



On Home Invasions

MARIE KREBS

University of Vienna

My front door is a barrier. It becomes a wall as soon as it shuts and locks; the one wall between me and the public, the outside, the unknown. A rupture appears whenever I hear the door rattle in the wind, when the gap between door and jamb widens for just a second, when I open it briefly and a fly buzzes in uninvited. I fear this door being breached. I fear someone breaking through this barrier and penetrating the security of my four walls. Like nothing else, I fear the invasion.

The Politics of Fear

Fear is political.

It is a tool that can become a weapon; a stone that can easily be shaped into a cudgel. In the case of horror and crime media, fear is also one of the bricks constructing the narrative, inspiring tension, suspense, and engagement. It propels plot developments, makes us watch more and more closely, repels and engrosses us simultaneously. However, fear is not just a means to an end for filmmakers, authors, and storytellers. It is a deeply political, malleable substance that does not just shape the stories we hear but leaves an aftertaste when we turn off the television. In this essay, I explore the politics of fear through one particular motif: the home invasion; a crime which has spawned its own subgenre of horror movies and, as I argue, can be found with increasing frequency in mainstream crime television programmes like *Criminal Minds*.¹

Home invasions, ubiquitously represented yet always provisionally defined, are most basically understood as forced entry into a person's home while it is occupied by its owners. However, as often noted, the crime itself is "inconsistently defined across police jurisdictions" (Byron et al. 2018: 249-250), and thus, its actual judicial standing is not clearly delineated. Nonetheless, across the literature consulted, a home invasion usually takes properties from two separate crimes: On the one hand, it resembles a residential burglary, in that perpetrators move across property lines and invade the home of another. On the other hand, the home invasion is also not unlike a street robbery, in which physical harm is threatened to affect material gain for the

¹ Henceforth abbreviated as *CM*.



perpetrators (Heinonen and Eck 2013: 7). This bifocal crime, then, is particularly frightening precisely because it encompasses a violent transgression of the boundary between the public/private spheres as well as a threat to one's bodily autonomy, i.e., an unwanted invasion on two separate levels. It gains another horrific dimension in the popular cultural imagination, though, as it is, in most representations, defined by purposeless sadism with disastrous (and murderous) consequences.

This iconography of a sadistic transgression into the home sphere of others has been inscribed so thoroughly that it cannot be dislodged by statistics. Home invasions account for a miniscule portion of crimes committed (*ibid.*: 9) and, quite often, do not have a particularly threatening context. In an anthropological study, researcher Russell Frank found that cases of invasions are mostly frivolous, whimsical episodes, like drunken college students accidentally entering the wrong houses. Invasions might momentarily inspire fear but end harmlessly if homeowners choose to respond non-violently (Frank 2017: 441). Of course, this does not preclude the existence of more sinister cases — Frank's study does not claim to account for all cultural and socioeconomic contexts (*ibid.*: 440) — yet it is important to note here that home invasions are grossly overrepresented in newspaper coverage, where they take up considerable amounts of space despite the infinitesimal chance of falling victim to one (Byron et al. 2018: 253). It is infinitely more likely to be pickpocketed on the street, to be victimised by someone already inside the house in the form of domestic abuse, to fall prey to an online scam or white-collar crime. Yet none of this makes for a compelling horror movie.

It is undeniable that home invasions provide ample narrative fodder. Alternately titled 'home invasion thriller' or 'gangster invasion film' (Sorrento 2021: 137), the sub-genre of home invasion horror has become a mainstay of modern genre fiction. Often, these films feature sadistic killers with purely violent motives (Grant 2016: 16) and explicitly serve to exemplify a threat to the white, heteronormative, middle-class family articulated by "strangers whose only drive seems to be the extermination of the owners/inhabitants of [a] particular house" (Romão 2019: 116). An oft-cited example is Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*, which was first produced in 1997 in Austria and then remade, shot-for-shot, with English-speaking actors in 2007. The film features two boys entering the home of a family and slowly, excruciatingly, beating the individual family members to death using golf clubs and forcing them to engage in perverse games of survival. Later films in this genre include *The Strangers* (2008), *The Purge* (2013), or *The Collector* (2009), all of which feature a homeownership nuclear family being terrorised by strangers (*ibid.*).² These films account for some of the grisliest and most terrifying examples of

