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Short-Form Horror: History, Pedagogy, and Practice

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Edited by Sonia Lupher & Alanna Thain

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Brief Encounter:
Short-Form Horror Across the Media Spectrum

Sonia Lupher and Alanna Thain

In the companion essay for Lucy Campbell's *The Pig Child* (2014) on Short of the Week, filmmaker Rob Munday asserts that horror shorts tend to be "Riddled with clichés and populated with predictable plots, for a bracket of storytelling focused on scares." Munday echoes the reservations expressed by many critics of the horror genre writ large, dismissing the genre as oriented only toward a cheap payoff. Munday's impression brings up two contradicting points of defense. First, Cynthia Felando's (2015) observation that short fiction films tend to build up to "two different kinds of unexpected endings: the 'surprise' and the 'twist'" (58); thus, Munday's criticism of short-form horror is a known facet of the short film's narrative framing more broadly. Second, as horror fans and scholars know very well, horror narratives across media are infinitely more diverse and complex than many critics give them credit for. The past several years have witnessed the genre's revival within mainstream discourse, due in large part to innovative features from filmmakers who represent marginalized groups within the film industry—among them *Jennifer's Body* (2009, directed by Karyn Kusama) and *Get Out* (2016, directed by Jordan Peele). However, a conscientious understanding of the innovation and variety observable in the horror genre is not possible without sustained critical attention to the short form.

For emerging and established filmmakers alike, working in the short form has a number of benefits: it is an affordable option for filmmakers, especially when they are just starting out; it offers learning opportunities for filmmakers who may not have access to formal training; and (because shorts are not commodified in the same way as a feature-length films), the short form allows for abundant creative freedom and experimentation. The short form is more pliable to individual artistic visions and opens possibilities to filmmakers who may feel restricted within or excluded from feature-length filmmaking. As a result, gender minorities, BIPOC, AAPI and Latinx artists, queer, trans and non-binary filmmakers (or whose work draws on multiple minoritarian perspectives) are more likely to approach production through the short form: television, music videos, online content, short films of all genres, and other

short-form or serial ventures. This accessibility has undeniable allure for those traditionally excluded from the resource-intensive and access-dependent feature format. In the short form, horror filmmakers tackle social and political topics such as racism, sexuality, disability, reproductive health, mental health, body image, and cultural experience through a variety of innovative formal and narrative styles—fiction, experimental modes, music videos, animation, and documentary. The short form is, in brief, a more accessible form to filmmakers at any stage of their career, and for some filmmakers, the short form is preferred. As Monika Estrella Negra, director of the short films *Flesh* (2016) and *Bitten: A Tragedy* (2021), puts it: "as an independent filmmaker—and by choice an independent filmmaker—I think that when there is some type of weird control, especially from the White gaze over our creative properties, we really miss a mark on what we were truly trying to convey to audiences that inevitably see our work" (quoted in Bethea 2022, 77). For Negra, choosing to make short films and maintain creative control is more important than trying to break into mainstream industry. It is in the short form that we can see the greatest amount of fearless innovation and demographic variety among horror filmmakers.

Unfortunately, short horror films—like short films more generally—suffer from a lack of professional and remunerated distribution. Ramon Lobato (2012) notes the importance of distribution practices in bringing attention to different titles when he argues, "Distribution plays a crucial role in film culture—it determines what films we see, and when and how we see them; and it also determines what films we do not see. Thousands of features are produced each year, but only a small number of these will play to large audiences" (2). These numbers are magnified when we add short film to the mix, particularly at the intersection of genre. Horror film festivals are significant as among the only organizations in the world that regularly curate and showcase a significant portion of short-form horror films for a live audience; events such as Nightmares Film Festival in Ohio, Blood in the Snow in Toronto, and Etheria Film Night in Los Angeles take evident pride in their horror short selections. Furthermore, there are a number of online short film distribution outlets including Short of the Week, Film Shortage, and *The New Yorker* Screening Room, as well as specific online channels and streaming services devoted to curating horror shorts (such as Alter on YouTube, Hulu's Bite-Size Halloween series, and Shudder). This suggests that the short film distribution model is heavily dependent on audience interest and motivation. In order to accurately assess the intricacies of independent film distribution in the digital age, there is a strong need for more directed analysis and discussion of short films at large within film studies. This special issue aims, among other things, to fill this gap

in academic film studies through particular study of the horror short, which accounts for a significant number of the most widely circulated and curated shorts in existence today. Attending to the short form also requires critical models that bring film studies into interdisciplinary dialogue with approaches that draw on methods from queer, feminist, decolonial, and critical race studies as well as other media forms, as demonstrated by the authors in this issue.

This issue also reflects how the internet, as an increasingly important site of encounter, distribution, and exchange, has rendered the short form itself ever more encompassing and challenging to define. At the 2022 exhibition *The Horror Show: A Twisted Tale of Modern Britain* (curated by Iain Forsyth, Jane Pollard and Claire Catterall), the historical overview of the 1990s in British horror included a large screen composed of sixteen televisions, showcasing a montage of that decade's horror shorts: music videos for Tricky, Chemical Brothers and George Michael by artists such as Chris Cunningham, Spike Jones and Jonathan Glazer; animated promos for MTV; excerpts from the BBC's reality horror mock documentary *Ghostwatch* (1992); and commercials such as the grisly "Smoker of the Future." This fragmented vision of short form horror on the horizon of Web 2.0, YouTube, and the internet's wild archiving of moving image media retroactively replayed the impact of the short form's intensity. The 21st century signaled a novel availability of the short form, rewriting histories and expanding the playing field for makers, critics, fans and curators. The essays in this special issue reflect the richness of the short form for contemporary horror studies. The question of what constitutes "short form" is itself up for grabs in new and exciting ways. While our call invited consideration of "short films, online videos, commercials, TV series, podcasts, music videos, dance films, horror GIFs, short stories, flash fiction, multimedia projects, photo essays, video essays, experimental film," it is not self-evident what "short" constitutes across these varied approaches. While often short form is defined in opposition to the standard of the feature, in different contexts it acquires a nuanced range of connotations that require novel analytical approaches. If an episode of a TV series is a short form, what of the long-term commitment of an entire series? How does the stability of platforms, circuits of distribution, and even of genre itself amplify the impact of an individual media piece? Our authors address these questions and more by giving critical attention to what Carolyn Mauricette, director of the Horror Development Lab at Blood in the Snow Film Festival, terms "bite-sized chunks" of horror, making of them a whole meal. Four feature essays, two interviews, two audiovisual essays and a curated dossier of reflections on international shorts offer a prismatic take on the short form and how they work across horror media today.

In This Special Issue

For many of us, our primal scene of horror is situated in childhood, where even a brief moment can be amplified into a lifetime obsession. Childhood is a space-time where, as in so many horror tales, the affective impact of an encounter is out of proportion to any common metric of measure. A weird little lump under a blanket in the corner of a darkened room or an image half glimpsed, half remembered can acquire a haunting persistence. It is no surprise then that our first two long form essays deal with different ends of the childhood media spectrum: one in media explicitly for children but with layers to unpack for years, and the other explicitly NOT for children, but encountered in a short gasp of inappropriate reveal.

In Aiden Tait's "'This Has All Happened Before': Intergenerational Trauma, Tulpas, and Tackling Lovecraft's Cultural Legacy in America in *Scooby Doo! Mystery Incorporated*," the semi-anthology short form of the 2010-13 children's animated series becomes a rich opportunity for the long arc of Scooby Doo seriality to take on "the perpetuation of settler-colonial violence and cycles of secrecy and oppression in contemporary American identity." In their deep dive into *SD!MI* as a fascinating candidate for precursor of the "dark reboot" that has become a convention of popular updates of youth media, Tait brilliantly contributes to the growing literature on the "Lovecraftian horror mode" and its relation to the harsh legacy of American colonialism, genocide and slavery, compellingly making the case that "*SD!MI* foregrounds semi-anthology short-form horror animation as uniquely capable of 'unmasking' Lovecraft's legacy and the horror of perpetuating intergenerational trauma for a contemporary audience in the best way Scooby-Doo knows how: the revelation of a grim reality lurking beneath a rubber mask scapegoat, with a dash of the supernatural for emphasis." Tait richly fills in the series' adaptations and citations of history, mythology and the figure of the Lovecraftian tulpa, a thoughtform made physical reality, in an attentive reading across the short circuit of the Monster of the Week format and the building dread of an "increasingly sinister narrative arc" of what Tait calls a "love letter to American horror."

Alexander Svensson's "Multiplex Monstrosities: Promotional Jolts and Marketing Mishaps at the Movies" takes up the short form of the jolt as starting point of his exploration of the multiplex as a site for the unexpected. This well-documented and often wry account looks at the panic around accidental exposures to horror media during theatrical screenings of children's films, as when late night preview screenings of *Twilight Saga: Eclipse* in 2010 were "marred" by the screening of the trailer for *Paranormal Activity 2*, deemed just

too terrifying for the delicate sensibilities of young, female fans by sensationalist press coverage. Svenson, through reading for "discourses of agitation," connects these blips to longer histories of industrial promotion, social control, and gendered expectations. In this case, the short form of the horror trailer and the shock effect renew cinema as a space of risk and risk management. Svensson's read draws out the value of attending to the short form—in this case the trailer—both to consider what it actually does and how it works, and to relink it to wider circuits that extend the short form's reach. Svensson concludes by slowing down the short circuit of cliché around gendered and childish "performances" of terror to resituate the "real story" in long histories of feminized screaming at the movies, and the "real" fright of children's "ability to feel and perform their (early, developing) spectatorship in complex, contradictory, surprising, and even banal ways" as they "navigate the strange pleasures of cinematic horror."

Such a second look is what the brevity and intensity of short form horror allows. Charlotte Scurlock's "Real Ghosts: Trauma, True Crime and Temporality in *Sharp Objects*" mobilizes this double vision in her audiovisual essay on HBO's 2018 Southern Gothic limited series. Drawing on tropes of "complex TV" and on the series' generic hybridity, Scurlock's approach animates the feeling of watching the work itself, redoubling the show's refractions of familial and intergenerational trauma through setting, atmosphere and obscured histories of violence that have attenuated relations to the promise of revelation. Working across multiple forms of attention, between the binging of streaming seriality and the formal lures that reward the replay, Scurlock models a poetic and vulnerable critical gaze. What keeps us looking in an age of distraction and endless availability, and how can horror interrupt spectatorial habits of relishing true crimes' watered-down horror of the exploitation of everyday life and easy blame?

The short form, as we have argued, registers a particular appeal for those on the margins of mainstream film production due to its accessibility and imaginative plasticity. Erica Tortolani explores this allure, at the nexus of experimental film and contemporary social media horror, in "Short-Form Women-Made Horror: Origins and Observations." Building on her own research into what she terms "horror's founding mothers," Tortolani rereads a set of experimental women filmmakers (Maya Deren, Mary Ellen Bute, and Claire Parker) as horror filmmakers to track how they transformed horror media "by reworking generic tropes, at times through intertextual exchanges; by building worlds through alternative, immersive sensorial experiences; and, as a result, by encouraging active spectatorship." This includes a reading of Deren's

incomplete short *Witch's Cradle* (1944), currently having a moment thanks to its central place at Cecelia Alemani's curation of the 2022 Venice Biennale, which, like Tortolani, has thoughtfully re-curated older works by women artists along with their contemporary peers in a re-fabulation of historical potential. Observing that this work "encapsulates the power dynamics of the chaotic back-and-forth between dominance and submission," Tortolani argues that an affordance of the short form for women might be that the tight structure promotes ambiguity and irresolution, rather than the need to wrap up and resolve questions that have no easy answer in the world we live in—a riposte to Munday's critique of *The Pig Child*. Turning to the contemporary popularity of women-made horror on TikTok, she underscores the appeal of a format that redoubles horror's affective participation with the chance to create dialogue between spectators and creators.

The desire to share and explore that which the mainstream neglects is also at the heart of Finley Freibert's "Angelic Frankenstein and the History of Bob Mizer's Pre-Stonewall Muscle Monsters." Freibert uncovers the fascinating queer history of filmmaker, photographer, activist and entrepreneur Mizer's mid-60s mail-order monster shorts, from *Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment* (1965) and *Psychedelic Monster* (1968) to his crossover film *Angelic Frankenstein* (1969). Through close reading and rich archival detail, Freibert traces the films' delicious and "obvious gay sensibility and undisguised homoeroticism," arguing that these works "provided a maximum of gay visibility on the cusp of Stonewall" distinct from more mainstream and oblique representations of queerness. Beyond the films themselves, Freibert traces the support networks of production, distribution and reception that created circuits of exchange and desire amongst gay men (and beyond) around these small gauge films designed for intimate, small-scale consumption. Much as these works showcased the semi-nude male body, Freibert argues that Mizer's approach to production and publicity made his "muscle monster films … unique in their comprehensive implementation of a queer sensibility on all levels of the media communication spectrum." This demands a rethinking both of queer horror histories and Mizer's own significance as an activist. As Freibert reveals, by relentlessly remixing the queer-coded mad scientist of pop culture remakes of Frankenstein, Mizer demonstrates cannily reimagined formal traditions of exploitation and horror film cultures to spectacularize gay male desire and build a shared language that reroutes horror, desire and pleasure.

Rounding out our long-form section is Steven Greenwood's video essay "Optional Narratives and Supplemental Storytelling in Behaviour Interactive's *Dead By Daylight*." Greenwood walks us through the playable world of the

popular match-based game *Dead by Daylight*, where four "survivors" compete against a killer in short sequences. He explores how we might undo the opposition of narrative and ludic desires, often termed "ludonarrative dissonance" that many such games produce by noticing and engaging the intense and pleasurable participatory options players encounter during the twenty-minute, cyclical "rinse and repeat" sessions. For Greenwood, even players who never access the vast archive (called "The Archives") of narrative materials that *Dead By Daylight* produces but locates outside of the game world itself, nonetheless embody "the narrative and story simply by playing the game." As such, rethinking what narrative is and does reimagines the body genre of horror for an era of often ambiguous participation and affective investments.

A common thread of these reflections on short form horror is the complexity of horror desires, especially when routed through formats that are outside of mainstream feature films. Intensity and shared experience make manifest that "something more" that horror is so adept at tracking. We conclude by looking at two scenes of short-form encounters with major impact-horror festivals that are platforming and amplifying the short form's particular power. Sonia Lupher interviews Ann Sarafina Nneoha, founder of the Africa International Horror Film Festival. Uniquely devoted to screening primarily African-made horror films, the festival exploits the concentrated attention of festival time to provide a lasting window on African horror production, still under-represented in the global horror community. Nneoha's passion project, which launched in 2021, is "an effort to revive the horror genre in Africa and allow films in that category to take their rightful place in the commercial horror market." Marveling at "how horror is interwoven in our storytelling as Africans and yet we hardly tell these stories," Nneoha's work underscores that there is not only an attention imbalance in global horror when it comes to African storytelling, but that this is reflected in the opportunities and resources for aspiring horror makers on the continent. This same observation—that "exposure" needs sustained care, opportunity and resources beyond the festival blip—is the driving motivation between the subject of our second industry interview, conducted by Alanna Thain, with Development Coordinator and Programmer Carolyne Mauricette of the Horror Development Lab at the Blood in the Snow Festival in Toronto, Canada. Also bringing their insights to the conversation are BITS Festival Director and Founder Kelly Michael Stewart, along with Development Advisor Alison Lang, lab participants Javier Badillo, Adrian Bobb, Nat Marshik, and Shelagh Rowen-Legg, and jury members Victor Stiff and Alex Hall. Also launched in 2021, this project takes the promise of the short form film as "calling card," and tries to make it a reality for makers from

under-represented groups, turning the soft skills of pitching, financing, adapting and even schmoozing into material resources. In this way, the HDL reflects a more diverse and complex horror audience than usually imagined and reinforces the need and desire to see a wider variety of stories on our screens.

This last desire is the driving force behind our final section in this special issue, a curated dossier of short-takes on recent short horror films. The global reach of contemporary horror is most evident when we turn to the short form. When we began to compile this special issue, we felt it was necessary to provide, wherever possible, an expansive look at the ways horror filmmakers are using the short film form in vastly different cultural contexts and to explore the experiences of marginalized perspectives unique to those contexts. Because short films are lesser-known and often difficult to access, we provided a brief list of possible titles for contributors to consider. We are including this list at the end of this introduction for reference. The initial goal was to include essays on films from as many countries as possible. Ultimately, while we succeeded in representing a wide variety of regions and countries, we see this as one step toward mapping the landscape of short horror film production on a global scale—a step that we hope will motivate others to build upon this work elsewhere. Another step for further research on short-form horror is to extend into the 21st century, as the dossier's short takes are focused exclusively on films from 2012-2021.

We begin the dossier with Murray Leeder's essay on Doreen Manuel's *These Walls* (2012, Canada), which takes on the horrors of Canada's residential school system, which kidnapped and brutalized generations of Indigenous children in what, only in 2022, was formally acknowledged as an act of genocide. Indigenous communities continue to be faced with the ongoing effects of historical and generational trauma—particularly those who suffered in the residential schools that were permanently closed only in 1996. Crucially, as Leeder notes, the film was made nearly a decade before GPS technology revealed a mass grave buried underneath a residential school in British Columbia, a pivotal discovery, though only the first, that forced settler Canadians to face their complicity in the treatment of Indigenous Canadians. We follow the themes of Indigenous historical and generational trauma down to Australia with Dani Bethea's piece on Jon Bell's *The Moogai* (2020), which focuses on the aftereffects of Australia's stolen generation—children who, between 1910 and 1970, were removed from their families and raised in settler Australian's homes with the goal of assimilation. As Bethea notes, this harrowing film about the combined effects of post-traumatic stress and

postpartum anxiety calls attention to the horrors that come to the surface when survivors become parents.

Next, we move to South Korea with Seung-hwan Shin's essay on Moon Ji-won's *Nose Nose Nose EYES!* (2017). Noting that *Nose Nose Nose EYES!* is adapted from true events that shocked South Koreans in the early 21st century, Shin applies the Deleuzian framework of naturalism to discuss how the film brings to life raw, real-life horrors. Sometimes, Shin argues, the domestic setting hides more terrors than anyplace else. Following Shin's essay is Qian Zhang on *Koreatown Ghost Story* (2021, USA)—codirected by Minsun Park and Teddy Tenenbaum. Here, Zhang thoughtfully brings in the experience of the Asian diaspora, specifically Korean-Americans, to invite a consideration of Asian American horror. As in *Nose Nose Nose EYES!*, *Koreatown Ghost Story's* horror is centered in the domestic space; as Zhang highlights, these horrors manifest themselves through the clash of cultures between the "Americanized" protagonist and the ghostly presence that ties her back to her Korean roots.

While many of the films featured in the dossier reflect on past horrors, Ido Rosen's essay on Aharon Keshales and Navot Papushado's *F is for Falling* (2014, Israel) is grounded in the longstanding and globally scrutinized Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rosen's discussion of the film brings attention to the individuals on both sides who suffer from the ongoing conflict while exploring victimhood and power dynamics within a violent encounter between a female Israeli soldier and an armed male Palestinian youth. Importantly, this is the only film in the dossier to have been produced as a segment of an anthology film, *The ABCs of Death 2* (2014), which is a follow-up to the popular 2012 *The ABCs of Death*. These films bring together an international assortment of emerging and established horror directors, and considering its placement within this anthology, *F is for Falling* is likely among the most widely distributed films featured in the dossier.

In her essay on Lillah Halla's *Menarca* (2020, Brazil), Valeria Villegas Lindvall applies a posthumanist framework to analyze the monstrous figure that appears in the film. Lindvall's careful discussion of the film's visual style brings attention to the ways it challenges normativity and, above all, gender binarism. Dan Vena on Kaye Adelaide and Mariel Sharp's *Monsterdykë* (2021) brings the dossier to a close with a return to Canada. Vena's discussion of trans/nonbinary monstrous romance in the film is deeply enriched by his interview with the directors and analysis of their earlier horror short *Don't Text Back* (2020).

Taken together, the various components of this special issue reflect our intentions to motivate further examinations of short-form horror, particularly across different media. It is also intended to provide teaching material for

instructors who wish to enrich their syllabi. Short films are often overlooked or consulted only as an afterthought in research and in the classroom, not to mention in mainstream exhibition contexts. Perhaps because of its diversity in terms of narrative, formal, and global range, the short form remains vastly under-theorized among scholars and critics. Although many scholars have written about short films within various contexts, Richard Raskin (2002) and Cynthia Felando are among the most prominent of those committed to defining and analyzing the short film as significant form in its own right. Felando's book *Discovering Short Films* offers the most thorough definition and theorization of the short film's narrative and formal tropes, as well as numerous readings of individual short films. Because Felando spends a considerable amount of time justifying the study of the short form and noting the reasons for its subservience alongside feature-length film, especially in North America, in this special issue we have taken for granted the necessity to study the short form following Felando's observations that "shorts are now the most available and likely most popular film form on the Internet" (2) and that "[n]ot only do [short films] vastly outnumber feature-length films, they can inform a richer understanding both of film history and our current shorts-saturated landscape" (12). Indeed, the internet has enabled a much broader availability of new short films and revived older ones—among other examples, through TikTok remixes of films like Cecilia Condit's 1983 short *Possibly in Michigan* (as Tortolani highlights in her essay for this issue).

The wealth of material facilitated by the internet can be difficult to navigate; thus, we would like to close by offering some suggestions for pairing the short films featured in this special issue's dossier to feature-length films—while maintaining the assertion that these are equally valuable for classroom use on their own terms. *These Walls* would make a strong companion film to *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013) directed by Jeff Barnaby, which is similarly attuned to the mental and physical abuse of Indigenous Canadian children within the residential school system. *The Moogai* could follow a unit on Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil* (1993), another Australian film deeply concerned with confronting Indigenous history through the theme of haunting. *Nose Nose Nose EYES!* could pair well with Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019), which also utilizes the domestic space as a central location for horrific secrets. *Koreatown Ghost Story* could be paired with Mattie Do's *The Long Walk* (2019) or Iris K. Shim's *Umma* (2022), two films that showcase the diversity of horror films made by members of the Asian diaspora and place intergenerational conflict at their center. *F Is For Falling* would be a relevant companion to *Big Bad Wolves* (2013), also directed by Keshales and Papushado; both films' attention to "real-life horrors" are

underscored by the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. *Menarca* could pair well with Juliana Rojas and Marco Dutra's *Good Manners* (2017), another Brazilian film that blurs the boundaries between bodies, queerness, and monstrosity. Finally *Monsterdykë* would make a strong aesthetic connection to Guillermo del Toro's *The Shape of Water* (2017); both emphasize the horror genre's fascination with monsters, eroticism, and "queer" relationships (both in terms of sexuality and non-normative relationships).

A Preliminary List of 21st Century Short-Form Horror Titles

North America

The Darkness (Alejandro Bustos Aguilar, Mexico/USA, 2020)

The Colony (Jeff Barnaby, Canada, 2007)

Crossers (Jennifer Varenchik, USA, 2019)

Devórame (Helena Aguilar, Mexico, 2018)

Hair Wolf (Mariama Diallo, USA, 2018)

Koreatown Ghost Story (Minsun Park/Teddy Tenenbaum, USA, 2021)

Madre De Dios (Gigi Saul Guerrero, Canada/Mexico, 2015)

She Whistles (Thirza Cuthand, Canada, 2021)

Slut (Chloe Okuno, USA, 2014)

Spout (Alex C. Munoz, USA, 2009)

Suicide By Sunlight (Nikyatu Jusu, USA, 2018)

Together (Ryan Oksenberg, USA, 2019)

Central/South America

El Campo Sangriento (Vicente Campos Yanine, Chile, 2019)

The Blackout (Emiliano Romero, Argentina, 2021)

La Mejor Mamá del Mundo (Catalina Sandoval, Chile, 2019)

Milk Teeth (Felipe Vargas, Colombia/USA, 2020)

Room for Rent (Enock Carvalho & Matheus Farias, Brazil, 2016)

La Solapa (Laura Sanchez Acosta, Argentina, 2019)

S.O.S. (Ángela Tobón Ospina, Colombia, 2017)

UK/Europe/Middle East

A New Perspective (Emanuela Ponzano, France/Italy, 2020)
Aria (Christopher Poole, UK, 2021)
The Burden (Nico van den Brink, Netherlands, 2019)
Dana (Lucía Forner Segarra, Spain, 2020)
Dawn of the Deaf (Rob Savage, UK, 2016)
The Expected (Carolina Sandvik, Sweden, 2021)
The Herd (Melanie Light, UK, 2014)
Lili (Yfke Van Berckelaer, Netherlands, 2019)
Lucienne Eats a Car (Geordy Couturiau, France, 2019)
Makr (Haa Kazim, United Arab Emirates, 2019)
My First Time (Asaf Livni, Israel, 2018)
Nasty (Prano Bailey-Bond, UK, 2015)
The Pig Child (Lucy Campbell, 2014)
Piggy (Carlota Martínez-Pereda, Spain/France, 2022)

Asia

Be Careful What You Say (Bugra Mert Alkayalar, Turkey, 2020)
Chewing Gum (Mihir Fadnavis, India, 2021)
Hide and Seek (Kayoko Asakura, Japan, 2020)
Incarnation (Noboru Suzuki, Japan, 2020)
Juan-Diablo-Pablo (Ralph Pineda/Dyan Sagenas, Philippines, 2021)
Night Bus (Joe Hsieh, Taiwan, 2020)
Nose Nose Nose Eyes! (Jiwon Moon, South Korea, 2017)
Overtime (Jeshua Hamasya Christian Maloring, Indonesia, 2021)
Shadow at the Door (Roshni Rush Bhatia, India, 2019)
Vinegar Baths (Amanda Nell Eu, Malaysia)
Visitors (Kenichi Ugana, Japan, 2021)

Africa

The Bodies (Nelson Bright, Nigeria, 2019)
Good Help (Lungile Mayindi, South Africa, 2019)

How May I Help You Again? (Aroyewun Babajide, Nigeria, 2020)
The Nightmare on Broad Street (Femi Johnson/Ayo Lawson, Nigeria, 2020)

Oceania

The Creakers (Peter Salmon, New Zealand, 1997)
Dark Place (anthology, Australia, 2019)
Drum Wave (Natalie Erika James, Australia, 2018)
The French Doors (Steve Ayson, New Zealand, 2001)
Here There Be Monsters (Drew MacDonald, Australia, 2018)
Lone Wolf (January Jones, Australia, 2019)
The Murder House (Warrick Attewell,New Zealand, 1998)
Maggie May (Mia'Kate Russell, Australia, 2018)
The Moogai (Jon Bell, Australia, 2021)

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Alanna Thain is professor of cultural studies, world cinemas and gender, sexuality and feminist studies at McGill University. She directs the Moving Image Research Lab, which explores the body in moving image media broadly conceived, and is former director of the Institute for Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies. She leads the FRQSC funded research team CORÉRISC (Epistemologies of Embodied Risk), focused in its first iteration on queer, feminist and minoritarian horror in media, art and performance. Her book, *Bodies in Suspense: Time and Affect in Cinema*, looks at how unusual or aberrant experiences of time resensitizes us to our own corporeal volitility around the body's primary capacity: change over time or "anotherness." She co-directs the NFRF funded project The Sociability of Sleep, and through that project is writing a book on 21st century feminist sleep horror. She is also finishing a book on post-digital screendance as a score for survival, entitled "Anarchival Outbursts."

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"This has all happened before": Intergenerational Trauma, *Tulpas*, and Tackling Lovecraft's Cultural Legacy in America in *Scooby Doo! Mystery Incorporated*

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Among renewed cultural and academic interest in the work of H.P. Lovecraft, and the emergence of several recent long- and short-form adaptations of the mode of horror he in part inspired—Lovecraftian or "cosmic" horror—the 2010–2013 television series *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated* (*SD!MI*) holds unusual membership. Unlike its predecessors in the *Scooby-Doo* media franchise, *SD!MI* removes the Mystery Incorporated gang from various conventional Euro-Gothic settings to instead locate the gang in the heart of Lovecraft's America and all its insidious trappings. Beyond the appeal of Lovecraft's terrifying cosmic forces and *Scooby-Doo*'s easily appropriated aesthetic and tone, *SD!MI* stands out among contemporary Lovecraftian horror and recent *Scooby-Doo* media not only for its combination of these two seemingly disparate horror modes, but also for its mobilisation of semi-anthology short-form horror animation as a critical media form through which to navigate Lovecraft's problematic legacy in America. Limited as the series was in the extent to which it could address Lovecraft's white supremacy and bigotry (Moreland 2018a) and the Lovecraftian horror mode's use of racist, queerphobic, and xenophobic representations (Klinger 2014), I argue that *SD!MI* nevertheless takes advantage of the short form to closely analyse, confront, and deconstruct the complex discursive matrix that surrounds a key underlying concern of Lovecraft's work: the horror of perpetuating intergenerational trauma.

Where Lovecraft locates this horror in the threat of supposed moral and biological "degeneration" of the dominant Anglo-American order in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *SD!MI* locates this horror in the perpetuation of settler-colonial violence and cycles of secrecy and oppression in contemporary American identity by translating the horror into a series of Lovecraftian *tulpas*, or thoughtforms made real through decades of collective intergenerational trauma experienced by the gang's hometown of Crystal Cove. The diverse, flexible nature of the series' predominantly "Monster of the Week" (MOTW) format, typical of short-form horror television (Rudy and McDonald

2016) and particular to *Scooby-Doo*, enables *SD!MI* to adapt elements of Lovecraft's work and to flesh out the specific political and sociocultural traumas that inform the series' Lovecraftian *tulpas*. Similarly, Hollywood animation's use of a "hyper-realist" aesthetic (Brown 2021), or a "a stylised realism that ha[s] a lifelike feel without actually being photorealistic" (Price 2009, 213), in tandem with humour provides a familiar, nostalgic, but experimental medium through which to visualise these traumas in accessible but no less nuanced terms. As such, I argue that *SD!MI* foregrounds semi-anthology short-form horror animation as uniquely capable of "unmasking" Lovecraft's legacy and the horror of perpetuating intergenerational trauma for a contemporary audience in the best way *Scooby-Doo* knows how: the revelation of a grim reality lurking beneath a rubber mask scapegoat, with a dash of the supernatural for emphasis.

"By the tendrils of Shap-Shap Sumagurath!": Short-form horror animation and adapting Lovecraft for *Scooby-Doo*

SD!MI is something of a love letter to American horror and an experiment in contemporary children's horror. The two-season, fifty-two-episode series follows the gang in their hometown of Crystal Cove, claimed to be the "Most Hauntedest [sic] Place on Earth," as they attempt to solve the various mysteries that both beleaguer the town and generate its booming dark tourism industry. The gang soon inadvertently uncover "a truth that should have remained hidden" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2010a, 00:22:21–00:22:23)—namely, the truth behind the supposed "curse" of Crystal Cove which the residents have done their best to keep hidden for generations. In their search for the truth, the gang pursue a series of puzzles and mystery cases that enable *SD!MI* to follow its typical MOTW format and *Scooby-Doo* formula of "investigate the mystery, trap and unmask the villain, solve the mystery, roll to the next episode." However, *SD!MI* is similar to other short-form horror television series such as *Supernatural* and *The X-Files* in that while it largely follows the MOTW format, it is a semi-anthology horror series that uses a narrative arc across its two seasons. This format allows the series to develop the increasingly sinister dealings at work in Crystal Cove—a reveal that suggests that there is more to the series' tongue-in-cheek allusions to America's horror tradition as is typical of *Scooby-Doo* than meets the eye, especially when Lovecraftian themes come into the picture.

SD!MI's engagement with Lovecraftian themes moves beyond citational "textual echo" (Sanders 2016, 6) to mobilise the discursive potential of the

adaptive process as critical literary praxis. More than simple revision of a source text to provide commentary or to make the source "relevant" to new audiences (Sanders 2016), adaptation fundamentally operates as a rhetorical tool for its wielder; adaptation can house "as many opportunities for divergence as adherence, for assault [on] as well as homage" (6) to a source text and the conditions that led to its production. While *SD!MI*'s point of entry to the "tradition" of Lovecraftian horror is not quite so oppositional, it is subversive by virtue of its unusual operation in short-form horror animation and its targeted youth audience. Of course, this subversive potential is not specific to *SD!MI*. Animated children's horror is regarded by many (though not all) scholars as inherently subversive for its introduction of "taboo" or "radical" concepts that are perceived as anathema to otherwise "mainstream" children's animation, these concepts including the supernatural, the grotesque, death, and moral ambiguity. However, in the case of long-form horror animation such as Hollywood children's horror films, Noel Brown (2021) argues the following:

> [The films'] radicalism should not be overstated; their moral ambiguities and depictions of death, decay, and so on are made palatable by a combination of humour and fantasy that serve to inoculate against unmediated feelings of horror or revulsion. Moreover, they are recognisable as family films, and any sense of alterity they might project is regulated by the conventions of the genre. (146–47)

But what of *short-form* children's animated horror such as *SD!MI*? While the degree to which *SD!MI* could explore its horror was undoubtedly restricted by the "age-appropriate" guidelines set out by Standards & Practices, I hesitate to say that it "inoculates" against negative affective responses for its youth audience in the way Brown suggests. In fact, I argue that *SD!MI* foregrounds how short-form horror animation specifically has the capacity to operate outside the generic boundaries that normally regulate long-form children's horror and which facilitate *SD!MI*'s subversive entry point into the Lovecraftian horror tradition.

First, *SD!MI*'s insistence on its supernatural threats being *real* and a direct consequence of Crystal Cove's residents' collective trauma negotiates space for negative affect to be explored with relative freedom.[1] It is revealed that Crystal

[1] Prior to *SD!MI*, only two *Scooby-Doo* animated incarnations had plots that revolved around the supernatural threat being real: *Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island* (1998) and *Scooby Doo! and the Witch's Curse* (1999).

Cove's curse is the result of a malignant being known as the Evil Entity that has been trapped in a crystal sarcophagus beneath Crystal Cove since the area was first colonised by Spanish settlers in 1630. The Evil Entity, an antagonistic member of a group of extradimensional gods known as the Anunnaki, has carefully orchestrated the lives of eight generations of mystery solvers to manipulate them into releasing him.[2] Unlike his benevolent counterparts that aid humanity, the Evil Entity is bent on the total destruction of humanity. Under his influence, the previous seven mystery-solving groups (the current Mystery Incorporated being the eighth group) either disappeared, succumbed to madness, or, it is implied, died by their own or each other's hands—ultimately reliving and repeating the traumas of their predecessors *ad infinitum* and driving Crystal Cove into an endless feedback loop of violence and secrecy. With this knowledge, when in the episode "The Devouring" Velma anxiously announces, "Gang, for the first time in our history as mystery solvers, we have to consider that something truly supernatural is happening here" (2013b, 00:04:23–00:04:30), she introduces a definitive cognitive and ontological shift in both the narrative and the characters that has been steadily growing throughout the seasons.[3] No longer able to operate under the assumption that supernatural threats are "crazy criminals pretending to be monsters all the time" (00:04:02–00:04:04), the gang are forced to approach the threats to Crystal Cove as a lived, ongoing reality and that they are no longer in conventional, manageable Hollywood children's horror or *Scooby-Doo* territory—they are now firmly in the territory of Lovecraft.

Second, it should be noted that the mode of horror *SD!MI* primarily operates in is specifically and deliberately *Lovecraftian*, the conventions of which largely preclude the possibility of total "inoculation" against alterity except through the utter madness or death of the protagonist—and *SD!MI* does not shy away from either option. Rather than simply alluding to the recognisable "Lovecraftian" aesthetic of tentacles, dark waters, and ominous religious organisations as other animated series have done to satisfy cult interest, *SD!MI*'s adaptive entry into Lovecraftian horror is subversive insofar as it does not

[2] The Anunnaki are based on a group of deities of the same name found in ancient Mesopotamian cultures; however, their origin and representation in *SD!MI* are largely based on the (rejected as pseudoscientific) theories proposed by Zecharia Sitchin in his 1976 book *The Twelfth Planet*.

[3] This ontological shift is also the central focus of the *Supernatural* episode "Scoobynatural." See Erin Giannini and Kristopher Woofter's essay ""That's a Scooby-don't': The Melancholy Nostalgia of 'Scoobynatural' for *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?*" (*Monstrum* 3, no. 1, 2020).

attempt to shield its characters (and by extension its audience) from its horror through humour and fantasy despite being a *Scooby-Doo* show. In fact, part of *SD!MI*'s approach to Lovecraftian horror is that the series introduces *Scooby-Doo*'s typical satirical treatment of cultural references to the mode and mobilises this satirical humour to *emphasise* the Lovecraftian horror, thus gearing what are otherwise "heavy" topics toward a youth audience without negating the discursive power of those topics. Humour becomes a survival tactic for the truth that satire exposes. A particularly effective way that *SD!MI* navigates this tension between horror and comedy is through its caricature of Lovecraft and Lovecraftian horror itself.

