to downplay the experience of fear do not take away from the fact that the group’s Violence Profiles gain their rhetorical strength from putting fear at the centre of television’s impact on society. The emotion is described as the ‘foundation of most governments’ (Gerbner and Gross, 1979: 195), an ‘historic instrument of social control’, and a ‘critical residue of a show of violence’ (Gerbner and Gross, 1976: 178). The most significant and recurring conclusion of their studies is that ‘one correlate of television viewing is a heightened and unequal sense of danger and risk in a mean and selfish world’ (Gerbner, 1979: 196). These assertions make a direct link between how people perceive (or ‘experience’) the world around them and their subsequent behaviour. The problem, as I see it, is that the concept of fear is ultimately rendered meaningless. We neither know how people’s interpretations of (and emotional responses to) individual programmes feature in the equation, nor do we have a clear understanding of the relationship between viewers’ expressed attitudes or perceptions and their everyday meanings and consequences.

In addition, because the Annenberg project conceptualised fear as cultivation outcome and thus, whether admittedly so or not, ultimately spoke of cumulative ‘effects’, fear is conceived as singular and negative. Yet in order to more fully generate a cultural account of the relationship between ‘fear’ and the media, one needs to open up a wider framework than that offered by Gerbner and colleagues. Instead of thinking of ‘fear’ as something caused by the media, we might consider other options. Television may provoke fears in viewers, but it might also play with
viewers’ already existent anxieties (if it is at all possible to distinguish between the two). It might remind audiences of certain fears, or it might help handle them. Further, some viewers enjoy being scared by certain programmes and even choose to watch specific shows under this thrill criterion (see, e.g., Hill, 1997, discussed in detail in Chapter Six). If we seek to understand ‘media-related fear’, we need to also ask how such viewing choices relate to ‘real-life fear’, and how viewing contexts and subsequent reflection might interact in the production of meaning.

There are other questions which become significant within a wider theoretical framework, questions, for instance, about the relationship between viewers as individual psychological beings and viewers as social agents. The issue of who we are afraid for is entirely neglected by the Annenberg group. More recent research, however, indicates that parents make viewing choices for their children depending on whether they see values or dangers in certain programming (Seiter, 1999). Their concerns about viewing habits of children other than their own are often even stronger (Buckingham, 1996, begins to describe this ‘third person effect’). What does it mean when parents worry about their children’s fears or other emotional responses to television? How do these concerns relate to their own viewing, fears, or actions? None of these questions have been addressed or answered by the Annenberg group, and while the researchers have given numerous explanations of why this may be the case, their arguments have not convincingly disposed of the issues at stake.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Gerbner et al.’s work has been extremely influential across a number of disciplines. Cultivation research has continued to form part of media and communications work and has spilled over into the sociological arena, and into criminology in particular. In the following, I consider some of the more recent thought on ‘fear’ as a societal illness. As it turns out, conceptual limitations have remained much the same.
2.2.6 Culture(s) of Fear

Recent writing about a perceived ‘culture of fear’ has informed much public debate. The most notable pieces of work from a sociological standpoint, and ones that help illustrate the concepts of audience/fear relations at stake, are Barry Glassner’s 1999 *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*, and Frank Furedi’s more recently revised edition of *Culture of Fear: Risk-taking and the Morality of Low Expectation* (2005). Both accounts share a conviction that ‘fear’ in Anglo-American societies is largely created artificially, with their mouthpiece, the media, generating an environment of unfounded and irrational fears which do not compare to actual, ‘measured’ threats. Whether such fears relate to crime, drugs, diseases, paedophilia, or plane crashes, Glassner reasons that ‘we had better learn to doubt our inflated fears before they destroy us. Valid fears have their place; they cue us to danger. False and overdrawn fears only cause hardship. Even concerns about real dangers, when blown out of proportion, do demonstrable harm’ (Glassner, 1999: xv-xvi).

Glassner’s book, whilst at times verging on sensationalism, is an interesting piece of work, not least because it was written before the events of September 2001 when, as some would argue, Americans’ apparent state of alert reached a high. Although it peripherally refers to perceived threats from ‘Middle Eastern terrorists’ (ibid: 209), the book is particularly concerned with domestic problems, setting out to shift focus from overestimated threats and ‘metaphoric illnesses’ to issues Glassner identifies as more in need of both financial and public attention, such as poverty, hunger, gun problems, health and education (ibid: 153ff). Thus, importantly, Glassner does not deny any threats or problems in American society but argues that they lose ground to artificially created and sustained dangers. *The Culture of Fear* succeeds in debunking a number of myths in this respect, particularly by demonstrating how prominent news stories about death and disease, when looked at closely, fall to pieces, either because evidence turns out to be flawed or because, from the outset, their wording was misleading. Yet one of its main questions – why people buy into scare-mongering, why they seemingly embrace ‘improbable announcements’ – is only half answered. Putting emphasis on journalistic practices,
Glassner points out a number of similarities between various flawed and fear-mongering reports. For one, there is the reference to apparent experts in a particular field who, when investigated more carefully, turn out to be ‘secondary scholars’ with fancy titles whose words should not carry authority (ibid: 206). Then, news reports are often backed up by personal testimonials of victims, or else by people with whom audiences are likely to sympathise. Poignant anecdotes are recounted in place of scientific evidence, and if scientific studies are drawn on, news journalists tend to misrepresent statistics or provide them out of context. Isolated incidents are reported as trends and used to stigmatise entire categories of people (young black males, teenage mums, children from single parent households, to name but a few). And finally, news presenters’ personal responses to such ‘terrifying’ reports lend additional emphasis to the severity of a situation. All of these practices, Glassner argues, function to dupe otherwise intelligent audiences into believing doubtful information.

One problem with Glassner’s account is his relative lack of a convincing theoretical framework as to how and why this apparent fear is created. There is a sense that many newsroom decisions are based on what Barker would call an imagined ‘figure of the audience’ (see, e.g., Barker et al., 2001), for instance the idea that ‘what bleeds, leads’, because audiences are considered more likely to read or tune in to shocking stories. Partly, there is a notion that “[n]ews is what happens to your editors”, as Glassner quotes from one of his journalist sources (Glassner, 1999: 201); thus, whatever is relevant to them and their family and friends will become relevant to the news. Then, of course, there are groups in society who, as mentioned above, benefit from certain distortions of facts and figures, such as politicians, entrepreneurs, and/or lobby groups. Yet Glassner’s book does not always convincingly account for these processes, at times almost suggesting a systematic conspiracy against factual knowledge without backing this up with plausible proof. In returning to Glassner’s initial question, it does not seem sufficient to explain audiences’ apparent credulity by merely pointing towards clever journalistic practices, not least since audiences might well be aware of these. That fear messages
are powerful and have a negative impact on the way people lead their lives is a crucial assumption in Glassner’s work, yet not one he justifies or explores in detail. Only if audiences are ‘fooled’ into believing they are in danger will they vote for politicians who promise their safety; and further, they only do so if they believe politicians can deliver. Only if they are scared of African-Americans will they consider changing to the other side of the road when passing a black person. Glassner bases his claims about the audience on statistics of consumer behaviour, as well as studies, such as the ones by Gerbner et al., which suggest a link between television viewing and a heightened fear of crime (whilst, at the same time, he acknowledges that the findings’ causal direction has been put into question). In the context of the significance of America’s drug problem, Glassner refers to the mechanics of ‘availability heuristics’, a model of mental processes which some psychologists have used to elucidate Gerbner et al.’s cultivation findings (see, for example, Shrum, 1996). As Glassner explains, the model proposes that ‘[w]e judge how common or important a phenomenon is by how readily it comes to mind. Presented with a survey that asks about the relative importance of issues, we are likely to give top billing to whatever the media emphasizes at the moment, because that issue instantly comes to mind’ (Glassner, 1999: 133). He goes on to argue that ‘[w]ere there a reasonable correspondence between emphases in the media and the true severity of social problems’, which evidently Glassner denies, then ‘the availability heuristic would not be problematic’ (ibid.). Yet this link between the overestimation of events, and thus their implied significance, does not automatically lead to any firm conclusions about what this might mean to people, particularly if – according to the very same approach – issues would come and go in people’s minds. Describing these issues as significant or troublesome does not tell us much about how people position themselves in relation to the problem, whether in fact they consider it relevant to their own lives, those of friends or family, or strangers. We might get a sense of the kinds of issues and stories that have dominated the news, but we cannot fully paint a picture of audience interpretations thereof.
All of this problematises Glassner’s very point of departure. This is not to say that his claims are implausible but that they fall short of being entirely persuasive in regard to the theoretical framework employed. He initially acknowledges that ‘[t]o blame the media is to oversimplify the complex role that journalists play as both proponents and doubters of popular fears’ (1999: xxvi). Yet he never further investigates the question of ‘why particular anxieties take hold when they do’, and why, as he argues, ‘news organizations and their audiences find themselves drawn to one hazard rather than another’ (ibid). His arguments are very broadly based on a psychological model that sees certain fears as ‘projections’ or ‘displacements’ of other problems or emotions. As such, fears for instance develop as a result of unacknowledged guilt. An example of this is fear about violence against children: ‘By failing to provide adequate education, nutrition, housing, parenting, medical services, and child care’, he argues, ‘[…] we have done the nation’s children immense harm. Yet we project our guilt onto a cavalcade of bogeypeople – pedophile preschool teachers, preteen mass murderers, and homicidal au pairs, to name only a few’ (ibid: xxvi-xxvii, my italics).

Frank Furedi’s Culture of Fear, whilst no less polemic in its approach and concerned with comparable subject matters, initially seems more conceptually grounded than Glassner’s work. It begins with a primary focus on society’s apparent preoccupation with risk and, in relation to this, the development of what he calls the ‘precautionary principle’, a ‘new etiquette’ of human behaviour and interaction that follows the ‘better safe than sorry’ rule-of-thumb and, as such, is argued to have wide-reaching, negative bearings on human creativity and intervention. Furedi sees this manifest on a number of levels. To him, the fact that even romantic relationships are being approached with caution – as one might get hurt – is a sign that everyday life has become structured by risk consciousness. While most research on risk has investigated the link between the reality and people’s perception of threats, Furedi is more concerned with how risk consciousness manifests itself in interpersonal relations.
To him, the last two decades have seen the development of what he describes as a ‘culture of abuse’, which is on the one hand characterised by an emphasis on and normalisation of ‘victimhood’ and, secondly, by the apparent consensus over ‘the defilement of the individual’ (ibid: 73). As crime and violence are perceived to be on the rise, almost everybody is seen to either be a perpetrator or a victim of maltreatment. Across the media spectrum, representations of abuse are seen to foster a climate of distrust. According to Furedi, soaps, crime dramas, novels and Hollywood blockbusters are almost obsessed with the topic, to the extent that ‘[c]oncern over physical and sexual abuse now constitutes a mainstay of the entertainment industry’ (ibid: 74). Frequently, children and the family are put at the centre of attention, with parents even starting to be suspicious of each other. Yet people are also prepared to doubt those who regularly come into close proximity with their offspring, such as teachers and childminders, whilst the biggest threat is still perceived to be the stranger.

