

**The Ring That Screws:
On the Metastasis of Terror and Evil in the Age of
Globalization**

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ABSTRACT

In terms of its smashing box office records and the worldwide productions of sequels as well as remakes, *Ring* (1998) has demonstrated its success as a commercial film. Moreover, taken from the classical scenes that have persistently fascinated its worldwide fans, the film has truly created its unique flair that has inspired many a horror film since its production for emulation. Hence the endless cycles (manga, radio drama, website, video game, etc.) attached to it. With special interest in the worldwide dissemination of terror and evil in the age of globalization, a time when the surging waves of information, culture and commodity flows converge to create a new spectacle of our contemporary world, this paper seeks not only to discover the fundamental elements that account for the overall "ring fever," but also to explore the possibility of its consumption, or rather the possibility of its cure, if we take the uncontrollable dissemination of terror and evil as the metastasis of cancerous proliferation.

KEY WORDS

horror, gaze, ubiquitous technological mediation, cinematic apparatus, ecstasy of communication, inhuman



I. The Ringed Fever

The study of the horror film as a special genre has long attracted critics' attention. Yet, most of the investigations, ranging from thematic genre markers to the sorts of stock characters, recurrent settings, or the most frequently seen motifs, are dedicated to the research on the genre itself and neglect the cinematic text as a peculiar medium different from literature. Following Linda Williams' categorization of the horror film (together with melodrama and pornography) as a "body genre" (703), which acquires its name because of its special reliance on the bodily response of its audience, Steffen Hantke asserts that since horror is an intense affect measured not by some static forms, but by its effect on the audience, there must be proper attention devoted to studying horror film as a social product interactively engendered by the technological apparatus of cinema and the ideological change of the time. In articulating the production and the marketing of fear in terms of the mechanical apparatus of cinema, Hantke thus urges readers to take a grave view of the genre's "technologies," by which he means not only "the technological apparatus of cinema, the machinery of recording and displaying images on film, and the industrial mechanisms of distribution and consumption that constitute the film industry itself," but also "the social mechanisms—the ideological apparatus, if you will—that surround the film industry and in which its products (films, genres, stars, images, ideologies) are embedded" (x). Here, if we follow Hantke's approach to the study of the horror film as a social mechanism, which both

reflects and evokes the fear and the desire of the audience in the larger context of a social language system incorporating each individual's unconscious, we would be confronted with exploring horror from its most materialistic dimension. That is, despite its being a personal affection produced on each individual's part, horror is treated in the posthuman age of late capitalism more like an impersonal commodity, which signifies not a particular person's fearful feeling and the fear factor any more, but values that can be technologically produced, distributed, and consumed. In the long run and taken from Lacan's psychoanalytical point of view, it is eventually the subordination of human's psychological formation to what Jean Baudrillard called the "pure absorption and resorption surface of the influent networks" (EC 27) that constitutes the very otherness of our psychology and thereby forms the territory of horror of our contemporary life.

In many ways, Nakata Hideo's *Ringu* (1998) reincarnates the haunting of the horror caused by the sense of alienation looming in the posthuman age of technology and mechanism. In terms of its storyline, *Ring* tells a mystery involving a videotape cryptically made by a vengeful ghost, Sadako, whose curse on the media dooms the viewer to die in seven days unless the viewer can copy the tape and pass it on to other viewers—an urban mystery involving the dissemination of terror and evilness which we may somehow relate to the spreading of chain letters, computer viruses, and bootleg videos. As Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp remark in their commentary on Nakata's contribution to the Japanese films, this skillful reconciliation of pseudoscientific horror with the traditional motif of a vengeful ghost, as well as the psychological exploration into the fear factor, has successfully marked itself as the so-called J-horror¹ peculiar to the style of Japanese film-making and won Nakata the reputation "the king of horror" in the last decade of our time (251–265). Yet, in a critical article devoted to the posthuman otherness and horror looming in Nakata's *Ring* series, Eric White remeasures the equilibrium of the two lines, Sadako's tragedy and the postponing of the fulfillment of her curse by way of a technological duplication and spreading of the curse, by weighing the latter with greater interpretive significance than the former. As he

