

**Supernatural surveillance and blood-borne disease in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*:
Reflections on mesmerism and HIV**

Fran Pheasant-Kelly, University of Wolverhampton

Abstract

While the relationship between surveillance and/or voyeuristic viewing, control and horror is central to certain horror productions, including *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), *My Little Eye* (Evans, 2002) and *District 9* (Blomkamp, 2009), it is less obvious in the vampire film. However, the vampiric gaze exerts a more immediate and absolute form of power, causing its victims to fall prey to inevitable death and an extended afterlife. Although all vampire films tend to exploit these mesmeric aspects of Victorian culture, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), directed by Frances Ford Coppola, progresses the notion of 'supernatural surveillance'. Coppola uses numerous creative visual techniques to accentuate the attention to eyes, notably in scenes that are linked to sexual desire and promiscuity. If the original novel implicitly reflected contemporaneous fears of venereal infection, namely syphilis, then Coppola's film is preoccupied with AIDS. This article argues that the film's attention to eyes and the gaze not only reflects the mesmerism associated with Victorian culture but also resonates with new forms of sociocultural watchfulness emerging in the AIDS era of the twentieth century.

Keywords

Bram Stoker's Dracula

AIDS

surveillance

eyes

sexual activity

mesmerism

Introduction

While the relationship between surveillance and/or voyeuristic viewing, control, and threat is central to certain horror productions, including *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), *My Little Eye* (Evans, 2002) and *District 9* (Blomkamp, 2009), it is less obvious in the vampire film. However, the vampiric gaze – whereby the supernatural connotations of mesmerism, as opposed to the scientific associations of hypnotism, are transposed to Gothic horror film¹ – exerts a more immediate and absolute form of power, causing its victims to fall prey to inevitable death and an extended afterlife. As Stacey Abbott notes, ‘[t]he close-up upon the face or eyes of vampires as they stare at their victims has become a staple convention of most vampire films, used to emphasize both their power over their victims and their desire for blood’ (2007: 94). Although all vampire films tend to exploit the mesmeric aspects of Victorian culture, either through the use of directional spot-lighting to accentuate purposefully bulging eyes (as in Tod Browning’s 1931 *Dracula*), or a reddening of the vampire’s eyes (evident in Terence Fisher’s *Horror of Dracula* [1958]), *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), directed by Francis Ford Coppola, progresses the notion of ‘supernatural surveillance’. Even as Coppola follows Stoker’s text closely, he uses numerous creative and conventional visual techniques to accentuate the attention to eyes, especially in scenes which are linked to expressions of sexual desire. He also promotes a highly differentiated range of gazes, namely, those related to mesmerism, gendered spectatorship and science and medicine, and a generalized panoptic surveillance (signalled by extreme overhead shots or enormous eyes appearing in the sky). Moreover, if the original novel implicitly reflected contemporaneous fears of venereal infection, namely syphilis, then Coppola’s adaptation is

unambiguously preoccupied with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). This points to the fact that the film was released at the height of the AIDS crisis following a number of mass media campaigns concerning the threat of the disease, and also that Coppola was concurrently working on an AIDS documentary, provisionally entitled *Cure* (Archerd 1992). As Coppola remarks in interview about the documentary, '[w]e sent our research people all over. And, in a way, we have a broader aspect of it (AIDS) than anyone' (in Archerd 1992: n.pag.). Indeed, while the film inevitably features significant visual associations with blood, these are not merely as a result of obvious vampiric actions. Rather, close-ups and microscopic images of blood are used in relation to both science and sexual activity. In addition, there are instances where the suggestion of blood infection is made verbally or visually explicit. For instance, Professor Van Helsing (Anthony Hopkins) refers to vampirism as a 'disease of the blood, unknown to man'. At the same time, such scenes almost always involve references to eyes and surveillance. This article thus contends that the film's preoccupation with eyes and the gaze not only invokes the mesmerism associated with Victorian culture, or, as others (such as Cordell 2013) have argued, a reflexive study of gendered spectatorship in cinema, but also resonates with new forms of scientific and sociocultural watchfulness emerging in the AIDS era of the twentieth century. Just as this sense of invisible presence/scrutiny chimes with more generalized increases in the surveillance of public places that occurred in the 1990s, the accompanying perceptible feeling of dread experienced by the characters corresponds with the hidden menace promoted by AIDS campaigns, especially in the United Kingdom. Engaging theoretically with the work of Alison Winter (1998 and Hilary Grimes (2011) on mesmerism in Victorian culture, the chapter suggests that while vampire films have historically drawn on the mystical and uncanny tropes of mesmerism,² this aspect has become reframed in an era of progressive monitoring. Coppola's film does not correspond to the current heightened and technologically

enhanced state of surveillance in an age of post-9/11 terrorism, but it does suggest the increasingly watchful nature of society at the time of its production when reality television and CCTV were becoming established. Certainly, the film's inclination for invisible surveillance reflects the global rise in the use of CCTV cameras, which had seen a steady growth since 1947 with a gradual diffusion into the retail and transport sectors (Norris et al. 2004: 111). CCTV installation escalated exponentially during the years following the film, in the United Kingdom partly motivated by the capture of the abduction on CCTV of James Bulger, and worldwide as a result of counter-terrorist measures after 9/11. Coppola's attention to surveillance and eyes therefore echoes, first, the onset of a more generalized disposition to viewing the 'real' lives of others as on-screen entertainment; second, an increase in CCTV use in public places; and third, and arguably, most significantly, scientific and sociocultural scrutiny in relation to the burgeoning AIDS epidemic.