² It may be somewhat misleading to present *Funny Games* and *The Strangers*, *The Collector*, and *The Purge* in a linear fashion, as it suggests that Haneke's film was simply an early iteration of the home invasion genre. *Funny Games*, however, is purposely metareferential, with characters addressing the camera and breaking the fourth wall repeatedly. This is often read as sociocultural commentary, exposing the viewers'



horror film in existence — partially because they narrativize the suppressed awareness that the boundary between the public and the private sphere is at best a ramshackle construct, and at worst an easily disrupted line in the sand.

Invasive Imageries

The theoretical superstructure of the aforementioned statistical and filmic tendencies is best expounded using Michel Foucault's theories of justice in *Discipline and Punish* (2020 [1975]). Foucault understands the contemporary penal system as having moved away from the raw violence of absolutist state power and towards a more complex interplay of disciplinary mechanisms to ensure cooperation and docility among citizens. In this essay, I am primarily thinking with Foucault, positing that the (re-)inscription of certain cultural imagery serves as a supplementary mode of enforcing discipline beside the carceral system (ibid.: 136), i.e., that the fears articulated in fictional media target and reinforce specific hegemonic frameworks. In keeping with the theme of this special issue, the frameworks examined here mostly pertain to the idea that the home is in dire need of protection from malignant invading forces.

While the motif of the home invasion stems primarily from the field of horror, it has slowly but surely become transcribed into network television shows like *CM*. With this spillover, the home invasion story has certainly lost some of its graphic violence, yet the core properties remain intact (as is discussed in the analytical section below). I will therefore briefly examine these properties before delving into a more thorough analysis of *CM* to indicate a stylistic confluence between what is considered 'mainstream' and what is considered 'fringe' (i.e., horror; Batchelor 2012: 33). While it may seem jarring to approach police procedurals not from the angle of the ample scholarship about crime (on) television but from a horror studies standpoint, this is precisely the point of intervention at which I situate my argument to suggest that certain motifs, here, specifically related to home, have transgressed genre boundaries in an outwardly political bid to inspire specific fears among viewers.

The primary purpose of home invasions in horror is the defamiliarisation of the most intimate space of comfort for the bourgeois subject. This is an essential feature of the genre itself, which is primarily concerned with the fear of permeability and transgression (Cohen 1996: 16) and the inversion of what is considered 'normal' (England 2006: 254). In the case of home invasions, this becomes a literal invasion through which "a picture of normality in home life [is] turned nightmarish" (Sorrento 2021: 137). It is also decidedly concerned with the materiality of domesticity in that

complicity, even revelry, in the extreme violence committed on-screen as the audience is "called upon to commit" (Fiddler 2017: 91) instead of merely watching the spectacle unfold. In a way, later iterations like *The Purge* have retroactively proven the validity of *Funny Games'* criticism: Voyeuristic enjoyment of violence apparently knows no bounds.



household items — irons, pans, pots — are turned alternately into “instruments of torture” (Speck 2010: 31) or tools for self-defence against the invading force (Meeuf 2022: 51). Home invasion films are, even more so than other horror subgenres, concerned with the fear of a penetration of the intimate private sphere by an evil or sadistic outside force. Whereas in ghost or haunted house stories, the threat usually comes from within the walls — thereby destabilising the illusion of Edenic domesticity — the home invasion is always concerned with an overstepping, a transgression, a rupturing of a particular boundary.