argues, “although *Ringu* employs the traditional motif of the vengeful ghost longing for eternal rest, this narrative should not be understood, at least in the most familiar sense, as a tale of the uncanny. Sadako’s emergence from a well of forgetting cannot finally be explained as the return of the repressed in the sense of an unresolved trauma that has endured in the unconscious, waiting to be exorcised by means of a therapeutic catharsis” (40). Rather, after seriously reconsidering Sadako as a “supernatural offspring of a human being and a sea monster” (40), White asserts that since Sadako’s otherness (considered from her origin, the motivation and the execution of her curse) has never been humanly intelligible, the combination of her horror with the inhuman “ubiquitous technological mediation” (40–41) should be interpreted as the collective anxiety of our time formed when inhuman technology and machines dominate our lives and beings. Indeed, though brought into existence by man, the mechanical development of technology in White’s reference—a cancerous proliferation not unlike the metastasis of pathogenic microorganism—is now far beyond our control and takes on life of its own. In this uncontrollable respect, the depicted condition under investigation can be analogically comparable with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, a gothic novel that reflects the rampant forces of laissez-faire capitalism existing at the time of its creation and that has now been treated as the archetype of the horror of technology.

Moreover, considered from the film’s box office reception, which naturally brings with it the productions of its sequels and remakes worldwide,² and the so-called worldwide “ring fever”,³ the whole technological apparatus connected to this film undoubtedly incorporates the production, distribution, and consumption of horror into the creating and marketing of an impersonal commodity, which in its inhuman sense may intensify itself as an invincible otherness, yet when taken from its commercial dimension, may also reduce its threat to its fans by having transferred all its terror and evil into something that can be valued, exchanged, discussed, and reproduced. In this way, the *Ring*, which has screwed up the transnational tension for the last decade of our age, not only terrifies its moviegoers throughout the

world, but also fascinates them, or more precisely, attracts them to be “ringed” or encompassed by the flow of the collective unconscious. As the original writer Suzuki Koji reveals in a Q&A on the creation of *Ring*, the word “ring” in the novel not only has possible reference to an alarm bell; it also suggests the possible meaning of worldwide circulation, whirling each act of sign reading into its circle of semantic structure.⁴ Here, if we compare our present “ringed” situation with the propagation of the urban mystery in the film, we would agree with White’s observation that the film *Ring* both transmits and reincarnates “a troubled and yet oddly expectant vision of a future in which the great collective psychotronic apparatus of contemporary information technology ceaselessly reconstitutes individual identity” (46). To get a clear picture of the ambivalent nature of horror, consider the following dialogue between the two investigators of the cursed videotape (Asakawa Reiko and Takayama Ryuji) on their way to Oshima,:

Reiko: It’s entirely my fault. Tomoko died, and the other three died too. That should have put an end to the event.

Ryuji: Could that?

Reiko: Where does such a legend like this originate?

Ryuji: No origin can be traced. It’s formed by the collective anxiety of the public.

Reiko: Anxiety?

Ryuji: Or maybe it’s not fear at all. Maybe it’s what we were secretly hoping for all along.

By treating fear and desire as transferable, Ryuji’s remark seems to suggest that these two impulses are not dissimilar in essence; or, to put it more safely, if they are not of the same category, they are at least the forces transferable to each other. Since in White’s article, it is also exactly on the coincidence of the opposite affections—desire and fear—that his “ubiquitous technological mediation” is grounded, the aim of this paper is to provide a psychological explanation accounting for the ambivalence that has been present with us and that, in its meaningless operation, has led us beyond ourselves, at least in terms of

the production of our emotion and language use.