Eyes, surveillance and vampirism

To date, work on the relationship between eyes, surveillance and the vampire is limited to the aforementioned generic tropes described by Abbott (2007), and a brief survey of the connection between the motif of eyes in the novel and their intertextual representation in various cinematic contexts (Pheasant-Kelly and Russell 2017: 335). In addition, Simon Bacon analyses surveillance in the original text of Stoker's *Dracula* and suggests that 'whilst ostensibly about the invasion of Victorian society by a vampire from Transylvania [*Dracula*] in fact exemplifies the ways in which surveillance was used to observe and control societal identity both in and outside of the British Empire' (2017: 105). Bacon claims that this surveillance is accomplished by various technological means, which 'form a kind of undead gaze', and by the physical architecture of the castle (2017: 106) that operates as a form of panopticon. For him 'Count Dracula's influence over his homeland shows how a culture of

surveillance embodies extremes of the all-seeing eye and the panopticon in ways that change those that know they are being watched' (2017: 106). While Bacon's analysis of the novel corresponds with the panoptic watching in Coppola's filmic counterpart, the latter version differs in that it represents the all-seeing eye of the Count in more literal ways, although the elevated position of the castle, with its precipitous drops (often viewed from overhead), does offer panoptic opportunities to be realized through architecture. At the same time, several sequences entail extreme low angle framing of the castle to emphasize its elevated position. However, the argument here is that the panoptic eye portrayed in the contemporary version is closely allied to scenes of sexual activity, reflective of concerns around the spread of HIV in the late twentieth century. Numerous scholars (including Bak 2007; Reed 2010; Sharratt 1993; Weinstock 1997) identify the film's links to AIDs too but there is limited commentary on its association with surveillance and eyes.

In respect of Coppola's inclusion of gendered spectatorship, Sigrid Cordell (2013) comments on the relationship between voyeurism and female sexuality, and focuses on the Cinématographe scene when Dracula (Gary Oldman) attempts to mesmerize Mina (Winona Ryder). As she explains

[t]he train clip [...] references one of the classics of early film [...] which, like Dracula, has its own mythology, with film-goers said to have been so terrified by the sight of the train rushing towards them that they fled the theatre. (2013: 2)

She connects this terror to that which Mina experiences in relation to Dracula suggesting that,

By implication, Coppola associates the terror Mina feels in the presence of Dracula with that of the Lumière brothers' audience in the presence of a technologically created illusion. Likewise, he associated Dracula's desire for Mina with the use of film to put female sexuality on public display. (2013: 2)

While Cordell's analysis centres on spectatorship, she links this to AIDS by suggesting that Lucy's (Sadie Frost) brazen sexuality must be punished:

That Coppola's Lucy must also pay for her liberated sexuality seems to reflect the 1990s historical moment in which the threat of AIDS expanded a public discourse over sex that both encouraged a discussion of sexuality and a terror of it. (2013: 14)

This article similarly suggests that sequences involving sexuality are related to the gaze. However, it contends that while a gendered gaze clearly exists (which involves both male and female gazes and occurs frequently), the overriding panoptic perspective exerted by the Count (illustrated by analysis of three key scenes) presents instead as an ominous invisible presence and is the more dominant feature. Such scenes of supernatural surveillance reflect the key aspects of AIDS and AIDS policy at the time of the film's production, namely: its association with unprotected sex, especially homosexual encounters; the initial 'invisibility' of AIDS in political policy, its early clinical manifestation and in public perception of the disease; the absence of detail in UK television campaigns; the lack of knowledge about the disease; and the sense of fear promoted by certain media campaigns, especially in the United Kingdom and Australia.

Vampirism and HIV media campaigns

Stacey Abbott identifies a comparable connection between vampirism and HIV in vampire films of the 1980s and refers to *The Hunger* (Scott, 1983) and *Lifeforce* (Hooper, 1985) as two other examples. As she notes,

Both *The Hunger* and *Lifeforce* seem to particularly convey fears about AIDS, as they showcase the transference of the disease of vampirism through same-sex contact, which, in the early 80s, was deemed to be the primary way of acquiring the virus. It should be pointed out that these films were not necessarily consciously made as AIDS allegories; they were made at very early stages in the outbreak, before AIDS was a nationally recognised concern. But they do represent a reinterpretation of the nineteenth-century equation of vampirism with sexually transmitted disease through the language of science rather than simply sex. (2007: 135)

Indeed, she contends that ‘vampirism is increasingly explained through the language of science, described as a disease, and in cases such as *Near Dark*, *The Forsaken*, *Vampire: Los Muertos* and the *Blade* trilogy [...], a treatment or cure is discovered’ (2007: 197). In a corresponding way, Coppola’s film consciously references vampirism, and more specifically, liberated sexual attitudes, as the source of blood-borne disease. Just four years prior to the film’s release, the virus had killed 949 of the 1730 individuals worldwide who had contracted AIDS (Street 1988: 491). As Virginia Berridge notes, much of the history of AIDS

has been structured by an agenda of ‘conspiracy and delay’, round the argument that governments were slow to respond to AIDS primarily because it was a syndrome which affected gay men and did not appear to impact on the population at large. (2003: 687)

In this vein, Samuel Hallsor compares initial responses to AIDS in the United Kingdom and the United States, noting that

The early 1980s [...] saw the emergence of the ‘New Right’ under Margaret Thatcher’s conservative government in the UK and the Ronald Reagan administration in the US, which was to have an undeniable influence on shaping the response to AIDS. (2017: 57)

While early on, there were several potent British television programmes, including a BBC Horizon programme (1964–present), *Killer in the Village*, first broadcast in April 1983, the US Government delayed any form of national education policy until 1987 when a major initiative, ‘America Responds to AIDS’ (ARTA), was launched. The campaign, orchestrated by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), was multifaceted, involving televised public service announcements (PSAs), radio PSAs, print PSAs, posters, brochures, point of purchase displays, and catalogues, and initially took place in five stages from 1987 to 1990 (Woods et al. 1991: 616). Early examples of televised PSAs focused on generalized awareness and included family centred scenes in domestic settings, with Hallsor suggesting that ‘the conservative American government was determined to maintain the focus on “innocent” victims of AIDS’ (2017: 61) although target audiences and the style of US televised PSAs have since shifted. For example, the Kaiser Family Foundation has more recently partnered with various media organizations to promote several campaigns (Rap it Up, Staying Alive, Fight for Your Rights: Protect Yourself and KNOW HIV/AIDS) that target specific at-risk groups (Noar and Kennedy 2009).