The fact that Furedi even goes so far as to brand awareness-raising groups and institutions, such as the NSPCC, as ‘misanthropic’ seems harsh and cynical. Yet his concern is not, as I understand it, to negate the existence and severity of some forms of ‘abuse’ per se, but to problematise the slippage of definitions in a climate in which almost every stressful situation between individuals is considered abusive, and in which the right to cast definitions is predominantly given to the victim. Furthermore, he highlights a shift in the understanding of victimhood from individual experience to corporate identity, which, he argues, goes back to the 1960s when criminologists and social policy-makers sought to give a voice to invisible groups. Furedi takes a firm social-constructionist stance here, arguing that ‘[p]eople who have had bad traumatic experiences do not think of themselves as victims unless society defines them in that way’ (ibid: 98). Once branded and approached as a victim, once affected for life, a person will feel they are an object, rather than a subject, which leads to insecurity and a loss of control. Likewise, the crisis of trust which has developed from a shared notion of the defilement of others does not only affect interpersonal relationships and lead to an erosion of social solidarity (2005:
171), it also impacts on people’s trust in themselves and their abilities. This, in turn, leads to a heightened sense of vulnerability, which only results in more risk consciousness and thus reinforces the vicious circle.

Reading Furedi’s bleak account, one is torn between admiring the author’s perceptiveness and wanting to urge him to provide sounder empirical evidence for his claims and observations. His rhetorical skills do not fully disguise the fact that much of his ‘matter-of-fact’ writing is open to contest. He asserts, for instance, ‘[c]laims that abuse is rife, that most people are affected and damaged by it are now widely believed’ (ibid: 73), yet does not as such provide any evidence for this.

Where Glassner psychologised societal fear as one of projections and displacements – for instance a projection of guilt, and the resultant search for other scapegoats – Furedi’s central argument is that ‘the perception of risk expresses a pervasive mood in society; one that influences action in general. It appears as a free-floating consciousness that attaches itself to (and detaches itself from) a variety of concerns and experiences’ (2002: 20, my italics). As such, the climate we live in leads us to acquire a kind of anxious disposition, while our attention or fearful focus moves from one object of interest to another. The media clearly plays a role for Furedi in creating this cultural climate, but much like Gerbner and colleagues, he is less concerned with specific incidences, programmes or stories, but more with a general stream of public voices and debates that foster risk consciousness as a combined force. This again leaves the audience with little agency and no room for negotiation in their fearful media encounters.

Both Furedi and Glassner’s accounts have been criticised by, amongst others, the sociologist Andrew Tudor. In his view, both suffer from being too descriptive and failing to provide a convincing analytical account of how this apparent culture of fear is ‘socially effective’: ‘What needs further examination’, Tudor argues, ‘[…] are the links between such a culture and everyday activity, and what is needed to understand those connections is both a more analytically grounded description of the culture of fear itself and, fundamentally, a systematic framework for analysing its relations with other features of social life’ (Tudor, 2003: 246). In an attempt to
provide a more refined and differentiated account of an empirically investigable
culture of fear, or ‘cultures of fear’ as the author insists, he outlines both the micro
and macro structures that he sees at play in shaping and determining fearful
encounters. Although he is generally in accord with the idea that late modern
societies are indeed experiencing (and perhaps suffering from) a distinct culture of
fear, he argues for a much more systematic investigation of fear within specific
socio-cultural contexts. As Tudor argues, in order to inquire into emotions
sociologically (as opposed to investigating their physical or psychological
properties), one ought ‘to address those structuring and constituting resources
which we utilise in expressing our own emotional states and in responding to those
of others’ (Tudor, 2003: 242).

The particular strength of Tudor’s approach is its ability to account for
differences between individuals, depending on the negotiation of various fear
factors, or what he calls ‘parameters of fear’. As such, he moves away from those
kinds of broad generalisations that see all of us (but their authors) in a constant state
of panic, and he allows for varying and conflicting degrees of ‘fear’. Further, he
offers a framework in which the media, as part of people’s cultural resources, can be
conceptualised as only playing one role in a whole array of competing factors.
Importantly, Tudor argues that ‘[w]e do not fear X simply because our culture tells
us to; we fear it because a concatenation of factors, cultural and non-cultural,
physical, psychological and social, lead us to do so’ (ibid: 251).

Tudor lists six parameters of fear which function within a matrix of
macroscopic (broadly societal) and microscopic (more individual) dimensions (see
Figure 2.1). The first, environments, comprises our physical surroundings, including
any objects or people we may consider as harmful or dangerous, whether they
constitute real or perceived threats. Cultures, and by this I assume Tudor means the
structures of knowledges, beliefs, morals and symbols that are part of everyday
sense-making and that are partly conveyed and reinforced through cultural
institutions (such as the media), constitute a second variable in his matrix. The third,
social structures, refers to the routines, patterns and hierarchies that run through our
social activities and interactions, whether within family structures or institutions. According to this variable, social divisions and power relations will, for instance, impact on the kinds of people who are more or less likely to be fearful (i.e. the isolated and powerless).

MACRO (structure)

The above structuring macro-variables in Tudor’s model constitute ‘the collective resources on which agents are bound to draw on in feeling fearful’ (ibid: 251). The micro-variables, on the other hand, account for people’s relative agency and for the ways in which we negotiate the terms and conditions of our fearfulness. Thus, depending on who we are physically (bodies), psychologically (personalities), or socially (social subjects), we will respond differently to otherwise similar situations.

MICRO (agency)

Figure 2.1 Tudor’s ‘Parameters of Fear’ (2003: 248)
Physically, we might experience or respond to a given situation differently according to whether we are tall or small, strong or weak, male or female, black or white, old or young. Likewise, our psychological dispositions, as Tudor calls them, form a basis on which we will act or react. And again, the position we inhabit within the ‘elaborate nexus of structured social interaction’, impacts on our fear (ibid: 250).

‘Any concrete situation of fearfulness’, Tudor writes, ‘will involve all six [parameters of fear] in a variety of possible permutations and combinations’ (ibid: 246). Their distinction is thus solely analytical; in practice, as indicated by the arrows in Figure 2.1, ‘the modes in which fearfulness is articulated and experienced are a consequence of complex interactions among sets of grouped variables’ (ibid).

Although there are problems with Tudor’s approach – some would, for instance, question the existence of psychological ‘dispositions’ (see Chapter Three), or interrogate the extent to which individual agency is consequently constricted by a kind of physical, social, or psychological determinism – his model manages to bridge two gaps. It accounts for both collective and individual elements, and it allows for connections and interrelations between physical and social dimensions of fear alike (or of any other emotion for that matter), an issue which has historically been taken to either one of two extremes: the essentialist or the constructionist perspective on emotions. As noted above, Tudor’s model also renders the cultural aspect of fear relative to other resources and factors, that is to say that ‘cultures constitute only one parameter of fear among the six, and, although clearly important, there is no a priori reason to suppose that their terms will predominate over the other parameters in constituting fearfulness’ (ibid: 251, his italics). Because a society, at any given time, will encompass different cultural patterns and influences, it is also more adequate to speak of ‘cultures of fear’ rather than a singular ‘culture of fear’. Although Tudor does not go into detail in conceptualising such cultural variations, he distinguishes between three broad levels on which sociologists might investigate fear accordingly. Firstly, cultures identify and provide us with images of ‘discrete phenomena’ that can be counted as fearful, such as ghosts, spiders, snakes, or strangers (ibid: 252). Secondly, on a broader level, we
might think of grouping these together in ‘classes of phenomena’ that are deemed fearful. Tudor alludes to fears about the supernatural (of which ghosts would be one distinct entity), or fears about environmental pollution which also comprise of a range of different individual objects or entities of fear. And thirdly, cultures might promote ‘fearfulness in general’, for instance by subscribing to an overarching ‘precautionary principle’, as has been suggested by Furedi.

Tudor illustrates these levels through the example of fear of paedophiles, which can be researched as an isolated phenomenon in empirically specifiable circumstances or as only one embodiment of general fears of child abuse (or the meaning of childhood *per se*), which gains precedence from its position within a ‘network of fears’ (ibid: 253). So it does not work as an isolated threat but as one that makes sense in relation to similar threats, present or past. As such, Tudor reasons, some people – those who are socially, psychologically, physically, or even spatially and temporarily disposed to accept the potency of the threat – are likely to take the paedophile example as a confirmation and reinforcement of an already (at least in parts) existing conviction that the sexual exploitation of children has become widespread and commonplace. This explains why people might have a tendency to pay less attention to facts or figures, because ‘[a] publicly articulated and apparently interconnected set of fears constitutes a potentially much more powerful cultural resource than a single fearful disposition’ (ibid.). Tudor is less inclined to support the idea that fear of paedophiles is only one manifestation of a general fearfulness (as Furedi would have it). In his opinion, such a view requires more systematic historical analyses that compare the cosmology of fear in modern societies with that of times gone by. Only then can we establish whether or in which way we live in a distinct ‘culture of fear’ (ibid: 255).

My interest in Tudor’s work lies in his careful attempt to move away from those very generalisations that ‘culture of fear’ proponents employ in their work, to both distinguishing between different objects and discourses of fear, and to breaking fearful experiences or frames of mind down into situated and complex dynamics. Although he does not go into detail in his description of individual
agency, he provides a framework that could potentially account for the reflective individual, and thus also for change in attitudes and behaviour. And further, since Glassner, Furedi, and perhaps particularly popular voices like Michael Moore and others (e.g. Adam Curtis with his 2004 BBC documentary series *The Power of Nightmares*) will have contributed to turning the notion of the culture or ‘politics of fear’ into a public discourse, it does not make sense to approach fear as though it exists in a vacuum.

