I Can Hear Someone Coming

Alison Peirse

"I Can Hear Someone Coming" is a celebration of queer women and the joy of queer desire. The material for this work comes from the 1930s, a period of film history that I haven't explored since my first book, *After Dracula: The 1930s Horror Film*, was published over a decade ago. Ellie Slee notes that lesbianism is "inherent in much of 1930s horror but never mentioned" (2014, 42), and as such, finding a queer woman character generally requires a viewer willing to read for what Patricia White describes as "queer resonances" (1999, 226). We can choose to read queer in Luna's movement towards Irene in *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), fading to a swooning black; or we can pick and choose from a multiplicity of moments in the films of openly gay director James Whale: the Bride's screaming rejection of the Monster in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), the "theatrical mocking of the heteronormative family unit" in *The Old Dark House* (1932) (Miller 2024, 1). In fact, only *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) has a female character whose lust for women forms an integral and unambiguous aspect of the plot (in *Mark of the Vampire*, Luna's craving is revealed as a feint).

Even in *Dracula's Daughter*, Countess Mary Zaleska's yearnings are not presented positively. In her analysis of the film, Rhona J. Berenstein reveals that the Production Code Administration rejected the plan for Zaleska's intended victim Lily to "pose in the nude"; only her "neck and shoulders" can be seen and "there will be no suggestion that she undresses … the whole sequence will be treated in such a way to avoid any suggestion of perverse sexual desire" (1996, 26). Furthermore, Zaleska is tormented by her predilections; Harry M. Benshoff describes her as "rather weak-willed" and notes that she aches to be "cured" of such longings (1997, 81). My video essay acknowledges the queer traces in 1930s horror film history, but then asks, what if *all* the women in 1930s horror films were *actually* queer? And then—most importantly—what if they really knew how to enjoy themselves?

To create this alternative world, I have chosen to (mostly) ignore reappropriating film visuals and to focus, instead, on sound. Here I'm following Lola Olufemi's idea that "the image is a dead-end because it implies an archive: a point of entry, a site that enables us to access the story of *how the image came to be*, a record of conditions" (2021, 18). To make this video essay, I have extracted individual words, sentences, and evocative utterances voiced by women across nineteen 1930s horror films from China, Japan, mainland Europe, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United

States. Without the constraint of the explanatory image, the audio becomes entirely more flexible and supple. It is clear now that when "between the lines" *are* the lines, all the women are queer, and they all want to have fun.

The resultant video essay is an auditory intervention into queer representation in horror cinema. It creates an archive of speech acts uttered by women in a wide variety of non-sexual scenarios and reconfigures them to be about women, women's bodies, women's needs, and in response to women's voices. This speaks to Teresa de Lauretis' understanding that texts can be queer when they not only work "against narrativity, the generic pressure of all narrative toward closure and the fulfillment of meaning", but also when they pointedly disrupt "the referentiality of language and the referentiality of images" (2011, 244). Such a disruption is also a feminist act. Continuing my feminist praxis (see Peirse 2022, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c), when I cite films in my audiovisual and written work, I do not default to including the director's surname, given that this is a prestigious role that has historically been dominated by men. Instead, at the end of my work, I create a filmography and cite the woman in the most senior production role on the film. In this way, my conceptual and citational practices speak to Sara Ahmed's principle of queer use as reuse—that is, "how things can be used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended" (2019, 199). Ahmed further suggests that with queer use, one can "linger on the material qualities of that which you are supposed to pass over; it is to recover a potential from materials that have been left behind" (2019, 208).

In this audio remix, I am asking you to encounter a new, sonic index of queer women's lust, sourced from a plethora of cinematic moments with the potential for desire. "I Can Hear Someone Coming" is thus attendant to the videographic possibilities for remaking film histories through a queer feminist lens, a remaking that lingers in imagined pleasures.

Click *** to view the video essay.

Acknowledgements

Alison Peirse is a Professor of Film Studies at the University of Leeds, UK. Her research focuses on illuminating women's invisible or overlooked contributions to the production of genre film and television. Her many books include the multi–award–winning *Women Make Horror: Filmmaking, Feminism, Genre* (2020). You can find out more about her research at www.alisonpeirse.com.

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Bride of Frankenstein (1935, USA). Story by Mary Shelley. Universal.

Double Door (1934, USA). Co–written by Gladya Lehman. Paramount.

Dracula's Daughter (1936, USA). Costume Design by Louise Brymer. Universal.

El fantasma del convento / The Phantom of the Monastery (1934, Mexico). No women credited in production roles. Producciones FESA.

Ghoul, The (1933, UK). No women credited in production roles. Gamont British Picture Corporation.

Kaibyô nazo no shamisen / The Ghost Cat and the Mysterious Shamisen (1938, Japan). No women credited in production roles. Shinkō Kinema.

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Mummy, The (1932, USA). Co–written by Nina Wilcox Putnam. Universal.

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Old Dark House, The (1932, USA). Wardrobe by Mae Bruce. Universal.

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