Interestingly, this boundary is often treated as upwardly scalable to the *homeland*, i.e., a national threat of invasion, as opposed to an individual one. In a historical sense, this is frequently attributed to a shift in public discourse after 9/11. After the towers fell, home invasion progressed from the seemingly funny, frivolous affair of the 1990s with such classics as *Home Alone* (1990), featuring a little boy setting traps for hapless burglars, to the gruesome narrative of sadistic killers penetrating the safety of the home and committing unspeakable acts of violence for the thrill of it (Romão 2019: 115). This is usually interpreted as reflecting the exacerbated fear of foreign invasion which is scaled and negotiated on a more individually manageable, personal level with the state becoming miniaturised as the house and the home becoming mapped onto the homeland (and its security). However, this does not paint the full picture: Whereas 9/11 certainly may have accelerated the spread of violent, gory horror movies which facilitate a simple division between ‘us’ and ‘the terrorists’ (McSweeney 2017: 251), the home invasion has a longer-standing history of threat. For example, *Funny Games*, frequently posited as a watershed work for the home invasion film, was first released in 1997, albeit to Austrian audiences. Nonetheless, the fact remains that this film, along with its 2007 remake, is one of the most widely received home invasion thrillers of contemporary cinema that was released long before the planes left Boston Airport (see Romão 2019; Speck 2010). Invasions, in general, were also a recurring theme of horror films in the Cold War era, often allegorised in the form of aliens (McSweeney 2017: 227). It is therefore not tenable to posit 9/11 as a singular caesura in the development of home invasion horror, as this argument would obfuscate the deliberately political, much earlier genre shift from comedies like *Home Alone* to the metareferential brutality of *Funny Games*.³

Home invasion narratives are then not primarily defined by their historical situatedness but by two questions of ‘who?’: Firstly, there is the matter of who is being invaded, and, secondly, the question of who is invading. In the former case, it might be unsurprising that the victims of home invasion are conspicuously inconspicuous, living tastefully cream-coloured lives in tastefully cream-coloured living rooms. They exist in

³ Furthermore, I cannot help but gesture at an implicitly dystopian element in *Home Alone* as well. There is something disconcerting about a neglected child, whose parents seem to have forgotten about him, maiming two grown men in a bid to protect his family’s property.



nuclear, usually white, heteronormative families, wealthy to the degree of comfort but not obscenity, i.e., the perfect figures for viewer identification (Romão 2019: 116). Importantly, they are also owners of their homes, i.e., the invasion is construed as an attack on their bodies as well as their property. As a matter of fact, the bourgeois self is so thoroughly determined by homeownership that the home becomes an extension of the bourgeois body, which implies that whenever the threshold of the home is violently crossed, this translates as an attack on the body itself. A home invasion is never *just* a crime against property, but always a violation of the deeply anxious sovereign self defined by its property. Wealth, be it ostentatious or more subdued, eventually does nothing to protect victims from harm. Conversely, it can be the very reason why they are targeted, as the home invasion might sometimes be a crime of class-based envy, of the proletariat mob coming to take revenge on those who grind them down by turning their wealth on themselves (Grant 2016: 16).

If the invaded are defined by their normality, their inconspicuous bourgeoisie, then the invaders serve as foils, as perverse, sadistic Others coming in, unmoored and without the burden of a conscience. They are frequently anonymous, indistinct, ungraspable, and, most importantly, attack victims simply because they are available (Romão 2019: 116). It has become an almost compulsory plot point in home invasion horror films for the victims to ask their invaders why they are doing this, to offer them money, to beg for their lives. The response then is exemplified by the killers' answer in *The Strangers*: "Because you were home." (Squires 2020: n.p.). This impersonal response does not only serve to exacerbate the horror of such invasions — the anxious knowledge that 'it could be any of us' — but also construes the antagonists as thoroughly monstrous and utterly frightening in their random bloodthirst. The invader is incurably and irredeemably Other, what Foucault calls the "great criminal" (2020 [1975]: 93). Notably, however, this does not necessarily demand antagonists who are visually marked as Other — in fact, in *Funny Games*, the main antagonists are "preppy young people whose only motivation for killing is their sadistic pleasure" (Speck 2010: 31) and thus cannot be distinguished from the protagonists on the surface. The great criminal may *look* like "one of us" (Chauhan et al. 2024: 35), but they are unassimilable, unfathomable, untreatable.