2.2.7 Fear of Crime

Due to its recurrent prevalence in debates about risk perception, powerlessness and insecurity, it makes sense to pay some attention to particular conceptualisations of ‘fear of crime’ here. Studies on crime-related fear started to become prominent in the fields of sociology and criminology in the late 1960s when, as Murray Lee has argued, growing sophistication in the collection and evaluation of statistical survey data coincided with many Western governments’ desire to gain more influence on the lives of ordinary citizens (Lee, 2001: 473). In linking risk and fear of crime research with the media, scholars have inevitably drawn on insights from mass communication research. In their much-cited 1996 review of the relationship between the mass media and ‘fear of crime’, Linda Heath and Kevin Gilbert assert that ‘[f]actors such as the type of programming (e.g., drama versus news), the credulity of the viewer, the extent of justice displayed at the program’s end, and the level of apprehension about crime before the viewing all lead to complex patterns rather than simple effects’ (1996: 381). Yet, in spite of a half-hearted attempt to account for complexities, much work on people’s perception of crime has historically employed models of media influence akin to Gerbner et al.’s Cultivation Analysis. Accordingly, lay responses to perceived crime rates have been juxtaposed with ‘real-life’ statistics or ‘objective threats’, and the discrepancies between the two accredited to irrational behaviour on the one hand and the media’s reality-warping properties on the other. It is not within the scope or interest of this literature review to regurgitate individual findings. What is more significant for my purposes is a
more recent conceptual shift in some thought on ‘fear of crime’ that has initiated investigations of people’s articulation of crime-related fear as regards specific (local and global) social contexts in which other (for instance, economic or social) insecurities have played a greater role than issues of victimisation and criminalisation.13

While this particular debate has not always directly referred to the role of the media, its conceptualisation of ‘fear’ is still relevant here. Lee’s 2001 intervention, a Foucauldian genealogy of fear of crime, constitutes a useful example of scholars taking issue with the taken-for-grantedness of one of criminology’s most significant concepts. According to Lee, it emerged in the US in the late 1960s ‘as a legitimate governmental and disciplinary object of calculation, inquiry and regulation’, and a number of factors coincided to foster its development. These included an ‘increasing sophistication of statistical inquiry, criminological concern with new forms of crime statistics, the emergence of victim surveys, rising rates of recorded crime in the USA and new attempts to govern this, racialized concerns about “black rioting”, a particular form of populist political discourse, and a historical moment where the conditions of possibility were such that these seemingly diffuse discourses could converge’ (2001: 480). What Lee concludes from his historical analysis is that ‘fear of crime’ cannot be approached as ‘a pre-discursive “social fact” but [as] a contingent category born of a set of very particular discursive arrangements and shifts’ (ibid: 467). Too often, Lee argues, criminologists have disregarded the role that their own discipline has played in the production (and normalisation) of ‘fear of crime’ discourses, as well as their position in relation to the production of knowledge and power. His concern is that through a mindless reinforcement of the discourse, criminologists might play a part in producing the very ‘fearing subjects’ they intend to study. Finally, he calls for the pursuit of more silenced narratives of crime, such as the fact that people often express ‘anger’ about crime, rather than fear, ‘if given the choice’ (ibid: 482).

Two studies, both in fact pre-dating Lee’s writing, have sought to tackle that very re-conceptualisation of fear of crime through empirical investigations of
situated discourse. Firstly, Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson have drawn attention to the concept of anxiety in relation to a psychoanalytic framework that again sees instances of ‘fear of crime’ as displacements or projections of other (partly embodied) insecurities (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). Secondly, Deborah Lupton and John Tulloch have sought to move beyond the binary opposition of rational and irrational subjects in ‘exploring the situated narratives, cultural representations and different levels of symbolic meaning that contribute to the dynamic constitution of fear’ (Lupton and Tulloch, 1999: 507). While they differ in their theoretical frameworks, both pieces constitute important deviations from mainstream fear of crime research and have partly informed the design and analysis of the current study.

Hollway and Jefferson approach ‘anxiety’ as a psychic phenomenon rather than a product of the social, though by situating the fear of crime concept within larger debates about the nature of late-modern societies (drawing, for instance, on work by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens), they also account for its social dimension. As the authors explain, ‘[w]hatever is repressed [by an individual] because it is threatening to the integrity of the self (thereby provoking anxiety) does not disappear but manifests in indirect ways; for example through displacement onto another arena in a person’s life or indeed onto another person or idea or group’ (ibid: 262). They illustrate this by analysing interviews with two individuals, Bob and Joe, both middle-aged, unemployed and living on a high-crime estate in a Northern British city. Despite sharing a conviction that the estate is ‘terrible’ and ‘getting worse’ (ibid: 264), the two men deal with crime in decidedly different ways. Bob is seemingly obsessed with it. Having been the victim of a burglary the previous year (whilst he and his family had been out of the house), he is preoccupied with preventing anything similar happening to him again. The family rarely leave the house and make sure at least one of them is always at home. Bob often lies awake thinking about safety measures and tactics for overpowering intruders. Joe, on the other hand, is cautious, having for instance placed a baseball bat underneath his bed, but does not seriously worry about his own safety, only that
of his children and grandchildren. The crucial difference the researchers see between the two men lies within their life histories and situations. While Joe has lived on the estate for almost all his life and is an active member of a large community of family and friends, an industrial accident has left Bob in constant pain and general ill health and has thus rendered him an inactive, disconnected resident. His preoccupation with crime is, in the eyes of Hollway and Jefferson, a preoccupation with something he can picture and control (the offenders are identified as boys from the neighbourhood), while much of the rest of his life (i.e. his condition) has left him anxious and vulnerable. The authors conclude that the impact of fear of crime discourses is a ‘variable affair that does not reduce to social group membership, incivilities and official risk rates’, but to individual biographies and particularly unique histories of anxiety (ibid: 265).

Lupton and Tulloch, wanting to account for a conscious and reflexive rather than a merely unconsciously anxious subject, put less emphasis on anxiety and other psychodynamic processes but share with Hollway and Jefferson an interest in individual biographies and narratives. In line with feminist critiques of mainstream criminology’s rational/irrational binary opposition, the authors argue that ‘[p]eople’s responses to crime are generated not so much via rationalistic calculations of probabilities, but via a series of intuitions, grounded in the experiences of everyday life’, in practices, feelings, culturally learned and shared assumptions, preferences and categories (1999: 510). Accordingly, rather than measuring fear or rationality as statistical quantities, the authors suggest to focus attention on the ‘cultural frames’ by which crime ‘makes sense’ to the subjective and ‘reflexive’ individual (Young in Lupton and Tulloch, 1999: 511). They do so by exploring participants’ narratives of (fear of) crime, as well as the channels of communication participants draw upon in making sense thereof. The centrality of television in evoking fears is questioned (or at least relativised) by a consideration of other ‘circuits of communication’, such as memory and life histories, conversations with friends or family, the local newspaper, and so on. Also providing examples from two interviews (but reserving judgement on whether participants’ fears were
appropriate or overly fearful), Lupton and Tulloch demonstrate how participants construct a kind of ‘lay knowledgeability’ which is innately conscious and exists in local dialogic exchange with above circuits of communication. As such, emphasis is placed on the ways in which participants account for their fears and make causal links between local and societal incidences.

This is important because it firstly highlights the ways in which perceptions of crime might be mediated and negotiated through various local and global sources and, secondly, because it renders the question of whether people are ‘right’ to be scared simplistic, patronising, and even irrelevant. Where Furedi and Glassner constructed audiences as relatively powerless receivers of a variety of risk messages, Lupton and Tulloch put a degree of conscious thought, reflexivity and agency into the equation. Instead of pre-conceptualising fear as a distinct entity, they demonstrate that the meaning of ‘fear’ can only productively derive from situated and embedded discourses of social audiences.

2.3 Fright Reactions

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the issue of people’s ‘fearful perceptions’ of the world. While most of the work in this area attends to television’s overall subtle but cumulative impact on society, with various degrees of interest in individuals as social and psychological agents, there is of course a whole domain of media-related ‘fear’ which falls into the category of more or less direct emotional responses to film and television. Arguably, the two areas are closely connected, since it is particularly within the encounters with dramatised crime or violence that researchers have seen the roots for subsequent fearful perceptions. The following constitutes an excursion into film-related literature, with a particular focus on horror. It is here that the concept of ‘fear’ becomes even more complex.

2.3.1 Fear and Film: The Case of Horror

Both within popular and critical belief, fear has been one (if not the) emotional response most commonly associated with the viewing of horror films. As Noël
Carroll has pointed out, ‘little argument seems required to establish that horror films are designed to provoke fear. Harmfulness, of course, is the criterion for fear. Thus, the depictions and descriptions in horror films are criterially pre-focused to make the prospects for harm salient in the world of the fiction’ (Carroll, 1999: 38). The nature of audiences’ emotional responses to ‘the field of horror’ (Gelder, 2004: 1) might also serve as one explanation for horror’s enduring cultural presence across the arts, literature, music, film, and television. In spite of its long-standing position at the ‘low-ground’ of aesthetic and moral value, the stories of the dreadful and the horrific live on and increasingly move into the mainstream, allegedly catering for those audiences who so ‘passionately want to be frightened’ (Twitchell, 1985: 8).

Our usual conception of ‘fear’ as one of the basic negative human emotions renders this phenomenon extraordinary. Why would people actively seek out potentially frightening material? And who are these individuals who find pleasure in something as mentally and physically challenging or disturbing as horror? Clearly, a worried tone rings through these questions, and it is this concern about the apparent absurdity of audiences’ enjoyment of being scared that originally sparked off academic interest in the ‘pleasures’ of horror per se. The ‘fears’ and ‘pleasures’ of horror have thus historically been interwoven. Often such explorations have mounted into wholehearted defences of both the horror genre and its audiences (see, for example, Twitchell, 1985; Kermode, 1997). At times, interest has shifted to the apparent paradox of being scared of what we know to be fiction (see Carroll, 1990, as a key text here). But when reviewing the literature on horror’s audiences (and pleasures) over the past twenty years, two issues emerge which have not to date found sufficient academic attention.

Firstly, and most importantly perhaps, it is questionable whether we indeed fully understand the kinds of emotions horror audiences experience when watching a film of that broad genre. It is possible that feelings such as ‘disgust’ or ‘embarrassment’ will feature as prominently as ‘fear’ (and, to an extent, disgust has been addressed by Carroll, 1990, and Miller, 1997). But if we take fear as the apparently inevitable, presumably even the intended emotional response to horror,
what kinds of fear, then, are we talking about? And further, as Andrew Tudor puts it, ‘what exactly are the consequences of [viewers] constructing their everyday sense of fearfulness and anxiety, their “landscapes of fear” (Tuan, 1979) out of such distinctive cultural materials?’ (Tudor, 1997: 461).

Secondly, with previous emphasis placed on the theoretical spectator, as well as the (most active) horror ‘fan’ or ‘enthusiast’ (Hills, 2001), how might we account for ‘ordinary’ viewers who, for instance, watch horror films but would not describe themselves as fans? How does fear feature in the lives of those viewers who feel quite ambivalent about horror, whose reactions perhaps depend on the kinds of films they watch, or the contexts they watch within? In the following, I sketch some of the main tendencies in academic thought on the relationship between horror and the fearful audience, though it is important to point out that both the growing hybridisation of film and television genres and the fact that certain images, style and narrative conventions are not genre-specific make this discussion similarly relevant to other forms of audiovisual entertainment. In fact, the main psychological approaches to the study of horror films – psychoanalysis and cognitivism – have both been applied to other kinds of emotional responses and film genres.