In *The Philosophy of Horror*, Carroll has undertaken to study the paradox of the horror and explore how audiences could be attracted to horror “if horror necessarily has something repulsive about it” (158). Attempting to offer a comprehensive investigation, Carroll’s approaches range from the philosophical enquiries of the 18th century, through the religious and psychological analysis of our time. But, since Carroll has also reminded us that no general account of the paradoxes can exhaust the possibilities of all horror productions (159), to connect the particular image of Sadako’s gaze to that of Lacan’s, both referring to the endless interchangeability between subject and object, the watcher and the watched, this paper chooses to analyze in the following section Nakata Hideo’s film from the perspective of Lacan’s gaze theory. Then, on the grounds of what Baudrillard terms “the ecstasy of communication,” or the excessive exposure of our current lives to the flooding of information and communication (*EC 22*), we will enter into the discussion on how each individual’s distinctive affection, either desire or fear, can be dissolved into only one dimension of communication since the position of the subject and the object has been proved to be interchangeable, abolishing all the boundaries between the watcher and the watched, the desire and the fear. Finally, by applying these postmodern theories to the “ringed fever” under consideration, this paper will demonstrate that since we can never go back to the primitive state unaffected by any fever or spectacle produced by the cinematic apparatus, we can recognize the ephemerality and superficiality of the current fashion only by receiving (or creating) more diverse cinematic spectacles from the technological apparatus, which in many respects is exactly what Nakata has been doing in the Japanese *Ring* of 1998.

II. The Looming Gaze and Its Elimination in the House of Cinema

For Lacan, the gaze is an act of looking which does not actually take place. Rather, it is more like a psychological vision which looms in

a subject's unconscious as a spotlight projected from the Other—some ubiquitous or structural entity, according to whose order the identity of the self is formed and recognized. As Lacan delineates the uncanny vision in his *Seminar* series:

I can feel myself under the gaze of someone whose eyes I do not see, not even discern. All that is necessary is for something to signify to me that there may be others there. This window, if it gets a bit dark, and if I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straight-away a gaze. (215)

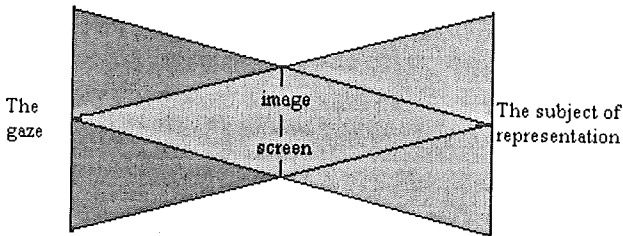
To shed light on such psychological mechanism, Žižek adopts a Hegelian point of view: in a sense, it is a way of fathoming the unfathomable Other by locating it somewhere the gaze is shed; or considered from the other side, the impulse to identify the unknown Other in a measurable way betrays nothing but the subject's anxiety about the indefiniteness of the Other. In short, the gaze is a reflective marker ambivalently incorporating the subject's fear of the Other and the desire to compromise with it in a certain way so that its pressure on the subject can be relieved. As Žižek clearly states:

At a more fundamental level, what we are dealing with here is the positivization of an impossibility that gives rise to the fetish object. For example, how does the object/gaze become a fetish? Through the Hegelian reversal from the impossibility to see the object, into an object that gives body to this very impossibility: since the subject cannot directly see that, the true object of fascination, he accomplishes a kind of reflection-into-self by means of which the object that fascinates him becomes the gaze itself. In this sense (although not in an entirely symmetrical way), gaze and voice are "reflective" objects, objects that give body to an impossibility. (201–202)

In this way, by fantastically producing the gaze to reflect the haunting spotlight back upon himself, the subject seems no longer

merely the watched, but also the watcher, or the mimicry of the Other, watching himself being watched like an object. The interchangeability between the subject and the object, the watcher and the watched, thus not only allows the subject to escape from being haunted, but also provides him with the fantasy that he can somehow manage the order of the relationship between himself and the unknown structure which is ubiquitously surrounding him.