In Season One, *SD!MI* introduces "H.P. Hatecraft," a depressed author whose appearance is that of a hyper-realised Lovecraft, and the fictional "dark forces" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2010b) he writes about and is tormented by. In the episode "The Shrieking Madness," Hatecraft tells the gang that he may have released the being currently terrorising Crystal Cove known as "Char-Gar Gothakon" into the world as a result of his connection to other realms, his voice an over-the-top warble as he claims, "[d]ark forces are at work in this [Hatecraft's] very home" (2010b, 00:11:14–00:11:16). For older audiences, they may recognise that Char-Gar Gothakon's appearance borrows recognisable elements from Lovecraft's stories to make its function as Lovecraftian caricature explicit, from the octopus-like features of Cthulhu drawn from the Cthulhu Mythos to the priestly vestments and strange jewellery of the Order of Dagon found in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (Lovecraft [1936] 2014).[4] However, both Char-Gar Gothakon and Hatecraft are unmasked as frauds, with Char-Gar Gothakon an overly enthusiastic Hatecraft fan in a costume and Hatecraft unable to commune with the supernatural. Part of the unmasking process is exaggerating the laughable mundanity behind the horror: Char-Gar Gothakon's terrifying Cthulhu-like features turn out to be parts of a dead, stinking octopus and the remaining costume as made or stolen from the local theatre, while Hatecraft's perpetuation of the Char-Gar Gothakon myth is essentially a marketing scheme to sell his work. More than simply commenting on Lovecraft as a haunted writer and the sometimes ridiculous nature of his monsters, *SD!MI*'s use of caricature exposes the social function of the "dark forces" it satirises in uncomplicated but critical terms: society's fear of the unknown and unfamiliar necessitates any means (even absurd ones) of control over what *is* known and familiar to maintain society's perceived position in the world. The

[4] *The Shadow over Innsmouth* was first published in April 1936 by Visionary Press, Everett, Pennsylvania.

repetitive nature of the MOTW format typical of the short form enables *SD!MI* to reinforce this caricature's critical work for its audience, as almost each episode's antagonist—rendered in similar hyper-realised, over-exaggerated fashion to Hatecraft and Char-Gar-Gothakon—follows the same *Scooby-Doo* formula of the villain manipulating what is familiar to exert power over the unfamiliar using extreme means.

So far, *SD!MI* seems to prioritise Lovecraftian horror's preoccupation with existential terror as a product of sublimity the most. By "sublimity" I refer not to the Burkean or Kantian sublime but instead to Vrasidas Karalis' (2010) explanation of the term: sublimity is "[a] historically defined category of experiencing and interpreting objective realities" (3) that occurs during periods of transition where "an existing order of things and values is gradually undermined, dislocated, and transformed by different forms of perception and diverse patterns of ordering experience" (2). Understood in these terms, Lovecraftian horror's relationship with sublimity is a product of the immense historical and cultural transitions occurring in America in the twentieth century. As such, Lovecraftian horror is an attempt to respond to the new objective reality of certain devastating events, such as the First World War (Moreland 2018b), where forces beyond the average citizen's reach can exert unimaginable power on the known universe and can do so without perceivable concern for humanity's survival. It is not surprising, then, that the Cthulhu Mythos is studded with the presence of unfathomable, uncaring Outer Ones and Great Old Ones. The conditions surrounding the sublimity experienced by the gang are eerily similar in that the gang, following most Lovecraftian protagonists, must also reckon with the notion that they have no true agency under the influence of cosmic forces such as the Anunnaki and the Evil Entity, thus reflecting the America Lovecraft imagines in his work. The Evil Entity is an ancient, powerful force beyond their comprehension that has systematically orchestrated the gang and their predecessors' lives, is singlehandedly responsible for Crystal Cove's current objective reality as a product of intergenerational trauma, and has made it clear that the world's survival upon his release is not his concern. The Evil Entity sets down the terms of the gang and Crystal Cove's existence in three sentences: "You have no choice. This is your destiny. Everything you have done, you have done for me" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013d, 00:19:14–00:19:21). In the wake of this existential crisis, having to endure these extreme cognitive and ontological shifts, the gang and their predecessors turn to one method of interpreting their new objective realities: the Lovecraftian *tulpa*.

"Doesn't anybody stay dead around here?": The Lovecraftian *tulpa*

The *tulpa* has a somewhat complex place in both paranormal discourse and popular culture. In basic terms, the *tulpa* is an entity that is initially produced in the imagination only to then gain sentience and exist in physical reality, either deliberately through an individual's will or unintentionally by the collective thoughts of multiple people—an embodiment through thoughtform (Mikles and Laylock 2015; Veissière 2016). In their research on the subject, Natasha L. Mikles and Joseph P. Laylock (2015) define the contemporary paranormal *tulpa* as "an entity that can be created by anyone, usually inadvertently; exists independently of its creator(s); is sentient and capable of rebellion; and is frightening, if not dangerous" (91).[5] It is in these terms that Lovecraftian *tulpas* manifest in *SD!MI*. I should clarify here what I mean by "Lovecraftian *tulpa*": the Lovecraftian *tulpa* is a *tulpa* that skirts the border between the "psychological" and "metaphysical" explanatory principles behind the phenomenon (Mikles and Laylock 2015; Veissière 2016). Samuel Veissière (2016) explains these principles as follows:

> In the psychological community, neuroscience (or folk neuroscience) is the explanation of choice. Tulpas are understood as mental constructs that have achieved sentience. The metaphysical explanation holds that tulpas are agents of supernatural origins that exist outside the hosts' minds, and who come to communicate with them. (59)

Following this, the Lovecraftian *tulpa* has the capacity to be a sentient mental construct conceived of by the Lovecraftian protagonist as a result of their heightened state of negative affect or through obsessive interest; the "unnamable" entity of the eponymous short story by Lovecraft fits this psychological category, as the nameless apparition is willed into being by the characters after a particularly frightening night in a graveyard where they debate

[5] Throughout this paper, all use of the term "*tulpa*" will be in reference to the contemporary paranormal concept as it is described by Mikles and Laylock. I acknowledge the complicated origins of the term as it relates to Western European Theosophy and Tibetan Buddhism but defer to Mikles and Laylock's (2015) article "Tracking the *Tulpa*: Exploring the 'Tibetan' Origins of a Contemporary Paranormal Idea" for a full account of this concept's inception.

the likelihood of the apparition's existence (Lovecraft [1925] 2014).[6] The Lovecraftian *tulpa* can also exist as a supernatural being of its own; the Outer God Nyarlathotep fits this metaphysical category given that Nyarlathotep is a real supernatural agent who delivers arcane knowledge to humanity. However, Nyarlathotep tends to occupy the space between psychological and metaphysical *tulpa* in that though he is real, in "Nyarlathotep" he only manifests as a result of humanity's desire to see him (Lovecraft [1920] 2014).[7]

Thus do the Lovecraftian *tulpas* in *SD!MI* skirt the tenuous border between psychological and metaphysical reality. However, more than just paranormal phenomena joining a growing list of supernatural happenings in *SD!MI*, the Lovecraftian *tulpas* that appear operate as ontological responses to sublimity, namely, Crystal Cove's legacy of intergenerational trauma and the conditions that led up to that trauma at various points in time—these conditions being inextricably tied to Crystal Cove's settler-colonial history. Veissière explains that tulpamancy is an example of the neurophenomenology of sociality, or "the tendency of humans and other social animals to form cooperative groups and experience shared ways of being in the world" (2016, 55). Consequently, the Lovecraftian *tulpas* of Crystal Cove may be understood as the residents' desire for a shared experience and interpretation of their past or current objective reality, and residents fulfil this desire at risk of further perpetuating past traumas and cycles of violence that result in the various monsters of the week. As Scooby-Doo so aptly puts it in "Dance of the Undead": "Doesn't anybody stay dead around here?" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013a, 00:02:52–00:02:54). For the seven Crystal Cove-based mystery-solving groups, this desire resolves itself into the creation of the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa*.[8] As a metaphysical *tulpa*, the Evil Entity's shift from thoughtform to physical reality can be attributed to being an Anunnaki, which the gang understand as having an established history as supernatural agents on Earth. However, the Evil Entity's existence in *SD!MI* and in Crystal Cove specifically is almost entirely predicated on the Crystal Cove-based mystery solvers, their attempts to find the truth behind the curse, and their attempts to come to grips with their fate upon realising the truth, thus presenting the Evil

[6] "The Unnamable" was first published in July 1925 in *Weird Tales*.

[7] "Nyarlathotep" was first published in November 1920 in *The United Amateur*.

[8] For the sake of brevity, I will focus only on the one (and arguably most significant) Lovecraftian *tulpa* in *SD!MI*—the Evil Entity. However, there is a case to be made for certain MOTW entities as *tulpas* that are most intimately linked to Crystal Cove's settler-colonial history, such as the ghost of Captain Fernando El Aguirre.

Entity as a psychological *tulpa*. The explanatory ambiguity of the Evil Entity—as possibly metaphysical, possibly psychological phenomenon—contributes to the existential terror he invokes.

The Evil Entity's origin as a Lovecraftian *tulpa* begins with the settlement of Crystal Cove by Spanish conquistadors, led by Captain Fernando El Aguirre and his men, and by Spanish missionaries, led by the Fraternitas Mysterium, the first Crystal Cove-based mystery solving group, under the edict of the Spanish Catholic missions in the Americas. I should note that while *SD!MI*'s engagement with America's Spanish settler-colonial history is largely suggestive in its representations and narrative, the series nevertheless attempts to acknowledge the gravity of the conquistadors' actions in Spain's expansionist regime and the Spanish Catholic missionaries' negligence. The semi-anthology short form is especially helpful here, as it enables *SD!MI* to slowly flesh out the particularities of this aspect of Crystal Cove's history across seasons without sacrificing the familiarity and fun of the MOTW format. In a series thematically concerned with hidden secrets, maintaining a formula designed to set up and reveal secrets in each episode is helpful. This in turn ensures that *SD!MI* is still recognisably a *Scooby-Doo* show from a form perspective and thus does not alienate its youth audience by deviating too far or too abruptly from what is generally understood to be the *Scooby-Doo* formula and norm. For instance, similar to how *SD!MI* uses caricature in "Shrieking Madness" to peel back the social function of fear, *SD!MI* exaggerates or emphasises certain episodes' unique monsters and spooky settings to unmask and pick apart specific layers of Crystal Cove's settler-colonial history and how they contribute to the creation of the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa*.

For example, the episode "Night on Haunted Mountain" largely takes place aboard El Aguirre's decaying galleon in the desert. The episode highlights the unsettling incongruency of an undiscovered Spanish galleon being found in a desert of all places, both alerting the gang to its significance to the Crystal Cove mystery and signalling to the audience the noticeable but gradual shift in the series' narrative arc toward a darker, more horror-focused character as it begins to address the topic of intergenerational trauma. In the preserved manifest of the galleon, El Aguirre explains that he and his crew stole the crystal sarcophagus containing the Evil Entity, perceiving it to be of great financial value. However, upon exposure to the sarcophagus, they soon realise that "in our thirst for power and wealth, we had discovered a terrible evil" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2012a, 00:13:54–00:13:58). In a flashback, a close-up of the crystal sarcophagus reflected in El Aguirre's terrified eyes is followed by a series of shots depicting El Aguirre and his men attacking and razing several

villages. El Aguirre states, "[the Evil Entity] preyed upon our fears, driving us to commit horrible acts" (00:14:00–00:14:05). It is significant that the conquistadors, flaunted symbols of the Spanish Empire's geopolitical hegemony and a nod to America's settler-colonial history more broadly, are the ones to introduce the Evil Entity and the cycles of fear- and capital-driven violence associated with him to Crystal Cove. Rather than ensuring that Crystal Cove operates as a proud extension of the Spanish Empire, the accumulated wealth that the conquistadors appropriated in their conquests instead corrupts the colony at the very root of its settlement. How to navigate the horror of this revelation without nullifying its critical impact? *SD!MI* returns to the *Scooby-Doo* formula but keeps the fear. The episode's monster is unmasked, the villain reveals how they nearly got away with it, and the gang, though unnerved, moves on to the next mystery, still secure in their established position in the formula. There is comfort in the return to the familiar in this episode, but *SD!MI* takes advantage of the semi-anthology format to seed a looming sense of terror into that comfort by including a chilling parting shot of the hitherto unseen ghost of El Aguirre watching the gang depart from the galleon. Rather than following the episodic *Scooby-Doo* trope which has it that the closing shot of each episode refocuses on the gang and Scooby-Doo himself as he howls his trademark "Scooby-Dooby-Doo!," the parting shot of the episode instead latches onto the unsettling incongruous object, the galleon, and onto a visual representation of the narrative arc of the series, being El Aguirre and his symbolic association with Crystal Cove's intergenerational trauma. This episode's mystery may be solved, but *SD!MI* uses this last shot to reiterate that the gang's encounter with sublimity remains inevitable and imminent.

SD!MI repeats this tactic of returning to the formula but keeping the fear in the episode "Theater of the Doomed," which explores the impact of the Fraterinas Mysterium on Crystal Cove's history. Similar to "Night on Haunted Mountain," this episode uses an object incongruous to its setting to emphasise a significant tonal and formal shift in the series' character. The object in question is the mummified corpse of the Fraternias Mysterium's Friar Gabriello Serra being used as a stage prop for a dramatic reproduction of Crystal Cove's history at the local theatre. The friar's corpse explains that the Fraternitas Mysterium took up the mystery the conquistadors had left behind after El Aguirre and his men were driven to madness, only for the friars to nearly succumb to the same fate as they grew obsessed with the mystery and fed into the Evil Entity's existence. Their obsession led to their negligence of the mission and ultimately to their partial destruction of Crystal Cove in an attempt "to rid us and the town of evil" (2012b, 00:20:32–00:20:33). As a result, *SD!MI* depicts the Fraternitas

Mysterium as agents of damnation rather than salvation. Like the conquistadors, when the Fraternitas Mysterium realise what they are doing, they are unable to reconcile themselves with their actions and instead attribute their faults to the influence of the Evil Entity. For both parties, if the Evil Entity is a real, Luciferian agent capable of influencing even the most powerful and holy of people to commit atrocities, then absolution of their guilt and erasure of their complicity is possible. Thus do the conquistadors and friars propel the Evil Entity from imagined bogeyman to living, sentient being through their shared investment in the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa*. Both groups attempt to prevent the next generation from investigating their actions, and therefore pre-emptively protect them from enacting the same traumas, but they do so through deceptive means as opposed to full disclosure, thus beginning Crystal Cove's long cycle of intergenerational trauma. Once again, *SD!MI* navigates the horror of this revelation by returning to the familiarity of the formula. Unlike "Night on Haunted Mountain," the closing shot of "Theater of the Doomed" *does* refocus on the gang and Scooby-Doo, but the close-up on Scooby-Doo's frightened face is far from celebratory. Instead, this trope cements the centrality of the gang as more than just mystery solvers but as arbiters of a very real and troubling legacy the conquistadors and friars have left behind.

From there the next five mystery-solving groups would follow in this cycle, contributing toward the traumas that mark the city. All seven Crystal Cove-based mystery-solving groups at some point become aware of the Evil Entity through the clues left by their predecessors, contributing to the continued existence of the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa*. As Friar Serra warns the gang, a warning that would come to haunt much of the series, "this has all happened before" (2012b, 00:21:29–00:21:30), intimating that the gang will inevitably follow in their predecessor's footsteps. Ultimately, these two episodes announce that the truth of the curse of Crystal Cove is this: the foundation of the city is built on the remains of its undisclosed, unaddressed traumatic settler-colonial history, and the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa* functions as that history made embodied and perpetual by the residents.

"It's come undone": (Un)Breakable cycles and the Lovecraftian hero

It is notable that of all the mystery solving groups, only the first group and the current Mystery Incorporated attempt to defeat the Evil Entity and redress the truth behind Crystal Cove's curse. The groups between only delayed the Evil Entity's plans, which required concealing the truth. However, the deferral of

definitive action, and therefore the deferral of full disclosure, only maintained or even ensured the cyclicality of the curse instead of its resolution. It is this idea of cycles, both the making and breaking of them, that operates as both formal and thematic throughline in *SD!MI*, sustained by its short form.

Cycles of violence and secrecy as products of intergenerational trauma inform many of Lovecraft's works, though it is *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* that *SD!MI* most closely engages with. Both the unnamed narrator in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and the eponymous narrator in *Charles Dexter Ward* (Lovecraft [1941] 2014) discover unwanted heritages: the narrator that he is part of a long line of monstrous humanoids known as the Deep Ones and Ward that his ancestor Joseph Curwen is a mass murderer and necromancer who has haunted Ward for most of his life.[9] For both protagonists, the truth of their heritage remains concealed through "furtiveness and secretiveness" ([1936] 2014, 886) until pursued by the two men. However, like the Crystal Cove mystery-solving groups, their investigation inevitably leads to their destruction; the narrator is transformed into a Deep One and Ward is possessed by Curwen. As Mark Lowell (2004) argues, the Cthulhu Mythos is the "perversion" (48) of the Campbellian hero and monomyth, with Alissa Burger (2018) expanding on this concept by remarking that "instead of setting out into the world and conquering the adversary which lies there, the Lovecraftian hero finds that there are questions best left unmasked, horrifying truths better left unknown" (82). In becoming aware of the "horrifying truths" that underpin their lives, both men as Lovecraftian heroes re-enact the cycles they thought themselves removed from. In both cases, the terror of their situations is centrally located in the idea that intergenerational trauma will be perpetuated by those that inherit it, and that attempts to circumvent their fate are inconsequential in the grand scheme of an uncaring universe. The conquistadors operate similarly as Lovecraftian heroes in that "what is seen cannot be unseen, what is learned cannot be forgotten, and the Lovecraftian hero is cursed to carry this knowledge to the grave" (Burger 2018, 84). In "Nightmare in Red," the gang encounter the trapped liminal counterpart of El Aguirre, who is convinced that he and his men "should never be set free. We must pay for all the horrible atrocities we committed while in service to the Entity. I can still hear their screaming. All the screams of the innocent ones" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013c, 00:17:05–00:17:20). Here El Aguirre as Lovecraftian hero is "broken by the futile nature of the human struggle for life and meaning in the face of cosmic terror" (Burger 2018, 84). However, El Aguirre's attempts at purgatorial

[9] *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* was first serialised in 1941 in *Weird Tales*.

atonement (the only way he perceives he can respond to sublimity) only further perpetuate the cycles that led to the creation of the Evil Entity in the first place, as El Aguirre misconstrues concealment as prevention and re-enactment of trauma as absolution.

But what of the gang as Lovecraftian heroes? How do they reckon with the existential terror that attends their encounter with sublimity? I should note that the realisation of intergenerational trauma is primarily directed toward the gang, who, except Scooby, are white subjects. While marginalised subjectivities are explored to an extent in *SD!MI* through recurring BIPOC side characters, *SD!MI* centres largely white subjectivities and white responses to the power they held and continue to hold in Crystal Cove, which *SD!MI* translates into the gang having to come to terms with their complicity in perpetuating the Evil Entity's existence as Lovecraftian *tulpa*. Nevertheless, in the final episode "Come Undone," the Evil Entity announces that "I brought you together as I brought all those together before you. I made you into friends. Forced you into a group. I am the author of your every hope and dream" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013e, 00:19:21–00:19:32). Shaggy and Fred articulate what the rest of the gang fears most upon this revelation: "'Like, is this—this evil telling the truth? Like, our whole life, our friendship has been a lie?' 'Maybe everything we think we know, none of it is real'" (00:19:55–00:20:06). However, faced as they are with their new and terrifying objective reality, the gang differ from most Lovecraftian heroes in that there is no "desperate yearning for their earlier ignorance" (Burger 2018, 84) or succumbing to their powerlessness but rather the obstinate refusal to perpetuate the cycles of trauma they were forged in, even if those cycles must end with their undoing. Armed with the truth of Crystal Cove's curse, the gang pit their friendship—"something that monster can never take away, something it can never defeat!" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013e, 00:11:29–00:11:34) Scooby-Doo insists—against the oblivion Lovecraft's America imagines. They destroy the crystal sarcophagus, the lingering symbol of Crystal Cove's settler-colonial history, and in doing so destroy the Evil Entity. However, this introduces a second ontological shift, as by destroying the Evil Entity, the gang have destroyed the whole of Crystal Cove, its residents, and the current timeline, and for a moment the gang are left isolated as the only survivors—friendship *in* the oblivion of finally breaking a long cycle of trauma.

SD!MI adheres to the Cthulhu Mythos narrative structure that subverts the teleological Campbellian hero's journey typical of the narrative ideology of Hollywood children's horror (Brown 2021), which sees the child protagonist leave their home, overcome some sort of obstacle, and eventually return home to re-enter society with a newfound sense of maturity. Closure is thus an integral

element of this narrative ideology. In *SD!MI*, the narrative trajectory is not quite so linear, made apparent by the series' break with the MOTW format in the last three episodes of the series, which form an extended encounter and final battle with the Evil Entity. Up until the three-part finale, each episode has operated as a self-contained story that closely adheres to the conventional narrative beats of the episodic *Scooby-Doo* formula. Maintaining the monomyth structure provided a sense of stability and familiarity that the audience could grasp onto as the series developed its narrative arc's trickier thematic concerns. As such, the break with this established format to shift into the Cthulhu Mythos narrative structure is all the more visceral. Moments after defeating the Evil Entity, the gang abruptly find themselves having to reckon with sublimity once more when they are placed in a new timeline where there are no monsters or mysteries to produce the *Scooby-Doo* formula. Any closure that the gang receives upon defeating the Evil Entity and breaking the trauma cycle is put into question when they cannot go "home" after their hero's journey when that home no longer exists in its former objective reality. Their "happy ending" resolves itself into a place where everything is too normal, too unmysterious—a new Crystal Cove, now "the Sunniest Place on Earth," where the gang's sole purpose of solving mysteries and thus the gang itself have no place without the Evil Entity to be sustained as Lovecraftian *tulpa*. As Velma states, "[w]e destroyed the Entity and by destroying it, it was as if it had never existed. So, everything it touched, all the evil, all of the curse . . . none of it ever happened" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013e, 00:18:38–00:18:48, 00:18:52–00:18:54). The horror of their survival is that they must navigate being remnants of another objective reality entirely.

This shift in narrative structure is also strategic in that it enables *SD!MI* to deliberately *defer* closure rather than seek it out. Despite being presented with the opportunity to assume the narrative teleology of the Campbellian hero, in which the gang would adapt to their now utopian circumstances, assured in their maturity and achievements, and resume life as is conventional of most long-form children's animated horror protagonists (Brown 2021), the gang instead choose to restart their cycle as Lovecraftian heroes anew. For them, closure as it is framed in Campbellian terms becomes a site of existential terror rather than psychological maturity and narrative fulfilment. As such, in this new timeline, the gang manage sublimity by reconstructing and reinserting themselves into their previous objective reality by recreating the symbolic and material conditions that led to their formation as the current Mystery Incorporated. Fearing the unknown and the unfamiliar, they inadvertently repeat the pattern the villains of *SD!MI* established by seeking control of what is known and familiar to them. As both close friends and as Mystery Incorporated, this means

controlling shared nostalgia. They repaint the now white Mystery Machine to its original Seventies design and leave Crystal Cove, where they promise to one another that "we'll stop and solve every mystery we find along the way" (00:20:51–00:21:53) and "[we'll] stop and eat at every burger place and pizza joint we find along the way too" (00:20:58–00:21:03). However, given the series' shift to the Cthulhu Mythos narrative structure, where the gang lose their identities and purpose, the callback to these iconic, nostalgic symbols and themes of Mystery Incorporated renders them uncanny rather than comforting. In the process of artificially restoring the *Scooby-Doo* formula, the stability that this formula once afforded to both the gang and the audience is now a false double given that *SD!MI* has made it quite clear that closure cannot be achieved. In these new Lovecraftian hero terms, *SD!MI* consigns the curse of Crystal Cove, its cycles of violence as a result of its settler-colonial history and as embodied in the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa* to the obscurity of an ultimately uncaring universe—until, of course, this all happens again.

"Scooby-Dooby-Doo!": Conclusion

For a *Scooby-Doo* show, the end of *SD!MI* is surprisingly harrowing. If the resolution of trauma in the series' ending seems too easy, that is because it is. Despite the smiles the gang share in the Mystery Machine and Scooby-Doo's signature "Scooby-Dooby-Doo!" that follows the gang as they depart from Crystal Cove in pursuit of new mysteries, the end of *SD!MI* leaves behind more uncertainty than security and a lingering sense of the existential terror that underpinned much of the series. The gang's decision to return to an earlier objective reality, facilitated by the series finale's break from the *Scooby-Doo* formula reinforced by the MOTW format and *SD!MI*'s shift to the narrative structure and thematic concerns of the Lovecraftian hero of the Cthulhu Mythos, critically undoes the gang's realisation of Crystal Cove's legacy of intergenerational trauma and their relation to it. In doing so, *SD!MI* seems to suggest that there is no clear-cut path in the navigation of trauma. This is emphasised by the gang who, in response to the horror that comes with perfect awareness of the truth of the (un)known universe and society's corresponding powerlessness, seems to choose the path of madness over death as Lovecraftian heroes, though it is a strangely jaunty kind of madness indeed. Over the course of two seasons, *SD!MI*'s adaptation of Lovecraftian horror and engagement with Lovecraft's cultural legacy is sustained, frequently subversive, and

championed through the semi-anthology short form specifically, thus marking the media form's potential as a discursive and critical platform.

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Multiplex Monstrosities: Promotional Jolts and Marketing Mishaps at the Movies[1]

Alex Svensson

In June 2015, cinemagoers of all ages settled in for an afternoon showing of Disney/Pixar's *Inside Out* at the Danbarry Cinemas in Middletown, OH, where they were greeted not by another heartwarming tearjerker from the "house of mouse," but (supposedly) a ghost story straight from the Blumhouse of horrors—*Insidious: Chapter 3*. As frantic and fearful audience and news reports told it, the fright film was mistakenly projected in place of the anticipated kid's flick—a mishap that didn't exactly go over well with those in attendance; early reports pointed out that the mix-up left parents "furious" and children "spooked" (Han 2015), the accidental digital projection of one film in place of another framed by audiences and the press as not just an honest mistake, but a terrible violation of audience pleasure, safety, and trust. Several news reports out of Middletown wrote breathlessly of "an auditorium full of weeping children" (Shoard 2015) that were egregiously exposed to "a movie full of screams and evil ghosts that murder people and then drag them to the land of the dead" (Shrayber 2015), claims that perhaps paint a more grisly and woeful picture than what truly happened—and importantly, as I will address further in this essay, mistakenly assign blame to *Insidious* when one of its attached trailers (the unsettling, jump-scare-laden advert for *Sinister 2*) was most likely the cause of such tabloid-ready alarm.

This particular case study is but one of several examples in recent years of *mistakenly screened* and/or *properly projected but poorly received* theatrical horror trailers that have reportedly caused unexpected terror, shock, or distress at the movies; as *Bloody Disgusting*'s John Squires (2019) has remarked:

> We're not sure why or how it keeps happening, but several theaters in recent years have accidentally shown horror trailers and/or the

[1] This essay is adapted from my dissertation: Alexander Svensson, "Promotional Horror Media: Consent, Control, and Space," PhD diss., (Indiana University, Bloomington, 2019).

> beginnings of horror movies to audiences full of children, with the trailers for *Bright Burn* and *Ma* most recently shown to unsuspecting families ahead of *Peppa Pig* in the UK. And it happened again over the weekend, this time in Canada. *ScreenRant*'s Ryan George was in attendance at a theater in Canada the other day for a showing of *Detective Pikachu*, but he knew something was wrong when the trailers playing before the film weren't exactly kid-friendly. The trailers for *Annabelle Comes Home, Joker* and *Child's Play* escorted an unexpected showing of *The Curse of La Llorona* onto the screen!

Similar to the above accounts, it was reported in the summer of 2010 that the premiere screenings of soap-operatic teen vampire phenomenon *Twilight Saga: Eclipse* (specifically those that took place at midnight and 3:00 AM in Cinemark theaters across Texas) were marred by the presence of another promotional phantom: the teaser trailer for *Paranormal Activity 2*. According to various news reports, the trailer was supposedly far too frightening—or "2 SCARY" as *Deadline* cheekily reported it (Finke 2010)—for the majority female tween and teen *Twilight* audience, supposedly drawing blood-curdling shrieks from young viewers and complaints from perturbed parents. By all accounts, the trailer was eventually pulled from Texas's Cinemark locations, a move that was both applauded *and* derided across online discourse in the premiere's immediate aftermath.

This essay is—at least in part—about the ways audiences might be unexpectedly moved or manipulated by horror trailers, and the ways those reactions often circulate as tabloid sensationalism; jumps and jolts—the frequently deployed "shock cuts" of horror cinema (Diffrient 2004)—correspond to what Lisa Kernan (2004) describes as the "feel!" motif of movie trailers (22), a promise and indeed demand of physiological response, surprise, and agitation that we see put into relief across these case studies. Both the Danbarry and Cinemark incidents highlight the ways marketers, studios, and entertainment publications turn negative reactions to both planned and accidental screenings of theatrical horror into publicity hype; this is a strategy of carnivalesque "ballyhoo" and exploitation marketing that both fits within and adds new dimensions to the history of horror film advertising, which has long played "on our naturally curious nature by hinting at the awful, terrorizing sights that await us inside the theatre. No matter how they state it, what these horror film advertisements are really saying is, 'We dare you to see this!'" (Kattelman 2011, 73). I argue that news stories, word of mouth reports, and social media hype about horror trailers supposedly gone awry at the movies perform similar

roles.

Theatrical horror trailers routinely function in these instances as easy targets for ire and blame, and they get centered in ways that elide arguably more pressing concerns across the spaces, technologies, and practices of cinemagoing. I find that the hyperbolically detailed frights of these and similar encounters with theatrical horror trailers situates them within three interrelated discourses of *agitation* that configure the cinema as: (1) a potentially dangerous, unpredictable space; (2) a space of disappointments and failures on the part of cinema staff and modern exhibition technologies; and (3) a space where performances of both youth and female spectatorship are routinely monitored, regulated, and criticized as excessive (with pleasure often conflated with fear and frenzy). Beyond examining the aesthetics, form, and impact of these particular horror trailers and their audience responses, this essay also critically explores the ways these incidents reveal ongoing struggles to manage and make sense of the behaviors of cinema audiences—especially ones often deemed too emotive, expressive, or undisciplined.

Terror in the Aisles

According to nearly all news articles about the incident at Danbarry Cinemas, word started to spread after Jazmyn Moore (who was in the audience at the time) posted on the Facebook page of local Middletown, Ohio-based paper the *Journal-News* after fleeing the botched screening with her kids: "I got our money back but the damage is already done" and "my children are terrified and keep asking questions" about the horrors they saw onscreen (Richter 2015). As explained by *Journal-News* staff writer Ed Richter, Moore was in a frightened panic, and as the horrific images flashed onscreen "she and other adults in the theater scooped up their children and rushed out" of the auditorium as quickly as possible (2015.). Apologizing for the spooky slip-up, the theater manager offered attendees not only refunds, but also a chance to upgrade their tickets to the 3D version of *Inside Out* for free. As complaints grew (which included Moore's account of disturbing images witnessed onscreen of children being terrorized, bound, and murdered), news of the incident quickly spread, starting in the *Journal-News* and eventually reaching media industry and entertainment-focused publications (*The Hollywood Reporter, Entertainment Weekly*), widely read horror blogs (*Dread Central, Bloody-Disgusting*), and even the websites of popular publications not typically concerned with such small-town scares (*Cosmopolitan*, *Jezebel*).

Across these publications, it is significant to note *how* the incident was reported and, more importantly, *crafted into clickbait*, with most headlines reading as such: "Whoops: Ohio Theater Accidentally Shows Insidious 3 Instead of Inside Out" (*Cinema Blend*); "Kids expecting 'Inside Out' get horror movie instead" (*Mashable*); "Children watch Insidious 3 rather than Inside Out after Ohio cinema mix-up" (*The Guardian*); and "Kids Traumatized After Theater Shows Insidious 3 instead of Inside Out" (*Jezebel*).[2] These headlines and others like them work to emphasize the supposed intensity of the situation, with the latter *Guardian* and *Jezebel* pieces especially making it seem like kids were unexpectedly forced to endure 90 minutes of gruesome, unsettling visions. Such claims correspond to the ways horror has been historically discussed in relationship to children; as Filipa Antunes (2020) reminds us, debates around horror's suitability for and supposed ill effects on children "tend to follow two strands: moral panic, in which the nefarious effects of horror are discussed; or preoccupations with the cultural legitimacy of horror, where its artistic, philosophical, and political merits are established" (7).

Such discourses on horror and children can often lead to hyperbolic claims; as Angie Han (2015) of *Slash Film* reports, though horror was most certainly onscreen as opposed to kid-friendly Disney fare, these various accounts and the headlines crafted out of them might not function as the best representations of the truth:

> [Another] person who claims to have been at the screening dispute[s] Moore's account. "*Insidious* never started," Mandy Adkins wrote on Facebook. "The managers caught on to what was happening, and turned the film off right after the opening credits cut off, before any of the actual film played." […] Adkins points out, "There are no children murdered anywhere within the entire hour and a half of *Insidious*, so it is pretty clear that this was a gross exaggeration." Instead, she suggests, Moore was probably referring to the *Sinister 2* trailer.

It should be made clear that the trailer for *Sinister 2* (which follows the haunting exploits of a demon named Bughuul that convinces children to slaughter their families) is arguably unsettling, and easy to understand as unsuitable for little children. It kicks off with the sound of a film projector clicking on, followed by a moment showing children within the diegesis of the film eagerly watching a

[2] Punctuation of film titles varies across these publications; I have elected to maintain the original punctuation.

home TV broadcast of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) [Fig 1]. From there, Moore's claims about a screen filled with children and parents in peril is not incorrect, as the trailer features several such moments of horror: newspaper clippings about murdered families; homicide scenes and autopsy photos; children having nightmares; and admittedly unsettling home movie footage of families being tied up and, depending on the reel being viewed, electrocuted, drowned, or burned alive.

Figure 1: The children of *Sinister 2*, drawn to *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) on TV (Assembled Screenshots)

The *Paranormal Activity 2* trailer is far less grisly, though filled with plentiful scares of its own [Fig 2]. A black screen and silence lead to what sounds like heavy, steadily approaching footsteps, the total darkness of the frame interrupted twice by sudden bursts of static. Without warning, the darkness immediately gives way to a jump scare—a loud boom and a body being launched towards the camera, knocking it over. This footage—the hurtling body, the bedroom setting, blue tint, mobile camera, and grainy digital image—might look familiar to some viewers: this is the ending of *Paranormal Activity* (2009). The trailer oscillates between this footage, more lashes of static, and the now-expected green night vision footage of a preview audience anxiously watching the very trailer being screened. Another shock cut lacerates the frame—a demonic face causing the diegetic cinema audience to shriek in terror (and presumably the live audience, too).

Figure 2: Haunted found footage in the *Paranormal Activity 2* trailer (Assembled Screenshots)

The remainder of the trailer excels in building even more tension, flashing between more digital distortion and seemingly banal scenes from a home security camera system: a child's bedroom with a baby in a crib and a dog sleeping on the floor; a serene back patio, a sleepy kitchen. Towards the end of the trailer, the baby's room is disturbingly graced by a shadowy figure looming near the crib—the child and dog now eerily missing from the shot. The title card flashes onscreen, followed by the franchise's official web address. Just as the trailer appears to be at an end, it offers one more unsettling moment as the footage begins to slowly rewind by itself; in revisiting the previous horrors in reverse, the promo seems to playfully question: who is in control of the projection? Is the space of the diegetic movie theater similarly plagued as the one onscreen?

As a genre given to disturbances of all sorts, horror trailers—like the feature films they are cut from and anticipate—can shock bodies and spaces into flux as much as they can confirm and amplify the fact that bodies and spaces are always already fluctuating, impermanent, porous things. Horror often revels in "forbidden, shocking, or astonishing spectacle" (Heffernan 2004, 10)—agitating jolts of image and sound that Diffrient (2004) refers to as the "unpredictable assaults" of the genre (50). For him, horror "short-circuits reason and provokes emotional as well as physical reactions" (50) that can mobilize and ultimately enmesh the body into the shocking world of the fictive horrors on display. Jay McRoy (2004) echoes and adds to this when he argues

that horror is "informed by a disruptive aesthetic," and that "horrific images *horrify* because they disrupt audience assumptions of what is and is not 'fixed' or 'normal'" (197)—a notion we can certainly apply to the cinema screens certain audiences begrudgingly find playing host to unexpected or undesired horror trailers.

