Having explored the "old school" of horror films earlier in the week, and with an examination of the mad doctors and the "things" due in September, we're turning tonight to the non-physical horror film — the horror of suggestion and understatement; films built around such intangibles as fear, superstition, the supernatural.

Is it mere coincidence that all of our films tonight, while scorning monsters and phantoms in their quest for more intellectual horror, revolve around man's simplest and oldest fear — the fear of night?

Program in order of screening:

"THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE" (excerpt) Rko Radio, 1946. Director: Robert Siodmak
Dorothy McGuire, George Brent, Ethel Barrymore.
In the mid-forties, Robert Siodmak seemed to be taking over from Fritz Lang as a master of the suspense thriller, and "The Spiral Staircase" was one of his best films of that period. Even though the identity of the "mystery" killer was rather obvious, it had some capital thrill sequences— all of them built more or less around the fear of night. Our sequence is from the very opening of the picture — a perfect opening for film society audiences in that a murder is committed during a performance of Griffith's "Sands of Dee" with Mae Marsh and Bobby Harron!

"THE RED HOUSE" (excerpt) Sol Lesser-UA, 1947. Director: Delmer Daves
Although a rather wild and rambling thriller, "The Red House" did have some excellent atmospheric stuff — including this excellent sequence of a youth's flight through a "haunted" wood at night. Beautifully edited by the late Merrill White, and with some effective musical fireworks from Miklos Rozsa, it was quite the best sequence in the film.

"THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY" (excerpt) MGM, 1945. Director: Albert Lewin
Hurd Hatfield, George Sanders, Donna Reed.
A meticulous adaptation of Wilde, Lewin's film was elegant and erratic, but always interesting. Its horror, of course, depended largely upon cumulative effect, and our sequence — the unmasking of the painting and the murder of Basil (Lowell Gilmore) may not be quite as effective torn out of context, and without the shock effect of the sudden introduction of color. Nevertheless, it is still a most stylish and macabre episode.

"I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE" (Excerpt) Rko, 1943 Dir: Jacques Tourneur
Frances Dee, Tom Conway, James Ellison.
Strangely Dreyer-like at times, "I Walked With a Zombie" was one of the better Val Lewton thrillers, markedly restrained and unsensational, especially in contrast with "White Zombie" of earlier this week. Probably too familiar through its occasional Museum of Modern Art showings to warrant our showing it complete, it is nevertheless a film that should be represented in this compilation.

"THE WOMAN WHO CAME BACK" (Excerpt) Republic, 1945. Dir: Walter Colmes
Nancy Kelly, John Loder, Otto Kruger.
Surprisingly little known, "The Woman Who Came Back" (from which we are showing three sequences) was obviously influenced by the Val Lewtons, and was an excellent and quite grim little picture of suspected witchcraft in modern New England. Extremely well directed by the usually uninteresting
Walter Gomes, and beautifully photographed by that old veteran of "Lorna Doone" and "The Black Pirate", Henry Sharp, it could have been a first-rate horror film. It was prevented from being so by a ludicrous script tangent at the very last minute, which explained away all the unexplainable elements by simply ignoring them.

"THE AMAZING MR X" (also known as "The Spiritualist") Excerpt.

Eagle-Lion, 1948. Dir: Bernard Vorhaus
Lynn Bari, Richard Carlson, Turhan Bey, Cathy O'Donnell.

A late hangover both from the Val Lewtons and the post-war cycle of psychological melodramas, "Amazing Mr X" (written by our old friend Crane Wilbur) had some extremely powerful episodes, made the more so by the cunning stark light-and-shadow camerawork of John Alton. For a film of its type and size, it was quite unusually intelligently made, and even had the integrity to retain a suspicion of the supernatural in its climax, after having explained the mystery away in sensible fashion.

"DEAD OF NIGHT" (Mirror Sequence) Rank, 1946.

With Googie Withers, Ralph Michael, Esme Percy.

To my mind at least, this sequence - together with Carl Dreyer's "Vampyr" - ranks as just about the strongest and most effective horror material ever put on the screen, quite putting to shame the industrious efforts of Messrs. Karloff, Lugosi, Atwill et al. "Vampyr" didn't let its audience in on what was going on - save that it was evil, and supernatural. The mirror episode from "Dead of Night" quite plainly shows what is happening -- but lets you wonder why and how -- all with the awful suspicion that so matter of fact is it all, and so logical in a diabolic sort of way, that it could very well happen in your own mirror!

INTERMISSION

"CAT PEOPLE" Rko Radio, 1942. Pro: Val Lewton; director: Jacques Tourneur
Kent Smith, Simone Simon, Jane Randolph, Jack Holt.

The first of Lewton's horror series for Rko, and together with "The Body Snatcher" the best and most literate, "Cat People" has been too much written about and perhaps even over-praised for much additional comment to be necessary here. Slow in getting under way, but always absorbing, it succeeds uncommonly well in getting its audience to believe in cat people (a variation on werewolves) while showing nothing physically to substantiate that belief. It suggests; it plays on natural fears and the mind's illogical supposition that A plus B equals C rather than just AB. Like most of the Lewtons, it sex is its terror in everyday surroundings, and confirms rather uneasily that to live in the heart of civilisation is hardly a guarantee of safety from ... but of course, it never comes out and names all the fears that it could! Its grim and foreboding quotes from "The Anatomy of Atavism" make it quite clear that the Middle Ages are still with us!

"Cat People" has been most widely praised, of course, for its swimming pool sequence, and indeed it is both an outstanding sequence of terror, and one of genuine nightmare quality. Needless to say, this sequence was cut in its entirety in the film's first appearance on television, although I understand that it had been replaced for some showings this week. Even apart from this episode however, there is much powerful material in "Cat People", and some extremely curious dialogue. I still haven't figured out the significance of that curious meal ("Bavarian cream ... roquefort ... and apple pie") or of a psychiatrist telling his patient to go home and live a normal life!