The UK Government were also slow to respond but eventually launched a number of compelling mass media campaigns, beginning in January 1986. Of these the most striking was the ‘Don’t Die of Ignorance’ campaign, launched in December 1986 and entailing both television-adverts and leaflets circulated countrywide. The campaign centred on two key television adverts, the first, *AIDS: Monolith* (Roeg, 1987a), involving a tombstone, and the second, *AIDS: Iceberg* (Roeg, 1987b), an iceberg. These were much more impactful and hard-hitting than the early US films, each employing the iconography of the horror film. John Street describes the monolith advert as being ‘rather enigmatic. No AIDS victims to shock us, no familiar face (no face at all) to guide us; just an anonymous pair of hands drilling the words ‘AIDS’ into a block of stone’ (1988: 493). As Street notes, ‘In January 1987 it was hard not to notice that the British Government was worried about the spread of AIDS’ (1988: 490). The 40-second advert proved to be highly effective, achieving impact via its horror signifiers. It opens with a long shot of a volcanic explosion before the camera rapidly zooms in to rocks cascading down a cliff-face. Low-angle close-ups then focus on an industrial drill chiselling out the word ‘AIDS’ in a block of granite. Low-key strobe light, smoke, and a strident, disturbing soundtrack, together with rapid editing, are accompanied by actor, John Hurt’s voice-over, which states

there is now a danger that has become a threat to us all [...] It is a deadly disease and there is no known cure. So far it’s been confined to small groups but it’s spreading. So protect yourself. If you ignore AIDS it could be the death of you, so don’t die of ignorance. (John Hurt, verbatim)

The second advert is equally apocalyptic and opens with an iceberg beginning to crumble, and is overlaid with text, the content of which follows a similar format to that of the voice-

over in the tombstone advert. A slow moving camera pans around the visible part of the iceberg and is accompanied by sinister music and howling wind. The entire sequence is blue-toned, adding to its eerie tenor. The camera then sinks below the water's surface to reveal 'AIDS' in gigantic letters etched into the side of the submerged portion of the iceberg, the implication being that the disease is largely hidden. The overall impression created is one of fear and terror, which was a reported to be a deliberate ploy. As Norman Fowler (UK Health Secretary 1981–87), in conversation with Tim Jonze, explains 'the death part was important [...] Scaring people was deliberate' (2017: n.pag.). As a result of its horror strategy, Street observes that this particular campaign was successful and that '[i]n January 1987 the government reported that 69% of people said that they had seen the press advertisement and that 73% of people questioned said that they now knew how to avoid the disease' (1988: 494). Later UK campaigns by the Health Education Authority included the 'Expert' and 'Personal Testimony' formats (1989–92), which, as noted by Tim Brown, again centred on the notion of AIDS as a hidden threat (2000: 1281). By 1993, the Illinois Department of Public Health had also adopted horror iconography to combat AIDS – here the image of Dracula in an AIDS campaign brochure was used 'to warn sexually active teenagers against going "batty over someone" and risk contracting AIDS' (Bak 2007: xi). Equally, the Australian Government caused controversy with a horror-based film, *Grim Reaper* (Reynolds, 1987) that features a Gothic Grim Reaper bowling down human pins, including children, with a huge ball. The sequence includes a close-up of a blond-haired child, her face illuminated with high-key lighting, and close-ups of the bodies after being struck. The 64-second sequence is virtually monochrome, has mist swirling round and is accompanied by a tolling bell, again generating fear and terror, with catastrophic inferences.

The delayed timing of the UK and US Government's AIDS policy was also partly due to the obscurity and invisibility of the disease. As Street explains, there was much uncertainty surrounding AIDS (1988: 499): 'its cause was still unknown. Discovery of the relevant virus was not officially confirmed until 1983, the same year that the first infection by blood transfusion was established' (1988: 499). In addition, there was no commercial means to test for the antibody, and figures concerning the incidence and spread of AIDS were unreliable (Street 1988: 499). Most significant to this article, however, was the relative inconspicuousness of AIDS in those with the disease. As Street states

there are some interests or causes which do not appear on the agenda because they are not 'visible' or rather because they are not made visible [...] Seeing the disease as a threat from the outside is very different from seeing it as a common problem. (1988: 500)

The fact that the disease itself is not immediately apparent and may not manifest physically for several years, was, as Tim Brown notes, a target for campaigns which 'sought to continually reinforce the boundaries between 'good' and 'bad' sexual behaviour by reminding the reader that HIV was invisible' (2000: 1280). Therefore the climate at the time of the film's release was one where individuals were aware of an unseen and unquantifiable threat, but to many, the chance of being infected remained a remote possibility.