The fantastic and dream-like character of many horror films has, for some, lent itself well to psychoanalytic accounts of the genre and its audiences. As Matt Hills points out in his critique of psychoanalytic theory, horror films themselves have at times been approached more as dream-works than as texts, and psychoanalysts have often split them into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ examples, depending on whether they were seen to be progressive or reactionary in their underlying meanings. As Hills argues,

[p]sychoanalytic approaches have [...] tended to discursively police and categorise horror texts while also bidding for horror’s cultural value as a sign of allegedly transhistorical, psychical processes (e.g. ‘the unconscious’, ‘the Oedipal complex’), and thus as a validation of psychoanalytic theory itself. (Hills, 2005: 46)
Horror films, according to Robin Wood, can be defined as ‘our collective nightmares’, as at once the personal dreams of filmmakers and the shared dreams of their audiences, having as their true subject ‘the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses, its [re-emergence] dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter of terror, and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression’ (Wood 1986/2002: 28).

Drawing on psychoanalytic theory by Freud, Marcuse, and Horowitz, Wood distinguishes between basic repression, that kind of self-control of our urges and desires that is natural, necessary, and distinguishes us from animals, and surplus repression, the latter being more culturally specific and relating to the way in which people are conditioned by society to act according to specific social norms. It is this surplus repression which predetermines our role (in Wood’s American society) as ‘monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists’, while ignoring our real needs and wishes, and oppressing our sexual energy, our creativity, anything which does not cohere with bourgeois ideology. Central to the notion of the repressed is its subconscious existence: it cannot be accessed by the conscious mind (other than through psychoanalysis) and, as such, functions as ‘fully [internalised] oppression’, with its roots deeply anchored in infancy (ibid: 26). Furthermore, it is closely linked to the concept of ‘the Other’, that ‘which bourgeois ideology cannot [recognise] or accept but must deal with […] in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself’ (ibid:27).

Wood’s examples of Otherness in Western culture include women, children, other cultures, other ethnic groups within culture, the proletariat, alternative ideologies or political systems, and alternative sexualities, such as homosexuality or bisexuality. All of these are considered oppressed elements within Western culture but serve as screens on which to project what during infancy we have learnt to repress. The Other is not regarded as merely constituting an opposite to culture or to the self, as an outsider thereof, but rather as comprising a (repressed) part of them. As Rhona J. Berenstein puts it, ‘the Self is constantly engaged in a process of
displacement and destruction of the Other, while that very process poses an impossibility. In order to truly annihilate the Other, one must simultaneously destroy the Self’ (Berenstein, 1990: 57).

In horror films, it is argued, the Other is represented through the monster – whichever shape or form it might take – and it is the presentation of the monster, as well as the nature of its fate, which define whether a film is socially and politically progressive or reactionary. The monster constitutes a threat to normality; if, in the end, normality is restored and the monster destroyed, then this also marks the re-establishment of repression. Matt Hills identifies these kinds of Freudian or post-Freudian psychoanalytic constructions of the pleasures of horror as ‘pleasures of restoration’, wherein ‘horror is said to narratively restore repressed material, before finally restoring repression itself via its narrative closures, or its textual boundedness’ (Hills, 2005: 46; his italics).

As Wood notes, normality is usually represented by the nuclear family, the heterosexual monogamous couple, and social institutions, such as the police, the church, and so on. However, the monster itself and the relationship between monster and normality have changed over time within the constraints of the basic horror film formula. And this is, finally, where ‘fear’ becomes a significant element, as the monster not only represents the repressed, but by implication, also our fears. ‘The Monster’, Wood writes, ‘is […] more protean [than normality], changing from period to period as society’s basic fears clothe themselves in fashionable or immediately accessible garments – rather as dreams use material from recent memory to express conflicts or desires that may go back to early childhood’ (Wood, 2002: 31).

If this is the case, ‘fear’ becomes a shared emotion of whatever is collectively repressed within society. Yet at the same time, these societal fears only serve as projections which can be reduced to such primal or infantile fears as the fear of castration. They subconsciously find their way into the horror film, and get digested, again on a subconscious level, by the horror audience. In a sense, the monster’s struggle to prevail occurs as we struggle to deal with our complexes. The
pleasure of horror viewing is thus seen to lie in the subconscious recognition of, and affection towards, the monstrous, since this is where we find our true selves and, by doing so, deal with our fears and anxieties. In psychoanalytic terms, we identify with the monster, while our moral upbringing teaches us to fear and loathe it at the same time, with the latter possibly serving as an explanation for our ‘conscious’ feeling of ‘fear’ when watching horror films, as well as for the general ambivalence we might feel about horror viewing per se (see Wood, 2002: 32).

The object of ‘fear’ is not actually Wood’s chief concern in his explanation of the ‘repressed’ in American horror of the 1960s and 70s. Yet his writing goes some way in presenting a possible framework through which to approach the relationship between horror and our fears and anxieties, loosely drawing on Sigmund Freud’s 1919 elaboration on ‘The Uncanny’ (German: ‘das Unheimliche’), which more directly engages with our fearful world and which serves as a main starting point for many psychoanalytic accounts on the topic.

Freud defines the uncanny broadly as lying within the field of what is frightening, as relating ‘to what arouses dread and horror’ (Freud, 1919: n.p.) It would go too far to offer a detailed description of Freud’s train of thought. What is important is that most of his examples of the uncanny can be detected in both everyday experiences and themes employed by many horror films, and he very skilfully relates them back to psychoanalytic theory. Many of his examples simply relate to superstition, for instance the function of repetition of specific occurrences, which seems to force upon us ‘the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of “chance”’ (ibid: n.p.). Freud sees in this the reminder of our own ‘compulsion to repeat’, an unconscious phenomenon which, again, dates back to childhood. Similarly, he traces our uncanny feelings about death and the undead back to old and animistic conceptions of the universe, to primitive men’s world views, to beliefs in magic and mysterious powers beyond our understanding, which appear in our narcissistic state of development, then get overcome (through rational thought), but always strive to re-emerge.18 With regard to our reading of horrific stories or our viewing of horror films, then, it can be
argued that our uncanny responses occur involuntarily because the themes depicted in these stories unconsciously remind us of repressed or surmounted past memories.

Robin Wood’s notion of the ‘return of the repressed’, of course, carries some political implications which do not appear in Freud’s work, since Wood is more concerned with what he defines as surplus repression. Wood’s writing has been criticised, firstly, for generalising about a rather diverse and multi-faceted genre and, secondly, for providing an outdated account, which does not cohere with a modern society whose problems are not so much related to a repressed sexuality, but to a saturation of sexual imagery, choice, and over-consciousness (e.g. Badley, 1995, and Elliott, 2001, in Matt Hills, 2005: 50-52). Still, it is easy to see why psychoanalysis constitutes the most dominant paradigm in the analysis of horror films and their audiences up to this date. If one believes in the significance of the ‘unconscious’ and specific universal patterns of parent-child relations during infancy (which seem to determine our entire future emotional life), Freud’s theories seem omni-applicable. And indeed, most of us will remember situations in which we got scared by something, or felt ‘uncanny’ about something, finding ourselves at a loss to say why we felt this way. Relating such instances back to very basic (and unremembered) experiences in our lives provides a feasible rationalisation.

However, even if one finds oneself in this loop of universal explanations, one cannot refrain from questioning some neglected elements, for instance the fact that both horror filmmakers and viewers have become more or less familiar with at least some psychoanalytic thought, which in turn affects both the construction of horror films and their reception and consumption. One does not need to ‘read Freud himself’ to have a vague concept of phallacy, castration threats, womb fantasies, or the Oedipal complex. Likewise, ‘the unconscious’ has become a popular tool for people to draw upon when reflecting on their dreams, deeds, or emotional reactions. This popular knowledge must have an effect on how we make sense of horror films and our reactions towards them, as does our understanding of horror conventions, viewing contexts, and so on. Even if we cannot entirely reject the
possible legitimacy of the psychoanalytic framework, it appears incomplete to neglect the ‘conscious mind’. A strand of psychology which moves more readily into this terrain is cognitivism.

Cognitivist philosophy is a relatively recent approach to the emotional realm of the horror audience, whereby its theories of spectatorship are often created under the umbrella of David Bordwell’s ‘historical poetics’ approach to cinema. A historical poetics of cinema studies the principles under which films are constructed and produce specific effects, and examines the production and development of these principles within particular historical, empirical contexts. It seeks to investigate (changing) norms and principles with regard to narrative, stylistic, and thematic construction. Instead of imposing what Bordwell calls a ‘method’ from an ‘interpretive school’ on the object of study, historical poetics is self-conscious of its analytic categorisations, seeking to base work within interdisciplinarily acceptable empirical data (Bordwell, 1989: n.p.). In Bordwell’s view, psychoanalytic approaches (as well as semiotic, Marxist, feminist, or other textual theory schools) use rhetoric in order to ascribe implicit or symptomatic readings to a text whose significant aspects have already been identified through existing theoretical concepts associated with each specific semantic field (the Oedipal complex or the castration threat serve as good examples here). In contrast, an historical poetics approach, and the neoformalist trend Bordwell and Kristin Thompson adhere to, consider themselves as grounded within a ‘theoretical activity’ rather than a ‘fixed theory’: ‘With no point of arrival’, Bordwell argues, ‘committed to no a priori conclusions, seeking to answer precisely posed question[s] with concepts that will be refined through encounter[s] with data, neoformalism deploys “hollow” categories’ (ibid: n.p.).

Bordwell et al. are not, in the first instance, interested in anything outside film form and, as such, they are not concerned with any social film audiences. However, the approach allows for elaborations on the cues given to the audience by the film text, as well as the normative ways in which spectators will be prompted to make sense of a film. It thus implies an ideal reader/spectator who is considered to
be equipped with specific cognitive abilities. As Peter Hutchings explains in regard to horror films, within this theoretical framework audiences are seen to be ‘actively working with the film to get the “horror effect”, reading in a knowledgeable manner the codes, conventions and cues provided by the film-makers, and performing particular cognitive operations without which the film in question would simply not make sense’ (Hutchings, 2004: 88). This cognitive component, however, also creates apparent difficulties if one seeks to account for emotional responses to film.

Noël Carroll’s _The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart_ (1990) clearly constitutes a key point of reference within cognitive thought on horror. In it, the author also investigates the ostensible absurdity of being scared by what we know to be fictional – not real, and thus not threatening – such as the monster in a horror film. What he calls the ‘paradox of fiction’ builds upon the notion that, in ‘real’ life, our emotions are considered to be very much intertwined with our beliefs: ‘In order to have the relevant emotion[,] [...] we must have beliefs about the way circumstances lie, including beliefs that the agents entangled in those circumstances exist’ (Carroll, 1990: 61). Emotions, here, are not seen to exist in opposition to thought and cognition, but in occurrence with cognitive processes.