Moreover, by illuminating the gaze as some phantasmatic vision born on the subject's part in order to form the mediation between the subject and the Other, Lacan seems also to suggest that both the self and the Other, estranged by the fictive gaze, are illusory. Putting it in philosophical terms, a subject's existence is now deemed unreal insofar as he can secure his status of being only by objectifying himself as being watched by a subjective/imaginary gaze. Precisely because this uncertainty of being undermines the subjectivity one needs to construct his epistemological framework, the gaze becomes an indispensable point of light. Here we borrow a diagram from Lacan, illustrating exactly how "[I] turn myself into a picture under the gaze" (*FFCP* 106):



According to Lacan, the two superimposed triangles represent the eye of the subject (the triangle on the left) and the reflective vision of the gaze projected from the outside (the triangle on the right) respectively. At the apex of the first triangle (or the middle point on the right-hand line) stands the geometral subject, whereas at the diametrical point lies the reflective gaze, under which one turns one's self into a picture on the middle line of image and screen. As Lacan

continues to say,

I must, to begin with, insist on the following: in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which—if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form—I am *photo-graphed*. (FFCP 106)

Since the gaze is clearly illustrated as the indispensable spotlight for representing the subject's image on the screen, the second motivation that compels a subject to seek the gaze from the Other is then revealed as follows: it is evidently the impulse to represent the self-image in vision that drives a subject obsessively to seek the gaze from the Other, though its shedding meanwhile makes the subject's flesh creep, his hair stand on end.

One way of applying this Lacanian gaze to the apparatus of cinema can be studied from the recent trend of "web cam" sites as exemplified in the logic of *The Truman Show*. As Žižek points out, in this continuous exhibition of one's private life under the camera's gaze, we see the subject's urgent need for the Other's gaze serving as the guarantee of the subject's being. "I exist only insofar as I am looked at all the time" (203). Taken from this perspective, the impulse to be secured via the function of a camera eye is precisely the fundamental cause which explains why a subject would expose himself to the gaze of the Other. Furthermore, since we have also seen from the interchangeability between the watcher and the watched that a subject's impulse to be watched by an imaginary gaze can be further traced from a more primitive desire to watch himself being watched—a psychological mechanism which frees the subject from being haunted by transfiguring the subject into the Other or the watcher in some

way—the *Truman Show*-like exhibitionism can also be re-examined from the following sadistic point of view: it is with the fascination to stand with the Other or to become one with it that a subject unconsciously creates the gaze outside him to watch himself being watched. In this sense, the libido fluid flowing in the *Truman Show*-like exhibitionism can be identical with what is called the desire of scopophilia. And it is at this point that we finally reach what is at the kernel of Lacan's gaze theory: the positions of the subject and the object, the watcher and the watched, can be interchangeable; the demarcation between them is merely a psychological mechanism; their distinction is regulatory, not essential.

Accepting the subjectivism of Lacan's gaze theory, in his *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, Metz thus posits that since in the act of watching, the positions of the subject and the object are essentially indistinguishable, the process of sign reading in the symbolic structure of cinema actually overlaps with the process of subject invention, or the spectator's completion of his self in the house of cinema. As he explicitly remarks, the spectator in cinema is searching for "the basic lure of the ego" (4). Situated in the locus of cinema, what a spectator desires in the reflection of "the other mirror," i.e., "the cinema screen," is thus a veritable psychical substitute, or the prosthesis for the primally dislocated limbs (4). Taken from this view, for the spectator, the cinematic apparatus of the horror film functions to elicit and to transfer his unnamable fear of the Other via the process of sign reading as follows: by replacing the indefinite horror latently hovering in the spectator's unconscious with some legible array of meanings, the original fear of the Other seems to have been successfully transferred/released in the process of representation. By this logic, the act of watching/consuming a horror movie can be taken as motivated by the impulse to participate in the line of horror production. In other words, by standing on the same side with the horror and the gaze in the cave-like house of cinema, the moviegoer seems to eliminate the creepy gaze projected from the Other. In the film *Ring*, this is exactly the point that seduces the viewers of the cursed videotape to watch through the film filled with riddles and puzzles:

though creepy and even repulsive, the tape nevertheless absorbs the teenage travelers in the cabins; to reveal the truth hidden behind the montage of the enigmatic images, Reiko and Ryuji even study the film again and again, seeking to decipher the meaning of the unsettling images. After being engaged with the cryptic tape, all viewers seem to be thoroughly transformed—considered from their distorted images developed on the pictures. In Lacan or Metz's terms, this is because in the subject viewers' encountering with the film, they find themselves dislocated from the once-stabilized structure. Drifting somewhere between their lost selves and the enigmatic images, like the twitching, undulating characters appearing on the screen, the film viewers or the sign readers now lose their positions in the once-definite structure. More precisely, they become one with the floating signifiers. And it is at this point where the imaginary gaze evaporates along with the dissolving of the subject and the object, the watcher and the watched, the consumer and the producer, that we will enter into Baudrillard's "ecstasy of communication."

In Baudrillard's view, postmodern capitalism has overwhelmingly turned everything in the world into exchangeable commodity, which in its entire substitutability in the market of circulation has not only drawn almost all people to participate in the network of trading, but made capital the stronger vehicle of communication. As a consequence of that, obscenity follows "when every-thing becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication" (*EC* 21–22). In this way, by eliminating the framing boundary between the exterior and the interior, driving every participant in the circuit to explore, to produce, and to exchange things or values, the postmodern obscenity abolishes the gaze (the imaginary reflective marker which estranges the object from the subject), transforming all the multiplicity and the opacity of the world into one transparent dimension, the dimension of communication. In a sense, this extreme phenomenon of obscenity is exactly what Baudrillard calls the ecstasy of communication or exchange in the postmodern society. He delineates the crazy dimension of capitalism in the following passage,

We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication. And this ecstasy is obscene. Obscene is that which eliminates the gaze, the image and every representation. Obscenity is not confined to sexuality, because today there is a pornography of information and communication, a pornography of circuits and networks, of functions and objects in their legibility, availability, regulation, forced signification, capacity to perform, connection, polyvalence, their free expression. (EC 22)

As such, in the ecstatic community of intense communication, everyone is materialized to the extent that even a car becomes capable of speaking, informing us of its social status, insofar as it uses the same language as man's (EC 13). Moreover, since everyone (or more precisely, *everything*) has been mechanically whirled into the circle of commodity circulation, exposing the inwardness of subjectivity to the one dimension of communication with the others, each individual's distinctive consciousness and emotions become as transferable and replaceable as commodities in terms of their exchange value. Once entering the system of capitalistic society, all desires and fears immediately lose their distinctive essence. Instead, they are invariably coated with the numbers of their valences according to their exchange value in the free market. In short, at the stage when even the inwardness of a subject becomes obscene and entirely translatable to the world, a new world of representation takes over the original one and takes on life of its own.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, this highly transferable nature of things and even each individual's subjectivity is exactly what Baudrillard observed in the process in which an abstract image eventually usurps the position of the real. Baudrillard unfolds the process in the following four phases,

1. The image is the reflection of a profound reality.
2. It masks and denatures the profound reality.
3. It masks the *absence* of the profound reality.
4. The image has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own

pure simulacrum. (6)

As Baudrillard continues to explain, while the images still stand as the subsidiary vehicles to transmit reality in the first two phases, they are found to be the only things that are *real* in the last two phases. That is, although the signifiers always take on their referential meanings, the original reality is irreducible. In fact, what has been present and real is merely the apparent residue of the mythical truth. Considering the transformation, not recovery, of the original reality, Baudrillard thus remarks, “the real is no longer what it was” (SS 6). Indeed, here, if we apply Baudrillard’s theory of simulation to the “ringed fever” under research, we could testify to the feasibility of the above formulation as follows:

1. The urban legend is the reflection of a profound fear caused by the posthuman anxiety.
2. It masks and denatures the profound fear.
3. It masks the *absence* of the profound fear.
4. It has no relation to any fear whatsoever: the legend is the fear itself.