In this sense, the home invasion presents a contamination of clearly delineated dichotomies — e.g., public/private, evil/good, psychopathic/normal. The 'outside' is construed as frightening and attacking the safe 'inside', reinforcing the notion that the membrane between the public and the private sphere is fragile and must be protected, often through rather violent measures. Violence is thus justified when it is viewed as defensive, when it is juxtaposed with deviant aggressive and transgressive violence. While I do not argue that this statement can be directly translated from horror film to crime television, there are distinct synergies between 'horror home invasions' and



'crime home invasions,' which are explored in the section below after a brief examination of the cultural significance and place of *CM* in relation to the horror genre.

***Criminal Minds* and the Invasion**

While horror is often considered a niche medium compared to, for instance, action and comedy blockbusters, the same cannot be said about *CM*: In its heyday, the show averaged around 14 million viewers per episode (Gorman 2011: n.p.) and is, at the time of writing, in production for its nineteenth season despite steadily declining rates of viewership (Ausiello 2022: n.p.). It is often named as one of the more gruesome shows on network television (Rice 2020: n.p.; Dempsey 2008: 21), even if it may seem rather tame in comparison to *The Purge* or *The Strangers*. Importantly for this essay, the show also features home invasions frequently and in surprising detail as an inciting incident for many of its episodic investigations. After a brief introduction of the show and its political position, I will present an analysis of two *CM* episodes that feature home invasions in particular.

CM focuses on the experiences of FBI profilers⁴ attempting to catch a different serial killer, rapist, or kidnapper in each episode. It is worth noting here that shows like this are frequently credited with helping to popularise the discipline of criminal profiling, i.e., the practice of identifying perpetrators by inferring their character properties from the crime scene evidence. For example, a *CM* profiler might arrive at a murder scene to see a victim who has been brutalised to the point of unrecognizability. From this, they directly extrapolate that the perpetrator must have known the victim and 'anonymised' them to give themselves more time to escape from the police without any hard evidence to support their claims (*CM*: S03 E12 02:18). The narrative ultimately substantiates their theory, promoting 'distant clues' to full proof (Foucault 2020 [1975]: 36). In nonfictional contexts, the practice of profiling has been widely debunked as an intermittently reliable practice at best (Kocsis and Palermo 2015: 324-325), and a junk science at worst (Snook et al. 2008: 1269). Nevertheless, the show retains a vested interest in reaffirming the validity of the discipline to promote the aesthetic of realism, which it does by mercilessly validating the profilers' hunches.

As a police procedural, *CM* follows in the well-worn footsteps of the crime and detective genres, which are based on the fundamental assumption that there is such a thing as a unified 'truth' about a particular situation, waiting to be uncovered. This is often blended with a healthy dose of pro-law-and-order ideology through the heroisation of police officers (Hatrick and González 2022: 2) — as evidenced by showrunner Erica

⁴ They are presented as members of the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit, henceforth abbreviated as BAU, which was created in the 1970s and uses a blend of psychology and police procedure to identify and apprehend violent criminals. For a closer look at the BAU's self-presentation, see the FBI's repository of *Resources for Law Enforcement* (n.d.).



Messer, who states that *CM* “is about the heroes who protect men, women, and children every day” (Rice 2020: n.p.). This is also reflected in the aesthetics of crime television, which tend to be less experimental, and most frequently follow well-established plot trajectories of investigation-discovery-arrest. While more experimental programmes most certainly exist (Jenner 2015: 2), *CM* could arguably not be counted among them, with a neatly patterned episodic structure and thoroughly majoritarian main characters — overwhelmingly white and cis-heteronormatively coded⁵ — whose sole focus remains on bringing criminals to justice and protecting innocent victims.⁶

In this section, I argue that the rhetoric of law and order is negotiated in *CM* through the representation of home invasions as particularly serious crimes, unlike any act of violence committed in a public space. I analyse two *CM* episodes from seasons 3 (E04 “Children of the Dark”) and 5 (E04 “Hopeless”) respectively, focusing first on their general narrative patterns and second on a more specific aesthetic consideration of their opening sequences.

