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Introduction: Vegan and Animal Liberation Horror Worlds

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How might works of horror fiction address globally normalized real-world horror that has been systematized to the level of banality and sanctioned to a state of near invisibility? How can horror fictions contest the nearly universally reinforced but artificial divisions between human subjects and otherized, indeed objectified, more-than-human animals? These questions pose significant representational challenges, given that, as Peter Singer notes, "[m]ost human beings are speciesist," and thus, "not a few exceptionally cruel or heartless humans, but the overwhelming majority of humans—take an active part in, acquiesce in, and allow their taxes to pay for practices that require the sacrifice of the most important interests of members of other species in order to promote the most trivial interests of our own species" (2009, 9). To address such a panoramic dilemma, one might duly consider vegan and animal liberation horror ontologically: works of vegan and animal liberation horror (or VALH) encourage us to shift away from localized ciphers of monstrosity—whether crocodiles or cryptids—and instead consider how horror interfaces with what we call "the world," or more specifically to consider the valences of what I describe here as Horror Worlds.[1] In its engagements with monstrosity that is writ so large as to seem ineffable, the horror genre does not typically depict the world as it *ought to be*.[2] Instead, horror addresses the world in four key ways: first,

[1] Poulomi Choudhury's essay in this special issue, "Abatthorror: Tracking the Animal-Industrial Complex in Agustina Bazterrica's *Tender is the Flesh*," proposes a similar critical move in "tracking how the world-systemic dimension manifests in literature through the 'worlded' aspects" of what Choudhury calls "abatthorror" (42-69). Both Choudhury and I thus follow Kerstin Oloff's project of "embedding food horror within its world-systemic, world-literary, and world-ecological context" (2021, 194). Whereas Choudhury and Oloff's projects primarily analyze global market systems and processes within their respective subgenres ("abatthorror" and zombie fictions, respectively), my VALH framework examines "the world" in more expressly ontological terms.

[2] There are undoubtedly many exceptions to the formulation I present here; as Peter Straub aptly observes, horror is "a remarkably expansive category willing at any time to erase its own hypothetical

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as it *is*, whether we would like to see that reality or not; second, as it *was*, in its most repressed but always Gothically reemerging pasts; third, as it *will be*, if we do not address our own hubris and cruelty; and, finally, qua Eugene Thacker (2011), horror also addresses the *world-without-us*, decentering customary anthropocentric ontologies to apprehend the unspeakable, the unnameable, and the unimaginable prospect of a planet after-humans.

The location of monstrosity is at stake in any work of VALH: where and how do we fix the monstrous in a complex global system of systematized violence towards both human and more-than-human animals? Philosophers have investigated the ethically laden implications of the very word *animal*. Jacques Derrida notes that the word itself is charged with otherness: "animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other" (2008, 23). Conversely, Patricia MacCormack states that "an animal is something that flees from the human because it knows it will be used or abused. It has no other definition. The human imposes. The animal proposes" (2020, 84). Where, then, does one locate the monstrosity in a world *governed by* systemic human monstrosities? Horror fictions have historically located monstrosity in subjects who behave monstrously or look monstrous, all too often invoking the "animalistic" or the "bestial." However, as Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock points out, contemporary monster theory differs "from the theorization of monsters in earlier periods" in that it views monstrosity as "a socially constructed category reflecting culturally specific anxieties and desires, and often deployed—wittingly or not—to achieve particular sociopolitical objectives"; for Weinstock, then, contemporary monster theory "disavows (or at least sidesteps the question of) the monstrosity of human subjects based on morphology and instead focuses on the means through which such subjects are 'monsterized' and the implications of this process" (2020, 25). This theoretical shift animates the progressive possibilities of VALH; it encourages us to move our focus from the innate monstrosity so often attributed to animals and "the animalistic" to an emphasis instead on the human practice of *inscribing* monstrosity. Jack Halberstam's *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* also provides an essential cornerstone for contemporary monster theory, in observing that the monster is "a remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable body," meaning that the "monster's body … produces meaning and can represent any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative" (1995, 21). The monster—

boundaries" (2007, 28). As such, I introduce these categories not as a means of enclosure, but to introduce specific interpretive openings for vegan and animal liberation horror.