Here, it is clear that in the same technological manner from which the posthuman fear is derived, the fear repeats itself in the spreading of the legend. More precisely, the fear is pursued by man’s blind escape of it. Yet, since, as we have clarified, the legend never evokes the same fear without transforming it into something reproducible in some way, the fear seems to become merely formal and not as threatening as it once was. In certain respects, as long as the fear is communicable and even exchangeable, it is nothing but *a* commodity in the capitalistic market of circulation. No longer an unbearable horror, it is now a rejoicing media by which people exchange comradeship with one another or more importantly, fill up their fantasy of the world. In a sense, at the beginning of the film, this is exactly how the two teenage girls (Tomoko and her friend) could possibly talk about the deadly videotape and even pick up the ringed phone amidst a bizarre

atmosphere intermingling intermittent horror and laughter.

III. The Return of Sadako's Gaze

In a conclusive overview of the spreading of the legend, the impulse to dance with the jubilant and exultant structure now is clarified to be one of the most essential motives that propel the metastasis of the terrible urban mystery. As we have analyzed using Baudrillard's formulation, in the representation and propagation of the mythical origin, the unnamable fear of the inhuman spirit seems to have been transformed into something exchangeable. Yet, taken from the other side, ecstatic as the postmodern condition of intense communication might be, the carnival-like phenomenon of the rejoicing representation and the communication of the mystery is merely a fantastic illusion. As Baudrillard also explicitly remarks, "when the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning" (SS 6). Furthermore, as Baudrillard continues to reveal, the real still fascinates us; it never dies without promising its resurrection; and this is "the vengeance of the dead" (SS 9). That is, although the original fear of the Other has somehow been masked in its transformed guise, its threat is still there. Indeed, the unpredictable hazards of life have never vanished from our *real* lives. Although literature, religion, and philosophy have been engaged in transforming the real life and world into words with meaning organically structured under symbolic order, the contingency of life goes far beyond the order. In fact, it is probably with the awareness of the possible "vengeance of the dead" that the participation in the rejoicing exchange and communication of fear becomes even more urgent and alluring. In Baudrillard's words, it is only the indistinguishableness of fear that seduces the structural production of the fear. As he articulates in the function of seduction,

Distinctive signs, full signs, never seduce us. Seduction only comes through empty, illegible, insoluble, arbitrary, fortuitous signs, which glide by lightly, modifying the index of the refraction of space. They are signs without a subject of enunciation, nor an

enounced, they are pure signs in that they are neither discursive nor generate any exchange. The protagonists of seduction are neither locutor nor interlocutee, they are in a dual and antagonistic situation. As such the signs of seduction do not signify; they are of the order of the ellipse, of the short circuit, of the flash of wit (*le trait d'esprit*). (EC 59–60)

In the film, this is exactly how Sadako's curse resists the deciphered storyline of a vengeful ghost. Determined to look into the mystery of the cursed videotape, Reiko and her ex-husband take the risk of being cursed to die in seven days, seeking to piece up the original story from the discontinuous or even illegible messages transmitted through the cursed videotape. Then, they decipher the tragedy behind the animosity of the vengeful ghost as follows: born as a descendant of a telepathic woman, Sadako's psychic powers far surpass her begetter; at her will, she takes the life of a journalist who humiliates her mother on the occasion of testifying to her mother's extrasensory perception; Sadako's evilness drove her mother to commit suicide, which in turn caused the investigator of her mother's telepathy to throw her down into a well; to get even with the malignance she had received from man, the ghost of the child thus disseminated her terror and evilness by means of the video curse. To appease Sadako's enmity and lift the curse she had imprecated for retaliation, Reiko and her ex-husband seek to uncover the well in the hope that Sadako's remains can be retrieved and given a proper burial so as to put an end to her tragedy. Rewardingly, Reiko passed the cursed time safely. Yet, beyond their (and our) expectation, Ryuji does not escape from the fate as the other cursed watchers of this evil videotape are doomed to meet. He dies in the striking scene which marks the most horrible and classical scene of this film: Sadako drags her insect-like body in a white gown and emerges out of the well; uncannily staggering out of the TV set, she enters into Ryuji's living room; and finally, after her approaching body confronts Ryuji (or us spectators who have now been profoundly identified with the camera eye), Sadako turns her evil gaze inside out, and fills the close-up shot with her malicious eyeball. Ryuji