Such reactions are evident in further anecdotes of spectatorial reception of the *Paranormal Activity 2* trailer, this time from Portland, Oregon. Though by all accounts it wasn't removed from Portland theaters as was claimed for Texas Cinemark theaters, *CinemaBlend*'s Josh Tyler (2010) observed a similar response to the found footage hauntings in the Lone Star State:

> Sitting next to me during *Eclipse* was a mother with her very cute, very polite daughter of around age ten or so. Before the movie started they talked happily, and excitedly about the movie. I watched their seats for them while they went, hand in hand, to get popcorn. The lights went down and the little girl squealed with excitement and hugged her mom. Then the trailer for *Paranormal Activity 2* started. Within mere moments, that happy little girl was reduced to horrible, uncontrollable, sobs of terror. Throughout the trailer she kept crying to her mom "make it stop, make it stop" while her mom hugged her close and tried desperately to cover her eyes telling her "it's ok, it's ok, it's just a commercial it's not the *Twilight* movie. It'll be over in a second, just don't look." The little girl kept sobbing.

Steffan Hantke (2002) has argued that, "we are supposed to experience [horror] as a loud, crass, and almost instinctual sensation […]. Horror, here, means bodily exertion: to shudder, to sweat, to squirm in our seats" (2). Such reactions to theatrical horror, however, are often marked by pleasure, performativity, and *consent*—something Tyler seems to indicate was compromised in the above anecdote.

Though written for the *HuffPost* within a larger, turgid proposal to ban horror trailers from movie theaters (a desire and demand I explicitly *don't* agree with), consider Julian Sancton's (2012) similar discussion about the lack of autonomy (and excess of ill feelings) supposedly brought about by contact with theatrical horror trailers:

> The great thing about America is that I can choose not to go see *The Devil Inside*. The terrible thing about America is that I can't choose not to see the trailer for *The Devil Inside*. […] There you are at the movies,

> slurping the dregs of your Cherry Coke during the endless preamble of trailers when suddenly the screen goes black and you hear a bell toll, a deep rumble, and a child starts singing a nursery rhyme really, really slowly. The fact that you know what's coming doesn't make it any less disagreeable: a blood-curdling shriek accompanied by a flash of some sunken-eyed humanoid. It will cause a reflexive shudder and a rush of horrible-feeling hormones that humans were only designed to secrete in the most life-threatening danger. But you will feel them 20 more times in the next two minutes. God forbid you have a heart condition.

Though framing horror trailers as aberrant, Sancton describes what is in fact a common condition of cinemagoing: that we consent to an experience that *bears the possibility of risk*—from the arguably minor (we risk the chance that a film won't be good according to our tastes and desires, or even that a trailer "breaks" its supposed promotional promises), to the potentially major and more dangerous (we risk the chance that a film or even a trailer might upset us or make us feel ill). As Catherine Clepper (2016) elaborates, cinemagoers "routinely entrust their bodies to the cinematic experience—to the confines of the theater, to the reflexes and reactions evoked by films, and to the sensory conditions of the crowd, space, and atmosphere. For those attending shockers, there are additional corporeal risks understood as generic conventions (e.g., rhythmic suspense) and their physical symptoms (e.g., sweaty palms, racing pulse)" (64). In line with Clepper, Steven Shaviro (1993) argues that film viewing is marked by "bodily agitations, […] movements of fascination," and "reactions of attraction and repulsion" (9)—especially in the face of cinematic horror.

Agitated in the Aisles

Cinemagoing—which includes the experience of movie trailers, even mistakenly screened ones of the horror variety—is thus often defined by such "agitations." For Charles Acland (2003) the term "cinemagoing" speaks broadly to "the physical mobility involved, the necessary negotiation of community space, the process of consumer selection, and the multiple activities that one engages in before, during, and after a film performance" (58); going to the movies is a varied experience—"it is banal, it is erotic, it is civil, it is unruly; it is an everyday site of regulated and unregulated possibility" (58).

Such notions of "possibility" allow us to situate these horror trailer incidents within broader understandings of disappointment and failure at the

movies—the projection mishaps, dirty floors, rowdy patrons, and poor screen conditions that often constitute the spaces and experiences of cinemagoing. These "failures" help to explain at least in part what happened at the Danbarry Cinemas the day that *Sinister 2*'s Bughuul appeared onscreen to (quite literally within the diegetic world of the film) capture and terrorize children, instead of bright, sweet, and endearing CGI animated characters. [Fig 3.]

Figure 3: The haunting failures of film, projected in the trailer for *Sinister 2* (Assembled Screenshots)

As several news reports speculated, the switch-up could have stemmed from a simple mistake in the projection booth that could be attributed to the similar spellings of *Inside Out* and *Insidious* within the digital projection system.

These kinds of mix-ups with film and/or digital projection are not anomalies.[3] Projection issues *do* happen, more frequently than one might want to think or admit. Beyond this, we can point to long-standing, historically documented understandings of the cinema as a fraught, unpredictable space whose perils were arguably often far worse than unexpected horror trailers. The history of film exhibition has been filled with potential physical dangers (Rhodes 2012), some related to the elements or poor structural conditions (horrifying storms, floods, natural disasters, falling ceilings), while others were more specifically linked to the cinema and its spectators (slips and spills in the darkened auditorium, unsteady film projection, nitrate film and projector fires, audience fist-fights, robberies, and other forms of violence).

While not exactly dire issues, poor projection quality and lack of attentiveness to both film and audience seemed to pervade the Danbarry Cinemas, where they allegedly made more mistakes than accidently showing kids a few horror trailers on a lazy summer afternoon. As various local news reports indicated, Danbarry Cinemas went out of business in their Middletown, OH location, replaced by Republic Theatres Cinema 10 in 2018. Apparently, the theater had long-running issues with late or cancelled screening times, cleanliness and maintenance, bad concessions, and poor customer service (Schwartzberg 2018; McCrabe 2018). Such occurrences are as common to cinemagoing as seeing a movie or buying popcorn, and have been so for quite some time. In a 2007 *Chicago Tribune* article titled "It's horror at the movie theater," entertainment reporter Mark Caro presented personal anecdotes of supposed "horror stories," from the movies, where one particular screening of *Waitress* (2007) was plagued by mishaps and odd occurrences in the auditorium, which included (quite fittingly for my purposes) a trailer for evil child horror film *Joshua* (2007) (also known as *The Devil's Child*) that was mistakenly played *twice*. Caro frames his personal experiences at, and grievances towards, the movies as ones that are frequently shared amongst the cinemagoing community, using a *Tribune* reader poll to back up his claim (though some of the gripes are

[3] From my own experience, I can recount several projection mishaps at the movies over the last few decades that didn't exactly terrify or unsettle, but rather made me either frustrated or mildly amused. One such experience forever baked into my memory happened during an opening week screening of *A Bug's Life* (1998) on Long Island, NY, where at one point the film (as in the *Sinister 2* trailer) began to tear and burn, revealing jarring strips of light and splotches of fiery corrosion. To many kids it seemed somewhat horrifying, especially since the projection mishap occurred during a very jovial scene featuring the caterpillar character Heimlich (to this then thirteen-year-old, it was kind of neat…). Like with the audience at Danbarry Cinemas, we all immediately received a ticket for another screening.

admittedly minor):

> More than 120 readers also chimed in with their own horror stories—tales of inadequate staffing at ticket windows and concession stands, dirty auditoriums, faulty closed-captioning equipment, screaming children taken to R-rated movies, cell-phone answerers, seat-kickers, loud talkers, loud popcorn chewers, smelly-food eaters, smokers, ushers who won't deal with any of the disruptions, ads and trailers that are too loud and numerous, high prices and, inevitably, disappointing movies. (Caro 2007)

Such complaints speak to a host of previously mentioned issues and problems with moviegoing—from the seemingly preventable or fixable (cleanliness) to the more difficult to manage (the perceived quality of a film; the behavior of patrons). This latter aspect is key to consider; consumers of course are just as critical of each other as they are the movies or the theater staff. In the next section, I will examine audience complaints specifically across the *Twilight/Paranormal* case study—complaints which are typically rooted in gendered critiques of youth and female spectatorship, particularly in relation to horror.

Cinema Space, Horror, and Female Spectatorship

As with the discourse surrounding the *Inside Out/Insidious* mishap, the ambiguity of reports coming out of the Texas *Twilight Saga: Eclipse* premiere screenings in many ways help to lend the whole controversy a whiff of insignificance—a non-event turned into spooky, lucrative hype. The primary source cited by the majority of online reports about the trailer's removal is a brief and rather vague article posted to *Variety*'s webpage on the afternoon of June 30, 2010—less than a day after the teaser's theatrical premiere at the *Twilight* screenings. The entirety of the article reads as such:

> Cinemark is pulling the trailer for Paramount's 'Paranormal Activity 2' from several theaters in Texas after receiving numerous complaints that the promo was too frightening. Trailer debuted during midnight runs of Summit Entertainment's 'Eclipse.' Cinemark has told Paramount it could pull the trailer from more theaters as 'Eclipse' opens nationwide today, should there be additional complaints. (McClintock 2010)

It perhaps goes without saying that this report leaves a great deal to be desired: Who were the moviegoers that were specifically making complaints? What exactly about the teaser was so scary? What Cinemark locations across Texas were the ones supposedly afflicted by these promotional night terrors? What specific representatives from both Cinemark and Paramount are being quoted (or, more aptly, indirectly referenced) here? Furthermore, how did both the cinema chain and the studio react so quickly, when the trailer only screened at midnight and 3:00 AM *that very day*?

With this initial *Variety* blurb used as the common and often sole source, additional reports across the web did nothing to answer these questions. Though a wide array of publications and the sites of various local news stations across the United States picked up the story and spread it around the web from late June into early July, none of them really bothered to dig much deeper than what *Variety* (and author Pamela McClintock) had already provided to the news-and-hype cycle. A day later, McClintock *did* update the *Variety* piece, further emphasizing the fright of young female viewers and adding some more information about Paramount's reaction to Cinemark's removal of the *Paranormal Activity 2* teaser: "Paramount marketers were anything but spooked by the decision, which is certain to fuel interest. 'We respect Cinemark's decision to address their clients' concerns', Paramount vice chair Rob Moore said, adding he doesn't recall another trailer being pulled. 'We think the trailer is engaging, and are certainly surprised by the intensity of the reaction'" (McClintock 2010). Many reporters echoed such skepticism, wondering if the whole thing was one big publicity stunt by Paramount. Writing for *Celluloid Junkie*, J. Sperling Reich (2010) claimed that, "The whole story seems so improbable that it wasn't long before fan boys on the blogosphere pegged it as a publicity stunt in advance of 'Paranormal Activity 2's' October 16th opening. If that is indeed the case, then good for Paramount. It certainly worked. After all, they got me (and dozens of others) to write about the film three months before its release. I suppose then this serves as one of those examples of there being no such thing as bad publicity." Similarly, *Houston Chronicle*'s Joe Meyers (2010) observed that the "'controversy' over the 'Paranormal Activity 2' trailer smacks of public relations hype […] The night I saw 'Eclipse', the trailer for the sequel to the sleeper hit 'Paranormal Activity' didn't cause a ripple in the crowd. Actually, it seemed scarier than funny [sic][4]—a bit like a parody of the original."

[4] This should arguably read as "funnier than scary," but is reprinted here as it initially appeared on the *Houston Chronicle's* website.

Truly, it is difficult to think in retrospect that Paramount's decision to attach a creepy found footage horror promo to a new *Twilight* film *wasn't* intentional—not only have the *Paranormal Activity* films (and supernatural films more broadly) been attractive to the teen demographic for years, *Twilight's* young fans are themselves notoriously impassioned. *Twilight* fandom has often been deemed newsworthy because of its intensity, with the 2010 midnight premiere screenings of *Eclipse* receiving significant attention from local and national television news around the United States.[5] As Jacqueline M. Pinkowitz (2011) points out, such high levels of media attention have been especially common around the theatrical release dates of each film in the *Twilight* franchise—moments when "*Twilight* fan activity is thrust most glaringly into the limelight, and […] public commentary seems focused on trying to explain the 'crazy' fan phenomenon to 'normal' outsiders." In the case of the Texas Cinemark screenings, these disparaging claims about *Twilight*'s female fans were repeated ad nauseum, refracting the excitement and pleasure of a midnight movie premiere into an image of crazed lust and terrifying fervor.

As Kristina Busse (2013) might argue, the discourses of fandom coming out of these particular *Twilight* screenings "are influenced by issues of gender not only in the way female fans are regarded but also in the way certain negatively connoted fannish activities are considered specifically female" (74). Busse expands upon this argument, pointing out that,

> Underlying all these analyses is a gender binary that identifies certain behaviors as *masculine* or *feminine*, with the former usually connoting active, intellectual, aggressive, and objective, and the latter, passive, emotional, sensitive, and subjective. While recent gender theory (Butler 1992) has clearly shown these categories to be constructed, not just on the level of culture but on the level of biology, the societal associations linger and become self-reinforcing. When women act according to stereotype, their behaviors get dismissed as feminine; when they act against stereotype, their behaviors get dismissed as aberrant or get reinscribed negatively as feminine nevertheless. In the case of overt sexual expression, for example, male desire for female stars is accepted as healthy virile sexuality, whereas female desire often gets redefined as

[5] For representative examples of this attention to female fandom, see news reports here (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXttHnwjzqQ), here (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyhgAEAi-gE) and here (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoUw0LPGJs8)

> overinvested and hysterical—a term that in its etymology, of course, already shows its genderedness." (74)

Such extreme assessments and critiques of female spectators are well documented since the early days of cinema. As Mireille Berton (2018) points out, "discourses about the consequences of female (over)presence in projection sites such as nickelodeons reveal a set of fears related to the new visibility of women's bodies in the public sphere—bodies, as I would like to suggest, that were mainly conceived of as nervous organisms overloaded with contagious stimuli" (221). Though the visibility of women in cinematic exhibition sites has not been "new" since the days of the nickelodeons, their presence, as I will show here, is still greeted with skepticism, contempt, mockery, and a sense of exoticism. Indeed, if "female fans are dismissed more easily, then so are their interests, their spaces, and their primary forms of engagement" (Busse 2013, 75).

Taking these reactions into account, it doesn't seem like a coincidence that Paramount chose midnight and 3:00 am screenings of a new *Twilight* film to unleash an unsettling preview for their newest found footage fright-fest; Berton's suggestion that women's spectatorial bodies were treated as sources of "contagious stimuli" takes on new meaning here in the context of "viral" promotion and the spread of the *Paranormal Activity 2* trailer in the wake of the Texas Cinemark screenings, where "overwrought" female reactions were used to sell the (positive) horrific attributes of the latest Blumhouse found-footage chiller. Interestingly, such audience reactions to the *Twilight* franchise have been so well documented that they were already primed to go viral; as various news reports indicated, the reactions of young girls and women were highly anticipated by film and media sites days prior to the Cinemark screening, when Paramount sent out a press release that the *Paranormal Activity 2* teaser would be attached to *Eclipse* (a headline from *Film School Rejects* summarizes many of these early predictions: "Paranormal Activity 2 Trailer Set to Scare Crap Out of Teen Girls" [Miller 2010]). It reads as highly intentional, then, that Paramount would exploit (1) the already guaranteed screams and cries of its specific test audience, and (2) the often skewed, sexist image of overwrought tween and teen girls (supposedly hyped on caffeine, raging hormones, and ardent fandom) in order to use the deeply impassioned performances associated with *Twilight* fandom as surrogates for the shrieks of viewers shocked and disturbed by onscreen promotional horrors.

Across the history of horror spectatorship and promotional gimmicks, this reliance on the screams of women to sell the genre and confirm its

effectiveness is nothing new. Writing of the classic horror cinema of the 1930s and 40s, Rhona Berenstein (2002) points out that various "exhibitor efforts" of the time "used women as prototypical viewers, [and] drew upon stereotypes that assumed that female patrons will be frightened by watching horror and invited women to defy those stereotypes as a means of garnering prizes and provoking their prowess as spectators" (142); additionally, female performers would be staged as fake medical personnel, who would occasionally tend to the overwrought patrons. This is a practice that predates the classic Universal Monsters era and exceeds it, having been used to eerie effect in early 20th century Grand Guignol performances and silent era film screenings, as well as by horror gimmick maestro William Castle (see: Skal 1993; Heffernan 2004; Kattelman 2011; Leeder 2011; Swanson 2015; Clepper 2016).

While Berenstein acknowledges that these promotional ploys could indeed be understood as exploiting and reinforcing gender stereotypes about women as weak and easily startled, they were in fact more complex in their understandings of gender and spectatorial performance than such an assessment allows for. Indeed, the key word here is "performance;" as Berenstein argues, if the female audiences of classic horror cinema "were asked over and over again to act out or refuse to act out their fears in front of crowds or to garner prizes, their gender roles—though conventional and promoted—were also highly theatricalized" (2002, 143). To scream might not necessarily indicate an involuntary reaction of fear, but a voluntary performance rooted in spectatorial pleasure and individual control. Indeed, the "act" of losing control is itself a somewhat controlled experience, directly contradicting notions of the movie audience as beholden only to the physical and ideological "agitations" of the cinema.

Such hyperbolic and trivializing language about *Twilight* fandom was also used in concert with the *Paranormal Activity 2* teaser to further an ongoing (and frustratingly reductive) discourse about the supposedly inherent qualities of "real" horror films and fans. According to many online journalists and pop culture commentators, the wild screams of young female "Twihards" at the *Eclipse* premiere screenings somehow "proved" that the teaser for *Paranormal Activity 2* was either a shining example of "real horror" in comparison to *Twilight* (because of its amplified frights, eerie tone, and ability to send moviegoers reeling in their seats), or that it was, conversely, an example of dumbed-down, gimmicky teen-centric horror (due to its conventional jump-scares and supposedly dull passages of either motionless surveilling or shaky found-footage-style camera work). This gendered mindset pervaded the majority of similar commentary posted to news sites and pop culture blogs in the immediate

hours and days following the Cinemark screenings, as evidenced by these excerpts:

> Most visitors to this site will have seen this trailer by now, it's no big deal right, pretty bland…and not scary in the slightest, right? Well, apparently it proved that jump scares still frighten people shitless as Deadline reports that Cinemark theater execs in Texas had a number of people (i.e. Twilight fans who were allowed up past their bedtime) who couldn't handle a minute or so of crappy video cam and generic ominous music and they ended up pulling the spot. (Cunninham 2010)

> The new Paranormal Activity 2 film has already started to build hype around it. […] The teaser trailer was attached to the midnight showing of Twilight Eclipse, and after viewing the trailer many fans left the theater demanding a refund. What's wrong, afraid of a dog and a baby? I expected more from a fan-base that goes crazy over Vampires and Werewolves. (Villarreal 2010)

> Personally, while I found the *PA2* trailer to be nicely discombobulating, and certainly a hundred times more frightening than the *Twi*-farce that followed it, I can think of several more commercials that in their day unnerved me more, including the ads for *Phantasm*, the *Dawn of the Dead* remake, and most terrifying of all, *The Shining* (Collis 2010).

> More proof that "Twilight" isn't true genre fare: Previews for actual horror movies are too frightening for Twihards. […] Genre filmmakers who were hoping to capitalize on the "Twilight" phenomenon should take this as a warning: People who swoon over sparkly vampires who fall in love with personality-less teenage girls aren't actually horror fans. There are vampires ... and then there are vampires who sparkle. (Beck 2010)

Not missing a chance to turn the removed trailer into a marketing moment, Paramount took advantage of the incident and the "masculinized" versus "feminized" discourses over horror spectatorship to fuel social media buzz for their lucrative *Paranormal* franchise. Using the studio's official *Paranormal* franchise Twitter account (@TweetYourScream) to retweet links to articles about the incident, they even went as far as to tweet the following sardonic proclamation: "Twilight moms getting the original Paranormal Activity 2 trailer

taken out of theaters for being too scary! #FlagOnThePlay"—the particular hashtag borrowing from football terminology, implying both a penalty against Paramount and a potentially egregious condemnation of a horror trailer that did its job by, well, *being scary*. By Paramount's logic, *Twilight*'s primarily adolescent, female fans are ill-suited to handle *real* horror when they actually encounter it—an unfortunate, ignorant assessment of both youth and female spectatorship and the varying, often contradictory pleasures of horror films, their trailers, and the cinema writ large. Drawing from Antunes (2020), such critiques overlap with the ways horror has long been "distanced from child audiences with the suggestion that they cannot comprehend it—or, alternatively, proposed as a genre so infantile it could never truly appeal to any other audience" (7). Here, *children* become (an often unfounded) source of agitation for adult audiences and critics, seemingly more potent than the disruptions and mishaps of the cinema discussed across this essay.

Conclusion

The *Twilight/Paranormal* case study is indicative of the movie theater, like other semipublic spaces, as having thresholds, boundaries, and strict conditions governed by a host of actors—with "implications of violence and exclusion" (Verschaffel 2009, 142) built into their very fabric. When combined with vicious genre gatekeeping and the devaluation of child and female spectatorship, this view of the semipublic spaces and practices of cinemagoing looks rather ugly, even in the playfulness that Paramount and entertainment journalists want to take from the incident and emphasize across promos and editorials. The overt critiques of young female *Twilight* and horror fans in relation to an exciting and jarring horror trailer—and most importantly, the critiques of their impassioned performances of terror, arousal, melodrama, wonder, and glee—in part attempt to erase what the movie theater has long been: "a site where people belonging to groups excluded from the dominant discourse and from positions of power could have access to a new kind of collective experience" (Berton 2018, 222).

In many ways, both case studies featured in this essay are about a kind of denial of experience at the movies. Recall the claims reported by Angie Han (2015) of *Slash Film*: that eyewitness accounts (specifically those made by patron Mandy Adkins) from inside the Danbarry Cinemas refuted the ideas that the cinema auditorium was a complete horror zone and that scores of children were left confused, nervous, crying, and traumatized from the *Sinister 2* trailer. On the contrary, Han quotes Adkins as saying that "the children in the theater were all

'calm and fine,' and it was actually the parents freaking out" (Han 2015). Interestingly, not all of the news reports about the horror trailer mishap included this information, an absence that only rehashed claims about the (allegedly) harmful, agitating powers of both the horror genre and movies more broadly.

Such misinterpretation or willful ignorance of children's actual viewing habits (and resistance to children's potentially pleasurable relationships with horror) have been a constant throughout cinema history; as Catherine Lester (2021) reminds us:

> More often than not, moral panics concerning children and horror rarely involve consulting actual children, but instead draw upon an abstracted, symbolic notion of the child as innocent, impressionable and in need of protection by adults at all costs. When children's experiences and views regarding horror are actually investigated, it is found that […] many children deliberately seek out and enjoy frightening media (Cantor and Reilly 1982: 92; Buckingham 1996: 112). (4)

So, to print and circulate the idea that the children were *calm* would be to admit that children, like everyone else, possess the ability to feel and perform their (early, developing) spectatorship in complex, contradictory, surprising, and even banal ways. It would mean to admit that kids weren't only scared, but rather potentially bored, oblivious, attentive to their parent's phones, talking to their siblings or friends, daydreaming, asleep, or—(Gasp!) most frightening of all for some parents—actually *interested* in the fragments of promotional horror projected in front of them. In this way, the trailers for the *Sinister* and *Paranormal Activity* sequels not only functioned as previews for upcoming horror films, but as a means for adults to project their fears, insecurities, and assumptions onto the bodies and experiences of young audiences coming into their own as they navigate the strange pleasures of cinematic horror.

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Real Ghosts:
Trauma, True Crime, and Temporality
in *Sharp Objects*

Charlotte Devon Scurlock

*The following text accompanies the videographic essay of the same title in this issue, viewable **here**.

Beginning in the late 2010s, streaming platforms have increasingly produced and distributed an increasing number of limited series and anthology horror programs. This trend can be observed on Netflix,[1] Amazon Prime Video,[2] and Hulu,[3] among others. These series are based in traditions of the televisual serialized family melodrama, and center elements of horror in aesthetics and narrative. They are presented either as individual episodes or season-length arcs. In their explorations of trauma and family dynamics, they embody what Jason Mittell (2015) identifies as schemas of "complex TV," featuring formal elements of serialization, melodrama, authorship, and deep character interiority and psychologization. In these regards, they are somewhat distinct from earlier televisual horror which frequently use an episodic structure. Like much of horror media, the threats in these series reflect Robin Wood's (1978) notion that horror's "return of the repressed," or the manifestations of unresolved trauma, center in the family. *Sharp Objects* (HBO 2018) fits within this schema of televisual horror, with the fall of a family empire playing out alongside visions of ghosts. In this video essay, I explore how *Sharp Objects* relies on fragmentation to mimic the impact of trauma and critique the gendered structures of true crime media. I use what Chiara Grizzafi (2020) would describe as a poetic (rather than explanatory) mode of videographic criticism.

Sharp Objects follows Camille Preaker, a crime reporter for a Saint Louis newspaper who copes with a slew of childhood traumas through alcohol abuse

[1] *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018), *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020), *Midnight Mass* (2021), *The Midnight Club* (2022), *Archive 81* (2022)

[2] *Them* (2021), *Lore* (2018)

[3] *Monsterland* (2020), *American Horror Stories* (2022)

and self-injurious behaviors. When she hesitantly returns to her fictional hometown of Wind Gap, Missouri, to report on the grisly murders of two young girls, she is confronted by memories, including those of her physically and emotionally abusive mother, her deceased sister, and intense gendered violence experienced in high school. Her past is revealed through brief sequences intercut throughout the series. This montage effect allows the mystery to unfold over the course of eight episodes. In order to connect the events of the past and present, and to solve the complex crimes driving the narrative, viewers must deploy what Mittell describes as the forensic gaze. This necessitates close diegetic engagement and rewards discussion and repeated viewings, encouraging audiences "to organize and uncover a wealth of narrative data" (Mittell 2007, n.p.).

As noted by Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbott in their 2012 book on the subject, televisual horror has always been diffuse and hybrid, with elements of the uncanny seeping into non-horror genres. The graphic murders at the center of the series drive the narrative arc, centering discussions of true crime media consumption. Writing about women readers of popular true crime books, Laura Browder (2006) notes a readerly focus less on narrative than on forensic scrutiny, the books structured to "encourag[e] the reader to participate in a voyeuristic dissection of the victim's mistakes, her failure to read obvious clues" (931). In *Sharp Objects*, the resolution promised by true crime media—the pleasure derived from solving the case and seeking justice—is shattered by an abrupt twist ending. A fourteen second mid-credit sequence reveals that Amma enlisted her friends to carry out the murders, luring the girls into the woods wearing long white gowns. While this ending offers tidy diegetic resolution, it dissolves the satisfaction that normally accompanies a true crime text as it further alienates Camille from her family. This ending also reveals how dominant cultural narratives of true crime (stranger danger, men as perpetrators of violence, etc.) diverts attention from the true killers in *Sharp Objects*.

The history of Wind Gap is saturated in gendered and racialized violence. Camille's mother is heiress to a large hog farm, employing much of the town, including a number of migrant workers. The frequent shots from car windows reveal the stark race and class divides at work in the city. The setting of Wind Gap places the series within the Southern gothic genre, with the constant hum of bugs and fans indicating the summer heat. Lisa Hinrichsen, Gina Caison, and Stephanie Rountree (2017) describe the televisual South as "an intensely visual place" (3). This emphasis on landscape allows for examination of class. The town of Wind Gap serves a prominent character function throughout the series, signifying the oft-explored notion of the idyllic American town with a seedy

underbelly. Frequent shots from Camille's perspective as she drives through town reveals the racial and socioeconomic segregation throughout the town, with homes ranging from large suburban mansions to decrepit homes and trailer parks.

I use video essay form to exemplify repeated patterns and capture the essence of watching the series. It would be difficult to understand the unique function of intercutting in *Sharp Objects* through text only. Additionally, I hope that I was able to capture the affective experience of watching the show through manipulation of sound. The poetic mode of this piece allows for implicit and explicit connections with the text.

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Short-Form Women-Made Horror:

Origins and Observations[1]

Erica Tortoloni

An animated, disembodied hand, its veins and ligaments provocatively exposed, juts out into the frame. Small trinkets, figurines, maps, clocks, scientific diagrams, historical illustrations, all frantically pulsating, appear in succession, enclosed in a circular iris. Staticky music, juxtaposed with natural sounds from a park (or perhaps a playground), fill the soundtrack and are quickly interrupted by the shrill screams of young children. A female doll, our protagonist, watches as limbs, blood, and teeth swirl around her.

Such describes, in part, visual artist Janie Geiser's 2009 short, *Ghost Algebra*. Geiser herself suggests that the animation fulfills, in part, the true meaning of *algebra*—that is, "the science of restoring what is missing, the reunion of broken parts" (Geiser n.d.). Indeed, *Ghost Algebra* reassembles "a landscape of constructed nature and broken bones […] the fragility of [the human body] exposed for what it is: ephemeral, liquid, a battlefield of nervous dreams" (Geiser n.d.). Beyond such ruminations on death, violence, and the corporeal,[2] *Ghost Algebra* and other Geiser films—like *Immer Zu* (1997), *The Fourth Watch* (2000), and *Arbor* (2012)—become even more significant for their significant role in short-form, women-made horror. We can observe, within the past several decades at least, a massive output of short-form horror helmed by women both in film festival circuits, including the Renegade Film Festival[3] and

[1] The following essay has been adapted from the author's doctoral dissertation, *Bitten By the Demon of Cinema: An Examination of Women-Made Horror* (2021).

[2] David Finkelstein of *filmthreat.com* provides a similar assessment, noting that "The film's title might suggest a method for trying to rationalize one's fear of death, but it might also suggest that the calculations themselves are elusive, ghostly." In "Ghost Algebra" (2011), https://filmthreat.com/uncategorized/ghost-algebra/.

[3] Formerly known as the Women in Horror Film Festival.

Etheria Film Festival, and online via video sharing platforms like YouTube and Vimeo.[4]

Yet, women creators' tendency to gravitate towards the horror short is nothing new. As I explore in this essay, at the most basic level, shortform horror filmmaking reinvited women, otherwise on the outskirts of mainstream Hollywood, back into creative roles behind the camera, despite the fiscal and technological challenges that came with it. Women were ultimately afforded more creative leeway, encouraging different genres, topics, and aesthetic styles to be incorporated in their films (Davis 2012, 11-12).[5] Artists-creators who I have affectionately deemed horror's "founding mothers"[6]—interrogating horrific imagery and themes at the cross-sections of film, animation, performance, and other media—transformed horror through the short in numerous ways: by reworking generic tropes, at times through intertextual exchanges; by building worlds through alternative, immersive sensorial experiences; and, as a result, by encouraging active spectatorship, to name a few. As I discuss, short-form horror's founding mothers, especially in non-mainstream experimental circles, were both horror creators and communicators, who had an indelible role in the ways in which horror was understood and normalized in society at large. The works created by these foundational figures have in common the unique ability to take otherwise commonplace images and subject matter (in and outside of horror proper) and

[4] Dennis Cooper, for instance, compiles numerous horror shorts—some helmed by female directors like Geiser and Leila Jarman—that are free to access on these video sharing platforms (see https://denniscooperblog.com/19-experimental-horror-films/). Similarly, Ellen Avigliano for *divinationhollow.com* offers a list of women-made short-form horror films, most of which can be streamed on Vimeo in particular, in conjunction with the Final Girls Film Fest (see https://divinationhollow.com/reviews-and-articles/short-horror-films-by-women-to-stream-now).

[5] To be sure, most production companies had a creative stronghold over their directors, even those working with a lower budget. Nevertheless, a "new way of making films outside of the major Hollywood studios"—both in terms of production practices, and aesthetic choices—came to fruition in the 20th Century.

[6] I've coined the term "founding mothers" – tongue firmly in cheek – as a way to best describe those female progenitors of visual, narrative, and thematic elements of the horror genre, in disciplines like cinema, proto-cinema, and the visual/performing arts. Borrowing from Julia Kristeva's discussion of abjection, Barbara Creed further observes that the "mother" or maternal in horror "does not respect borders, positions, rules, that which disturbs identity, system, order" (Creed 1986, 38). Horror's founding mothers, therefore, while not as negatively coded as maternal abjection, still arguably disrupt the same types of boundaries in their interpretation of the genre.

give them new feminist meaning. Such radical tendencies extend into the modern day, where contemporary women horror creators share in common the same movement towards subversion in their short-form horror creations.

Beginning with a more general overview of the role of women in short-form horror media, this essay focuses on those artist-filmmakers experimenting with horrific imagery in modern art circles in the twentieth century, namely Maya Deren, Mary Ellen Bute, and Claire Parker. I then draw parallels between these founding mothers and contemporary online horror which, in many instances reconceptualize existing women-made horror. Such remediations are similarly redefining the boundaries of the horror genre, all while breaking new ground in how horror is created, communicated, and now shared across media platforms.

Towards the Short Form: New Perspectives

It is first important to consider *why* the short is so popular amongst women behind the camera. Talking more broadly about her experiences making and studying film shorts, scholar Charlotte Crofts observes that

> The lack of narrative space in short film also contributes to its open-endedness as a medium, demanding a similarly active spectatorship […] Thus the short form could be said to be potentially radical in its tendency to encourage the imaginative activity of the spectator. As [Malcolm] le Grice suggests one way to resist "dominant cinema" is by 'demanding or encouraging a more "conscious" or self-aware spectator. (Crofts 2007, 19-20)

The short, by this logic, breaks new ground stylistically, and spectatorially, allowing women creators to radically challenge mainstream filmmaking *writ large*. Short-form filmmaking becomes even more relevant, arguably, when considering the horror genre. Speaking with Brian Hauser, multi-hyphenate horror creator Jennifer Trudrung states rather baldly that the short's appeal lies in the fact that she's "just a true horror geek. I absolutely love horror […] My imagination is also ripe with scary ideas. I tend to try not to think too hard on what lurks in the corner, but I'm also riddled with fears. So making short horror films came quite naturally" (Hauser 2022, 182). Actor-director Tristan Risk, comparing short-form horror to "tango-dances—they are a brief love affair," offers additional rationale for their attraction to the horror-short,

noting that "short films can elicit a strong reaction […] I think it's a neat trick if you can take someone on an emotional journey in a short period of time, allowing for a richer depth of experience" (Christopher 2019, n.p.). Meredith Alloway of *Ride* and *Deep Tissue* [2019] fame observes the formal, stylistic, and thematic potential of horror shorts:

> I have been making horror movies since I was about 10 — they're sitting in my closet on VHS. They're ridiculous. I think genre is such a great way to explore darker themes in life. I don't think I set out to make horror films, but let the story dictate the tone and the tone dictate the genre — and also really love playing with typical 'genre' boundaries. My first short *Interior Teresa* wasn't horror, but played with spiritual elements that did let it live slightly in that world. I also think thrillers, body horror, psychological descent films and slashers (all the above!) can be really fun." (Bohannan 2021)

From these observations, it is clear that short-form horror allows creators to embrace the genre in an experimental, almost playful way, in effect feeding "an impulse and a passion and a daily trek," in Alloway's words (Bohannan 2021). Beyond taking enjoyment in short-film horror, we can additionally extrapolate other advantages to the horror short: it is an overall practical, not to mention cost-effective, entry point into a restrictive (financially and otherwise) film industry. Besides, short-form women-made horror encapsulates women's unique experiences, showcasing in part "other worldviews, opening the variety of 'real' and showing new ways of seeing things with other stories that can give a counterpoint to those ideas that the main cultural industries offer" (Caradeux and Salom 2013, 128). Women-made short-form horror, in other words, opens up the space for new, alternative experiences not only along gender lines but also intersectionally, accounting for deeper explorations of race, sexuality, religion, and socioeconomic class otherwise not afforded in the industry at large, born out of systematic inequalities that are still present today.

Above all, short form horror implies something *outside of* Hollywood. In the contemporary context, Hauser asserts: "Horror films have long been a genre that blurs the lines between studio and independent fare, allowing some filmmakers to achieve big-budget commercial success without necessarily requiring front-end studio involvement. Horror films, and specifically horror short films, may offer a singular opportunity on the border between these categories" (2022, 195). This positioning of horror between the mainstream and

the margins can be traced back even further to Hollywood's studio era. "When Lois Weber warned would-be female directors in 1927 that they would 'never get away with it'," [7] writes Karen Ward Mahar, "the age of the female filmmaker appeared to be over" (Mahar 2008, 204). To be sure, as the Hollywood film industry expanded economically (with the rise of the studio system in the late-1920s) and technologically (with developments such as synchronized sound and the transition to color film), the number of opportunities for women behind the camera decreased significantly. Additionally, as studios became "larger, centralized, and dependent on outside capital," different roles within the film industry became largely gendered, with women being pushed out by their male counterparts and placed instead in roles with less creative control (Mahar, 204).[8] Women, once "touted as artists" and argued as bringing "special talents to the screen," were now viewed as being intrinsically different from their male counterparts, their abilities constrained to so-called feminine dramas, like social-problem films, serials and, above all, melodramas (Mahar, 190). Horror filmmaking[9], therefore, was a male enterprise, at least within the context of the studio system; women, already on the outskirts of this industry, were defined "as suitable filmmakers *only* when the subject of was germane to women."[10]

Horror's Founding Mothers: Bute, Parker, and Deren

Given the gendered discrimination of the Hollywood studio system, it would appear as if women's role as horror directors, during and after this industrial shift, is relatively scant. On the contrary, a number of women creators outside the studio system—namely, within avant-garde film circles—experimented

[7] "It," in this regard, pertaining to "filmmaking careers. Mahar, 2.