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so often figured through the "bestial" and "animalistic"—thus has the potential to do serious ideological work for the relationship between human and more-than-human animals, and not just in lending grotesque faces to real-world social "others" (although some of the genre's more reactionary works have trafficked in this mode). As Allan Lloyd-Smith notes, Gothic horror fiction can also deploy monsters to politically progressive ends; he argues that Gothic horror "often provides a voice for silent or repressed concerns and disenfranchised groups, its distanced parallels with reality offering implicit critiques of accepted institutions and behaviors" (2004, 135). Lloyd-Smith turns specifically to the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, who "speaks for many in his complaint of inhuman treatment from his master and his master's society; he speaks for women and even for contemporary black slaves in ways that the text does not need to make overt" (135). The question of who speaks for the speechless is integral to VALH works. If our societies are complicit in collective systems that not only otherize nonhuman animals but cruelly reduce them to the role of commodified objecthood, where and how might works of *vegan and animal liberation horror* locate their monstrosity? It is not by making humans the monster in the dyad, since the question here is largely of perspective and orientation. For whom are VALH works made, if not for humans? And what can they do to shift us out of our conventional orientations? The essays in this volume approach all the questions posed above to consider VALH's capacities to address the horror worlds of past, present, future, and without-us. In what follows, I frame this special issue with brief explanations for each category (*Is*, *Was*, *Will Be*, and *Without Us*) within the context of vegan and animal liberation horror.

Horror World 1: The World as it Is

VALH texts face the *world as it is*, rather than indulging in the collective fantasy encouraged by speciesist capitalism. Douglas E. Winter notes that "horror fiction is an intrinsically subversive art, which seeks the face of reality by striking through the pasteboard masks of appearance" (1982, 207-8). Building, then, on the broader genre framework that Winter describes, VALH is innately subversive in its rebuttals to dominant cultural narratives of compulsory carnism. Winter's reference to "pasteboard masks" fittingly invokes a seminal work of animal-centered American Gothic, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), wherein Captain Ahab proclaims that "[a]ll visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks" (1996, 172). In a complex conceptualization of

monstrosity, Melville's titular whale epitomizes both a blank pasteboard mask and the overbearing glow of unvarnished reality; that is, Moby Dick is the otherized figure upon which Ahab and his *Pequod* crew inscribe their monomanias and fears, but he also represents that which exceeds human sense perception, that which is more-than-human (or which intimates *the world-without-us*). As if prophesying Lovecraftian cosmic horror, Melville finds in the whale's whiteness a symbol for the "indefiniteness" that "shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation" (207). In other words, Moby Dick possesses an awesome, sublime inscrutability that ruptures anthropocentric logic and human sense perception. Of course, narratives like *Moby Dick* run the risk of reinforcing more-than-human animals' "otherness" in pitting the whale and Ahab as dyadic foes, but Melville's novel helps lay the foundation for the philosophical and representational boundlessness of VALH. Namely, it offers an animal-centric example of Gothic and horror fiction's capacity to unmask more-than-human reality.

Sune Borkfelt, writing on literature's depictions of slaughterhouses, directly invokes horror's vegan and animal liberationist potential to strike past the pasteboard masks of systemic animal exploitation, which are defining features of *the world as it is*. Specifically, Borkfelt notes that horror "has the capacity to explore 'what is most repressed by society', for instance in the form of unspoken fears and traumas that we otherwise banish to heterotopias and attempt to forget about," and thus, since "most people arguably collectively deny or forget about the slaughterhouse and what it represents in their daily lives …, this certainly seems to open up an argument that horror is particularly well suited to delve into the anxieties connected with the slaughter of other animals" (2022, 225). Indeed, speciesist capitalism needs to shield consumers from its own horrific conditions of possibility, so that "meat" represents glistening, factory-sealed abstractions ("nuggets," "cutlets," "roasts," etc.) in brightly lit supermarkets rather than confronting us with the realities of sustained, industrialized suffering. Vegan horror fictions expose what lurks underneath these industrial illusions: the normalized and systematized torture, mutilation, and killing of sentient beings. Consider Emelia Quinn and Benjamin Westwood's assertions regarding the horror of animal exploitation in the world as it is: "The past decade has seen numerous reports of the devastating impact of animal agriculture and mass meat consumption on the environment, compounded by an unprecedented rise in global human population, predicted to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, and the anticipation of a concomitant explosion in demand for animal products" (2018, 6). These staggering figures implicate the

