



Psychoanalytic Takes on the Cinema

Friday, November 14, 2025, 4:00pm-5:30pm

Discussion of the film *The Thing*
Via Zoom



1982 (109 min)

Director: John Carpenter

Discussant: Alex Smith, PsyD

A research team in Antarctica is hunted by a shape-shifting alien that assumes the appearance of its victims.

Learning Objectives:

1. Review and elaborate on the effectiveness of horror motifs in rendering the individual and group processes with fantastical tropes.
2. Describe the concepts of “existential permeability”, “unbounded consciousness”, and the “psychic envelope” in individual and group processes.
3. Describe aspects of the process of paranoia as it is reflected in the horror narrative.

1.5 CME/CE available for physicians, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, licensed professional counselors.

*** Film must be viewed prior to event.***

Presentation At surface level fantastical, appalling, and occasionally comical, horror renders that which is unthinkable or unspeakable into inhuman, slimy, or spectral forms, presenting the taboo or the overwhelming at a safe, controllable distance from the self. In horror, unthinkable and unspeakable aspects of the “self” can be experienced as the monstrous “other” and exorcised with flamethrowers. The horror movie generates credibility through performance, photography, and effects that ground the viewer in a “reality” that can then become credibly unreal. This magical reality evokes archaic experiences of the

self as unbounded and vulnerable, taking on challenging, unsettling thoughts and feelings while allowing for the suspension of the neatly boundaried “I” of the viewer.

John Carpenter’s *The Thing* belongs to a rich tradition of paranoia and body horror in the uncanny narrative and horror cinema. The self, here under the condition of isolation and environmental confusion, becomes vulnerable to external corruption. The un-integrable impulse is cast off, producing a disintegrated state. Then, in the presence of an alien “other”, the once familiar body is usurped. The mind is subsumed. The “me” becomes a “me” copy that is at once terrifying and terrified, its sole purpose being to consume additional “others.” *The Thing* is an allegory for the mental mechanisms of unbounded consciousness: not only the body, but also the psychological boundaries constituting the self, are at risk.

In working on this allegory, we will briefly touch on horror cinema’s enduring interest in paranoia and the unbounded consciousness. We will consider Clara Keane’s clairvoyant work on existential permeability and Andre Green’s psychic envelopes as regards their explanatory power for experiences of unbounded consciousness, paranoia, and uncanny encounters. We will see how *The Thing*, as an apex of creep-tastic cinema, resonates with our own experiences—both archaic and present-day—of the fragility of our distinct, boundaried sense of a “me”, and why it matters.

Discussant: Alex Smith, PsyD, completed his postdoctoral fellowship and additional trainings in psychoanalytic theory, psychotherapy, and supervision at the New York Psychoanalytic Society and Institute and the Washington School of Psychiatry. He is an Associate Professor at George Washington University. He has led classes in psychological assessment, psychotherapy, ethics, and the writing of the horror story. Alex has a private practice in Washington, DC

Pre-registration is required via the WBCP website at <http://wbcp.org>. If you do not have an account on the WBCP website, you will need to create a “guest account” to register and view/print your CME/CE credit certificate after the seminar. For registration assistance, contact the WBCP at 301-470-3635/ 410-792-8060 / 202-237-1854 or admin@wbcp.org

To Register:

https://wbcp.memberclicks.net/reg_psy_cinema_25-26

REGISTRATION DEADLINE:

Wednesday, November 12, 2025, at 4:30 pm

Fees:

I do not need CME/CE	\$0.00
1.5 CME/CE	\$67.50

Please note, a confidential evaluation will be sent out after this program. We are required by our accrediting organization to provide a summary of evaluation results within 30 days of the completion of a program. In order to comply with this

requirement, we will close the evaluation link three weeks after the program. Those who want CE credits AFTER the evaluation closure will be charged a \$30 processing fee for us to reopen the evaluation and generate a certificate.

References:

Craig, S. G. (2004). Invasion of the individual: John Carpenter's modernization of the myth of identity-theft in *The Thing*, *Prince of Darkness*, and *They Live*. *Popular Culture Review*, 15(1), 123–130. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2831-865X.2004.tb00621.x>

Canelas Neto, J.-M. (2018). Reflection on the void in psychoanalysis: From horror of the void to the void as a creator of metaphors. *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 82(4), 1126–1137. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfp.824.1126>

Perelberg, R. J. (2016). Negative hallucinations, dreams and hallucinations: The framing structure and its representation in the analytic setting. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 97(6), 1575–1590. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-8315.12572>

*There is no known commercial support for this program.
CVs available upon request.*

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The American Psychoanalytic Association designates this Live Activity for a maximum of **1.5 AMA PRA** Category 1 Credit(s) TM. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

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