[8] According to Mark Garrett Cooper, factors like vertical integration, the rigidity of production roles (ultimately eliminating the pipeline that actors and screenwriters would travel to become directors), and the overall opinion that directing "would be men's work" (Cooper 2010, xvii), each helped to eliminate women from major directorial opportunities. Even studios like Universal Pictures, who were unique in their employment and promotion of a large number of women behind the camera, abandoned these progressive practices in favor of such industrial developments. In Mark Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

[9] Specifically, in directorial roles; women instead have figured prominently in screenwriting and editing, for instance.

[10] Author's emphasis; Mahar, 192.

heavily with horrific elements, their contributions arguably vital to the expansion of short-form horror as a whole. One such example is Mary Ellen Bute, whose work combines traditional animation, lighting techniques, music, and other visual effects[11] to reproduce a unique audiovisual language, and, in Bute's words, to create "a world of color, form, movement and sound in which the elements are in a state of controllable flux," with film thus becoming "a stimulant by its own inherent powers of sensation […] on the effect it produces" (Bute 1956). Bute's films, along these lines, immerse the viewer fully within a sensory experience that heightens their affective response to a film. This is most evident in her 1939 short animation, *Spook Sport*,[12] a "new type of film ballet" that combines traditional, popular horror visuals (like ghosts and so-called "spooks") with "Danse macabre," a classical song and poem chronicling the activities of the undead on Halloween (Bute 1939). Bute, while not explicitly staking a claim in the horror genre, animates her abstract, neon-colored illustrations in such a way to as to both physically visualize sound (Naumann, n.d.)—in this case, the frightening tune of the *Danse macabre*— and lend a further sense of eerie uncanniness to otherwise inanimate objects. As indicated in its opening intertitle, the film depicts "the bewitching hour of midnight, [when] spooks and ghosts arise from their graves to cavort about and make merry" (Bute 1939). Certainty, throughout the film, Bute expertly fulfills this description, layering darting, dancing, and morphing creatures on top of a foggy, mysterious midnight sky. The menacing and altogether unpredictable movements of the ghosts, spooks, and other creatures, which interact within a traditionally scary environment, therefore add a more horrific tone to the film. Bute then calls upon her audience to experience the film in a fully sensory way, encouraging their frightened, or at least uneasy, response to the content of her film. *Spook Sport*, beyond merely featuring horrific elements, amplifies its status as a horror film through its affective experimentations, a key example of the transgressive potential of short-form, women-made horror.

For other artists, the combination of the avant-garde and horror genre harkened back to the foundational works of Alice Guy-Blaché and Germaine Dulac, borrowing from multiple genres and narrative techniques, as well as

[11] These include such experiments with light and movement, which reproduced "constant flowing forms" like "swirling liquids, clouds or circles" (which were created by common household items like mirrors, cellophane, kitchen tools, and jewelry). See William Moritz. 1996. "Mary Ellen Bute: Seeing Sound," *Animation World* 1, no. 2: 29-32.

[12] *Spook Sport* is oftentimes credited to animator Norman McLaren, who collaborated on some of the visuals for the film.

displaying, in tandem, physical and psychological horrors. Animator Claire Parker, together with husband and collaborator Alexandre Alexeieff,[13] paid similar attention to the horror genre, using the novel *pinscreen*, or pinboard, animation method in each of their films. In brief, this animation medium, invented specifically by Parker and Alexeieff, consists of thousands of small metal pins held upright and moved around by a roller system; when lit in different positions, shadows emitted from the pins created moving images that could be photographed (Furniss 2014, 54).[14] The result of the pinscreen is rather distinct. In Maureen Furniss's assessment, not only does it afford a "wide variety of image types […] from abstract to representational, from realistic to stylized and from firmly modeled to softly amorphous" due to the positioning of the pins relative to the lighting apparatus, but these images also have an almost nightmare-like quality, becoming more "loosely constructed, blending into the [background] rather than being self-contained forms" (54). This then leads to a number of creative possibilities. In *Le nez* (1963), Parker and Alexeieff use these fluid movements to capture a variety of emotions on their characters' faces, seamlessly weaving between thriller, drama, and dark comedy in the process. In their earliest and most famous work, 1933's *Night on Bald Mountain*, the pinscreen effectively enters the realm of horror. Described by Arthur G. Robson as "a nightmare, a *Walpurgisnacht*" (Robson, n.d.), the film takes inspiration from Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky, and features a dizzying, chaotic montage of witches congregating on top of the titular mount. Like Bute, Parker and her collaborator combine the rhythm of a thrilling, sometimes chilling classical score with the fluid movements of horror characters; in *Bald Mountain*'s case, these include floating witches, grotesque animal hybrids, and shadowy, demonic creatures. Moreover, like Blaché's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *Bald Mountain* combines physical horrors (human and animal faces mutating into one another, bodies floating in mid-air, and so forth), with the psychological, focusing on tormented emotional states just as much as visual grotesqueries. Viewers are often shown innocent victims—or what appear to be innocent victims—grimacing and contorting in horror at the very sight of the witches' activities. Enveloped in "shadows and shine, positive and negative space,

[13] Like Bute, Parker's films are often solely attributed to a male collaborator; in this case, Alexeieff is listed above Parker in their films' credits.

[14] In 1973, Norman McLaren released a documentary in which Parker and Alexeieff demonstrate the technology and creative capacity of pinscreen animation amongst fellow animators. For more information, see *Pinscreen*, streamed in full by the National Film Board of Canada.

surface and depth, and above all else, the virtual and actual" (Thain n.d., 168), the spectator is witnessing the victim's reactions but, because of the frequent lighting and movement techniques, the spectator is also left in a state of utter chaos. The film as a result, leaves the viewer in a perpetual state of horror, immersed in a "tragicomic story of life and death" (Robson n.d.) where confusion and mental anguish are at the forefront. *Night on Bald Mountain*, in its surreal imagery, aptly encapsulates the sheer terror of the source material—the Witch's Sabbath—and the eventual societal and physical persecution that accused "witches" would face as a result. *Bald Mountain*, as a result, has important implications for how trauma, and specifically women's trauma, can be represented on screen. A striking entry into women-made horror, Parker's animation combines horror and the surreal to chronicle the terrors of the everyday.

Still, for others, using horrific elements in film followed in the longer tradition of visual modernisms outside of film, like in dada and surrealism.[15] Maya Deren, one of the foremost figures in US avant-garde film circles during the 1940s and 1950s, is an interesting example of this, given her own tangential affiliation with surrealist filmmaking and her subsequent work in collaboration with fellow artists like Marcel Duchamp (Keller 2015, 67).[16] Deren's work across her career can be characterized by the themes of autobiography, modern subjectivity, and subconscious exploration, as well as her frequent experiments with movement and mobility (juxtaposing physical movements like dance with experimental, visual techniques) and, in her later works, explorations of Afro-Caribbean culture.[17] Importantly, a common thread through all of Deren's works is a fascination with dreams—not just the nonsensical, abstract imagery that is commonplace to dreamlike states, but also, in the words of Sarah Keller, the temporal "logic of dreamscapes" that takes shape in nonlinear narrative

[15] For a lengthier discussion on this topic, see the author's dissertation, *Bitten by the Demon of Cinema* (2021).

[16] Deren "did not consider herself a Surrealist, she felt her art form [sic] was more controlled than allowed by the movement's original objectives using 'stream of consciousness'." (Philpot 2001, n.p.). However, the case has been made by both contemporaneous and current critics for surrealism, noting her tendency towards conveying "the Imaginary, to map the very psychic structures that predate and predetermine both the 'eye' and the 'I' […]" (Harper 2016, 290).

[17] See P. Adams Sitney (1974); Catrina Neiman, "An Introduction to the Notebook of Maya Deren" (1980, 4); Maria Pramaggiore, "Performance and Persona in the U.S. Avant-Garde: The Case of Maya Deren" (1997, 25); Graeme Harper, "Maya Deren in Person in Expressionism" (2016, 291).

structures and the "emotional experience" that one may have with their dreams (Keller 2015, 32). What has often been neglected from these discussions of Deren's use of dreams, however, is how it implicitly grafts onto the horror genre. In her most famous work, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943),[18] Deren constructs a dreamlike world—characterized by "collapsing and expanding of time and space, meticulous structure, mysterious symbology and imagery, and recursive, poetic logic"—which, as its narrative unfolds, quickly shifts into a nightmare-scape marked by violence, death, and an overall sense of disarray (42).

This experimentation with psychological horror is expanded in Deren's incomplete short, *Witch's Cradle* (1944),[19] which combines dreamlike qualities (like the movement of inanimate objects, and repetition of actions and events) with actual horrific elements, like an ominously beating heart, ritual magic, witches, and occult symbols (prominently, the pentagram painted on the forehead of actress Anne Matta Clark).[20] The result of Deren's combination of such horror tropes with the display of jarring psychological states is two-fold. On one hand, the film immerses its viewers in a seemingly never-ending labyrinthine journey that constantly threatens the protagonist with literal and figurative stasis; vine-like strings frequently constrain the protagonist and her non-linear, non-resolute movements in time. On the other hand, in her exploration of magic and the occult related to the female body, Deren makes implicit statements about gender. As Keller offers, "the 'witch' invoked in the film's title both [wields] an excess of power and yet [is] always in danger of punishment for her brazen independence" (66). In other words, the use of horrific elements in *Witch's Cradle*, through the trope of the witch, communicates the fraught status of women as both "wielding an excess of power" and being "in danger of punishment for her brazen independence" (66). Indeed, Matta Clark's witch character oscillates between being powerful and powerless,

[18] Like Parker's films, *Meshes of the Afternoon* is attributed to two directors; in this case, the film is directed by both Deren, and her then-husband, Alexander Hammid.

[19] Several parts of *The Witch's Cradle* are lost, but in general, the film was not completed. This, according to some, is because Deren herself "must have surmised that [the film] did not or would not be successful at some point in the production" (Keller 2015, 61).

[20] There are confusing inconsistencies as to the correct name of the actress playing Deren's witch. Sources like IMDb, for instance, list the actress as "Pajorita Matta;" other, particularly in reference to her artist son, Gordon Clark, use "Anne Clark Matta," "Anna Matta," and "Anne Alpert" in their records. For the purposes of consistency, I'll be using "Anne Matta Clark" (referenced in Sarah Keller's text) in my analysis.

eventually ensnared by a series of web-like ropes that appear in the empty gallery space. However, by the film's end, the witch reclaims agency through her magical powers: through the simple act of looking, she is able to set herself free from the ropes, a literal and figurative symbol of restrictive power in society, and redirect them towards the figural, oftentimes grotesque artworks that fill the halls of the gallery (perhaps a representation of the restrictive, "boy's club" in the modern art world). *Witch's Cradle* ultimately ends on a cliffhanger, with Matta Clark's witch once again cowering in fear over the ropes that twist across the gallery. Yet, this uncertain ending works to turn the witch trope on its head; rather than merely representing the woman-as-witch as a figure in constant persecution by her male counterparts, as was more or less common in the horror trope, Deren presents a witch that is multi-dimensional, one that works to regain her agency and actively work against the inevitable persecution that she faces within society. At its core, horror is impactful because it encapsulates the power dynamics of the chaotic back-and-forth between dominance and submission that results, in mainstream iterations, in the latter. Deren, through her aesthetic reconceptualization of the witch trope, reconceptualizes horror as a genre, constructing a world in which the monster character is indeed complex, and the power struggle is one where there is no clear-cut resolution. Coupled with the distinct mythos surrounding Deren's own persona as an artist,[21] the visual and thematic experiments in *The Witch's Cradle* propel it into a distinct realm of horror, one that is extended in more contemporary iterations of the genre that reclaim the witch.

As I have discussed thus far, the works of directors like Bute, Parker, and Deren were located outside of the studio system, during a time that generally eschewed the creative input of women behind the camera. Nevertheless, the works of non-mainstream directors like Bute, Parker, and Deren were valuable for their expansion of horrific elements developed by other seminal female creators as well as their new interpretations of such content aesthetically and thematically. Of course, the trajectory of the cinematic medium—and all of the multi-media experiments surrounding it—is enriched by the contributions of women, who laid the groundwork for how we understand horror as a unique and popular genre. The creative contributions of these women—some prominent, some obscure, and some that were altogether anonymous—are indeed novel for their experiments with horror *as a genre*. They

[21] Rumors of Deren as a witch place her in a unique position with the horror genre, reinforcing "the image of Maya as an occult priestess, the exotic 'angle' of her story which most journalists still find irresistible" (Neiman 1980, 15).

were preoccupied with how the genre (and, all of its earliest iterations) looked and felt, and how audiences could and should understand the content they were consuming.

Short-Form Horror's New Internet Frontiers

As we see in the contemporary context, experiments with short-form horror now also consider affective response, namely, how the spectator should react to and interact with on-screen horrific content. Additionally, contemporary women-made horror is all the more radical in its reinterpretation of the genre, situating horror as a larger statement on topics like gender, sexuality, and race relations. Shorts like *Suicide By Sunlight* (Nikyatu Jusu, 2019), *For A Good Time Call…* (Izzy Lee, 2019), *Do You Want Me to Kiss You This Time?* (*Quieres Que Hoy Te Bese?*; Miriam Ortega Dominguez, 2019) and many others have taken both film festivals and Internet platforms by storm, "filled with meaty, macabre substance and no filler" (Guest Editor 2020). Outside of the festival circuit, even more interesting experiments in horror shorts have been taking place: namely, on popular social media sites. According to Megan McCluskey, Tik Tok in particular has been fertile ground for short-form horror creation. "From comedies to musicals, these videos run the genre gamut," McCluskey observes,

> There's even a thriving corner of the TikTok community that has taken to creating short-form horror flicks — including ones that are themed for this unique moment in time. And while it may seem strange for horror fans to want to experience the thrill of a good scare in the midst of a crisis that could be considered a real-life nightmare, with millions of viewers tuning in, it's clear some of these spooky shorts are resonating with people. (2020)

Typically, however, Tik Tok's women-made horror takes on myriad forms and styles, beyond traditional horror narratives. Shelby Nicole of @nightpoolproductions, for instance, alternates between "story-time"-style testimonials, directly addressing the viewer with personal anecdotes; engaging summaries of real-life true crime headlines; and ranking and reviewing her favorite horror content, including those Tik Tok-specific shorts cropping up since 2020. Similarly, @briheartshorror and @horror_chronicles share their favorite horror content, giving first-hand accounts and reviews of mainstream, indie, and even experimental horror content. Still others are largely self-

reflexive, following the tradition of many other Tik Tok creators, in that they remix and rework pre-existing horror content in new, bite-sized formats. This is most evident in the recent resurgence of soundbites from Cecelia Condit's influential horror short, *Possibly in Michigan* (1983), on the platform, where users like @stargirlaur (a popular cosplayer on the site) lip sync and even reenact snippets from the infamous horror short.[22] All in all, what's noticeable about the new batch of short-form, women-made horror is, like the foundational figures in experimental film and video before them, its transgressive nature, on multiple levels. New horror shorts, akin to those works by horror's founding mothers, evidently play with form, offering alternatives to traditional horror content in the process. They break the fourth wall, actively incorporating multiple storytelling forms and engaging the spectator, this time with an arguably broader (viral) reach. And, through this social mediated environment, new horror shorts in effect maintain "relationships with audiences that many institutions find difficult to engage, developing alternative narratives and reclaimed histories."[23]

Quoting a Tik Tok user who popularized the #filmtok hashtag on the site, Maybelle Morgan notes:

> What we watch has always had a direct impact on culture and society, and as long as conversations in film are singular so will be viewpoints by the masses that consume them […] There's a ton to discuss in terms of race, gender, and sexuality in film, and the darker potential that it can have as a tool of propaganda or in terms of producing and reinforcing negative stereotypes that genuinely affect people's lives. The stories we tell as a culture, and the funding that goes behind that, has a very tangible impact on all of us. (Morgan 2021).

[22] Many articles exist dissecting the popularity of Condit's horror short; see, for example, Tatum Dooley's 2019 piece for *Vice*: https://garage.vice.com/en_us/article/wjvv8z/cecilia-condit-video-art-tiktok.

[23] Andrew Chitty develops this argument in reference to digital film archival work, namely, co-curation "between collections-based institutions and members of the public" (2011, 413). In my view, Chitty's observations are salient to new short-form women-made horror: social media sites like Tik Tok arguably house media texts in a way similar to these digital archives; they reinterpret relationships between film industry-as-institution and consumer; and, importantly, create a space for such "alternative narratives and reclaimed experiences" from women in front of and behind the camera. See Chitty. 2011. "London Re-cut: Reclaiming History through the Co-curated Remixing of Film," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 54, no. 4: 413-418.

Indeed, the significance of women creators, even beyond the horror genre, is one that is mold-breaking and discourse-disrupting. Importantly, such new tendencies can be traced back to those early creators who, firstly, offer new insights into the power and potential of horror and, secondly, exploring the nuances, and oftentimes shortcomings, of the existing genre, laying bare the scaffolding of otherwise commonplace genre conventions, and the potential (and, sometimes harmful) shortcomings thereof. Returning to the work of Janie Geiser, the short arguably has the unique potential to "activate our primal fears, emotions, childish fascination, nostalgia, fear of ghosts, remembrances; resonating in the spiritual part of the self and how is it related to this emotional hauntology we know very little of but is present as deeply as something we might've felt minutes ago" (Sarmiento Hinojosa 2020). Undeniably, the women at the heart of my discussion have cultivated an index of images and techniques challenging those things that society deems horrific, breaking down such rigid assumptions and, sometimes simultaneously, loudly and proudly expressing aspects of identity that are limited or censored in mainstream society. Women clearly have always made horror, and the short, once on the genre's periphery, is now an essential mode of discourse that amplifies these voices at their loudest.

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Angelic Frankenstein and the History of Bob Mizer's Pre-Stonewall Muscle Monsters

Finley Freibert

In the mid-1960s Bob Mizer—Los Angeles-based male physique photographer and founder of the Athletic Model Guild (AMG)—produced a series of short monster films sold on a mail-order basis via both catalogs and advertisements in publications like Mizer's *Physique Pictorial*. These films spoofed the homoeroticism implicit in their source material, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and also generated their own sexual appeals to queer men through the display of scantily clad male physiques. Culminating in at least nine short monster films, Mizer's productions primarily circulated within the underground gay film niche. However, a notable exception was *Angelic Frankenstein* (1969), a film that crossed over to the realm of horror fandom when it was mentioned in the magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*.[1]

Bob Mizer's muscle monster films are an underexplored and relatively prolific branch of the history of queer horror cinema. The conspicuousness of sexual expression in Mizer's films is notable given that contemporaneous feature films only hinted at homosexuality. As films with an obvious gay sensibility and undisguised homoeroticism that acknowledged their maker's and audiences' non-straight sexualities, these films provided a maximum of gay visibility on the cusp of Stonewall—an event that historians often consider a turning point for gay activism toward the tactic of gay public visibility—that was distinct from the closetedness of more mainstream horror cinema. Even popular horror features produced during the post-Stonewall surge in gay visibility did not directly posit gay characters in their narratives. As Harry Benshoff observes of horror films from the late 1960s to the 1970s, "the proto-gay male figures are never identified as such, and must be read as homosexual by the spectator" (1998, 220). Mizer's horror shorts are thus precursors to the cinematic mode that Darren Elliot-Smith calls "Gaysploitation horror" (2016, 89-110), a set of homoerotic films from the 2000s—spearheaded by David

[1] In this article, film release dates follow the date of each film's public availability. For a list of Mizer's Frankenstein shorts and their release dates, see *Table 1* below.

DeCoteau's *Voodoo Academy* (2000)—that centered the semi-nude male body as their primary visual feature. Congruent to how some of DeCoteau's films found audiences of women outside of their clear gay male target audience, Mizer's *Angelic Frankenstein* gained broader recognition when knowledge of the film circulated outside of his consumer base of gay men.

This article unearths the history of Bob Mizer's gay monster shorts to argue that even before the Stonewall uprisings of 1969, the "monster queer" (1998, 20) identified by Harry Benshoff was an overtly visible entity in both gay subcultural contexts *and* horror fandom circles. While at least one of Mizer's monster films was exhibited at a gay theater, the fact that his monster films were shorts produced on a small gauge for private viewing allowed them to circulate more widely, even in locales where there was not a local gay theater. In tracing the history of Mizer's *Frankenstein* adaptations, this article stages a conversation between recent social and cultural historiographic methods (Johnson 2019; Powell 2019), queer media studies' dual methods of textual analysis (Benshoff 1998), and cultural study (Elliot-Smith 2016) that have been applied to horror media. Synthesizing these methods provides an avenue for bringing into relief how pre-Stonewall gay public visibility permeated all levels of Mizer's media transmission spectrum, from overtly gay content forged in production by a gay-identified filmmaker, through the conspicuous advertising of gay mail order and theatrically-distributed products, to the reflections of gay audiences and peers of Mizer who provided ideas for his later productions. The first section of this essay details the production and distribution contexts of Mizer's short film operation. In doing so, the section identifies Mizer's nine known Frankenstein monster shorts and analyzes how the marketing of the films emphasized their gay sensibility. The second section focuses on the formal qualities of Mizer's monster films by providing a close reading of his two available monster shorts. The final section chronicles the more public visibility of *Angelic Frankenstein* and situates Mizer's monster shorts within the tradition of queer horror filmmaking.

A Production and Distribution History of AMG's Monster Filmmaking Operation

Bob Mizer was a prominent and pioneering physique photographer who began his operation in the 1940s and eventually became a major force in the industry. As a contemporary of Tom of Finland, Mizer has recently attained a significant cultural status with the endeavors of the San Francisco-based Bob Mizer Foundation and the publication of several retrospective tomes by German

boutique art book publisher Taschen.[2] Yet beyond his artistic prowess, Mizer was a significant political force in pre-Stonewall gay activism. Historian David K. Johnson has argued that Mizer's work was an overlooked catalyst of gay liberation politics in Los Angeles: "although often portrayed as something of a bumbling loner, Mizer was at the center of an increasingly sophisticated gay network and came to be a leader of an effort to unite and defend the rights of gay men" (2019, 51). Film scholar Ryan Powell has estimated that Mizer's filmic work spearheaded an emergent counterpublic formation in conjunction with the films of Kenneth Anger and the communal organizing of the Mattachine Society: "the AMG films of the 1950s and 1960s constitute a precursor to a whole domain of cultural production and commercial development for and by male-desiring men" (2019, 44). In conversation with Johnson and Powell's work, this section details the emergence of Bob Mizer's monster film line inspired by the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

In 1957, after an over ten-year expansion of his photography operation and a six-year run of his magazine *Physique Pictorial*, Bob Mizer looked to his customers to gauge the demand for diversifying his product offerings by running a series of surveys in *Physique Pictorial*. One of those surveys ("Are You Interested in Physique Movies?" 1957) was designed to measure the viability of offering small gauge films for private home viewing. The survey included queries on various topics to determine customers' access to projection technologies, preference for 8mm or 16mm, favorite AMG models, interest in seeing models in posing straps (thong-type briefs) or nude, and affinity toward physique film genres such as "posing routines, wrestling, day in the life of athlete or model, dramatic stories, humorous stories, adventure" ("Are You Interested in Physique Movies?" 1957).

Within months, Mizer's company, AMG, publicized their entry into the film production and distribution realm with the announcement of seven films in production ("AMG Physique Movie Production Schedule" 1957), most written by Mizer, but occasionally written by Mizer contemporaries such as sculptor David Tomlinson of Inca Studios, who wrote a treatment for a short adaptation of *Pygmalion*. Contrary to widespread belief, Mizer's available film offerings began with so-called "story films" (Wuest 2017, 69), full-fledged short narratives rather than the more "primitive" posing films or wrestling films identified as their predecessors in the broader industry (Waugh 1996, 259). In fact, the linear progress narrative outlined in previous scholarship—from posing films to wrestling films to narrative films—contradicts how Mizer developed

[2] See for example Dian Hanson's *Bob's World* (2009).

his commercial film enterprise, which initially comprised mail order story films.[3] Mizer stated in an early announcement: "AMG has a good deal of footage of physique posing, Muscle Beach contests, etc [sic]. which will be made available a little later. But primarily we are going to film simple little stories which will give the models an opportunity to display their bodies in natural activities, rather than in strictly stilted posing." ("AMG is Going into the Movie Business!" 1957). In the summer of 1958, Mizer made his first three catalog films—*Street Fight* (1958), *Cowboy and the Sailor* (1958), and *Brother Cinder-Elmer* (1958)—available to consumers, and in the same issue of *Physique Pictorial* he announced the release of five more story films on a once-a-month basis from August to December of 1958 ("Physique Movies" 1958). The initial AMG film offerings were story films that each fell squarely into a narrative genre akin to categories established in the Classical Hollywood period: crime (*Street Fight*, *Motorcycle Thief* [1958]), western (*Cowboy and the Sailor*, *Cowboys and Indians* [1958]), Orientalism (*Pharaoh's New Slave* [1958], *Aladdin* [1958]), and fantasy (*Brother Cinder-Elmer*, *Danny and the Muscle-Merman* [n.d.]).

While AMG did not initially engage with the horror genre, in 1958 they announced their first monster film, entitled *Young Dr. Frankenstein* (n.d.) ("Scene from the film: 'Aladdin'" 1958). While it is unclear whether that film was ever produced or if it perhaps was released under a different title, what we do know is that AMG began branching out into a few other horror themes before producing several mad scientist films inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It is significant that Mizer's first monster film was announced in 1958 since this year marked both Hammer's revival of Gothic horror with the release of *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) and the first publication of James Warren and Forrest J. Ackerman's *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine. Thus, Mizer's monster films are situated within the broader development of 1950s "monster culture" (Skal 1993, 266), as they appropriated the mainstream horror iconography of studios like Universal and Hammer, and often infused it with a tongue-in-cheek camp sensibility. As Thomas Waugh has described broadly of Mizer's employment of Hollywood-inspired genre iconography, the physique films "mix the activity of

[3] For example, Thomas Waugh traced a narrative progression more broadly in the physique film industry when he argued, "the posing film soon became eclipsed by the other two genres" (1996, 259), and then explicated that "the narrative film genre, the most developed form of the mail-order cinema, evolved within a decade from minimally anecdotal variations of the posing and wrestling loops" (1996, 262). Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin also assert a similar linear historical trajectory of physique genres, "The first to appear was the posing genre, … however, this formula quickly grew stale, and the wrestling genre was born … eventually physique filmmakers began adding small narratives" (2006, 114).

borrowing with the making of the new. In such works the shock of theft merges seamlessly with the pleasure of creation out of whole cloth, and an empowerment is felt that moves beyond the pleasure of the scrapbook. And who says camp precludes the erotic?" (1996, 57). Early entries in AMG's horror line include the hybrid mad scientist horror/fantasy *Witch Boy* (1959), the Halloween-themed *Trick or Treat* (1962), the shapeshifting comedic narrative *Mad Scientist* (1964), and the werewolf-mask camp of such films as *Cyclist and the Werewolf* (aka *Cyclist and the Wolfman*) (1964), *I Dreamed You Were-A-Wolf* (1966), and *Bewitched Hunters* (1974).[4]

By late 1965, AMG had completed a series of at least eight Frankenstein-esque films (note: this count does not contain *Psychedelic Frankenstein* [1968], which was likely produced later; see *Table 1*) that were all filmed on similar laboratory sets and all enacted mad scientist scenarios with bare-chested actors wearing posing straps. While the idea for the films may have been Bob Mizer's, he was known to have solicited ideas from his contemporaries (Freibert 2020, 37) and also his customers ("AMG Physique Movie Production Schedule" 1957). In an advertisement for the earliest film in release, *How to Make an Athlete* (1964), Mizer underscored his desire for collaboration with customers, a sentiment often reiterated in his magazine: "Though the plots may be specifically tailored on the spot, none the less we benefit tremendously from the ideas customers send us, read them carefully and keep them in the back of our mind ready to press into service when the occasion presents itself. Please send us your ideas" ("How to Make an Athlete" 1964, 23). The second film released in the series, *Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment* (1965), had a title which proclaimed its overt queer orientation via the name of the Dr. Frankenstein stand-in, Dr. Faggerty (Ardell Langford), that referenced a derogatory word for a gay man. Yet the title also indexed the culture of collaboration and interpenetration of physique photography industries in its rhyming allusion to Tag Haggerty, a physique studio run by Don O'Donnell, Leonard Robinson, and Harris Eidner ("Certificate of Business" 1957) that had previously photographed Langford.

[4] Mizer also made several mummy-themed films (with the mummy in pharaoh-garb rather than wraps), but it should be noted that most of these films fell more within the Orientalist genre than horror. For example, a film like *Mummy and the Dancer* (1963) used very similar set, costuming, and scenario as *Belligerent Slave* (1965).

Film Title	Release Date
How to Make an Athlete	December 27, 1964 (PP, GGSQ)
Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment	November 21, 1965 (PP, GGSQ)
Dr. Bigelow's Monster	January 9, 1966 (GGSQ)
Psychedelic Monster	July 1968 (PP)
Angelic Frankenstein	October 5, 1969 (GGSQ)
Making of a Monster	July 4, 1971 (GGSQ)
Dr. Doty's Creation	December 1971 (PP); September 29, 1974 (GGSQ)
Scientist and the Demon	January 7, 1973 (GGSQ)
Dr. Schulz's Manikin	December 29, 1975 (GGSQ)
The PP label means the film release date was indicated in an issue of *Physique Pictorial*. GGSQ means the release date was stated in *Grecian Guild Studio Quarterly*, no. 16 (Winter 1965).	

Table 1: Bob Mizer's Frankenstein monster shorts and their release dates.

Mizer's series of Frankenstein films were shot on markedly similar sets, sometimes identical. Most of the films contained at least some form of electrical machine (often with a climbing high voltage arc), a gurney or laboratory table, makeshift cabinets that on close inspection had drawn-on hinges and doors, and a mat on the floor for wrestling.

Figure 1: Still from *Making of a Monster*, Courtesy Bob Mizer Foundation.

As Mizer described an early film in the series, "this is another example of making up a plot to fit the models & background available at the time" ("How to Make an Athlete" 1964, 23). In a retrospective oral history interview, Mizer reflected on further expanding this production method a bit later in his career: "I would set up four different sets in the

studio at one time, so you could take the same actors and take them through four entirely different groups" (Mizer 1992). Indeed, the films Mizer efficiently produced in his Frankenstein series not only recycled props and sets but also actors from previous films; for instance, *Angelic Frankenstein* and *Scientist and the Demon* starred Ray Greig, Jim Johnson appeared in *Scientist and the Demon* (1973) and *Dr. Bigelow's Monster* (1966), and Paul Bigelow starred in *Dr. Bigelow's Monster*, *Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment*, and *Making of a Monster* (1971).[5] As Mizer recalled, "I would custom design something to make use of the people that were here, and if somebody left at the beginning or just before we got started you'd change it just enough to adapt to the people you had" (Mizer 1992). Mizer's Frankenstein shorts represented one branch of the factory-like production operation that he developed over the years, which circulated available acting talent through different settings for the purposes of maximum production output.

Figure 2: Still from *Scientist and the Demon*, Courtesy Bob Mizer Foundation.

Given this efficient production system, Mizer also needed a distribution arrangement that emphasized his product variety. He accomplished this by interspersing the release dates of films across thematic product lines (such as the Frankenstein shorts) so that similar films were not released simultaneously. The Frankenstein-line averaged a new film in release every year or two. To make customers aware of the films, Mizer publicized them in both his periodical *Athletic Model Guild Bulletin* and his physique magazine *Physique Pictorial*, and he would often include stills from the films, as well as information on current availability and release dates. In 1964, Mizer distributed the *1964 Physique Movie Calendar*, which was essentially a catalog for over a hundred films he had completed. The calendar advertised

[5] Mizer's creation of a makeshift star system designed for indoor sets is a precursor to the star building endeavors of Pat Rocco, a contemporary of Mizer who frequently shot his physique shorts outdoors (Freibert 2021).

8mm and 16mm versions of the films, a "Physique Movie of the Week Club" that offered discounts, and a relatively cheap film viewer (the Mansfield Cine-Vuer) for those who could not afford a projector (*1964 Physique Movie Calendar* 1964, 2-3). The following year an entire issue of *Grecian Guild Studio Quarterly* (1965) was dedicated to enumerating Mizer's copious short film roster, including film stills and release dates for the films that were featured.

Beyond the eight posing strap films produced in Mizer's Frankenstein series, by 1968 he shot a ninth film, *Psychedelic Monster*, that thematically tied into the muscle monster theme of the series, but included full frontal nudity (rather than featuring scantily clad models), featured significant special effects supplements, and was exhibited theatrically a month after its 8mm mail order release. The August issue of *Physique Pictorial* offered the 8mm film for $25 with the advertising copy, "It's full of colorful lighting effects and other nonsense. It will be something really different for your party showings. This is a natural film and purchasers must establish an age of 19 or more" ("Psychedelic Monster" 1968, 10). The "natural film" descriptor and the age restriction were coded ways of signaling the film's main attraction of full frontal male nudity. Recent to the film's production, the legality of nudity in physique films had been clarified by a federal district court in the case *U.S. v. Spinar and Germain* No. 4-67 CR 15 (D. Minn. 1967). In the case, Bob Mizer's earlier nude film *Blackie and the Pirate* (1967) was considered alongside various physique magazines published by Lloyd Spinar and Conrad Germain. Judge Earl Larson ruled that *Blackie and the Pirate* was "high camp" (Larson 1967, 9) rather than obscene and that despite its depiction of full frontal nudity "the film does not exceed contemporary limits of candor" (Larson 1967, 9). This federal decision ushered in a new wave of nude male films of which *Psychedelic Monster* was a part.

In spirit and aesthetic focus, Bob Mizer's Frankenstein shorts are unique branches of the long tradition of exploitation cinema, a sector of the commercial film industry that, as Eric Schaefer (2001) has argued, are defined by their emphasis on spectacle and advertising over narrative trajectory. With *Psychedelic Monster*, Mizer elicited the tactics of exploitation cinema—particularly, the fact that "a major component of exploitation movies was their use of timely and sensational topics" (Schaefer 2001, 236)—for commercial appeal. The film's title and surreal effects played on the timely subject matter of mind-altering drugs, situating Mizer's film within what Andrew Owens calls the "psychedelic tapestry of queer occult images" (2021, 74), a contemporaneous trend of queer psychedelia—epitomized in the work of Kenneth Anger—that often invoked the conventions of horror. In addition to its psychedelic sensibility, the film's

aesthetic core is the visual display of male frontal nudity, as we will see in the next section.

Parallel to the 1967 federal decision that allowed for commercialized male nudity for private consumption, there were increased endeavors to publicly exhibit queer erotic films, particularly in Los Angeles. After previous years of fits and starts in screening gay films, on June 26, 1968, Continental Theatres transitioned its Park Theatre on Alvarado to an exclusively gay policy, which lasted until June 1, 1971. Initially, the theater drew from an eclectic mix of physique films (primarily made by Pat Rocco) and underground films (such as *My Hustler* [Andy Warhol, 1965] and *Flaming Creatures* [Jack Smith, 1963]). Due to a product shortage in gay-oriented film, Continental approached Bob Mizer with the prospect of exhibiting his mail order shorts (Mizer 1992). By August the Park was showing Mizer's posing films of individual nude models including Blackie Preston, Rick Collette, and Bobby Nelson, and in September the Park began screening Mizer's story films like *Annie's Angry Android* (1968) and *Boy Factory* (1968). From September 4 to September 10, 1968, *Psychedelic Monster* played alongside Mizer's posing film featuring Monte Hanson, and two campy foreign features *The Day the Fish Came Out* (Michael Cacoyannis, 1967) and *My Son, the Hero* (Duccio Tessari, 1962). While the reception of *Psychedelic Monster* is unclear, the film's aesthetics, which included special effects and full frontal nudity, diverged significantly from the eight previously produced monster shorts.