very thing we call *the world*, presenting the nearly inarticulable magnitude of systemic violence (past, present, and future). A number of the essays in this special issue look at contemporary horror texts that attend to the violent reality endemic to factory farming.

William Taylor's contribution, "'The factory is a fertile body': Necro-reproduction, Miscarriage, and the Failure of Queer-inhuman Affect in Elle Nash's *Deliver Me*," looks at Nash's 2023 body horror novel to identify the ways that compulsory carnist capitalism yokes queer subjectivity to more-than-human life, thereby stripping both positions of subjecthood in the name of justifying systemic violence. Dru Jeffries' vegan reading of a seminal American horror film in his essay, "'Oh, you'd probably like it if you didn't know what was in it': Carnism, Cannibalism, and Repression in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974)," draws on Naomi Klein's notion of capitalism's "Shadow Lands," a term describing "the mangled and dense understory of our supposedly frictionless global economy" (2023, 236)—a fitting descriptor for the horrors lurking beneath the comforting illusions of the industrial *world as it is*. Jeffries argues that *Chain Saw* resists dominant carnist cultural narratives, which deliberately defamiliarize animal products. For Jeffries, *Chain Saw* steps into the Shadow Lands of carnist capitalism to "refamiliarize" meat as a flesh food produced by violence and suffering. Indeed, Nash's novel and Hooper's film both articulate Stephen King's conception of "the new American Gothic, where we have, instead of a symbolic womb, a symbolic mirror" (1983, 281), a means of seeing things *as they are* in *the world as it is*.

Horror World 2: The World as it Was

VALH also offers a window into the historical genealogy of the fallacious logics undergirding carnist anthropocentrism, which several scholars have helped to delineate. Ruth Heholt and Melissa Edmundson identify how nineteenth-century Gothic horror literature often responds to the contemporaneous publication of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution, noting that Darwin's work announces the moment when literature begins complicating "the matter of the relationship—internal and external, immediate and evolutionary—between humans and animals" (2020, 5). Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay connect the key ideas from Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man Animals* (1872) to Ann Sewell's *The Black Beauty* (1877), a novel whose subtitle claims that it is "translated from the original equine"; Morse and Danahay note that the "effect of both works was to foster the growing belief in