CM episodes are neatly patterned: They begin with an opening scene, between 2 and 5 minutes long, presenting the inciting incident — a murder, a kidnapping — followed by a cut to the BAU protagonists of that episode receiving their instructions to find the depraved individual who has committed the primeval sin (of the episode). This is then followed by the credits and, significantly, a famous quote by a philosopher/intellectual such as Thoreau or Emerson. There is a comforting sameness to these episodes, reassuringly procedural, usually leading to neat climaxes which see the perpetrator arrested, shot, or, in very rare cases, receiving a more lenient treatment if their condition is considered one of curable evil.⁷ However, the way in which home invasions are depicted and consequently discussed diegetically establishes notable patterns both in contrast and in relation to the home invasion trope from the horror genre.

Although *CM* is certainly less graphic than most horror films due to network regulations, it is undeniable that home invasions feature in the most horrific episodes on the

⁵ In this paper, I primarily refer to seasons 1-6. While I am aware that there are significant changes to the cast from season 7 onward, it would exceed the limits of this paper to go beyond approximately its first 140 episodes.

⁶ ‘Innocent victim’ might be one of the most interesting paradoxes presented during the era of law and order. As discussed by journalists Sarah Marshall and Michael Hobbes in their podcast *You’re Wrong About* (episode “The Victims’ Rights Movement”), the use of this phrase inevitably begs the question of what might make a victim ‘guilty.’ Wearing the wrong clothes? Being in the wrong place, at the wrong time? Leaving the front door open for burglars? Not having a gun? Not evaluating every stranger in the home’s proximity as a potential threat?

⁷ For example, in the episode “Children of the Dark,” which sees a pair of home-invading killers murdering entire families, the final third of the episodes suggests that they developed their bloodlust after spending their childhood with an abusive foster mother (i.e., in a perverted version of the nuclear family). The two killers are noticeably absent from the climax of the episode; instead, the foster mother is almost gunned to death by another one of her foster children, which the BAU manage to stop at the last minute. Someone simply *must* be punished by the end of the episode.



show and are considered particularly heinous by the show's own standards. They push the boundaries of what is acceptable for network television — for example, “Children of the Dark” shows the images of two people, their hands tied behind their backs, covered in fake blood and their children's toys lying next to them on the floor to emphasise the cruelty of their premature death (CM: S03 E04: 14:30). What cannot be visualised directly is conveyed through reaction shots: Derek Morgan, one of the BAU's most seasoned profilers, cannot help but cover his mouth and avert his gaze in shock upon seeing four beaten and bloodied corpses on their living room floor (CM: S05 E04: 05:14). This is also a direct stylistic reference to established horror conventions, in which the monster is usually only shown toward the end of the narrative. See, for example, Hideo Nakata's genre-defining classic *Ring* (1998; remade for American audiences by Gore Verbinski in 2002), which does not depict characters' deaths but instead cuts to negative images of their horrified faces to lend more impact to the antagonist Sadako's first appearance as a stringy-haired, vengeful spectre during the finale. In CM, the singularly horrific nature of home invasions also becomes a component of the episodes' dialogic framing, with characters frequently addressing that the killings under investigation are particularly horrible; the unspoken addendum is that they are particularly horrible because they happen in domestic spheres and to people who are, by any measure, considered entirely innocent — they are sweet children, caring mothers, or loving fathers, both intensely 'normal' and ideal in terms of family models.