Both the ‘illusion theory’, according to which we are deceived into believing what we see for the course of a fiction, and the ‘pretend theory’, the idea that we play a game of ‘make-believe’ in which our emotions are not genuine, are criticized by Carroll as unconvincing explanations for this phenomenon (ibid: 63-79). Instead, he argues for a third option, the ‘thought theory’, in accordance with which the audience entertains and reflects upon certain thoughts that are prompted by the text. As Carroll writes, ‘we can be moved by prospects of what we imagine’ (ibid: 80-88). Our emotions are genuine but relate to thought contents rather than to the belief, or make-believe, in the fiction’s reality status. We are not ‘horrified’ by horror, we are ‘art-horrified’ (ibid: 91). And this emotion of ‘art-horror’ is dominated by fear and repulsion (disgust), as we respond to the horror monster, which Carroll defines as ‘any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science’ (ibid: 27). Horror’s pleasures, here, derive from the kind of
disclosure/discovery narratives which horror films share with murder mysteries, as well as from a fascination with the monster: More than anything, it is curiosity which keeps us glued to the screen, while we more or less endure watching the frightening and repulsive elements (ibid: 187).

*The Philosophy of Horror* also explores the relationships between viewers and characters in the (horror) film, specifically those with the protagonists. As the emotional states of a protagonist do not usually correspond with those of the viewer – while we may feel concerned for the protagonist’s well-being through suspense, for instance, the main character herself may still be oblivious of any threat – Carroll dismisses the concept of character-identification. We may ‘assimilate’ the protagonist’s viewpoint while assimilating their situation from our external viewing position, but we will not feel identical emotions and thus not identify with the characters in a film (ibid: 95).

Carroll’s quick dismissal of character-identification has more recently been revisited. Berys Gaut, for instance, argues that the concept of identification must not automatically be rejected merely because of its historical links to psychoanalytic theory. Instead, it should be more adequately distinguished and conceptualised (Gaut, 1999). One such attempt at conceptualisation is Murray Smith’s *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (1995), which, as the title suggests, replaces the term ‘identification’ with that of ‘engagement’, more precisely with the idea of different degrees of engagement. According to Smith, viewers engage with screen characters on three different levels (‘structure of sympathy’): firstly, through ‘recognition’, secondly, through ‘alignment’, and thirdly, through ‘allegiance’ with the characters (ibid: 81ff). Broadly speaking, recognition refers to the spectator’s construction of the character as a fictional (human) agent who is present within a given story world. Alignment describes the ways in which the character’s actions, knowledges, and feelings are (through narrative) made accessible to the viewer who is then able to morally evaluate the character’s endeavours through allegiance (ibid: 82-85).
Murray Smith’s emphasis on audience imagination and the potential of engaging with characters on different levels of the ‘structure of sympathy’ lead him to an appraisal of human imagination, and of film or film characters as forums of social, cultural, universal, and local reflection. Yet his book also leaves a number of questions open. For instance, he works hard to defend filmic emotional responses as ‘genuine’ emotions, yet he does not offer an adequate framework for putting them in relation to real-life emotional contexts. Further, it is questionable whether our emotional engagement with film is automatically based on character engagement, or whether in fact there are other factors at play.

A more recent and perhaps more comprehensive contribution to the field of cognitivist film theory is Greg M. Smith’s *Film Structure and the Emotion System*, in which the author develops a ‘mood-cue approach to filmic emotion’ (Smith, G.M.: 2003: 41ff). Its central assertion is, as the phrase suggests, the interaction between mood and emotion. As Smith argues, ‘the primary emotive effect of films is to create mood’:

> Generating brief, intense emotions often requires the orienting state that asks us to interpret our surroundings in an emotional fashion. If we are in such an emotionally orienting state, we are much more likely to experience such emotion. [...] Film structure seeks to increase the film’s chances of evoking emotion by first creating a predisposition toward experiencing emotion: a mood. [...] To sustain mood, we must experience occasional moments of emotion. [...] Therefore, mood and emotion sustain each other. (Smith, G.M., 2003: 42)

Further, he argues that emotion cues, or ‘emotion markers’ (concentrated organisations of cues which elicit strong emotional outbursts but do not serve any specific narrative function), do not always create sharply discrete entities of emotions but different, related (associative) emotions which again produce moods. In addition, different audience members may pick up on different cues, depending on their ‘differing preferences of emotional access’, which, according to the author, helps to account for individually varying responses to one and the same film (ibid:
43). Texts only offer ‘invitations to feel’; it is up to the individual viewer to ‘accept or reject these invitations’ (ibid: 172).

This kind of approach clearly relies on the structuring of a film in eliciting emotions and moods, and it goes some way in accounting for variation in what we might call a ‘fearful’ reaction to a (horror) film or programme. A cognitive approach to audiences’ emotional responses to films, such as the one offered by Smith, seems thorough and promising. By analysing texts for emotional cues, it offers some possible explanations and models of viewers’ emotional responses to film and television. Smith’s emphasis on the notion of moods enables him to describe some complexities of the emotional viewing experience, which have in the past been neglected and which may be worth pursuing in more detail. However, what concerns me is cognitivism’s wide-spread reliance on theoretical thought experiments, and a subsequent reluctance towards conducting empirical research into actual audiences. Although Smith tentatively suggests the need for sociological inquiry in his conclusion to Film Structure, he appears to be an exception to the rule.22

There are, for me, a number of common problems within both cognitive and psychoanalytic approaches to horror (and other films for that matter). Firstly, and this is something which has been noted by cognitivist critics themselves (see Tan, 1996, in Hills, 2005: 18), both psychoanalytic and cognitive perspectives on horror fail to regard horror films as constructions/artefacts in the sense that their significance might move beyond that of the fictional world, and into such extra-textual arenas as the importance of stars (both filmmakers and actors) and other production/reception contexts (such as production values, marketing, a film’s reputation, viewing contexts, etc.), which real audiences will be aware of and respondent to. Even within the film text itself, issues of narrative and representation cannot be the sole concerns; depending on the film under discussion, it might particularly be the use of special effects and technological development per se which constitute important features within the meaning-making world of real audiences. Viewing context is particularly important here. Both psychoanalytic and cognitive
studies have approached film viewing as though it exists in a vacuum. It is between the text and the individual viewer that meaning-making processes are seen to take place; yet both these entities are considered as relatively static. This view neither takes into account that viewers often come equipped with certain knowledges and expectations about a film (derived from ancillary material, media literacy, word of mouth, etc.), nor does it account for social viewing and the ‘social dimension of emotions’. These are not new points of criticism but seem particularly relevant here. The former relates to what Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath have sought to advocate in their notion of the ‘viewing strategy’, that is the importance of studying ‘the ways in which different audiences prepare for their viewing of a film, how they experience the film in the light of their preparations, and what they make of the experiences they undergo’ (2001: 63).

The social dimension of emotions has been usefully summarised by the psychologist Tony Manstead who, together with Agneta Fischer, has further developed conventional appraisal theories by introducing the concept of ‘social appraisal’ (Manstead and Fischer, 2001). Though interested in all aspects of everyday life, Manstead gets to the heart of media-related implications when he asserts that ‘[a] comedy viewed in the company of a friend who seems not to find it funny is much less amusing than it would be if the friend found it hilarious’ (Manstead, 2005: 485). Not only does the (emotional) behaviour of fellow viewers impact on our own emotional responses, ‘how we think others would react to our emotional behaviours, if we were to behave emotionally’ (ibid.) is equally important. With regard to the latter, it is plausible to consider this social dimension to even go beyond the viewing context and thus include ‘imagined audiences’ as well as physically present audiences alike.

Secondly, although critics like Greg Smith are keen to point out that films only offer cues to their audiences which can – but might not – be taken up by actual viewers, both approaches only minimally account for a multiplicity of responses to single films. The various reactions to David Cronenberg’s Crash, to take just one case study of audience reception research, are deeply, if perhaps not entirely, rooted in
viewers’ diverse emotional reactions to the film (see Barker et al.: 2001). Cognitivism’s reliance on ‘normative’ responses seems to complement a model of ‘preferred’ readings, such as Stuart Hall’s early encoding/decoding model, which has subsequently been criticised for its simplicity, even by its creator himself (see Hall, 1980; 1994; see also 2.4 for a more detailed discussion of the model).

And, thirdly, neither psychoanalysis nor cognitivism sufficiently account for people’s possible personal relationships with certain films, characters/actors, situations, soundtracks, and so on. That these relations might change through repeat viewings or throughout a person’s life time is largely underestimated, but might be significant in relation to their emotional (fearful) responses. There needs to be a willingness to approach the audience when attempting to shed light on audience/text relations, especially if we seek to learn more about viewers’ emotional reactions to film and television. While researchers from a broad cultural studies background have recently begun to explore the pleasures and meanings social audiences associate with horror (see, for example, Cherry (2002) on women’s relations to the genre), worries about viewers’, and especially children’s, ‘fright’ reactions to various media have led to a relatively constant stream of media effects research since the 1930s. A recent example of this work demonstrates the importance of approaching ‘real’ audiences, whilst at the same time, inadvertently, serving as a reminder of the shortcomings of conceptualising fear as mere (negative) effect.

2.3.2 Fear as Distress
Joanne Cantor’s work on children’s fright reactions to the media spans over three decades and includes such titles as ‘Mommy; I’m scared’: How TV and Movies Frighten Children and What We Can Do To Protect Them (1998). Originally a student of Psychology and Communications at the Annenberg School (Gerbner’s CA centre), Cantor grounds her work firmly in developmental psychology as well as the neural sciences. A relatively recent article by Cantor, ‘“I’ll Never Have a Clown In My House”: Why Movie Horror Lives On’ (2004), deals with students’ fear reactions to
horror films, and four films in particular: *Poltergeist, Jaws, The Blair Witch Project,* and *Scream.*

Over the period of three years, from 1997 until 2000, Cantor collected a total of 530 papers from students at the University of Madison-Wisconsin, in which she asked them to write about fright reactions they or their friends/acquaintances had had from films, television, or the radio, whether these occurred during their childhood or more recently. Students were encouraged to ‘describe the mass media stimulus responsible for the reaction, the age and gender of the person experiencing the reaction, and the situation under which it occurred’ (Cantor, 2004: 286). Finally, they were asked to speculate as to why they thought they reacted in this way.

Even though students could write about any kind of media material, the overwhelming majority (91%) wrote about fictional content, of which the four films above were the ones most cited. Through a content analysis of those papers, Cantor developed two major categories of fright effect reports, those that related to the bedtime context (i.e. sleeping difficulties, nightmares, etc.), and those which would happen during waking activities (i.e. avoidance of, or discomfort with, otherwise non-threatening activities, such as swimming in a lake after watching *Jaws*). Furthermore, the researcher made a note of the duration of these effects, whether they only lasted for a short time after the viewing, for several hours, days, months, years, or even until the moment of writing the paper.