Supernatural surveillance in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

This threat, arguably, is mirrored in Coppola's film through its focus on eyes and surveillance. As noted, the surveillant gaze takes multiple forms, either as a mesmeric, scientific, gendered or panoptic gaze although these overlap at times. In general, the frequent

deployment of extreme overhead shots throughout the film suggests an omniscient surveillant presence but the multiple and direct references to eyes and the sense of a concealed menace occur specifically in conjunction with scenes that involve sexual desire or sexual activity. These sequences take several forms: the eyes or face of Dracula appears overhead in the sky on a broad geographical scale that traverses a number of locations and so are more panoptic in nature; second, in specific images of mesmerism that are localized to certain spaces and directed at specific individuals; third, scientific scrutiny that is or appears to be devoid of a sexualized subject but sometimes intersects with the mesmeric gaze such that one is edited immediately after the other. (In other words, there is a tendency to ground mesmerism in science); and finally, gendered spectatorship that usually involves desire and may also be related to science.

Panoptic gaze

The panoptic gaze is most relevant to the argument here concerning AIDS and draws loosely on Michel Foucault's (1991) adoption of Jeremy Bentham's panoptic model. In his analysis of institutional structures of power, Foucault describes a central tower surrounded by cells and notes that, '[a]ll that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy' (1991: 200). Reference to the term here therefore indicates an analogous all-seeing and controlling eye but is removed from the institutional (and architectural) context.

The film's opening immediately implies a panoptic gaze in the way that Renfield (Tom Waits), now an inmate of Carfax Lunatic Asylum (and formerly employed as a solicitor and colleague of Jonathan Harker [Keanu Reeves] to sell property to Count Dracula), gazes upward to speak to his 'master'. An extreme overhead shot and wide-angle lens cause the

image to appear distorted and stylized in that Renfield's head, which is closest to the spectator, appears much larger than his body that recedes in a manner that makes it appear out of proportion. The overall effect is to emphasize the overhead position of the 'master', who remains out of sight and off-screen and who we assume is Dracula. This is followed by the first of several broader scale all-seeing images that occurs in an early sequence just as Harker informs Mina of his imminent departure to Transylvania (to resume the property deal initiated by Renfield). Framed in mid-shot by a garden arch the two discuss their imminent marriage and declare their love for each other. Harker glances around surreptitiously before kissing her, their passionate embrace then being shielded from the spectator by the spread of a peacock's feathers in the immediate foreground. Here, the use of a graphic match and shift in focal point enables a sharply defined close-up of an 'eye' in the peacock's fanning feathers to become a tunnel through which Harker's speeding train travels to Budapest. Given their conversation and subsequent embrace, the tunnel metaphor, also used by directors such as Alfred Hitchcock in a parallel context, has sexualized connotations and is important to the ensuing sequence.

During the train journey to Transylvania, a medium shot sees Harker reading a letter from the Count whilst 'in the reddening sky above the surrounding mountains, a pair of enormous piercing eyes becomes discernible and creates an air of menace' (Pheasant-Kelly and Russell 2017: 336). The eyes not only observe the entire landscape but also seem to stare directly at the spectator, whilst Harker is unaware that he is under scrutiny. A close-up of an eye, seemingly that of Mina, also fleetingly appears superimposed over the image of Harker. Here, the visual references to eyes imply an omniscient supernatural presence that suggests the impossibility of evading Count Dracula's watchful gaze. Such a spectral sensation persists throughout the film, with the effect that the spectator often assumes the position of those

being watched whilst, unlike the characters, being aware that they are under scrutiny. The focus on eyes continues, for when Harker reaches the ominous-looking Borgo Pass, he encounters a pack of wolves, their eyes reflected in the moonlight and so standing out in the darkness. The notion of panoptic surveillance is iterated as the wolves, which are framed in medium shot, are positioned high up and surround Harker so that they look down on him, with a sense of menace linked to their watching.

A second instance involving an all-seeing ill-boding presence occurs when, following Harker's departure for Transylvania, Mina stays with her friend, Lucy. Together they read a book subtitled the *Arabian Nights* (Burton 1885) and puzzle over the sexual positions portrayed therein. 'There is more to marriage than carnal pleasures' Mina tells Lucy, who talks freely about sex and marriage. Thereafter, Lucy's suitors, Dr Jack Seward (Richard Grant), Quincy Morris (Billy Campbell) and Arthur Holmwood (Cary Elwes), arrive and Lucy flirts provocatively with each of the three men. As Mina looks on, seeming bemused by Lucy's brashness, a vast overhead shadow of the Count extends across the scene, darkening the entire room. The extra-diegetic soundtrack becomes sinister and a shadow of his spindly fingers falls across Mina's dress before it also darkens her face. We hear the words 'you are the love of my life' uttered before the sequence cuts to a low-angle close-up of the Count's face, his eyes appearing glazed and opaque as if mesmerized.

A third situation arises as Lucy and Mina again discuss marriage – this time, they are in the garden, the high-key, sunlit close-ups of the two being accompanied by the sound of birdsong. Suddenly it begins to rain causing them to look upwards whereupon the sky immediately darkens. In the heavy, fast moving clouds overhead Dracula's eyes become visible before the pace of the editing significantly escalates and a rapidly edited montage of

the girls running wildly through the garden reveals them kissing on the lips (with homoerotic nuances). This sequence intercuts with images of the passage of the *Demeter*, a ship carrying the Count together with boxes of earth from his castle, across stormy seas. The face etched in the sky above continues to present an omniscient danger, as if the Count's presence is universally pervasive, and the trigger for the apparent chaos, while the cinematography of the extended montage becomes progressively more erratic, now encompassing violent lateral camera swings and extreme canted angles. At the same time, the strobe effect of lightning, together with growling sounds and scenes that feature local zoo animals appearing highly disturbed, contribute to the overall suggestion of an unseen malevolent force.