Sustained Spectacle and Shifts in the Formal Structure of Bob Mizer's Frankenstein Films

Dr. Bigelow's Monster (1966) and *Psychedelic Monster* (1968) are the only two extant films of Mizer's muscle monster cycle that were accessible for the purposes of this article.[6] The overall narrative structure of the two films is very similar: a mad scientist brings a muscular monster to life, the two initially get along, and finally a fight ensues, resulting in a wrestling match between the two. However, beyond their narrative similarities and despite the fact that only two years separated the films' release dates, the two could not be more different in terms of how they unfold to emphasize different forms of spectacle. This section

[6] Of the nine known films, it is currently unclear how many are extant. For example, *Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment* (1965) was screened in the late 2010s at The Magazine in San Francisco, but the film was not available to view for this article.

argues that the earlier film's visual style is coordinated to emphasize dual entwined spectacular elements—scantily clad male bodies and forms of contact between them—while the latter film is structured around a primary spectacle—full-frontal male nudity—complemented by a secondary spectacle of special effects.

Dr. Bigelow's Monster begins with a full shot of the laboratory containing various implements, a Jacob's ladder arc machine in foreground, and a laboratory table covered with a sheet in midground. Dr. Bigelow (Paul Bigelow) enters from the left, clad only in a posing strap and a physician's circular mirror attached to his forehead. Approaching the laboratory table, Bigelow uncovers a nearly nude male body (Jim Johnson) wearing only a striped posing strap. The centrality of the male body to the mise-en-scène in the first shot of the film underscores the blatant nature of the film's homosexual appeal. The linkage of audience appeal to this film's display of masculine bodies is akin to early silent films' focus on visual spectacles; by centering the seminude male as an attraction, "its energy moves outward towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative" (Gunning 1990, 59). While previous physique photography operations had to rely on the alibi of artistic study (Waugh 1996, 223–224) in order to allow for the spectacle of the disrobed male body, by this time legal precedents had effectively codified as licit the dissemination of both nude male physique content and literature that appealed to gay consumers.[7] By the time of *Dr. Bigelow's Monster*'s release, Mizer's operation had already overtly acknowledged its appeal to queer consumers with *Physique Pictorial* columns referring to ONE Inc. as "friends" (Editorial 1964, 11) and directing readers to be in touch with Mattachine Society in order to learn "how to get the most out of gay life" ("Physique News Items" 1965, 2).

The gay appeal in *Dr. Bigelow's Monster* is heightened with a nearly immediate shift to a focus on not only the exposed male physique, but nearly nude male bodies in contact. After uncovering Johnson's body, Bigelow mounts him, straddling Johnson's bulging posing strap-covered crotch. Bigelow begins to closely examine Johnson's eyes; the tactile intensity of the examination is heightened by an extreme close-up of Johnson's face with his rolled back left eye revealed as Bigelow peels open his eyelids. Bigelow then injects something into Johnson's arm before adjusting the electric arc rod machine. Smoke emits from Johnson's head as his body begins to twitch from the electric current.

[7] See respectively *MANual Enterprises, Inc. v. Day* 370 U.S. 478 (1962) and *One, Inc. v. Olesen* 355 U.S. 371 (1958).

Johnson sits up and begins flexing his muscles, vigorously moving his jaw and eyebrows before breaking a chain that binds his hands. Bigelow caresses Johnson's arms in an attempt to calm him down. Bigelow's persistent touching of Johnson suggests a sexual assertiveness that could not be fully realized onscreen until the ushering in of hardcore in the early 1970s. *Dr. Bigelow's Monster* makes do with invasive tactility—Bigelow's acts of mounting, injecting, eye examining, and caressing—that, while obvious in their appeal to gay customers, could not fully manifest male-male sexual contact.

An extended wrestling sequence concludes *Dr. Bigelow's Monster*, acting as the film's denouement of male touch. Taking up nearly six minutes (three-fifths) of the film's ten-minute runtime, wrestling is clearly the film's main feature, and perhaps its most anticipated given the ubiquity of wrestling sequences in Bob Mizer's "story" films. With this shift in action, there is a notable shift in cinematography when the wrestling sequence commences. Whereas the beginning of the film tends toward full and medium-full shots at eye level, the wrestling sequence employs a closer camera distance with the camera positioned at either a high angle or straight on at knee level in order to tightly frame the men's writhing and struggling bodies. In a textbook example of intentional camp's pursuit to "dethrone the serious" (Sontag 1964, 527), the wrestling sequence holds in tandem the earnestness of the sport and the ridiculous context of the Frankenstein-spoof. While the actors' expressions appear rather serious, the close camera distance reveals several artificial aspects of the mise-en-scène that throw each actor's intense countenance into relief. The doors and hinges of the laboratory cabinet become clearly visible as squiggly black lines drawn onto a cardboard-like base, a wrestling mat inexplicably appears beneath the actors, and Bigelow bursts into giggles as the smirking Johnson feigns zapping him with an electrical instrument. The film ends with Johnson gnashing his teeth and beating his chest as he sits on the unconscious Dr. Bigelow's torso.

Unlike *Dr. Bigelow's Monster*, *Psychedelic Monster* begins with an extended credits sequence that initiates the film's secondary spectacle of special effects. Gloomy clouds created with a liquid dye effect descend upon the silhouette of a castle as the titles dissolve in and out, crediting the special effects to Dave Harris and Ben Vincent. Akin to the earlier film, the first noncredit shot of *Psychedelic Monster* is a full shot of a laboratory, in this case filmed through an arched doorway, wherein we see a midground table and large machine topped by high voltage arc rods in the foreground. The nude mad doctor (Tom Jones) enters from the right with a box labeled "Monster Parts." During a comical incident based on the spectacle of male nudity, Jones burns his exposed genitals

while pouring liquid into a retort flask machine. A visual joke ensues as he attempts to cover his lower body with an apron, but a hole is ripped out of the apron in the crotch area, so he shrugs and throws the apron away.

Drawing from classical studio produced monster cinema that coded mad scientists as homosexual with subtextual cues like an everpresent-male assistant (Benshoff 1998, 144), *Psychedelic Monster* is forthright in its depiction of Jones' sexual identity with the employment of reaction shots to signal attraction to male or female body parts. Jones cackles as he peers into the "Monster Parts" box. The contents of the box are displayed in a stop-motion collage of clippings of nude body parts from muscle magazines. Reaction shots of Jones's face are intercut with rearrangements of the body parts, with a particular emphasis on close ups of male genitalia. Jones's queer sexuality is demonstrated in this sequence via his reaction shots that display excitement at the sight of male penises and buttocks, and a look of disappointment and disapproval at a brief shot of a nude female torso. Jones builds an ideal male body with the parts and then pulls his bricolage monster (Mack Reed) out of the box to strap him onto an inclined gurney.

Jones brings Reed to life in a sequence that employs special effects, experimental cinematography, and an emphasis on male nudity. Connecting an electrical conductor to Reed's hand, Jones then turns some switches that initiate the electrical current, as signified by a rising electric arc on the arc rod machine. A full shot of Reed on the gurney is overlaid with a sequence of shapes that signify lighting and electricity. After a shot of Reed's wiggling toes, a montage of medium full and full shots of Reed is presented with overlay effects of moving psychedelic swirls and other shapes that culminate in a close-up of Reed's twitching penis and scrotum. The sequence ends with an aerial close-up of Reed's face that zooms out and twists sideways as Reed breaks the leather straps that confined his body. Reed's first interactions with Jones amount to a comical sequence of misunderstandings between the two: Jones attempts to put cowboy boots on Reed and Reed tries to eat them, Jones tries to apply oil to Reed's body and Reed drinks it, and Jones pours Reed a cup of coffee that Reed throws at Jones.

While *Psychedelic Monster* does conclude with Mizer's signature wrestling sequence, in this case the wrestling takes up less than a minute of the film's runtime, which is a marked difference from the earlier film's prolonged emphasis on male-male contact. The wrestling pair knock over a table that starts a fire, evidenced by flames that flicker at the bottom of the screen as the two wrestle in medium shot. An exterior shot of the castle silhouette is overlaid with a liquid effect that suggests clouds of smoke billowing from the castle. In a

medium full shot, Jones pushes Reed and runs offscreen toward the camera; Reed attempts to follow and the shot ends with a still frame of his torso lunging toward the camera. Two dark spots appear on his immobile chest and the still burns up. Further shots of Reed grabbing Jones end in another freeze frame of the two that ignites. A "The End" title card flashes over another shot of smoke effects on the castle silhouette. While there are significant differences between the two films and a notable increase in visual display of the male body from the first to the second, both films emerged from the same mix of formal traditions derived from exploitation and horror film cultures.

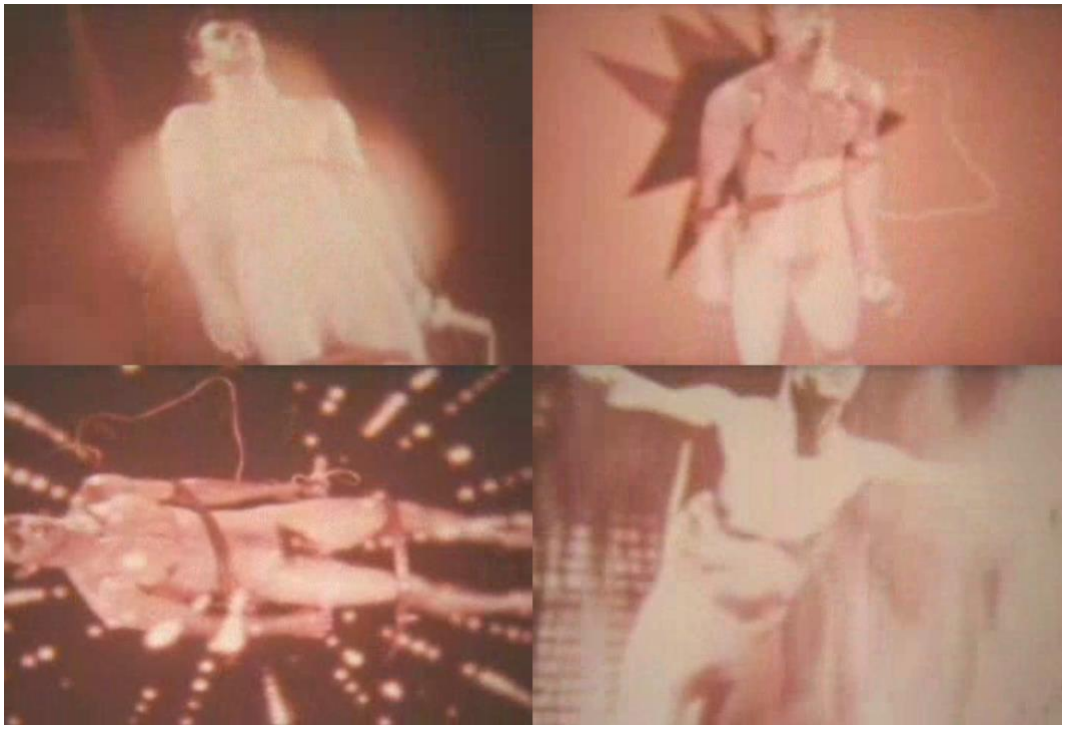

Figure 3: Optical effects and the centered male body in four shots from *Psychedelic Monster*, Courtesy Bob Mizer Foundation.

Both *Dr. Bigelow's Monster* and *Psychedelic Monster* were film products that existed primarily as avenues for displaying the male body for the pleasure of the films' queer male target audience. Where they differ is in how that primary spectacle of the male body is qualified, in the first case, by supplementing partial male nudity with a dual emphasis on the tactile aspects of bodies touching and, in the second case, by foregrounding total male nudity often with the help of visual effects and experimental cinematography. As alluded to in the previous

section, these films are closely aligned with the category of exploitation cinema because their impetus is sensation and spectacle rather than narrative immersion; as Eric Schaefer has defined the category: "The centrality of spectacle in exploitation films tended to disrupt or override the traditional cause-and-effect chain in narrative, while it also permitted filmmakers to be slack with classical devices like continuity editing. As a result, the forbidden sights stood out in relief from the shambling wreck of the diegesis" (2001, 80). As softcore precursors to later gay hardcore films, Mizer's monster shorts are quintessential examples of how corporeal spectacle is so central to both horror and pornography, two of the film categories that Linda Williams famously dubbed "body genres" (1991). Akin to Schaefer's observations about spectacle's centrality in exploitation films and Williams's theorization of horror and adult film as "genres whose non-linear spectacles have centered more directly upon the gross display of the human body" (1991, 3), Mizer's shorts specifically position the male body at the crossroads of horror and pornography's flesh-based attractions. Both films employ congruent narrative structures that culminate in a wrestling sequence, although wrestling is more central to the contact-based spectacle of the earlier film and an adjunct to the special effect supplemented male nudity of the second film. The films' spectacular appeals unmistakably acknowledged their queer audience and, in the case of *Psychedelic Monster*, encoded a gay-identified character in the film itself; thus, such films fit uniquely within the tradition of queer horror cinema, as we see below.

Pre-Stonewall Muscle Monster Shorts in the Lineage of Queer Horror Cinema

Angelic Frankenstein is a unique entry in Mizer's Frankenstein cycle because as a cultural product it crossed over from an exclusively gay context into the broader consciousness of cinephile culture and horror fandom in particular. While originally announced in a 1965 physique publication as planned for an October 1969 release (*Grecian Guild Studio Quarterly* 1965, 7), in May 1969 *Angelic Frankenstein* was discussed in the French film journal *Premier Plan* in an issue on the subject of Frankenstein monster depictions in cinema. Whereas the Frankenstein films of studios like Universal and Hammer were extensively considered in the issue, *Angelic Frankenstein* appeared in a section on "Quelques films un peu spéciaux" [some peculiar films] primarily focused on erotic adaptations of Mary Shelley's book (Bouyxou 1969, 116-126) such as the softcore American movie *Kiss Me Quick* (Peter Perry Jr., 1964), the Italian

exploitation documentary *Sexy Super Interdit* (Marcello Martinelli, 1963), and the French short *Frankenstein Cherie* (1967). Bouyxou's discussion of *Angelic Frankenstein* briefly introduced Mizer's AMG operation while also evaluating his films' makeshift overtly queer style as "parfaitement grotesques" [perfectly grotesque] and "délibérément pédérastiques" [deliberately homosexual] (1969, 119).[8] The subsequent discussions of Bob Mizer's *Angelic Frankenstein* within horror fandom appear to have derived (without citation) from the reference to the film in *Premier Plan.* At least two pieces of evidence suggest that the *Premier Plan* issue was the origin of information on *Angelic Frankenstein* in horror fan circles: these horror fandom discussions often reference the other erotic films mentioned in *Premier Plan* in nearly identical order, and the subsequent descriptions of Mizer's film appear to be condensed versions of the *Premier Plan* capsule review.

Notably, *Angelic Frankenstein* was mentioned in a March 1970 article on Frankenstein adaptations in the kid-oriented horror fan magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, once again, alongside an enumeration of "adults only" adaptations ("Mary's Amazing Monster" 1970, 24). The reference to Mizer's film in effectively the "bible" of youth-driven horror fandom is remarkable given that postwar homophobia was often undergirded by child-protectionist urges to segregate knowledge of gay culture away from children (Strub 2013, 112-113). *Famous Monsters*' acknowledgment of a gay monster film provides a historically grounded instance of queerness within Stonewall-era youth culture that reverberates with the broader confluence of gay liberation, exploitation cinema, and youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s (Staiger 1999, 39-40). References to Mizer's film in later horror-fan tomes continued through the 1970s. In his book on the transmedia iterations of the Frankenstein monster, Donald Glut described *Angelic Frankenstein* as "the first homosexual Frankenstein film" (1973, 232) and made a similar observation to Bouyxou crediting Mizer's directorship in a context of attributional anonymity. References to the film would further circulate in Michael Parry's *The Rivals of Frankenstein* (1977, 218) and John Stoker's *The Illustrated Frankenstein* (1980, 73, 121).

As is evident, discussions of the *Angelic Frankenstein* short crossed over from the gay counterpublic of Bob Mizer's physique magazines into the broader public sphere via distinct yet intersecting venues from French cinephile culture

[8] Here the adjective "pédérastiques" aligns in English translation more closely to the general understanding of "homosexual" rather than the age-differentiated meaning of "pederastic;" for more discussion of the broader connotation of this French term as different from its more specific employment in English, see Kadji Amin's *Disturbing Attachments* (2017, 148).

to American and British horror fandom. Jane Drover argues that because of its marginality *Angelic Frankenstein*'s "contribution to the Frankenstein myth is for the most part minimal" (1990, 262). While surely true in comparison to more well-known films that queerly spoofed the source material, like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), the crossover interest in *Angelic Frankenstein* is significant because it demonstrates that pre-Stonewall queer culture was remarkably visible and could circulate beyond the seemingly isolated sector of queer counterpublics.

More broadly, Bob Mizer's muscle monster films are unique in their comprehensive implementation of a queer sensibility on all levels of the media communication spectrum. Queerness is present at the level of production in the sexual identity of the film's director, the intentional depiction of male same-gender desire in the films' narratives, and the origin of those depictions in Mizer's direct solicitation of narratives from his audience ("AMG Physique Movie Production Schedule" 1957). Queerness was also essential to distribution infrastructures in that Mizer's film mail order operation was based on social networks that constituted a burgeoning gay counterpublic sphere. Mizer's intentional distribution scheme was also reflected in the films' content that blatantly courted a gay male audience by infusing the films with both a conspicuous homoeroticism and a camp sensibility. Finally, queerness was indicative of the films' exhibition contexts because the mail order films were initially bought by male-desiring men who screened the films in private contexts, and later, films like *Psychedelic Monster* were screened at a public theater with an exclusively gay policy to an audience largely composed of queer men. In sum, Mizer solicited ideas for storylines directly from his customers, he produced and then distributed films to fit those treatments, and finally audiences accessed the short films either privately or at a gay theater. Thus, rather than having to implement negotiated or oppositional reading strategies (Hall 1980), audiences for Mizer's films participated in a complete circuit of counterpublic cultural production.

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Optional Narratives and Supplemental Storytelling in Behaviour Interactive's *Dead By Daylight*

Steven Greenwood

*The following text accompanies the videographic essay of the same title in this issue, viewable **here**.

Abstract

This written analysis and the videographic essay it accompanies explore the relationship between narrative and gameplay in *Dead by Daylight* (*DBD*). The term "ludonarrative dissonance" has become very popular in video game discourse, referring to situations where the gameplay and narrative of a game seem to be at odds: the story tells you one thing, while the actual gameplay mechanics ask you to do something that doesn't logically fit with that story. I want to explore how *Dead by Daylight* creates the opposite phenomenon of ludonarrative harmony, where every gameplay input or choice not only fits within the narrative but actually serves a crucial role in telling it.

Match-based, short-form games like *DBD* often struggle with ludonarrative dissonance. It's really hard to tell a cohesive, consistent story in a game with short, standalone, multiplayer matches where each match begins and ends in the same place. *DBD* is a compelling example of a game that manages to find a strong narrative function for its cyclical matchmaking structure. The last section of this analysis makes a case for why this phenomenon is particularly relevant to the horror genre. *DBD* takes a style of game where narrative is often seen as secondary or optional to the main experience of gameplay and makes a case for the centrality of narrative to the game. I tie this into a similar discussion of horror, exploring how people often see the plots of horror movies as thin excuses for the "real" entertainment, and how these assumptions miss out on the importance of narrative to even horror films whose narrative seems supplementary.

Introduction

Behaviour Interactive's *Dead By Daylight* is a relatively straightforward, match-based game. Each match consists of five players: four people play as survivors and one plays as the killer. The killer's goal is to kill all four survivors before any of them can escape. The survivors' goal is to escape before they are sacrificed. While there are additional mechanics to keep gameplay fresh and interesting, the core gameplay loop is the same. Matches typically last for less

than 20 minutes, and this match-based cycle makes up the entirety of the game. There is no single-player mode to progress through, and nothing like a continuous campaign or story mode. The game is cyclical: each match starts exactly the same way, and ends in one of exactly the same three ways:

1) The survivors escape.
2) The survivors die.
3) Some survivors escape while others die.
Rinse and repeat.

This essay is a discussion of narrative in *Dead By Daylight*. This seems like a strange approach: how can I talk about narrative in a game that doesn't involve playing through a story? As I have mentioned, there is no progression component, and nothing the player does results in a clear story; gameplay consists of cyclical, repeated matches that always start and end in the same way. You spawn in a randomly-chosen level. You are either the killer or a survivor, and then you either kill, fail to kill, survive, or die. And yet, many fans of *Dead by Daylight*—including me—are deeply invested in the story and lore of the game.

Narrative in Dead by Daylight?

Despite *Dead By Daylight*'s cyclical structure, its producer Behaviour Interactive actually does produce a vast amount of lore and backstory behind the game. However, the only way to learn more about this story is to actually stop playing. The explicitly narrative content is contained in an area called The Archives, which is entirely separate from the main game and accessed through a series of menus where you can read short stories and listen to audio recordings that flesh out the characters and universe of the game. The Archives have a vast amount of narrative content, but they are completely distinct from the game itself; there is no need to engage with The Archives to play the game fully, and the only way to listen to the stories in The Archives is outside the realm of gameplay proper. It is therefore hard to see these archives as an active part of the game, but more as a supplemental, optional feature.

This raises the question of why The Archives are even there in the first place. Why bother writing pages and pages of expansive lore for a game that could entirely function without this lore? Why write all of these stories for when the likelihood is that the majority of players will never read or listen to them?

This is a recurring issue that happens in matchmaking games like *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) or *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment / Iron Galaxy 2016, 2022); there is an expansive lore, but all of it is contained in peripheral or supplementary materials that never overlap with the main game. As with *DBD*, none of it is essential to playing the game itself, and players actually have to stop playing the game in order to access it. Yet it still continues to exist; many fans, including myself, also love this lore, and for many of us the games would be much less fulfilling without it.

This essay explores storytelling in *Dead by Daylight* (*DBD*). I argue that, even if players never read anything in The Archives and never actively seek out the game's backstory, said story nevertheless manages to become a core part of their gaming experience. The video accompanying this written analysis explores how narrative is intertwined with gameplay, even for players who never intend on engaging with *DBD's* more obviously narrative components.

The primary way that *Dead by Daylight* does this is by constantly incorporating the narrative into the gameplay mechanics; that is, almost every element of *DBD*'s gameplay is interwoven with its narrative structure in a way that makes the two impossible to understand separately. The closer you look at character playstyles and gameplay mechanics, the more it becomes clear that they are inextricable from the story; you are embodying the narrative and story simply by playing the game. This harmony of gameplay and narrative is a core part of how *Dead by Daylight* tells its story through the gameplay, and it makes up the bulk of my video essay. I also briefly explore the concept of embedded narratives, examining how small narrative clues or "breadcrumbs" keep jumping out at players during the game, teasing them with the possibility of a greater narrative context behind the matches in which they are engaging, keeping the narrative relevant even to the most narratively-disinterested of gamers.

Ludonarrative Harmony

One of the most popular terms in video game discourse is ludonarrative dissonance. This term refers to what happens when the gameplay of a game doesn't match up with its narrative. Classic examples include stopping to play a bunch of minigames while a giant meteor that you need to stop is slowly hurdling towards the planet—or being set on fire, stabbed, and shot repeatedly in a gameplay battle, only to die from a single stab wound in a cutscene. As Lauryn Ash describes: "for me, just the other day playing *Divinity Original Sin 2* [2017], my immersion was broken: as the main story says you must escape, but

my friends/myself were spending all our time sneaking and looting around a giant castle. If you really wanted to escape a place so badly, would you in real life really snoop around every corner and risk getting and killed? No. You would high tail it out of there as fast as possible. That's ludonarrative dissonance" (2020, n.p.).

This issue happens very often in matchmaking games: in the plot of Overwatch, for example, Pharah is friends with Cassidy and Mercy. Despite a tense relationship with her mother Ana, the two are also ultimately fighting on the same side. However, this doesn't stop her from firing a literal rocket barrage in these characters' faces and blowing them up if they end up on opposite player teams in the game. Match-based games require a lot of suspension of disbelief because the gameplay itself often doesn't really fit with the larger narrative, and the two exist on separate plains. While Morgana and Kayle in *League of Legends* hate each other, they can still fight on the same team in a match because it would be too restrictive to prevent players from choosing certain team compositions due to narrative restrictions. The narrative in matchmaking games may be vast and interesting, but it often gets in the way of gameplay, so the two simply occupy different spheres, and thus ludonarrative dissonance is introduced.

As the popularity of the term implies, it is very common for game designers to create situations where players are engaging in a gameplay mechanic that is at odds with the story that they're playing through. However, there has also been a lot of work towards developing games that express the related concept of ludonarrative harmony, where gameplay and narrative reinforce each other. Ash explains ludonarrative harmony as "a synchronization between mechanics and narrative that create a consistent and realized experience or story" (2016, 1). The video explores ways that *Dead By Daylight* creates ludonarrative harmony, using its cyclical matchmaking structure as a narrative strength rather than a limitation.

The Entity

The underlying narrative behind *Dead by Daylight* is that an evil creature known as The Entity abducts people and traps them in its realm. It then puts them through endless trials where killers and survivors have to play out the matches that the players of *Dead by Daylight* undergo. The killers are as much prisoners as the survivors, and many of them do not consent to their participation but do so out of fear of reprimand. The Entity feeds on extreme emotion; however, it isn't content with only one extreme emotion, but requires

an oscillation between different extremes in order to fuel its energy. Thus, it provides as many opportunities for hope and escape as it does for fear and defeat—this fluctuation is key to how it feeds off of energy. As the video demonstrates, these narrative features of The Entity always inform the gameplay structure, leading to there being pretty much no element of gameplay input or interaction that is at odds with the narrative; by playing out the game, you're playing out the narrative. By playing *Dead by Daylight,* you are feeding The Entity.

For killers, the game also creates moments of narrative engagement through gameplay mechanics. The *obsession system*, for example, means that killers don't just mindlessly hunt down survivors the same way every time. Every trial, a random survivor is marked as the killer's obsession. Depending on the killer's perks, different trials require the obsession to be handled differently: some require you to save the obsession for last or taunt them, while others give you the power to hunt down the obsession quickly and kill them more easily than the others. One ability has your obsession change every time someone injures you, turning the game into a story of vengeance where you hunt down specific survivors for retribution. The obsession mechanic bakes narrative into the gameplay experience of killers; you don't simply hunt down survivors mindlessly, or approach every trial the same way. Depending on your obsession and corresponding perks, you play out a story in the trial related to how the killer is feeling about specific survivors that time around; rather than executing the exact same gameplay loop every time, the gameplay mechanics are the catalyst for a type of thinking that is filtered through storytelling. If Jake hits you with a pallet during the game and you have equipped the ability Nemesis, Jake is now your obsession; you're encouraged by the game to act out a revenge plot inspired by the action he took in the game.

Narrative Fragmentation

While the bulk of the video essay accompanying this analysis is interested in exploring ludonarrative harmony in *Dead by Daylight,* I also briefly examine the game's use of narrative fragmentation. While narrative fragmentation in gaming was around long before the release of FromSoftware's *Dark Souls* (2011), the game (and the *Souls* series of which it is a part) is often gestured to as a strong example of the technique. The story of *Dark Souls* is fragmented and embedded in subtle parts of level design, item descriptions, gameplay mechanics, and level art. Every interaction with the gameplay in *Dark Souls* reveals a little bit more about the context behind its narrative, and the

combination of narrative design with gameplay leads to moments where the player is tantalized with the promise of secrets and information about both gameplay and story. As Daniel Vella argues:

> Another mode of ambiguity that *Dark Souls* employs can be identified in its tendency to present the player with entities whose function within the game system is never explained or hinted at. One of the starting 'gifts' the player can choose when creating a new character, for instance, is the Pendant [...], which is only described, in its inventory entry, as an "old-looking item with no obvious value". Of course, what such a description tantalizingly suggests is that the pendant might have some value which is not obvious and which it is up to the player to discover. It is likely, then, that the player might decide that there is a good chance the Pendant might actually offer more valuable rewards than any of the straightforward bonuses provided by the other starting gifts. (2015, n.p.)

In this case, the pendant taunts the player with two simultaneous suggestions; it might have a gameplay use that isn't obvious at first sight, and it might end up having narrative significance that isn't obvious at first sight. In both cases, a mystery is hinted at in something seemingly mundane like an item description, and players—whether they're focusing on gameplay, narrative, or both—are pushed to string these various hints together to piece together an understanding of what's going on in the world of the game.

Dead by Daylight is full of these moments. The video component of this essay explores a few of them, where idiosyncrasies are impossible to ignore in the game, but don't fully make sense unless you're able to piece them together with narrative components to better understand the bigger picture. The narrative itself is also never available in one clear or coherent space; The Archives consist of a variety of different notes, short stories, and similar fragments, and each fragment has to be unlocked separately by completing gameplay challenges. The result is that, much like in a *Souls* game, playing the game constantly throws narrative breadcrumbs at the player that become increasingly hard to ignore, and players find themselves piecing together these breadcrumbs to figure out the truth. As with the rest of the game, this is done with a sense of ludonarrative harmony; the players have to piece together the lore out of fragments and hints because this is also exactly what the characters have to do. It is established that characters in The Entity's realm have a hard time holding on to memories, which get lost in a substance called The Fog; piecing together memories—in both gameplay and narrative—is a process of

reaching into this fog to try and pull out the lost memories and put them back together. Narrative fragmentation is justified through ludonarrative harmony, rather than simply being present as an arbitrary feature to imitate the popularity of something like *Dark Souls*.

Why *Monstrum*?

A lot of this essay has been looking at *Dead by Daylight's* relationship to video game discourse more generally; however, the video was made for *Monstrum*, raising the question of how all of this relates to horror? I do find it interesting that, out of all of the matchmaking-based games that I regularly play, it is the horror one, *Dead by Daylight,* that seems to have particularly mastered ludonarrative harmony. One of the most common experiences that I have as both a gamer and a fan of horror is that people are often surprised to learn how much I care about the plots of things that I like. When I tell people I love the *Saw* movies, for example, they often assume that it's because of the intense, graphic violence that characterizes what has since become known as the "torture porn" genre, or cycle. They tend to assume I'll love extreme movies like *The Human Centipede* (2009) or *Hostel* (2005) because they have a similar spectacle-horror aesthetic, but I have much less interest in those movies: the reason that I love *Saw* (2004) is because of the narrative. This is something that people still find strange because a lot of people have trouble conceptualizing horror as a narrative medium; the narrative is often seen as being something secondary or supplementary, or just an excuse to justify the desire to watch scenes of violence.

Video games and horror both suffer from the same stereotyping when it comes to narrative: while the stories are there, people see them as just an excuse to justify engaging in the medium when, secretly, the "true" desire is simply for something more carnal, usually violence. I want to show how narrative is important to these mediums—not simply because the narratives themselves are good, but because even the components seemingly divorced from storytelling such as gameplay are actually intricately bound with the narrative itself. I enjoy the violence in *Saw* because it's part of the point that the film's narrative is trying to make about human nature, games, and the will to survive; the two features are inextricable from each other. Because *Dead by Daylight* (like *Saw*, arguably) sits at the intersection of video games and slasher movies—two things very frequently accused of using narrative as an "excuse" to frame the parts that fans actually care about—it is particularly useful to see how all of its gameplay and

horror elements are deeply intertwined with its narrative. The narrative isn't just a secondary feature "tacked on" to the gameplay and horror; it's a core feature without which these elements would be significantly less meaningful.

The short-form focus of this issue is important to my argument. People are warming up more to the narrative potential of obviously story-based video games like *Mass Effect* (2007) or other RPGs (role-playing games). Similarly, horror films like *The Babadook* (2014) or *Midsommar* (2019) are being embraced more as meaningful narrative cinema. However, these examples are often put in a more distinctive or "elevated" category and contrasted to the seemingly less sophisticated manifestations of horror like slasher flicks or first-person shooters. By looking at how even the most seemingly non-narrative form of gaming—match-based games like esports games and party games—still have a substantial narrative function, I hope to complicate our understanding of what narrative looks like, when narrative matters, and what genres or media are narratively significant.

Countering the idea that a film or video game might only have a narrative as an "excuse" for someone to engage in more carnal pleasures, I want to show how narrative has a significant, embedded place throughout the entire experience. Even if you just watch *Saw* to see people's heads get ripped off, you inevitably end up engaging to some extent in a narrative structure that informs how and why those heads are getting ripped off, and even if you just play *Dead By Daylight* to get stabbed by Michael Meyers, you're engaging in a form of narrative storytelling in a more complex way than you may realize.

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Pathways to African Horror:
An Interview with Ann Sarafina Nneoha,
Founder of the Africa International Horror Film Festival

Sonia Lupher

This interview took place via email in September/October 2022. Through the aspects of my research that concern horror film festivals, I have long noted the dearth of genre film festivals hosted within the African continent. This is why, when I chanced across the Africa International Horror Film Festival earlier this year, I found that it added a much-needed breath of fresh air into the global landscape of horror film festivals. The only other horror film festival on the African continent (South African Horror Fest) concluded its 18th edition in November 2022, marking it as a long-running and well-established festival. However, Africa International Horror Film Festival is the first—and only—film festival in the world devoted to screening primarily African-made horror films, including a large concentration of shorts. Founded by Ann Sarafina Nneoha in 2021, the Africa International Horror Film Festival's first edition screened 80 short films and 12 features from around the world, including African countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa.

Particularly within the last twenty years, the horror genre has become ripe with voices across the globe. Over the course of my research, I have interviewed or spoken with filmmakers such as Amanda Nell Eu (Malaysia), Aislinn Clarke (Northern Ireland), and Mattie Do (Laos) who are passionate about exploring urban and folk legends from their individual contexts, leading to films like *It's Easier to Raise Cattle* (2017), *The Devil's Doorway* (2018), and *Dearest Sister* (2016). In turn, this passion matches the hunger of audiences eager to see them. Despite the ever-expanding popularity and growth of the horror genre on a global scale, however, African horror rarely exports beyond its individual national boundaries. The ample material located in African legends and superstition (as Ann Sarafina Nneoha outlines in the interview below) would undoubtedly find voracious genre audiences within and beyond the African continent. Often, horror films made in Africa are co-productions with European countries, such as France (*Atlantics*, 2019) and the UK (*His House*, 2020), and created by filmmakers that belong to the African diaspora within

those countries. As is the case in North America and elsewhere, the majority of African filmmakers working in horror make short films and face budget constraints. However, the sheer amount of horror film festivals available to filmmakers in the Americas, Europe, and elsewhere offers filmmakers the possibility of developing and maintaining ties with their peers on a local or global scale. For many reasons—chiefly the lack of horror festivals in Africa—these opportunities are not often available to genre filmmakers in Africa.

Enter Ann Sarafina Nneoha, who transitioned from a career in law to filmmaking in 2018 and soon after took the initiative to found the African International Horror Film Festival. As she states in the interview below, she began the festival with the intention to "create more pathways and revive the African Horror Genre." She is a genre and documentary filmmaker, and a member of the Directors Guild of Nigeria. Her personal works can all be found on her official YouTube page. Below, Nneoha discusses her motivations for founding the film festival and offers some insight into the state of African horror in the twenty-first century as one of the foremost experts on this topic worldwide.

Figure 1: Ann Sarafina Nneoha

Sonia Lupher: You hold a wide range of roles as festival director/founder, lawyer, and writer. In your film work, you often work in documentaries? Do you also write or direct horror films, or have plans to?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: Yes, I also write and direct horror films. My first short film was a horror film, titled *Facebook Friend*. I wrote and directed the film in 2019 shortly after I graduated from law school. Since then, I have written horror films both short and feature-length but basically for my clients. Most of them haven't been shot. I also have two horror feature-length films on my script shelf. I plan to direct them next year.

SL: I'd love to learn about the formation of AIHFF. What motivated you to found the festival?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: Well, African International Horror Film Festival started as a passion project last year, 2021. As a filmmaker who has always fancied "Dark Art," I wondered why a genre like that isn't celebrated enough in Africa. I also have a couple of friends who loved this style of art and when we openly talk about how much we love the horror genre, we're not taken seriously. In fact, people wonder if all is well with us as though it's taboo to love horror stories.

I also thought about how horror is interwoven in our storytelling as Africans and yet we hardly tell these stories. Creating a platform like Africa International Horror Film Festival was a step taken in an effort to revive the horror genre in Africa and allow films in that category to take their rightful place in the commercial horror market.

SL: What is the festival's mission?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: AIHFF's goal is to create more pathways and revive the African Horror Genre. This will be achieved through collaborations and partnerships with other international genre festivals and creative platforms.

We also aim to reawaken the consciousness among African filmmakers and industry stakeholders on the need to explore other forms of storytelling deeply rooted in African culture and tradition.