Her findings seem to reveal that the chosen films left a lingering ‘effect’ and stayed with participants for a long time, even if they had become aware of the irrationality of their feelings; indeed, out of the 91 papers written about any of the four films, ‘46 percent reflected some effect of the movie on bedtime behaviour, and 75 percent reported some effect on the viewer’s waking life. Only 12 percent of the papers failed to mention effects that spilled over into the viewer’s sleeping or waking existence’, of which almost all referred to young adults’ exposure to *The Blair Witch Project* or *Scream,* which were the more recent films mentioned (ibid: 295).
Based on existing research, Cantor makes children’s ‘vulnerability’ responsible for certain lingering effects, such as their cognitive inability (until the age of seven or eight) to sufficiently differentiate between fiction and reality, as well as their ‘perceptual boundedness’, which makes them respond more strongly to visual images than other kinds of information (ibid: 296). They are also considered to have difficulties with transformations, which explains their problems with the metamorphosis of the clown in *Poltergeist*. Yet, as Cantor notes, this does not explain why effects continue for these viewers throughout adult life. Here Cantor argues that it is the reality factor of some fiction which leads us to believe that the events in the story are plausible and might actually happen in real life, making us more alert to real-life dangers. And further, it is the sensationalism and vividness employed in violent fiction that lets these stories have a deeper impact, and stay with us longer, than everyday television news. With regard to supernatural stories, Cantor argues that we continue to be anxious because we entertain an ambiguity about the possible reality factor of such occurrences, and in addition, we cannot envisage a defence against supernatural forces, which again leaves us in a state of vulnerability.

Her final explanation for lingering effects relates to the research of Joseph LeDoux, a neural scientist whose work in *The Emotional Brain* (1996) suggests a ‘fear conditioning’ to be the cause for our long-lasting experiences (see also Chapter Three). The brain, according to LeDoux, has two memory systems which function during fear responses – a conscious one and an unconscious one. As Cantor explains, ‘[t]he hippocampus mediates conscious processing and is involved in appraising the situation and making sense of it. The amygdale responds more quickly, even before the cause of alarm has reached our state of awareness, and orchestrates more automatic responses, such as tensed muscles, blood pressure and heart rate changes, and the release of adrenaline into the bloodstream’ (Cantor, 2004: 300, my italics). Our ‘emotional memory’ stores the stimuli of experienced fear contexts, so that later in life we will be able to respond quickly to possibly dangerous situations. As regards lingering film effects, Cantor reasons:
If we experienced intense fear while watching *Jaws*, our implicit fear reactions (e.g., the heart rate increases, blood pressure changes, and muscle tension) became conditioned to the image of the shark, to the notion of swimming, to the musical score – most likely to a combination of the stimuli in the movie. Later, one of these stimuli – or even thoughts of the stimuli – trigger these unconscious reactions, even after our conscious minds have gotten past the problem. (ibid: 301)

By linking her findings to neuro-physiological research, Cantor attaches additional significance to her study (though it is important to point out that LeDoux’s findings are not set in stone, see Chapter Three). It makes sense to view our experiences in the light of an emotional memory that leads us to act apparently irrationally in situations which unconsciously (or perhaps also consciously) remind us of earlier traumatic experiences. Furthermore, Cantor’s work is important because it deals with real viewers, social audiences, and their responses to horror.

My main problem with her reasoning refers to her conceptualisation of ‘fear’ within the viewing context, and precisely again to whether it is really ‘fear’ – as a clear-cut emotion – that we experience when watching a ‘scary movie’. According to the researcher, certain images like physical deformities and animal attacks automatically arouse fear in us, and our empathy with characters, combined with the use of suspense and ‘scary music’, make us feel fearful in certain viewing situations. This implies a simplistic, taken-for-granted concept of fear based on some notion of Samuel T. Coleridge’s ‘suspension of disbelief’, as well as an array of relatively stable entities that will almost instinctively trigger fear in us as viewers. Yet Cantor’s neuro-physiological thesis really only holds up if our fearful encounter with a film comes close to that of real-life situations. Further, while the suspension of disbelief is not outright implausible, it still demands some elaboration. It also implies a degree of evolutionary determinism as regards our object of fear; in her attempt to chart the overall patterns in responses, Cantor does not go far in accounting for differences between viewers. If one entertains the idea that certain images automatically arouse fear in us, one is also pressed to ask how the process of association is actually meant to work during the viewing situation. Are films
playing with already existing fears, or are they seen to trigger fears in us? Cantor’s reference to participants’ fear of swimming in lakes and seas after watching *Jaws* seems to imply the latter. Yet, if one considers that people can be afraid of doing the same without ever having watched *Jaws*, one begins to wonder whether, firstly, *Jaws* only helps to provide viewers with some additional imagery to dress their imagination, or whether there are indeed other processes of sense-making at stake. It is distinctly possible that films only help us to give a face to the fears we are already prone to. Whether these fears are indeed evolutionary, based on repressed desires or derive from our perception of the world we live in, depends on theoretical stances. Stuck at a level of speculation about abstract text/audience relations, we need to consider the social dimension of (horror) film viewing, as well as some methodological consequences implied in such a shift.

Cantor carefully reflects on her recruitment process and conducts a number of pilot studies so as to minimise the influence of students’ attempts to impress their professor in gathered responses. Yet she is less reflective when it comes to the actual analysis of the papers. Here, Cantor approaches the students’ writing as straightforward reports of their experiences, ignoring their performative elements and the ways in which the students construct an account of their memories and behaviour, a specific version of events. This is not to say that they were dishonest but that any analysis of such talk or writing needs to take into account the discursiveness of the material. While it is possible and, as I will argue in the course of this thesis, necessary to allow for experiential dimensions in talk and writing, it is short-sighted to merely consider language as a window onto the experience. Ultimately, Cantor’s approach to fear is simplistic, in the sense that, not dissimilarly to Gerbner et al., she almost seeks to measure it as a distinct entity in people’s writing. The discursive and performative aspects of ‘fear’ are ignored.

2.3.3 (Actively and Discursively) Performing Fears and Anxieties

It has been argued in recent years that audience behaviour and interaction might constitute significant elements in the viewing experience of horror audiences and,
further, that previous conceptions of horror audiences and the horror cinema as male-dominated do not always hold up. The image of the screaming female and the fearless male has been replaced by a general perception of the auditorium (or living room!) as performance space in which different groups of viewers behave according to certain social roles and around social boundaries, such as gender, fan/non-fan divisions, and so on. The woman’s stereotypical scream is thus no longer an expression of fear but part of her role-fulfilment within the audience; likewise, the man’s subdued reaction to the horrific does not necessarily suggest a lack of emotional capacity, but the gender role he is inclined to take on (see, for example, Berenstein, 1996).

It is doubtful this theory of clear gender divisions prevails, since audience expressions are likely to be more varied and unconventional, frequently crossing the boundaries of gender expectations. Yet what is important here is, firstly, the tendency to go beyond textual and psychological analyses and instead include context and reception, thus considering that ‘[w]hile learning to enjoy the roller-coaster ride of a new kind of thrill, the audience may begin to perceive its own performances of fear as part of the show’ (Williams, 2000: 372). And secondly, the shift of emphasis from an interpretation of audience reactions as (fearful or other) expressions to that of audience responses as discursively constructed, and attributable to socio-cultural conditions.

This is where Matt Hills’ *The Pleasures of Horror* (2005) usefully intervenes. Hills takes what he calls a ‘performative’ micro-physical approach to horror’s pleasures, challenging theoretical or empirical attempts of elucidating the realities of pleasure as something present (or absent), and instead treating them as ‘discourses of affect’ (Hills, 2005: 6). As the author explains:

[P]leasure is not dealt with here as a mystical, ineffable ‘thing’ that is somehow outside of culture, thereby ‘reducing the problem to non-theorisable dimensions of personal experience’ (Mercer 1983, p. 87). Nor is pleasure treated as somehow excessive, as a passional force outrunning social and cultural order in its blissful *jouissance* (Barthes 1976). Neither merely an existent thing, nor magically a disruptive entity, pleasure-as-
performative is always a cultural act, an articulation of identity. (Hills, 2005: ix)

Pleasure is thus considered as fluid and permanently reconstructive/ed, and ‘although horror’s pleasure must be assumed to be felt, materially and affectively by audiences, as soon as this process is [theorised] by academics (or recounted by fans) then we are necessarily dealing with discourses of pleasure or, more broadly, […] “discourses of affect”’ (ibid: 6).

Besides considering the major theoretical approaches to horror, Hills discusses the pleasures of horror with regard to fan practices, centring on fans’ knowledge of the genre and their relationship to censorship. Hills shows how fans construct ‘pleasure’ less through the potential of being scared by horror and more through the agency fans gain from their special knowledge on narrative worlds, special effects, other technical details, and genre/production contexts. Being scared by horror is constructed as a non-fan characteristic or as something which fans have experienced in the past (mainly during childhood), and which is now something they yearn for but do not experience. Furthermore, their ability to subvert cultural categorisations through their practices around censorship is considered as an additional construction of ‘pleasure’ by these fans. Again, Hills demonstrates the significance of extra-textual elements to the viewers’ construction of ‘pleasure’ (or other ‘affects’) and thus further criticises such text-based approaches as those offered by Carroll or Todorov.

Hills’ conclusion theorises the ‘displeasures’ of horror, again within a performative framework and referring to both critical thought and fan discourses, challenging the taken-for-grantedness of horror rejections. In Hills’ view, both discourses of pleasure and displeasure, though not opening up a window to any lived experience, are meaningful and can be meaningfully analysed, since they function to ‘produce and reproduce cultural distinctions, differences, moralities, and identities’ (ibid: 211, his italics), making it seem that ‘horror is always “concerned with a lot more than being scary”’ (citing Newman in Hills, 2005: 211).
Hills’ work is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it moves away from a mere focus on horror texts and the positioning of imagined spectators through the text, thus seeking to reduce the risk of imposing *a priori* concepts and assumptions on the text/audience relationship. The role of knowledges and understandings, personal histories and self-narratives, agencies and aims, which fans bring to their horror viewing needs to be taken into account if we seek to comprehend the entity of horror meanings, and thus the complexity of emotional (possibly fearful) responses to the genre. Secondly, Hills’ investigation of fans’ online postings gives us an idea of the ways in which viewers very distinctly differentiate among what they consider different emotional responses to horror. As one user wrote, “I almost posted my list of most disgusting scenes, but that’s not the same as most disturbing, right? And that’s different from scary, too” (in Hills, 2005: 82). These distinctions carry certain connotations which can only be fully understood when also considering the kinds of expectations and experiences viewers bring to a film. And finally, the author’s discursive-performative approach reminds us that such distinctions and categorisations are fluid, subject to change, and always related to a person’s identity-construction (in relation to others).