Scientific gaze

Also reflecting the AIDS climate, the scientific gaze crops up regularly in Coppola's adaptation and, while present in Tod Browning's 1931 adaptation, differs significantly from previous incarnations of Stoker's text. Indeed, the scientific allusions indicated in Coppola's version are absent from the novel, reflecting the director's inferences of vampirism as disease. Mary Ann Doane discusses the clinical eye in her study of the woman's film of the 1940s where she notes the

association, within patriarchal configurations, of femininity with the pathological. Disease and the woman have something in common – they are both socially devalued or undesirable, marginalized elements which constantly threaten to infiltrate and contaminate that which is more central, health or masculinity. (1985: 205)

This model is readily applicable to Lucy who is repeatedly the object of Van Helsing's medical gaze that verges on becoming a voyeuristic sexualized gaze for male characters and

spectator. For instance, her ‘contaminated’ body is repeatedly exposed during various medical examinations with the camera positioned proximate to her semi-naked body so that it is clearly visible to the spectator. She is subject to a transfusion that has obvious connotations of sexual penetration in its close-up of the hypodermic being thrust into her arm (we do not view in the same way Arthur Holmwood’s arm being similarly pierced). Moreover, in her discussion of medical surveillance, Susan Flynn notes that

the birth of the clinical gaze was based on optical examination through medical instruments [...] [while] [t]he prestige of the clinical gaze was enhanced by a nosology and science of nosography: a system of disease description that made it appear that all illnesses fit within a definitive disease classification. (2017: 232)

That Lucy’s illness proves impossible to categorize corresponds with the early lack of knowledge about AIDS. This is particularly apparent immediately following the transfusion scene when the three suitors (who have just donated their blood to Lucy) go into the garden. Seward, Lucy’s doctor, remarks ‘I feel like a blundering novice’, to which Van Helsing responds ‘do you not think Jack, that there things in this universe that you cannot understand and that are true’ and then suddenly disappears from view, his voice fading to an echo. The disappearance is suggested to be supernatural but it transpires that Van Helsing is merely hiding behind a gravestone, indicating a rational explanation for things that appear irrational. Given Van Helsing’s comments, this concealment arguably again reflects on the initially obscure nature of AIDS and its frightening but ultimately explicable aspects (AIDS was first described in the media as a ‘gay cancer’). Doane also notes that ‘[m]edicine introduces a detour in the male’s relation to the female body through an eroticisation of the very process of knowing the female subject. Thus, while the female body is despecularized, the doctor-

patient relation is, somewhat paradoxically, eroticised' (1985: 207). An example of such a relationship manifests several times between Jack Seward and Lucy, but especially during the scene when he tells her 'Lucy I'm here as your doctor. A doctor's confidence is sacred. I must have your complete trust'. However, when Lucy implores Jack to kiss her, he leans forward to kiss her without hesitation, despite his claims of professionalism.

While the scientific gaze may therefore be linked to sexual desire, there are instances when it is removed from any sense of gendered or sexualized spectatorship and purely signals microscopic scrutiny and the anthropological predilections of the Victorian era. However, the absence of this precise portrayal of microscopy from the novel further points towards Coppola's fixation with eyes and surveillance. One such instance unfolds during a scene when Seward visits another of his patients, Renfield, in the 'lunatic asylum' where he is detained. Attention is immediately drawn to Renfield's eyes by the thick-lensed spectacles that he is wearing but the act of looking is markedly accentuated when he begins to consume a plateful of living larvae and beetles. An extreme close-up from his perspective through the spectacle lenses, which serve as a microscope, magnifies the wriggling larvae. This is followed by an ultra-close-up of Renfield's eye, before an extreme close-up of his mouth reveals him inserting a writhing maggot into it. The scene thus bears no relation to the AIDS climate of the time but merely draws attention to eyes and surveillance as dominant themes of the film and consolidates its neo-Victorian approach.

A further example of a brief scientific gaze that one might consider devoid of sexual intent occurs immediately following the Cinématographe scene when the body of a dead woman in an upright coffin is fleetingly superimposed with an X-ray of her skeleton. As has been noted 'the scene follows verbal reference to Madam Curie and appears [...] as trick photography

[...] whilst simultaneously highlighting a prominent Victorian scientist [...]’ (Pheasant-Kelly and Russell 2017: 338). However, given the fact that the scene coincides with a sequence when the Count clearly intends to bite Mina, ‘[t]his supernatural envisioning concurrently marks a rupture in the Count’s sophisticated outward appearance, its momentary transparency suggesting a parallel glimpse of his repressed evil/desire, but this is effectively disavowed when he resists the temptation to bite Mina’ (Pheasant-Kelly and Russell 2017: 338).

In addition, there are numerous microscopic shots of red blood cells, indicated by their circular framing, one such image occurring just prior to Van Helsing’s lecture to his medical colleagues. The red blood cells, which are normally static in real-life when observed microscopically, appear motile, whilst one cell in the image varies both in appearance and in its erratic, amoeboid movement, as if motivated by an external force and is highly suggestive of infiltration by a foreign body. The connection between sexual activity and disease is amplified when Van Helsing states that ‘blood and diseases of the blood such as syphilis concern us here. The very name venereal diseases are involved in that sex problem about which the ethics and ideals of Christian civilization are concerned’. Such imagery recurs, notably in scenes of mesmerism. For example, when Count Dracula mesmerizes Lucy, her blood cells move in one direction as if uncontrollably drawn to him. Likewise, extreme close-ups of Mina’s eyes as she is later beguiled by the Count Dracula cut to microscopic shots of blood cells also swarming. This is particularly noticeable during the restaurant scene when they drink absinthe together. An extreme close-up of Mina’s eye cuts to a graphic match of an overhead shot of an empty glass. Thereafter, another extreme close-up of her eye cuts to a surreal, abstract image, suggesting her disorientated state of mind, before framing the swarming red blood cells once more. The scientific gaze is therefore here linked to mesmerism, and implicitly to AIDS.