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animal subjectivity, and to embolden those who fought for the relief of animal pain" (2007, 2). While *The Black Beauty* does not qualify as a horror novel, the proximal historical publications of Darwin and Sewell's texts help to contextualize how nineteenth-century fictions interface with the world *as it was*. More directly relevant to this special issue is the late-nineteenth century publication of H. G. Wells's science fiction horror novel, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1897), where the term "vivisect" and its derivations appear thirteen times, namely to describe the experimental research that the hubristic title scientist, Moreau, is conducting on a remote island; Moreau's attempts to transform animals into humans results in the creation of the abject "Beast Folk." Working in the science fiction genre, Wells (like Shelley in *Frankenstein*) crosses several "Horror Worlds," speculating on the world *as it will be* while also offering perspective on contemporaneous anxieties that offer a 2025 reader a view of the world *as it was*. Theophilus Savvas offers a cogent reading of plant-based consumption in *Moreau*, noting that vegetarianism is "crucial to both the [novel's] surface science and the underlying theological dimension"; Moreau's vegetarianism thus aligns with a "significant strand of vegetarian discourse which argued that eating meat was atavistic behavior, a primitive urge which civilized man would outgrow; vegetarians, in other words, were more evolutionarily advanced than carnivores" (2024, 78-9). As such, *Moreau* offers an essential early case study of the crossover between horror affects and vegan ideology. Morse and Danahay group Wells's novel alongside two other Gothic horror novels depicting "the animal within" (Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* [1886] and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1891]), but of the three, it is *Moreau* that proves most pertinent to VALH (although the "animal within" in Stevenson's novel also makes visible the human-as-animal). Wells's novel explicitly engages with entanglements between humans and animals, using horror fiction to represent the ways that Darwin's ideas "make the human more animal and the animal more human, destabilizing boundaries in both directions" (Morse and Danahay 2007, 2). Animals loom large in many works of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century horror fiction, to various figurative ends—consider, for example, the title animals in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" (1843) and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897); or the species-crossing transformation of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915); or the ghastly carnivorous diet experiment in R. R. Ryan's *The Subjugated Beast* (1938); or the otherworldly animalistic creatures in cosmic horror texts like William Hope Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland* (1908) and Frank Belknap Long's *The Hounds of Tindalos* (1946). Some of these works—such as *Borderland* and *Tindalos*—reiterate the problematic trope of the monstrous-animal other,

and Marsh's *The Beetle* traffics explicitly in the racist "animalizing" of the orientalized Other. By contrast, *The Metamorphosis* and "The Black Cat" progressively close gaps between human and more-than-human animals; the former imposes empathetic proximity to the agency-deprived insect, while the latter sees its monstrous human protagonist displacing his cruelty on a more-than-human animal. Perhaps R. R. Ryan's *The Subjugated Beast* hews closest to Wells's novel by locating malice in the very act of meat-eating.

Following Allan Lloyd-Smith's reading of *Frankenstein* (cited above), Shelley's 1818 novel also offers an essential nineteenth-century perspective into more-than-human experience in the *world as it was*. Included in this special issue, Britt MacKenzie-Dale's essay, "'An Unfortunate and Deserted Creature': Bearing Witness to the Nonhuman, from Frankenstein's Monster to Modern Farmed Animals," offers an animal liberationist allegory of the science fiction horror classic. Specifically, MacKenzie-Dale reads *Frankenstein* as a prophetic rumination on humankind's ethical responsibilities to the more-than-human world, an increasingly prescient dilemma in the contemporary Anthropocene. For Mackenzie-Dale, Frankenstein's creature is a generative symbol for those more-than-human beings whose lives our species have radically shifted, destroyed, and in some scientific practices, even created. Luka Romney's essay turns to more recent history, reading Larry Cohen's *It's Alive* film trilogy as an attempt to reconcile the normative subject with the abject "animal" Other. Romney situates *It's Alive* (1974) within a cycle of post-Vietnam War American films that Joseph Maddrey labels "Apocalypse America," which collectively announce the arrival of a new, self-critical and politically antagonistic "modern American horror cinema" (including, for example, George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* [1968], Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* [1972], and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* [1974]). Romney finds within *It's Alive* an advocation for fathers to shirk reactionary patriarchal impulses to radically accept the abject Other with "fierce love," noting that this empathy extends to those more-than-human animals we have historically deprived of subjectivity under carnist capitalism.

Horror World 3: The World as it Will Be

Since the nineteenth-century, horror fiction has often represented humanity doomed by its own hubris. The genre is replete with post-apocalyptic dystopian scenarios. From Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), to Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978), to Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), to Cormac McCarthy's