There are also limitations to his piece, one of which is its focus on fan audiences instead of ‘ordinary’ viewers, since it might be argued that fans come equipped with certain knowledges, understandings and activities which the ‘average’ horror viewer might not engage in. Yet my main reservation lies in the fact that Hills so entirely ignores the ‘lived experience’ component of our affective discourses. While Cantor’s approach to students’ papers failed to account for any performative elements at all, Hills’ work veers towards the other extreme. Although it is necessary to approach audience responses discursively as social constructions rather than direct windows to ‘lived experiences’, I would argue that they might offer *some* insight into the ways in which we make sense of, for instance, the ‘bodily’ responses that accompany our ‘affective’ responses to horror. Specifically at moments when viewers struggle to define their responses, when they begin to
differentiate between or are simply puzzled by them, it might be possible to explore more about their nature and functions through people’s talk.

I conclude this literature review with a piece of work that, to me, manages to bridge this gap to some extent, offering an empirical study of children’s emotional responses to the media from a broad cultural studies perspective. David Buckingham’s *Moving Images* (1996) has influenced much of the design of this study, not least because it provided something of an antidote to Gerbner et al.’s approach to fear and the media. It is useful to situate it within the wider field of audience and reception studies first. Due to the scope of this thesis, the following discussion can only be brief.

2.4 Mapping Emotional Responses to Film and Television

Audience research from a broad media and cultural studies position is varied and marked by its methodological diversity. However, what studies in this field have in common is that, in one way or another, they conceive of audiences as ‘active’ and meaning-making individuals. ‘Audience activity’ has of course been a contested and complex term, a ‘protean and infinitely malleable meta-construct’, as Frank Biocca has called it (Biocca, 1985: 4). Speaking from a mass communications perspective in the mid-1980s, Biocca distinguishes between activity as selectivity (‘choice’), utilitarianism (‘use’), intentionality (related to pre-existing ‘needs’), involvement (i.e. cognitive and affective arousal), and ‘imperviousness to influence’ (a term coined in the 1960s by the psychologist Raymond Bauer; ibid: 5f). The latter is key to its initial conception as a response to the dominant paradigm of media effects research at the time, which considered audiences as on the whole ‘passive’, vulnerable and powerless, and of which Gerbner et al.’s work is arguably a strand, albeit one which departs from immediate ‘effects’ of the ‘hypodermic needle’ kind. The two audience paradigms most associated with the concept of audience activity are ‘uses and gratifications’ (U&G) research and Stuart Hall’s ‘encoding/decoding’ model.
According to Denis McQuail, the origins of U&G can be traced back to the 1940s when mass communication researchers in the United States began to study the appeal of radio programmes, as well as the connections between that and other features of listeners’ personalities and social circumstances (McQuail, 1998: 152). Yet, it was only by the 1960s and 1970s that uses and gratifications work was conceived as one (albeit a broad and multifaceted) field of research – proponents would say a ‘paradigm’ – which was characterised by three main features. First, work in this area was ‘functionalist’ in its conception, that is, rather than asking what the media did to its audiences, this new approach sought to find out ‘what people do to the media’ (a phrase famously introduced by Elihu Katz in 1959; see ibid: 153). Importantly, the approach presumed that ‘people’s values, their interests, their associations, their social roles, are pre-potent, and that people relatively fashion what they see and hear to these interests’ (Katz in Ruddock, 2001: 69). Thus, focus lay on audiences as rational subjects who make use of the media for their own purposes, and particularly in response to inherent needs or desires. Second, U&G research approached audiences as individuals with social and psychological needs. Third, with its use of questionnaires and decent-sized samples, it lent itself to multivariate statistical analysis, enabling systematic comparisons between different media and audiences. The latter has always been considered a particular strength of the approach.

Uses and gratifications research is still generally interested in how the media fit into people’s daily routines, the social functions they fulfil, and the kinds of ‘pleasures’ people derive from them (see Ruddock, 2001: 68). Despite its origins in mass communication research, it has had a strong influence on cultural studies audience work, not least because it provides audiences with some agency and power in their relationships with the media. Ruddock, however, observes a growing gulf between the two traditions; as U&G steers more and more towards a form of biological determinism, the fact that needs are seen to exist before media use renders them ‘pre-symbolic and hence acultural’ (Ruddock, 2007: 56). In contrast, cultural
studies audience researchers argue for the importance of the symbolic world, of issues of representation and interpretation.

Specific U&G work on media-related ‘fear’ seems comparatively rare but can often be found within the European context. Two notable pieces of work are an article by Jurgen Minnebo, which employs a uses and gratifications framework in relation to ‘fear of crime’ (Minnebo, 2000) and a more general and comprehensive ‘typology of audience behaviour’, with a central focus on fear, by the Austrian media researcher Peter Vitouch (2007). Both approach media exposure as a way of dealing with existing fears, though they collapse back into the kinds of psychological theories and methods which have been problematised by cultural studies audience researchers in the past. And in the case of Minnebo’s work, it can be argued that he uses precisely the static concept of ‘fear of crime’ which criminologists have recently sought to redefine (see 2.2.7).

U&G work has generally been criticised for its lack of convincing theoretical foundations, even by proponents of the approach themselves (see McQuail, 1998: 155). Neither is there a coherent theory of ‘needs’, nor an independent way for measuring them. Further, U&G work is considered wholly uncritical. Its focus on the gratification of predetermined needs means that all media use and content ultimately aid people’s social adjustment (ibid). U&G’s legacy, in the context of this study, is that audiences make sense of their media use as ‘purposeful’, if only for such objectives as relaxation. This is not to say that this is the only way of accounting for media encounters, or that such expressions of choice and selectivity are to be taken entirely at face value. Yet, as will be illustrated through the course of this thesis, purposefulness constitutes a common explanatory framework for audiences when talking about their uses and interpretations of the media.

Stuart Hall’s aforementioned ‘encoding/decoding’ model is not as obviously relevant to the responses gathered during this project. It should, however, be included for reasons of comprehensiveness and because it continues to form a common reference point within audience research across disciplines. The model has been described by some as a progression from U&G work which was perceived as
too imprecise (see Brooker and Jermyn, 2003; Morley, 1980). Hall’s wide influence can be seen in the earlier quotation from Gerbner (p. 17 above), who adopts his concept of the ‘limits of polysemy’ even while proposing a model significantly at odds with Hall’s. Not unlike effects researchers, Hall was concerned with media power and the workings of ideology in media texts. However, his approach diverged from previous conceptions of media/audience relations in that he saw messages ‘encoded’ in given texts, which could only be meaningfully understood if ‘decoded’ by audiences with ‘the right interpretative guide’, that is, with the means to access these messages (see Ruddock, 2001: 124; cf. Bourdieu’s notion of ‘cultural capital’, 1984). Grounding his argument in semiotics (though not labelling it as such), he reasoned that the relationship between signifier and signified was arbitrary, and that political power lay in making that relationship look natural or commonsensical. He argued that the structure of a text, combined with the perception of ‘reality’ that was dominant in any given society, encouraged ‘preferred’ readings of media texts. However, depending on audiences’ sociocultural backgrounds (factors such as age, occupation, ethnicity, and so on), it was possible to construct ‘negotiated’ or ‘oppositional’ readings, instead of the ‘dominant’ (or hegemonic) reading encouraged by the producers of a given text. Encoding/decoding research thus relied on textual analysis to determine a text’s preferred reading, and on reception research to reveal the extent to which a media text was accepted or rejected by different social groups.

Importantly, Hall’s model proposed a two-way relationship between texts and audiences, in which the latter took on a more active role in interpreting and engaging with media content. Yet, critics have argued that, if put to the test, for instance by David Morley in The Nationwide Audience (1980), issues of comprehension, relevance or enjoyment (‘pleasure’) emerge as equally significant to audience/text relations, and that social positioning is not in fact as deterministic as the model suggests. Further, media researchers have contested the notion of texts coming with singular preferred meanings, particularly if accounting for changes in production and reception contexts over time. Encoding/decoding, while useful in
highlighting the importance of viewers’ interpretative properties, again constitutes a somewhat ahistorical model of audience/text relations. A recent trend in cultural studies audience research sees extra-textual elements as equally relevant to our media encounters as textual properties per se (e.g. the implications of pre-circulated materials and the nature and consequences of social viewing; see, e.g., Barker and Brooks, 1998; Barker et al., 2008; Hill, 1997). Besides, it accounts for affective dimensions in addition to our interpretative strategies.

With this introduction to audience activity in mind, let me return to Buckingham’s research as an example of how media/fear relations have been approached from a broad cultural studies perspective, and particularly in a way which seeks to draw attention to the importance of reception contexts and audiences’ ‘locatedness’. Drawing on insights from psychology as well as previous work within film and media studies, Moving Images investigates children’s ‘negative’ emotional responses to television, such as ‘fear, fright and distress’. While the book addresses public concerns about the influences of the medium on its ‘most vulnerable’ audience, Buckingham clearly distinguishes his work from the media effects tradition by looking at how children make sense of worrying or frightening viewing experiences and how, in doing so, they learn to cope with them. Furthermore, he offers advice for both parents and policy-makers as to how they may help or hinder children in managing these kinds of experiences.

In the course of his research, Buckingham conducted a series of focus group interviews with a total of 72 children, aged between 6 and 16. At first, these interviews concerned general matters relating to the kind of television material the children found distressing, frightening, or upsetting. Questions also involved viewing contexts and the children’s ways of dealing with their experiences. Buckingham then returned to his interviewees to speak more specifically about certain genres and programmes which had raised questions during the first sets of interviews. The themes running through these interviews also form the structure of Moving Images; chapters are devoted to the issue of moral panics, the analysis of
emotional talk, children’s mixed responses to horror, melodrama and the news, and finally, to the boundaries between fact and fiction.

Buckingham’s work draws a more comprehensive and informed picture of the nature and meanings of social audience’s emotional responses to the media than any theoretical, experimental or survey-based studies had managed in the past.28 It convincingly challenges the simplistic dichotomy between ‘positive’ emotional responses, such as joy or happiness, and ‘negative’ ones, such as fear or sadness. For instance, Buckingham argues for the necessity of children coming to terms with certain ‘negative’ emotions in a process of learning and understanding, which may assist them in dealing with ‘real-life’ issues. Furthermore, he notes that it is difficult to predict children’s emotional responses to television. Apparently harmless material, such as adverts, cartoons, children’s programming and the news seemed as ‘emotional’ to some as horror films or melodramas. *Moving Images* also begins to account for ambiguous or mixed feelings, such as the enjoyment of being scared, as well as for different modalities of fear or distress depending on the media’s reality status in the children’s mind.