Mesmeric gaze

Certainly, almost all vampire films draw on mesmerism, a technique originating in the 1760s when, as Hilary Grimes explains,

Franz Anton Mesmer discovered a universal fluid which he believed could be harnessed by magnets and used for healing purposes. Using his hands or a magnetized wand, Mesmer would make passes over his subjects in order to restore the natural flow of the universal fluid that disease or illness obstructed. (2011: 61–62)

Often the mesmerist would lean forward towards the subject. Otherwise, the subject might stare at an object and would sink into a trance. Alison Winter describes how the subject would appear to be asleep and would lose his/her (usually her) senses. She further explains that ‘a strange communion would develop between the mesmerist and his subject’ and ‘she would speak his thoughts, taste the food in his mouth, move her limbs in a physical echo of his [...] Subjects might claim to see events occurring in the future, inside the body, in distant lands’ (1998: 3). Grimes identifies certain dangers associated with mesmerism, notably ‘the moral and sexual dangers of the male mesmerist, especially to vulnerable women’ (2011: 62). As a result, Winter explains that doctors tried to make the practice of mesmerism respectable, in the guise of hypnotism (1998: 184). She clarifies how Scottish surgeon, James Braid, developed hypnotism, distinguishing between the two practices by the fact that ‘he removed from mesmerism its magnetic fluids, the sexual associations that attended the “passes,” and the personal relationship between mesmerist and subject explicit in the claim that one person’s body, mind or will impinged on another’ (1998: 186). In a book titled *Neurynology* (1843), Grimes reports that Braid described the brain’s activity during the trance state and

‘defined hypnotism as a peculiar condition of the nervous system induced by a fixed and abstracted attention of the mental and visual eye, on one object’ (in Grimes 2011: 63). Grimes suggests that by the 1880s and 1890s, ‘mental scientists and medical practitioners, following Braid’s early example, attempted to claim hypnotism for science’ although she suggests that the differences were minimal (2011: 63). It was during the rise of hypnotism as a therapeutic therapy at the end of the nineteenth century that psychoanalysis developed (Shamdasani 2003: 309) and established hypnotism as a scientific phenomenon.

Coppola’s film differentiates the two disciplines in that Van Helsing, a medical doctor, carries out hypnotism on Mina, whereas mesmerism (which is never described as such) is confined to a supernatural format. Although the Count’s panoptic gaze is able to induce a degree of trance-like state in those individuals involved, there is a distinction between the mesmeric gaze directed at individuals and the all-seeing surveillance that spans broader spaces. The mesmeric gaze generally occurs between vampires and their victims and is a genre-specific trope, irrespective of director. Even so, Coppola’s version of the vampiric gaze relates more directly to concepts of Victorian mesmerism than conventional vampire narratives (which merely tend to focus on staring, bulging, and/or reddening eyes in a colour film, or spotlighting of the eyes in monochrome productions). Instances of mesmeric surveillance occur frequently and are again implicated in sexual desire and sexual activity. For example, both during, and immediately following the aforementioned absinthe sequence, Mina appears to access thoughts and memories of the Prince’s former ‘life’, illustrating how, as Winter describes ‘[a] new sense would open to her shut eyes. Subjects might claim to see events occurring in the future, inside the body, in distant lands’ (1998: 3). One of the clearest examples occurs when Harker is taken captive by the Count. Harker is lured by what seems to be the sound of Mina’s voice when the semi-clad three vampire brides entice him with

obvious sexual intent. Here, rapidly edited close-ups and extreme close-ups of erotically charged imagery both reflect anxieties concerning the sexual and moral dangers of mesmerism (although these generally applied to female subjects and a male mesmerist), and contemporaneous real-world AIDS concerns about unbridled sexual activity.

The attention to eyes is especially directed when the Count travels to London to trace Mina. He wears blue spectacles that seem out of place in Victorian London. Staring at Mina, who is at first unaware of his presence, he whispers 'see me now' before she looks back at him, correlating with 'the strange communion' (2013: 3) between subject and mesmerist that Winter describes. However, even though he persuades Mina to visit the Cinématographe with the intention of attacking her, he is unable to do so. As Cordell (2013) notes, the cinema itself is concerned with spectatorship, which in this case, assumes an erotic gendered component given that a scantily clad woman is displayed on the screen. Here, the Count mesmerizes Mina, her entranced state suggested by an out of focus shot of her as she reclines, and is conveyed as an act of seduction. However, the Count is unable to go through with the act of vampirism and is seemingly affected by Mina, also in line with Victorian discourses on mesmerism which suggested that 'the operator could be affected and infected by the subject' (Grimes 2011: 70). It contrasts with an earlier scene in which he mesmerizes and rapes Lucy, the sequence in that case involving extremely rapid and disjointed zooms, with tracking and panning shots across the city into the Westernra's garden and towards Lucy's bedroom before retreating into the garden again. Lucy, seemingly entranced, floats down the steps towards the beast (the Count is now transformed into animal form), the gale blowing her hair and dress and imbuing her with a ghostly appearance whilst flashes of lightning illuminate the scene and the howling of wolves is audible. Overall, the repeated use of overhead shots and the

sexual and surreal aspects of the *mise en scène* conflate the panoptic, desiring and mesmeric gaze.