The Road (2009), Gretchen Felker-Martin's *Manhunt* (2022), and beyond, horror fiction is constantly returning to this thematic fixation. This subset of horror in *the world as it will be* connects intuitively to VALH, in that dystopian and apocalyptic horror often concerns itself with environmental collapse. Emelia Quinn and Benjamin Westwood grapple with the thorny relationship between veganism and environmentalism, noting that veganism is a choice made "for many, first and foremost, by environmental concerns," but that conversely, "veganism may be criticized for reinforcing and promoting an alternative model of anthropocentrism in prioritizing ethical actions that are unassimilable and unreciprocated by the nonhuman world, paradoxically reinforcing humanity's moral exceptionalism" (2018, 7). Certainly, this position poses a challenge to vegan environmentalist praxis, but the horror genre offers a mode by which to express concern *for* the nonhuman and more-than-human world. As indicated by Weinstock and Halberstam, the monster is a malleable instrument for horror fictions: the monster is not always the "bestial" other, but also sometimes takes the form of the systemic and the industrial. Take, for example, Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960) and Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), which allegorically treat marginalization and control via medical discourse and the kinds of grotesque industrial lab experimentation so often inflicted on animal *objects*. Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles note in their introduction to *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene* that "ecohorror is not defined only by fear of nature but also encompasses fear for nature" and thus that ecohorror "is not simply a venue for ecophobia" (2021, 14). Jodey Castricano also gestures to the progressive possibilities of vegan environmentalist horror fiction in her survey of animistic thought in Gothic literature. For Castricano, Gothic horror proves more prescient now than ever; in "the time of the Anthropocene," she argues, "the return of the concept of animistic interrelationship and interconnectedness cannot be overemphasized, if only because it is the harbinger of the failure of the Cartesian paradigm, which had once 'seemed infallible to most Westerners' and which has, arguably, contributed to the crisis facing the planet today with respect to climate change" (2022, 190). Embedded in Castricano's reading of ecohorror is a fear of the world as it will be, if we continue to accelerate ecological collapse and anthropogenic climate catastrophe. How, then, might vegan and animal liberation horror speak to this subset of *the world as it will be*?

Poulomi Choudhury's essay in this special issue uses Agustina Bazterrica's dystopian horror novel, *Tender is the Flesh* (2017) to advance the concept of "abatthorror." Choudhury's term describes a subgenre that exposes the grotesque processes whereby sentient beings become meat commodities dependent on systems of dismemberment, eugenic manipulation, and

reproductive control. Bazterrica's *Tender* imagines a near-future evolution of these systems, a zoonotic catastrophe that compels a shift from animal meat to institutionally sanctioned cannibalism in Argentina. Choudhury asserts that this abatthorror novel presents a terrifying *world as it will be* to provoke a visceral reckoning with industrial animal agriculture's cruel hidden economies under carnist capitalism. Emerson Rheault's "Interpreting *Ginger Snaps* as a Trans Story" also addresses *the world as it will be*, but suggests affirmative criteria therein by imagining a progressive, trans-inclusive *world that could be*. Rheault's essay reads trans-liberatory possibilities in John Fawcett's 2000 werewolf film, identifying the werewolf as a being whose fusion of human and wolf traits resists the conventions of species binaries. Reading the film's representations of hormonal changes as belonging not only to AFAB (assigned female at birth) subjects, but also to young trans men, Rheault's reading is rife with possibilities both for trans-inclusive politics and animal liberation. Similarly liberatory and future-oriented thought undergirds Jenni Makahnouk's "The Creation of the zagimekwe (mosquito-lady): David Cronenberg's *Rabid* as an Inadvertent Anishinaabe Creation Story." Makahnouk reads Cronenberg's body horror film through an Anishinaabe lens to locate an alignment with Indigenous perspectives on transformation, hybridity, and knowledge of balance between human and non-human worlds. The author argues that, in the *world that could be*, Indigenous perspectives could reclaim and reinterpret pop culture objects like Cronenberg's film, thereby embedding cultural knowledge and ecological relationality into analysis of horror fictions.