Figure 2: Africa International Horror Film Festival's Official Logo

SL: What was the process like from initial idea to planning stages to the inaugural festival edition in October 2021?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: Honestly, it was tough. Prior to starting the festival, I had never worked in a film festival. Though I had attended some festivals I had no idea what went on behind the scenes. So, I had to do a lot of research on how to set up a film festival. Some of the festivals I researched on were Screamfeast, South African Horrorfest, and Africa International Film Festival. I also attended some workshops on film festivals.

Midway I realized that I can never be fully ready to start this. So, I dived right in, opened an account on FilmFreeway, put out a call for submission, and promoted it a lot on my personal page and film groups.

I also spoke to other passionate horror filmmakers and they jumped right in. We had a series of meetings and dedicated a lot of time to watching the submitted films—about 4,000 of them.
As the slash judges, we picked the best films, then passed them on to our final jury to pick the winners. Hosting the festival from the 29th to the 31st of October was very deliberate considering that World Halloween Day falls on the 31st.

The first edition taught me that you need a village to run a festival. We secured lots of brand partnerships from media to event coverage, marketing, and locations. We also had some volunteers join us during the festival. They all came with a burning passion to see the festival to the end and it was such a beautiful sight.

We reached out and invited lots of industry professionals and had them on our panel sessions. My team and I learned a lot of lessons from the first edition and promised to make the 2nd edition, bigger and better.

SL: How do you anticipate the festival changing in its second edition, slated for October 2022?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: A lot is changing! First, this second edition is themed, "Our Story, Voice, and Identity." We are going back to our roots and culture and learning how they drive the African Horror Narrative.

The events lined up for the festival include, free film screenings, master classes, panel discussions, workshops, and award Presentations. We are also organizing an African-themed Halloween Party which we have named, "Afroween Party."

There will also be masquerade performances, all geared towards entertaining, enlightening, and elevating our audience and guests.

SL: Who else is involved with screening submissions and running the festival?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: I'm currently working with a team of three. Love Nebo is our marketing and branding consultant. Dhee Sylvester is working as our creative and design lead while Juliet Ezeigwe is our Media Lead.

SL: How would you describe the horror film/fan community in Lagos? (In terms of audience demographics, types of events that exist around horror apart from AIHFF?)

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: The horror film/fan community is an encouraging one, from the turn-up. I have noticed when pubs in Lagos organize Halloween parties every October, these events resonate more with the millennials.

SL: In addition to the festival, AIHFF also held a standalone masterclass, "Telling an African Horror Story," in February 2022 with South African director Beer Adriaanse.

SL: How did this event come about, and do you plan to hold similar events in the future?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: Yes, we wanted to keep the horror narrative going even as the first edition had ended. And so we decided to reach out to filmmakers who had directed popular African Horror Films. Beer Adriaanse was one of the directors we reached out to and he had directed *Parable,* a Netflix original. It's one of the very few African horror films we have on Netflix. And so, we invited him to share his insights on how Africans can tell relatable African Horror Stories.

We had other masterclasses on topics like, "Tackling social issues with the horror genre." Our aim is to organize these masterclasses as often as possible. We are not only creating awareness for the African Horror Genre but also imparting knowledge.

SL: Of the films selected in 2021, I see that the festival truly does represent horror across Africa and internationally. You programmed films from Nigeria, Uganda, Namibia, Egypt, and South Africa, but also from Ireland, Chile, the Philippines, and many other countries. Were any of the filmmakers from outside of Nigeria in attendance at the festival?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: No. Filmmakers from outside Nigeria whose films we screened were unable to attend mostly because of the unavailability of travel funds.

SL: African horror is rarely distributed in North America, and many scholars, critics, and fans outside of Africa are unfamiliar with its horror film industry. Without conflating regional differences and taking Africa's size into account, how would you describe some common traits of African horror (in formal or narrative terms, or both)? What are some themes/topics you often see in African horror films (feature-length and/or short)?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: African Horror is majorly driven by our folk tales, culture, and tradition. In my culture especially, which is the Igbo culture, there's a very close bond between life and death. And that's why our houses are littered with the graves of our departed ancestors. We honestly don't believe in burying our loved ones at a public graveyard. As long as the person has close family members—a spouse and children, he or she deserves to be given a befitting burial.

And it doesn't just end there, sacrifices and prayers are offered at the graves yearly, a subtle reminder that death is part of our existence and the departed souls will continually be part of our lives.

That's why our stories revolve around these beliefs and superstitions, lacing them with themes like reincarnation, burial rites, ghosts, demonic possessions, witchcraft, and hauntings. Because our culture is more in tune with the supernatural, this sub-genre is mostly relatable in our continent.

There are also true-life horrors like the killing of witches, kidnapping and harvesting human parts for money rituals or political motives or pastors offering rituals to brainwash and attract more followers to their church.

As Africans, we grew up digesting a lot of cautionary horrific tales from our parents. They would say, "Don't go to their auntie's house, she is a witch"; "If you pick money on the road, you will turn into a 'yam' "; "Don't allow a baby to look into a mirror at midnight"; "If you hear a baby crying outside at midnight, that's a bush baby, don't go out else you'll die." I could go on and on.

They told us these stories to keep us in check so that we don't go out at night, pick edibles or money from the road, or accept gifts from strangers. As much as these were cautionary tales, over time, they became part of us. Now that we are all adults, we know these things never happened but subconsciously, we can't shake them off.

As much as we are embracing our cultures and traditions, it's still important that the stories are internationally relevant and commercially viable. The goal is to find a balance between our cultural narratives and global issues.

SL: By virtue of your role as AIHFF's director and founder, you are among the foremost experts in contemporary African horror. What would you say are some key differences (thematic, formal, or otherwise) between the feature-length African horror films you've seen and the short African films you've seen?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: Aside from the obvious length differences, there are no other technical differences between short and feature-length African horror films. Aesthetically, both film types employ the same casting process, lighting, production design, and photography.

SL: Do you believe most African filmmakers who make short horror films would like to make feature-length films? What value/benefit do they see in the short film form?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: I think one of the primary factors why filmmakers make short horror films is the lack of resources. If they have access to better resources, like funds, they will definitely be making feature-length films.

Aside from that, most filmmakers making short films are just starting out in their careers and so are experimenting, testing their creativity by shooting short horror films. It's easy to get a group of friends together to shoot your film.

SL: What do you find most compelling or unique about short-form horror?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: I think it's fast and creative, the filmmaker expresses an idea, and gets to the story without pointless diversions. That's where your creativity is tested as a filmmaker.

SL: In my cursory research, I have come across very few short horror films from Africa (the ones I have found outside of the AIHFF program include *The Bodies*, 2019; *Good Help*, 2019; *How May I Help You Again?*, 2020; and *The Nightmare on Broad Street*, 2020, as well as a handful listed on the African Film Database). What are among the most impressive and memorable African short horror films you would recommend to viewers?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: I will recommend *Juju Stories* (2021, Nigeria), *Ojuju* (2014, Nigeria), *Ounje Ale* (2019, Nigeria), *Atunmarilaka* (2020, Nigeria), *Anuli*, and *FTFO V* (2020, Nigeria).

SL: What is your sense about how horror storytelling is evolving in Africa? What do you expect to see more or less of in the future?

Ann Sarafina Nneoha: Judging from the horror films from our continent distributed worldwide, especially on platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, there's been a lot of improvement. Just recently, *Juju Stories*, a collection of 3 short horror films by Nigerian filmmakers was acquired by Amazon Prime Video.

I'm looking forward to having more African horror films getting more international distributions, and piquing the interest of the global audience.

Sonia Lupher is a Visiting Lecturer in Film and Media Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, where she completed her PhD. She is the founder and editor of the digital humanities project "Cut-Throat Women: A Database of Women Who Make Horror," which catalogues the work of hundreds of female practitioners in horror media production. Her scholarship has appeared in *Jump Cut*, *Critical Quarterly*, and *Studies in the Fantastic*.

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Beyond Type A: The *Horror Development Lab* at the *Blood in the Snow Film Festival* Remakes the Scene

Alanna Thain in conversation with *Horror Development Lab* team members and participants

Since its founding in 2012 by critic, filmmaker and programmer Kelly Michael Stewart, the Toronto-based *Blood in the Snow Film Festival* (*BITS*) has championed contemporary Canadian horror and genre cinema and media, aiming to "challenge social boundaries, explore artistic taboos and support and exhibit independent Canadian genre media artists" (www.bloodinthesnow.ca). Taking a holistic and activist view of the cycle of production, distribution and consumption of Canadian horror media, *BITS* has worked to support media that better reflects a horror fandom and creative community much more diverse than is usually assumed. In 2018, they revamped the festival's industry market as *Deadly Exposure,* with panels, roundtables and networking events, but felt that there was more they could do to build a sustainable pipeline to production for minoritarian makers. In 2021, the first edition of the *Horror Development Lab* (*HDL*), directed by *BITS*'s Carolyn Mauricette and Stewart, was launched in an online edition.

BITS HDL is a "development program focused on facilitating business and production opportunities for genre (horror, sci-fi, action, thriller) scripted projects and short films by traditionally underrepresented BIPOC, women, and LGBTQ+ Canadian filmmakers and content creators" (www.bloodinthesnow.ca). The *HDL* offers targeted support for moving selected short-form films or web series pilots into feature films or fleshed out web series. Twelve to fifteen projects are selected by a jury, and the makers take part in a two-stage program. In stage one, selected artists work with feedback from the *BITS HDL* team to perfect their pitch, and then participate both in *HDL*-specific activities, including two days of workshops, and in the wider events of the *Deadly Exposure Industry Market* which runs in parallel to *BITS*. The focus is on pragmatic tools for business development. After the festival, participants work with assigned Industry Leads for hands-on follow-up sessions to take their work to the next level.

HDL is the brainchild of Carolyn Mauricette, *BITS* development coordinator and programmer. I spoke at length with Mauricette, who in addition to her work with *BITS* is a critic who writes for such venues as *Graveyard Shift Sisters*, *Cinema Axis*, *Rue Morgue Magazine* and *Grim Magazine*, and is also director of Canadian Programming for *Fantasia International Film Festival*. I also spoke with two other members of the *HDL* team: Kelly Michael Stewart, *BITS* founder and a strong advocate for diversifying the genre and supporting Canadian talent, and Alison Lang, *BITS* development advisor, writer and author of *Women with Guts: Horror Heroines in Film, TV and Print* (Rue Morgue Library, 2017). Finally, members of the *HDL* jury and maker/participants offered their takes on why *BITS* is needed, what makes a great short film and why horror is so attractive for minoritarian makers. Speaking for the jury are Victor Stiff (Film Critic, *Rendezvous With Madness* Programmer) and Alex Hall (MA student, Cinema Studies Institute at the University of Toronto, and runs the Instagram account *Lezzie Borden*, examining depictions of queer women in horror). And finally, filmmakers to watch out for and *HDL* participants Adrian Bobb (Writer/Visual Artist and Director, including 2022's *The Foremen*), Javier Badillo and Nat Marshik (who together wrote, directed and produced the sci-fi comedy feature *Lupe Q and the Galactic Earworms*) and Shelagh Rowan-Legg get into how their work was supported by this program. These interviews have been condensed and edited for content.

Alanna Thain: We begin with *BITS HDL* team members Mauricette, Stewart and Lang discussing horror histories and how they got involved with *Blood in the Snow*.

Kelly Michael Stewart (Founder and Festival Director): I was always into Gothic horror. I have strong bonds with the classic Universal Horror films of the 1930s, as well as the films of Mario Bava and the Hammer, AIP atmospheric films of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Then that led to the more modern horror that we are all fans of today…. Between 2010 and 2012, I was writing for a few websites and occasionally contributing to *Fangoria* magazine. That opened a few doors including hosting my own movie night called "Fright Nights at the Projection Booth" which was an old grindhouse cinema in Toronto at the time. By late 2012, I had become aware of the growing genre scene in Canada and had the opportunity to play a number of premieres of new horror films. So instead of rolling them out monthly for four or five months, I took five features and premiered them over one weekend, which became the *Blood in the Snow Film Festival*.

Carolyn Mauricette (Development Coordinator and Programmer): I was raised in horror. Sounds crazy, but my mom loved that soap, *Dark Shadows*, and she liked the name Carolyn, so I was named after Carolyn Stoddard. My family is from the West Indies, so horror and folk tales are a part of growing up. They would tell you the Jumbie would come and get you at night, which is like a boogeyman, or the Soucouyant. They would gossip about someone's girlfriend and say, "Oh, she's a Soucouyant," using these folkloric anecdotes in conversation, and you absorb it. Also, my family was tragically Catholic, very religious: as if it was a discipline tool. I remember being on a podcast talking about *The Exorcist*, and I felt like that could have happened to me. I was raised in a "there's something else out there" type of environment …. I always watched films like *Godzilla* as a kid, *Doctor Who*, anything sci-fi, fantasy, or horror. My favorite things to read as a kid were the Grimms' fairy tales. Anything about fairies, fantasy worlds, and things that didn't relate to the real world. I started writing about film just as a hobby, and then it just expanded from there. I started covering film festivals, one of which was *Blood in the Snow*. How I came to work for *BITS* is that I went to the festival, and I saw a film I didn't like. I felt that they were really not thinking about who the viewer is, and Kelly (founder of *BITS*) took that to heart. He called me and said, 'I'd like to talk to you'. I thought I pissed somebody off or something, but he asked me if I wanted to be a programmer. I just thought that was so amazing because he's the real deal. I joined and it all just kind of worked.

Alison Lang: I grew up reading horror, watching horror, just generally obsessed with horror. Moving to Toronto, there's been a pretty good horror community here…. I love that there were so many women involved in particular and in various roles. I was approached a couple of years ago by Carolyn and Kelly to be on the board. I had been to *BITS* a few times, and really enjoyed the idea of a Canadian film festival that highlights short films and independent creators. And I love how it has a really strong, tight-knit community that surrounds it that's very friendly and welcoming. It's different from any other type of festival I've ever been to, in that sense.

AT: The *Horror Development Lab* was launched in 2021. What prompted its creation? Why this was the right moment for that project? Was it something that you always had in mind working with *BITS*, and how did it come to be?

Stewart: Mauricette, as a programmer, came to me a few years ago about her frustration at the lack of diversity and representation she was seeing in our submissions at the time. I tend to be problem solver rather than accept the status quo, so I suggested we do something about it. That led to discussions of having some sort of lab that could help foster better representation in front and behind the camera which led to the *Horror Development Lab* we have now.

Mauricette: I had been a programmer since 2015 and we started talking about it in 2018. I was seeing the same, predominantly white, filmmakers all the time. As a programmer, you're often watching screeners on your own. When I saw like a person of colour, I'd be like: "Oh my God!" In a horror film specifically, that's not typical. These days, it's getting better, but it wasn't typical. And so, I would champion these films. Of course, they would have to be technically good, well-written and have all the moving parts, but I would always champion a film with people of color. I'm sick of seeing the same old thing and then getting excited when I see a person of color in horror film. So, Kelly said, well, let's do something about it—what do you want to do? We discussed it, and we came up with the *Horror Development Lab*. The problem is, filmmakers who are underrepresented might only have a weekend to make a short film, and they might have the funds to do that, but after the fifth or sixth short film, they need to get that boost to go to a feature length, if that's what their goal is. What the lab does is facilitate that filmmaker to meet with an industry leader, to meet with funders, to meet with people and get business advice and feedback on their pitches and projects, so that they have the tools to move forward to create a feature film.

Lang: Basically, me and another board member, Mariam Bastani, were brought on to feed into the Development Lab. There was a core nucleus of about four of us—Kelly, Carolyn, me and Mariam. And we just discussed the lab and Carolyn's ideas. I just love the idea that there's a small film festival that is not just doing callouts to marginalized creators for submissions, but actually addressing the lack of visibility in genre film festivals head-on by providing opportunities for folks who fall in one of our category groups in the lab, and giving them an opportunity to work and develop their work so they can submit it. And I think that's a really key component that has been missing, especially from genre horror film festivals for a long time: an element of nurturing talent so they can submit and feel empowered to submit…. It's such a great concept. I'm very proud to be involved with an organization that has something like this

in place. I think it's already done well; it has a lot of interest, and it can only grow as the years go on.

AT: How long was the lab in development before you were able to launch in 2021?

Mauricette: About two or three years, we were just hashing out what we wanted. I feel like it's still it's early days, too, so each year we adjust to what's happening…. Last year was online, and this year is in person. Because this is Canada-wide, we have people coming in from other provinces; it's a lot, and we're figuring out how to make it the easiest for the lab participants and make it streamlined for us planning it.

AT: What needs were you already seeing in the horror film community as programmers, for example, but also as critics, makers and fans, that this program is responding to?

Stewart: In our research for creating the lab, underrepresented filmmakers told us they felt they were being kept in mentorship programs, and not being presented with real opportunities. So, Carolyn and I right from the beginning framed the lab as a place for filmmakers to pitch their projects directly to funders, distributors and broadcasters, with the intention they would be going to camera soon on these feature film projects.

Mauricette: Speaking from the artistic side: you have a filmmaker. They've got all these ideas without necessarily thinking about those little cogs. They don't think about where they're going to get the money and support (because a lot of this is financial). I went to the *Women in Film and Television* Toronto International Film Festival reception this year in Toronto, and I saw one of our lab participants from last year. She said she was looking at a website for funding and didn't understand any of it, like it's written in legalese! This is a component in the lab, where we actually have funders coming to guide them and tell them what they need to do. Even me, as a writer, I was looking to see if I could get funding to write a book. I looked at the website and the requirements were so contradictory; I just gave up. And that's what they want, right? They want the hardcore people to push through it, but some of us who are not business-minded aren't going to think about it. And that's why we want to have that component in the lab. [Artists] need to ground themselves so that they are prepared, and not just showing up at a production company saying "I've got

this great story about XYZ, let's make it!" and not know that they have to rent lights, get insurance, and perhaps things like an intimacy coordinator. All of that costs money, all of that you have to budget for.

AT: Why did you want to be involved with the *BITS Horror Development Lab*? What does *BITS* contribute to the Canadian horror media scene?

Victor Stiff (HDL jury): As a film critic, festival programmer, and unabashed cinephile, I watch an ungodly number of movies. I began noticing a lot of young filmmakers running into similar problems. BITS allows me to share my insights with up-and-coming writers/directors/producers so that they can avoid some of the common bumps in the road. The Canadian entertainment industry often takes a backseat to our neighbours to the south. BITS champions homegrown talent that deserves time to shine.

Alex Hall (HDL jury): I've always found *Blood in the Snow*'s approach to Canadian genre films to be a vital platform for horror makers. The festival has consistently carved out a space for voices that don't necessarily get centred in similar environments, and the programming has always pushed boundaries in ways that make it such a generative setting for horror fans and devotees, too. So, having been a fan of the festival for years, when I was approached with the opportunity to become involved, I was all-in…. I deeply admired (and continue to laud) the work being done by the entire team behind the *BITS* Development Lab as well as my fellow jurors. Knowing the stats are still astoundingly high regarding minoritized filmmakers being overlooked and undervalued, it's a project I truly wanted to advocate for and support in any way I could. [The festival is] an innovative outlet for more localized, transgressive and diverse genre work beyond the typical Can-con [Canadian content] one often associates with a national cinema. Going beyond the pale and providing an outlet for work that pushes boundaries, the festival is a necessary platform for facilitating BIPOC presence in genre film, as well as forging a vital space for horror fans, too.

Javier Bardilo and Nat Marshik (HDL participants 2021): *Blood in the Snow* is exactly what is needed in Canada for genre filmmakers to get ahead. I knew it would be incredibly competitive and oversubscribed, like most film development programs in Canada and elsewhere, and would require travel and accommodation investment on my part, but there's no other program quite like it in the whole country. As a POC member of the Canadian film

community, and a resident of Vancouver, BC, it is very difficult to get your projects developed and funded. A cohort of talented creatives and film business executives working on similar projects is not only greatly inspiring, but also key to establishing the connections one needs to get their projects done. And this is exactly what BITS does for underrepresented Canadian filmmakers.

Shelagh Rowan-Legg (HDL participant 2022): As a Canadian filmmaker, *BITS* is a great opportunity to connect with local and regional producers, financiers, and others working in the film industry, the people and companies with whom I would work on my project. It provides a place and atmosphere to make good business connections. To help filmmakers make connections, to foster development of Canadian genre film…, I think it's necessary to have a genre lab that is dedicated specifically to Canadian productions, as often local talent is lost in international labs.

Adrian Bobb (HDL participant 2021): It's no secret that genre filmmaking is overwhelmingly white and cis-male. But that's not in and of itself evidence that that's the only group interested in making genre-films. I feel that especially in recent years *BITS* has broadened its net to search for stories that touch on fears, hopes, dreams, and futures of people often silenced or spoken over and it's done nothing but showcase the potential of genre film as a revelation of true human experience. It's necessary because while I'm crazy enough to remain a genre-filmmaker (in a genre known for being expensive and time-consuming) there are many in marginalized communities that simply assume it's not an option or not a realistic point of entry into the industry. If you can see it, you can imagine it, and *BITS* is one of the few Canadian genre houses that are taking a practical step in broadcasting that vision.

AT: *BITS HDL* has an open and free call for submissions. What is the process like for selecting participants? Who applies to the *Horror Development Lab*? Do you have a set of criteria that's explicit?

Mauricette: We have submissions, and then we have a separate jury. This jury is made up of members from underrepresented groups (BIPOC, LGBTQ, disabled), and they are all filmmakers, film critics, and academics. They'll go through the submissions and look at things like budget, storyline …. We also have a requirement that, if you're from the LGBTQ community but not from the BIPOC community, for example, you have to show that you have

representation behind the camera and in front of the camera. They also look at whether that story can be developed into a feature. There's a whole separate section that decides on that project, which is anywhere from 12 to 15 selections. We have 13 this year (2022). Last year selections were made by a scoring process. This year, we used Filmfreeway, which is a submission website that has its own integrated scoring system…. Kelly and I stay out of it, so it's not biased, because we know a lot of the filmmakers and we encourage people to apply. [*HDL* participants] have a choice, if they want to submit to the film festival as well…. Usually we have that component because if you don't get into the lab and your film is submitted to the festival, it still has a chance to be shown somewhere, or we'll support you in some way. The programming team deals with that …, and we all discuss it.

AT: How you do outreach?

Mauricette: We did a different brand of outreach this year (2022). The first year, we just opened it up. We reached out to colleges, film schools, different organizations like film groups online, we reached out to film commissions to see if they would post information about the lab. And then within our own filmmaking community here in Toronto. Basically, the first year was reaching out to whoever; we cast a wide net to figure out where we can do this. This year, Kelly and I did a ton of networking at *Fantasia Film Festival* where I'm a programmer, and *TIFF*. We let a ton of Canadian filmmakers know that the lab exists. We also did a lot of outreach …. I was reaching out to women-run production companies and thinking outside of the box. So, we did a different approach this year, and I think we'll probably actually hone it even more. Because once people are aware of it, and see what it actually is, I think there'll be a lot of interest …. There are so many notes I'm making on what we need to do for upcoming labs, so I would like to actually have a bigger outreach. We also went to every province, to whoever was able to take a meeting with us. We did have outreach across Canada, it's just whether people are willing to submit or feel like they have the wherewithal to submit at that time. We will be persistent …. We just want to make it as representative as possible.

AT: As jury members, what is it like working on *BITS*?

Stiff: I always look forward to my time with the *BITS* team. Most people in my life don't appreciate horror movies, so I love our *Horror Lab* discussions. I'm eager to hear everyone's perspective, even when we disagree.

Hall: The process has allowed me, and my fellow jury members, to oversee applications from filmmakers across Canada identifying as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, women and from other minoritized communities. Mauricette encouraged our analysis and insight into each applicant's project, fostering an engagement with genre film that felt uniquely community oriented. Furthermore, it provided me insight into a potential future of national cinema and genre work that redirects a focus to vital underrepresented voices, and the further possibilities surrounding Queer women in horror. Two years on, this has been one of the most gratifying experiences I have had so far in my work within minoritized horror.

AT: From the participants' side, what was the experience like?

Bardillo and Marshik: Absolutely wonderful. Exactly what I expected. Informative and entertaining. Made new friends and valuable professional connections that will grow with time and last me a lifetime. It opened up a door into a new filmmaking community that thrives in adversity, larger and more interconnected from the one I've been part of on the west coast.

Rowan-Legg: It was a very positive experience. While I have a long history as a programmer and critic, and have made several short films, this was my first experience from this side, as a filmmaker with a feature project. I came into the lab quite nervous but left feeling confident and assured of the support I would receive should my project move forward.

Bobb: I've had a great relationship with *BITS* ever since my third short film *EXT* played at the festival in 2019. After multiple chats with … Mauricette about the Black experience in relation to genre filmmaking (a real blind spot especially in Canada) I was immediately interested when I heard about the construction of a Horror Lab that boosted marginalized voices. As someone who has had a long career in the VFX, animation, and videogame industries as a digital artist and eventually as a writer/director, I've found my progression in the industry consistently ignored as the kind of projects I like to make rarely structure themselves around racial trauma, but instead simply place POC protagonists in sci-fi positions as scientists, soldiers, and future peoples. The lab was a fantastic way to not only support genre filmmaking among marginalized people but to normalize it too.

AT: *BITS* positions the Development Lab to be less about mentoring emerging filmmakers. As Mauricette noted, once you get to that fifth short film, there's a kind of plateau that so many marginalized communities encounter when they're trying to get to that next level. Was that a conscious choice from the beginning to focus on that level, rather than on first-time filmmakers, for example?

Mauricette: Yes, because often the first time filmmaker … sometimes they're great right out of the gate. But especially when you're making short films, you need to gain a bit more experience of how the industry works, because a lot of people will come in with, for instance, a really high budget. And Kelly always says, "this is Canada, so that's not going to happen," because there's a whole different system here of how films are funded, as opposed to the US …. Whereas if they learn the business, you can get all kinds of funding, you can get equipment at different rates, you can get consulting; there's a bunch of things that you have to get under your belt first. Of course, there are those success stories that happen right away, but oftentimes, you really do have to kind of take a couple of knocks, sadly.

AT: *BITS HDL* invites submissions that showcase short-form horror as proof-of-concept, with the idea that makers want to develop it either into a feature or a web series. What tells you that what works in a short film could translate into a feature? Would you say that there's the same or different set of considerations for web series?

Stewart: The short films [they submit] don't actually have to be the same project as the one they are pitching. The main point of showing us a short film is to ensure that the person/team submitting is at a professional level, that we feel they are ready to make a feature film. Mainly we are seeing if they have the production values and strong story skills to translate something into a feature film. Many times, we have seen filmmakers make a few weak short films but then make a feature film before they are ready.

Mauricette: If you have just me thinking personally as a programmer and watching tons of films, you have compelling characters that you want to know more about, right? And then there's the story. For instance, we had a short film play last year called *DUPPY* by Andrew Hamilton …. It was about a little boy … his grandmother was telling him about their Jamaican heritage, and she's telling him about this kind of boogeyman called the Duppy. And so it started with him as a little boy, and then when he grows up and encounters this creature

as an adult, the storytelling was so compelling and I really wanted to see that expanded …. Now, having said that, I've seen a few viral horror shorts become long form or a mainstream feature film. They didn't quite work. But I think that might be because one of those movie production houses that crank out horrors got a hold of it. Something that's pure going through the machine to make it saleable, that's a whole other story. But compelling storytelling, good writing, and just leaving the audience member to ask what happens next? I think that works for feature film.

Web series have that bit of luxury because they can extend the story…At the festival, we have a web series component [*Bits and Bytes*] and it's so exciting to see what people are making out there. Sometimes we get maybe one or two episodes, and sometimes we'll get a whole season. I love it because you get to see that story progress in little bites.

AT: What makes a great horror short? What do you see as the place of short form horror in today's industry? Are short films always just a calling card, or ends in themselves?

Rowan-Legg: Short films present their own challenges: you have to tell a story more quickly, getting to the "point" of the film, or creating a mood, and thus you have to put aside much of your ego in order to accomplish this goal. It also allows a sharper focus. A great horror short is one that gets you into the mood quickly, gives us a new perspective on a horror trope, and makes us remember it long after viewing.

Bardillo and Marshik: Horror is incredibly versatile and can take many different masks—it can be disguised under science fiction, under documentaries, and even under comedies. A great horror film can hide the genre behind its premise and tone, making it subversively accessible to many.

Stiff: A great horror short tells a complete story. That can happen in two minutes or twenty. Most filmmakers can create a creepy five-minute scene, but few can tell a thoughtful and engaging story in that same window. If the whole point of a short is to create a jumpscare, that's not a story, and you can't build on that. A successful web series or feature spinoff builds on the short's hook/germ of an idea while examining its themes through compelling characters who grow and change over time.

Bobb: The success of a good horror film, in my opinion is in its ability to haunt you long after you've seen it. It follows you home and might even reveal a dark truth you've rarely touched upon. It is why short-form horror is so difficult and also so dependent on concept and delivery. You have to get in and get out and scar the viewer with a thought or image that has staying power and it requires a thorough understanding of the techniques of filmmaking as well as story craft in general. The jump from short form to long form is the concept. Sometimes the concept isn't grand enough to expand into a feature, just as a concept might be too grand to fit into a short …. The more novel or rare a concept is, the more opportunity there is to address it in a long form film or web series.

Hall: I think more than anything, it's so vital for short-form filmmakers (both writers/directors) to hone a particular vision that is not only clear and concise but is visually devoted to the process. For example, being able to articulate, onscreen, a vision and craft that is indicative of a singular (or, in some cases, collaborative) sensibility. The restraint of the format allows for a malleability of storytelling and narrative forms of onscreen expression, in that a certain level of inventiveness and resourcefulness is required in establishing, especially for viewers being introduced to a filmmaker, a vision that will translate across a body of work, including from short format to feature projects.

Mauricette: I love a good short film. I remember there was a time during the lockdown where attention spans were a blip. If I had the gumption to go to my partner's place, we would just sit and watch a bunch of horror shorts; they're just nice bite-sized chunks of horror. It's like reading short stories, where sometimes you just want to read a little capsule of horror. They really do serve a need. Sometimes, we don't want to sit through a whole film. I don't know if there's a director that, unless it is experimental, does specific short form unless they enjoy doing anthologies.

Stewart: I love anthology films and I actually produced and co-wrote my own anthology film *Late Night Double Feature* in 2016. Short films can be both a calling card and an end in itself, but talking to most of our alumni, the end goal is almost always to make a feature film. Equitable representation is much fairer for short films than features simply because of the smaller costs and resources needed to make a short. Parlaying that short into a feature is where the

institutionalized obstacles arise. This is why the *Horror Development Lab* is so important to help encourage these changes.

AT: Is short form filmmaking more accessible to a more diverse range of makers? Are there limits that come with working in the short form?

Hall: I think short-form projects present a terrific opportunity for filmmakers just starting to hone their craft to utilize the form as a means of exploring and experimenting with specific themes, narrative structures and aesthetics: aspects that may present as more transgressive or experimental and that wouldn't necessarily serve longer or feature-length projects. It can be utilized as such a generative space for outlier filmmaking practices, being such an indispensable medium unto itself. Succinct cinema can weird a sort of otherworldly, spellbinding spectatorial experience that I've always felt deeply drawn to. Of course, this feels especially true for works operating within genre, horror and sci-fi modes.

Stiff: Short form filmmaking is more accessible than ever. If Steven Soderbergh is willing to shoot movies on smartphones, what's stopping you? What's most important is that information about how to make and distribute movies is at your fingertips, too. Studying cinema isn't as sexy as going out and shooting something with your friends, but developing your skillset is just as important. Aspiring filmmakers can go to YouTube film school and master their craft. The new struggle is getting a film in front of the right audience.

Bobb: There are certainly creative limits that come with working in the short form but in comparison to features or series, short form filmmaking is absolutely more accessible. A big part is money and equipment, which in long form can be extremely difficult to get, especially in the genre space. Minorities have a higher hill to climb especially due to the fact that our stories are "othered," rare, and generally unlike those that have been given multiple opportunities to refine and normalize themselves in the public consciousness.

AT: What would make working in short form more sustainable for you? Aside from money, what is the biggest challenge for makers going from short to long form?

Rowan-Legg: The limits are really just about the time—often you can't tell the story you want in a short time, so you have to cut a lot that you would

not otherwise. Funding can also be difficult, as it's harder to find financiers for smaller projects. More access to equipment would help—perhaps a government program would help for films under a certain budget.

Bardillo and Marshik: Filmmaking in general has become democratized, affordable, and accessible to all cultural and economic layers of society. You can make a film anytime, anywhere, with or without training. But it's a hobby, and it won't pay your bills. But it will develop your skills and build you a network of professionals who all grow and collaborate together …. The problem with short-film filmmaking is that there is no existing economy to sustain a viable career. The short film distributors worldwide that purchase films are so few and far between that their selection threshold keeps the vast majority of filmmakers out. And self-distribution models are not sophisticated enough to engage enough paying audiences. Unfortunately, there isn't an easily accessible career guidance program for short form filmmakers. Other than commercial films (i.e. branded content promotion "short stories" for large companies), art-drive indie film fare is un-monetizable.

Mauricette: From our survey from last year, a lot of [*HDL* participants] said they were really glad they were able to speak to [industry] people. Because before they didn't have a chance to get in the door; they would maybe just send an email. It's understandable, if you're working for a production company and you get an email from somebody, sometimes it just gets lost in the ether, right? … Kelly will tell you at the festival proper, there have been people meeting up and then ending up doing films together years later. It's those actual in-person meetings that are really beneficial for them. They don't get that normally, unless they push themselves, go to festivals, and show up to things. It's really hard to push yourself to get out there and network! So that's one of the number one barriers for these filmmakers—that they don't get the chance to speak to people face to face.

Rowan-Legg: It can be more accessible, simply because it costs less money, and one can make a short film with just a smartphone, if you have the skills. I think horror appeals to a wide range of filmmakers, though it can have appeal to those from marginalized groups, as many of the themes and tropes of horror can be used to represent the stories of those groups.

AT: What would *BITS* need, not just from the wider horror community, but also in Canada where provincial and federal forms of funding for production are so important, to make that happen?

Mauricette: Absolutely more funding and more response from sponsors to see how important it is that underrepresented groups are represented in this genre. Because it's an important genre—there are academic papers on horror, there's a niche of people of color writing and talking and making horror. I just think it's really important to give a space to everything.

AT: Does horror have any special affordances that make it more interesting, or full of potential for more diverse, more equitable representation, with a broader palette when it comes to thinking about what we see on our screens?

Bobb: That's a great and difficult question. It's special in that horror is such a real and ancient part of what it means to be a living thing. It's revealing, and it's something all of us can tap into. In relation to minoritarian filmmakers, it's novel. Fear is universal as a concept but it's incredibly diverse and specific to every group of people on this planet. Personally, I believe the horror we've seen on screen since the earliest days of the medium have been tied to the horrors of those privileged enough to have access to the technology and financial backing necessary to share it. Which is why I'm so excited to see where the future takes us. Being human can be terrifying and there are 8 billion of us on the planet. Film, TV, and Videogames are strangely the few mediums that can showcase that horror, but in a way that we willingly embrace it. As a minority filmmaker I find that space so honest and spectacular because it's personal and reflective. And at this point in history, it's untreated territory.

Stiff: Horror has always had a special appeal to minoritarian makers because it's the perfect medium to deliver scathing social commentaries. Horror is at its best when it uses metaphorical monsters to terrorize viewers. Horror movies feed audiences life's bitter truths with a spoonful of sugar so the message goes down easy.

Hall: The fact that so much of horror film is still considered to be part of an outlier genre definitely speaks to the experience of those systematically "outcast", forgotten and marginalized. Narratives within horror have always

forged deeper paths into the loneliness, isolation and terror felt by the oppressed for so long.

Mauricette: Absolutely. Look at the late Jeff Barnaby …. I'd never seen *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013). When I finally watched it, though, I realized it's like a horror and fantasy film. The way he posits his film *Blood Quantum*: that's a horror film that comes from a specific background and set of beliefs, which is very important for that representation. And you would think, with so many cultures in Canada, so much folklore, and so many beliefs that it would be so easy to just pick out of this big well of subjects, but the problem is, and this is my personal belief—horror is not respected in the way that it should be. So, you've got your *Exorcist,* you've got your Ari Asters, *Hereditary*: I did a panel at TIFF recently … and someone asked a question about "elevated" horror. Everybody thinks there's a certain hierarchy in horror, but I think it's really unfair, because then you're leaving out these folkloric horrors and things that represent cultures that are not within mainstream white culture. There's so much room for that. But the problem is people of color will get funding for a documentary, no problem. Because I feel like, not that these stories don't matter, but [mainstream audiences] like to see a documentary about a person of color going through strife, and then you walk away, and you feel like you've done something. But really, it's just kind of perpetuating a level you can't get past. There are stories about people who are happy, or people who want to do a horror movie who are from the Caribbean or Morocco for example, and there's a particular thing that they remember from childhood. Maybe they want to make a horror movie about it, and it doesn't have to be a trauma-based film. So, I think that's the struggle—horror is not respected. And when I show up to things, I say, yeah, I program horror, and they're like, huh? And I still find that really weird. It's just so discriminatory against the genre itself. And then you get that the lack of representation. It's like a double layer.