Gendered gaze

While Cordell regards Coppola's film as a reflexive study of cinema which explores 'spectatorship and the gaze within the history of film as mass entertainment' (2013: 9), this article argues that a gendered desiring gaze, which is common to many of the exchanges of looks in this film, also has implications of homoeroticism and is thus coupled to initial beliefs about and attitudes towards AIDS. One example of the latter includes the feminized tropes of the Count and his words to the three vampire brides as they seduce Harker: 'How dare you touch him! He belongs to me'. However, the gendered gaze is different to the mesmeric look of the vampire in that it is motivated purely by desire and not by vampirism and is not limited to one particular form of gender or sexuality. This reflects more egalitarian views across cinema more generally whereby '[w]omen are now not merely sexual objects of the male gaze but perform in more active, independent roles, while men routinely appear eroticised and victimised' (Pheasant-Kelly 2014: 209). In fact, many of the gendered desiring looks originate from Lucy, with one such example occurring in the above-mentioned scene where she flirts with the three suitors – just prior, she discusses each of them in highly sexualized terms, recounting her voracious desires to Mina. In turn, a key example of a heterosexualized desiring gaze directed at Lucy occurs when she lays sick on her bed. Here, all three of her suitors watch her, but, rather than looks of concern or horror, they seem fascinated by her and almost seem to take pleasure in observing her. At the same time, their physical immobilization suggests they are incapable of helping her, reflecting the early lack of treatment for AIDS. This sense of voyeurism is promoted first by the fact that the camera frames the three men (rather than the object of their desiring gaze) standing adjacent in a

medium shot as they look at Lucy, and second, by the extended nature of the shot which lasts for 38 seconds. As they continue to stare at her, a zoom into an extreme close-up of her neck reveals two puncture wounds, followed immediately by a graphic match to the eyes of a wolf.

Contrastingly, the homoerotic gaze of the Count towards Harker is presented differently, typified in a scene where Harker, detained at Dracula's castle, is shaving. Here, '[a] subjective shot discloses Harker shaving before a mirror, with the camera positioned behind him so that we are able to see his face in the mirror' (Pheasant-Kelly and Russell 2017: 340). Like Harker, we are not initially aware of the Count's presence and, as Harker comments 'I didn't hear you come in', the Count glides rapidly across the room and stands immediately behind him, creating an awkward homoerotic tension. An overhead shot frames the two men as the Count then takes the razor and, still standing immediately behind Harker, draws the blade across his throat in a sensual action, the homosexual intimation related to potential imminent death correlating with a filmic interpretation that is underpinned by references to AIDS.

Conclusion

The film indisputably reflects on the AIDS landscape of the time and whilst drawing on 'eye' motifs from the novel and intertextually from other vampire films, Coppola's adaptation extends concepts of supernatural surveillance to encompass a panoptic gaze and a scientific gaze that is related to Victorian anthropology but also relevant to the contemporaneous AIDS climate. Dialogue compounds the intimation of an unseen AIDS threat – for example, when checking with Harker about his experiences in captivity, Van Helsing enquires 'so Mr Harker, during your infidelity with those demonic women, did you, for one instant, taste of their blood' to which Harker responds negatively. 'Then you have not infected your blood

with the terrible disease that struck poor Lucy'. This statement varies from usual vampire narratives in that vampirism here is suggested to be not caused by a vampire's bite, but by drinking the blood of a vampire. In other words, it is based on contamination by 'infected' body fluids. Overall, the exertion of a pervasive panoptic gaze uniquely articulated in Coppola's adaptation corresponds to the invisible threat of AIDS and influencing, in mesmeric fashion, the actions of those being observed. This was a major concern at the time of its production with an escalation in global Government-led public health warnings. Of these the British 'Don't Die of Ignorance' campaign (National Archives 1987) was one of the most impactful in its use of horror iconography and suggested AIDS as an unseen force, its message chiming with the menace depicted in Coppola's film.

References

Abbott, Stacey (2007), *Celluloid Vampires: Life after Death in the Modern World*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Archerd, Army (1992), 'Coppola preps AIDS-themed pic', *Variety*, 4 May, <https://variety.com/1992/voices/columns/coppola-preps-aids-themed-pic-1117862340/>. Accessed 12 August 2019.

Bacon, Simon (2017), 'To see and to be seen: Surveillance, the vampiric lens and the undead subject', in S. Flynn and A. Mackay (eds), *Spaces of Surveillance: States and Selves*, London and New York: Palgrave, pp. 105–19.

Bak, John (ed.) (2007), 'Bad blood; Or, Victorian vampires in the postmodern age of AIDS', in *Post/Modern Dracula: From Victorian Themes to Postmodern Praxis*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, pp. xi–xxii.

Berridge, Virginia (2003), 'AIDS and patient-support groups', in R. Cooter and J. Pickstone (eds), *Companion to Medicine in the Twentieth Century*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 687–702.

Blomkamp, Neill, (2009), *District 9*, New Zealand, USA, Canada and South Africa: TriStar Pictures.

Brown, Tim (2000), 'AIDS, risk and social governance', *Social Science and Medicine*, 50:9, pp. 1273–84.

Browning, Tod (1931), *Dracula*, USA: Universal Pictures.

Burton, Richard (1885) *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, Stoke Newington: Kama Shastra Society.

Craft, Christopher (1999), "'Kiss me with those red lips": Gender and inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in G. Byron (ed.), *Dracula*, New Casebooks, London: Macmillan, pp. 93–118.

Cordell, Sigrid (2013), 'Sex, terror, and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*: Coppola's reinvention of film history', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 6:1, pp. 1–21.

Doane, Mary Ann (1985), 'The clinical eye: Medical discourses in the "woman's film" of the 1940s', *Poetics Today*, 6:1&2, pp. 205–27.