In fact, the perpetrators overtly comment on their victims' identities as respectable middle-class individuals. They are “lucky guy[s]” with “nice famil[ies]” (CM: S03 E04: 2:47), who are chosen seemingly at random, but in fact precisely because they are lucky guys with nice families. Much like the protagonists of *The Strangers* or *Funny Games*, CM's victims live in middle-class normalcy and respectability, which is disrupted by unspeakable violence. The opening of “Children of the Dark” (CM: S03 E04: 00:00-01:03) follows a woman talking on the phone, incidentally about how her husband wants to expand the family (there is little time for nuanced characterisation in a five-minute opening sequence) and then cuts to an image of the aforementioned husband, sternly but kindly helping his son with his maths homework. They then fall victim to their own mild-mannered niceness: A stranger appears on their doorstep holding what appears to be a dead cat, asking to come inside and use the phone. When the woman begins to feel uncomfortable at having a stranger in her house, her husband responds that he wants to be “neighbourly” (CM: S03 E04: 02:22), signalling that their ultimate downfall is not merely their status as a happy, middle-class family, but also their politeness and willingness to be good hosts and kind neighbours.

In contrast to the innocent 'nice people' they prey upon, the perpetrators featured in these home invasion episodes are defined by the stark juxtaposition of an inconspicuous exterior with a merciless, frighteningly psychopathic interior. “Children of the Dark”



sees one of the perpetrators, a white man, approach the house while his Hispanic partner stays behind, using the perception of whiteness as nonthreatening and unmarked to give victims a false sense of safety through sameness and inconspicuous normality (*CM*: S03 E04: 01:33). Similarly, the episode “Hopeless” (*CM*: S05 E04: 00:00-00:09) opens with what could be described as a domestic and more or less non-threatening image for the first few frames. Three men, probably in their late twenties, are settling down for a movie night on a couch. They open cans of beer and bicker good-naturedly, appearing to be friends — until the episode’s soundtrack sets in with an undeniably menacing set of strings. The camera then cuts to what they are watching, which turns out to be a homemade snuff film of them breaking into a suburban home and brutally murdering four people, two straight couples, during a dinner party. The veneer of respectability is hereby juxtaposed with the ‘real’ inside selves, which are violent and animalistic in their urge to kill. One of the police officers on-site even says this explicitly later, stating that “whoever did this ain’t human” (*CM*: S05 E04: 5:44). This statement is particularly important in understanding how the criminal themselves is conceived in *CM*; namely, they become a perverse Other whose exterior does not reflect their interior moral corruption. In this process, the visual Other — the racialised, disabled, or non-heteronormatively coded body — is substituted for the non-visual Other, the inconspicuous Other who is threatening exactly because they do not have any visual markers to distinguish them from the mainstream.

Victim and perpetrator are thus never visually separated or identifiable in their difference, leading to a calcification of the notion of the self as a unified whole, which is then later mapped back onto the home(land). In a modern society which has correctly identified phrenology as a useless and dehumanising pursuit of morality reflected in visual Otherness, there can no longer be an overt marker of a person’s character — they may look like a neighbour, a friend, or a door-to-door salesperson. In *CM*, viewers can rely on cinematic framing to suggest whether a character is a victim or a perpetrator, but in real life, the conclusion of a logic of ‘it could be anyone’ is that the only person who is not a psychopath can only ever be the self. Everyone else might well be an axe murderer, a home invader, a threat to the sovereign self, and so it is important to police the borders of the self as much as the borders of the nation state and to evaluate every contact as a potential threat. The necessity to secure the border of the home by questioning norms such as neighbourliness in *CM*’s home invasion episodes then effectively expresses these logics of a larger defensive suspicion, justifying it through affective imaginaries of everyday experience that are familiar to most viewers.

In its materiality, the act of home invasion murders in *CM* therefore becomes a symbolic bludgeoning of bourgeois respectability, an assault on individual privilege through the appropriation of the victims’ possessions. Once inside, the perpetrators use weapons they have brought with them — a crowbar in “Hopeless,” a cocktail of drugs in “Children



of the Dark” — but they also make a show of turning household items into weapons as in many home invasion horror films. They bludgeon their victims with golf clubs (*CM*: S03 E04: 02:25), a theme which features so frequently in stories of home invasion that it is impossible not to mention it. In this case, one of the most ubiquitous symbols of upward mobility and leisure — golf — is weaponised in the hands of the psychopathic Other in a perverted caricature of class-based rebellion.

