

## Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde



Even before Jean-Luc Godard and other members of the French New Wave championed Hollywood B movies, aesthetes and cineasts relished the raw emotions of genre films. This contradiction has been particularly true of horror cinema, in which the same images and themes found in exploitation and splatter movies are also found in avant-garde and experimental films, blurring boundaries of taste and calling into question traditional distinctions between high and low culture. In *Cutting Edge*, Joan Hawkins offers an original and provocative discussion of taste, trash aesthetics, and avant-garde culture of the 1960s and 1970s to reveal horror's subversiveness as a genre. In her treatment of what she terms art-horror films, Hawkins examines home viewing, video collection catalogs, and fanzines for insights into what draws audiences to transgressive films. *Cutting Edge* provides the first extended political critique of Yoko Ono's rarely seen *Rape and Shows* and shows how a film such as *Franju's Eyes Without a Face* can work simultaneously as an art, political, and splatter film. The rediscovery of Tod Browning's *Freaks* as an art film, the eurotrash cinema of Jess Franco, camp cults like the one around Maria Montez, and the cross-over reception of Andy Warhol's *Frankenstein* are all studied for what they reveal about cultural hierarchies. Looking at the low aspects of high culture and the high aspects of low culture, Hawkins scrutinizes the privilege habitually accorded high art -- a tendency, she argues, that lets highbrow culture off the hook and removes it from the kinds of ethical and critical social discussions that have plagued horror and porn. Full of unexpected insights, *Cutting Edge* calls for a rethinking of high/low distinctions -- and a reassigning of labels at the video store.

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