

## Queer + Horror

Heather O. Petrocelli and May Santiago

In the video essay *Queer+Horror*, Heather O. Petrocelli and May Santiago collaborate to bring written arguments from Petrocelli's book *Queer for Fear: Horror Film and the Queer Spectator* (2023) to visual culture. This shift from the academic written text to visual media facilitates the expansion of the book's arguments through video practice in order to show how the queer relationship to horror is ontological, visually demonstrating the queer-horror connection by creatively repurposing, reanimating, and reclaiming horror film scenes/clips in new contexts.

*Queer for Fear* employs original research to evidence that queer embodiment shares a haunted, uncanny, and transgressive nature with the medium of film and that queers have a distinctive connection with horror film, the queerest genre. By creating an audiovisual collage using segments from horror and/or queer films, Petrocelli and Santiago not only reinforce the *Queer for Fear* thesis, but also recontextualize the film clips into a new independent work with multilayered meaning. *Queer+Horror* plays with the recognition of filmic texts in order for the spectator simultaneously to find pleasure in recognition and to have their connective curiosity piqued.

Queerness, film, and the horror genre all share essential qualities that inextricably connect them: their uncanny, transgressive, and haunted natures that manifest in distinct ways. The connection between queer-film-horror in part stems from their survival despite ongoing societal censorship, discriminatory legislation, and familial control. Queerness is uncanny because it is a liminal state, as well as a transgressive existence and embodiment outside cisheteronormative society. Film exists as an uncanny intrusion of the past in the present, while horror's distinct uncanniness comes in part from how it specifically plays with both aesthetic and representational effect/affect. The queer-film-horror uncanny nature is further found in their shared hauntedness. Queer otherness stems in part from the queer history of invisibility and absences, whereas film operates as a ghostly manifestation of the past, and horror haunts our psyche by tapping into our deepest fears and anxieties.

*Queer+Horror* employs the video format to show these elements, which

are organized into three segments. Each section displays different formal elements and creative experimentation that modify existing media, all together creating a new artifact that represents the meaning of the source written text. Each segment is crafted to demonstrate the practice of editing itself as fundamentally disruptive through fragmentation and the refashioning of time and space. Three quotes from the *Queer for Fear* text anchor the sections and act as the scaffolding that supports the visual experience, allowing the spectator to make new connections and meaning from the media objects.

The first segment, “Queer,” utilizes manipulated frames and constructed shadows from queer films that feature queer hauntings—hauntings of longing and loneliness: *Rebecca* (1940), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019), and *All of Us Strangers* (2023). Putting the selected queer films and haunted characters in relation to one another transgresses the temporal bounds of the original texts, forming an uncanny disruption and queering of linear time.

In “Film,” the second segment, the themes of the haunted queer and queer haunting are expanded to speak directly to the queer, haunted, uncanny, and transgressive nature of film itself by using techniques such as layering, echoes, and the disruption of linear time. Film functions as not only a graveyard of the past, but also a queered intrusion of the past into the present, so each layer of media used is, in and of itself, an intrusion of the past into the present. This segment highlights the layering of temporalities by featuring Cary Grant, a posthumously outed queer man, from *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944) and overlaying and fusing him into multiple films: one of the first ghost films *The House of the Devil* (1896); an experimental dyke documentary *Nitrate Kisses* (1992); and the David Lynch short film—shot with the Lumière brothers’ cinématographe—*Premonition Following An Evil Deed* (1995). This layering highlights film’s ability to disrupt linear time and digitally puts different media in relation to one another as a deliberate act of burning disconnected forms of queerness into each other.

The final section, “Horror,” is a montage crafted through match cuts and mash-ups to put transgressive queer cinema into dialogue with both queer horror films and banned horror films (including “video nasties” that were successfully prosecuted under the UK’s Obscene Publications Act). This segment uncannily suspends fractions of controversial films in time in order to emphasize an important connection between queer embodiment and horror film: both queer people and horror films have and continue to be haunted by personal, professional, and political discrimination and violence for their transgressions on normative society.

We celebrate film's potential as a transgressive tool and a political force—particularly for marginalized communities. *Queer+Horror* focuses on and articulates aspects of queer culture by remixing, layering, and disrupting extant media objects with the specific goal of leaving the spectator with an uncanny and haunted feeling.

Click [\\*\\*\\*](#) to view the video essay.

---

**Heather O. Petrocelli**, PhD is a multidisciplinary independent scholar who works across film studies, queer theory, and public history, conducting research that engages with and renders visible queer stories and experiences. This academic foundation has combined with a life-long horror obsession and decades of experience making, studying, programming, and marketing film. This all informs Petrocelli's book *Queer for Fear: Horror Film and the Queer Spectator* and now the road show *Queer for Fear Live!* that they co-host in cities around the world with legendary drag icon Peaches Christ.

**May Santiago** is a cultural studies scholar and essay filmmaker. She is a PhD candidate in the Cultural Studies program at George Mason University. Her work focuses on Puerto Rican cinema, particularly at the intersection of horror, queer, and feminist studies. She is also a filmmaker who has had films screened at Final Girls Berlin Film Festival, Ax Wound Film Festival, Panama Horror Film Festival, and Wench Film Festival. She was named one of the rising voices within video essayists in *Sight and Sound* in 2023 and 2024.

## References

Petrocelli, Heather O. 2023. *Queer for Fear: Horror Film and the Queer Spectator*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

---

- 2024 -

MONSTRUM is Published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society.  
Copyright and intellectual property rights are held by the individual author(s).



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).