In this context, the camera plays a crucial and fluid role, shifting and bending its allegiance, particularly during the opening sequence, which depicts the episodes’ inciting incidents. As the audience’s sole point of access to the narrative, it significantly impacts the construction of characters — and frequently the camera’s eye becomes an invaluable accomplice to the ideological conceptualisation that presents home invasions as a real and utterly horrific threat. While it remains relatively unmarked in the episodes themselves, the camera becomes noticeably stylised in the opening sequences. In one example (*CM*: S03 E04: 00:00-01:03), it does so by invoking the imagery of old slasher films, mimicking the voyeuristic camera eye of *Halloween* (Clover 2015: 185; Deacon 2015: 7). Here, the camera is frequently placed behind the characters, following their movements, or even placed slightly below eye level in positions that appear to be partially hidden. It puts the viewer in the perspective of a stalking killer, prowling the house, waiting for the moment to strike. In “Hopeless” (*CM*: S05 E04), the camera exercises a study in shifting perspectives and dangling allegiances, jarringly forcing viewers to inhabit several bodies at once. At first, it appears decidedly neutral, depicting the opening shot in the same colour and lighting schemes as the rest of the episode (high contrast, warm tones). Then, however, it adopts a diegetic perpetrator position, posing as the shaky, grainy image of a camcorder that the murderers bring on their killing spree. Then, and perhaps most jarringly, it slips into the perspective of the victim, becoming black and white and following the movements of a body knocked around the room by blunt force. These two scenes, though stylistically very different, serve similar purposes of creating maximum impact within the confines of the rigid episodic structure and, importantly, establishing the killer featured in the episode as the most horrific yet.

Importantly, however, as opposed to horror films, the narrative focus of *CM* lies exclusively on the perpetrator and their psychological makeup, rather than on those who are being invaded. The victim may be briefly introduced by the BAU, as they compile their ‘victimology’ to discern the killers’ true motives, by their distraught families, or, in rare cases, when a victim survives the attack. However, this characterisation is passive and retrospective, with the victims themselves remaining mute and invisible, long dead and gone by the time the episode fully begins. The main goal of the narrative, then, is always to find a reason for what has happened, and it operates on the fundamental assumption that there *is* a reason to be discovered for violent acts at all. The BAU investigators enter the crime scene and are able to



reconstruct what has taken place, which we as viewers can verify ad hoc, having seen the images of the invasion only minutes before. Through this, we are given the instant gratification of knowing that the investigators are correct in their educated guesses, that there is a logical explanation for the crimes and that the criminals will be brought to justice. In “Hopeless” (*CM*: S05 E04), one of the main characters makes the rather revealing statement that for a crime as horrific as a home invasion-cum-murder, “there’s no ideology behind this, it’s about violence and power” (16:51).

While this may be true for the text-internal world, in which crime is embedded in a clear logic of causes and effects, the *representation* of these crimes is laden with ideological gravity. In the case of *CM*, this ideological tilt is undeniably one of crime and punishment, of irredeemable human evil, and of the importance of remaining vigilant against all threats directed at the home. *CM* instrumentalises a less stylised aesthetic representation of the home invasion to distinguish itself from the more nuanced nature of similar narratives in the horror genre. Whereas in horror, evil from the outside frequently causes the inside, the bourgeois family, to retaliate in a violent way, *CM* does not place its narrative focus explicitly on themes of retribution or survival. Instead, it focuses on the reasoning, the explanation, the dissection of the criminal, while the victim remains mute and powerless. On the one hand, this results in a more two-dimensional narrative process which enables a very clear distinction between ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ and on the other, it also lends credence to the idea that crime is essentially unpreventable and can only be addressed in retrospect, as an exercise of damage control after the murder has already been committed.

