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BLOODBATHS AND COREFESTS: HAVE LATEST FILMS GONE TOO FAR?
THE NEW FACE OF HORROR

BERNARD PERUSSE
THE GAZETTE

With Eli Roth's Hostel tossing severed limbs and spraying buckets of blood across multiplex screens since Jan. 6, the expression "box-office gross" has taken on an extra meaning.

For many, the decline of the Roman Empire was never this bad. Detractors say Roth's gorefest – about a group of libidinous young men whose quest for kicks in Slovakia brings them to the sexually charged accommodations of the film's title – has pushed violence to an unacceptable level of nausea-inducing explicitness.

But unacceptable to whom? As of Monday, five weekends after Roth's cinematic assault opened in theatres, moviegoers worldwide had paid more than \$54 million for the privilege of watching characters be tortured on-screen by thrill-seeking, high-rolling tourists.

Clearly, it's a long way from the then-shocking shower scene in Psycho, in which Alfred Hitchcock used chocolate syrup to simulate blood.

McGill University English professor Trevor Ponech, who taught a course on horror films in 2003, said the content of Hostel is nothing new, pointing to the work of pioneer goremeister Herschell Gordon Lewis, who made Blood Feast in 1963 and Two Thousand Maniacs a year later. Both were marketed to drive-in movie audiences. "You would see people's legs being sawed off and stuff like that," Ponech said. "But obviously, back in those days, the special effects weren't as compelling."

In fact, the slaughter-and-gore genre predates cinema, Ponech argued, citing Paris's Grand Guignol Theatre, which was founded in 1897 and specialized in grisly, graphic terror plays that regularly had audience members depositing their lunch on their shoes.

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