dies in the same manner as the other victims, with his mouth open wide, his face severely distorted. And it is at the knowledge of Ryuji's death that Reiko comes to realize that her findings about Sadako's revenge have been wrongly deciphered. To save more people from the curse, namely, her son Yoichi, she then has to try on another experiment. At the end of the film, that is exactly how the solution to the cursed video turns into an indifferent propagation of the tape. Here, the sympathetic investigation into the origin of Sadako's curse has given way to a carnival-like representation and reproduction of Sadako's story. Sadako's danger is concealed in the ecstatic communication again.

Indeed, in her exchangeable mode, Sadako has become a complete commodity not only for people in the film, but for us spectators about to be drawn into the film/ring. Moreover, her terrifying gaze, her alien way of staggering and her most celebrated emergence out of TV set, have all created a new spectacle of what we might call the horror. In this way, in the dark house of cinema, Nakata's Sadako represents and transforms the inner darkness of our hearts. At the moment when Sadako stares her resentful gaze toward us, as Lacan tells us, it is merely the reflection of our desire and fear of the unapproachable eye positioned at the inaccessible side. Yet, as Baudrillard also tells us, the frozen fear of the inhuman ghost may still be defrosted at the moment when it becomes the pure sign of emptiness and meaninglessness. Beneath the surface of ecstatic communication, there thus still lies the volcano of "the vengeance of the dead" surging to erupt, or more specifically, to come out from our TV set.

The spectacle which congeals the postmodern fear, then, proves to be a mere illusion, as ephemeral and flashy as the instant shot of a camera shutter. Yet, living in an age of globalization when spectacles, information, and communication overwhelmingly come in floods, we can never go back to the primitive state unaffected by the cinematic apparatus. To see through the phantasmagoria of what we might call the distinctive emotions such as fear and desire, as Lacan and Baudrillard might suggest, we can only receive (or create) more diverse cinematic spectacles from the technological apparatus, which in many respects, is exactly what Nakata has been engaged in the Japanese *Ring*

of 1998.

NOTES

¹ J-horror is the contraction for Japanese horror film, a particular style of horror film that can be traced back to the horror and ghost story classics or *kaidan* of the Edo period and the Meiji period. Whereas American horror films tend to rely on special effects and a multitude of sub-genre, J-horror tends to focus on psychological horror and tension building. Among the conventional themes of J-horror films are possession, exorcism, demons or *yōkai*, and the vengeance of a female ghost or *yūrei*.

² The whole *Ring* series contain *Ring/Ringu* (1998), *Rasen/Spiral* (1998), *Ring 2* (1998), and *Ring 0: birthday* (2000). The worldwide remakes include *The Ring Virus* directed by the Korean Dong-bin Kim (1999), the American *The Ring* (2002), and the American *The Ring 2* (2005).

<http://www.mandiapple.com/snowblood/theringcycle.htm>

³ The transnational “ring fever” include symptoms like Sadako’s funerals seriously held on the O-Bon festival, children playing Sadako in the image of her appearance and way of walking during recess, hot discussions over the details of the film on the internet, and finally, the spreading of this ambivalent fear and desire by means of some illegal copy and distribution of the film—a fact which may or may not go beyond the film maker’s expectation, but one certainly reminding us of what White termed the “technological expedient” (41) to escape from Sadako’s curse.

⁴ <http://www.theringworld.com/koji.php>

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