Horror World 4: The World Without Us

In striking past the illusions of carnist capitalism, VALH takes aim at anthropocentric logics that prioritize the human subject over the more-than-human world and all its inhabitants. VALH thus marks an ontological shift, whereby the object of horror is granted subjectivity and becomes sympathetically subject *to* horror. VALH thus presents a context for narratives that decenter the human, or a context for narratives to step away from what Eugene Thacker calls "the *world-for-us*," meaning "the world that we, as human beings, interpret and give meaning to, the world that we relate to or feel alienated from, the world that we are at once a part of and that is also separate from the human" (2011, 4, italics in original). For Thacker, horror offers a unique entry into cosmic pessimism, "a strange mysticism of the world-without-us" that moves toward "the difficult thought of the world as absolutely

unhuman" whose "limit-thought is the idea of absolute nothingness, unconsciously represented in the many popular media images of nuclear war, natural disasters, global pandemics, and the cataclysmic effects of climate change" (17). Indeed, Melville's *Moby Dick* provides an animal-centered exemplar of this philosophical feature: the titular whale symbolizes and reminds us of the indifferent void that underlies our anthropocentric concept of Nature. Melville writes of Moby Dick in cosmic terms, noting that the whale's whiteness covers "nothing but the charnel-house within; and when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge—pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper" (1996, 207).

Horror, then, presents radical ontological narrative possibilities; it offers a means to upend and even efface anthropocentric conventions in the name of *thinking the unthinkable*. Such concerns undergird the cosmic horror fiction of H. P. Lovecraft and his progeny, especially Thomas Ligotti. Both writers offer philosophies of horror wherein human agency and exceptionalism are innately compromised; Lovecraft (1927) makes the case for his own genre subset of "weird fiction," which he famously asserts must contain both a "certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces" and a "hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and natural suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space" (1973, 15). Key here is that Lovecraft invokes "nature" to imply a preordained order that exceeds human sense perception and influence, which he extends to the realm of the cosmic. Ligotti similarly argues that, as humans, we "are following orders, as we have always done, that nature is forever barking out" (2010, 125). Ligotti thus inherits from Lovecraft a vision of horror that originates in the "natural order" of the universe, thereby destabilizing any sense of an autonomous human subject.[3] Ligotti conveys this notion even in

[3] Arthur Schopenhauer's conception of "Will", as presented in *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I* (1818), haunts both Lovecraft and Ligotti's work. Schopenhauer argues that "[e]xistence itself as well as the mode of existence, in the whole and in each of the parts, all comes from the will alone. It is free, it is omnipotent. The will appears in everything, precisely as it determines itself, in itself and outside of time. The world is only the mirror of this willing: and all finitude, all suffering, all the misery the world contains belongs to the expression of what it wills; it is so because the will wills it so" (2014, 378).

deliberately passive grammatical construction, which shifts the human from subject to object: "Because of evolution, we *got made*. We did not bring ourselves out of the primeval ooze. And everything we have done since we became a species has been a consequence of being made. No matter what we do, it will be what we were made to do—and nothing else. We may try to make something of ourselves, but we cannot take over our own evolution" (125).[4] For Lovecraft and Ligotti, humankind is radically subordinated to forces that predate and will live beyond it; this is the horror of the *world-without-us*.

In this special issue, Zoë Laks's spirited and compassionate essay, "Seeding Vegetal Sovereignty: Plant-Based Witches and the Horrors of Gardening in *The Manor*," does not subscribe to the unilateral bleakness of Lovecraftian horror. Rather, it investigates radically "other" phenomenologies in its serious engagement with plant sentience and plant sovereignty, thereby shifting from the focuses of Horror Worlds Is, Was, and Will Be. Namely, Laks examines how director Axelle Carolyn's plant-themed horror film challenges anthropocentric and even "sentient" logics, thereby putting the film in conversation with the cognitively destabilizing "world-without-us." Laks offers an allegorical vegan reading of the film, wherein ethical considerations are afforded to plant lives. Specifically, Laks identifies a precarious state of sovereignty for all entities in *The Manor*, human and plant alike, within the oppressive confines of an ableist, colonial-capitalist system designed around a hierarchy of "consumable" bodies. Laks locates within *The Manor* opportunities for reflection on our ethical and relational modes of consumption within plant-based ecosystems. Laks thus identifies a cogent thesis within *The Manor*: we are always-already interfacing with forms of sentience that exceed human sense perception— the world without-us is present, alive, and, perhaps paradoxically, even with us.