AT: That's a really good point, about what counts as "worthy" representation: where the funding goes, but also where the interest goes too. And the idea that with so many works produced by marginalized communities there's often such a demand to be representative in a very limited way. You miss that whole sense of all the possibilities of how representation starts to crack open. We sometimes don't see that with genre film because genre films are always supposed to be the same thing, but perhaps they are a site for experimentation because people feel like they can own the material a little bit. Everybody understands what they want, because usually they start as a fan.

Mauricette: I did a Q&A for a Mexican film at *Fantasia* this year, called *Huesera* (Michelle Garza Cervera, 2022) …. It was about a woman who is haunted by this ghost, and the pressures of societal norms for women. It represented culture, women, a niche, punk, anarchist section, and it was so well done. That film is a niche film, but it was universal. At the Q&A, there was another filmmaker, who was in the audience. She was in tears by the end of it because she said, the film represented her being a mother and going through postpartum depression. The character in the film was driven to become a mother, but she wasn't ready for it …. To have that reaction from one audience member and to know that it affected somebody in that way, that's what I want to see with the representation of the [*Horror Development*] *Lab*. Basically, my hope for the lab is that it reaches people who don't see themselves.

Alanna Thain is professor of cultural studies, world cinemas and gender, sexuality and feminist studies at McGill University. She directs the Moving Image Research Lab, which explores the body in moving image media broadly conceived, and is former director of the Institute for Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies. She leads the FRQSC funded research team CORÉRISC (Epistemologies of Embodied Risk), focused in its first iteration on queer, feminist and minoritarian horror in media, art and performance. Her book, *Bodies in Suspense: Time and Affect in Cinema*, looks at how unusual or aberrant experiences of time resensitizes us to our own corporeal volitility around the body's primary capacity: change over time or "anotherness." She co-directs the NFRF funded project The Sociability of Sleep, and through that project is writing a book on 21st century feminist sleep horror. She is also finishing a book on post-digital screendance as a score for survival, entitled "Anarchival Outbursts."

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Bones and Voices: Doreen Manuel's *These Walls*

Murray Leeder

In 2021, GPS evidence revealed the presence of 200 suspected human remains on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia. This discovery shocked settler Canadians into a long-overdue reckoning with the country's history of colonial violence. However, numerous Indigenous artists had long dealt with colonialism in general and the Indian Residential School (IRS) system, including through the medium of film. Some such representations have turned the conventions of dystopian science fiction (e.g. *Night Raiders* (2021) by Danis Goulet (Cree/Métis), while others come closer to horror. Features include *Older Than America* (2008) by Georgina Lightning (Cree) and *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013) by Jeff Barnaby (Mi'kmaq), as well as such short films as *Savage* (2009) by Lisa Jackson (Anishinaabe), *The Candy Meister* (2014) by Cowboy Smithx (Blackfoot) and *These Walls* (2012) by Doreen Manuel (Ktunaxa/Secwepemc).[1] *These Walls* was part of the 2012 Crazy8s, a filmmaking challenge in Vancouver, where six finalists are given a small budget and production resources to produce a short film in eight days.

In brief, the Indian residential school system (IRS) was established in 1883, based on pre-existing U.S. models, to separate Indigenous children from their parents and communities in order to pacify, assimilate and Christianize them under the guise of education. They were funded by the Department of Indians Affairs and largely administered by the Catholic and various Protestant churches, and were compulsory from 1894 to 1947; they only fully closed in 1996 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2014, Milloy 2017, MacDonald 2019). They became notorious sites of physical and sexual abuse, with teachers and clergy operating with almost complete impunity. The conservative estimates of numbers of children who died in their care exceed 4000 (Deer), with many not given proper burial, but thanks to poor record keeping the real number is likely substantially higher. Some of the schools themselves are gone but others still stand, either abandoned or repurposed[2] reminders of this tragic history that still haunts communities across the country.

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[1] The makers of these films may not universally accept the label "horror film," though I feel each at a minimum engages with some of the generic preoccupations of cinematic horror.

[2] For example, the Blue Quills Residential School in Alberta now houses Blue Quills First Nation College ("The State of Canada's Former Residential School Buildings" 2017).

Doreen Manuel is herself a Survivor of the Port Alberni residential school, and her parents were the celebrated activist, writer and chief George Manuel and spiritual leader Marceline Manuel (Smith). Her subsequent projects have largely been non-fiction, including the feature *Unceded Chiefs* (2019). She explains on her website that *These Walls* came out of a dream vision:

> *These Walls* is in a way an adaptation. I wanted to stay true to the original text, which is the dream vision, the dream story. My spiritual practices tell us that when we want or need something in our lives, we need to meet the spirits half way. We need to work and pray as hard as we can to achieve our hopes. Then if it doesn't turn out the way we envisioned, it is then that we realize that it has come to us the way it was meant to be.

It tells the story of troubled Indigenous teen Mary (Grace Dove) who has car trouble near an abandoned school and seeks help there, flouting the advice of her survivor mother, Claire (Andrea Menard). Hearing voices, she looks inside an sees a baby crawling through a debris-strewn hall. Entering to investigate, she is soon supernaturally sucked into the walls of the building and trapped there alongside a skeleton. She then sees a vision of a priest seizing a baby from an Indigenous mother – her own origin story.

She is let out by Father Kelly (Peter Hall), who clutches a skull and claims it is his confession. He says that she was the baby he let live, but then tries to strangle her, saying that she must "Go with them to their final burial." She manages to escape to her mother, who then confronts Father Kelly and another priest who are trying to hide the evidence of their crimes. Claire and Mary overpower them and reclaim the bones of the murdered children.

Sound plays a significant role in *These Walls,* suggesting the invisible presence of spirits who are suffering and benign, rather than malign. Whispered spirit voices are heard throughout the film, and Manuel's website provides translations for them: "We are in here. Find us. Help us. Protect us. We need you. Tell everyone about us. Don't forget us." While Mary is imprisoned in the wall, one says, "Sing your helper song," cuing Mary to begin to sing ("*These Walls*"). Throughout the film the cries of babies and children, of those dead and improperly mourned, fill the soundtrack. At the film's close a voice whispers "Don't forget about us." As Salomé Voegelin writes, "Sounds are like ghosts. They slink around the visual object, moving in on it from all directions, forming its contours and content in a formless breeze. The spectre of sound unsettles the idea of visual stability and involves us as listeners in the production of an

invisible world" (12). *These Walls* plays on the longstanding cinematic tradition of supernatural aurality, providing voices at the level of soundtrack that both Mary and Claire nonetheless respond to.

These Walls is, as Manuel puts it, "an experiment in some ways to see if I could take a dream vision and turn it into a film" ("*These Walls*"). Numerous significant themes are packed into *These Walls*' nine minutes. Corrupt clergy preside over separations and murders to cover the evidence of their own crimes, and face only much-belated punishment. Bodies of innocent, murdered children are hidden and unearthed. Though long abandoned, the residential school still stands as an ominous relic of the system that did so much damage to Indigenous communities. It is understood as simultaneously a physical location and a spiritual prison for both the living and dead. The daughter comes to see her own origins and what her mother suffered, and the last image frames them together, finally unified by a common understanding, as a spirit exhorts them to remember the murdered.

These Walls would be interesting to pair with the recent podcast *Kuper Island* (2022), hosted by Duncan McCue (Anishinaabe), which is also about a west coast residential school and deals with many of the same topics from a journalistic perspective. In its first episode, we hear of the apparitions of ghosts being spotted while the community searches, as so many now do in the wake of the Kamloops discovery, for evidence of unmarked graves. The point is made, however, that the language of ghosts and hauntings is somewhat inadequate to convey the concept, but is also the best available in English.

It is interesting to note that, as of this writing, the last item shared on the promotional Facebook page for *These Walls* is a CBC article about the Kamloops discoveries ("These Walls"). In the days after these graves were first publicized, writer Alicia Elliott (Tuscarora) wrote that,

> this entire country is a real-life Indian burial ground . . . Just like those white families in horror movies, though, non-Indigenous peoples of Canada seem to believe they are innocent . . . They lean into the silence that's expected of them, hoping that the nationalistic myth of Canada—polite, multicultural, consistently more tolerant and humanitarian than the United States—will overcome the gruesome facts of how this country was actually forged. (Elliott 2021)

If the conventions of the horror film provide Elliott with a metaphor for white ignorance, Indigenous horror films like *These Walls* provide the opposite, a

window into the crimes of the past, the ongoing effects of colonialism and the need for justice against the still-living perpetrators.

Figure 1.

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Jon Bell's *The Moogai* and the Ghosts of a Stolen Generation: A Film and Historical Reflection

Dani Bethea

> *The orphanage wasn't a very nice place to be in. We weren't orphans, we had family, we had mum and dad. The reason we were taken away…the colour of our skin.* [Now] I graduated with the Residential Childcare Certificate which enabled me to help children. A lot of people ask me "why do you go and work for these very people, the Community Services?" I don't know what they used to call it. It used to be "native welfare" during my time. Why do you go and work for these very people [who harmed you]? My answer to them was: if I could help one child make it in this world it'll be worth it.
>
> — Sheila Humphries, "My Stolen Childhood, and a Life to Rebuild" (2017)[1]

Often, films in the horror canon utilize a monster allegory to explore the dark realities of histories that leave communities traumatized, violated, and reeling with interpreting the ghosts of intergenerational trauma. One such ghost, called the Moogai by the Bundjalung (Black Aboriginal peoples of the northern coast of modern-day Australia), is the manifestation of hundreds of years of colonization that fundamentally shaped entire generations of native people on the entire continent through the Torres Strait of the Pacific. These native and indigenous children are referred to as The Stolen Generation, who from 1910 to 1970, were the targets of federal and state policies to "civilize" the remaining Aboriginal population after decades of previous genocide and enslavement.

In *The Moogai* (2020), writer/director Jon Bell, who is an Aboriginal person, attempts to unpack the fear and anxieties that still linger for the descendants and last victims of a colonial policy of capture, forced assimilation, and rehousing by the Australian Government. If this horror sounds frighteningly familiar, this genocidal process of reeducation has parallels similar to the Native peoples of North America, who also continue to navigate the

[1] An excerpt from Sheila Humphries, "My Stolen Childhood, and a Life to Rebuild," filmed November 2017 in Perth, Australia, TEDx Perth video, 14:50, https://www.tedxperth.org/my-stolen-childhood-and-life-rebuild.

intergenerational traumas of invasion and forced inculcation into "whiteness." This violent unmooring of various Black Aboriginal communities saw thousands of children tortured by white missionaries, displaced into labor camps—or adopted out, if they were "fair-skinned" enough—to white families.

Figure 1: Poster for *The Moogai* (Jon Bell, 2021)

The poster for *The Moogai* is positively haunting: outstretched, unnaturally long fingers of a white-taloned ghost reach for a beautiful, vulnerable Aboriginal child. The child is barefoot and clad in a simple, but intricately crafted, white dress; this leaves open the possibility that this child could be from a century past or the present day. An additional detail is the child's unseeing eyes—or perhaps eyes that have been blinded by the monster's hands.

In the film, a previously captured child's spirit appears first to the mother Sarah (Shari Sebbens) who believes she's experienced a nightmarish warning from a spirit beyond the grave that her baby is in danger. Sarah's attempts to express her fears to her husband Fergus (Meyne Wyatt) are at first ineffective because he hasn't experienced the haunting … yet. Escalating supernatural occurrences throughout the home careen into the first encounter by Sarah which rattles her so badly she refuses to sleep, lest the monster snatch her baby. Pregnancy and childbirth are already harrowing experiences— stressful even for the mother-baby-partner dynamic—but this state quadruples for many in racist colonized environments. Segregation from proper medical care, nonchalance about the individual's pain from doctors, and the hesitancy to seek hospital care where some babies were historically taken away for adoption are all lingering in the cultural memory for Aboriginal people. Also, the physical (maternal) weathering in this case—that is, the health effects of stress and discrimination—have physiological consequences for pregnant people that can be passed down to their children. In

these heightened environments of stress, sleeplessness and hyper-alertness via post-trauma are a grim and present reality that many Aboriginal mothers experience.

During one night of this forced alertness, Fergus is roused by his wife rocking the baby in bed. Dual concerns for his wife's mental state and for how tightly she's clutching the newborn baby prompt him to hold the child and allow her a brief reprieve to sleep while he keeps watch. An absolutely wrenching aspect of this film is its modernity juxtaposed to the past that is constantly on the periphery of their comfortability with a home, career, and a future. Trying to carve out some semblance of stability when you have so much healing to do, unspoken familial trauma, or potential triggers that impede that progress, layers this short film with additional commentary of a house not always being a measure of safety or security but a fortification against a larger white society with its locks and modern appliances to supposedly ward off intruders or invaders. Alas, monsters know nothing of physical buttresses. A jaunty bathroom break while his family sleeps reveals the ghost girl has reappeared to whisper to the husband as he returns to their shared bedroom, "he's watching you". He finally sees and hears the monster that's been keeping his wife Sarah on edge for days; quickly rousing his wife with the baby in his arms, they flee from the house. Driving all night, because even rest stops provide no safe haven or reprieve from the monster's chase, forces them both to the very brink of exhaustion.

Having careened into the forest, the father is shown, deceased, head smashed into the steering wheel ... while the back door is open with the mother ejected from the vehicle grasping her baby in vain as the monster appears and snatches it away into the night. The final shot of film shows the spectral girl apparition isn't alone but is one of many who have been taken from their parents never to be seen again. Sarah's mournful wails are intercut with the haunting image of dozens of Black Aboriginal children in a field scattered like the eeriest of flowers or tombstones. The telltale signs of posttraumatic stress are deftly weaved into the short film as exaggerated startled responses, inability to remain asleep, heightened anxiety, and affected mood to name a few immediate examples. Terror and posttraumatic stressors are studied extensively in the field of epigenetics and reverberate like a bell once you identify the weight the mother Sarah seems to be carrying from the very beginning of the film.

In a 2021 interview with the Writer and Director for the Virtual Indigenous Film Festival, Jon Bell revealed that the child actors are his granddaughter, nieces, and nephews. This note added an additional, personal heaviness to the short film that there are children who will still be grappling with

this trauma for generations to come. The government of Australia still has significant reckoning to do with its colonial past and present, especially because its acts of violence have left many Black Aboriginal individuals lost, depressed, angry, and heartsick for their language and cultural traditions. Like many nations with a colonized past, the native and Aboriginal people have suffered the most, but the weight is also being felt by the white citizenry that must have a continued national healing and diligence to restorative justice, reparation, and repatriation. Films and other pieces of outspoken art work by the affected Stolen Generation are integral pieces of the puzzle to make a nation reflect and their communities progressively whole again. With brilliant direction, chilling sound design, stellar acting, and the injection of historical horror *The Moogai* stands not only as a piece of powerful cinema but a chilling refrain to show that colonization was not an isolated traumatic event and that the ghosts are still being seen to this day.

**The Moogai* is currently available on the Vimeo streaming service.

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Nose Nose Nose EYES!: Korean Horror and Naturalist Sensibility

Seung-hwan Shin

In theorizing naturalism in his cinema book, Gilles Deleuze notes that it originates from what he calls "the originary world," or the world of primordial impulses that realism proves powerless to represent and idealism remains powerless to make felt (123). Deleuze's concept of the originary world offers some useful clues to the eccentric aspects of Moon Ji-won's 2017 short horror film *Nose Nose Nose EYES!* This film confirms that the spectral or the supernatural is not always necessary to invoke a deep sense of horror. Unlike many other Korean horror films, the film has no enigmatic force that horrifies us as a fatal threat to our being or society. It instead owes much of its shock effect to the way in which some uncontainable raw impulses emerge at the heart of our ordinary milieux.

The film starts with Ji-hyo, a little girl haunted by a recurring dream about a mysterious man repeating "Nose nose nose … lips," the chant from a popular children's game, "Nose Nose Nose," in South Korea. As the mysterious man resumes the play, he slowly turns around with his eyes covered by his hands. When the ghastly man reveals his face with the word "eyes," he turns out to be the girl's Daddy with only the whites in his eyes. Upon waking up screaming, she runs to her mother, who comforts her assuring her that Daddy is fine and just needs some rest. Yet she soon learns that her Daddy is far from fine, but instead, bedridden with some unknown illnesses. When she sneaks into the parents' room, she finds her Daddy with his legs and hands all tied to the bed posts and unconscious with an oxygen mask covering his face. The real shock, however, is yet to come. As her mother enters the room, she hides under the bed, from where she secretly witnesses her mother trying to stab Daddy's eyes with a brooch pin. Yet when her mother catches her, she tells her that it is all Daddy's idea intended to get insurance money. Now unable to trust her mother, she asks her not to hurt Daddy. But her revolt against her mother pushes her into a situation where either she or Daddy must give up the eyes to secure insurance money, to which she eventually responds, "Do it to Daddy."

This film, as director Moon acknowledged, draws on a true story of a real-life serial killer known as Lady Uhm (MSSF). From 2000 to 2005, she murdered two husbands and even stabbed the eyes of her own family for insurance payment, which shocked the entire nation. However, the film's

primary concern does not rest with replaying the appalling story itself. At its core, the film reimagines through the eyes of a child—which is eloquently foregrounded through Ji-hyo's POV shots, such as her observation of her mother through her shadow cast on the wall, which feels like children's shadow puppetry—the rise of perverse impulses in the depths of our ordinary milieux, more specifically, home.

Figure 1: Hiding under the bed, Ji-hyo witnesses her mother's shocking deed through her shadow projected on the wall of the opposite side of the room.

Figure 2: The uncle seen from the inside through the opaque window glass.

Nose Nose Nose EYES! is a film of enfolded interiority. This film never steps out of the house and its interior becomes a space sealed off from the outside, as hinted through all the blockades between inside and outside such as the phone call for deception, bolted doors, and closed windows. They are not for opening or connecting, but for closing off or hiding from the outside. The enclosed interiority is further accentuated as the inside grows into a clearer shape, while the outside in contrast becomes bleary or shapeless. Notable in this regard is the uncle's appearance seen through the opaque window glass. Taken from the inside, the blurry image of the uncle trying to open the locked windows and peer through them becomes evocative of Francis Bacon's amorphous figures.

The family ties, the most intimate form of social relation, dissipate in this claustrophobic space governed by primordial impulses, and so do people's identities shaped through social relations. A consequence of this overpowering interior is that any attempt to understand it *in relation to* the outside proves futile,

as the outside remains powerless. Herein lies a justification for the film's refusal to situate or explain the interior within a larger historical or social context. The absence of outward linkage in the film is a result of the fortified inside as its primary concern, which also clarifies the special validity the short form has for this film. Mainly concerned with scrutinizing the interior under the reign of originary impulses, this film defies the impulse to build continuity with the real milieu on the outside. Watching this film thus feels like being abruptly stranded and helplessly trapped in an unknown interior space.

We are mistaken, however, to think that the outside is completely abolished or destroyed. This is neither a dark fantasy film nor an apocalyptic drama. The world of raw impulses, as noted above, arises and grows in the depths of the ordinary milieux. The enfolded interior world defies the determined world on the outside. But then again, it is only valid through its immanence in the real milieux since the determined milieux are the medium of the originary world's existence. The originary world causes the outside to become exhausted and powerless. Yet its destruction is not in the mother's interest. After all, it is the insurance money that awakens and fuels her primitive impulse in the first place. Instead of devastating the outside completely, she reconstructs it into a hunting ground and in the social forest, she becomes a highly skilled hunter who effectively uses the regulations and norms of the determined world to catch her preys. It is not a coincidence that her living room is carefully decorated with a wealth of references that help us to easily recognize the film's temporal and cultural setting, Korea's typical middle-class household in the 1990s. In contrast, the parents' room, where she holds her prey captive, looks much further detached from the real milieux. The innermost part of her world, the room feels surreal as the connection to the outside becomes more tenuous and things are deprived of their original meanings or values. Instead, they are in service of the manifestation of her primitive impulses or their extraction from the established modes of behavior, as suggested in the primacy of the mother's perverse deed. Then again, the primordial impulses cannot exist independently of the real milieux. As Deleuze noted, the originary

Figure 3: The living room, despite its Gothic color tone, feels like any living room of the middle-class household in 1990s Korea.

world may feel marked by the artificiality of the set as much as by the authenticity of the real milieu and the established behavioral customs in it (124). Motherhood, for example, is not useless to the mother. She relies on it to have her little daughter under her tight control. She, or the originary world in general, is parasitic.

Figure 4: The parents' room and its surreal overtone.

This eccentric relationship between the original world and the determined milieux is also responsible for the special kind of violence involved in the manifestation or extraction of the raw impulses from the real milieux. Essential to the impulses is an obsession with special parts. Their emergence comes with an act of tearing away, fragmenting, and dislocating. That is, the fetish on partial objects taken from the determined world is an essential attribute of the originary world. In the case of *Nose Nose Nose EYES!*, the fetishistic desire is channeled toward the eyes. Above all, Daddy's eyes are the ultimate object of the mother's obsession. Even prior to that, however, the repeated use of close-up tears the eyes away from the whole body and renders them partial. That is, the fetishistic impulse is eloquently reflected in cinematography, and this emphatic use of the eye fetish clarifies the deeply perverse quality of the originary impulses. This perversion, in turn, renders the originary world replete with mutilated and disfigured bodies as a consequence of the uncontainable impulses to possess specific parts. This fetishistic impulse, however, is not purely for the object itself. Nor is it purely accidental. As noted above, it emerges only in relation to the determined milieux. The values of Daddy's eyes are only valid as the means to secure insurance money. In brief, it is the determined milieux that trigger and nurture the fetishistic impulses.

In this world of raw fetishistic impulses, humans cannot remain whole. They cannot help constantly tearing and being torn. Humans are simply like animals. They morph into a being that precedes all differentiation between human and animal. Yet words like "degeneration" would not be right for this transformation. The originary impulse is not without intelligence. Its intelligence instead becomes diabolic as it is used to nurture primitive impulses at the heart

of the real milieu. Children are an exception. The originary world does not spare them innocence. Their unfledged intelligence rather causes them to be deeply vulnerable to the dominance of the raw impulses. Ji-hyo witnesses things yet remains incapable of deciphering their meanings. She also questions her mother's lies to the uncle yet her mother quickly subdues her curiosity with another lie. She then shares a rotten apple with her mother. At the end, she rebels against her. Yet when forced to choose between her eyes and Daddy's, she begs her mother to stab Daddy's. It is truly cruel to expect a little girl like Ji-hyo to be able to reject the pact with the devil. What feels more chilling here, however, is the girl's implication in the originary world through her own action. Her action is not entirely innocent. Instead, it is embryonic, for it is not out of her own impulse but not fully involuntary, either. In other words, the little girl is locked or absorbed into a vicious relationship with her mother. If the mother's heinous action at the end denotes the climax of her impulses, Ji-hyo takes us back to the nascent stage of the originary world with her embryonic action. And the establishment of this cycle leaves no exit to the outside.

To return to Deleuze, he closes his reflection on the originary world with the difficulty of becoming a naturalist (133-140). The originary world is too brutal or indecent to idealism, and it is too illogical or unintelligible to realism. Filmmakers thus have often repressed their naturalist sensibilities, sometimes with a moralizing view, and other times a disavowal of the unknowable that lurks beyond the parameter of the perceptually and ideologically suitable. *Nose Nose Nose EYES!* is not a full-blown scrutiny of the world of raw impulses. Yet it presents us a compelling glimpse into the originary world, which is not accidental or transitional but always immanent to our ordinary determined milieu.

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The Othered Subject in *Koreatown Ghost Story* (2021)

Qian Zhang

Although *Asian horror* films often gain much attention as a category under the umbrella of the horror genre and are popular in American horror remakes, the category of *Asian American horror* remains conspicuously absent on the horror landscape. As Margaret Cho, who is the producer and plays the character of Ms. Moon in *Koreatown Ghost Story* (Park and Tenenbaum 2021), comments in an interview, "The diversity in American horror isn't the best. So the fact that we're doing an Asian American horror, I think is really exciting."(Borders 2021, para.4) Along with *I Am A Ghost* (Mendoza 2014) and *Umma* (Shim 2022), *Koreatown Ghost Story* (2021) suggests the potential rise of Asian American horror cinema, which focuses on the fear that is central to the experience of Asian Americans. Through the lens of temporality, this essay examines how the theme of ghost marriage and the formal representation of spatial structure in the horror short *Koreatown Ghost Story* function as a means of rethinking kinship linearity in the Asian diaspora context. Thus, this rethinking of transgenerational inheritance reveals what I call a temporally Othered subject and uncovers the Korean Americans' struggle to reach an open-ended future and maintain a connection to Korean culture and tradition.

Ghost Marriage: One Way to Approach Asian American Horror

Ghost-marriage stories grounded in Asian cultures are common in horror-themed American media texts, such as Yangsze Choo's novel *The Ghost Bride* (2013), the TV series *Without a Trace: Devotion* (Polson 2009, S7E22) and *Bones: The Boneless Bride in the River* (Wharmby 2007, S2E16). Traced back to East Asian cultures, including Korea, China, and Japan, ghost marriage refers to an unusual form of matrimony involving at least one party that is dead. This form of marriage aims to form new social relationships, thereby serving a number of different material and symbolic functions, including ensuring the patrilineage (Schwartze 2010; Pasternak, Ember, and Ember 1997), pleasing the vengeful spirit, and assigning a living daughter-in-law for offspring and domestic work (Topley 1955; Schwartze 2010), among others (Malbrancke 2018; Schwartze 2010; Topley 1955; 1956; Freeman 1970; Schattschneider 2001). In literature,

TV series, and films, the theme of ghost marriage functions differently: the ghost marriage in *Bones* serves as an exotic element, which introduces the fear to the incomprehensible East to the primarily Western audience; meanwhile, the ghost marriage in Choo's work reconstructs the fear that comes from the Asian diasporic subject (Dalal 2020). *Koreatown Ghost Story*, akin to Choo's approach, uncovers a temporal ambiguity (neither past, future nor present) in the construct of subject position. Removed from linear chronology, the subject occupies an ambiguous temporal position, struggling to access the cultural past and to make sense of the futurity that is uncanny and doomed to be haunted.

Time Trouble and the Othered Subject in *Koreatown Ghost Story*

The juxtaposition of Koreatown and the ghost marriage creates the central horror in *Koreatown Ghost Story*. In the film, the ritual of ghost marriage takes place in Koreatown, drawing attention to the subject's struggle to maintain a connection to Korean tradition and culture. 'Koreatown' in the film's title identifies what Katherine Yungmee Kim calls "the overseas Korean diaspora," which indicates both "a community and a geographic location" (Kim 2011, 8). That said, Koreatown is displaced from Korea but maintains historical and social ties through the continuity of traditions, stories, and identities. It is also a part of the violently contested American myth of immigration, melting pot, and opportunity. Meanwhile, the ghost marriage, as mentioned earlier, aims to maintain family ties, or straighten a patrilineal kinship structure, thus allowing the dead (and often) younger generation to be 'imagined' in relation to a future via their living partner.[1] Paradoxically, it is worth noting that, since it involves the dead, a ghost marriage forecloses the possibility of reproduction within a bloodline. The tension between a future-oriented desire to integrate the past into a present life versus the closing off a natal future creates a form of temporal anxiety unique to the practice of ghost marriages.

[1] Lucas J. Schwartze (2010) points out that the "ghost marriage," or spiritual marriage, as a rare variation of marriage often goes beyond the conventional definition of marriage by anthropologists for its absence of economic and sexual union. Also, the conventional definition of marriage functions to culturally and/or legitimately secure childbearing. Schwartze's (2010) research focuses on two Asian societies: the Singapore Chinese and the Japanese. Due to the limited research on Korean ghost marriage and given the cultural influence among Eastern Asian societies, I use the research by drawing on the sharing meaning in the ghost marriage while being aware of the potential differences in the ghost marriage in Korean culture. For further reading, see Pasternak, Ember, and Ember (1997).

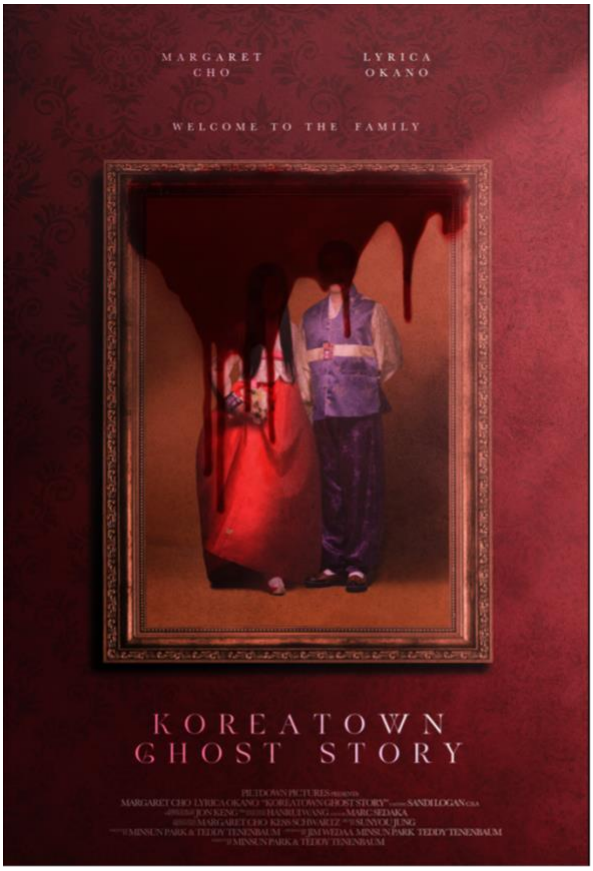

Figure 1: *Koreatown Ghost Story* poster

The film's poster emphasizes the cultural ambiguity and conflict central to the film. The poster recreates a marriage photo in which both partners are dressed in the traditional Korean dress, the Hanbok (see figure 1). While a curtain of blood covers the couple's faces, their bodies in traditional Hanbok become more stunning to the viewers. However, the bride has long straight hair, worn down; this clashes with the way hair is traditionally worn in Korean weddings (Ahn 2012), and is in fact more reminiscent of the trope of the female ghost in the contemporary Asian gothic.[2] Whereas the film's title emphasizes the story's geographic and the immigrant community, the poster emphasizes characteristics more broadly related to Korean representations, downplaying the Korean American status of the film. In addition, throughout the film, the camera is rarely set outdoors, thereby obscuring the narrative's relation to the Koreatown that is mostly offscreen. This absence of an objectified view of Koreatown presents the town as an untraceable image, which challenges the common association between location and culture and further discloses the idea of Koreatown as a liminal space.[3] The contrast between the emphasis on *Koreatown* in the film's title and the absence of image of Koreatown in the poster as well as the film, therefore, displaces the

[2] Including Korean horror and Japanese horror films, the dark long hair is iconic portrayal of the female ghost, who often revengefully returns from the past to punish the wrong doers or the patriarchal society. For further reading, see Lim (2009), Lee (2011), Hwang (2013), Martin (2013), Chung (2014), etc.

[3] I would like to thank Sonia Lupher for raising this point.

"Americanness" of the Korean Americans' experience and juxtaposes this absent imagery with anxiety about the characters' Korean traditions and heritage.

The narrative explores the anxiety hinted at in the film's title and promotional materials. During this holiday period of Chuseok, the Korean version of Thanksgiving that is observed in honor of ancestors and dead family members, a cancer-diagnosed acupuncture therapist, Ms. Moon (Margaret Cho) invites Hannah (Lyrica Okano) to complete a ritual of ghost marriage, which is unknown to her. In the past, Ms. Moon and Hannah's parents, who were then alive and are now dead, have agreed to a marriage between Ms. Moon's son Edward (Brandon Scott Halvorsen) and Hannah. Since Edward is dead, Hannah must marry Edward's spirt to fulfill her parents' promise and inherit Ms. Moon's fortune in the future. Throughout the film, Hannah goes through her confusion of the arranged visit, then her resistance to the ghost marriage, and finally accepts her bond with this Korean American family. As the narrative closes, Hannah has transformed from an acupuncture-suspicious, orphaned single young Asian woman to a Korean American ghost's wife, who is taking the lead role in the family after the ritual.

Often, the theme of the ghost marriage produces an anxiety associated with temporality. For example, drawing on Asian literature, Yu Wang (2016) explicitly connects ghost marriage to the temporal anxiety attributed to the modernization of time. Wang (2016) argues that modern literary authors often rely on the theme of ghost marriage to unleash a "nostalgia for an unrecoverable ethics-based society," which is labeled 'premodern.' Akin to the ghost marriage in Wang's (2016) research, the one in *Koreatown Ghost Story* also unleashes the anxiety that can be attributed to the difficulty of properly positioning the self in time. However, this temporal anxiety cannot be explained as simply a nostalgia for premodern social relations. As a child of Korean immigrants, Hannah is not herself directly familiar with Korean culture: She is puzzled by the wooden Korean mask attached to Ms. Moon's front door (see figure 2), is resistant to acupuncture (a traditional medical approach backed by Asian philosophy and beliefs) and is surprised by the existence of the Chuseok festival. In many ways, Hannah identifies not with her Korean heritage, but with American traditions and cultural life. This is exacerbated by the fact that her parents died when she was young, leaving her literally orphaned and cut off from her Korean cultural heritage. Therefore, the theme of ghost marriage here plays a role in re-bonding to the Korean tradition and culture, though in a troubling way. This re-bonding to the ethnic traditions is a journey for Hannah to rewrite Korean-ness into her subjectivity.

Figure 2: "Ms. Moon answers her door (00:49) in *Koreatown Ghost Story*.

The kinship lineage juxtaposed with cultural transmission contributes to the meaning of inheritance in this film. However, kinship lineage or tradition inheritance does not occur in a natural progression. Consequently, via re-forming a transgenerational linkage (by specifically positioning Hannah into Ms. Moon's family), the ruptures and tension across generations are revealed. As discussed, the ghost marriage *per se* may imply a problematic theme that has to be inherited (the marriage agreement from Hannah's dead parents and the ritual of the ghost marriage from the old generational beliefs). It is especially worth noting that the cinematic spatial construction with an emphasis on barriers in the film underscores the conflicting wills across generations. These spatial barriers delay and obstruct Hannah's movement, dramatizing her confusion and reluctance in her twofold journey: the re-familiarization with Korean culture together with the ritual of the ghost marriage. Specifically, the space *per se* is introduced as a hybrid space—a Victorian house filled with Korean cultural signifiers, such as an altar for Chuseok, Hahoetal masks, hanbok dresses, and acupuncture. Accordingly, each room's functions shift: an altar set in the living room to honor the dead during Chuseok, the circular open space is packed with cups and needles for acupuncture therapy, the kitchen allows a female ghost in hanbok to haunt… In this sense, Hannah's physical movement in this space is akin to a tour in a museum of Korean culture while the ghost marriage takes place ahead of Hannah's acquiescence.

Furthermore, the film pays close attention to the use of doors—opening and closing doors—to intensify Hannah's struggle in this hybrid space. For example, the focus on closed doors onscreen, sharply separating room-spaces

from each other, reorients Hannah's physical experience in the space. Her confined movements reflect her psychological variations, including waiting, confusion, shock, and fear, and all these emotions contribute to a depiction of the young generation's delay in comprehension of the older generation's plan. Notably, the doors that are opened by Ms. Moon (see figures 2 and 3), as well as the ones that Hannah cannot open, create a contrast between passes and the impasse, which could also symbolize the asynchronization between generations. For Hannah, almost every door represents a rupture in space, requiring a permission of the elder generation (Ms. Moon) to allow her to pass through. This permission by Ms. Moon echoes an imposed obligation to Hannah's inheritance. As such, the use of spatial barriers reveals a difficult and delayed path for the young generation to reconnect to the tradition; the self-conscious confusion and reluctance are a struggle in the younger generation during the process of comprehension of the transgenerational inheritance.

Figure 3: Ms. Moon blocks a door with the Haboetal mask during the ritual of ghost marriage (10:03) in *Koreatown Ghost Story*.