Evans, Marc (2002), *My Little Eye*, UK, USA, France and Canada: StudioCanal.

Fisher, Terence (1958), *Horror of Dracula*, UK: Hammer Films.

Flynn, Susan (2017), 'Medical surveillance and bodily privacy: Secret selves and graph diseases', in S. Flynn and A. Mackay (eds), *Spaces of Surveillance: States and Selves*, London and New York: Palgrave, pp. 229–44.

Foucault, Michel (1991), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin.

Grimes, Hilary (2011), *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny and Scenes of Writing*, London and New York: Routledge.

Hallsor, Samuel (2017), 'A comparison of the early responses to AIDS in the UK and the US', *Res Medica*, 24:1, pp. 57–64.

Heffernan, Kevin (2002), 'The hypnosis horror films of the 1950s: Genre texts and industrial context', *Journal of Film and Video*, 54:2&3, pp. 56–70.

____ (2004), *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953-1968*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Hitchcock, Alfred (1960), *Psycho*, USA: Shamley Productions.

Hooper, Tobe (1985) *Lifeforce*, UK, USA: Golan-Globus Productions.

Hopkins, Lisa (2005), *Screening the Gothic*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Jonze, Tim (2017), "It was a life and death situation. Wards were full of young men dying": How we made the don't die of ignorance AIDS campaign', *Guardian*, 4 September, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/sep/04/how-we-made-dont-die-of-ignorance-aids-campaign>. Accessed 29 July 2019.

Mason, James, Noble, Gary, Lindsey, Brian, Kolbe, Lloyd, Ness, Paula Van, Bowen, Stephen, Drotman, Peter and Rosenberg, Mark (1988), 'Current CDC efforts to prevent and control human immunodeficiency virus infection and AIDS in the United States through information and education', *Public Health Reports*, 103:30, pp. 255–60.

National Archives (1987), 'AIDS monolith',

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/films/1979to2006/filmpage_aids.htm. Accessed 4

September 2019.

Noar, Seth and May Kennedy (2009), 'HIV/AIDS prevention messages', *Virtual Mentor*, 11:12, pp. 980–87.

Norris, Clive, McCahill, Mike and Wood, David (2004), 'Editorial: The growth of CCTV: A global perspective on the international diffusion of video surveillance in publicly accessible space', *Surveillance and Society*, 2:2&3, pp. 110–35.

Pheasant-Kelly, Frances (2014), 'Reframing gender and visual pleasure: New signifying practices in contemporary cinema', in G. Padva and N. Buchweitz (eds), *Sensational Pleasures in Cinema, Literature and Visual Culture: The Phallic Eye*, London and New York: Palgrave, pp. 195–214.

Pheasant-Kelly, Frances and Russell, Natalie (2017), 'Revisionist vampires: Transcoding, intertextuality and neo-Victorianism in the film adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in B. Poore (ed.), *Neo-Victorian Villains; Adaptations and Transformations*, Leiden: Rodopi, pp. 325–44.

Reed, Thomas (2010), "'Belle et le Vampire": Focus and fidelity in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 38:4, pp. 289–310.

Reynolds, Siimon (1987), *Grim Reaper*, Australia: National Advisory Committee on AIDS.

Roeg, Nicolas (1987a), *AIDS: Monolith*, UK: Central Office of Information for Department of Health

____ (1987b), *AIDS: Iceberg*, UK: Central Office of Information for Department of Health.

Scott, Tony (1983) *The Hunger*, UK: MGM.

Shamdasani, Sonu (2003), 'The psychoanalytic body', in R. Cooter and J. Pickstone (eds), *Companion to Medicine in the Twentieth Century*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 307–22.

Sharratt, Christopher (1993), 'The horror film in neoconservative culture', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 21:3, pp. 100–11.

Street, John (1988), 'British government policy on AIDS: Learning not to die of ignorance', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 41:4, pp. 490–507.

Weinstock, Jeffrey (1997), 'Virus culture', *Studies in Popular Culture*, 20:1, pp. 83–97.

Winter, Alison (1998), *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Woods, Diana, Davis, David and Westover, Bonita (1991), “‘American responds to AIDS’: Its content, development process, and outcome’, *Public Health Reports*, 106:6, pp. 616–22.

‘Killer in the Village’ (1983), Alec Nisbett (dir.), *Horizon*, Season 19 Episode 23 (25 April, UK: BBC).

Contributor details

Fran Pheasant-Kelly is reader in screen studies at Wolverhampton University. Her research centres on American film, particularly fantasy and science fiction, post-9/11 cinema, space, science and abjection. She is the author of over 60 publications including two monographs, *Abject Spaces in American Cinema* and *Fantasy Film Post 9/11*, and the co-editor of *Spaces of the Cinematic Home*. She is currently working on a third monograph entitled *The Bodily Turn in Film and Television* and a co-edited collection titled *Tim Burton’s Bodies* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

Contact:

University of Wolverhampton, Faculty of Arts, Molineux Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1LY.

E-mail: f.e.pheasant-kelly@wlv.ac.uk

ORCID 0000-0002-3647-5388

Notes

¹ The Gothic is characterized by ruinous and haunted settings, a sense of unease and doubling. It also often features polarities and ‘an aesthetic of violent contrasts’ (Hopkins 2005: xii).

² Alison Winter describes mesmerism as a trance-like state whereby 'mesmerist and subject would stare into each others' eyes as he made "magnetic passes" over her (or him, though subjects were more commonly women)' (1998: 2). Winter describes how the subject would appear to be asleep and lose all senses unless the mesmerist addressed her. She also indicates that there would be a psychic connection between the two (1998: 3).