This compulsively retroactive perspective becomes the defining factor of *CM*, which is fundamentally a programme based on a misunderstanding of statistics. It engages with the probability of one person committing a crime against another and builds narratives based on these probabilities. Correlation is always causality; accidents never happen. The series is characterised by a general shift away from mystery or detective stories, which serve as the basis for many other crime TV programmes, and toward more explicitly horror-based imagery (Jenner 2015: 42), which frequently deploys the home invasion as an inciting incident for the plot of individual episodes. However, while horror film often takes a more ambiguous stance toward transgressions of binary pairings (Cohen 1996: 16), *CM* is abundantly clear in its insistence on the good/bad and associated dichotomies (e.g., killer/cop, psychopath/‘normal’ person). It relies entirely on the undisputed existence of incurable evil. In doing so, the show becomes an instrument of the penal system by normalising and de-stylising horror imagery to suggest mimesis where there is none, overriding statistics, and narrativising an extremely politicised fear of an abject Other. In short, *CM* radicalises mainstream imagery by suggesting that horror is a part of the everyday business of policing.



Conclusion

By frequently using the iconography of home invasion horror, *CM* reinscribes the separation between the menacing outside and the comforting inside of a home. The transgression or penetration of this membrane has undeniably disastrous effects, ranging from property damage to death and general mayhem. The constant cultural re-enactment of this fantasy can be read as an exercise in exorcising the fear of transgression and permeability, not only in the context of the private/public sphere, but also of the inherent contamination of all the binaries which constitute the current dominant processes of discipline and punishment. The home is read here as infinitely scalable — the body is the home of the soul, and the (owned) house is the rightful home of the bourgeois body, the nation state is the proper home for the bourgeois, home-owning subject in a context which predicates citizenship on property. Thus, a home invasion becomes not merely a crime of property, but also a crime of physical and psychological violation; one that exposes the membrane between the self and the outside world as constructed and the border between community, nation, and self as fluid.

CM focuses on home invasions as cruel, sadistic crimes, in which victims are chosen at random ‘because they were home.’ Violent crime, which is always perceived to be on the rise (Foucault 2020 [1975]: 75), targets the normal, the inconspicuous, those with cream-coloured carpets. This representation has a very clear purpose which is perfectly reflected in a home invasion survival manual entitled *Krav Maga Extreme Survival*: Towards the end of the book, the author summarises their advice in a few pithy sentences — they note that “[w]e need to plan more. We need to have our escape routes defined ahead of time, and have safe places where we can go should we need to. We need to think about our safety and be prepared to deal with those things that threaten it.” (Keren 2018: 223). In short, it is necessary to own guns, to perpetuate narratives of law and order, to be tough on crime, to protect the homeland, to police the borders at all costs, all of which takes on the form of being suspicious of tiny, everyday acts of neighbourliness, politeness, and helpfulness. All of this is continuously inscribed and reinscribed in popular imaginaries of home through works such as *CM*, which repeat the message that the home is being constantly threatened, a feeling that is then so fiercely ingrained that even statistics cannot counter it.

It is no coincidence that horror imagery appears in a show that is considered mainstream, majoritarian, and somewhat apolitical (as evidenced by the characters’ insistence that there is such a thing as a crime without ideology). Extreme imagery, masquerading as simple procedure, is normalised through repetition and thus thoroughly inscribed in the popular consciousness: *CM* insists on the fact that home invasions are a real, equivocal threat. They are forever perceived as being on the



increase, a pot of oil slowly coming to a boil. Through this narrative of perpetually increasing threat, the politics of law and order become the only possible response, violence the only way to mitigate such an imminent threat, and suspicion the logical state of mind for the responsible citizen-subject. The home — whether on the scale of the body, a family home, or the nation state — must be enclosed and protected from any and all invasions.

Fear, after all, is political.

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