This future seems not exclusively promising; along with the ghost marriage, the film adopts the image of the dead son, Edward, to further renegotiate the image of the hopeful future. Notably, Edward is the only identifiable ghost in the film.[4] His photos stand on the altar, surrounded by traditional Korean food and fresh fruits (see figure 4). Often, Chuseok functions to honor the ancestors and celebrate the familial unions ("Chuseok: Korean Thanksgiving Day" n.d.). However, the altar has only Edward. Along with the

[4] The female ghost in the kitchen appears anonymously, therefore limited knowledge helps us to identify her as an either grandmother or a maid in charge of domestic work.

dying Ms. Moon, this missing reference to the ancestors uncovers a visual absence, disrupting the kinship lineage, thereby derailing the Moon family in its patrilineal trajectory to maintain the kinship inheritance. The film renders a future built on the ghost marriage, thereby binding the potential with haunting by all ghosts (Edward, as well as the unexplained ghost dressed in Hanbok appearing in the kitchen) in Ms. Moon's house. The haunting in the future thus releases an anxiety associated with this upcoming alternative space-time, which reveals the subject as an improper temporal being, challenging a "proper" temporal relation to the linear past-present-future framework.

Figure 4: "Edward's photos are on the alter (3:08) in *Koreatown Ghost Story*.

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F is for Female: The Woman Soldier and the Horror of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in Keshales and Papushado's *F is for Falling*

Ido Rosen

In the early 2010s, the duo Aharon Keshales and Navot Papushado staged themselves as arguably the most refreshing voices in Israeli cinema. Their debut film, *Rabies* (2010), was a rare successful example of local genre filmmaking and inspired a wave of new Hebrew Horror (Rosen 2014). Their second feature film, *Big Bad Wolves* (2013), was internationally acclaimed, and selected by Quentin Tarantino as "best film of the year," a seal of approval that paved the creators' route to Hollywood (Anderman 2022). After attempts at a few follow-up projects who never made it to the screens (Fleming Jr 2016; Fleming Jr 2017; Hopewell 2017), the two split. In 2021 they released two separate American productions as solo directors—*Gunpowder Milkshake* (Papushado) and *South of Heaven* (Keshales).

The media buzz and scholarly interest around their works focused on their full-length films. Yet their first international project hardly received any attention. It is a six-minutes segment for the horror anthology film *ABCs of Death 2* (2014), called *F is for Falling*. This short film features a female combat warrior in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) whose parachute gets caught in a tree in a hostile territory. A young Palestinian man finds her. She persuades him to capture her solely and enjoy all the glory for himself. The teenager climbs up the tree and cuts off her parachute. As a result, she falls and breaks her leg, and he accidently falls to his death. However, a group of armed locals arrive before she manages to leave the place, implying her misfortunate faith. Despite the gradual unfolding of the plot, and the well-planned disclosure of information, the film still hides more than it reveals. In order to fully assess the situation, viewers need further details that are not supplied: Where is this story set? Whose territory is this? (Is it in the Gaza strip? The West Bank? or in an Arab village within the borders of the Israeli state?) Was the soldier on a combat mission during wartime, or is it a routine training that got wrong?

The film attempts to present the main characters as more than a flat dichotomy of good versus bad. They operate out of anxiety and lack of trust, that leads to mistakes and accidents. The frequent plot twists create a constant need to reassess the situation and change the moral viewpoint. All these cause difficulties to anyone who try to cast judgment. Perhaps this is

exactly the point. Film viewers, filmmakers, journalists, or social media users, many people often pretend to portray a full picture and reach verdicts. But this mission might be impossible when attempting to deal with what is possibly the most complicated conflict in the world.

When Keshales and Papushado promoted their feature films within Israel, they presented a rebellious agenda, wishing to detach from the national cinema traditions, that tend to be realistic, topical and political (Rosen 2012). For example, the internationally award-winning Israeli war films from around that same time, *Beaufort* (Joseph Cedar, 2007), *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008) and *Lebanon* (Samuel Maoz, 2009). However, while the duo's films, like most other Israeli horror films, present surface structures of allegedly escapist tales, they are actually allegories. They comment on the growing violence in the Israeli society as a result of the stressful security situation and dominant militaristic values (Gershenson and Hudson 2019; Rosen 2017). *F is for Falling* appears to be the opposite of the duo's declared separatist approach. It is overtly tied to Israeli cinema tropes such as soldiers on a mission, its critique is softened, and the moral stand is different. What can explain the change? Unlike Keshales and Papushado's previous productions, this one was made as a product of the American commercial assembly line. Although the duo's Israeli productions were marketed as "genre films," they can also be connected to the "festival films."[1] World cinema directors often hope to penetrate the network of international quality film festivals in order to find global distribution, audience and critical acclaim. Many Israeli filmmakers have been criticized for obsequious self-exoticizing meant to fit the imagined expectations of foreign viewers (Hagin and Yosef 2021). Indeed, *The ABCs of Death* (2012)

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

[1] Keshales and Papushado's films were presented at film festivals around the world and earned prizes in esteemed genre festivals as PiFan and Fantasporto.

is associated with commercial circuits of sensational exploitation movies, and not with art house festivals. So, when Keshales and Papushado were invited to join the sequel, they were set to meet a different target audience. Nevertheless, the directors claimed that the sequel's producers aspired to ascend above the blunt vulgarity of the first installment. They also stated that they personally wished to distinguish themselves from the other segments, and to aim higher: "[The previous anthology was] so out-there, so we decided to go the other way around…With these movies, you're cheering for death—you're watching and waiting to see how people die. But what if we go the other way and show you two people you don't want to see die? […] [I]t's political and more about the humane and tragic side of death" (Barone and Lees 2014; See also Hunter 2014).

Figure 3.

The segment begins with a rapid series of shots and camera movements, each adding new information. First, the camera pulls out of a hole in a tree trunk. Daylight enters the frame, revealing the time and the location, an arid piece of land. A pair of legs in heavy military boots enters the frame from the top. The languid legs dangling above the ground create the impression that a person was hanged.[2] A cut to a long shot exposes that the legs belong to a paratrooper who tangled in the branches. Is this the death by falling which was hinted in the title? The next shot is a medium close up which shows the soldier's face as she regains consciousness—it is a pretty blonde female (Dana Meinrath), and this is perhaps the biggest surprise so far.

One of the most prominent flaws in Keshales and Papushado's earlier films, according to several critics, was inadequate female representation (Alexander 2013; Pinto 2010). Yet this time, they chose a

[2] The iconography resembles Keshales and Papushado's mock poster for their planned project *Once Upon a Time in Palestine*, another attempt at adapting foreign genres to the Israeli national cinema, this time in the tradition of Westerns (Hopewell 2017). Possibly, *F is for Falling* (which has several Western elements in it, such as the horse-riding gunman) borrowed some of the ideas from that project. Perhaps it even served as an exercise towards it. After all, their first film, *Rabies*, began as a mock teaser-trailer, made for a competition by HOT cable company in 2007 (Abramovitz 2010).

Figure 4.

female protagonist. The fact that the military service in Israel is compulsory for both men and women has long been "considered one of the pillars of gender equality in Israel" (Munk 2019) and "helped create Israel's (self) image of a 'nation in arms', and the Israeli army as 'the people's army'" (Berger and Naaman 2011). However, many writers pointed out that this Zionist myth is merely a "smokescreen" or a "simulacrum of equality." In the 20th century, women's enlistment has been generally marginalizing. Females played minor part in the army, and in the local national-heroic films, if they appeared in them at all. Their typical roles were helpmates who glorify the masculinity of the fighters, or serving to undermine the soldier's real purpose, or simply a decoration (Harries 2017; Munk 2019).

Over the years, roles that were previously held by men alone were opened to females: technical and instructional positions, combat supporters, and since the year 2000, also combat warriors. Women notably appeared on the battlefield in the 2006 war with Lebanon. Nowadays, at least in principle, women can perform any military role (Berger and Naaman 2011; Harries 2017). This process, along with an increase in the number of women filmmakers, led to generic changes, that introduced military films with female heroines. For example, *Close to Home* (Vardit Bilu and Dalia Hager, 2005), *Room 514* (Sharon Bar-Ziv, 2012), *Zero Motivation* (Talya Lavie, 2014), *Image of Victory* (Avi Nesher, 2021) and the TV series *Dismissed* (Nir Berger and Atara Frish, 2021-).

Yael Munk argues that these films criticize the inherent gender bias and the inevitable moral decline of women soldiers who are plunged into the violent reality of military occupation (2019). Mira Moshe and Matan Aharoni claim that the female filmmakers manage to form an alternative to the dominant discourse of militarism and sexism, and to channel their heroines to the holistic and authentic world of female solidarity (2020). Rachel S. Harries, on the other hand, asserts that in many ways the films' feminist pretension failed, and that the new representations of women soldiers are not always flattering, to say the least (2017).

Israeli horror films have a strong affinity to the war and military genres. The biggest fears in them stem from national traumas, along with the

military pedagogy and violent values which exceed beyond the army bases and shape the society. Therefore, the Israeli horror films are also gender biased. One of the most notable examples is that in contrast to the common American trope of a "Final Girl" (Clover 1987), in Israeli horror films there is almost always a "Final Boy" (Rosen 2017; Rosen 2020).

This might explain why the female soldier in *F is for Falling* is not a particularly accomplished one, and (probably) does not survive. Despite her officer ranks, she is quite inept. First, she gets stuck, hanging passively from the tree. When a male sets her free from the parachute, her graceless land on the ground results in a severe injury which cripples her. Her hopeless attempt to flee by running seems like an irrational decision. The reason she manages to break loose from her capturer is a freak accident, a coincidence. Eventually, she fails in her mission, and is probably killed by the enemies. This is because she is not a heroine of a war film, but of a horror film. In this genre, she plays the role of the victim. Constantly threatened, not threatening. This also echoes the critique about the cycle of "shooting and weeping" Israeli war films about the conflict with Lebanon from around that same time (Rosen 2017).

But it is not accurate to say that the female soldier is not scary. She is, just in an indirect manner. Judd Ne'eman (2018) noted that women in the battlefield are considered to be a threatening abject (following Julia Kristeva's notion of abject, 1982). Fittingly, in this military-horror film, the woman's body becomes a source of fright. The heroine is constantly seen bruised and stained in blood. In the goriest moment her leg 'opens up' in the form of an open fracture. By comparison, when the Palestinian boy falls from the same height, his body remains complete. Although he was seemingly hit by an unintentional bullet discharge, fell, and landed on his back, there are no visible wounds. Yes, he is dead, and a puddle of blood behind his head suggests that his skull was crushed, but his wounds are never shown. In some ways, this reflects the dichotomy of gendered death that prevailed in 20th century slasher films: women's suffering is prolonged and made into a spectacle; male deaths are quick and less graphic (Molitor and Sapolsky 1993; Weaver 1991).

Blood is not the only bodily fluid in the film. Although the dialogue is meager, some of it is dedicated to the soldier's need to pee. The male patronizingly says, "women, you never know how to hold it in." But the line is delivered as the two exchange smiles. The universal bodily need, and the helping gesture from the capturer, create a moment of fraternity between the rivals. It might even imply an upcoming intimate moment with sexual connotations (considering that one of the characters in *Rabies* claims that there is nothing sexier than watching women urinate). But what can be read as a humane moment, can also be read as another scare in the horror-war

film. As Harries noted, "the obsessive fear that women soldiers will be raped by the enemy is an expression of the deepest possible threat to patriarchy: that women's motherhood will slip out of the control of the men to whom it 'rightfully' belongs." The film suggests such a threat more explicitly in its final moment, as three armed Palestinians stand confidently and gaze at the helpless women on the ground. This kind of potential sexual assault is "an assault on the male hegemony for whom woman serves as a possession, a violation of the home, and an attack against the national womb" (Harries 2017; See also Creed 2015).

Figure 5.

The heroine is not only subject to a fetishizing male gaze by the Palestinian characters, but also by the viewers. The audiences of the international production *ABCs of Death 2* are invited to stare at the Israeli woman soldier, "an exotic fantasy about the foreign girl" (Berger and Naaman 2011). The directors admitted so themselves when an interviewer wondered about "the soldier's ample cleavage…highlighting boobs" (Hunter 2014). More recent examples of this trope became widely popular. One can think of the career of former Miss Israel who turned into a Hollywood star, Gal Gadot. Her military experience was widely emphasized in the global promotion of her roles in action films such as *Fast & Furious* (Justin Lin, 2009) and *Wonder Woman* (Patty Jenkins, 2017) (Schleier 2011; Vilkomerson 2016). Another example can be found in social media, on TikTok and Instagram, where images of scantly clothed IDF soldiers/models, often holding weapons, became extremely popular (Dickson 2021; Michael 2016). Berger and Naaman claim that the objectification of the female soldiers belittles their violent agency (2011). In this case, it can also be seen as another device for the self-victimization by Israeli filmmakers.

Figure 6.

The battle of the sexes is used to enhance the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinian character is first introduced through a close-up on the legs of a white pack animal. Is it a knight in shining armor coming to the rescue? Music starts playing in the soundtrack, associating the shot with the Western genre. But as the animal steps further into the frame, the leg of its rider becomes visible, and these are no cowboy boots with spurs, but white sports shoes. The next shot begins as a long shot of the soldier as she is looking beyond the camera, towards the visitor. A camera movement changes the frame into an over the shoulder shot, in which a young man is looking at the soldier. He becomes the subject, and she turns into an object to be looked at. The camera continues to move, revealing that he has a big (phallic) rifle strapped to his back.[3] The local Palestinian teenager (Tawfeek Barhom) is mobile and armed while she is helplessly stuck on the tree.

Figure 7.

The soldier teases the boy and questions his masculinity: "Maybe you're afraid of heights?... I jumped from an airplane, let's see you climb a tree." He replies with a chauvinistic cliché: "If that's how you jump off an airplane perhaps you should stay in the kitchen." This interchange might also express a certain perception regarding the status of women in each society.

[3] This image creates two intertextual connections to *Big Bad Wolves*. In the feature film, one of the characters, Yoram, also carries a rifle that is strapped to his back. In addition, the film similarly includes a character of "an Arab on a horse." However, in the feature film, this Arab character is unarmed and unthreatening, in a manner that contradicts viewers' expectations. The viewers are used to find expressions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in local films, yet this character refuses to fill the trope of the "enemy" or the "scare." At one point he even scolds a Jewish character for making stereotypical assumptions about Arabs.

F is for Falling plays with horror tropes. It avoids binary dichotomies and makes it difficult for viewers to classify the characters as a perpetrator or a victim, monstrous or human, good or evil, masculine, or effeminate. Outside the diegesis, on the cinematic level, it mixes together the horror genre and the war genre and defy classifications of "high" or "low" culture. This ambiguity amplifies the immense complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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On the Vengeful Vulva: Lillah Halla's *Menarca* (2020)

Valeria Villegas Lindvall

A creature washes ashore in a Brazilian fishing town. It is tangled in a fishing net; we can only make out its skin, burned by the salt of the ocean, cracked and leathery, adorned with iridescent pearls (Figure 1). A crackling sound, like a muffled dolphin's call, intertwines with the hissing of the sea and its waves, while the camera moves capriciously between the creature's indiscernible body and the faces of eager fishermen that try to untangle it.

Figure 1: The creature (courtesy of Lillah Halla)

We move to another space, and behind the wired fence of a fishermen's shack is a prepubescent girl, Nanã (Amanda Yamamoto) who inquisitively gazes while José (Dinho Lima Flor) jokingly wonders whether the creature is "a boy or a girl." Insistent on categorizing the creature that is now supine on a wooden table, José licks his fingers and introduces them underneath the nets. The creature releases a painful wail, and a loud snap suggests that José's fingers have been severed in this action. Nanã averts her gaze, and the creature's shrill laments drown José's screaming as the camera scrambles to depict several fishermen holding it down, as if to reprimand its insolence. The scene is unbearable not only because of its suggestion of mutilation, but also because it confronts the viewer with the violent act of asserting power over a vulnerable body through sexual assault. Nanã's perspective acts as an anchor for the viewer, while the film unfolds the

relation that she builds with the creature—dubbed Baubo, a name only revealed to Nanã—whom she ultimately releases from captivity with the help of her friend Mel (Nathally Fonseca).

This short essay approaches the ways in which *Menarca*'s amplification of the creature's inscrutability highlights the transmogrification of difference and facilitates its understanding as resistance. I suggest that in *Menarca*, the horror elicited by the creature turns into a promise of reckoning, intimating that coalition is possible in the bond that Nanã and Baubo develop. I explore the film's implications behind the veiled suggestion of a vagina dentata turned something other, which finds productive kinship in Patricia MacCormack's theory of the becoming vulva (2010). Moreover, I draw a link between MacCormack's formulations and the vision that Rosi Braidotti (2021) articulates towards a liberation that challenges views of binarism imposed to hierarchize gender and animality/humanity.

A Note on Female Authorship and Genre in Brazil

Menarca was, in great part, produced by a female crew. It was directed by Lillah Halla, co-written with Halla and Libia Perez, with cinematography by Wilsa Elsser, music by Karina Buhr and editing by Eva Randolph.[1] Halla and her collaborators continue a legacy of female labor in Brazilian horror filmmaking. This line was inaugurated by figures like editor Nilcemar Leyart—long-standing collaborator of José Mojica Marins 'Zé do Caixão,' figurehead of Brazilian horror— and filmmakers like Lygia Pape, whose short film *Wampirou* (1974) can be traced as the first female-directed horror film in the country (Puppo & Autran, 2007; Saldanha 2019, 77). Further, Pape's inaugural intervention illustrates the potentiality of short films as a crucial springboard for female filmmakers in the region, a phenomenon I note in my doctoral work (Villegas Lindvall 2021, 214). The first feature-length genre film directed by a woman was released a few years later—Rosângela Maldonado's *A mulher que põe a pomba no ar* (1978)—and with it, a statement on authorship, genre and gender started to take shape. Today, the relationship between violence and sexuality adopts new and nuanced forms in the work of contemporary filmmakers like Halla, Gabriela Amaral Almeida, Anita Rocha da Silveira, Juliana Rojas and Larissa Anzoategui, testing the limits of genre convention. Crucially, their labor continues to disprove the generalized notion that horror film is articulated "by and for sadistic men" as Katarzyna Paszkiewicz writes (2017, 42), which presumes

[1] Halla is also the co-founder of Vermelha, a collective that brings together women and queer filmmakers in Brazil. "Lillah Halla." accessed 20 June, 2022, https://www.lillahalla.com/.

the incapability of women to author and enact fear in film. Feminist and female scholarship reveals that the politics of fear are unequivocally traversed by a binary gender hierarchy (Mulvey 1975, Clover 1992, Creed 1993, Williams 1996, Pinedo 1997) and can be reevaluated, reinforced and/or subverted through authorship (Paszkiewicz 2018, Pisters 2020, Peirse 2020)—a matter crucial to the reimagination of the menacing vulva that Halla's *Menarca* offers.[2]

On the Ravenous Opening

Menarca illustrates the pertinence of ambiguity as a mode of seeing that challenges a power play determined by binary gender. Crucially, the camera work jettisons the reproduction of sexual abuse and establishes a look that muddles its focus, rather than fully revealing the look of pain on Nanã's or Baubo's face. The presence of the creature is conveyed via sound—a crackling, almost dolphin-like wail—and partial, puzzle-like views of its body: close ups of hands cracked, the leathered skin, a mouth that appears like a voracious opening subsisting on the scraps of meat that Nanã feeds them. The ambiguous visual characterization of the creature is fundamental to ascertain the usefulness of suggestion: Elsser's cinematography, abundant in blue hues and shallow depth of field, navigates the space by providing a collection of tight shots of the creature that refuse to display its body in full for the viewer.

Despite the explicit relationship that the story draws with the myth of the vagina dentata as a patriarchal phantasy, Baubo's body becomes threatening because of its indeterminacy, its excess gesturing towards a continuous becoming that subverts the seemingly steadfast constraints of the gender binary. Its unclassifiable existence between the human and the non-human animal, I would suggest, underlines that "bodies are neither natural nor cultural but in constant process between them, as a heterogeneous assemblage of complex relational components" (Braidotti 2021, 42). Here, Braidotti proposes the possibility of redefining the subject by challenging the stifling taxonomies that have, historically and conveniently, associated humanity to white, cisgendered, male subjectivity.

The posthuman feminist turn that Braidotti proposes revisits the very articulation of subjectivity in its interlocking of race, class and gender as co-constitutive axis of oppression and domination. "The power of 'Man' as a

[2] The film's suggestion of the vagina dentata as a manifestation of patriarchal dread draws thematic similarities with Samantha Ribeiro's segment for the anthology *Conceição —Autor bom é autor morto* (2007), which also features an instance of castration during the sexual act (Saldanha 2019, 81).

hegemonic civilizational model was instrumental to the project of Western modernity and the colonial ideology of European expansion," she writes (2021, 54). The author recuperates what anti-colonial theorists have elucidated (Fanon 2021 [1952], Wynter 2000, Maldonado-Torres 2007, Lugones 2012, Ko 2019): the naturalized encumbering of Man as the subject of Western Humanism, a project in line with the teleological nature of colonial modernity within which racialized, feminized and animalized existences become subordinated to this universal, ontological point of reference. Provocatively, Baubo embodies an extreme otherness that confronts the model of Man predicated as a standard of subjectivity: their excessive anatomy, exacerbated by the evasive gaze of the camera, confounds the hierarchization of the human and non-human animal, of woman and man—it is ontologically unclassifiable.

Baubo's ambiguous depiction confounds precisely "because it collapses binary machines and liberates desire through becoming-more-than-one" (MacCormack 2010b, 96). In other words, their existence in the interstices of animality and humanity, masculinity, and femininity, issues a challenge to neat classification and, therefore, throws the illusion of hierarchy in a tailspin. The creature is met with derision by the fishermen, entrapped as a threat and condemned to exclusion. I would argue that, in precise strokes, this rejection reminds us of the terror of practical exclusion and violence enacted on the body that proves unruly towards classification under colonial parameters of "Humanity," precipitating the alienation of "women and LGBTQ+ people (sexualized others), Black and Indigenous people (racialized others) and the animals, plants and earth entities (naturalized others)" to further the notion that "'Man' is One and fully entitled" (Braidotti 2021, 54). Baubo reads as the confounding amalgamation of the sexualized and naturalized others in Braidotti's address. The creature becomes an inexorable fold between categories, ready to trouble and horrify the neat and stifling hierarchies that result from the establishment of 'Man' as a universalizing measure of subject.

Consequently, the recognizable vagina dentata becomes an ambiguous fold, illustrating the possibilities of the "becoming vulva" conceptualized by MacCormack. The author's theory negotiates the Deleuzian formulation of the fold and Luce Irigaray's model of the two lips (1985, 24-35) to articulate difference as a challenge to the reification of binaries. MacCormack's model of the becoming vulva illuminates the ways in which Baubo's elusive corporeality suggests an ambiguity that resists the sameness of phallogocentric models. The author's articulation gestures towards a horror of the fold that resides in the proverbial patriarchal heart, conceiving that "vulva is a demon," multiple and embodying the fluid possibility of futures proscribed by phallogocentrism (2010a, 103). In her

formulations, vulva is an eternal unfolding: rather than a prescriptive reinforcement of gender binaries, it offers a model descriptive of futures outside of the universalizing, colonial Humanism that Braidotti indicts. Baubo's "vaginal 'aperture' is a volitional hole, both penetrable and ingurgitant" (MacCormack 2010a: 93). This is to say, Baubo's unknowability is also a promise of what can be, a body of possibility that illustrates the weaponization of difference and reconciles the colonial, patriarchal rift between the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, in Braidotti's words.

Such futures are also signaled by the vastly different reactions that Baubo elicits, which appear to be gendered. Their anatomy escapes comprehension from the fishermen and sparks their violence, but invites compassion in Nanã, who insistently asks the creature how did they manage "to put a piranha down there."[3] The reason of her insistence is gut-wrenching: threaded as a series of fleeting instances in which Nanã covers herself at the sight of José, the relationship of sexual abuse between both characters is fully revealed by the end of the film, when he goes to Nanã's home enquiring about her. An unsteady close-up captures her profile as she puts her hair up, as if in gesture of resignation to the abuse to come. However, the next frame shifts the gesture to suggest ritual preparation for revenge—a beheaded piranha, its body almost translucent, flaps about in a white bucket, staining the water with a red ribbon of blood (Figure 2, next page). A severance between head and body has been enacted to configure the new body of Nanã, the human/non-human animal amalgam, the fold that becomes an extreme other.

Nanã confronts José, gaze fixed on his face as he enters a room. She follows, and the camera pans down, showing a ribbon of dark blood running down her leg. She crosses the threshold as if entering a different state. As the door closes behind her back, the viewer is left out of the room, in expectation: a loud snap comes followed by José's desperate yells. An ultimate alliance has taken place, and Nanã is suggested as the unforgiving unfolding of Baubo: the vulva has exacted its revenge. Not a point of entry or violation, but the viscous herald of reckoning for patriarchal abuse.

[3] Interestingly, the vulva as a terrible fold also comes across in the name that Halla and Perez's script gives to the creature: Baubo appears as a servant engaging in *anasyrma* (exposure of her genitals) to the goddess Demeter in the Orphic version of a tale of Demeter and Persephone (Suter 2007, 21). In this context, the *anasyrma* carries with it a sense of protection more than shame: the vulva is displayed as "a gesture of revelation that is unexpected and startling" that holds a powerful "ability to expose the forbidden" (Suter 2007, 21, 24). In light of this context, I would argue that, in a figurative fashion, the loaded nature of Baubo's name puts the threat of the fold at the center of *Menarca*.

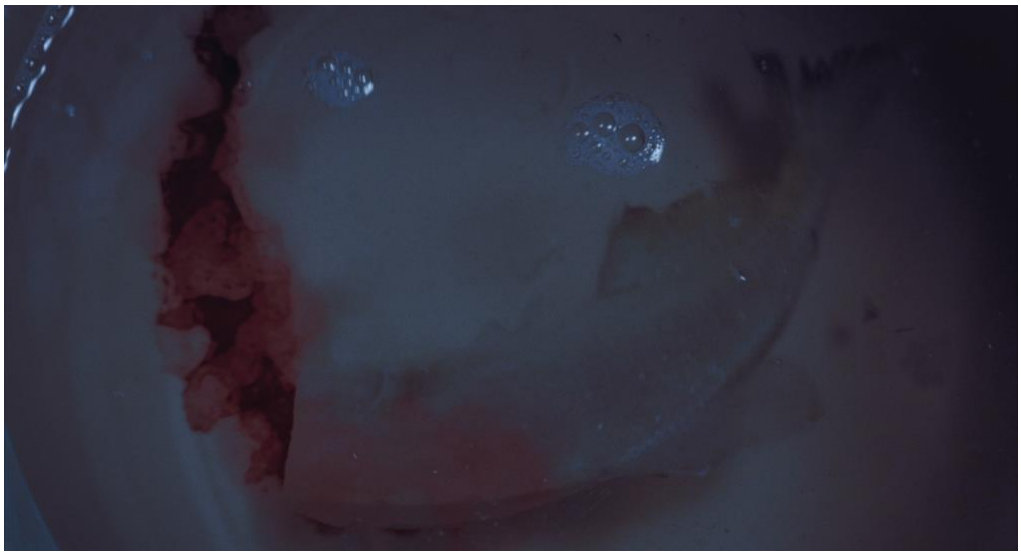

Figure 2. The beheaded piranha (courtesy of Lillah Halla)

Nanã's body becomes an amalgamation of human and non-human animal, unfathomable and dangerous. She fashions herself as Baubo and with this gesture, embraces the nature of the indiscernible. Consequently, the motif of the vagina dentata is transformed into an unknown, an embodiment of the becoming vulva that MacCormack conceptualizes. She becomes a posthuman arrangement, a coalition of forms that challenges phallogocentric conceptions of subjectivity. Ultimately, the human animal and the non-human animal become one to exact revenge over sexual violence condoned and bred by patriarchal organizations of labor and domestic life. The triumph of the monstrous indiscernibility that survives in Nanã's new-found vagina dentata-come-becoming vulva is heralded during the revealing ending: José's desperate screams blend into Nanã's and Mel's, as a stark transition reveals both children fiercely screaming by the pier, frenzied as the camera refuses to stay steady and their bodies contort, dancing riotously. The final frame positions the camera behind the characters, both bodies shrinking in a wide shot of the sea that has welcomed Baubo again. The scene suggests a radical gesture of abandon, of joyful confrontation: the becoming vulva is reclaimed in power. Baubo, Nanã and Mel have embraced the indeterminacy of the vengeful vulva.

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MonsterDykë (2021, dirs. Kaye Adelaide and Mariel Sharp)

Dan Vena

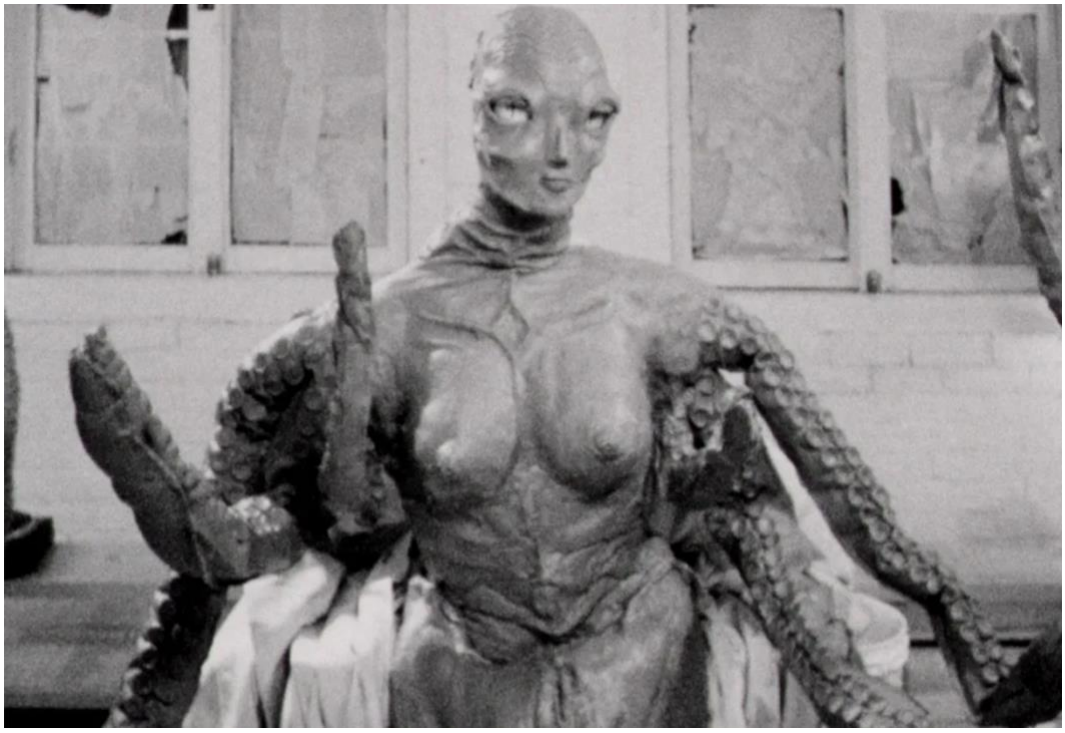

Figure 1: *MonsterDykë*

I first encountered Kaye Adelaide (she/her) and Mariel Sharp's (xe/xer) strangely erotic tale *MonsterDykë* (2021) at Montréal's Festival Fantasia, an apt locale to watch a short about a burgeoning trans-queer romance between a sculptress and her tentacled creation. Watching as a trans horror fan, the film felt like a salve on an open wound, working deep into a hurt produced by each underwhelming filmic encounter of trans representation and healing the ache with a playful, lustful, and heartwarming celebration of trans-queer love. Birthed out of creative ingenuity and practical limitations impressed upon the filmmakers during Québec's COVID-19 lockdowns, Adelaide and Sharp, with their accompanying production team, offer a compelling meditation on loving the strange. Mapping neatly onto larger discourses of settler Canada's supposedly 'weird' sexual cinematic proclivities (see Monk 2001), the film adds

some much-needed self-authored, trans-queer representation into the orgiastic mix.

The film begins with a title card, a quote taken from Tumblr that boldly announces: "There are only two genders: monster fuckers and cowards." The next cut reveals our protagonist, the Sculptress, as she picks up a voice message from Brett (clearly, the coward) who states, "You know, I'm kinda doing you a favour, right, cause I kinda don't go for the whole chubby, trans goth girl usually. But anyway, hit me up." Understandably annoyed and upset by the message, the Sculptress refocuses her attention onto her creation, tenderly laying wet clay onto its face while sultry electronic tones score the moment. Soon, the sculpture awakens and extends its tentacles to its creator. The Sculptress, although briefly vexed, consensually embraces the monster and the two indulge in an ecstatic, fluid-filled sexual encounter.

Shot on a Bolex camera with a pack of leftover 16mm black and white film, the short is a naughty ode to classic monster movies in the style of past DIY, queer-feminist experimental cinema. In keeping with these lineages, the film shares common themes with its predecessors such as monstrosity, sexual agency, identity, and belonging, but adds further commentary on how to indulge in a pleasure that cannot be easily accounted for under cis-heteronormative binaries. In doing so, the directors refuse canonical permutations of the monster as a 'thing' to be killed or destroyed, instead reimagining the creature as a partner/lover who offers vital opportunities to explore one's limitations of the self and desire. This portrait importantly goes against the expectations of horror as well as queer politics of acceptability, which continue to strive for so-called positive (read normative) images of trans sexuality. Instead, the directors opt to render a portrait of trans sexuality that extends past human-centric ideas of the possible, into a wonderful world of the strange where being trans is perhaps not the oddest identity to occupy. Here, transness finds its ability to love and survive, not in the restrictive of coils of normativity, but in its allyship with the monstrous.

To this extent, *MonsterDykë* seems to pick up where Adelaide and Sharp's previous co-directed short, *Don't Text Back* (2020), leaves off. The earlier title focuses on Kelly, an ill-fated woman who unwittingly accepts a cursed necklace from a men's rights member, forcing her to text him back lest the necklace get tighter. With the help of Jaren, an energy healer/graphic designer, the two women attempt to break the necklace's curse before it strangles Kelly to death. In sum, the story's main premise hinges on Kelly's willingness to explore the possibilities of queer romantic dynamics rather than rely on toxic heteronormative ones. The arc of the action maps nicely onto *MonsterDykë*,

which begins with the Sculptress not calling Brett back, instead putting down her phone and opening herself up to a non-normative/traditional sexual encounter (as if nodding to the possibilities Kelly may be able to experience if she too does not text back). Although not intentional by the filmmakers, the overlapping narrative action of both shorts reveal telling personal journeys for the duo, especially Sharp. As xe shared in a joint interview with Adelaide and myself:

> This is a little backstory about *Don't Text Back* because I think it all plays together in the creation process. I spent a long part of my 20s in emotional combat – just misery. I had a lot of bad experiences dating. And then, I was starting to connect with Kaye and my own queerness, and developing this love of horror and making horror – all around the same time. […] So, *Don't Text Back* became how we saw toxic heteronormativity as a curse you *could* break. And that's controversial, I guess, for lots of reasons. But that's how it felt for us.

The important theme of *choice* is physicalized in both films by the shared prop of the phone, which offers both protagonists a way out of heteronormativity. Tightly enwrapped in the sociality of the day-to-day, heteronormativity, just like the phone, needs to be disconnected from to free up one's consciousness. Although I agree that the insinuation of sexuality as a choice may be controversial, I am equally compelled by a film that plainly asks its audience what they themselves *accept* and thereby *choose* as normal. In other words, who are they *choosing* to text/call back?

As touched upon by Sharp in xer above comment, the question of choice comes from a uniquely personal place of self-exploration; after reflecting on past relationships and xer desires, Sharp found a partner in Kaye by bonding over shared expressions of trans/non-binary identities, queerness and horror (amongst other things). Indeed, the reason why the film works as a salve for other injured trans mind-bodies is because it comes from such a personal place of trans-queer affection. The film's affect radiates a knowingness that there are other monsters out there, waiting to be loved or waiting to make known the depth and capacity of the partnerships. Furthering these affects is the delightful behind-the-scenes trivia that Adelaide purposefully stepped into the role of the Sculptress as a trans-queer creator herself, while Sharp agreed to lend xer voice to the creature. Embedded into the heavily edited audio work of the film is a beautiful time capsule of Adelaide and Sharp's love, punctuating the on-screen moments with an off-screen romance.

For some, the emotional cadences of romance and sexual delight of *MonsterDykë* may not be 'enough' to classify this film as horror – fantastic yes, but horrific? However, as I continue to petition, it is time to rethink the definitional boundaries of this historically cis-masculine genre, taking cue from trans-queer creators who are exploding and rebuilding horror towards new possibilities and successes. For Adelaide and Sharp, horror is a love language shared with the self or others. Making love and making horror need not be at ends, but indeed part of the same affective tethers that bind.

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Dan Vena is a queer-trans white settler of Italian descent, who identifies as disabled in relation to capitalist calls towards productivity (under Eurocentric medical models, they are diagnosed with fibromyalgia/chronic pain). They are also radically invested in spirituality and death positivity as part of my pedagogical practice and are committed to decolonial, anti-racist, queer-trans, disabled, anti-capitalist & neurodivergent collaborative world-making.

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