Further, Buckingham acknowledges the complex relationship between ‘feeling’ and ‘describing’ an emotion. His framework of discourse analysis draws upon social psychology, (socio)linguistic and poststructuralist theory and is broadly described in the his earlier work, *Children Talking Television* (1993: 60ff). Here, Buckingham explains that ‘language cannot be used simply as evidence of what people think or know or understand’; the researcher needs to take ‘the social contexts in which language occurs, and the social functions it performs’ into account when analysing discourse (Buckingham, 1993: 60). According to poststructuralist thought, ‘discourse constructs notions of “self” and “other”, and thereby sustains relationships of social power’ (ibid.). In other words, it is through language that people construct relationships with others, and it is through these constructions that they begin to define their own identities.

This kind of identity-formation plays a crucial role in *Moving Images* and in the way the children describe their emotional responses to television. Buckingham’s
discourse analysis enables him to trace certain ‘self-narratives’ in the children’s talk, which sets their contributions into a historical and social context. Similarly, ‘in describing their responses, speakers […] take on emotional “roles”, which in turn serve particular social or interpersonal functions’ (ibid.). This view has significant implications for his research. For instance, emotions can subsequently not only be considered as straight-forwardly media-evoked, their meanings and significances may change in the children’s engagement with peers or parents. Furthermore, such interrelations between emotional responses to television and the children’s construction of identities might influence the ways in which they may appropriate succeeding viewing experiences, either through enacting previously adopted emotional roles or re-evaluating their positions. Buckingham’s work questions the extent to which emotional roles are frequently reproduced or randomly adopted throughout a person’s life time.

Consequently, media-related emotions suddenly appear more complex and fluid than any psychoanalytical or cognitive theory has previously suggested. What Buckingham’s study fails to do, however, is to put its findings into a wider context than that of public concern. While making some enlightening observations, Buckingham does not offer an adequate theoretical framework for media-related emotions in general. Furthermore, the concern about the possibly detrimental effects of specific media encounters is never quite overcome. Even though Buckingham argues that frightening material might enable children to deal with certain issues and emotions within a safe environment, the book still toys with the idea that children may be harmed by what they see, possibly in terms of not being able to cope with their emotions. For after all of the author’s efforts to emphasise his largely liberal stance towards children’s media use, after a book length description of children’s ability to deal with their emotions, Buckingham backs out on this issue, and, more confusingly, fails to explain exactly why he has reservations.
2.5 Conclusion

The sheer breadth and diversity of the literature indicates that ‘media-related fear’ is a complex and multifaceted issue, and needs to be approached as such. Besides general questions about the centrality of the media in our fearful lives, there are clear differences between the research on direct responses to individual media material, such as the horror film, and the subtle, long-term ‘effects’ seen at play in the discourses of fear cultures. Whether or how these are related to each other has not thus far been sufficiently investigated, and it is an objective of this thesis to provide a more holistic approach to the topic by bridging this gap and exploring which kinds of ‘fear’ are relevant with regard to what kind of material, and in which contexts. The purpose of this study is not to treat fear as a media effect but to consider the various roles of film and television in people’s fearful lives.

How we conceive of fear itself inevitably influences our methods of investigation. Already, there is a discrepancy between researchers who consider fear a measurable entity and those who emphasise its fluidity, subjectivity and situatedness. As will become clear in the course of the thesis, this study aligns itself more firmly with the second view. Instead of imposing meanings and categories, the aim is to consider how participants make sense of the media in relation to their fears and worries. Of course, this touches upon a further tension in the literature between the experiential and discursive properties of fear, between fear as psychological phenomenon and fear as social construct. This conflict is not easily resolved, partly because there seems to be an element of truth to both. In fact, it has been a constant battle to discern just what it is we can tell from viewers’ accounts of fear and the media. The following chapter goes some way in dealing with these issues by discussing definitions of fear (as emotion) and exploring the relationship between language and experience.

1 The report is available online at the National Library of Medicine’s Profiles in Science site, http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/NN/B/C/G/X/ (last accessed on 4 August 2006).
Similar developments can, of course, be observed in Western European countries, such as the UK, where communications research was funded in the light of equal concerns about the youth. See, for example, the Television Research Committee’s *Second Progress Report and Recommendations*, submitted to the Home Secretary in 1969.

It is this attempted departure from the mainstream of mass communications and media violence research which Shanahan and Morgan make responsible for the large criticism the group earned in the early days (Shanahan and Morgan, 1999: 59).

Hirsch, for instance, describes the researchers’ rhetoric as ambivalent across their cultivation studies, arguing that ‘by seeming to reject the relevance of “causal” analysis, the Annenberg group underestates the conceptual common ground between causal and cultivation analysis and obscures the degree to which both are bound by the same rules of evidence before either can claim empirical support’ (Hirsch, 1980: 435).

The first dimension establishes what is generally available in a given system, how frequently it occurs, and to what extent. The dimension of *existence* is determined through measures of ‘attention’, which indicate the presence and distribution of characters, topics, issues, or themes within and across systems. The second dimension, the dimension of *priorities*, determines the significance of available elements, which is measured through ‘emphasis’. In this way, it is established how certain roles or topics compare to each other, which elements are presented as central or less prominent, and so on. The dimension of *values* concerns itself with the question of moral rights or wrongs, of what is presented in a good or a bad light, or which point of view is favoured in the system. Gerbner rates the direction and intensity of value judgements through measures of ‘tendency’. And finally, measures of ‘structure’ assess more complex associations within and among measures, which refers to the dimension of *relationships*. As Gerbner explains, ‘when we deal with patterns of attention, emphasis, or tendency, instead of only simple distributions, or when we relate the clustering of measures to one another, we illuminate the underlying structure of assumptions about existence, priorities, and values represented in message systems’ (Gerbner, 1970: 73).

One example here is the distribution of personality traits on a scale for violent, non-violent and killing characters, which determines whether violent characters in TV drama are, for instance, more likely than non-violent ones to be old or young, masculine or feminine, bungling or efficient, repulsive or attractive, emotional or unemotional, and so on (see Gerbner, 1970: 78). Additional variables, such as whether the final outcome for the stories or the characters’ goals is a happy or an unhappy one, can be applied.

This was considered as particularly true for our conception of facts in areas we do not have any first-hand knowledge of, such as life in the police force, prisons, hospitals, courtrooms, and so on.

The formula for the Violence Index is $VI = %P + RP + RH + %C + %K$. ($%P =$Percentage of programmes containing violence, $RP =$Rate of violence per programme, $RH =$Rate of violence per hour, $%C =$Percentage of characters involved in violence, and $%K =$Percentage of characters involved in killing) See Shanahan and Morgan, 1999: 51.

One observation Hirsch makes is that, in some cases, daytime viewing and news or ‘non-violent’ entertainment are excluded from coding criteria, which results in one and the same person being assigned to different coding categories, depending on which criteria were used. Hirsch, in turn, argues that the NORC survey is more reliable than some of the other data sets used by Gerbner et al., which, for instance, rely on smaller samples (Hirsch, 1981).

Of course, there is a long-running debate about the relationship between attitude and action (see LaPiere, 1934).
For a further discussion of these paradigms of emotion research, see Chapter Three.

See, for example, Dammert and Malone, 2003, and for a more recent critique of the conceptualisation of fear within the field of criminology, Walklate and Mythen, 2007. See also Mythen and Walklate, 2006, for a linkage between fear of crime and the politics of fear in the light of the ‘new terrorism’ threat.


Having initially preferred Gelder’s description of the ‘field’ of horror to that of the horror ‘genre’, I believe I can risk making use of both terms interchangeably here. Although I am aware of the difficulties of defining horror as a distinct genre (see, for example, Hutchings, 2004), I shall go along with Andrew Tudor’s view that genre is ‘what we collectively believe it to be’ (Tudor, 1989: 7). This is, of course, not unproblematic in the eyes of genre critics, but for the time being I believe it will be sufficient for my purposes.

Berstein, of course, is interested in issues of motherhood as the Other in films like Aliens and Rosemary’s Baby. An important related concept is Julia Kristeva’s notion of the ‘abject’, that which does not respect borders, rules, or positions and which disturbs identity, order, and system (see Creed, 2002).

Like Hills, I am neglecting Jungian approaches to horror here, mainly for reasons of space. For examples of these, see Iaccino (1994), Hockley (2001), Izod (2001).

As Freud writes, ‘if psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny. […] if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended das Heimliche [‘homely’] into its opposite, das Unheimliche […] for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression’ (ibid: n.p., his italics).

Peter Hutchings discusses this phenomenon in The Horror Film, arguing that ‘one should not assume, as some psychoanalytical interpretations of cinema assume, that horror films are “innocent” of psychoanalysis or that the people responsible for making such films have no knowledge of it’; instead they broadly draw on psychological concepts that are ‘widespread in and popularised by […] generic cultural forms’, which in turn impacts on our interpretation of these films (2004: 62f).

For a relatively recent accumulation of cognitivist thought on filmic emotion, see Issue 8 of The Film Studies Journal, 2006.

Carroll’s definition of the horror monster has, of course, been contested by some academics who also attach monstrous qualities to such very ‘real’ things as serial killers, or who argue that the monster does not, in fact, need to be clearly represented within horror and can remain hidden while still presenting a threat. Furthermore, critics have argued that it is the figure under threat, the victim, which all horror films share, rather than the monster as defined by Carroll (see Jancovich, in Hills, 2005: 15).

See Carroll (1997: 208) for a good example of cognitivism’s general tendency to reject empirical audience research.

See also Barker’s more recent conceptual elaborations in the light of the Lord of the Rings research project (2006).

Katrin Döveling (2007) has demonstrated the relevance of Manstead and Fischer’s ‘social appraisal’ theory in her research on audiences’ emotional responses to the German reality
television programme *Deutschland sucht den Superstar* (a talent show based on such formats as *The X Factor* and *Pop Idol*).

25 There are, of course, exceptions; there have been some – again theoretical – investigations of the emotional significance of repeat viewing (see, for instance, Noël Carroll, ‘The Paradox of Suspense’). A more recent example is Karen Renner’s article ‘Repeat Viewing Revisited: Emotion, Memory, and *Memento*’ in *The Film Studies Journal* (2006), in which the author employs Greg M. Smith’s mood-cue approach to suggest that viewers are conditioned to have partially unconscious, intensified responses to particular emotion markers that are stored ‘as representational and emotional memories’ (Renner: 2006: 113).

26 See, for instance, Blumer (1933), Eisenberg (1936). More recently, American media effects research has been dominated by such figures as Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, whose 2002 edition of *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* has been much-cited.

27 In January 1996, David Buckingham and Mark Allerton published a working paper for the Broadcasting Standards Council, called ‘Fear, Fright and Distress: A Review of Research on Children’s “Negative” Emotional Responses to Television’, which assesses and criticizes previous work in the area and which can be considered as an introductory paper to Buckingham’s more elaborate book (Allerton and Buckingham, 1996).

28 A critique of the methodological inadequacies within past research on emotional responses to television can be found in Buckingham and Allerton’s BSC working paper (1996: 6-10).