Conclusions and Beginnings

In addition to the feature essays and student forum contributions listed above, this issue includes an atypical reviews section, which does not survey academic books but is comprised instead of retrospective "re-views" of three twenty-first-century horror texts. That is, the critical analyses of films and literature in this

[4] Thanks to Kristopher Woofter for noting that arguments parallel to Ligotti's show up in Simon Estok's *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (2018), and in Jean-Thomas Tremblay and Steven Swarbrick's *Negative Life: The Cinema of Extinction* (2024).

section emphasize their focal texts' previously unacknowledged vegan and animal liberation features. Miriam Richer reviews Antonia Lloyd-Jones's 2018 translation of Olga Tokarczuk's 2009 novel, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, contending with the novel's inner contradictions between genre snobbery and animal liberation advocacy. Fred Barrett reviews Lovecraft-inspired auteur Stuart Gordon's noir-tinged feature, *King of the Ants* (2003), observing vegan allegory in the "dehumanizing" cruelty meted out by its human antagonists. I read *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003) with an emphasis on writer-director Rob Zombie's vegan commitments, which have gone largely unacknowledged in the existing scholarship. Additionally, this issue includes two original works of fiction by vegan writers: "The Playground," by Kathe Koja, and my new story, "Cogno," which draws direct inspiration from H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* (1953).

This special issue does not aspire to be a "summation" of vegan and animal liberation horror; rather, it presents myriad critical methodologies and textual approaches that speak to the intersection of horror and vegan modalities. The issue thus opens itself to boundless terrain for further scholarly investigation, offering some road maps, inspiration, and invitation for discussions of horror's engagements with the overpoweringly dominant system of speciesist, carnist capitalism. In doing so, it offers some means for articulating fear *for* and *with* the animal other.

This special issue identifies the various ontological shifts endemic to vegan and animal liberation horror. Fear need not function only as an atavistic instinct for self-preservation *from* the monster (or the animalistic, the bestial), but also can function as an expression of concern *for* the monster*ized*. That is, VALH shifts fear away from the (human) local and individual; it mutates and expands fear to encompass the world as a whole. Horror is ubiquitous in the world *as it is*, underlying such daily banalities as the gleaming vacuum-sealed abstractions that occupy our grocery stores' "meat" sections. The world *as it was* evidences a genealogy of oppression and normalized violence, but it also showcases ruptures in dominant carnist capitalist logics; writers like Wells and Shelley call out from the past to suggest alternative and even futuristic modes of thinking and being. Fittingly, this special issue is housed with *Monstrum*, whose namesake highlights the etymology of the word *monster*. In the original Latin, *monstrum* describes a divine or supernatural omen or portent. In VALH, this monstrum lurks in the world *as it will be*, haunting us from the future, if we do not attend to the ethical and ecological catastrophes bound up in our industrial systems of violence. Finally, in its most ontologically disruptive form, VALH urges us to imagine the unimaginable *world-without-us*. It forces us to

reckon with the possibility of our own erasure, but its other temporal arrangements (*is*, *was*, and *will be*) provide us with portents aplenty. These portents show us the monsters that are our normalized industrial processes; they make visible the horror of the world we create. In doing so, they suggest possibilities for more ethical, relational, and empathetic modes of being.

Mike Thorn is a fiction writer and scholar. He is the author of *Shelter for the Damned*, *Darkest Hours*, and *Peel Back and See*. His essays and articles have been published in *American Gothic Studies*, *The Weird: A Companion*, *American Twilight: The Cinema of Tobe Hooper*, *Thinking Horror: A Journal of Horror Philosophy*, *The Film Stage*, and elsewhere. He co-hosts the writing-themed *Craftwork* podcast with Miriam Richer, and he is currently editing a book on Peter Straub. He holds his PhD in English from the University of New Brunswick.

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